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Methodism and the British Armed Forces from John Wesley to the Second World War

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A thesis submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The relationship between British Methodism and Britain's armed forces has been under-researched. Whereas the past two decades have seen an extensive reappraisal of the connections between religion and the military, most of this work has focused on the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions. However, the comparative neglect of Methodism is both noteworthy and paradoxical, especially given the importance of the soldier and sailor in the development of Methodism in the British Isles and worldwide. This thesis argues that the links between the movement and the British armed forces were significant throughout Methodism's first two hundred years. Despite some ambiguity in attitudes towards soldiers and sailors, Methodists maintained an active interest in the spiritual health and temporal welfare of the British soldiers, sailors and airmen. That commitment to the armed forces was constant throughout the movement's history, underpinned by a political loyalism that was central to Methodism, particularly Wesleyan Methodism. The relationship is analysed by exploring the presence of Methodists in Britain's forces, by studying the links that developed between the armed forces and the movement, and by investigating the development of chaplaincy and other kinds of ministerial and lay outreach. The struggle for recognition and representation in the army, navy and air force will be shown to mirror Methodist striving for political and societal acceptance. Opposition to engagement with the armed forces will be explored, and a prevailing narrative challenged: that Methodist attitudes towards peace and war, especially in the twentieth century, were predominately pacifist.

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List of Abbreviations

A.L.	Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford
B.L., I.O.R.	British Library, India Office Records
C.U.L.	Cambridge University Library
I.W.M.	Imperial War Museum
M.A.R.C.	Methodist Archives and Research Centre, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester
T.N.A.	The National Archives
R.A.Ch.D.A.	Royal Army Chaplain's Department Archive, Amport House
S.O.A.S.	School of Oriental and African Studies, London University
W.H.L.	Wesley House Library, Cambridge

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I am also extremely appreciative of the guidance, encouragement and support of my supervisor, Professor Canon Michael Snape.

Dedication

This venture would have been impossible without the encouragement, help and support of Eiraly, my wife. The thesis is dedicated to her.

Chapter One: Introduction

‘The connexion of Methodism with the army begins with Methodism itself.’¹

(Owen Spencer Watkins, *Soldiers and Preachers Too*, 1906)

Watkins was one of the most experienced Methodist acting chaplains. He had served during the 1897-8 Cretan Expedition, in the 1898 Sudan Campaign and throughout the South African War of 1899 to 1902. The links between Methodism and Britain’s armed forces, which his career epitomised, had deep roots. His military ministry was part of a tradition dating to the earliest days of the movement. Watkins asserted that the association between the movement and the armed forces began, as with most things in Methodism, with John Wesley himself.² This relationship is well documented; Watkins was not the first writer to explore the denomination’s mission to soldiers and sailors. There is a rich vein of earlier material for Methodist work in the British Army and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the Royal Navy.³

¹ Owen Spencer Watkins, *Soldiers and Preachers Too: Being the Romantic Story of Methodism and the British Army with a Complete Record of the War Service of Wesleyan Chaplains in the Forces* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1906), 1.

² *Ibid.*, 2–6.

³ William Rule, *Recollections of My Life and Work at Home and Abroad in Connection with the Wesleyan Methodist Conference* (London: T. Woolmer, 1886); Alfred Laverack, *Seventeen Years’ Experience in India / by Alfred Laverack, Late Quarter-Master Sergeant of the 98th Regiment of Foot* (Leeds: William Askey, 1871);

By 2005, the relationship between the British soldier and religion, which Watkins described, had been 'forgotten', according to Michael Snape.⁴ In his *Redcoat and Religion*, he contended that previous scholars had largely ignored British soldiers' religious experience. This neglect has had three effects, he claimed. Firstly, that the historiography of the army is 'oddly secular'— even senior Christian military figures are dismissed as 'eccentrics' — rather than being representative of belief in the army and, more widely, in society. Secondly, that the religious history of the period largely ignores soldiers. Thirdly, that historians of the British Army have not recognised that soldiers of this period frequently identified themselves in religious terms.⁵ Whereas this disregard applied to the range of Christian belief and practice in the forces, it is especially so for Methodism. As Snape stated, 'the vast historiography of eighteenth and nineteenth-century British Methodism has almost completely overlooked the existence and experiences of the Methodist soldier.'⁶ Such myopia has similarly applied to the twentieth century. The Methodist sailor, too, has been unnoticed by both Methodist and naval historians.

Methodism's development ran in parallel with Britain's wars; armed struggle helped to shape the denomination. There was Methodist involvement with the forces during all of Britain's major conflicts of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The army, and to a lesser degree, the navy, were significant in the movement's spread. The forces were an evangelistic opportunity. Methodism had particular appeal to soldiers and sailors, men on the margins of society exposed to hardship and danger. The self-restraint

Arthur Male, *Scenes through the Battle Smoke* (London: Dean & Son, Ltd., 1893); Richard Marks, *The Retrospect, or, Review of Providential Mercies / by Aliquis* (London: J. Nisbet, 1820).

⁴ Michael Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion: The Forgotten History of the British Soldier from the Age of Marlborough to the Eve of the First World War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 1–5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

and conformity to collective religious, moral and social norms required of Methodist adherents were analogous with military discipline, both individual and collective. The links that existed between civilian society and the armed forces helped to fashion military mission. Methodism flourished in citizens' armies and navies during periods of extensive mobilisation. These connections with the armed forces existed in all branches of Methodism, especially within the Wesleyan strand. The connections between the denomination and Britain's armed forces have been under-emphasised by religious and military historians and especially so by scholars of Methodism, as the Literature Review which follows will explore.

Literature Review

The links between John Wesley, the development of the movement and the armed forces have received insufficient attention in the historical record. These connections have been marginalised but not entirely 'forgotten'.⁷ Indeed, some leading scholars of early Methodism have acknowledged the importance of the British Army in the spread of the denomination. Henry Rack's *Reasonable Enthusiast*, the most authoritative and least hagiographical modern biography of Wesley, recognised the importance of soldiers in the evangelical revival that spawned Methodism.⁸ He referred to the movement's appeal to those, including soldiers and sailors, whose occupations were perilous by their very nature.

⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁸ Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 171–76.

Furthermore, he stressed the loyalty to crown and country, which underpinned Wesley's politics and set the tone for future Wesleyan conformism and conservatism. Wesley's attitudes to the Jacobite Rebellion, the Seven Years War, and the American War of Independence made clear his support for the British Government, as Rack made clear.⁹ Briane Turley's examination of Wesley and war agreed; she emphatically concluded that 'the context of Wesley's political philosophy negates even the remotest possibility that he may be properly interpreted as a Christian pacifist in the modern sense.'¹⁰ It is not an inheritance with which many contemporary Methodists feel comfortable.

Britain's armed forces were central to David Hempton's argument that Methodism thrived on imperial military and trade links.¹¹ He stressed that this was an international movement thriving on both sides of the North Atlantic, on cultural frontiers and 'among soldiers in barracks and garrisons'.¹² Hempton saw a clear link between Methodism's growth and the movement of regiments and ships: 'Indeed, wherever one looks at the spread of Methodism in the pioneering phase, soldiers patrolling the empire were often key figures in its transmission.'¹³ Like Rack, Hempton explored Methodism's development and growth among those on society's fringes, marginalised by occupation, geography, race, and class.¹⁴ John Kent acknowledged that identification as Methodists gave servicemen a sense of belonging to a movement beyond themselves, 'a cultural shelter'.¹⁵

⁹ Rack, 371, 471–88.

¹⁰ Briane Turley, 'John Wesley and War', *Methodist History*, 29, 2 (January 1991), 97.

¹¹ David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750-1900* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3–28.

¹² David Hempton, 'The People Called Methodists', in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. by William Abraham and James Kirby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 67.

¹³ David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 21.

¹⁴ Hempton, 'The People Called Methodists', 67–69.

¹⁵ John Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82.

Methodism's growth in the army serving overseas during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was explored in several studies. Dee Andrews emphasised the importance of the military to the movement's development before and after the American Revolution. She used the example of Captain Thomas Webb to illustrate the role of individual soldiers in establishing societies and chapels in North America, demonstrating that Methodists were both loyalists and revolutionaries.¹⁶ Susan Jackson's comprehensive study of Methodism in Gibraltar highlighted how important soldiers and sailors were in creating and sustaining a flourishing sub-culture dating to the movement's earliest days.¹⁷ In his history of the denomination in Ireland, and especially so in his article on the army in the first century of Irish Methodism, Dudley Cooney emphasised how crucial members of the armed forces were to that development. Using evidence from John Wesley's letters and journals, and also accounts by soldiers themselves, he showed how the movement in Ireland grew around garrisons and barracks, how individual soldiers disseminated their faith to their comrades and civilians, and how frequently servicemen acted as protectors of nascent Methodism in the face of local hostility.¹⁸ Cooney's book and article were published in 2001; no similar work had been written on the army's influence on English Methodism for almost a century, indicating the dearth of scholarship in this field. Together, these writers presented a picture of a vibrant, albeit small, Methodist presence in Britain's armed forces serving overseas.

¹⁶ Dee Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton, N.J., Yale University Press, 2002), 50-55.

¹⁷ Susan Jackson, *In the Shadow of a Mighty Rock: A History of the Gibraltar Methodist Church* (Evesham: Wesley Historical Society, 2009), 3-36.

¹⁸ Dudley Cooney, *The Methodists in Ireland: A Short History* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Columba Press, 2001), 54; Dudley Cooney, 'The Influence of the Army in the First Hundred Years of Irish Methodism', *Bulletin Methodist History Society of Ireland* (2001), 80-91.

The existence of numbers of Methodists in Britain's armed forces during the wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, highlighted by Snape in his *Redcoat and Religion*, was not revelatory as he acknowledged.¹⁹ However, military historians and Methodist scholars of recent times have neglected this history. In his commanding study of Wellington's army, written in 1912, Charles Oman described several instances of Methodist activity during the Peninsular War and quoted the concerns it caused to Wellington and his Anglican chaplains.²⁰ Anthony Brett-James used some of the same material as Oman in citing instances of Methodism in Wellington's army.²¹ Snape defined modern scholarship in this area; *God and the British Soldier* examined the relationship during the First and Second World Wars. His authoritative history of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department concluded a comprehensive study of religion in the British army.²²

Several writers have explored the connection between sailors and faith in this period. Both Peter Earle and Marcus Rediker, in their examinations of seamen's beliefs and spirituality, described an absence of organised and orthodox Christian religion at sea. Together, they provide a broad background to seamen's religiosity, albeit that Earle's study was of merchant mariners, and neither work deals with the later part of the eighteenth century.²³ A 2007 article by Christopher Magra, a more specific analysis of sailors' faith,

¹⁹ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 1–74.

²⁰ Charles Oman, *Wellington's Army, 1809-1814* (London: E. Arnold, 1912), 324–30.

²¹ Anthony Brett-James, *Wellington at War, 1794-1815; a Selection of His Wartime Letters* (London: MacMillan, 1961), 212–14.

²² Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London: Routledge, 2005); Michael Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department 1796-1953: Clergy under Fire* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008).

²³ Peter Earle, *Sailors: English Merchant Seamen, 1650-1775* (London: Methuen, 1998); Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

drew similar conclusions.²⁴ Stephen Berry's work on the North Atlantic maritime culture concurred, describing sailors as 'irreligious' and existing outside conventional Christian norms.²⁵ Berry connected Methodism and shipboard culture in a chapter describing George Whitefield's several crossings of the Atlantic during his career and his almost entirely unsuccessful attempts to evangelise the sailors with whom he came into contact.²⁶

Several maritime historians have described naval chaplaincy. Waldo Smith presented an image of the inadequate spiritual provision in the Hanoverian navy, a view later substantiated by Margarette Lincoln and Nicholas Rodger.²⁷ The most detailed history of Royal Navy chaplaincy was written, in retirement, by Gordon Taylor, former Anglican Chaplain of the Fleet.²⁸ His account of the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century religious provision at sea presents a somewhat rosy, although not uncritical, picture of naval chaplaincy. Possibly unsurprisingly, his study is predominantly focused on Church of England ministry.

Snape's work has rediscovered the presence of Methodism among British soldiers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, whereas the movement's influence amongst sailors has remained neglected. Scholars have largely ignored the evidence of a Methodist sub-culture in the Royal Navy that developed during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

²⁴ Christopher Magra, 'Faith at Sea: Exploring Maritime Religiosity in the Eighteenth Century', *International Journal of Maritime History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 87–106, <https://doi.org/10.1177/084387140701900106> [accessed online 09.12.2018].

²⁵ Stephen Berry, *A Path in the Mighty Waters: Shipboard Life and Atlantic Crossings to the New World* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2015), 86.

²⁶ Stephen Berry, 'Whitefield and the Atlantic', in *George Whitefield: Life, Context and Legacy*, ed. by Geordan Hammond and David Ceri Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 219; Waldo Smith, *The Navy and Its Chaplains in the Days of Sail* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1961), 69–103; Margarette Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750-1815* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 117; Nicholas Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815*, 2 vols (London: Allen Lane in association with the National Maritime Museum, 2004), II, 393.

²⁸ Gordon Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains: A History of the Chaplains of the Royal Navy* (Oxford: Oxford Illustrated Press, 1978), 162–240.

of 1793 to 1815. Shipboard Methodism's existence has been acknowledged in the chronicling of wider evangelicalism in the fleet,²⁹ but only one study has focused on the development of the denomination in the navy during this period.³⁰ In two articles published in 2015, Gareth Atkins described and analysed the growth of evangelical culture in Britain during the wars of 1793 to 1815.³¹ Atkins explored how evangelicalism became linked with the national cause during these conflicts.³² This he examined concerning the Royal Navy, especially regarding the influence of key figures linked to the evangelical movement, such as Charles Middleton, Lord Barham, First Lord of the Admiralty from 1805 to 1813.³³ The existence of Methodism in the navy was acknowledged within Atkins' work; however, his concern was predominantly with the Anglican evangelical officers rather than the men of the lower deck who formed pious societies. He stressed that 'Methodism', like other religious labels of the period, was a very imprecise and loose term rather than identifying membership of a defined denomination.³⁴ Denver Brunsman's study of the role of the press gang in the recruitment of the Georgian navy was significant in that he described the use of impressment by the state to silence those seen as troublemakers, including Methodists.³⁵

²⁹ Richard Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy, 1775-1815: Blue Lights and Psalm-Singers* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008); Christopher P Magra, 'Faith at Sea: Exploring Maritime Religiosity in the Eighteenth Century', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 19, no. 1 (2007): 87–106, <https://doi.org/10.1177/084387140701900106> [accessed online 02.02. 2019].

³⁰ Andrew Pickering, 'Methodism in the Royal Navy, 1740-1815.', *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 11, no. 2 (2019), 192–210.

³¹ Gareth Atkins, 'Christian Heroes, Providence and Patriotism in Wartime Britain, 1793-1815', *The Historical Journal* 58, no. 2 (2015): 393–414, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X14000338>; Gareth Atkins, 'Religion, Politics and Patronage in the Late Hanoverian Navy, c.1780–c.1820', *Historical Research* 88, no. 240 (2015): 272–90, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2281.12089> [accessed online 04.11.2018].

³² Atkins, 'Christian Heroes, Providence and Patriotism in Wartime Britain, 1793-1815', 393–414.

³³ Atkins, 'Religion, Politics and Patronage in the Late Hanoverian Navy, c.1780–c.1820', 274–76.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 274.

³⁵ Denver Brunsman, *The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 147–48, 246.

Richard Blake separated 'Blue Lights', officers, from 'Psalm-Singers, men'.³⁶ It was amongst the latter that shipboard Methodism flourished. Blake too gave far more attention to the officers than the men, and he used few of the plentiful contemporary sources to illustrate the existence of Methodist sailors and societies in Nelson's navy. For this reason, the scale and influence of Methodism in the fleet were under-emphasised in his book, subsumed in a more general examination of the significance of evangelical Protestantism in the Royal Navy. A less forgivable weakness in Blake's work was the unsubstantiated link that he made between Methodism and the 1797 mutinies in the fleet, which is dismissed in Chapter Two of the thesis.

Historians of Methodism concerned themselves little with mission to the armed forces from Waterloo to the Crimean War. Most scholarship explored the movement's fissiparous nature during the years following John Wesley's death, the connections between Methodism and radical politics, or the lack thereof.³⁷ The growth of active international mission, especially within Wesleyanism, has interested Methodist scholars and imperial historians. Writing at the British Empire's heyday, William Moister emphasised how important the army and navy had been to the movement's overseas expansion.³⁸ Findlay and Holdsworth's monumental history of the Wesleyan Missionary Society also stressed the

³⁶ Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*.

³⁷ Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850*, 197; John Kent, 'The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. by Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp, 4 vols (London: Epworth Press, 1965-1988), II, 213; John Wilkinson 'The Rise of Other Methodist Traditions in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. by Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp, II, 200; Kevin Watson, 'The Price of Respectability: Methodism in Britain and the United States', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism*, ed. by William Gibson, Peter Forsaith and Martin Wellings (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 35-38; Elie Halévy, *The Birth of Methodism in England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 11-13; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 382; Geoffrey Milburn, *Primitive Methodism* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2002), 200.

³⁸ William Moister, *Missionary Worthies: Being Brief Memorial Sketches of Ministers Sent Forth by the Wesleyan Missionary Society Who Have Died in the Work from the Beginning* (London: T. Woolmer, 1885), 14, 33, 78, 375-6.

significance of soldiers and sailors in mission to British colonies.³⁹ Allen Birtwistle described the role of members of the armed forces as pioneer evangelists of Wesleyanism.⁴⁰ More recently, Methodist mission in the forces was given a strongly imperial focus in Stewart Brown and Hilary Carey's works.⁴¹

As with the previous period, Michael Snape is the foremost historian of the British army and religion from Waterloo to the Crimea. Given the lack of connexional engagement with the forces between 1815 and 1854, it is excusable that he only briefly described Methodist activity in the army, excepting recognising that concessions to Presbyterians and Roman Catholics during the 1830s were taken as a precedent by the Wesleys.⁴² Other scholars largely failed to acknowledge the presence of Methodist soldiers in the army during this period.⁴³

Methodism in the Royal Navy of this period has received similarly scant attention. Roald Kverndal, however, linked the development of the Seamen's Mission movement to Methodist sailors' evangelical endeavours.⁴⁴ Blake's book on religion in the navy from 1815 to 1879 suggested that the decline in the size of the navy and the fragmentation of associational groups at the end of the Napoleonic Wars contributed to a decline in lower

³⁹ George Findlay and William Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 7 vols (London: Epworth Press, 1921), v, 311.

⁴⁰ N. Allen Birtwistle, 'Methodist Mission' in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. by Rupert Davies, Raymond George and Gordon Rupp, 4 vols (London: Epworth Press, 1965-1988), III, 28.

⁴¹ Stewart Brown, *Providence and Empire: Religion, Politics and Society in the United Kingdom, 1815-1914* (Harlow: Pearson, 2008), 190; Hilary Carey, *Empires of Religion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 9; Hilary Carey, *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801-1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 178.

⁴² Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 92; Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 64-67.

⁴³ Hew Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy: The Reform of the British Army, 1830-54* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 86; Kenneth Hendrickson, *Religion and the Public Image of the British Army, 1807-1855* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), 113.

⁴⁴ Roald Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions: Their Origin and Early Growth* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1986), 32, 103, 109-11; Roald Kverndal, *The Way of the Sea: The Changing Shape of Mission in the Seafaring World* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2008), 16.

deck piety.⁴⁵ His contentions were valid; however, as with his work on the earlier period, he largely ignored the contemporary evidence of shipboard Methodism.

Historians have paid far more attention to the relationship between religion and the armed forces from the Crimean War to the South African War. The connections between the armed forces and Christian bodies have been extensively explored, although Victoria's soldiers elicited more interest than her sailors. Writers, including Kenneth Hendrickson and Edward Spiers, explored the influence of organised religion in the British Army.⁴⁶ However, Snape's work dominates scholarship as for earlier and later periods. He traced the Army Chaplains' Department's development and the connections between the army and the churches.⁴⁷ His work described and accounted for growing Methodist involvement with the army, including the creation of the Wesleyan Royal Navy and Army Board, the first acting chaplains and Soldiers' Homes.⁴⁸ Hendrickson acknowledged the presence of Wesleyans in the army, although he was guilty of some factual errors in this regard, including erroneously describing Louisa Daniell as a Methodist.⁴⁹ Spiers gave a more fulsome account of the development of Methodist military mission during this period; significantly, he distinguished Wesleyan attitudes to the armed forces from those of other Nonconformists.⁵⁰

The growth of Methodist concern for soldiers and sailors in the second half of the nineteenth century is given little consideration in histories of the movement in Britain during the Victorian era. Whereas this is understandable for the smaller denominations,

⁴⁵ Richard Blake, *Religion in the British Navy, 1815-1879: Piety and Professionalism* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014), 28–32, 60.

⁴⁶ Kenneth Hendrickson, *Religion and the Public Image of the British Army*, 9–28, 86–92, 110; Edward Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 113–145.

⁴⁷ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 100–175; Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 100–200.

⁴⁸ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 109, 117–20, 126–28, 152.

⁴⁹ Kenneth Hendrickson, *Religion and the Public Image of the British Army*, 83.

⁵⁰ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 180.

which were not extensively committed to military mission, it is a significant omission for the Wesleyans, for whom it became a priority. Scholars explored the rehabilitation of the armed forces' reputation in the public's perception, Spiers and John Watson for the army, and Mary Conley and Brian Lavery regarding the navy.⁵¹ Both Spiers and Watson discussed the development of the concept of Christian militarism, 'the Christian Soldier'. The growing association of Christianity and Britain's armed forces was described in two articles by Olive Anderson, which remain essential contributions to this field.⁵² She showed how the Crimean War and the Indian Rebellion created the image of the soldier hero in the Victorian popular imagination, fostering the connections between the Protestant churches and British military enterprise. Anderson also explored the Wesleyans' role in adopting the soldier as an evangelistic and philanthropic target, describing the significance of their efforts at military mission at Aldershot in the 1860s. The increasing religious tolerance by the army authorities, which enabled Methodism to establish a toehold of recognition and representation, was also identified in her work. Anderson acknowledged women as agents of this concern for the soldier and sailor's spiritual, moral and physical well-being.⁵³ Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock further described the ideal of the Victorian woman as spiritual guardian of the nation.⁵⁴ This theme was also explored by Hendrickson, with a more specific

⁵¹ Spiers, 113, 140–47, 182; John Watson, 'The Fighting Man and the Christian Life', in *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture*, ed. by Andrew Bradstock, Sean Gill, Anne Hogan and Sue Morgan (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), 13–20; Mary Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 35–78; Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 113, 143–47, 180–82.

⁵² Olive Anderson, 'The Reactions of Church and Dissent towards the Crimean War', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 16, no. 2 (1965): 209–20; Olive Anderson, 'The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain', *The English Historical Review* 86, no. 338 (1971): 46–72.

⁵³ Anderson, 'The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain', 58.

⁵⁴ Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock, *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1998), 147.

reference to the armed forces.⁵⁵ Carey identified the role of women as spiritual agents to the forces in Britain's colonies.⁵⁶

John Thompson's 1990 PhD thesis on Free Church army chaplaincy remains a comprehensive and balanced analysis of his subject matter.⁵⁷ His research was based on a thorough examination of the available sources, including the Wesleyan Armed Forces Board's extensive records. He linked the extension of the development of Methodist military mission to the decline in Anglican exclusiveness, to growing Nonconformist assertiveness, and to the War Office's accommodation of religious pluralism. Wesleyan endorsement of British imperial expansion, he argued, underpinned their increasing association with the army. Wesleyan conformity was also made manifest in their willingness to be represented in chaplaincy. Thompson described the denomination's effectiveness in dealing with the army hierarchy, the civil service and government ministers. Although his work on the First World War has been considerably augmented since the writing of his thesis, that is not the case for the earlier period. His research remains one of the most important contributions to this field.

Thompson's thesis and Snape's work excepted, there have been few studies of the relationship between the army and Nonconformity, specifically Methodist mission to the armed forces. The association of Methodism and empire has been studied in far more detail. Both Hugh McLeod and Andrew Porter explored the connection between imperialism

⁵⁵ Kenneth Hendrickson, 'Winning the Troops for Vital Religion: Female Evangelical Missionaries to the British Army, 1857-1880', in *Armed Forces and Society* 23, issue 4 (1997), 615-634.

⁵⁶ Carey, *Empires of Religion*, 3.

⁵⁷ John Thompson, 'The Free Church Army Chaplain, 1830-1930' (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1990).

and the churches, but neither looked specifically at Methodism.⁵⁸ In an article of 1975, Stephen Koss explained Wesleyanism's support for Britain's imperial project during the 1880s and 1890s and how that differed from other Nonconformist denominations.⁵⁹ Interestingly, scholars of the former colonies have shown more interest in the links between Wesleyan Methodism and the armed forces, especially concerning the South African War. Writing from a South African perspective, Greg Cuthbertson was condemnatory of Wesleyan support for the British government.⁶⁰ Australian, Canadian and New Zealand historians have also explored Methodist support for, and involvement with, the forces these colonies sent to fight for Britain against the Boers.⁶¹ Links to British military power and support for imperial policy were extensively discussed in Glen O'Brien and Hilary Carey's history of Australian Methodism, and Neil Semple's study of the movement in Canada, in a way that is not the case for any comparable study of British Methodism of the period.⁶² A chapter by Jennifer Woodruff Tait explored the connections to British imperial policy, but she focused on pacifists rather than Wesleyan military mission.⁶³ Michael Hughes, the foremost scholar of British Methodism and war in the twentieth century, contrasted attitudes of the Primitive

⁵⁸ Hugh McLeod, 'Protestantism and British National Identity, 1815-1945', in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, ed. by Peter Van Der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 46–56; Andrew Porter, 'Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. by Andrew Porter and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), III, 198–221.

⁵⁹ Stephen Koss, 'Wesleyanism and Empire', in *The Historical Journal*, 18, no. 1 (1975): 105–117, 106.

⁶⁰ Greg Cuthbertson, 'Preaching Imperialism: Wesleyan Methodism and the War', in *The Impact of the South African War*, ed. by David Omissi and Andrew Thompson (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 157–8; Greg Cuthbertson, 'Pricking the "Nonconformist Conscience": Religion against the South African War.', in *The South African War Reappraised*, ed. by Donal Lowry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 171.

⁶¹ Michael Gladwin, *Captains of the Soul: A History of Australian Army Chaplains* (Newport, N. S. W, Australia: Big Sky Publishing, 2013), 16–23; Glen O'Brien and Hilary Carey, *Methodism in Australia: A History* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015); Carey, *God's Empire*, 59, 148, 152; Gordon Heath, *A War with a Silver Lining: Canadian Protestant Churches and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2009), 2–138; Doug Owsam, *Canada and the Empire* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 148; David Hall, *The New Zealanders in South Africa, 1899-1902* (Wellington, N.Z.: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1949), 25.

⁶² O'Brien and Carey, *Methodism in Australia: A History*, 2–3, 109–18; Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal: McGill and Queens University Press, 1996), 292–98.

⁶³ Jennifer Tait Woodruff, 'The Methodist Conscience, Slavery, Temperance and Religion', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism*, ed. by William Gibson, Peter Forsaith and Martin Wellings (London: Routledge, 2016), 336–77.

and Wesleyan churches to the South African War, seeing this conflict as presaging some of the divisions which were later to emerge over the First and Second World Wars.⁶⁴

The centenary of the First World War saw a flood of popular and academic histories, general and specific. That anniversary, coupled with the 1996 bicentenary of the establishment of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department, saw the publication of a significant number of works on the previously overlooked relationship between faith and the armed forces. Recent studies of army chaplaincy, general and denominational, have largely remedied that neglect. That notwithstanding, Methodist mission to the British armed forces during the First World War remains 'relatively under-researched' according to Snape and Edward Madigan.⁶⁵ In 2013, Peter Howson wrote that 'there has been no modern discussion of Wesleyan Army Chaplains.'⁶⁶ That remains the case for Methodist army chaplaincy and, even more so, for mission to the navy. Chapter Five of this thesis aims to address that deficiency.

Despite scholars' efforts of the past twenty years, it is difficult to break free from the widespread stereotypes that have so influenced perceptions of the First World War. For example, the highly entertaining 2019 film *1917* featured tropes of brave Tommies, inept officers, bungled orders, mateship, heroism against overwhelming odds, but remarkably little mud.⁶⁷ Adrian Gregory summed up this potent and predominant repudiation of the war: 'The verdict of popular culture is more or less unanimous. The First World War was

⁶⁴ Michael Hughes, 'Dilemmas of the Nonconformist Conscience: Attitudes Towards War and Peace within Primitive Methodism', in *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 5 (2013), 75–96; Michael Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict: Methodism, Peace and War in the Twentieth Century* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2008), 17–29.

⁶⁵ Michael Snape and Edward Madigan, *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War* (Farnham, Surrey, Ashgate, 2013), 6.

⁶⁶ Peter Howson, *Muddling Through: The Organisation of British Army Chaplaincy in World War 1* (Solihull: Helion, 2013), 16.

⁶⁷ Sam Mendes, *1917* (DreamWorks, 2019).

stupid, tragic and futile.’⁶⁸ Nick Lloyd’s *The Western Front* concludes by agreeing with this view; the Great War was ‘a byword for slaughter and futility, a meaningless exercise that accomplished nothing but the murder of an entire generation’.⁶⁹

British military chaplaincy has not escaped the general denunciation that surrounds the war. Until recently, the study of mission to the armed forces had suffered from a combination of neglect and a belief that Christian mission to fighting men was an oxymoron. Snape recounts the bad press that has characterised chaplains: ‘Even by the impressive standards of the wider historiography of Britain and the First World War, the subject of British Army Chaplains and their role in their country’s bloodiest conflict is burdened with myth, misrepresentation and misunderstanding.’⁷⁰ During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, most historians of religion had neglected the war, and, equally, military historians largely ignored or marginalised the religious dimensions of the conflict.⁷¹ Where the relationship between organised religion and the churches was explored, it was generally in condemnatory terms. For example, Alan Wilkinson was highly critical of the British churches, especially, but not exclusively, the Church of England. Nonconformity, in his view, had sold its soul by supporting the war effort.⁷² Since the Royal Army Chaplains’ Department’s bicentenary in 1996, and particularly around the centenary of the 1914 to 1918 conflict, the subject has received more light and balance. The publication of Snape’s official history of the RACHD and his *God and the British Soldier*, which examined the role of religion in the army, served

⁶⁸ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

⁶⁹ Nick Lloyd, *The Western Front* (London: Penguin, 2021), 502.

⁷⁰ Michael Snape, ‘Church of England Army Chaplains in the First World War: Goodbye to “Goodbye to All That”’, in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 62, no. 2 (2011): 318.

⁷¹ Heather Jones, ‘As the Centenary Approaches: The Regeneration of First World War Historiography’, in *Historical Journal* 56, no. 3 (2013): 857–78.

⁷² Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SPCK, 1978); Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches, 1900–1945* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 3–84.

to open academic debate on a previously closed area, dispelling some of the prejudices and misconceptions which have influenced the study of mission to the armed forces.⁷³

Recently, there has been extensive exploration of army chaplaincy, the relationship between faith, the war, and the role of the churches. Stuart Bell marked the war's centenary with an analysis of belief in Britain during the conflict.⁷⁴ A study of British Sunday schools by Catriona McCartney, which extensively used Methodist sources, stressed the links between the home churches and the armed forces.⁷⁵ Peter Howson, a former Methodist army chaplain, produced a detailed account of army chaplaincy in 2013.⁷⁶ The same year saw the publication of several essays addressing the British army chaplaincy of several Christian denominations during the conflict.⁷⁷ The past decade has also seen several books on army chaplaincy, dominated by studies of Church of England and Roman Catholic ministry.⁷⁸ A broad range of articles and monographs similarly focus on elements of Anglican and Catholic chaplaincy.⁷⁹

⁷³ Michael Snape, 'The Christian Churches and the Great War: England, Scotland and Wales', in *Revue d'Histoire de l'Eglise de France* 102, no. 1 (2016): 121–38; Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department; God and the British Soldier*; Tom Johnstone and James Hagerty, *The Cross on the Sword: Catholic Chaplains in the Forces* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1996).

⁷⁴ Stuart Bell, *Faith in Conflict: The Impact of the Great War on the Faith of the People of Britain* (Solihull: Helion, 2017).

⁷⁵ Catriona McCartney, 'British Sunday Schools in the Era of the First World War' (PhD thesis, Durham University, 2018), by kind permission of the author.

⁷⁶ Peter Howson, *Muddling Through*.

⁷⁷ Snape and Madigan, *The Clergy in Khaki*.

⁷⁸ Edward Madigan, *Faith under Fire: Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Linda Parker, *The Whole Armour of God: Anglican Army Chaplains in the Great War* (Solihull: Helion, 2009); Johnstone and Hagerty, *The Cross on the Sword: Catholic Chaplains in the Forces*; James Hagerty, *Priests in Uniform: Catholic Chaplains to the British Forces in the First World War* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2017).

⁷⁹ Michael Snape, 'Proclamation and The Great War: Reconsidering British Military Chaplaincy in the Two World Wars', in *Royal Army Chaplains' Department Journal* 43 (2004): 6–8; Edward Madigan, 'The Life Lived versus Balaam's Ass's Ears: Neville Stuart Talbot's Chaplaincy on the Western Front', in *Royal Army Chaplains' Department Journal* 47 (2008): 14–19; Christopher Jary 'Woodbine Willie', *Royal Army Chaplains' Department Journal* 44 (2004): 24–29; Linda Parker, *A Seeker after Truths: The Life and Times of G.A. Studdert Kennedy ('Woodbine Willie') 1883–1929* (Solihull: Helion, 2017); K. V. Turley, *Fr Willie Doyle and World War 1* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2014).

Extensive recent scholarship on other denominations emphasises the lack of similar studies of Methodist military mission. Methodist chaplaincy has elicited far less interest than has that of the Catholic and Anglican churches. Michael Hughes' *Conscience and Conflict*, written by a historian of Methodism rather than a Methodist historian, provided valuable background on how the denomination's churches responded to the war.⁸⁰ His emphasis was emblematic of the study of Methodism and war. He gave far more attention to conscientious objection than to chaplaincy or Methodists in the armed forces.⁸¹ Martin Wellings, a Methodist minister and scholar, produced a more nuanced account of Oxford Methodists' response to the war.⁸² In 2008, Neil Allison, a serving Baptist army chaplain, produced a concise history of the United Board, one-third of whose chaplains were Primitive and United Methodist ministers.⁸³ This study was followed by a chapter in which he examined the evidence for Free Church revivalism in the army.⁸⁴ Although this latter study was valuable, the sources cited are from Baptist or Welsh Calvinist, rather than Methodist, origins. Thompson's earlier thesis was supplemented by a chapter in the same volume on Nonconformist chaplaincy, including that of the United Board and Wesleyans.⁸⁵ An article by this researcher excepted, there has been little other detailed study of Methodist chaplaincy to the British Army and none whatsoever on the Royal Navy or the nascent air force.⁸⁶ In

⁸⁰ Michael Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, 46–78.

⁸¹ See also two articles: Michael Hughes, 'British Methodists and the First World War', in *Methodist History* 41, no. 1 (2002): 316–28; Michael Hughes, 'Methodism and the Challenge of the First World War', in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 60/1 (2015): 3–16.

⁸² Martin Wellings, 'Oxford's Free Churches and the Outbreak of the Great War', in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 60/4 (2016): 154–65.

⁸³ Allison, *The Official History of the United Board*.

⁸⁴ Neil Allison, 'Free Church Revivalism in the British Army during the First World War', in *The Clergy in Khaki*, ed. by Michael Snape and Edward Madigan (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 41–56.

⁸⁵ John Thompson, 'The Nonconformist Chaplain in the First World War', in *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War*, ed. by Michael Snape and Edward Madigan (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 17–40.

⁸⁶ Andrew Pickering, 'Wesleyan Chaplaincy on the Western Front during the First World War', in *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 9, no. 2 (2019): 163–83.

2014, the Methodist Church produced a collection of six short essays reflecting on the spiritual and ethical issues that the centenary of the First World War raised and assessing the value of its ministry. Mark Powell, Member of the Methodist Forces Board and former military chaplain, concluded: 'I don't think we will ever know this side of eternity'.⁸⁷ Not, perhaps, the most useful of judgements.

In contrast to the sparsity of British research on Methodist chaplaincy to the forces during the war is Commonwealth historians' positive wealth of scholarship. Duff Crerar, Neil Semple and Gordon Heath included detailed examination of the denomination's contribution to Canadian forces chaplaincy, as did Robert Linder, Michael McKernan and Michael Gladwin for the Australian Imperial Force.⁸⁸ The complete absence of any modern study of British naval chaplaincy, including that provided by the Methodist churches, is highlighted by Rowan Strong's study of Australian naval ministry.⁸⁹ Alan Davidson's account of New Zealand Methodist chaplaincy emphasises the need for a comparable study of Methodist mission to the British forces.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Mark Powell, "Serving the Serving", in *Sacred Presence and Ethical Challenge*, ed. by Robert Jones (Peterborough: The Methodist Church, 2014), 17.

⁸⁸ Duff Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land: Canadian Chaplains and the Great War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 12–25, 43–72; Duff Crerar, "Where's the Padre?" Canadian Memory and the Great War Chaplains', in *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Doris Bergen (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 2004), 141–64; Gordon Heath, *Canadian Churches and the First World War* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2014), 102–17; Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism*, 395–413; Robert Linder, *The Long Tragedy: Australian Evangelical Christians and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 2000), 54–138; Michael McKernan, *Padre: Australian Chaplains in Gallipoli and France* (Sydney: Catholic Theological Faculty and The Australian War Memorial, 1986), 25–62, 73–168; Gladwin, *Captains of the Soul: A History of Australian Army Chaplains*, 31–91.

⁸⁹ Rowan Strong, *Chaplains in the Royal Australian Navy: 1912 to the Vietnam War* (Kensington, N.S.W.: University of New South Wales Press, 2012), 61–120.

⁹⁰ Allan Davidson, *New Zealand Methodist Chaplains and Ministers at War: The First World War through Their Eyes* (Auckland: Wesley Historical Society (New Zealand), 2016).

The study of Methodism from 1919 to 1939 has been principally concerned, as was the Church itself, with the union of 1932.⁹¹ Whereas Methodist scholars were not blind to the problems surrounding unification, perhaps writers from a non-Methodist background, such as Adrian Hastings and Hughes, were able to give more rounded assessments of its impact and inadequacies.⁹² The links between the denomination's attitudes to British foreign policy, its support for the League of Nations, and Methodist pacifism's growth were also explored in Hughes' work.⁹³ Peter Catterall's study of the relationship between the Labour Party and the Free Churches concluded that Methodist pacifism was as much based on politics as in religious belief.⁹⁴ Wilkinson believed that Nonconformist pacifism was grounded in guilt over the churches' support for the war effort from 1914 to 1918, a view that is not substantiated by the Methodist press or Conference minutes.⁹⁵ Methodist opposition to war during the 1920s and 1930s, outright or qualified, has been extensively studied. Martin Ceadel, the foremost scholar of the peace movement, distinguished 'pacifists', those who could not countenance war in any circumstances, from 'pacifists', who believed that armed conflict could be justified as a last resort; such a distinction is important in examining Methodist attitudes to peace and war in the interwar period.⁹⁶ The former, rather than the latter, have dominated the examination of attitudes within the

⁹¹ George Thompson Brake, *Policy and Politics in British Methodism, 1932-1982* (London: Edsall, 1984), 90–94; Rupert Davies, 'Methodism', in *The Testing of the Churches 1932-1982: A Symposium*, ed. by Rupert Davies (London: Epworth Press, 1982), 32–53; Rupert Davies, Raymond George, and Gordon Rupp, *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 4 vols (London: Epworth Press, 1965-1988), III, 309–59.

⁹² Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1985* (London: Collins, 1986), 363; Michael Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, 77–81.

⁹³ Michael Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, 77–86; Michael Hughes, 'Methodism, Peace and War, 1932-45', in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 85, no. 1 (2003): 147–67, <https://doi.org/10.7227/BJRL.85.1.10> [accessed online 30.07.2019].

⁹⁴ Peter Catterall, *Labour and the Free Churches: Radicalism, Righteousness and Religion, 1919-1939* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 73–126.

⁹⁵ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?*, 98–100.

⁹⁶ Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 126.

denomination. In his 2018 thesis, John Broom distinguished between the principled pacifism of several high-profile clerics and the pragmatic pacificism of the majority of the denomination's laity.⁹⁷ The role of such leading church figures as Donald Soper and Leslie Weatherhead in the interwar peace movement has been widely examined, perhaps reflecting the pacifist prism of post-1945 Methodism.⁹⁸ Broader studies of the British peace movement, in which Methodism played a part, have featured in recent work by Richard Overy, David Reynolds and Daniel Todman.⁹⁹ The development of chaplaincy to the British armed forces during the 1920s and 1930s, which saw Methodist ministers appointed to permanent commissions as chaplains in all three services, has been largely ignored by writers other than Alan Robinson and Snape.¹⁰⁰ There has been little other scholarship on Methodist mission to soldiers, sailors and airmen during this period, which is somewhat surprising given its enduring importance to the connexions. The career of Wesleyan chaplain Owen Spencer Watkins, who became Deputy Chaplain-General in 1924, would warrant a modern biographical study.

Military mission to Britain's armed forces during the Second World War is under-researched compared to that of the First World War.¹⁰¹ Again, the topic does not fit tidily under the headings of either religious or military history. Snape's history of the Royal Army

⁹⁷ John Broom, 'Faith in the Furnace: British Christians in the Armed Services, 1939-1945' (PhD thesis, Durham University, 2018), 25-26, <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/12709/> [accessed online 02.06.2020].

⁹⁸ Mark Peel, *The Last Wesleyan: A Life of Donald Soper* (Lancaster: Scotforth Books, 2008); John Travell, *Doctor of Souls: A Biography of Dr Leslie Dixon Weatherhead* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1999); A. Kingsley Weatherhead, *Leslie Weatherhead: A Personal Portrait* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975).

⁹⁹ Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization* (London: Penguin, 2010), 221; David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 200, 217-18, 220-23; Daniel Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle, 1937-1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 70-71, 75-78, 110, 186.

¹⁰⁰ Alan Robinson, *Chaplains at War: The Role of Clergymen during World War 11* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 38-59; Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 262-80.

¹⁰¹ See recent book by James Hagerty, *No Ordinary Shepherds: Catholic Chaplains to the British Forces in the Second World War* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2020).

Chaplains' Department more than adequately covered the development, operation and effectiveness of army chaplaincy, but there has been no such comprehensive work on naval or air force ministry, nor that to the three women's military services: ATS, WAAF and WRNS.¹⁰² His *God and the British Soldier* assessed beliefs and the provision of the churches, chaplains, civilians and religious agencies.¹⁰³ Robinson's study, *Chaplains at War: The Role of Clergymen during World War II*, supplemented Snape's work; it was less a study of the Chaplains' Department and more an account of the 'tangible role of chaplains'.¹⁰⁴ Despite the title, his book focused exclusively on the army rather than including the Royal Navy and the RAF. His examination included Methodist chaplains' role in the conflict. Robinson presented a positive picture of their ministry, arguing that the Church was ideally suited to military mission, meeting the challenges that the war presented. Gordon Taylor's comprehensive account of naval chaplaincy marginalised the role of Free Church clergy and condoned the Anglican exclusivity that dominated ministry at sea for most of the war.¹⁰⁵

As with the First World War, Hughes has written most extensively on Methodism and the War, and valuable though his contribution is, he gave little attention to armed forces' mission, focusing more on opposition to the war. He described civilian and uniformed ministry, 'the practical challenges of war' in four pages, devoting eleven to the development of pacifism in the Church.¹⁰⁶ An article of 2003 by the same author presented the war through the same lens.¹⁰⁷ Unlike military mission, Methodist pacifism, opposition to conscription, and conscientious objection have been the subject of considerable

¹⁰² Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 262–341.

¹⁰³ Snape, *God and the British Soldier*.

¹⁰⁴ Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, 368, 511–24.

¹⁰⁶ Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, 117–32.

¹⁰⁷ Hughes, 'Methodism, Peace and War, 1932–45'.

attention.¹⁰⁸ Wilkinson's account of the churches in the Second World War was more balanced than his highly critical judgement on the First World War. Unlike Hughes, he described military ministry in as much detail as the work of peace campaigners.¹⁰⁹ Elsewhere, he challenged the very concept of armed forces chaplaincy, stating that 'Christianity and the military profession' are utterly incompatible.¹¹⁰

There has been no detailed research focusing upon Methodist mission to Britain's armed forces during the Second World War. However, there is an abundance of archival and published resources, as Chapter Seven makes clear. Moreover, the remarkable and well-documented wartime experiences of several Methodist chaplains, individually and collectively, warrant further exposure. Leslie Skinner, the first British chaplain ashore on D-Day, and Robert Watkins, who showed extraordinary leadership and bravery at Arnhem, for example, deserve to be better known. The fortitude and Christian witness of those chaplains whose wartime ministry was in Prisoner of War Camps are no less worthy of attention.¹¹¹ A thorough study of Methodism and the Second World is overdue.

¹⁰⁸ Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith*, 126; Martin Ceadel, 'Opposition to War', in *The Great World War, 1914-45. vol. 2, The Peoples' Experience*, ed. by Peter Liddle, John Bourne and Ian Whitehead (London: HarperCollins, 2001), II, 443.

¹⁰⁹ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?*, 232–97.

¹¹⁰ Alan Wilkinson, 'The Paradox of the Military Chaplain', in *Theology*, 84, no. 700 (1981): 249, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X8108400403>. [accessed online 12.09.2019].

¹¹¹ Andrew Pickering, 'Chaplaincy "in the Bag"', in *Methodist Recorder*, 19 June 2020, 24.

Methodology and Sources

This thesis is a chronological study of Methodist mission to Britain's armed forces from the beginnings of the Methodist movement in the middle of the eighteenth century to the end of the Second World War, arguing that consistent strands in that relationship can only be understood through such historical analysis. Military mission is set within the context of developments in the Methodist movement and broader ecclesiastical history. This study makes extensive use of the wealth of contemporary source material, examining evidence including the published papers of leading Methodist figures, minutes of the connexional conferences and denominational periodicals, which include the testimony of many Methodist servicemen and those who ministered to them. The minutes and papers of the Methodist forces boards are analysed to trace the relationship with the military authorities, as are War Office, Admiralty and India Office records, together with the memoirs, diaries and letters of many Methodist chaplains, soldiers and sailors. Later chapters also utilise the sound recordings of Methodist servicemen and the ministers and laity involved in mission to the forces.

Many recent studies have examined the influence of religion on the First World War and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the Second World War and the colonial clashes of the late nineteenth century; however, these conflicts tend to be treated in isolation. In addition to examining this relationship during war, the thesis also looks at military mission during periods of peace. Extensive research on religion in the British Army has been undertaken in the past thirty years, but there is little comparable scholarship on the Royal Navy and almost

nothing on the Royal Air Force.¹¹² In each chapter, the thesis compares Methodist outreach and its reception in each of the services. Although there is an emerging canon of scholarship on other denominations, such an analysis of the relationship between Methodism and the armed forces has not previously been undertaken.

By including the early years of the movement, the thesis shows that the connections began with John Wesley himself, as did some of the ambiguities which characterised mission to soldiers and sailors. Chapter Two examines that relationship from the movement's birth in 1738, the date commemorated by Methodists as John Wesley's conversion, to 1815, the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The presence of Methodists in the armed forces during all of Britain's major conflicts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is illustrated. Wesley's connections with soldiers and sailors are well-documented in his journals and diaries. There have been several collections of this material, the most commanding and comprehensive being the twenty-four volumes edited by Reginald Ward and Richard Heitzenrater between 1988 and 2003.¹¹³ The letters he wrote to and received from soldiers are contained within John Telford's collection (there is no existent correspondence with sailors).¹¹⁴ Wesley's sermons are also invaluable evidence of his views.¹¹⁵ This chapter uses similar material from other prominent figures in the movement's early history, including Charles Wesley, George Whitefield and Francis Asbury.¹¹⁶ *The Arminian, Methodist and*

¹¹² For example: Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*; Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*; Snape, *God and the British Soldier*.

¹¹³ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley. Journals and Diaries*, ed. by W. Reginald Ward (Journals) and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Diaries), 24 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988-2003).

¹¹⁴ John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.: Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford*, ed. by John Telford. 7 vols (London: Epworth Press, 1931).

¹¹⁵ Albert Outler and Richard Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1991).

¹¹⁶ Charles Wesley, *The Letters of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Kenneth Newport and Gareth Lloyd, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Charles Wesley, *The Manuscript Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, ed. by S.T. Kimbrough, Jr. and Kenneth Newport (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 2008);

Wesleyan Methodist Magazines, published continuously from 1774, contain accounts by, and about, Methodist soldiers engaged in Britain's conflicts of the period. The National Army Museum holds the diaries and letters of a small number of Methodist soldiers who fought in the Napoleonic Wars. This chapter also uses similar material for the navy, albeit that there is no evidence which predates the start of the Revolutionary Wars in 1793.

The focus of Chapter Three is the period from 1815 to 1854. From Waterloo to the Crimean War, the Methodist churches showed little apparent engagement with the armed forces. Denominational periodicals and minutes refer to the armed forces, but they were not a priority for any of the connexions. However, this chapter illustrates an enduring Methodist presence in the army and navy and a growing concern for soldiers and sailors' souls. A genre of recollections from those who served during this period includes testimony from several men who identified themselves as Methodists.¹¹⁷ The memoirs of William Rule, one of the first Wesleyan clergymen to minister to soldiers, are particularly useful in examining the relationship between his Church and the armed forces.¹¹⁸ Servicemen's role in spreading the movement overseas is revealed by studying the Wesleyan Missionary Society's records. Its minutes and papers, including letters from the first Methodist chaplain posted to the Crimea in 1855, are part of the missionary records held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University.

George Whitefield, *Letters of George Whitefield, for the Period 1734-1742* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976); Francis Asbury, *Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury* (London: Epworth Press, 1958).

¹¹⁷ For example see William Mason, *A Primitive Methodist Soldier in the British Army* (Leeds: J. Strafford, 1877); Alfred Laverack, *Seventeen Years' Experience in India* (Leeds: William Askey, 1871).

¹¹⁸ William Harris Rule, *Memoir of a Mission to Gibraltar and Spain: With Collateral Notices of Events Favouring Religious Liberty, and of the Decline of Romish Power in That Country, from the Beginning of This Century to the Year 1842* (London: John Mason, 1844); William Harris Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army* (London: T. Woolmer, 1883); William Harris Rule, *Recollections of My Life and Work at Home and Abroad in Connection with the Wesleyan Methodist Conference* (London: T. Woolmer, 1886).

Chapter Four explores and accounts for the establishment of a Methodist presence in the army and navy that occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century. This chapter shows how Methodist mission became part of the military's religious establishment by creating and extending chaplaincy to the army and the navy. Striving for recognition and representation are shown to mirror broader Nonconformist struggles for societal and political status. This chapter further demonstrates how the Wesleyans became committed to working with the forces and how they differed from the other Methodist connexions. Wesleyan mission to the armed forces is shown to indicate the denomination's support for Britain's military and imperial endeavours. There is a comprehensive collection of the minutes of the Methodist churches held at Wesley House, Cambridge. These minutes and agendas provide insight into the connexions' work with the armed forces. From the mid-1860s, the minutes meticulously record the numbers of chaplains and their postings, expenditure on military outreach, the numbers of adherents and members in each of the services, and their locations. Methodist hymnody suggests the extent to which military themes and language permeated their ecclesial culture. There is an extensive range of these hymn books at Wesley House, Cambridge. The Methodist Archives and Research Centre at John Rylands Library, Manchester University, holds the minutes and papers of the Wesleyan Armed Forces Board, which coordinated work with the armed services from its creation in the 1860s, and the Methodist Board, which subsumed its work after union in 1932. These archives include correspondence with the government and military authorities, chaplains' service details, and some of their letters and unpublished memoirs. The India Office papers at the British Library provide useful evidence of the Wesleyan Connexion's struggle for recognition and representation in the British Army serving in the sub-continent. Several of

the Wesleyan chaplains who ministered to troops during the Victorian era published memoirs.¹¹⁹

The attitudes to The First World War of the three major Methodist connexions, Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist, that underpinned their commitment to work with Britain's servicemen are explored in Chapter Five. Tensions within and between denominations over enlistment and conscription are described, both for their significance during the conflict and insofar as they framed later Methodist attitudes to peace and war. The implications of accepting acting chaplaincy commissions are examined, as are these uniformed clergy's roles and effectiveness. The chapter argues that there was considerable continuity in military mission between the First World War and earlier conflicts. Furthermore, it will be shown that there was a commonality in purpose between Wesleyan padres and those Primitive and United Methodist chaplains serving as part of the United Board, a distinctive Methodist military mission. Finally, the support that the churches at home gave to men in the forces is explored. Methodist mission during the First World War is extremely well-documented. In addition to the Wesleyan Armed Forces Board's papers are the records of the United Board that coordinated the ministry of the Primitive and United Methodist Churches together with the Baptists and Congregationalists. These records are held at the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford. There is a wealth of material for the war in contemporary periodicals, religious and secular, including accounts by chaplains and Methodist soldiers and sailors. Many of these chaplains and servicemen published their

¹¹⁹ For example see Arthur Male, *Scenes through the Battle Smoke* (London: Dean & Son, 1893); Edward P Lowry, *With the Guards' Brigade : From Bloemfontein to Komati Poort and Back* (London: Horace Marshall, 1902); Frederick Brown, *From Tientsin to Peking with the Allied Forces* (London: C. H. Kelly, 1902).

memoirs and diaries.¹²⁰ The Imperial War Museum holds a comprehensive collection of diaries, memoirs, and letters; there are also several recorded interviews by Methodists who served during the war, all invaluable sources for research into this period. The Royal Army Chaplains' Museum, based in Amport, Hampshire, until 2019, has an extensive range of archival material, especially regarding the First and Second World Wars. These sources include the unpublished papers of some Methodist chaplains. The National Archives' War Office, Admiralty and Royal Air Force records illustrate this and other thesis chapters.

The tension between Methodist pacifism and mission to the armed forces during the interwar period are examined in Chapter Six. The Implications of Methodist union for work with service personnel are also explored in this part of the thesis, as are the significant differences between Methodist naval chaplaincy and that in the army and the newly-formed RAF. This chapter makes use of similar material to the two chapters which precede it. The minutes and papers of the Primitive, United and Wesleyan Methodist Churches are especially useful, as are those of the Methodist Church of Britain which united the three denominations from 1932. The growth of pacifism during this period is illustrated through several recordings held at the Imperial War Museum and in the debates which took place in the Methodist press.

Chapter Seven also features Methodist differences over pacifism, conscription, and Britain's participation in the Second World War. The Church's ministry is assessed, that of commissioned chaplains and that of civilian clergy working with the services. Examples of army, navy and RAF chaplaincy in different theatres of war are described, including those

¹²⁰ For example see Owen Spencer Watkins, *With French in France and Flanders : Being the Experiences of a Chaplain Attached to a Field Ambulance* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1915); George Kendall, *Daring All Things : The Autobiography of George Kendall* (Solihull: Helion, 2016); T. L. B. Westerdale, *Messages from Mars: A Chaplain's Experiences at the Front* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1917).

padres who were prisoners of war. The important role of lay Methodists in supporting the military at home and overseas is also examined in this chapter. Although under-researched compared to the First World War, ministry during the Second World War is also rich in source material. Many of the chaplains who served in the forces produced diaries, memoirs and collections of letters.¹²¹ Several of these accounts were published; others are held at The Imperial War Museum, the Methodist Collection at John Rylands Library and The Royal Army Chaplain's Museum and Archives. National and church periodicals augment this material and are especially useful for ascertaining forces personnel and civilians' views.

The thesis eschews contemporary Methodist ahistorical preoccupation with pacifism which produces a reluctance to confront the significance to the Church of its relationship with Britain's armed forces. Many Methodists were conscientious objectors during the First and Second World Wars but far more served in the services as volunteers and conscripts.¹²² Moreover, most Methodist clergy and laity supported the British Government believing in the justice of the national cause.

This work is an exploration of ministry to the armed forces; this goes beyond commissioned chaplaincy. Indeed, there was no Methodist chaplaincy before 1854; it was exclusive to the Wesleyans for the next sixty years and was not commissioned before 1914. Thompson's comprehensive thesis on Free Church chaplaincy looks at the period from 1830 to 1930, at chaplaincy rather than mission in a broader sense, and exclusively at the army.¹²³

¹²¹ For example see Douglas Thompson, *Captives to Freedom* (London: Epworth Press, 1955); R. Edward Cubbon, *Methodist, Mad and Married* (Douglas, Isle of Man: Hospice Care, 1945); Leslie Skinner, *'The Man Who Worked on Sundays': Personal War Diary of Revd. Leslie Skinner RChD. Chaplain, 8th Armoured Brigade, Attached Sherwood Rangers (Notts.) Yeomanry Regiment*. (Self-published, 1991)

¹²² Stuart Bell, 'Tomb of the Unknown Warrior', in *Methodist Recorder*, 6 November 2020, 15.

¹²³ John Thompson, 'The Free Church Army Chaplain, 1830-1930' (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1990).

For much of the period studied, ministry to the forces was delivered not through chaplains but rather by clergy and laity, including by soldiers and sailors themselves.

This is a study of the denomination's mission to members of the armed forces of Great Britain, although frequent points of comparison are made with Methodist mission to the forces of the colonies and dominions. Likewise, the following chapters deal with ministry to full-time soldiers, sailors, and, latterly, airmen and women, conscripts and volunteers, rather than members of militias and other part-time units. Memorialisation and memory studies are outside this study's scope, which focuses on the religious life of members of Britain's forces.

The thesis concentrates primarily on the relationship between those Methodists in the Wesleyan tradition, those who followed John Wesley's Arminian theology, and the armed forces. However, although the Wesleyans were predominant in leading the movement's mission to the forces, the role of the smaller denominations such as the Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians is also examined, arguing that there are consistent and distinctive strands in Methodist outreach to the forces. The military mission of those in the Calvinist tradition, the Welsh Calvinist Methodists and George Whitefield's followers, though referred to in places, is largely outside the scope of this research owing to the ecclesiastical, cultural and linguistic divide with those in the largely anglophone Wesleyan tradition.

Chapter Two: Methodism and the Military, 1738-1815

‘From the first, soldiers attracted Wesley’s sympathy.’¹

(Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Revd John Wesley M.A.*, 1870)

‘A soldier’s religion is a byword even with those who have no religion at all; vice and profaneness in every shape reign among them without control and that the whole tenor of their behaviour speaks “let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”.’²

(John Wesley, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, 1745)

Introduction

Britain was at war for much of John Wesley’s lifetime. He was born in 1703 during the War of the Spanish Succession; his lifetime also saw the wars of Jenkins’s Ear and the Austrian Succession, 1739– 48, the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion, the Seven Years War, 1756– 63, and the War of American Independence, 1775– 83. After Wesley died in 1791, Britain was involved in the French Revolutionary Wars of 1793– 1801 and then the Napoleonic Wars of 1803– 1815. Thus, Britain was engaged in armed conflict for the majority of the first seventy-seven

¹ Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley M.A. Founder of Methodism*, 3 vols (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1870), I, 432.

² John Wesley, *A Father Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part 1* (London: T. Tyre, 1745), 47.

years of Methodist history. The close association that developed between the movement and the army and navy was a product of these wars. Links with the armed forces were close and enduring throughout Methodism's early years and central to its development. There is abundant evidence of a Methodist presence in the army throughout this period and in the navy during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Connections to members of the armed forces originated with John Wesley and other early leaders of the movement. Likewise, the ambiguity between saving the souls of Britain's fighting men and being repelled by their apparent godlessness and immorality was an enduring characteristic of attitudes to the army and navy from the beginnings of Methodism.

The Rise of Methodism

The Methodist movement had its origins in an evangelical revival that took place throughout the British Isles, in the North American colonies, and central Europe during the 1730s.³ Although John Wesley was to become the dominant figure in Methodism, during his lifetime and subsequently, other individuals were also profoundly important, notably his brother Charles, George Whitefield, Benjamin Ingham, John Cennick, Selina Countess of Huntingdon and Howel Harris, Daniel Rowland and Thomas Charles in Wales. Moravian pietism, New England evangelism, and Scottish Presbyterian revivalism shaped Methodism's origins and early development. During the 1730s and early 1740s, these individuals and elements of

³ Jonathan Clark, 'The Eighteenth-Century Context', in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. by William Abraham and James Kirby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3–23; David Hempton, *Methodism : Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 6–31; Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 158–80.

religious awakening were inter-linked and closely associated. However, an early parting of ways led to the origins of significantly separate strands of Methodism. Though the key actors' relationships remained reasonably cordial, there were definite and irreconcilable divisions into two broad traditions.⁴

George Whitefield, although younger than the Wesleys, was a far more significant figure in the very early years of Methodism. He rapidly achieved acclaim as a celebrity preacher on both sides of the North Atlantic, addressing crowds of up to 20,000.⁵ He pioneered many features that defined Methodist spirituality and practice: the emphasis on 'new birth', extempore prayer, itinerant and open-air preaching, the stress on hymn singing, and the development of cells and societies. These elements were also found in Welsh Methodism, the early development of which preceded the movement in England.⁶ John Wesley was to borrow all these components, which were to become characteristics of the strand of Methodism that he developed, shaped, and led. The split which occurred between, on the one hand, George Whitefield and the Welsh Methodists, and on the other hand, John and Charles Wesley, was over profound doctrinal differences. Whitefield, the Countess of Huntingdon, and the Welsh Methodists were Calvinists, following John Calvin's teaching, believing in predestination; God had 'elected' certain people for eternal salvation, and therefore others were chosen for damnation.

In contrast, the Wesley brothers, especially John, were Arminians, a theological tradition taking its name from Jacobus Arminius. Arminianism rejected the doctrine of

⁴ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 181–250.

⁵ Geordan Hammond and David Ceri Jones, *George Whitefield: Life, Context, and Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁶ David Ceri Jones, Boyd Schlenther and Eryn White, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012).

election, believing that predestination was unscriptural, that God's sovereignty is incompatible with free will and that Christ died for all rather than the elect.⁷ In Bristol in 1739, John Wesley preached, then published, a sermon entitled 'Free Grace', in which he emphasised his Arminian theology and described predestination as 'blasphemy' nine times.⁸ From this point, it was impossible to reconcile such profoundly differing theological standpoints. Therefore, Methodism was divided into Calvinistic and Arminian, or Wesleyan, traditions almost from its inception. At the first Methodist Conference, held in 1744, attended by the key figures from both sides of this divide over election, attempts to heal the rift were unsuccessful.

The initial unity of this 'heart religion' was shattered; competing claims and agendas replaced it. By the early 1740s, Arminians like the Wesley brothers, Calvinists such as Whitefield, and Moravians like Ingham, all claimed to be 'Methodists'. Howel Harris, the leading Welsh Calvinist Methodist layman, described this division, 'there are three branches of Methodists (Wesleyans, Moravians and us)'.⁹ Therefore, Methodism became a broad term, lacking defining boundaries, encompassing both followers of and seceders from both Wesleyan and Whitefieldite strands, evangelicals who remained within the Church of England and Dissenters of an evangelical hue.

Neither George Whitefield nor John Wesley joined another church, and both were adamant that they remained ministers within the Church of England.¹⁰ John Wesley wrote in March 1788, three years before his death, 'I believe I shall not separate from the Church of

⁷ Charles Yrigoyen, *T & T Clark Companion to Methodism* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 396-7.

⁸ Albert Outler and Richard Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1991), 49-60.

⁹ Quoted in Derec Llwyd Morgan, *The Great Awakening in Wales* (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 13.

¹⁰ William Gibson, 'Whitefield and the Church of England', in *George Whitefield*, ed. by Geordan Hammond and David Ceri Jones, 46-63.

England till my soul departs from my body.’¹¹ A month later, in a letter to his brother Charles, he reiterated, ‘Indeed, I love the Church as sincerely as ever I did; and I shall tell our Societies everywhere. “The Methodists will not leave the Church, at least while I live”.’¹² William Gibson emphasised that Methodism was a movement born and nurtured within the Church of England.¹³ Both Whitefield and the Wesleys aimed to reform the Church of England, not to secede from it.¹⁴ Methodism was a child of Anglicanism, not Dissent.¹⁵ A Welsh Connexion was formed in 1743, within the Established Church, influenced, in part, by Whitefield, emphasising the separate direction from the Wesleyan-dominated English movement.¹⁶ Methodism spread to Ireland by the late 1740s, especially to garrison towns in Ulster, but the movement made little impact in Scotland.

During George Whitefield’s lifetime, relationships between the two factions remained civil for the most part, his relationship with John Wesley moderating the rivalry.¹⁷ John Wesley delivered Whitefield’s funeral sermon following the latter’s instruction. The separation, though, was irreconcilable after Whitefield died in 1770. Wesley’s periodical, first published in 1778, was *The Arminian Magazine*. If the title did not make its theology sufficiently transparent, the first edition featured a biography of Arminius. By the 1770s, Wesley’s Arminian Methodism had emerged as the dominant force within English Methodism. English Calvinistic Methodism remained important during the lifetime of Selina,

¹¹ John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.: Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford*, ed. by John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931), VII, 250.

¹² Wesley, *Letters*, ed. by Telford, VII, 254.

¹³ William Gibson, *The Church of England, 1688-1832: Unity and Accord* (London: Routledge, 2001), 204–6.

¹⁴ John Munsey Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation: Studies in Methodism and Ecumenism in England, 1740-1982* (London: Epworth Press, 1985), 9-29.

¹⁵ Jeremy Gregory, ‘The Long Eighteenth Century’, in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. by Randy Maddox and Jason Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 13–42.

¹⁶ Jonathan Clark, ‘The Eighteenth-Century Context’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. by Abraham and Kirby, 10.

¹⁷ Geordan Hammond, ‘Whitefield, John Wesley and Revival Leadership’, in *George Whitefield*, ed. by Geordan Hammond and David Ceri Jones, 98–114.

Countess of Huntingdon. However, after her death in 1791, the same year as John Wesley's, it rapidly declined as a separate connexion in England, its followers and influence blending into broader Dissenting traditions. Calvinistic Methodism flourished in Wales, closely identified with the Welsh language and national identity. Like Whitefield and Wesley's movements, Welsh Methodism developed within the Established Church and strongly influenced Dissent before becoming a separate church, culturally and linguistically, in 1811.¹⁸

Wesleyan Methodism thrived after its founder's death, becoming pre-eminent within the movement in England and the anglophone world. Wesley and his followers wrote Methodism's history, and they dominated the historical record and its historiography. Although John Wesley was the single most dominant figure in Methodism's development, the movement was much more than, in Richard Heitzenrater's words, 'the lengthened shadow of one man'.¹⁹ During Wesley's lifetime, Methodism, in all its shades, was a small minority movement. At the time of John Wesley's death in 1791, his connexion in England and Wales had 72,426 members and, perhaps, two or three times that number of adherents, between one and two per cent of the population.²⁰ However, the significance of the Methodist movement was much greater; it extended to other Dissenting groups and the evangelical school within the Church of England. In addition, it influenced wider society, including the anti-slavery campaign and movements to reform prisons, housing and working conditions. In contrast to that of Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon, Wesleyan

¹⁸ Eifion Evans, *Fire in the Thatch: The True Nature of Religious Revival* (Bridgend: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1996); Jones, Schlenther and White, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*.

¹⁹ Richard Heitzenrater, 'The Founding Brothers', in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. by Abraham and Kirby, 30-44.

²⁰ Jonathan Clark, 'The Eighteenth-Century Context', in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. by Abraham and Kirby, 4-29.

Methodism thrived after its founder's death; membership in England quadrupled between 1791 and 1821. It was, however, only one part of a larger and frequently fissiparous movement.

In synthesis, key elements that led to Methodism's establishment and growth included achieving personal and social holiness on earth and in heaven. For the 'People called Methodists', this was an individual, self-adopted choice, not an institutional or state-sponsored obligation. With adoption came personal and spiritual discipline or 'method'. Methodism was lived religion; it required action rather than passivity, emphasising emotions and practical divinity. Hymn-singing also defined the collective and individual expression of spirituality; John Wesley labelled his hymn book: 'a little briefing in experimental and practical theology'.²¹ Members were encouraged by leaders, and their peers, to be literate, earnest, frugal and industrious. Membership gave an alternative identity both as individuals and collectively. The class system, weekly meetings, societies, lay participation, itinerant preaching and a commitment to evangelism were common elements in all Methodist strands. These features, which brought growth and endurance to Methodism beyond the lives of the Wesley brothers, also help to explain its appeal to members of Britain's armed forces.

²¹ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*: 414.

Attitudes to the State and the Armed Forces

Britain was a nation forged in war and the threat of war. These wars of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were, to Britons of the period, religious conflicts. Linda Colley has emphasised that it was Protestantism pitched against the Catholic powers of Europe, especially France, the pre-eminent Catholic state, which united England, Wales, and Scotland together to form Britain in the eighteenth century.²² A common commitment to Protestantism was the most significant unifying factor in Britain. Methodism was, above all, a Protestant movement born from, and growing within, the Church of England. Wesley applauded the loyalist Independent Companies raised in Ireland during the American War of Independence who, 'if they answer no other end at least keep the Papists in order'.²³

John Wesley remained loyalist, conservative and anti-French throughout his lifetime.²⁴ Charles Wesley described the brothers as having suffered accusations of being 'papists, Jesuits, seducers and bringers in of the Pretender'.²⁵ Early Methodists were often accused of being Jacobites; therefore, stressing their loyalism to the crown was essential to the Wesleys. Rumours of a French invasion in February 1744 caused Wesley to exhort his congregation in London to pray and prepare.²⁶ During the height of the threat of the

²² Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 19.

²³ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. by W. Reginald Ward (Journal) and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Diaries), 24 vols (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), XXIII, 82.

²⁴ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XX, 108-109.

²⁵ Charles Wesley, *The Manuscript Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, ed. by S. T. Kimbrough, Jr. and Kenneth Newport, 2 vols (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 2008), I, 207.

²⁶ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XX, 9.

Jacobite Rebellion, John Wesley wrote to the mayor of Newcastle affirming his loyalty to the monarch:

All I can do for His Majesty, whom I honour and love – I think not less than I did for my own father – is this, I cry unto God, day by day, in public and in private, to put all his enemies to confusion: and I exhort all that hear me to do the same; and, in their several stations, to exert themselves as loyal subjects; who, as long as they fear God, cannot but honour the King.²⁷

John Wesley supported a day of solemn fasting and prayer and sent an address of loyalty to the King.²⁸ Charles wrote the Service of Thanksgiving, held at the Foundery, to mark victory over the Jacobites and published his *Hymns for the Public Thanksgiving Day, Oct 9, 1746*, for the occasion.²⁹ The following year, John Wesley rebutted allegations that he and his followers were Jacobites and that ‘we are bringing the Pretender’.³⁰ However, invasion scares increased public suspicion of Methodism and, in many riots, accusations were made that the movement was colluding with the King's enemies.³¹

Allegations that Methodists were Catholics were prominent in the early years. George Lavington, Bishop of Exeter, produced *Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared*, in which he claimed that the ‘whole conduct of the Methodists is but a counterpart of the wild fanaticism of Popery’.³² In March 1756, faced again with the threat of French invasion, Wesley advised his followers to drill, and he offered to raise a company of ‘at least two hundred volunteers’ to defend London.³³ Brother Charles was privately

²⁷ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XX, 189.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.

²⁹ Charles Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, ed. by Kimbrough and Newport., II, 476.

³⁰ John Wesley, *Letters*, ed. by Telford, II, 101.

³¹ Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation*, 30-3.

³² Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850*, 3.

³³ John Wesley, *Letters*, ed. by Telford, III, p.165.

sceptical about whether John's Methodist militia would be of much value in the event of invasion. 'I question whether my brother's soldiers with all his pains and haste to train them up will be too tardy to rescue us.'³⁴ John Wesley's offer had indeed included the proviso that his volunteers would need both arms and training.³⁵

Methodists of other hues also stressed their commitment to the crown and country. George Whitefield was always a loyal subject, urging his followers to 'Fear God, and [. . .] honour the King'.³⁶ In June 1760, he preached to twenty-eight army officers at a dinner where he commended their 'zeal and good behaviour'.³⁷ Whitefield's biographer, Robert Philip, considered him 'The Apostle of the English Empire'.³⁸ Leading Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Daniel Rowland, in his *Aceldama*, urged his readers to pray for those fighting for the Protestant faith and enduring the cruelty and vagaries of war.³⁹

Like the rest of his family, John Wesley was a Tory. In 1775 he wrote, 'I am a High Churchman, brought up from my childhood in the highest notions of passive obedience and non-resistance.' Two years later, he repeated, 'It is my religion which obliges me "to put man in mind to be subject to principalities and powers"'. Loyalty is with me an essential branch of religion.'⁴⁰ Wesley commended Samuel Bradburn for lending a preaching house to the army in Ireland in 1771, 'I would show them all the respect that is in my power.'⁴¹ In 1785, he firmly rejected claims that his brother Samuel had been a Jacobite:

³⁴ Charles Wesley, *The Letters of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Kenneth Newport and Gareth Lloyd, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), I, 402.

³⁵ *John Wesley, Letters*, ed. by Telford, II, 53.

³⁶ Carla Pestana 'Whitefield and Empire', in *George Whitefield*, ed by Geordan Hammond and Ceri Jones, 86.

³⁷ Quoted in Evans, *Fire in the Thatch*, 93.

³⁸ Robert Philip, *The Life and Times of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: George Virtue, 1837), 13.

³⁹ Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 303

⁴⁰ Quoted in Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 371.

⁴¹ John Wesley, *Letters*, ed. by Telford, VI, 352.

Most of those who gave the title did not distinguish between a Jacobite and a Tory; thereby I mean “one that believes God, not the people, to be the origin of all civil power”. In this sense he was a Tory: so was my father: so am I. But I am no more a Jacobite than a Turk.⁴²

Wesley’s loyalism was made manifest in clear opposition to the American Revolution. Instead, he called for Christian obedience, ‘Let us put away our sins; the real ground of all our calamities! Which never will or can be thoroughly removed, till we fear God and honour the King.’⁴³

Stephen Plant used the analogy of a genome in discussing the relationship between Methodism and politics, arguing that Wesley’s beliefs combined the ‘base pair’ of liberty and order. Liberty, religious and civil, could only be guaranteed with obedience to authority, especially that of the monarch.⁴⁴ Kings ruled by Divine authority; their power came from God, not the people. The state’s authority was assigned by God and, therefore, must be obeyed by his followers. ‘[Government] is a trust, but not from the people; “there is no power but of God”. It is a delegation, namely, from God; for rulers are God’s ministers or delegates.’⁴⁵ Pamphlets such as *A Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England* (1777) and *A Serious Address to the People of England, with Regard to the State of the Nation* (1778), were further appeals for duty and deference.⁴⁶ Wesley’s views were a drawing together of support for King, country, and Protestantism; he was a defender of royal paternalism, the law, and the establishment.

⁴² John Wesley, *Letters*, ed. by Telford, VII, 305.

⁴³ John Wesley, *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies* (London: R. Hawes, 1775), 17–18.

⁴⁴ Stephen Plant, ‘Methodism and Politics’, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism* ed. by William Gibson, Peter Forsaith and Martin Wellings (London: Routledge, 2016), 354–64.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Briane Turley, ‘John Wesley and War’, in *Methodist History* 29, no. 2 (1991), 97.

⁴⁶ J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology, and Politics during the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 290–91.

After John Wesley's death, the Methodist Conference maintained his position of subservience and loyalism. The onset of war against France in 1793 saw Methodism affirming its commitment to the national cause. During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the movement's leadership firmly distanced itself from any taint of destabilising radicalism that might question its Protestant patriotism.⁴⁷ *The Gentleman's Magazine* of September 1793 commented positively upon the movement's attachment to the King, the government and the constitution, affirmed through the *Address to the Members of Methodist Societies* issued after the Conference held during the previous month.⁴⁸ During the wars against France, *The Times* and other newspapers approvingly recorded Methodist chapels as contributing to raising funds for the families of sailors killed at the battles of the Nile and Trafalgar.⁴⁹ In 1812, following the passing of the Toleration Act, the Wesleyan Conference of preachers wrote to members, 'We proclaim loudly and earnestly, "Fear the Lord and the King: and meddle not with them that are given to change, avoid them"'.⁵⁰ Methodism appealed to soldiers and sailors partly due to such loyalism, positioning itself firmly within the context of a Protestant and Anglican British Empire.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Gibson, *The Church of England, 1688-1832*, 14.

⁴⁸ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 63, issue 3, (September 1793), 3.

⁴⁹ *The Times*, Thursday, 30 January 1806, issue 6694, 2.; *The Oracle*, Saturday 29 December 1798, issue 21,867; *True Briton*, Friday 28 December 1798, issue 1874 [accessed online 21 November 2017].

⁵⁰ David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750-1900* (London: Routledge, 1996), 115.

⁵¹ Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, 16–17.

The Growth of Methodism in the British Army

The close and enduring relationship between Methodism and the British Army dates to the very beginnings of the movement, to John Wesley himself. Wesley met with a class of soldiers in Westminster as early as October 1738, and in 1740 he spent time with a condemned soldier at Bridewell Prison.⁵² Contacts with soldiers and, to a much lesser extent, sailors continued throughout John Wesley's lifetime. However, as with many other elements of early Methodism, Wesley's attitudes were full of apparent contradictions. On the one hand, John Wesley saw servicemen as souls ripe for salvation; on the other hand, their moral standards repelled him.

There was much about men in the military that Wesley admired. Owen Spencer Watkins wrote, 'There was no class of the community to which John Wesley was more drawn, or of which he records with greater pleasure than the soldiery'.⁵³ These men were disciplined, obedient and subservient to authority; they were used to structure, order and the regular habits which characterised early Methodism. During the first Conference in 1744, the question was asked, 'Is it lawful to bear arms?' and answered that the New Testament did not condemn it and that Cornelius, a soldier, is commended.⁵⁴ Wesley's organisational structure of classes, bands and societies within a wider connexion would have been comprehensible to soldiers and sailors.

⁵² John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XIX, 19.

⁵³ Owen Spencer Watkins, *Soldiers and Preachers Too: Being the Romantic Story of Methodism and the British Army with a Complete Record of the War Service of Wesleyan Chaplains in the Forces*. (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1906), 1.

⁵⁴ Manfred Marquart, 'Social Ethics in the Methodist Tradition', in *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism*, ed. by Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., 296.

Methodist soldier preachers' activities and influence during the Flanders Campaign of 1742-5 are remarkably well documented. The earliest editions of the *Arminian Magazine*, published from 1779 to 1783, give very detailed accounts of the military and spiritual exploits of men such as John Haime and Sampson Staniforth.⁵⁵ John Haime, who had enlisted in the Queen's Regiment of Dragoons, had heard Charles Wesley and John Cennick preach in London. When posted to Flanders in June 1742, he wrote to the Wesley brothers for spiritual guidance and reported the progress of the meetings of soldiers that he led; both John and Charles offered encouragement.⁵⁶ He survived the Battle of Dettingen, 27 June 1743, and continued to correspond with John Wesley.⁵⁷ Haime described founding a Methodist society in Ghent with two men from the baggage train, William Clements and Pitman Stage. The group grew from twelve to twenty, but by the time they were posted to a location near Brussels, preaching was being attended by 'a thousand hearers; officers, common soldiers and others.'⁵⁸ In 1744, Haime preached up to thirty-five times a week, thereby walking between twenty and thirty miles a day. According to him, the society in Flanders grew to 300 members and seven preachers. The society built a hut, a 'tabernacle', of two to four rooms at each of the camps to which they were posted. A society was also started in the Hanoverian army; however, this activity was banned. Whilst quartered in Bruges, during the winter of 1744 to 1745, Haime arranged with the Commander-in-Chief to hold meetings at the English Church, which up to 200 soldiers attended, 'And we had every

⁵⁵ *Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption*, 1778–83.

⁵⁶ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XX, 8–9.

⁵⁷ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 26, *Letters: 2 1740-1755*, ed. by Frank Baker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 98.

⁵⁸ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 6, May 1783, 257.

day a numerous congregation both of soldiers and townsfolk.’⁵⁹ One of the features of this congregation in Bruges was their hymn singing, a distinctive element in early Methodism.⁶⁰

At the Battle of Fontenoy, 11 May 1745, Methodist soldiers faced death with fortitude and bravery. Haime described William Clements having his arm broken by a musket ball but fighting on with his good arm until that, too, was injured. John Evans lost both legs to a cannonball and was laid on a wagon to die, ‘praising God and blessing him with joyful lips’. Haime, clearly in the thick of the battle, recounted withstanding enemy fire for eleven hours, confident that he would not be harmed, ‘The French have no ball made, that will kill me this day.’ He had a horse killed under him, leading an officer to ask him, ‘Haime, where is your God now?’ His answer was, ‘Sir, he is here with me; and he will bring me out of this battle.’ The officer then had his head taken off by a cannonball.⁶¹

Haime met with the Duke of Cumberland, who was more than satisfied with the answers he gave to his questions, and the Commander in Chief ordered that he continue preaching without molestation. Later, unbeknown to Haime, the Duke heard him preach a sermon message of loyalty, duty, and obedience, commenting, ‘You fight for a good cause and for a good King, and in defence of your country.’⁶² Haime returned to England, was discharged, and became an itinerant Methodist preacher.

Wesley also corresponded with John Evans, William Clements, and Sampson Staniforth, who fought in Flanders.⁶³ In Ghent, during the winter of 1743 and 1744, William Clements and John Evans led a nascent society of soldiers and civilians. These meetings

⁵⁹ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 3, April 1780, 257.

⁶⁰ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 3, May 1780, 231.

⁶¹ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 6, May 1783, 262.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 264.

⁶³ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XX, 45–46, 107, 146–8.

attracted not only a considerable number of soldiers, but civilians, also, attended.⁶⁴

Sampson Staniforth, who joined the society in Ghent, had enlisted in 1740. He was posted first to Glasgow, where hearing George Whitefield's preaching made little impression on him, and then with the Duke of Cumberland's army to Flanders in the spring of 1743, arriving shortly after the Battle of Dettingen. Staniforth, moved by the preaching of Methodist soldiers including John Haime and Mark Bond, was converted and led a society within his regiment.⁶⁵ He described how Methodist influence in the army grew until there were members 'in almost every regiment'.⁶⁶ He took part in the Battle of Fontenoy, describing a strong sense of God's protection amid the fighting.⁶⁷ Then, in 1745, Staniforth was recalled to England because of the threat posed by the Jacobite Rising. He marched north to meet Charles Edward Stuart's army near Derby. 'Wherever we were, I enquired if there were any Methodists that we might sing and pray together.'⁶⁸ Both Staniforth and Haime were posted to Holland and later described the close relationships that developed with Dutch Reformed Protestants, 'They were a free loving people. So we found them; and so did many of the Methodist soldiers for they gave them house room and firing [fuel] freely.'⁶⁹ Staniforth bought himself out of the army in 1748 to become a preacher, having been ordained by a somewhat mysterious Bishop Erasmus of Arcadia.⁷⁰

Staniforth and Haime's accounts of their own lives and those of other soldier preachers are stylised. They fit a pattern: an early life of sin, conversion, 'backsliding',

⁶⁴ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 6, February 1783, 277-80.

⁶⁵ Susan Gane 'Common Soldiers, Same Sex Love and Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century British Army', in *Gender and History*, vol 25 no 3, 2013, 637-653.

⁶⁶ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 6, March 1783, 122.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶⁸ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 3, April 1780, 184.

⁶⁹ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 3, May 1780, 271.

⁷⁰ Thomas Jackson and John Telford, *Wesley's Veterans: Lives of Early Methodist Preachers Told by Themselves*, 7 vols (London: Robert Culley, 1909), III, 62.

sanctification and, finally, holy dying, which was at the heart of the ideal of Methodist spirituality. As recounted by Thomas Jackson and John Telford, the careers of these *Wesley's Veterans* follow this conversion narrative model.⁷¹ Other soldiers who joined the nascent movement included Thomas Mitchell, who had spent about a year in the Yorkshire Blues, a regiment with a strong Protestant tradition, during the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 to 1746. On discharge, he too joined the ranks of former soldiers who became Methodist preachers.⁷² Alexander Mather was unusual amongst Methodist soldiers in that he joined a 'party of the rebels' during the Jacobite Rebellion. He survived Culloden, was saved by 'several providential incidents', and later became another Methodist preacher who was a military veteran.⁷³ The faith and doggedness shown by these soldier preachers distinguished them as early itinerants; according to Kent, 'These soldiers stand out among the early preachers as men living in a hard world of their own and reshaping it through the power of imagination.'⁷⁴

Admirable in some respects, there was also much about soldiers which was an anathema to John Wesley. He was certainly not blind to their faults and moral failings. In 1744, Wesley published a *Word in Season or, Advice to an Englishman*, in which he reminded soldiers how close to death they lived, listing and condemning their sins: 'Sabbath breaking, drunkenness, revenge, fornication, adultery, and all uncleanness'.⁷⁵ Another publication further warned soldiers of the consequences of their sinful lives.⁷⁶ At Doncaster in 1745, he described the 'shameless depravity' of General Wade's army and their

⁷¹ Jackson and Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*; Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, 160.

⁷² *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 3, June 1780, 314.

⁷³ Jackson and Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, II, 78.

⁷⁴ Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans*, 97.

⁷⁵ John Wesley, *A Word in Season or, Advice to an Englishman* (London: Mills, Jowlett and Mills for J. Kershaw, 1745), 7.

⁷⁶ John Wesley, *Word in Season, or Advice to a Soldier* (Bristol: Farley, 1748).

drunkenness, swearing and blasphemies.⁷⁷ In the same year, Wesley was shocked by the soldiers who protected Newcastle against the Jacobite threat, the 'senseless wickedness, the ignorant profaneness, of the poor men to whom our lives are entrusted'.⁷⁸ When Charles Wesley preached outdoors at Plymouth in June 1746, he was confronted by a large crowd of shouting and blaspheming soldiers and sailors.⁷⁹ At Newport, Isle of Wight, in 1758, John Wesley was disgusted by the troops he encountered. 'The neighbouring camp had filled the town with soldiers, the most abandoned wretches whom I ever saw. Their whole glorying was in cursing, swearing, drunkenness, and lewdness. How gracious is God that he does not send these monsters to their own place!'⁸⁰

John Nelson may be described as the first Methodist conscientious objector. After hearing John Wesley preach at Westminster in 1739, he was converted and later became a preacher in his native Yorkshire. In 1744, to silence him, he was impressed into the army, set up by local publicans and clergymen.⁸¹ Nelson flatly refused to conform, to bear arms, or to wear uniform. Before a court martial in York, he announced, 'I shall not fight; for I cannot bow my knee before the Lord to pray for a man, and get up and kill him when I have done.' He also declared, 'You may array me as a man of war, but I shall never fight.' During his enforced three-month spell as an impressed soldier, he preached several times, including, he claimed, to a crowd of 600 on Hepworth Moor outside York. John Wesley urged him to see impressment as an evangelistic opportunity: 'Who knows how many souls God may by this means deliver into your hands.'⁸² The military authorities released Nelson at the

⁷⁷ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XX, 95.

⁷⁸ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 26, *Letters: 2 1740-1755*, ed. by Frank Baker, 163.

⁷⁹ Charles Wesley, *Journal*, ed. by Kimbrough and Newport, II, 462.

⁸⁰ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XXI, 166.

⁸¹ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XX, 29–30, 32.

⁸² John Wesley, *Letters*, ed. by Telford, II, 20.

instigation of Charles Wesley; the London Methodists hired a substitute. Like Nelson, John Downes was another itinerant preacher who was ‘dragged away for a soldier’ and rescued by the Wesley brothers’ intercession ‘out of the mouth of the lion’.⁸³

John Wesley found that soldiers made good listeners even though they did not always respond as enthusiastically as he would have wished. During the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion, he preached on the outskirts of Newcastle, acknowledging that a sermon by a fellow soldier might have had more impact:

At ten I preached in the Town Moor, at a small distance from the English camp [. . .] none attempted to make the least disturbance, from the beginning to the end. Yet I could not reach their hearts. The words of a scholar did not affect them, like those of a dragoon or a grenadier.⁸⁴

John Wesley found soldiers a receptive audience and protectors against sometimes hostile crowds on his many visits to Ireland.⁸⁵ In 1750, on visiting Limerick, he noted, ‘I could not but take particular notice of about sixty of the Highland regiment of soldiers —men fit to appear before princes. Their zeal, according “to knowledge” has stirred up many and they still speak for God, and are not ashamed.’ On the same visit, he was equally impressed when he examined a class of nineteen soldiers, twelve of whom he found to have achieved ‘perfect sanctification’.⁸⁶ In 1756, Wesley wrote that ‘in Ireland, the first call is to the soldiery.’⁸⁷

⁸³ Jackson and Telford, *Wesley’s Veterans*, III, 150.

⁸⁴ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XX, 98.

⁸⁵ Dudley Cooney ‘The Influence of the Army in the First Hundred Years of Irish Methodism’, in *Bulletin Methodist History Society of Ireland*, 2001, 80–91.

⁸⁶ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XX, 343.

⁸⁷ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. By Ward and Heitzenrater, XX1, 53.

Duncan Wright, who had enlisted in the 10th Regiment of Foot in 1754, was converted after reading religious books whilst in winter quarters in Limerick. He attended the Methodist society in the town and heard Wesley preach during the summer of 1755.⁸⁸ Wright led meetings for hymn singing and prayer in his regiment.⁸⁹ When he left the army, he became a preacher and learned Gaelic in order to minister in the Scottish Highlands. After having preached, in 1769, at the Royal Square barracks in Dublin to a large gathering of attentive soldiers, Wesley asked, 'By what means but field-preaching could we have reached these poor souls?'⁹⁰ Gideon Ouseley, a prominent Irish rural preacher for fifty years, first encountered Methodism at meetings conducted by the quartermaster attached to the Royal Irish Dragoons at Dunmore barracks during the 1780s.⁹¹ James Field, an Irish sergeant in the Royal Artillery, joined a Methodist society in Duncannon in 1796 primarily due to civilian and female evangelism.⁹²

Soldiers were agents of Methodist evangelism throughout the British Isles. For example, Thomas Rankin described the influence of several of the Queen's Dragoons, John Haime's former regiment, when stationed in Dunbar in the 1750s:

There were ten or twelve of the men and some of their wives, who were pious Christians. They met twice each day, for singing and for prayer and many in the town attended their meetings. I went with some other young people, to see and hear, this strange thing, religious soldiers.⁹³

⁸⁸ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 3, May 1780, 261.

⁸⁹ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 4, August 1781, 214.

⁹⁰ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XXII, 169.

⁹¹ Dudley Cooney, *The Methodists in Ireland: a Short History* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Columba Press, 2001), 54; Hempton, *The Religion of the People*, 131.

⁹² James Field, *The Life of Faith in the Son of God Illustrated in the Memoirs of Mr. James Field, of Cork, Formerly Sergeant in the Royal British Regiment of Artillery* (London: Robert Huston, 1851), 17-21.

⁹³ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 12, May 1789, 183.

These dragoons also were responsible for establishing Methodism in Musselburgh.⁹⁴ At Berwick in 1752, soldiers made up a 'considerable part' of Wesley's congregation.⁹⁵ In 1753, John Wesley described examining a society in Manchester which included seventeen dragoons who had been members of the same regiment as John Haime. Their faith, both in Haime and in God, had declined until they came under civilian Methodist influence.⁹⁶ In 1759, Wesley recorded: 'I went to Canterbury. Two hundred soldiers, I suppose, and a whole row of officers attended in the evening. Their number was increased the next evening and all behaved as men fearing God.'⁹⁷ His congregation at Malton in Yorkshire in 1766 was chiefly made up of members of the Oxford Blues, the Royal Horse Guards, 'who stood together, and were deeply serious, kept them in awe so but all behave decently, and many were present again the next morning'.⁹⁸ At Chatham Barracks in 1768, his audience of soldiers was 'all ear'.⁹⁹ In Jersey, garrison soldiers and fishing families formed the core of a small Methodist fellowship during 1782-3.¹⁰⁰

Methodism also spread outside the British Isles due, in part, to soldiers. One of the most prominent early Methodists in the American Colonies was Captain Thomas Webb. Webb, a veteran of the Seven Years War who had lost an eye at the siege of Louisbourg in 1758, preached in military uniform complete with a green eye patch and sword. He was one of those responsible for the building of the first Methodist chapel in New York. Webb was also influential in the creation of several other societies in the Middle Colonies. John Adams

⁹⁴ Jackson and Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, IV, 131.

⁹⁵ *John Wesley, Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XX, 422–23.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁹⁷ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XXI, 229.

⁹⁸ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, Wesley, 24:XXII, 50.

⁹⁹ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XXII, 119.

¹⁰⁰ David Chapman, 'Le Magasin Methodiste (1817-1901)', in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 62, no. Part 3 (October 2019), 119.

pronounced the former soldier as ‘one of the most fluent, eloquent men I have ever heard’.¹⁰¹ Webb passed on military intelligence to the British during the Revolutionary War, and he was arrested, imprisoned, and returned to Britain in 1778. On his return, his preaching, in uniform, gained him a colourful reputation in Bath and Bristol. A memorial in a Bristol chapel claimed, somewhat exaggeratedly, that he had founded the first Methodist Church in America.¹⁰²

George Whitefield had preached in Gibraltar in 1738 whilst en-route to Savannah. He was impressed by ‘a little group of pious soldiers, who for twelve years had been the *methodists* of Gibraltar’.¹⁰³ According to William Rule, Methodist prayer meetings were still taking place there in 1769.¹⁰⁴ When three regiments, the Forty-Sixth, Fifty-First and Sixty-First, were stationed on Gibraltar in 1792, a society of about ten men grew up. These men petitioned the governor for permission to meet and worship. ‘Hearing they belonged to the Methodist connexion, he readily consented, hoping they would not neglect their duty as soldiers.’¹⁰⁵ The society expanded; by the outbreak of war the following year, up to 120 men attended meetings. An unnamed private in the Gordon Highlanders referred to a Methodist society in Gibraltar composed of men from several different regiments.¹⁰⁶ A letter from a Scottish soldier ‘latterly returned from Gibraltar’, dated November 1801, recounts how numbers declined as men were posted to Egypt, Menorca and Malta, but that these troop movements led to the spread of Methodism elsewhere.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Dee Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Yale University Press, 2002), 52.

¹⁰² *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 25 (November 1802), 422-424.

¹⁰³ Philip, *The Life and Times of the Reverend George Whitefield*, 64.

¹⁰⁴ William Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army* (London: T. Woolmer, 1883), 14.

¹⁰⁵ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 24 (July 1802), 323.

¹⁰⁶ *Narrative of a Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92d Regiment of Foot / Written by Himself* (Glasgow: 1820), 6.

¹⁰⁷ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 24 (July 1802), 323-7.

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars of 1793 to 1815 saw examples of Methodism's influence, especially that of the role of soldier preachers similar to those of previous campaigns. There is a fleeting reference in the *Arminian Magazine* to the death from disease of Lieutenant John Tuffie in Holland in 1794.¹⁰⁸ James Field refers to Wesleyan soldiers meeting near Breda in Flanders during the same year.¹⁰⁹ Army Methodism flourished during the Peninsular campaigns. There was a powerful sense of cultural 'otherness' about serving in Portugal and Spain for British soldiers. Daly described the strong anti-Catholic prejudices and condescension which permeated the predominantly Protestant army.¹¹⁰ Nothing could have been more at odds with Methodism's 'religion of the heart'. Sergeant Edward Reynolds described this sense of alienation, using the language of Psalm 137, in comparing serving in Iberia to exile in Babylon: 'We can sing the Lord's song in a strange land'.¹¹¹ James Field led prayer meetings in Sir John Moore's army in 1808.¹¹² In 1810, John Rae, 'a well-known Methodist', was awarded a medal for his bravery in combat at Sobral.¹¹³ Edward Costello was less complimentary in describing Methodist lay preacher Billy McNab as 'a notorious skulker.'¹¹⁴ By 1810 there were, according to Sergeant Reynolds, ten to twelve religious societies in the army serving in the Iberian Peninsula and a Methodist 'chapel' had been established in a disused wine press near Cartaxo; meetings also took place in 'quarries, fields, groves, on the banks of rivers or in old buildings'. He reported that the numbers attending meetings were increasing and that activity included twice-weekly

¹⁰⁸ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 19 (April 1796), 157.

¹⁰⁹ Field, *The Life of Faith in the Son of God*, 10.

¹¹⁰ Gavin Daly, *The British Soldier in the Peninsular War: Encounters with Spain and Portugal, 1808-1814* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 161-7.

¹¹¹ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 33 (October 1810), 402.

¹¹² J Field, *The Life of Faith in the Son of God*, 21.

¹¹³ Oman, *Wellington's Army, 1809-1814*, 324.

¹¹⁴ Edward Costello, *Costello; the True Story of a Peninsular War Rifleman*, ed. by Eileen Hathaway (Swanage: Shinglepicker Publications, 1997), 75.

preaching and a 'love feast'.¹¹⁵ In February 1811, Reynolds described the grace which protected Methodist men at the Battle of Busaco. His providential tone in describing the action is strongly reminiscent of that of John Haime and Sampson Staniforth. He also mentioned the Methodist soldier preacher Sergeant Stevenson of the Third Foot Guard, who was later referred to, his name inaccurately, by Wellington.¹¹⁶ In May 1812, *The Times* reported that Sergeant Reynolds had preached at the new Methodist chapel in Skipton, in full uniform, 'to the largest congregation ever recorded in that town'.¹¹⁷ Stevenson organised prayer meetings in the First Division, firstly in a gravel pit outside Badajoz, then later so close to Wellington's headquarters behind the Lines of Torres Vedras that the commander could hear their hymn singing.¹¹⁸ In three letters written in 1812, Charles Wood, a sergeant in the Third Foot Guards, described preaching onboard the troopship *Leopard* carrying him to Portugal, leading classes and preaching to soldiers in Spain. His accounts painted an optimistic picture, with the number of attendees at each meeting increasing.¹¹⁹ A 'pious class leader' James Graham was killed at the Battle of Vitoria on 21 June 1813.¹²⁰ Although few officers appear to have been Methodists, in 1811, the Duke of Wellington noted that two officers in the 9th Regiment attended Methodist meetings and preached at them.¹²¹ There is abundant evidence that Methodism was well established in Wellington's army during the Peninsular War.

That influence spread as the reach of the British army extended. A letter from John Kendrick, a sergeant in the Twenty-First Light Dragoons, reported a strong Methodist

¹¹⁵ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 33 (October 1810), 402-3.

¹¹⁶ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 34 (June 1811), 473.

¹¹⁷ *The Times*, Issue 8592, (Friday 1 May 1812), 3.

¹¹⁸ Oman, *Wellington's Army*, 330.

¹¹⁹ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 35 (July 1811), 797-9.

¹²⁰ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 36 (November 1813), 874-6.

¹²¹ Oman, *Wellington's Army*, 326.

presence in the army stationed at Cape Colony in 1813. Kendrick described sixty men meeting in the dragoons, fifty in the Eighty-Third Regiment, eighteen in the artillery and fourteen in the Ninety-Third Regiment; their numbers included ten preachers.¹²² By this date, soldiers, especially NCOs, had been instrumental in establishing Methodist societies in Quebec, Upper Canada, Dominica and Barbados in the West Indies and New South Wales.¹²³

Methodist soldier preachers were also present during the Waterloo campaign of 1815. A letter from Charles Wood described his activities as a lay preacher in Wellington's army, including leading hymn singing on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo. He preached three times on a Sunday and again on Wednesdays, led class meetings on Mondays and prayer meetings on Fridays. One of Charles Wood's society members in the same regiment, Sergeant Silver, was killed at Waterloo, and two others, both NCOs, were injured. Thomas Hasker, also wounded in the battle, described a flourishing Methodist society in the First Dragoon Guards.¹²⁴ Widespread Methodist influence in the army needs to be viewed relative to the number of Protestants in the ranks, one third of recruits being drawn from predominantly Roman Catholic Ireland.¹²⁵

It is undoubtedly significant that such a high proportion of Methodist soldiers in the ranks appear to have achieved promotion; the majority of individuals named in the *Methodist Magazine* were sergeants. These were steady and sober men and clearly literate, resembling the artisans and tradesmen drawn to Methodism in civilian life. In a similar way to the testimonies of Sampson Staniforth and John Haime, Charles Wood was anxious to

¹²² *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 36 (January 1813), 74-5.

¹²³ Watkins, *Soldiers and Preachers Too*, 126-137.

¹²⁴ Thomas Hasker, *The Camp and the Sanctuary: Or, the Power of Religion, as Exemplified in the Army and the Church. A Memoir of Thomas Hasker*, ed. by James Everett (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co, 1859), 62.

¹²⁵ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 77.

emphasise to his readers the loyalty, bravery and piety of fellow Methodist soldiers (and to quash any suggestion of radicalism):

It will rejoice your heart to hear that the Methodists in this action have completely refuted the shameless propaganda against them in that pernicious publication [the Anti-Jacobin Review] [. . .]. Our names are known and our conduct seen [. . .] and C. W. is ready to meet and dispute with that gentleman, to vindicate the character of the religious soldier, on the return from the field of blood to the land of peace.¹²⁶

The Growth of Methodism in the Royal Navy

References to John Wesley and other early Methodists addressing soldiers, usually with positive results, are frequent. There are forty-nine examples recorded in Wesley's journal and diaries of his preaching to soldiers.¹²⁷ There is far less evidence of his preaching to sailors. In 1756 he preached at Pill, near Bristol, to a 'large attentive congregation', many of whom were sailors.¹²⁸ At Dover in 1768, Wesley recorded, 'What a desire to hear runs through all the seaport towns whenever we come! Surely God is besieging this nation and attacking it at all the entrances.'¹²⁹ He also visited Falmouth, Plymouth and Portsmouth many times, but there are no records of him preaching to audiences made up mainly of sailors.

¹²⁶ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 39 (April 1816), 300-2.

¹²⁷ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater.

¹²⁸ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XXI, 44.

¹²⁹ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater XXII, 165.

Although expressed far less often than those about soldiers, Wesley's views on sailors were equally condemnatory.¹³⁰ He asked the question of the Royal Navy 'Is not every man of war a floating hell? Where is found more consummate wickedness, a more full, damning contempt of God and all the laws, except in the bottomless pit.' He unfavourably compared the Georgian navy's lack of religion with the piety he attributed to Francis Drake and the Elizabethan mariners.¹³¹ One of the very few meetings with sailors that Wesley described was when the crews of some privateers were amongst the most active members of a hostile mob that he encountered at Falmouth in 1745.¹³² A close associate of the Wesleys, Edward Perronet, had his sermon at Whitehaven in September 1749 disrupted by a party of sailors playing the violin.¹³³ In 1757, Wesley asked whether God would be able to 'kindle the same fire in the fleet which he has already begun to kindle in the army?'¹³⁴ He perceived that Methodism had failed to make a similar impact upon sailors as it had done with soldiers.

Owen Spencer Watkins recognised that evidence of Methodism in the Royal Navy during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: 'Was at most very occasional. The result is that a most interesting chapter in the history of our Church is lost to us.'¹³⁵ Unlike the soldier preachers, there are no sailors amongst Jackson and Telford's *Wesley's Veterans*.¹³⁶ Copies of the *Arminian Magazine*, which commenced publication in 1778, make no reference to Methodism in the navy during its first fifteen years. Methodism was

¹³⁰ John Wesley, *Advice to a Sailor* (London: ?, 1758).

¹³¹ John Wesley, 'The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion, and Certain Related Open Letters', in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. by Gerald Cragg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 242.

¹³² John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, X, 179-80.

¹³³ Stuart Andrews, *Methodism and Society* (Harlow: Longman, 1970), 40.

¹³⁴ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XXI, 89.

¹³⁵ Watkins, *Soldiers and Preachers Too*, 50.

¹³⁶ Jackson and Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*.

primarily an oral movement, and ordinary sailors of the eighteenth century left little written evidence of any kind, so the absence of records from a ship at war is hardly surprising. Nevertheless, this applied to the army to a large extent. The lack of evidence for any Methodist activity in the navy for the period before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War is extraordinary, especially when compared to the relatively plentiful material that exists after 1793. There is a paucity of material, certainly compared to the army during the same period; however, it is possible to give sufficient evidence of a thriving Methodist sub-culture in the Royal Navy during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

The first letter from a Methodist in the Royal Navy that appears in the *Arminian Magazine* is dated 27 June 1794; it was written by a sailor on board the *Caesar*, a ship of Admiral Howe's fleet based at Spithead. The unnamed sailor recorded the events of the Battle of the Glorious First of June. The writer stated that he was one of only two Methodist sailors on board and that he and his companion prayed together before the battle.¹³⁷ Blake saw little evidence of Methodism in the navy before this period; however, he made links with the Spithead and Nore Mutinies of 1797, 'It can be no more than guesswork, but it is interesting to speculate whether Methodists were used to pass mutinous correspondence, or even that they were instrumental in organising the mutinies.'¹³⁸ Such speculation may be 'interesting', but Blake produced no evidence to substantiate this claim which other historians ignore or dismiss.¹³⁹ Margarette Lincoln suggested that the mutinies did raise

¹³⁷ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 18 (June 1795), 308.

¹³⁸ Richard Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy, 1775-1815: Blue Lights and Psalm-Singers* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008), 93.

¹³⁹ Nicholas Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, vol.2, 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane in association with the National Maritime Museum, 2004), 446; Ann Coats and Philip MacDougall, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797: Unity and Perseverance* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), 14; Conrad Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913).

suspicion of small groups meeting for prayer with fears that the common sailor was 'susceptible' to Methodism.¹⁴⁰

However, from this date on, references to Methodist societies, albeit usually small in membership, are frequent. A private in the Gordon Highlanders described an active and influential Methodist society on board the *Terrible* which transported his regiment to the Mediterranean in April 1799, 'religion appeared to have so far prevailed in this ship'.¹⁴¹ William Rule cited sailors from the *Hector* and the *Defence*, 74-gun ships of the line, the 94-gun *Queen*, and the fireship *Incendiary* attending Methodist meetings in Gibraltar during the 1790s.¹⁴² A letter from a Scottish soldier returned from the Rock mentions that some seven or eight of the frigate *Terpsichore's* crew met on board 'as often as duty would permit to read and pray'. The little Methodist society on this ship gave forty-six dollars prize money to the steward of the newly established chapel on Gibraltar.¹⁴³ Watkins is emphatic that there were Methodists at the Battle of Trafalgar. He quotes 'an early number of the Gentlemen's Magazine' regarding a Methodist cell on board HMS *Victory*:

The dogs were the best seamen on board. Every man *knew* his duty; and every man *did* his duty. They meet together and sing hymns and nobody dared to molest them. The commander would not have suffered it had they attempted it. They were allowed a mess to themselves, and never mixed with the other men.¹⁴⁴

J. Glass, a sailor onboard *Le Tonant*, fought at Trafalgar. He wrote to the *Methodist Magazine* of the Methodists on the ship, 'We assembled together every night upon the

¹⁴⁰ Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750-1815*, 126.

¹⁴¹ Anon, *Narrative of a Private Soldier in His Majesty's 92nd Regiment of Foot*, 56.

¹⁴² Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army*, 16.

¹⁴³ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 25 (June 1802), 327.

¹⁴⁴ Watkins, *Soldiers and Preachers Too*, 50.

main deck, where we join in praise and prayer to God [. . .] also scripture reading.' Before the battle, 'We were upward of twenty in number; one was killed of whose happiness we have not the least doubt. One we left at Gibraltar in a prize, and some have become weary in well doing.'¹⁴⁵ H. Roberts, a sailmaker who served on the same vessel, stated that the Methodist society on board numbered thirty men in 1806.¹⁴⁶ A sailor, 'E. P.', on the *Dreadnought*, wrote to the *Methodist Magazine* in 1810; the first letter that he had ever written, he claimed. He had been converted by John Clark, who also taught him to write.¹⁴⁷ Classes varying between eight and sixty men met on the *Coulaque*, the *Revenge*, the *Caledonia*, the *Royal George*, the *Prince of Wales*, the *Armado* and the *Berwick*.¹⁴⁸ An extract from a letter published in November 1814, written by James Ashford, a sailor on board the *Repulse*, described a 'little flock' of between thirty and forty and reported societies on board 'other ships in the Mediterranean fleet.'¹⁴⁹ Letters published in the Methodist press refer to societies on nineteen named ships during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

By 1815, there was 'genuine organised Methodism' on nearly 100 ships of war, Kverndal concluded, more than a quarter of the navy's strength.¹⁵⁰ Blake agreed that there was evidence of groups meeting on 'scores' of ships during the wars.¹⁵¹ The Royal Navy numbered 140,000 men at the peak of its strength in 1814. If Methodist societies, of perhaps an average of twenty-five men, existed on each of 100 ships as Kverndal suggested, that would give a figure of approximately 2500, two per cent of men in the service. H.M.S.

¹⁴⁵ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 29 (April 1806), 330.

¹⁴⁶ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 30 (April 1807), 187.

¹⁴⁷ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 32 (June 1810), 244-5.

¹⁴⁸ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 37 (June 1814), 471-2.

¹⁴⁹ *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 37 (November 1814), 87.

¹⁵⁰ Roald Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions: Their Origin and Early Growth* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1986), 109.

¹⁵¹ Richard Blake, *Religion in the British Navy, 1815-1879: Piety and Professionalism* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014), 19.

Victory had a crew of 821 at Trafalgar; about three per cent of her crew, twenty to thirty men, were Methodist sailors.¹⁵² The 1811 Census recorded the population of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales as 18,044,000. There were 181,200 Methodist members recorded in the same year with possibly twice as many adherents.¹⁵³ The proportion of Methodists in the Royal Navy, therefore, broadly mirrored that of civilian society.

The considerable increase in the size of the navy, which occurred during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, was made possible, in large part, by impressment.¹⁵⁴ It was also used as one element of anti-Methodist harassment. Some local religious and political authorities tried to suppress the growing movement by impressing local preachers and their listeners into the army and the navy.¹⁵⁵ John Wesley himself was detained 'for His Majesty's Service' in Cornwall during July 1745, albeit very briefly.¹⁵⁶ Wesley also refers to a press gang from a man of war landing and presumably hunting for men while he was preaching at Pill in 1756.¹⁵⁷ In 1759, Joseph Jones and William Alwood were seized at Stockton but quickly released by the press gang's lieutenant when he learned that they were both licensed preachers.¹⁵⁸ William Clowes, later the pioneer of Primitive Methodism, was, for a short period, impressed into the Royal Navy at Hull in 1803.¹⁵⁹ Although Kverndal identified Methodists as 'soft targets' for the press gangs, impressment appears to have been used to intimidate, rather than deliberately recruit, members of the movement.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵² National Museum of the Royal Navy, 'History of HMS Victory'. <https://www.nmrn.org.uk> [accessed online 31. 08. 2021].

¹⁵³ G. M Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival* (London: Routledge, 2003), 83.

¹⁵⁴ Denver Brunsman, *The Evil Necessity British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013); Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval Impressment and Its Opponents in Georgian Britain* (London: Continuum, 2007).

¹⁵⁵ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, vol. XX, 28 (f.n.), 84-5, 251 (f.n.); vol. XXI, 10, 87, 113.

¹⁵⁶ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XX, 75.

¹⁵⁷ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XXI, 44.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 206-7.

¹⁵⁹ Geoffrey Milburn, *Primitive Methodism* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2002), 19.

¹⁶⁰ Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions*, 32.

There is no evidence that the use of the press gang led to a growth of a Methodist presence amongst the men of the navy before 1793. Impressment was primarily intended to secure experienced professional sailors to serve in the Georgian Navy. Non-seafaring men were generally of limited value, although wartime expediency led to the forced recruitment of men whose connexions with the sea were tenuous. Historians disagree about the proportion of Nelson's navy recruited by coercion; however, it included significant numbers of Methodist sailors for the first time.¹⁶¹

One of the problems with the study of Methodism in the navy is that the term 'Methodist' was used very loosely and as a pejorative term. The label was applied to any man of a spiritual, especially evangelical, disposition who openly attested to his beliefs on board. The confusion of Methodism and evangelicalism was general in this period, especially so in the Royal Navy. Richard Marks, the former marine officer, wrote "'Methodists' (was) a term which in their vocabulary, comprised of individuals of all sects, parties, ranks and ages who feared God and endeavoured to work righteously.' Even his fellow officers said Marks 'knew not the meaning of the word'.¹⁶² Blake differentiated evangelical officers, 'Blue Lights', from Methodist other ranks, 'Psalm Singers'.¹⁶³ Atkins saw 'Methodism' as a very broad label in the navy and also an insult.¹⁶⁴ It was undoubtedly an imprecise term in the Royal Navy during this period, as indeed it was more generally during the movement's first 75 years.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, one must differentiate Methodism as a broad, generic and deprecatory term from those sailors who formed societies onboard ships and informed the

¹⁶¹ Brunsman, *The Evil Necessity*, 246; Rogers, *The Press Gang*, 4–5; Nicholas Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Collins, 1986), 145, 153.

¹⁶² Marks, *The Retrospect, or, Review of Providential Mercies / by Aliquis*, 81-2.

¹⁶³ Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*.

¹⁶⁴ Atkins, 'Religion, Politics and Patronage in the Late Hanoverian Navy, c.1780–c.1820', 274-5.

¹⁶⁵ William Gibson, 'The Complexity of Methodism', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism*, ed. by William Gibson, Peter Forsaith and Martin Wellings, 3.

movement of their 'heart religion' through, for example, letters written to the *Arminian and Methodist Magazines*.

Methodist mission was particularly strong amongst naval prisoners of war during the Napoleonic period. There were different group dynamics and discipline in prison fortresses from those of a man-of-war; the separation of officers and men created an environment in which Methodism flourished. For example, there were cells at Givet in 1805 and at Cambrai, where Jeremiah Taylor led a society of over forty, with up to seventy prisoners attending meetings twice a day for prayer and hymn singing. Such was the importance attached to Charles Wesley's *Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists*, that incarcerated sailors copied the work by hand so that the hymns could be sung at their services.¹⁶⁶ Taylor was aware of similar groups meeting at Valenciennes, Verdun, and Longwy.¹⁶⁷ Bo 'sun Smith claimed that almost 800 prisoners converted during this period, and Kverndal believed that the men who served a spiritual apprenticeship in these French prisoner of war fortresses later led the 1816 Thames Revival amongst merchant mariners.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions*, 111.

¹⁶⁷ Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*, 243.

¹⁶⁸ George Charles Smith, *Portsmouth, or The First Part of an Humble Address to the Right Honourable and Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of London, Concerning the Fatal Licence given to the General Admission of Unmarried Females into British Ships of War : And an Historical Detail of the Measures Adopted during the Last Seven Years, to Prevail on the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to Withdraw Their Sanction of the Gross Immoralities and the Fatal Enormities That Prevail in the Ships of His Majesty's Navy That Arrive in Port to Be Refitted or to Be Paid off* (London: W.K. Wakefield, 1828), 69–70; Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions*, 111.

Acceptance and Hostility

What was it about Methodism that exerted such a strong pull upon both soldiers and sailors? Snape analysed the factors which explained the appeal of Methodism in the army.¹⁶⁹ Eighteenth-century Britain was not a spiritual vacuum; those servicemen attracted to Methodism lived in a society with strong Protestant Christian influences. Soldiers and sailors found comradeship through the regiment and with shipmates. Methodist classes and societies were relatively easily assimilated within these military associational structures. Generally, Methodist soldiers and sailors' comrades were accepting of their beliefs and activities. Officers, especially from 1793 onwards, supported and encouraged their men's faith. Unlike civilian society during this period, there was little organised opposition to Methodist association, such as that encouraged by landowners and clergymen.¹⁷⁰

Several writers analysed Methodism's appeal to members of marginal communities, those such as miners and fishermen for whom danger was ever-present and death an occupational hazard.¹⁷¹ These groups, whose very existence, beset by risk, was precarious, bear close comparison to the realities of men's lives in the forces. The hazards of battle were self-evident, but just as real were the threats of disease for both soldiers and sailors. At sea, hazards included: shipwreck, fire, falling from aloft, capsizing in ships' boats, lightning strikes, frostbite, or suffocating in the hold. During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the Royal Navy lost 7,000 men in enemy action, 12,000 to shipwreck, and

¹⁶⁹ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 34.

¹⁷⁰ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 270-82.

¹⁷¹ Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, 20-2; Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 170-81.

45,000 from disease. Many soldiers succumbed to death by disease when stationed in the West Indies and on campaigns such as the 1794–5 expedition to the Low Countries.¹⁷²

Soldiers and sailors were on the margins of British society. Methodism in England often thrived in areas where there were gaps in the Anglican parish system.¹⁷³ The armed forces certainly fell between adequate provision by the Church. Nicholas Rodger's study of the Georgian navy stated that: 'seamen have always dwelt on the fringes of settled society'.¹⁷⁴ The army and navy recruited from those regarded as the dregs of eighteenth-century society. Both John Haime and Sampson Staniforth, prominent soldier preachers during the Flanders campaign of 1742 to 1745, describe themselves as moral and spiritual reprobates before their conversions. Haime wrote of a background of 'cursing, swearing, lying and Sabbath breaking'.¹⁷⁵ Staniforth claimed an absence of either morality or religion in his upbringing, 'Nay, I was totally averse to all good, and hated the very appearance of religion.' He was, he later wrote, 'perfectly without God in the world'. His early career in the army featured drinking, gambling and womanising; on campaign in Flanders, he describes looting and drunkenness.¹⁷⁶ On the surface, neither man was promising material for a future career as a preacher; however, the narratives of both fit with standard Methodist narratives of sinfulness preceding conversion and, later, perfect sanctification.

Sailors, too, were sinners. 'Bo 'sun Smith', Revd George Smith, a former mariner turned Baptist minister, described morality within the navy; sailors were guilty of 'habitual drunkenness [. . .] meeting in every port, at home and abroad, with an immense multitude

¹⁷² H. V Bowen, *War and British Society, 1688-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20-2.

¹⁷³ Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation*, 34-5.

¹⁷⁴ Rodger, *The Wooden World*, 5.

¹⁷⁵ Jackson and Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, II, 11.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 61-2.

of prostitutes [. . .] and like leeches [. . .] they become habitual fornicators, and the destruction of one-half of them by the most virulent disease follows'.¹⁷⁷ A quarter of *Wesley's Veterans*, early Methodist preachers whose lives Jackson and Telford chronicled, were soldiers; none were sailors.¹⁷⁸ John Lenton examined the records of every preacher who entered the Methodist itinerancy before 1791; this study identified several former soldiers but not one sailor.¹⁷⁹

There was considerable interaction between the armed forces and civilians; men were rarely in the army or navy for all their adult lives. Blake compared Methodism in the navy to that described in Snape's study of the army.¹⁸⁰ Sailors generally had fewer opportunities to interact with civilians apart from periods spent in port. They were almost a race apart, distanced from wider society by their appearance, dress, habits and language in a way that did not apply to soldiers to quite the same degree. The Marine Society took orphaned boys and prepared them for a career at sea; they could have had little previous contact with civilian religiosity before joining the Georgian navy's enclosed world.¹⁸¹ Civilian Methodism had few contact points with sailors, especially when shore leave was a rarity.¹⁸² That notwithstanding, lower-deck seamen in the navy, both volunteers and pressed men, were recruited from seaports with considerable Methodist influence such as the Cornish ports, Plymouth and Portsmouth.¹⁸³ There were flourishing societies at Plymouth Dock,

¹⁷⁷ Smith, *Smith's Tracts*, 69.

¹⁷⁸ Jackson and Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*.

¹⁷⁹ John Lenton, *John Wesley's Preachers: A Social and Statistical Analysis of the British and Irish Preachers Who Entered the Methodist Itinerancy before 1791* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 51.

¹⁸⁰ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 1-86; Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*, 8-32.

¹⁸¹ Jonas Hanway, *Instructions, Religious and Prudential, to Apprentices, and Servants in General, Placed out by the Marine Society* (London: Printed for the use of the Marine Society, 1763), x-xii.

¹⁸² Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*, 32.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 35.

Gosport and Chatham, all potential points of contact with the men of the Royal Navy.¹⁸⁴ The 'Quota Acts' of 1795 and 1796 led local authorities to recruit 31,000 additional men, many landmen, into the Royal Navy, thereby making the service more representative of British society.¹⁸⁵ Kverndal saw a strong link between the discharge of thousands of sailors back into civilian society following the Peace of Amiens in 1802, when the size of the navy was reduced from 130,00 to 50,000 men, and the sharp growth of Methodism aboard ship that occurred when many of these men served again once war resumed. During this period ashore, he believes that significant numbers of men were subject to Methodist evangelical influence.¹⁸⁶

It is important to stress the size of Britain's armed forces, especially during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Between 1793 to 1815, some eleven to fourteen per cent of males aged between fifteen and forty served in the army or navy, similar proportions to the First World War.¹⁸⁷ By 1814, there were 250,000 men in the British Army and 140,000 in the Royal Navy, increases since 1793 of six-fold and nine-fold, respectively. At the peak, in 1804, when the threat of French invasion was at its height, there were nearly half a million men in arms. In the main, the army and navy drew their men from the lower end of the social scale, the constituency in which Methodism flourished in its first seventy-five years. With this extent of military commitment, it would have been extraordinary not to find considerable evidence of cross-fertilisation between the civilian population and Methodism in the armed forces.

¹⁸⁴ Lenton, *John Wesley's Preachers*, 43, 429.

¹⁸⁵ Coats and MacDougall, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797*, 3.

¹⁸⁶ Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions*, 103.

¹⁸⁷ Bowen, *War and British Society*, 14.

Spiritual provision for both soldiers and sailors was woefully inadequate during most of the eighteenth century. Snape addressed the inadequacy of regimental chaplaincy, in quality and supply, before the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.¹⁸⁸ In 1745, during the Flanders campaign, John Haime pressed for better spiritual provision for the men:

We had no Sacrament administered in the army for a long season. I was greatly troubled and complained aloud in the open camp of the neglect. The chaplains were exceedingly displeased. But the Duke of Cumberland hearing of it, ordered that it should be administered every Lord's Day to one regiment or the other.¹⁸⁹

It was the quality of the chaplains that Duncan Wright condemned in particularly scathing comments:

Were the chaplains men of real piety and courage, much good might be done in the army; but the chaplaincy is generally a kind of sinecure, and the care of souls is left to any worthless wretch that will do it at an easy rate. When we lay in one city the care of four or five regiments was left to an unhappy man who was an object of common ridicule among the soldiers for his perpetual drunkenness.¹⁹⁰

In 1779, John Wesley bemoaned the absence of a chaplain at an army camp on Portsmouth Common, which he felt contributed to the fact that 'The English soldiers of this age have nothing to do with God!'¹⁹¹

Sailors' impiety was notorious; Berry explored the trope of the spiritually destitute sailor:

¹⁸⁸ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 21-3.

¹⁸⁹ *Arminian Magazine*, vol. 3 (April 1780), 263.

¹⁹⁰ Jackson and Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, II, 33.

¹⁹¹ John Wesley, *Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater, XXIII, 150.

The notion of the irreligious seaman had a long pedigree in Western culture, and this popular conception persisted throughout the eighteenth century [. . .] The sea provided an analogy for the wicked whose turbulent lives filled their souls with flotsam and jetsam [. . .] the wildness and intractability of the ocean symbolically stained the men who worked on it.¹⁹²

Clergymen noted that the seaman's life was accompanied by almost constant danger; he had due cause to fear the power of God, but his response was found in blasphemy and swearing rather than orthodox Christian faith.¹⁹³ James Meikle was a Scottish Presbyterian Seceder who served in the navy as a surgeon's mate during the Seven Years War. His memoirs record the deep shock to his pious sensibilities that he felt when he boarded the *Portland* on Sunday 7 July 1758:

I believe, the demoniacs in the gospel were never more under the devil's power than many of these men are, whether we look to their lives or their language [. . .] This day, when I took a serious survey of the wickedness practised about me, when I saw the call of God cast off, heard them on the morning of the Lord's day swearing and singing obscene songs, and observed the ship's boats bringing lewd women aboard, no respect being paid to the holy Sabbath, [. . .] I was filled with vexation, grief, and, might I say, holy indignation, till my breast ached, and I was pained at my heart.¹⁹⁴

However, trust in some providential care was a rational necessity given the hardships and dangers of life at sea. Seamen were believers in omens and apparitions; they were deeply

¹⁹² Berry, *A Path in the Mighty Waters: Shipboard Life and Atlantic Crossings to the New World*, 86.

¹⁹³ Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, 117.

¹⁹⁴ James Meikle, *The Traveller, or Meditations on Various Subjects Written on Board a Man of War: To Which Is Added, Converse with the World Unseen* (Edinburgh, J. Pillans and Sons, 1811), xlv-xlvi.

superstitious, but they certainly did not follow the Church of England's teachings.¹⁹⁵ Sailors were not unusual in their belief in the supernatural.¹⁹⁶ Rack saw folklore, magic and traditional beliefs as both pervasive and persistent in eighteenth-century society.¹⁹⁷ John Wesley himself was a firm believer in ghostly phenomena, including the visitation by a poltergeist to his childhood home at Epworth.¹⁹⁸ Hostility to Roman Catholicism was common in the navy, born of nationalistic, as much as religious, prejudice.¹⁹⁹ Francis Asbury labelled sailors as 'insensible creatures' who showed little interest in his preaching to the ship's company when he crossed the Atlantic in September 1771.²⁰⁰

Coupled with an irreligious climate, chaplaincy provision in the navy was as inadequate as that in the army.²⁰¹ Although the Royal Navy was both Protestant and Anglican, few clergymen went to sea in the eighteenth century. The Admiralty left the spiritual well-being of crews in the hands of ships' captains. According to the 1731 regulations, there was a requirement for divine service twice daily and for a sermon on Sundays, but observance was infrequent. Pluralism was a problem in naval chaplaincy, as it was more generally in the Church. In 1742, the Navy Board wrote to captains instructing them not to pay chaplains who held warrants but never actually served on the ships to which they were appointed.²⁰² A chaplain was only present on the larger ships, and communion was rarely observed because most were deacons. In 1752, a commodore wrote

¹⁹⁵ Peter Earle, *Sailors: English Merchant Seamen, 1650-1775* (London: Methuen, 1998), 103; Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 153.

¹⁹⁶ Michael Snape, *The Church of England in Industrialising Society: The Lancashire Parish of Whalley in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), 68-70.

¹⁹⁷ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 23-4.

¹⁹⁸ Richard Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 46-51.

¹⁹⁹ Magra, 'Faith at Sea: Exploring Maritime Religiosity in the Eighteenth Century', 103-6.

²⁰⁰ Francis Asbury, *Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury* (London: Epworth Press, 1958), I, 5-6.

²⁰¹ Evan Wilson, *A Social History of British Naval Officers, 1775-1815* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017), 60-62.

²⁰² Smith, *The Navy and Its Chaplains in the Days of Sail*, 67.

to an aspiring young naval officer about worship at sea, ' You will see some little outward appearance of religion, and Sunday prayers; but the congregation is generally drove together by the boatswain, like sheep by the shepherd, who neither spares oaths or blows.'²⁰³ Chaplains were difficult to recruit and of lamentable quality; pay was inadequate; it had remained unchanged since Charles II's reign.²⁰⁴ The chaplain of James Meikle's ship, The *Portland*, was 'expelled 'from the ship in 1758 for some unspecified 'wickedness'.²⁰⁵ A letter of 1759 addressed to 'the Officers of the British Navy' summarised the deficiencies of chaplaincy:

A chaplainship in the navy is procured by interest. Now the same interest which enables a man to obtain his office is sufficient also to get him excused from attendance in the duties of it, for a cruise or an expedition cannot be supposed to be extremely agreeable to a person who has had a liberal education.²⁰⁶

Revd Percival Stockdale, writing to his patron David Garrick in 1775, was horrified that as a naval chaplain, he might have to go to sea.²⁰⁷ The language that former marine officer Richard Marks used to describe naval chaplains was similar to Duncan Wright's castigation of those in the army. In 1816 Marks wrote: 'Few ships ever had a chaplain on board, and jokes, and furnished too many sad objects of their contempt and ridicule.'²⁰⁸ A letter published in the *Naval Chronicle* in 1802 labelled chaplains as 'idlers' and suggested that an additional role as schoolmasters to young sailors would see them far more productively

²⁰³ Quoted in Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, 118.

²⁰⁴ Blake, *Religion in the British Navy*, 16-32.

²⁰⁵ Meikle, *The Traveller, or, Meditations on Various Subjects Written on Board a Man of War*, lxxv.

²⁰⁶ Quoted in Gordon Taylor, *the Sea Chaplains; a History of the Chaplains of the Royal Navy* (Oxford: Oxford Illustrated Press, 1978), 170.

²⁰⁷ Quoted in Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 393.

²⁰⁸ Marks, *The Retrospect*, 70.

employed.²⁰⁹ Admiral John Jervis, Earl St Vincent, when commanding the Mediterranean Fleet, wrote to First Lord of the Admiralty complaining of 'roué parsons', one of whom was convicted of selling spirits to seamen on his ships.²¹⁰ The Revd Edward Mangin was utterly despairing; for him, shipboard chaplaincy had proved to be an impossible challenge:

I did not see the smallest likelihood of effecting material change in the morals of such an assemblage. To leave them unreprieved and vicious was possible; and I dare say it was equally possible to transform them all into Methodists, or madmen and hypocrites of some other kind: but to convert a man-of-war's crew into Christians would be a task to which the courage of Loyola, the philanthropy of Howard, and the eloquence of St Paul united would prove inadequate.²¹¹

In such a spiritual vacuum, it is not surprising that many soldiers and sailors became Methodists during the eighteenth century.

During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, spiritual provision improved in both the army and the navy. The creation of the Army Chaplains Department in 1796 created a system of commissioned and officiating chaplaincy. Applicants were subject to approval by an Episcopal committee comprising the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Bishop of London; pay and status were enhanced, and the creation of the post of Chaplain General gave structure and supervision to army chaplaincy. Provision was not instantly transformed; absenteeism remained a problem, and there was no chaplaincy provision on some overseas campaigns. For example, the army was without a senior chaplain for twenty-six months of

²⁰⁹ *The Naval Chronicle*, vol. 7 (January-June 1802) 374.

²¹⁰ Smith, *The Navy and Its Chaplains in the Days of Sail*, 103.

²¹¹ Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*, 79.

Wellington's Peninsular campaign.²¹² However, this reform did give a structure from which improvements were later to follow.²¹³ The Peninsular War saw tensions between Anglican chaplains and Methodists in the ranks; however, Charles Oman's description of spiritual life in Wellington's army states:

On the whole, however, there was no regular or normal opposition between Church of England and Methodist soldiers: they were in such a minority among the godless that it would have been absurd for them to have quarrelled. The Methodists regularly received the sacrament from the chaplains along with the churchmen, and the latter were frequently to be found at the prayer meetings of the former.²¹⁴

The end of the eighteenth century saw an increase in evangelicalism within the Royal Navy.²¹⁵ The navy became viewed as an instrument in a religious struggle against atheistic France, linking Protestant piety, patriotism, and a desire to provide sailors with strong spiritual leadership. Evidence of the seriousness with which divine service was observed by the time of the Revolutionary Wars appears in the diary of Revd Cooper Willyams, who served as chaplain on the *Boyne* on the expedition to the West Indies of 1793 and 1794:

The 25th of December, being Christmas Day, divine service was performed on the quarterdeck by the Chaplain, the crew appearing as on Sunday in clean trowsers and jakets [sic]: and here I must beg leave to mention that I never saw more regularity and decorum in any place of worship than is invariably observed on His Majesty's ships of war.²¹⁶

²¹² Michael Glover, *Wellington's Army in the Peninsula, 1808-1814* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1977), Appendix 4.

²¹³ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 89-90.

²¹⁴ Oman, *Wellington's Army*, 329.

²¹⁵ Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*, 92-124, 141-46.

²¹⁶ Quoted in Smith, *The Navy and Its Chaplains in the Days of Sail*, 79.

Several senior naval officers strongly influenced the promotion of religiosity and evangelicalism from 1793 to 1815. Sir Charles Middleton, the future Lord Barham, and his nephew James Gambier, a captain of HMS *Defence* during the Battle of the Glorious First of June 1794, were pre-eminent 'Blue Lights', evangelicals, in the navy of this period.²¹⁷ Middleton's insistence on spiritual provision on board ship led to him being dubbed 'a superannuated Methodist' by an opponent and the accusation by William Pitt that 'he would do anything for a *Methodist*.'²¹⁸ In 1806 Middleton became First Lord of the Admiralty and Lord Barham. His issue of new regulations and instructions in that year included directions for a ship's chaplain to lead regular prayers on board, preach sermons, visit the sick, comfort the dying, and supervise educational provision. Chaplains' pay was increased in 1807, reflecting their improved status; however, they still earned less than ordinary seamen and cooks.²¹⁹ Middleton defined the moral leadership of all officers, including promoting respect for religion and suppressing vice. He was certainly not a Methodist, but George Whitefield influenced his Anglican evangelicalism, and he had attended a chapel of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion.²²⁰ Notwithstanding that there were some improvements in chaplaincy provision, by 1814, there were fifty-eight naval chaplains, of whom only thirty-one served at sea. The vast majority of ships and sailors never saw a clergyman afloat.²²¹

Admiral Nelson created an environment on the ships he commanded that encouraged the outward profession of Christian belief. Following victory at the Battle of the

²¹⁷ Gareth Atkins, 'Christian Heroes, Providence and Patriotism in Wartime Britain, 1793-1815', *The Historical Journal* 58, no. 2 (June 2015): 393-414; Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*, 69, 105, 124, 138, 150-1.

²¹⁸ Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*, 45; Wilson, *A Social History of British Naval Officers*, 116.

²¹⁹ Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean*, 625.

²²⁰ Atkins, 'Religion, Politics and Patronage in the Late Hanoverian Navy, c.1780-c.1820', 274-78.

²²¹ Michael Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy, 1793-1815*. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 2004), 252.

Nile on 2 August 1798, he ordered public thanksgiving to God to be observed.²²² After the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801, Nelson attributed his crew's conduct to 'a belief that good to our King and Country may have arisen from the seamen and marines having been shown to respect the established religion and Kings have been shown that our seamen are religious'.²²³ It is improbable that a similar comment about sailors' reverence might have been made in the middle of the previous century. Both Nelson's avowed public religiosity and his acknowledgement of his men's apparent piety are evidence of the growing influence of evangelicalism afloat.

Methodists John Davies and George Cussons created the first Bible society to supply scripture to soldiers and sailors. Cussons explained their motivation:

My mind has been much impressed with the necessity of something being done for the spiritual good of a numerous body of men, our common soldiers, and I think nothing so likely to effect this as the putting a small pocket Bible into the hands of them; when they might read to their comrades.²²⁴

The society distributed Bibles to the troops called to London in 1780 to deal with the Gordon Riots.²²⁵ Its title was changed from 'The Bible Society' to 'The Naval and Military Bible Society' when the British and Foreign Bible Society was formed in 1804.²²⁶ The NMBS, though Methodist in origin, became ecumenical and had extensive and influential support. Admirals supported its work and that of similar societies such as the Society for Christian

²²² *The Naval Chronicle*, vol. 2. (January-June 1799), 59.

²²³ Quoted in Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, 240.

²²⁴ George Cussons, *Memoirs of Mr George Cussons of London: Who Departed This Life, June 6th, 1817, Aged Eighty-Two Years / Extracted from His Diary Including Original Letters from the Late Rev. Dr. Conyers* (London: Joseph Butterworth and Son, 1819), 73.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 74-5.

²²⁶ *Sunday at Home: a Family Magazine for Sabbath reading* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1874), 772-775; Naval, Military and Air Force Bible Society, *A History of the Oldest Bible Society* (NM and AFBS, Portsmouth) <https://www.nmafbs.org> [accessed online 06.03.2017].

Knowledge and the Religious Tract Society. For example, Nelson applied to the NMBS for 900 books for the crew of the *San Josef* serving in the Baltic in 1801. This commitment to supplying the men of the navy with Bibles and tracts attests to the growing interest in their spiritual well-being.

This growing acceptance of collective and individual spiritual observance on board was separated by rank: evangelical officers, 'Blue Lights', and Methodist other ranks, 'Psalm Singers'.²²⁷ Those officers attracted by evangelicalism promoted a climate on their ships whereby their men could express their piety through adherence to Methodism. Some pious officers believed that their men's souls and morality would benefit from regular Anglican observance and access to scripture. Both status and inclination, however, barred them from joining their men in societies of believers.

Reactions to Methodism in both the army and the navy varied enormously depending upon context: time, regiment or ship, and the officer in charge. Owen Spencer Watkins claims that 'The very persecution to which Wesley's followers were subjected was the means of bringing the movement into the very midst of his Majesty's forces' has some substance.²²⁸ One response that magistrates used to get rid of troublesome Methodist lay preachers was to 'press' them hoping that they could be silenced by removing them into the armed forces. Several early preachers were impressed in this way, including John Nelson. If the intention was to silence him, then the opposite occurred, and he described many opportunities for witness and preaching to soldiers and civilians during the three months that he involuntarily spent in the army in 1744. Nelson claimed that his fellow soldiers were

²²⁷ Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*, 45.

²²⁸ Watkins, *Soldiers and Preachers Too*, 17.

very 'good natured' toward him, carried his weapon and equipment and that they received his message favourably.²²⁹ Watkins names Thomas Beard as the first Methodist martyr; however, the fact that he died in a hospital in Newcastle following impressment in Yorkshire makes this assertion more than a touch hyperbolic.²³⁰

Both John Haime and Sampson Staniforth were favourably received in Flanders during the campaign of 1742 to 1745. The military and civilian authorities allowed the use of the English churches at Bruges and Ghent for preaching and meetings and the construction of huts on the outskirts of camps. Both officers and men attended meetings. The fact that Haime was allowed to preach up to thirty-five times a week suggests a very great deal of latitude. The Duke of Cumberland met with Haime and gave him considerable encouragement.²³¹ Duncan Wright's example illustrates individual commanding officers' role in accepting or resisting Methodist activity within the army in Ireland between 1757 and 1764. Whilst the colonel of the 10th Regiment of Foot accepted Wright's preaching; the major 'thought it a disgrace to have a sergeant a preacher among them. He resolved to drive me out of preaching if possible'.²³²

The greatest substance to Owen Spencer Watkins' claims of persecution of Methodism in the army probably occurred in Gibraltar. One commanding officer, General O'Hara, received complaints about Methodists meeting. His reported response was very positive, 'Let them alone. I wish there were twenty-four more of them; we should have fewer courts martial in the garrison.' Another commanding officer prevented his men from

²²⁹ Jackson and Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, II, 140.

²³⁰ Watkins, *Soldiers and Preachers Too*, 18.

²³¹ Jackson and Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*, II, 37.

²³² *Ibid.*, 31.

attending Methodist meetings.²³³ In 1802, the Duke of Kent, the Governor of the British base, banned men from attending meetings, labelled them 'democrats' and threatened them with imprisonment. William Rule claimed that this was at the instigation of the garrison chaplain, Revd Wetherell.²³⁴ In the following year, Methodists in the Queen's Regiment were court martialled for meeting against orders, two corporals were reduced to the ranks, and John Reeves and John Fluccard were sentenced to several hundred lashes (the sentence was not carried out). This episode is untypical and perhaps one of few that deserves the label 'persecution'. Probably more frequent was derision. A soldier of the Seventy-First Regiment was labelled 'the distressed Methodist' in 1806 because he refused to drink, swear and gamble. Ridicule only ceased when he showed that he was prepared to respond to mockery with his fists, 'the Methodist is going to fight'.²³⁵

The Duke of Wellington embodied the contradictions in the attitudes that the army showed to Methodism. In February 1811, Wellington wrote from Cartaxo to the Adjutant General, Sir Henry Calvert, commenting that:

Methodism is spreading very fast in the army. There are two, if not three, Methodist meetings in the town, of which one is in the Guards. The Men meet in the evening and sing psalms; and I believe a sergeant (Stephens) now and again gives them a sermon [...]. These meetings prevail in other parts of the army.

Wellington blamed the influence of Methodism in the Army on the lack of 'respectable clergymen' who would moderate this 'zeal and enthusiasm' and prevent meetings from

²³³ Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army*, 15.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-7.

²³⁵ Thomas Pococke, *Journal of a Soldier of the 71st, or Glasgow Regiment, Highland Light Infantry, from 1806 to 1815* (Edinburgh: Ralph Wardlaw, 1819), 15.

becoming 'mischievous' or cease them completely.²³⁶ Although Wellington had no objection to Methodists in the abstract, he expressed concern about their habit of meeting in groups together.²³⁷ These classes or cells were, Wellington believed, bad for discipline.²³⁸ He also reportedly described sappers, the Royal Engineers, as: 'mad, married or Methodists'.²³⁹ In November 1811, the Adjutant General informed Wellington that the Duke of York had commanded army chaplains to visit the sick and lead divine service on Sundays to mitigate 'the exertions and interference of sectaries of various prescriptions [sic]'.²⁴⁰ Archdeacon John Owen, the Chaplain General, wrote to Revd Samuel Briscall, the senior chaplain in the Peninsula in 1811:

Methodism is said to make progress among troops. I am sorry for it and my Lord Wellington rightly infers that the zeal of the Chaplains is the surest obstacle to its progress. When men in the ranks undertake to preach and pray extempore they become shocking coxcombs and think all knowledge and religion centred on such as themselves.

However, Owen's response was not to seek to ban expressions of Methodist belief and practice, but rather to offer his chaplains advice on combating 'enthusiasm and methodistical self importance.'²⁴¹

Reactions to Methodism in the navy broadly mirrored those of the army. Methodism on board had the potential to be seen as divisive, puritanical, exclusive and censorious. However, promoting sobriety, honesty, charity, reliability, and duty endeared Methodist

²³⁶ Quoted in Anthony Brett-James, *Wellington at War, 1794-1815; a Selection of His Wartime Letters* (London: MacMillan, 1961), 212.

²³⁷ Oman, *Wellington's Army*, 326.

²³⁸ Brett-James, *Wellington at War*, 212.

²³⁹ *North British Weekly*, vol. 50 (1869), 15.

²⁴⁰ Quoted in Brett-James, *Wellington at War*, 214 (f.n.).

²⁴¹ Quoted in Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 43.

sailors to officers. When opposition occurred, as in the army, it took the form of mockery rather than violence. Bo 'sun Smith described verbal abuse directed at the sanctified sect, the psalm-singing Methodist club. He also gave an example of opponents having sent several prostitutes on board ship to break up a Methodist meeting.²⁴² Margarette Lincoln described how the pious seaman challenged cultural norms afloat: 'Openly religious sailors were sometimes marginalised by shipmates, possibly due to prevailing shipboard concepts of masculinity, and because seamen were encouraged to adopt a devil-may-care attitude.'²⁴³ 'Psalm Singer', wrote Lieutenant Richard Marks, was 'a term of derision and contempt, among common seamen'.²⁴⁴ According to Marks, 'Wingers' was a description applied because small societies met, behind canvas screens erected for privacy, in the ship's wings; the label 'stigmatised' Methodist sailors.²⁴⁵ John Hubbock, who organised a Methodist society on HMS *Elizabeth*, was threatened with flogging for seditious assembly, but the threat was not carried out.²⁴⁶ When John Owen became Chaplain to the Fleet in 1812, in addition to holding the role of Chaplain General, he was concerned by the growth of Methodism among sailors.²⁴⁷ Bo 'sun Smith and Lieutenant Marks describe opposition to Methodism in the navy declining during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, evidenced by the notable increase in societies meeting by the end of the period.²⁴⁸ By 1814 the reputation of men in the navy had, in part, been transformed; the Christian sailor was no longer an oxymoron.

²⁴² Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*, 237.

²⁴³ Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, 132.

²⁴⁴ Marks, *The Retrospect, or, Review of Providential Mercies / by Aliquis*, 79.

²⁴⁵ Marks, 82.

²⁴⁶ Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions*, 109.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁴⁸ Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*, 232-5.

Given the often ferocious hostility that Methodism faced in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, which is repeatedly described in John Wesley's journal, and throughout the often hagiographical accounts of Jackson and Telford's *Wesley's Veterans*, what is remarkable about the army and the navy is that there was so little opposition.²⁴⁹ Evidence of the 'persecution' which William Rule and Owen Spencer Watkins describe is scarce. On the contrary, Methodist soldiers and sailors were generally accepted by their comrades, at times admired, and not infrequently emulated. Moreover, commanding officers saw Methodism as positively influencing their followers, making them better soldiers and sailors.

Summary

It is impossible to adequately explain Methodism's spread without considering the movement's impact upon the British Army and the Royal Navy. Soldiers and sailors were targets for evangelism and factors in the growth of the movement. Methodism followed the army and navy throughout the British Isles and especially overseas. Even before the creation of missionary societies, the agents of Methodist mission were often members of the armed forces. This mission within and by the armed forces helped transform Methodism into a worldwide religious movement. As soldiers and sailors moved within the British Empire, including during the wars of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they were instrumental in spreading the movement.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ *John Wesley, Works*, ed. by Ward and Heitzenrater; Jackson and Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*.

²⁵⁰ Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, 21.

There were elements of Methodism that were particularly well suited to soldiers and sailors. The emphasis on lay leadership of societies, classes and bands proved effective in the dynamic environment of the army and the navy, particularly so in wartime. Itinerancy was a good fit with the mobility required of men in both services. Soldiers were tough men; they had the robustness required of a travelling preacher. Methodism could flourish in the absence of the clergy or where provision was inadequate; it was not reliant on a chaplain's supervision. Hymn singing was an expression of Methodist belief and a means of its transmission. Groups of men could meet for hymn singing, Bible reading, and extempore prayer in a barn or on deck. This 'heart religion', which stressed individual piety, personal responsibility, and self-improvement, paralleled military discipline. The courage and tenacity that John Wesley and many of his early preachers had shown in the face of opposition and adversity could inspire men in the British Army and Royal Navy.

Methodism appealed to the rank and file; almost all named Methodists in both the army and navy were common soldiers and sailors. Men were influenced by their comrades, not chaplains or officers. However, what is significant is that many documented were NCOs; in a similar way to the movement's appeal to the craftsman and the artisan, it attracted those in the nation's armed forces who were steady, stable, and ambitious. An emphasis on sobriety, industry, loyalty and duty can have done their promotion prospects no harm. Methodism amongst civilians was predominately a female movement; it was an exclusively male domain in the army and navy.²⁵¹

Methodist influence was affected both by external factors: peace and war and campaigns' geography and extent. It was also shaped by wider religious dynamics, including

²⁵¹ Ibid, 137-8.

the growth of an evangelical culture throughout the army and the navy in the later years of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The official promotion of organised Protestant religiosity through improved chaplaincy provision, the supply of scripture, and an increasingly favourable climate amongst officers created a climate where the ordinary soldier and sailor's faith could find its expression through Methodism. The leadership of often very fragile and transient cells was crucial in determining their endurance and success. Where strong lay leadership existed, such as that provided in the army by John Haime and Sampson Staniforth in Flanders and the navy by sailmaker H. Roberts on the *Tonant*, Methodism flourished.

There was no structure to Methodist mission to the army or navy in this period. Conference minutes from 1744 to 1815 do not record the dispatch of preachers to garrisons, ports or on campaign; indeed, there is no mention of the armed forces in these minutes during either John Wesley's lifetime or in the period up to 1815.²⁵² Only one minister was sent to a military base, a posting to Gibraltar in 1804, but this was to a flourishing congregation of civilians in addition to soldiers and sailors.²⁵³ By 1814, Methodist missionaries had been dispatched to several Caribbean islands, Ceylon, the Cape of Good Hope, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, New South Wales, Sierra Leone, and in the largest numbers, to Ireland. Conference sent fifty-six preachers on mission during that year, but not one with a specific brief for military ministry.²⁵⁴ Despite this lack of connexional

²⁵² *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences from The First, Held in London By the Late Revd John Wesley A. M. In the Year 1744*, vols 1-72 (London: Butterworth, Baines and Hamilton, 1744-1815).

²⁵³ William Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army*, 20.

²⁵⁴ *Minutes of the Methodist Conference, 1814*, 71.

engagement, Methodism had achieved a significant presence in Britain's armed forces by 1815.

Chapter Three: Methodism and the Military, 1815–54

Few facts in the history of the foreign missionary enterprise of the Methodist Church are more constant and more significant than the part played in the inception of missions by the Methodist soldier. We find him in New York and Canada, in Gibraltar, at the Cape of Good Hope, in Columbo, Madras and Hong Kong, and in each place, it is he who gathers his comrades together for prayer and mutual edification, builds up a 'Society' and appeals to the home Church for a missionary to be sent to instruct the Methodist congregation which has come into being.¹

(George Findlay and William Holdsworth. *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 1921)

Introduction

The sixty years of Methodist history that followed John Wesley's death in 1791 were beset by schism and division; 'The age of disunity' in Hempton's description.² John Kent saw the potential of Methodism hugely weakened as a consequence: 'They were tragic years for anyone who believed that it was the business of the Methodist societies to spread Christian Holiness throughout Britain, for in them the religious potential of Wesleyan Methodism was

¹ George Findlay and William Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 7 vols (London: Epworth Press, 1921), V, 311.

² Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society*, 179.

greatly reduced by internal dissension about the nature of the Church, and by actual secession.³

The period was marked by a series of damaging withdrawals from the Methodist Connexion.⁴ The expulsion of Alexander Kilham in 1796 had led him and his followers, the 'Kilhamites', to form The New Itinerancy, which later became The Methodist New Connexion. The Primitive Methodist Church, formed in 1812, and the Bible Christians in 1816, were spontaneous new movements rather than expulsions. Further secessions included the Leeds Protestant Methodists in 1827–8 and The Wesleyan Methodist Association in 1834–5. Smaller withdrawals included the Unitarian 'Cookites' in 1808, the Tent Methodists in 1825 and Y Wesle Bach in north west Wales in 1831.⁵ There were a total of twenty-three splinter groups formed during the first half of the nineteenth century.⁶ The rift over the 'Fly Sheet' issue in 1849 was probably the most damaging of these splits, leading to a loss of 100,000 members, nearly a third of the membership, from the Wesleyan Connexion and ultimately the formation of the United Methodist Free Churches in 1857.⁷ These secessions caused wounds within the movement, which were not healed until the creation of the Methodist Church of Great Britain in 1932.

Divided though they were, all Methodist churches in the English-speaking world saw themselves as Wesley's successors and his legacy's upholders. The ruptures were significant; nevertheless, the varieties of Methodism that emerged in this period were branches grafted

³ John Kent, 'The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. by Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp, 4 vols (London: Epworth Press 1965-1988), II, 213.

⁴ John Lander, '"They Are a Pitiful Set of Radicals, Agitators and Slanderers": Methodist Disharmony, 1797-1849', in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 63, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 3–15.

⁵ Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment, 1603-1920* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 220.

⁶ Lander, '"They Are a Pitiful Set of Radicals, Agitators and Slanderers": Methodist Disharmony, 1797-1849', 5.

⁷ Henry Rack, 'Wesleyan Methodism 1849-1902', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. by Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp, 4 vols, II, 219.

from the same tree. Calvinistic Methodism, which had separated from Wesleyan Arminian Methodism in the early days of the movement, was predominately centred in Wales and was Welsh-speaking. All Methodist churches were evangelistic, demanding from their adherents transforming piety with self and collective discipline. Soldiers and sailors of the period would have perceived few differences between the Methodist denominations which emerged. The divisions that Methodism inflicted upon itself weakened and reduced its capacity to look outward, albeit that this was a period of increasing overseas missionary endeavour. Between 1815 and 1854, there were few indications of commitment to mission to the British armed forces within any Methodist branch. Dissension and division affected the ability to meet the spiritual needs of soldiers and sailors.

The Age of Disunity

If one issue can be said to have led to schism, expulsion, and division in this period, it was that of the status of ministers and the laity. Non-Wesleyan denominations were more akin to other Dissenting traditions, less authoritarian and more democratic. Style of worship also proved contentious, with Wesleyanism rejecting the American-style corybantic camp meeting. Conflicts also occurred over connexional authority, chapel autonomy, spiritual freedom and curbs on excessive 'enthusiasm'. Nevertheless, it was principally the role of the

laity, not theology, that distinguished the various groups within Methodism in the early nineteenth century.⁸

Differences went beyond church organisation, discipline, and style of worship. Most famously, Halevy linked Methodism and popular radicalism. He claimed that the Methodist movement took the energy which might otherwise have been directed by the 'elite of the working class, the hardworking and capable bourgeois' into Revolutionary politics and gave it a spiritual dimension; 'Methodism was the antidote to Jacobinism'.⁹ Therefore, for Halevy, the divisions in Methodism were a power struggle between the democratic proletarian worshippers and the authoritarian middle class pastorate. Conservative Wesleyanism had deprived the English working class of men who would have been its natural leaders.¹⁰ Methodism, claimed E. P. Thompson, took working men and ensured they would have no interest in improving their working and living conditions in this life; the movement was the 'Chiliasm of the defeated and the hopeless'.¹¹ For Robert Wearmouth, the 'Fly Sheet' controversy was the culmination of a class struggle that had taken place in Methodism since the death of John Wesley.¹²

These fractures took place at times of economic hardship. For example, the Kilhamite secession, 1796–7, Hugh Bourne's expulsion of 1808, the emergence of the Bible Christians, 1816, The Leeds Protestant Schism, 1827, and the 'Fly Sheet' controversy, 1849, all took place during 'bad years', as Kent referred to them. In contrast, periods of economic

⁸ Kevin Watson, 'The Price of Respectability: Methodism in Britain and the United States', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism* ed. by William Gibson, Peter Forsaith and Martin Wellings (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 35–38.

⁹ Elie Halévy, *The Birth of Methodism in England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 11–12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹¹ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 382.

¹² Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes, 1850-1900* (Leicester: E. Backus, 1954), 97.

growth saw revivals and strong growth in members.¹³ However, Hempton viewed it as highly simplistic to see Methodism's fissures as symptoms of economic change. Instead, he argued that the secessions that dominated the early nineteenth-century movement were part of Britain's broader political, sectarian and social conflicts.¹⁴

During the nineteenth century, all Nonconformity saw embourgeoisement, none more so than the Wesleyans for whom respectability was paramount. Methodism was a route to upward social and economic mobility, to aspiration and advancement.¹⁵ Attending class meetings and reading the Bible, hymn books, tracts, and religious periodicals educated members and increased literacy. The Sunday School movement grew in all Methodist denominations in the first half of the century. Upright men and women were given roles and responsibilities as local preachers, class leaders, exhorters, prayer leaders and Sunday School teachers. A growing number of Wesleyans were successful in business; their religious outlook fused with their industriousness. Divisions between work, home, and chapel were blurred.

Striving for propriety was at the core of Methodism, especially Wesleyanism. Hempton pithily summarised the change in emphasis that Wesleyan Methodism was undergoing in this period, 'Mechanics were giving way to mahogany.'¹⁶ Thrift, sobriety, and avoiding gambling, dancing, and flashy clothes, were the outward manifestations of this Christian decorum. Such earnestness led to advancement, not only within Methodism but in life. The

¹³ Kent, 'The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849', 249.

¹⁴ David Hempton, 'Evangelicalism in English and Irish Society', in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and beyond 1700-1990*, ed. by Mark Noll, David Bebbington and George Rawlyk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 157–59.

¹⁵ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 105.

¹⁶ Hempton, *The Religion of the People*, 105.

common soldier and the ordinary seaman were not sober, prudent or thrifty; they were far from respectable; therefore, they were not of interest to Wesleyans.

In contrast to John Wesley's involvement in and pronouncements on social issues, Wesleyans were not prominent in social reform during this period. In 1839, to mark a hundred years since the founding of the London Society, the Centenary Fund raised £220,000. This money was spent on two theological colleges, overseas missionary enterprises, clearing debt, chapel building, and the two Methodist boarding schools. None of the considerable sum was spent on social or philanthropic enterprises outside the church, evidence of connexional introspection.¹⁷ Wesleyans withdrew from elements of society. Members avoided worldly things; they did not read novels, attend the theatre or speculate financially, and they were strongly urged to eschew politics. Methodism was a restraining influence, wrote Thompson, 'It is the paradox of a "religion of the heart" that it should be notorious for the inhibition of all spontaneity.'¹⁸

Increasingly defined by its opposition to Roman Catholicism, Wesleyanism exhibited antagonism, bordering on hatred, to the Papacy and its influence. Methodism was, wrote Hempton, more 'stoutly anti-Catholic than any other denomination'.¹⁹ Methodism opposed Catholic Emancipation; ministers campaigned against any lessening of legal discrimination. Catholic influence in the army was to prove one of the most decisive factors in driving a desire to provide a Wesleyan presence in the forces. The Oxford Movement's rise further separated Methodism from the Church of England and fuelled fears of the growing threat of

¹⁷ Brian Beck, 'The 1839 Wesley Centenary Fund', in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, vol. 62, Part 6 (2020): 255–64.

¹⁸ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 368.

¹⁹ Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society*, 136.

Catholicism.²⁰ The possibility of a closer relationship with the Anglican Church was scuppered as Tractarian influence grew. Wesleyanism was increasingly isolated, occupying a position facing an increasingly Anglo-Catholic Church of England in one direction and Dissent and Methodist secession in the other. Was Wesleyanism a religious society with a relationship, other than the historical, to the Church of England? Was it a denomination in its own right, a dissenting church, or was it something between, a bridge between the Established Church and Dissent?²¹ The Wesleyan Connexion waited until the end of the century before assuming the name of 'Church'. It increasingly, though, allied itself to Nonconformity, a third force challenging Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism.²²

If Wesleyanism was unsure about its status, it was no longer a sect based around one man's charismatic leadership. Jabez Bunting was undoubtedly not a charismatic leader in the mould of John Wesley. However, he dominated Wesleyanism in the first half of the century; he was four times President of Conference, twice Secretary of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Connexion Editor and President of the Theological Institution. Bunting was so authoritarian a figure that he was labelled 'The Methodist Pope'. His conservatism, he was dubbed 'a connexional brontosaurus' by Hempton, has been frequently blamed for Methodism's divisions during his hegemony.²³ The 'Fly Sheets' were directed at him personally, accusing him of over-arching dominance in the Connexion. For Robert Currie, Jabez Bunting was the villain of the piece: 'Bunting's rule and doctrine established a Wesleyan priesthood in conflict with the Wesleyan people.'²⁴ He forcibly insisted that Methodists obey the 'no politics' rule; to challenge clerical or temporal

²⁰ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 101–3.

²¹ Kent, 'The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849', 217–23.

²² Rack, 'Wesleyan Methodism 1849-1902', 153.

²³ Hempton, *The Religion of the People*, 57.

²⁴ Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber, 1968), 44.

authority was to challenge the will of God. Bunting stated that 'Methodism hates democracy more than it hates sin'.²⁵

The Wesleyan Conference's leadership was far from neutral politically; in being anti-Whig, anti-liberal, anti-radical and, above all, anti-Catholic, it was pro-Tory. Bunting's Wesleyan Connexion pushed the state to commit itself to overtly Christian values in the public sphere. The respectability that Bunting urged Methodists to aspire to allied them more closely and consciously to popular Toryism. However, Clive Field's study of how those enfranchised Wesleyans voted in this period clearly shows that their electoral behaviour did not mirror the church leadership's political leanings. Most Wesleyans supported Whig/Liberal candidates except when compelling religious motives, chiefly anti-Catholicism, intervened.²⁶

Worship for Wesleyans balanced the excitement that characterised the eighteenth-century Methodist revival and more formality in services, akin to the Church of England. Kent described early nineteenth century Wesleyanism as:

Torn between the excitements of the past and the prosperity of the present, between revivalism, for instance, and rhetorical popular preaching, between worship as 'common prayer' and worship which resembled more and more closely that of the Dissenting tradition, between holiness as sudden change and holiness as gradual growth.²⁷

Methodists' calling was to spread Christian holiness at home and, increasingly during the century, overseas. Holiness would lead to individual and societal repentance, repentance to

²⁵ Quoted in Stuart Andrews, *Methodism and Society* (Harlow: Longman, 1970), 74.

²⁶ Clive Field, 'Crosses on the Ballot: The Political Alignments of British Methodists, 1832-2017', in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, vol. 61, part 6 (2018): 239-64.

²⁷ Kent, 'The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849', 117.

salvation. Such a desire for holiness led to philanthropy and mission. Bunting was an active supporter of the Anti-Slavery Society, and during his hegemony, Wesleyanism hugely increased its involvement in overseas mission.

The Wesleyan Connexion also had to balance its finances; debt was ever-present in the first half of the nineteenth century. The cost of chapel building, sometimes imprudent, was heavy. Societies frequently overstretched themselves, adding interest payments to their burden; schools and the cost of minsters and their dependants added additional expenses. Wesleyanism was deeply committed to home and overseas mission, to the extent to which it was continuously overstretched. Mission to the armed forces would have made it even more difficult to balance its books. Wesleyanism was, however, relatively wealthy in comparison with other Methodist denominations.

The first challenge to orthodox Wesleyanism had taken place in 1796, with the expulsion of Alexander Kilham and his supporters. The 'Kilhamites', who later became the Methodist New Connexion, were committed to shared authority between preachers and the laity. From the start, they were accused of being radicals because of their associations with independence and religious liberty. Methodist New Connexion's strength was mainly in the north east of England and Lancashire, but the denomination struggled for funds and numbers. In 1841, it suffered from its own schism when Joseph Barker and his followers were expelled from the Connexion for 'doctrinal unsoundness'. However, New Connexion was committed to mission; ministers and lay workers were sent to Scotland, Ireland and Canada.²⁸

²⁸ John Wilkinson, 'The Rise of Other Methodist Traditions', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. by Rupert Davies, A Raymond George and Gordon Rupp, 4 vols, II, 284-94.

The Bible Christians started in east Cornwall and west Devon in 1816; the movement was centred on a Methodist preacher, William O'Bryan, and the layman, James Thorne. As with the New Connexion, ministers and lay members shared authority. Women played a far more prominent role in the movement than in Wesleyanism, including serving as local and travelling preachers. Austere simplicity, fervent evangelism and strict individual and chapel discipline characterised the denomination; they advocated total abstinence before the rest of Methodism. Bible Christians were generally somewhat poorer than Wesleyans; the connexion suffered from a lack of funds, emigration and rural depopulation. As appeared endemic in Methodism, schism also occurred in the Bible Christian movement in the middle of this period. Mission was at the heart of the Bible Christian doctrine; much of this endeavour was to Cornish emigrant populations in Canada and the United States.²⁹

Beginning in Cheshire and Staffordshire, between 1807 and 1814, Primitive Methodism's origins had much in common with the Bible Christians. Hugh Bourne, a carpenter, and William Clowes, a potter, were expelled from the Methodist Connexion due to their participation in, and advocacy of, revivalist camp meetings. Primitive Methodism had much more lay influence than Wesleyanism; the movement had women local preachers and itinerants. Bourne summarised the appeal of Primitive Methodism to those not deemed sufficiently respectable for Wesleyanism: 'Our chapels were the coal-pit backs, or any other place; and in our conversational way we pressed the Gospel to all, good and bad, rough or smooth.'³⁰ Although it retained political neutrality, some members took prominent roles in reform and working class movements, especially in northern England and the north

²⁹ Wilkinson, 296–303.

³⁰ Quoted in Stewart Brown, *Providence and Empire: Religion, Politics and Society in the United Kingdom, 1815–1914* (Harlow: Pearson, 2008), 27.

Midlands, where its strength was centred.³¹ It remained committed to evangelism, including the open-air meeting, a worship style closer to Dissent than the Church of England. In 1829, Primitive Methodism commenced overseas mission with ministers despatched to the United States, Canada, and, later, to Australia and New Zealand.³² However, in no Methodist denomination did missionary endeavour encompass members of the armed forces.

Some of the pioneers of Primitive Methodism were ex-military men; they included Eleazar Hathorn, a one-legged veteran of the Napoleonic Wars who preached in Manchester at the time of Peterloo and Thomas Batty, a former Royal Navy sailor, who ministered in the Durham Dales. William Clowes had, very briefly, been impressed into the navy in 1803.³³ One of the first Bible Christian Societies was formed at Plymouth Dock in 1816, and a service was held in the Officers' Mess of the gunboat, *Alfred*, at Chatham in 1820.³⁴ Recruitment of sailors from the Bible Christian heartlands of Cornwall and Devon, or soldiers from the areas of Primitive Methodist strength, the northern Midlands and the North East, might have been expected, but this does not seem to have been the case; indeed, the Bible Christians and Primitives left few traces in the armed forces in the first half of the century. Ministry to soldiers and sailors was not a priority for either denomination.

A further secession from Wesleyan Methodism occurred in Leeds in 1827, when the issue was ostensibly about a chapel organ, but, in reality, the division was centred on the power of the Conference to impose its will on a local society; 1000 members left to form the Protestant Methodists. A further dispute in 1835 over theological training for prospective

³¹ Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working-Class Movements of England, 1800-1850* (London: Epworth Press, 1937), 190–93.

³² Wilkinson, 'The Rise of Other Methodist Traditions', 296–303.

³³ Geoffrey Milburn, *Primitive Methodism* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2002), 19.

³⁴ Thomas Shaw, *The Bible Christians, 1815-1907* (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 25–27.

ministers led to the Wesleyan Association's formation. However, the most damaging of the splits was in 1849, with an extraordinarily bitter rift known as the 'Fly Sheet Controversy', which proved, according to Stewart Brown, 'catastrophic for the denomination'.³⁵ William Everett, Samuel Dunn and William Griffiths were accused, probably correctly, of writing a series of pamphlets attacking the leadership of the Wesleyan Connexion in general and Jabez Bunting in particular. This bitter dispute led to the formation of the Wesleyan Reform movement resulting in 100,000 members leaving or being expelled from the Wesleyan Connexion.³⁶ Beset by internal conflict, from 1815 to 1850, divided Methodism's potential for military mission was severely weakened.

The 1851 Religious Census nevertheless clearly showed the extent of Methodism's influence in England. On the census day, 1.8 million people attended Methodist services, half that of the Church of England. Methodism was firmly established as a national church, a significant ecclesiastical force. Wesleyanism was, by some margin, the single largest Nonconformist denomination in England. In Wales, where Nonconformists outnumbered Anglicans, Calvinistic Methodism was the largest denomination in the Welsh-speaking north and west. Wesleyan Methodism never made much headway in Wales, except in English-speaking areas in the urban east of the principality.³⁷ In 1850, The Wesleyan Church in England and Wales had 358,277 members; there were 104,762 Primitive Methodist Church members, 19,411 in the Wesleyan Methodist Association, 17,656 members of The Methodist New Connexion and 10,146 Bible Christians.³⁸ The Methodist denominations together had about half a million members; the number of worshippers, followers and

³⁵ Stewart Brown, *Providence and Empire*, 190.

³⁶ Wilkinson, 'The Rise of Other Methodist Traditions', 313–29.

³⁷ Williams, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment*, 310–15.

³⁸ Thomas Jessop, 'The Mid-Nineteenth Century Background', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. by A Raymond George, Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp, 4 vols, II, 180–81.

adherents was much higher. By this date, Robert Wearmouth estimated that there were two million Methodists, approaching one-tenth of England's population. In 1801, 825 meeting houses provided 163,000 seats for worship; by 1851, there were 11,000 meeting houses and 2,144,298 seats. In the half-century from 1801 to 1851, the population of England and Wales doubled from 8.8 million to 17 million; in the same period, Methodist numbers increased six-fold. The sixty years following John Wesley's death were undoubtedly a turbulent period for Methodism; however, numbers increased despite schism and division.³⁹

Mission to the Armed Forces

Methodism was the most internationally active of all Dissenting denominations, according to Hilary Carey: 'Methodists spread across the Atlantic and Pacific following the Imperial trading and communication networks with great rapidity.'⁴⁰ Soldiers and sailors were responsible for disseminating Methodism across the globe, wrote Findlay and Holdsworth. 'They were uncommonly bold and active in their testimony. In the first instance, they were the first to hold Methodist meetings abroad and make, or suggest, openings for missionary work.'⁴¹ Soldiers had been responsible for the first Methodist society in South Africa. When Revd Barnabas Shaw arrived at the Cape in 1816, he found that his first congregations were soldiers, both there and at Simon's Town. 'Among the military, at this time were several

³⁹ Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working-Class Movements of England*, 15–16.

⁴⁰ Carey, *Empires of Religion*, 9.

⁴¹ Findlay and Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, I, 201.

men of deep piety [. . .] and excellent local preachers.'⁴² These Methodist soldiers, recorded Shaw, frequently held prayer meetings on Table Mountain.⁴³ Conference of 1818 recorded a society of 120 members amongst the British Army on the Continent.⁴⁴ At this time, there were societies led by lay preachers in Malta, with good congregations of both sailors and soldiers.⁴⁵ British soldiers established a Methodist Society at Hobart in 1820.⁴⁶ By 1831, the Wesleyan Church had appointed ministers at many stations with a significant military presence, including Gibraltar, Malta, Alexandria, Ceylon, India, Australia, New Zealand, Southern Africa, Canada and the West Indies.⁴⁷ By 1848, there were 368 ministers on overseas mission, a figure that had quadrupled since 1816.⁴⁸ However, not one of these missions was intended to meet the needs of the armed forces.

The mission potential of members of the armed forces and veterans was, however, recognised. In 1819 the Wesleyan Church Missionary Society, formed during the previous year, saw that soldiers' movement led to the spread of Christianity 'in different parts of the heathen world'.⁴⁹ The majority of Wesleyans in Gibraltar were from the garrison and the fleet, although military service's peripatetic nature created problems for the society.⁵⁰ In Upper Canada, many Wesleyans were 'disbanded soldiers and half-pay officers'.⁵¹ Revd William Moister, in his 1885 history of Methodist overseas mission, described the role that the military had played in the denomination's evangelism: 'Methodism has done much at

⁴² Barnabas Shaw, *Memorials of South Africa* (London: T. Riley, 1841), 60

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁴⁴ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1818, 553.

⁴⁵ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, December 1823, 468.

⁴⁶ Findlay and Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, V, 565.

⁴⁷ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1832, 332.

⁴⁸ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1816, 339; 1846, 221.

⁴⁹ Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, *Report of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 1819, 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵¹ Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, *Report*, 1841, 100.

different times and in different countries for soldiers and sailors; and it is a fact worthy of notice that the British Army has furnished a number of zealous evangelists, some of whom have done good service to the cause both at home and abroad.⁵² The armed forces are rarely mentioned in the Minutes of Conference from 1816 to 1854.⁵³ However, the 1849 Conference did remind Superintendent Ministers of soldiers' rights to attend Divine service at places of worship of their own denomination.⁵⁴ The armed forces were clearly not a Wesleyan priority in this period.

All the smaller Methodist churches established missionary societies and sent evangelists overseas during this period: The Bible Christians in 1821, Methodist New Connexion in 1824, and the Primitive Methodists in 1843–4. When the United Methodist Free Churches were formed in 1857, they, too, set up a missionary society. Although all shared the same broad aims as the Wesleyans, their resources, scope, and reach were much more limited. There is no evidence of any mission to the armed forces at home or abroad during these missionary societies' early years. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that, in this period, Methodists in the armed forces contributed more than they received from their churches.

Much of Methodism's involvement with soldiers and sailors before the Crimean War was through support for organisations seeking to meet their spiritual needs. Methodists were active members of the Religious Tract Society; its reports were on every annual Conference agenda. The 'Sailors' Cause' became a popular evangelical and philanthropic

⁵² William Moister, *Missionary Worthies: Being Brief Memorial Sketches of Ministers Sent Forth by the Wesleyan Missionary Society Who Have Died in the Work from the Beginning* (London: T. Woolmer, 1885), 33.

⁵³ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, 1816–1854*.

⁵⁴ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, 1847*, 111.

endeavour in this period.⁵⁵ Kverndal saw very active Methodist involvement in the foundations of the Seamen's Mission movement dating from 1815: 'The Seafarer was, at the close of the Napoleonic War, socially and spiritually still subject to belonging to a pariah caste. The Methodists, with so little to lose in general estimation themselves, were least likely to be deterred by the current public image of seamen.'⁵⁶ Blake, too, described active Methodist engagement with a range of spiritual and temporal endeavours for merchant and Royal Navy mariners.⁵⁷ Wesleyans were strongly involved in the Bethel Movement, which developed after 1815 to provide spiritually for sailors, civilians and the navy. On 3 July 1826, Revd Macpherson preached at Alexandria to a congregation of Royal Navy sailors on board *The Vere*, which flew the Bethel flag indicating that religious services were conducted on board.⁵⁸ The *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* of July 1827 reported that 21,000 tracts had been distributed to sailors during the previous year.⁵⁹ Most of these worthy ventures to save soldiers and sailors were ecumenical, but all enjoyed Methodist support; for example, four Wesleyan ministers preached regularly to the British and Foreign Sailors' Society in 1838.⁶⁰ In 1843, the Wesleyan Seamen's Mission was formed, based around the Wesleyan Seaman's Chapel in the East End of London, which recognised that sailors required special spiritual attention.

Methodists in this period, like all Nonconformist denominations, were active in their support for a wide range of educational, philanthropic and auxiliary organisations; these included evangelical and school societies, the Sunday School movement and nascent

⁵⁵ Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*, 28–32.

⁵⁶ Roald Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions: Their Origin and Early Growth* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1986), 151.

⁵⁷ Blake, *Evangelicals in the Royal Navy*, 267.

⁵⁸ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, November 1826, 775.

⁵⁹ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, July 1827, 474.

⁶⁰ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, January 1838, 58.

temperance organisations. This engagement had a strong and growing influence on morality, social welfare and mission in Britain and the colonies. Methodism thrived in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the West Indies, all of which had a significant British military presence.⁶¹

There is far less evidence of shipboard Methodism in this period than during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. In part, this is accounted for by the sharp reduction in the size of the navy. Blake suggests that the disappearance of wartime group structures gave fewer opportunities for expressions of lower deck piety and that perhaps peace created less religious urgency at sea. Nevertheless, sparse though the sources may be, it is possible to show that the movement continued to have a small but enduring presence in the Royal Navy. 'There are Methodists in the Navy', proclaimed a letter from a sailor to his mother following an engagement in 1815 with a Turkish frigate and a corvette. 'I chose the most dangerous station [. . .] My reason was, I am called a Methodist, they call us cowards, and I wished to convince them that we are not; and I believe that most people on board are satisfied that we are not.'⁶² In the forty years following this letter's publication, Methodists in the Royal Navy left fragmentary traces. After conducting the funeral of a Wesleyan in the navy who had fallen from the topmast, Revd Macpherson visited sick sailors in Alexandria in 1825 and found them 'ignorant of God, and ignorant of themselves'.⁶³ In 1828, Mr Grogan preached at Zante to a congregation that included just eight sailors.⁶⁴ The active exercise of faith in the Royal Navy was challenging, as the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* acknowledged in 1842:

⁶¹ Carey, *God's Empire*, 178.

⁶² *Methodist Magazine*, September 1815, 664.

⁶³ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, November 1826, 776

⁶⁴ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, September 1828, 637

From the very nature of things, those employed on board a ship must be deprived, to a greater extent, of that religious instruction which is enjoyed by those who reside on shore. It is not possible for men to enter weekly into houses of prayer and sing the praises of God. They are also deprived of that literature which is conveyed to every part of England, and which must continually, remind men of the necessity of catering for their souls. On board ship, they scarcely know what it is to enjoy the privileges of a Sabbath.⁶⁵

Problematic though it certainly was, Methodism endured amongst common sailors between 1815 and 1854.

Wesleyan minister William Harris Rule's ministry to the military was a by-product of his church's broader mission endeavours. His first posting, on ordination in 1826, was to Malta. Rule was a gifted linguist, and the plan had been for him to learn Arabic before being sent to evangelise the Druze of Lebanon, a quite fanciful project to convert the Muslim world. Unsurprisingly, this mission was aborted; instead, he found himself ministering to soldiers and sailors based on the island. When the work in Malta was abandoned, he was sent to Gibraltar, where there was a long-standing Methodist military presence. Working with the garrison was a significant part of his role, and soldiers formed the core of his congregation: 'My field of labour was chiefly the garrison.'⁶⁶ However, Rule's mission on the Rock was seen by his church as not primarily to soldiers and sailors but, rather, as a bridgehead for evangelism in Roman Catholic Spain.⁶⁷ He made clear that he 'had given himself to be a missionary not a colonial chaplain'.⁶⁸ Rule nevertheless was frequently in

⁶⁵ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, July 1842, 613.

⁶⁶ William Rule, *Recollections of My Life and Work at Home and Abroad in Connection with the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 99.

⁶⁷ Susan Jackson, *In the Shadow of a Mighty Rock: A History of the Gibraltar Methodist Church* (Evesham: Wesley Historical Society, 2009)

⁶⁸ Rule, *Recollections of My Life and Work at Home and Abroad in Connection with the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 67.

conflict with both the military authorities and the garrison chaplains.⁶⁹ Susan Jackson summed up both his achievements and his weaknesses: 'Maybe only a person with Rule's determination, energy and zeal could have achieved this, yet had these qualities been tempered with a little more humility and understanding, fewer people might have been hurt.'⁷⁰ In ten years on the Rock, Rule established a model of ministry to the military, which was to become the pattern for Methodism after the Crimean War. The Wesleyan Missionary Society report for Gibraltar in 1839 remarked on the transfer of Methodist soldiers to the West Indies and the difficulties that such fluctuating numbers created. The report requested, fruitlessly, that another minister be sent to acknowledge the demands of ministry to the garrison.⁷¹

During the period between Waterloo and the Crimean War, the Wesleyan Connexion did not view Rule's work with the military in Gibraltar as a blueprint for mission work with Britain's armed forces. Two hundred soldiers and sailors regularly attended Sabbath worship in Malta in 1842, including a sizeable number from the 19th and Rifle Regiments, but, as at Gibraltar, the Wesleyans found it difficult to accommodate the ebb and flow of troop movements.⁷² In 1843, Rowland Rees of the Royal Engineers was posted to the newly formed colony of Hong Kong; he started a class, mainly of soldiers, led by two sergeants, and requested that Wesleyan Conference send a missionary. His request was rejected even though his letter enclosed a donation towards the costs of a minister's

⁶⁹ Michael Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department 1796-1953: Clergy under Fire* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), 117–18; Jackson, *In the Shadow of a Mighty Rock*, 77–146.

⁷⁰ Jackson, *In the Shadow of a Mighty Rock*, 146.

⁷¹ S.O.A.S., Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Report of the Spiritual State of the Gibraltar and Spanish Mission for the year 1839, MMS/ Europe/ Synod Minutes/ FBN1.

⁷² S.O.A.S., Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Report for Malta 1842, MMS/ Europe/ Synod Minutes/ FBN1.

appointment.⁷³ Nevertheless, Wesleyanism made a few half-hearted attempts to meet military men's temporal needs during this period; a Methodist Soldiers' meeting room was opened near Woolwich Barracks during the 1840s, and prototype Soldiers' and Sailors' Homes were established at Gibraltar and Malta.⁷⁴

There was some Wesleyan activity in the army in India before the Rebellion. Andrew Armour, who had previously served in the British Army, had founded a Methodist Society in Madras (Chennai) by 1816.⁷⁵ Another society was formed around 1820 at Poonamaree, near Madras, where a small chapel was built using subscriptions from soldiers, and at Bangalore, where a small property was rented for worship.⁷⁶ Most of the members of the society in Madras were soldiers. In 1830, Fanny Pant, the wife of a civil servant, wrote in her diary: 'Methodism is gaining ground very fast in Cawnpore; young ladies sometimes profess it highly incorrect to go to balls, plays, or any party where it is possible there may be a quadrille. A number of officers also profess these opinions and set themselves up as "New Lights".'⁷⁷ Lay preachers were active in Ceylon in this period, including Corporal Desley of the 61st Foot at Colombo. Andrew Armour, ex-soldier, had also been preaching in Columbo by the end of 1814.⁷⁸ Owen Spencer Watkins paid tribute to Methodist soldiers' role in the sub-continent: 'In India it was the same story, again and again the soldiers formed the nucleus of the Church, and were the first preachers of the Gospel.'

⁷³ John Pritchard, *Methodists and Their Missionary Societies 1760-1900* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 46.

⁷⁴ William Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army*, 30–31.

⁷⁵ Kenneth Cracknell, 'The Spread of Wesleyan Methodism', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. by Randy Maddox and Jason Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 254.

⁷⁶ Findlay and Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, V, 187, 202.

⁷⁷ Pritchard, *Methodists and Their Missionary Societies 1760-1900*, 104.

⁷⁸ Cracknell, 'The Spread of Wesleyan Methodism', 254.

Complaints that Wesleyan missionaries were baptising the children of European soldiers were addressed to the Adjutant General of the Army by the Anglican chaplain at Bangalore. His protests were dismissed, and the response made it clear that the army in India by this time was denominationally pluralist: 'I cannot object to the soldiers seeking opportunities for worship and instruction wherever they find them'. The East India Company was not prepared to compel 'European soldiers to resort to Chaplains in the Company's service for the administration of the sacraments.'⁷⁹ Alfred Laverack of the 98th Regiment of Foot was posted to India in 1846. He was converted at Fort William, Calcutta, by the ministrations of James Lincoln, a colour sergeant of his company. Laverack describes some opposition to the 'Blue Lights' in his company, which he could forestall as he had been 'a notorious boxer'.⁸⁰ Laverack bemoaned the absence of an ordained minister during most of his extensive service in India: 'Oh! If I had only a dear Methodist minister or leader to take me by the hand, I might have found the Saviour at once.'⁸¹

The soldier retained the reputation that had tarnished him during the previous century; 'going for a soldier' was viewed as being but one step up from being imprisoned. Recruitment was often based around drink and deception. Even in peacetime, death rates were high, as was sickness. For those with a choice, the army was a singularly undesirable occupation, as Peter Burroughs stated:

Soldiering was not considered a popular or honourable occupation among the labouring classes despite the guarantee of food and shelter, pay and pension [. . .] the army was an escape from domestic troubles and a refuge for a variety of inadequates, misfits, rascals,

⁷⁹ B.L., I.O.R., IOR/F/4/1808/74- 393, August 1838.

⁸⁰ Laverack, *Seventeen Years' Experience in India*, 26.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

drunkards, bigamists, adulterers, debtors, criminals, and those who had quarrelled with family, friends, or employers.⁸²

Sailors certainly enjoyed no better a reputation than soldiers, with concerns expressed about endemic drunkenness.⁸³ Samuel Leech, who served in both the U.S. and British navies, described the moral climate on board: 'Profanity in most Revolting aspect: licentiousness in its most shameful and beastly garbs; vying in the worst Proteus-like shapes, abound there.'⁸⁴ Naval service was far from voluntary for many men in this period; either they were impressed, despite the abandonment of press gangs after 1815, or joined as boy sailors.⁸⁵ Economic hardship meant that enlistment in either army or navy was a necessity for many, an alternative to the workhouse for the unskilled, unemployed and destitute.

The *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* of July 1822 commented on the 'rapid increase in our Army and Navy' as a moral and spiritual opportunity and 'a token for good'. In reality, the numbers serving in the armed forces decreased after 1815.⁸⁶ The navy was reduced from 140,000 seamen in 1813 to 38,000 in 1850, but only 27,000 were fit for active service.⁸⁷ During four decades of European peace, the army was reduced in size and status, from 233,952 soldiers in 1815 to 116,434 men in 1848, half that of the time of Waterloo. The reduction in spending on the military was also an indication of its diminished priority;

⁸² Peter Burroughs, 'An Unreformed Army', in *The Oxford History of the British Army*, ed. by David Chandler, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 168.

⁸³ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, September 1834, 704.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Henry Baynham, *From the Lower Deck: The Old Navy, 1780-1840* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 93.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 3–5.

⁸⁶ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, July 1822, 468.

⁸⁷ Brian Lavery, *Able Seamen: The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy from 1850 to the Present Day* (London: Conway, 2011), 11–16.

the army's budget in 1815 was £43 million; by the 1840s, annual expenditure was £9.5 million, less than a quarter of that of 1815.⁸⁸

The numbers of Methodists and other Nonconformists in the armed forces were low during the period from Waterloo to the Crimea; 'no more than a sprinkling', according to Harold Hanham.⁸⁹ Few Methodists had the wealth, breeding or inclination to take commissions. Rule believed that the public in general, and members of his church in particular, were indifferent, rather than hostile, to the armed forces before the Crimean War.⁹⁰ Methodists, aspiring for respectability and social and economic advancement, did not see the army as a career and had little interest in associating with soldiers and sailors. The public perception of the armed forces was diametrically opposed to Methodists' self-image of piety, industry, thrift and sobriety.

Spiritual provision on board ship was woeful as Samuel Leech, converted to Methodism after his naval service, described: 'The Sabbath was also a day of sensuality. True, we some-times had the semblance of religious services, when the men were summoned to hear the captain read the morning service from the Church prayer book; but it was observed more as a day of Revels than of worship.'⁹¹ The influence of Admiral Sir John Saumarez on the spiritual provision for the navy was very considerable. He strongly supported 'Blue Lights' amongst his officers, insisted on regular Sabbath observance, and encouraged the Bible societies in providing the scriptures for sailors. In 1818, Saumarez stated: 'Bibles make sailors more firm to their duty, and certainly had not made them less

⁸⁸ Peter Burroughs, 'An Unreformed Army', 160.

⁸⁹ Harold Hanham, 'Religion and Nationality in the Mid-Victorian Army', in *War and Society: Historical Essays in Honour and Memory of J. R. Western 1928-1971*, ed. M. R. D. Foot (London: Paul Elek, 1973), 103.

⁹⁰ Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army*, 33.

⁹¹ Quoted in Baynham, *From the Lower Deck*, 33.

valiant or courageous in the hour of danger and the day of battle.⁹² However, spiritual provision at sea was not transformed in the first half of the century. An account written by a Scottish sailor, who served on the *Genoa* for three years during the 1820s, makes no mention of services on board; men were gathered together on Sundays only to hear the Articles of War read.

Christian observance in the army was instrumental, argued Hanham; religion was helpful for order, discipline, morale and routine, but hardly a priority. Church parades ensured that men were well-presented, prayer helped calm men in battle and chaplains' functions included burying the dead and comforting the sick.⁹³ The Army Chaplains' Department was reduced from thirty-six chaplains in 1815 to four in 1844; several overseas expeditions had no chaplain accompanying them. In 1829, the office of the Chaplain-General was reduced to that of Principal Chaplain. In England, Anglican parish clergy received allowances for ministering to soldiers; Hew Strachan was dismissive of this provision: 'though cheap it was totally ineffective'.⁹⁴ Only clergy of the Church of England, and Episcopalians and Presbyterians in Scotland and Ireland, received these allowances. The appointment of Revd George Gleig in 1844 restored the fortunes of army chaplaincy, the status of Chaplain-General was reinstated, and additional chaplaincy appointments were made. However, Revd Charles Kelly, not the most unbiased commentator, described Chaplain-General Gleig as 'High, dry, and bitterly opposed to Nonconformists'.⁹⁵

⁹² Quoted in *Methodist Magazine*, July 1819, 548.

⁹³ Hanham, 'Religion and Nationality in the Mid-Victorian Army', 161.

⁹⁴ Hew Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy: The Reform of the British Army, 1830-54* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 86.

⁹⁵ Charles H. Kelly, *Memories* (London: Robert Culley, 1910), 122.

According to Kenneth Hendrickson, the army's status improved towards the end of this period with more attention paid to its spiritual health: 'Clearly then, from the 1840s, the army and government made some attempts to rehabilitate the moral and religious life within the ranks'.⁹⁶ However, Chaplaincy provision in the Royal Navy improved little during this period. In 1842, there were eighty naval chaplains on the Admiralty list, but only thirty-nine 'active' chaplains; most ships did not have a chaplain.⁹⁷ Beneath established provision, there was a more denominationally pluralist evangelical sub-culture in the army's ranks, evidence of which is provided by the testimony of small numbers of Methodist soldiers.⁹⁸ In July 1839, General Lord Hill issued a general order that no Roman Catholic or man 'of any religious persuasion differing from the Established Church is compelled to attend Divine worship of the Church of England; but that every soldier is at full liberty to attend the worship of Almighty God according to the forms of his own religion, when military duty does not interfere'.⁹⁹ In practice, some officers ignored or restricted this liberty. In Gibraltar, Rule often found himself in conflict to secure this right for Wesleyan servicemen; he believed there had been little real change for Methodist soldiers.¹⁰⁰ At the 1848 Wesleyan Methodist Conference, Rule spoke, urging his church to pursue this religious freedom, but, despite a letter to ministers in garrison towns, 'it took no effect'. The armed forces were not perceived to be a target for civilian or church philanthropy. He was right in concluding that his denomination was largely indifferent to the armed forces between 1815 and 1854.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Kenneth Hendrickson, *Religion and the Public Image of the British Army*, 13.

⁹⁷ Michael Lewis, *The Navy in Transition, 1814-1864* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), 164.

⁹⁸ Michael Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion: The Forgotten History of the British Soldier from the Age of Marlborough to the Eve of the First World War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 118-19

⁹⁹ Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army*, 25.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 27-33.

Summary

Schism, disunity and financial difficulties mitigated against any concerted mission to the British armed forces between Waterloo and the Crimean War. Nevertheless, Methodism was able to mount and maintain substantial and sustained overseas missionary endeavour in this period. Coupled with the spread of all Methodist denominations throughout the colonies and the United States, there was significant growth in all connexions in Britain itself. Throughout the period, there is ample evidence of a significant Methodist sub-culture in the army and, to a lesser extent, the navy. This was primarily a spontaneous movement in both services, self-supporting, led by the men themselves, not officers, chaplains or any Methodist connexion. Methodists in the armed forces were missionary agents rather than targets for active evangelism by their churches. They helped spread Methodism overseas; congregations of the faithful sprang up and flourished almost everywhere with a sustained British military presence. The soldier and sailor's perceived reputation served to distance them from the Methodist desire for respectability and recognition. Too close a relationship with common soldiers and ordinary seamen would have done nothing to advance acceptance into British society. The limited outreach to the armed forces in this period took place, for the most part, overseas; perhaps here mores allowed more contact with soldiers and sailors than in Britain itself. Military mission during 1815 to 1854 might best be seen as diffuse, recognising that soldiers and sailors were neglected spiritually and needed Christian influence. Ministry was delivered at a distance through a range of ancillary and auxiliary bodies rather than directly by the Methodist churches themselves. There is little evidence of

systematic mission by the Wesleyans to either the army or the navy, and still less from the other connexions. In sharp contrast, during the second half of the nineteenth century, Methodism, especially Wesleyanism, gave a markedly higher priority to its work with the British Army and the Royal Navy.

Chapter Four: The Development of Active Mission, 1854–1902

Our work in the army is not only church work, spiritual and soul saving: it is also for the national and imperial weal. It aims to secure true moral discipline, that which will make a soldier perform all his duty properly. Good men really make the bravest and best soldiers.¹

(Revd Charles Kelly, Wesleyan Acting Army Chaplain during the 1860s and 1870s)

Introduction

Methodism recovered its stability and increased its influence during the second half of the nineteenth century. Neither the Wesleyans, nor any other Methodist denomination, suffered further damaging division; indeed, there were increasingly fruitful moves towards union in the later part of the century. The 1851 Religious Census had shown Nonconformity in general, and Methodism in particular, as a third force in English ecclesiastical life.²

Nineteen per cent of the English population attended a Nonconformist place of worship compared with the 20% who attended the Anglican Church. The Wesleyans served some 5.5% of the population; the smaller connexions, Primitives, Bible Christians, New Connexion, and Methodist Free Churches accounted for 3.7%.³ Welsh Calvinist Methodism attracted the

¹ Kelly, *Memories* (London: Robert Culley, 1910), 158.

² Thomas Jessop, 'The Mid-Nineteenth Century Background', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. by A Raymond George, Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp, 4 vols (London: Epworth Press, 1965-1988), IV, 180–81.

³ David Bebbington, 'The Growth of Voluntary Religion', in *The Cambridge History of World Christianities, c.1815-c.1914*, ed. by Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 54.

largest number of worshippers in Wales.⁴ These were national churches rather than sects, denominations on their own terms. Methodism was some considerable distance from its origins as a society of the Church of England. The Wesleyan Connexion became increasingly allied to, and identified with, Nonconformity, although it tried to remain distinct from other Dissenting traditions. Membership grew steadily, if unspectacularly, during the second half of the century, broadly mirroring population growth and Methodist influence was probably greater than at any time before or since.

Methodism in all its hues was imbued with growing confidence that enabled it to mount a concerted challenge to the Church of England's power and the perceived threat of Roman Catholicism. The growing influence of Anglo-Catholicism within the Anglican Communion increased the divide with the Methodist connexions, making them all the more determined to present a staunchly Protestant position. Collectively, the Free Churches, fuelled by a powerful blend of evangelical piety, shared social mores and political radicalism, challenged the Church of England, and national and local government, over disestablishment, temperance, education and morality. Commitment to the provision of education, extensive charitable work and a social gospel characterised Victorian Nonconformity. Work with soldiers and sailors was a natural adjunct to these philanthropic and pious endeavours. The desire to achieve recognition and representation for their adherents and churches was manifest in a newly found assertiveness towards mission in the army and navy.

⁴ 'In Our Time: "John Wesley and the Methodists"', William Gibson, Stephen Plant and Eryn White (London: BBC Radio 4, 10 December 2020).

The Development of Chaplaincy

The Crimean War marked a sharp change in Methodist attitudes to the armed forces.

Initially, the Wesleyan Connexion found it hard to reconcile British involvement alongside Catholic France and Islamic Turkey. Wesleyans were strongly influenced by a speech in the House of Lords by The Earl of Shaftesbury, delivered on 10 March 1854, representing the conflict in Christian terms. Military intervention was viewed in a spiritual light, enabling them to give fulsome support for the national cause. The war was, Wesleyans believed, an opening to religious liberty; 'this providential and an opportunity to spread Protestant Christianity'.⁵ The death of Tsar Nicholas was a judgement on Russia.⁶ The Connexion appeared to have been previously unaware of Wesleyans in the armed forces as the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* recognised:

The recent departure of great bodies of our countrymen to Turkey, in connection with the naval and military armaments intended for service in that region has had the effect of awakening an increased interest in the moral and religious state of the army and the navy [. . .] Men in the military, and of the coast guards, drafted for this service, have been in the habit of attending our chapels, and consider themselves under the pastoral care of the Wesleyan Ministry. The least we can do for them is to follow them and their companies with our sympathy and prayers.⁷

⁵ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, December 1854, 1143; Olive Anderson, 'The Reactions of Church and Dissent towards the Crimean War', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 16, no. 2 (1965), 209-219.

⁶ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, April 1855, 353.

⁷ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, April 1854, 374.

Letters to the Wesleyan press pleaded for a ministerial presence with the forces.

Methodism in both armed services was initially sustained due to the efforts of lay preachers. For example, there was a society of thirty-four sailors on board a man-of-war in the Baltic Fleet.⁸ In addition, a Wesleyan NCO, Sergeant Burton, organised daily meetings and Sunday services for several hundred soldiers at Balaklava. Other NCOs led worship, classes and meetings throughout the campaign. Burton wrote from Balaklava:

Several of the pious sergeants were placed in important offices in the town and neighbourhood – such as those of Hospital-Sergeants, Store-Sergeants and Sergeants in connexion with the Sanitary Commission; and being located there, they had opportunities of usefulness and Christian fellowship which they would not have enjoyed in the camp or in the trenches. It was observed by one of the oldest sergeants, in reply to a remark that it was singular so many pious men should have been selected for such duties, that he had never known a consistent Methodist who did not rise in the service.⁹

The steady Methodist NCO was to become a stalwart of future campaigns.

The Crimean War saw the first appointment of a Wesleyan minister to military chaplaincy on campaign marking a sharp change in direction in relationships with the army. Revd Peter Batchelor, who had experience working with soldiers in India, was dispatched with a small library of 'interesting religious books', hymn books and a supply of Bibles. He arrived at Scutari shortly before the end of the war, where he found an existing Methodist society established by soldiers, principally NCOs.¹⁰ He was shocked by what he saw and

⁸ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, April 1855, 365.

⁹ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, March 1855, 269.

¹⁰ Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army*, 34.

heard: 'the most horrifying description of the suffering of the poor men last winter'.¹¹

However, Conference saw Batchelor's appointment in much the same way as Rule's earlier ministry in Malta, as a possible opening for evangelism to Muslims in the Ottoman Empire.

Events in India helped further persuade the Wesleyan Connexion that its mission was alongside Britain's armed forces.¹² The Indian Rebellion was represented in Britain as a religious war, a conflict against Islam and Hinduism, civilisation against barbarism.¹³ Christian soldiers needed the ministrations of their churches. There were no Wesleyan ministers in northern India at the time of the Rebellion in 1857, although there was a society led by a paymaster sergeant of the 86th Foot and another at Scinde, whose members included Primitive Methodists.¹⁴ Four hundred Wesleyan soldiers in Bengal appealed for their connexion to provide them with a minister. Their requests were met after the Rebellion. In 1858, Revd B. Broadley began four years of ministry to British soldiers at Karachi, Poona and Ahmednagar. Revd Daniel Pearson was despatched to work with soldiers at Barrackpore in the following year.¹⁵ There was now an acknowledgement that soldiers required chaplaincy, distinct and separate from mission designed to convert Muslims and Hindus.¹⁶ This ministry was a new departure, different from the motives that promoted Rule's posting to Gibraltar or Batchelor's to the Crimea. The Wesleyans assumed a

¹¹ S.O.A.S., Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Letter from Revd Peter Batchelor dated January 1865, MMS/ Europe/ Correspondence / FBN1.

¹² Olive Anderson, 'The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain', *The English Historical Review* 86, no. 338 (1971), 46-74.

¹³ Michael Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion: The Forgotten History of the British Soldier from the Age of Marlborough to the Eve of the First World War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 219-20.

¹⁴ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, January 1856, 172.

¹⁵ George Findlay and William Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 7 vols (London: Epworth Press, 1921), V, 311, 376.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, V, 360.

responsibility to deliver spiritual, and later practical, comfort for the neglected British soldier and sailor by providing ministers and lay preachers.

Revd William Rule's appointment to the Aldershot Camp was the first to meet the specific needs of the armed forces in Britain.¹⁷ In 1856, building upon his experience in Gibraltar, he set about mission at the camp on his own initiative.¹⁸ Considering that he had the nucleus of a congregation at Aldershot, he sought out the General Officer Commanding and was permitted to minister to Wesleyan soldiers. However, Rule's request to General Knollys, Commander of Division, to hold Sunday services was refused; Knollys was not prepared to set this 'precedent' for worship led by anyone but a chaplain from one of the accredited denominations. Rule responded by appealing directly to the Secretary of State for War, who overturned the prohibition. A temporary Wesleyan chapel was opened in July 1857 by the President of the Conference, Robert Young.¹⁹ Most of those who attended Rule's services and meetings were not members of the Wesleyan Connexion; they were Methodists by upbringing, Sunday School attendance, or inclination. Both Rule and his deputy, Charles Kelly, were popular and powerful preachers and their services were livelier than those of the Anglicans at Aldershot.²⁰ Rule developed an effective working relationship with Colonel Ward, Assistant Adjutant General, and said he learned much about discipline, rank, and protocol, which stood him, and later ministers attached to the army, in good stead. However, he was not employed by the army, which gave distinct advantages: 'Not

¹⁷ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1858, 27.

¹⁸ Rule, *Recollections of My Life and Work at Home and Abroad in Connection with the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 234.

¹⁹ Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army*, 40–42.

²⁰ Anderson, 'The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain', 56–57.

being paid, we could not be commanded', and that 'The subjection of a chaplain to martial control would be fatal to freedom of spiritual ministration'.²¹

Rule enjoyed a fight and saw Aldershot as 'The principal battle-field' in a war to achieve religious recognition and representation for Methodist soldiers and sailors.²² He and his assistant minister were excluded from visiting the camp hospital by the senior Church of England chaplain, who believed that they had too much influence on young soldiers and that Kelly was an 'unsafe visitor to the army'. An appeal directly to the Duke of Cambridge saw the ban rescinded. Kelly was the first Wesleyan minister allowed to visit military prisoners. The issue of the burial of Wesleyan soldiers also proved highly contentious.²³ Perhaps not surprisingly, having cajoled and cultivated the military authorities at Aldershot, Rule found them easier to deal with than the Chaplain-General, Gleig. He blamed Gleig and his subordinates for 'persecution', 'intolerance', and 'clerical interference'.²⁴

Opposition to the ministry of Rule and Kelly with the army at Aldershot was not only from the military authorities and Anglican chaplains; some senior figures within the Wesleyan Conference, including an ex-President, did not support their work.²⁵ Some retained the view of the soldier as a reprobate beyond redemption; the very term 'Wesleyan Soldier' offended at least one speaker at the 1859 Conference: 'Words were not wanting wherewith to condemn the application of this name to the red-coated drunkards, whose very presence in our towns was pestilential'.²⁶ Rule, however, hoped that Conference would view his mission at Aldershot as a precedent: 'It thence devolved on me to endeavour

²¹ Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army*, 46, 66.

²² *Ibid.*, 95.

²³ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 157–61.

²⁴ Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army*, 67, 93–94.

²⁵ Kelly, *Memories*, 127–29.

²⁶ Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army*, 67.

for an extension of the work through all the Army wherever troops were stationed, at home and abroad, and to obtain for our brethren throughout the service the full enjoyment of religious liberty.²⁷ Kelly was in no doubt of Rule's achievements:

I consider that he did more than any other man to secure religious liberty in the British Army. The fight which he waged in order to establish the rights of Methodist soldiers to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience and the custom of their own Church was hard, long and keen. He stormed a strong citadel of exclusiveness and prejudice.²⁸

The military now had a hugely increased priority within Wesleyanism. The denomination had put aside the ambiguity which had previously characterised its attitude to the forces. The appointment of Roman Catholic chaplains to the Army in 1858 incensed the Wesleyan Connexion and affirmed its growing determination to achieve recognition and representation for their soldiers and sailors. The Wesleyans became increasingly determined to take advantage of the precedent which the army had created. In 1860, Conference acknowledged that the 'Wesleyan portion of the army' had been previously 'long-neglected'.²⁹ Conference commended 'those members of the Wesleyan families who are serving their country in the Army to the active and prayerful care of our ministers and people'.³⁰ From this date on, Chairmen of District were required to ascertain the numbers of troops marched to Divine Service, and the numbers of NCOs and men attending chapel were reported in the annual minutes. The creation of the Army Committee also took place in 1860; its membership, including the President, Ex-President and Secretary of Conference, in

²⁷ Ibid., 234.

²⁸ Kelly, *Memories*, 120.

²⁹ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1860, 297.

³⁰ Ibid., 505.

addition to Rule and members of the Home Missionary Committee, indicates just how seriously the denomination now took its mission to the armed forces. Conference continued to give attention to the army and navy's specific needs for the rest of the nineteenth century.

Conference appointed Kelly to military work at Chatham in 1861; his ministry included the Royal Navy at nearby Sheerness. Experience working under the tenacious Rule at Aldershot prepared him for familiar battles. The Commanding Officer at Chatham, General Eyre, was unwilling to see Wesleyan troops marched to a hall for Kelly's services, and he was banned from the military hospital. His letter to the Duke of Cambridge shows the extent of his confidence and feeling of righteousness. 'Personally, I am simply no one; but officially I represent one of the greatest churches in the world, and I must claim for it proper respect.'³¹ The Royal Navy proved more accommodating than the army; marines attended services in Chatham during the period when Eyre had prohibited soldiers from Methodist meetings.³² Chapel attendance at both Chatham and Sheerness increased rapidly during the six years of Kelly's ministry, to the extent that it was necessary to hold four separate Sunday services.

The Wesleyan Connexion enjoyed an increasingly fruitful relationship with the British Army. By 1863, additional full-time chaplains, 'for the spiritual benefit of Methodist soldiers', were stationed at Chatham, Shorncliffe, Portsmouth, the Curragh in Ireland, and Scinde and Barrackpore in India. In that year, the President of Conference was Charles Prest, former military chaplain and Secretary of the Army Committee. In his Conference Address,

³¹ Kelly, *Memories*, 150.

³² Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army*, 106.

he acknowledged that soldiers' needs had been ignored by the Connexion, 'not from indifference to their spiritual necessities, but rather through a want of adequate means, and the extent and urgency of other claims on our pastoral care.'³³ In 1865, Conference expressed satisfaction at good and improving relationships with the army, the War Office and Horse Guards and 'approved of steps taken to secure for Wesleyan Methodists in the Royal Navy those facilities for attending our services and receiving our pastoral care, which are enjoyed by men in the other branch of the service'.³⁴ In the following year, Conference expressed its pleasure that the Admiralty now made it possible for Wesleyan sailors and marines to attend Sunday services in port.³⁵

The issue of attestation was crucial to achieving recognition in the armed forces. Without the correct recording of soldiers' and sailors' affiliations, the Wesleyan Conference could not meet their needs. The church claimed that Wesleyans were routinely recorded as Anglicans or Presbyterians; their very existence was ignored, and ministers were denied access to their congregations.³⁶ The Armed Forces Committee wrote to the Secretary of State in 1862, requesting that the numbers of soldiers describing themselves as Wesleyans in each regiment be recorded, that ministers have access to men in camps and barracks for 'Divine worship, religious instruction and pastoral care' and that Wesleyan soldiers and ministers were given 'protection' from the harassment of clergymen from the three recognised churches.³⁷ As a result of this lobbying, a fourth class of religious return, 'Other Protestants', was added in 1863.³⁸ The following year, saw a man's spiritual affiliation

³³ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1863, 335.

³⁴ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1865, 399.

³⁵ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1866, 263.

³⁶ Rule, *An Account of the Establishment of Wesleyan Methodism in the British Army*, 102.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 113–16.

recorded in his army pay book.³⁹ In 1869, the Admiralty recognised the right of sailors to enrol as Wesleyans in the Royal Navy.⁴⁰

Sailors and soldiers now had spiritual and societal worth; military and Methodist values were not incompatible. During the period between Waterloo and the Crimea, the armed forces were rarely mentioned in the Wesleyan press. In contrast, by the 1860s, the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* regularly reported under the heading 'Our Army and Navy Work' with evident pride.⁴¹ In 1865, there were encouraging reports of active ministry, conversions and large congregations of soldiers, sailors and marines at Shorncliffe, Portsmouth, Parkhurst, The Curragh and Dublin. Letters written in 1868, from a Royal Marine corporal serving in Hong Kong and a colour sergeant stationed near Multan in India, bemoaned the lack of either a Methodist minister or a chapel to meet the needs of military flocks.⁴²

By 1863, Conference had assigned eight ministers to seven military stations at home and overseas, including India. One hundred soldiers attended the Wesleyan service held at Aldershot on Christmas Day 1869 and 210 the New Year's Eve 'Watch Night' service.⁴³ Revd Hardy reported good attendances at Parade, voluntary Sunday and week-night services, and many conversions at Aldershot. In addition, there were baptisms, class and society meetings, Bible classes, prayer and fellowship meetings and temperance activities. This work convinced Hardy of the value of his chaplaincy: 'My own conviction deepens that Methodism has no finer field of work than the Army, none that will better repay culture,

³⁹ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 93.

⁴⁰ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, October 1869, 973.

⁴¹ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1854-1902.

⁴² *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, April 1869, 369.

⁴³ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, February 1870, 177.

none that will yield more wide-spread spiritual results.’⁴⁴ Similarly, the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* received positive reports of soldiers' attendance at services at the Parkhurst Garrison, Chatham, and that of members of the Guards Regiments at Spitalfields in London.⁴⁵ From Aldershot in 1871, Revd Hardy declared, ‘No part of our Methodist work yields a greater harvest, both of direct and indirect spiritual blessings.’⁴⁶

Wesleyan Methodism was also flourishing amongst the garrison at Gibraltar, according to a Synod report of 31 December 1859. The society had 500 members, mostly soldiers. ‘The English work is principally among the military. It is pleasing to observe that in many regiments stationed in the Garrison “Wesleyan Soldiers” are to be found, who have been regularly marched to our Chapel for Divine Service in the evening – official return is that there are 434’.⁴⁷ In 1864, George Allan, Wesleyan minister on the Rock, reported opposition and obstruction from the army’s chaplains to Wesleyan servicemen attending Divine Service.⁴⁸ Although the numbers of active Wesleyan soldiers and sailors had fallen by 1865 due to military movements, by 1870 there were 600 regularly worshipping; this number included many sailors from the Channel and the Mediterranean Squadrons. As was typical in the relationship between Methodism and the military, ‘a strikingly large proportion of these are of the highest class of non-commissioned officers’.⁴⁹ Gibraltar had been a bastion of Wesleyanism in the armed forces throughout the century as their Missionary Society recorded: ‘The fact that Gibraltar is a military garrison, and a naval port

⁴⁴ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, September 1870, 856.

⁴⁵ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, February 1870, 177; March 1870, 273.

⁴⁶ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, October 1871, 950.

⁴⁷ S.O.A.S., Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Report of the Spiritual State of the Gibraltar and Spanish Mission for the year 1860, MMS/ Europe/ Synod Minutes/ FBN2.

⁴⁸ Susan Jackson, *In the Shadow of a Mighty Rock: A History of the Gibraltar Methodist Church* (Evesham: Wesley Historical Society, 2009), 221.

⁴⁹ S.O.A.S., Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Report of the Spiritual State of the Gibraltar and Spanish Mission for the year 1875, MMS/ Europe/ Synod Minutes/ FBN2.

stamps its character as a mission station. Methodists, whilst Britain holds the Rock for the benefit of the world, should have its sanctuary for British soldiers and sailors, so many of whom she furnishes from her work.’⁵⁰

Improvements in Wesleyan representation and representation in the army were paralleled in the navy. From 1857, Wesleyan ministers were paid allowances by the Admiralty for conducting services for sailors and marines at Devonport and Portsmouth.⁵¹ Although there were no Methodist chaplains afloat in this period, sailors themselves led the active observance of their faith on board, ‘prompted by petty officers and seamen of the fleet and generally conducted by officers and leading men’⁵² In 1867, Charles Kelly recounted the despatch of 116 Wesleyan seamen and marines to the China Station aboard HMS *Rodney*.⁵³ In the same year, the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* reported active Methodist societies onboard unnamed ships serving off India, on the South American station, in the Pacific and in the Channel Squadron.⁵⁴ For sailors and marines based ashore, attendance at Methodist services was possible; the Revd John Walter from Gosport recorded that an average of ninety-five marines and fifty-four seamen attended his regular Sunday services.⁵⁵ Methodist adherence appears to have been particularly strong in the marines; Revd B. Broadly reported that of 912 members of the Royal Marine Light Infantry based at Chatham in 1870, 221 were Declared Wesleyans.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ S.O.A.S., Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Report of the Spiritual State of the Gibraltar and Spanish Mission for the year 1870, MMS/ Europe/ Synod Minutes/ FBN2.

⁵¹ T.N.A., Marine Office, 29 July 1857, ADM 12/ 1895.

⁵² *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, January 1865, 85.

⁵³ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, June 1867, 561.

⁵⁴ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, November 1867, 1041; February 1869, p.177.

⁵⁵ T.N.A., The Marine Office, 3 November 1869, ADM 12/ 1895; *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, February 1868, 117.

⁵⁶ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, August 1870, 754.

In Malta, as at Gibraltar, there was a significant Methodist presence in the fleet. In 1870, Revd W.S. Caldecott ran two services for sailors and marines each Sunday in addition to two for the army.⁵⁷ More sailors than soldiers attended Wesleyan Sunday services in Malta by the following year, with 302 declared Wesleyans in the fleet based there.⁵⁸ The cordial relationship that Caldecott had established with the naval authorities led to an invitation to join a cruise with the Mediterranean Fleet, visiting Palermo, Naples, Rome, Sorrento, Messina, Catania and Syracuse. This voyage, probably the first example of Methodist chaplaincy at sea, improved relationships with officers and men. It also endorsed his view that the navy had changed; 'A British man-of-war is not what it once was, a floating hell'.⁵⁹ Caldecott's ministry appears to have been particularly effective. In April 1872, he reported on his work to the Vice-Admiral Commanding at Malta: 'Divine Service has been regularly and punctually performed in the dockyard school-room throughout the year and the services have been marked by attention and devotion on the part of the men.' He described visiting the sick at the naval hospital and conducting funerals, writing to 'the men under our care' when they were leaving Malta, distributing religious material, arranging for sailors to attend Methodist services in other ports and opening a Soldiers and Sailors' Home principally for men on shore leave. In addition, he offered to hold services on board any naval vessel that did not carry a chaplain.⁶⁰

Evidence that the Wesleyan Connexion felt increasingly confident in its dealings with the Royal Navy is found in the correspondence between the Wesleyan Army and Navy Committee and the Admiralty. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the Committee mounted a

⁵⁷ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, April 1870, 369.

⁵⁸ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, April 1871, 368.

⁵⁹ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, June 1871, 563.

⁶⁰ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, April 1872, 369.

relentless campaign to achieve better recognition and representation in the service and secure increased payments for ministers whose work was with sailors and marines.⁶¹ In 1892, the Committee requested that Queen's Regulations recognise the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion's status and that the duties of their ministers working with the navy be defined. The lack of formal status was, the Committee claimed, an impediment to their work. Boats were sometimes not provided to bring men ashore to voluntary services, and Methodist sailors were 'often compelled', when in port, 'to attend services of the Church of England held on board'.⁶²

Further complaints included the obstruction of men attending Wesleyan services by some commanding officers, difficulties over correct denominational attestation, and inadequate payments to ministers. The Admiralty refused all Wesleyan requests, citing both practical difficulties and reluctance to set precedents that could be seized upon by other Methodist 'sects'. The navy was not prepared to define responsibilities for ministers over whom they had no authority. A response that the Royal Navy was 'conscious of the good influence which the Wesleyan Church has exercised over their followers among the Seamen and Marines of the Fleet' offered platitudes but no concessions. Persistent as ever, the Committee continued to lobby the Admiralty by letter and deputation, often trying to use the influence of Methodist MPs.⁶³ In 1898, the Wesleyans successfully sought an increase in the allowance paid to ministers officiating in H.M. ships at Hong Kong, arguing that they were also serving the needs of Presbyterian sailors and marines.⁶⁴ In addition, they

⁶¹ Matthew Seligmann, *Rum, Sodomy, Prayers, and the Lash Revisited: Winston Churchill and Social Reform in the Royal Navy, 1900-1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 110–14.

⁶² T.N.A., Admiralty, 'Miscellaneous Offices: Re Wesleyan Church', 31 January 1894, ADM/1/7227.

⁶³ T.N.A., Wesleyan Church Application for Recognition in Queen's Regulations, 16 May 1892, ADM 1/7227

⁶⁴ T.N.A., Wesleyan and Presbyterian Ministers, 11 April 1898, ADM 1/7397B.

requested improved access to their followers who were consistently discriminated against, they claimed. Comparisons with Presbyterians and, especially, Roman Catholics were used to try and win concessions. The Wesleyan Connexion's confidence is shown in how it now claimed to represent not only its followers but all Free Churchmen in the forces. In negotiating with the Admiralty, the Wesleyan Army and Navy Committee used the same tactics and arguments as in its dealings with the India Office.

The Wesleyan Church Army and Navy Sub-Committee was reorganised in 1878 to include members, ministers and laymen, who had a direct interest in work with the military, as opposed to those members chosen previously as a result of their membership of the Home or Foreign Missions Committees who happened to be based in London.⁶⁵ Home Mission funds financed work with soldiers and sailors based in Britain and the Overseas Missionary Society those who served abroad. The Irish Methodist Church funded the work at the Curragh.⁶⁶ The Committee liaised effectively with the War Office over military issues and appointed the increasing number of chaplains. Making chaplaincy distinct from regular circuit ministry enabled these ministers to devote all their endeavours to the needs of servicemen and their families.⁶⁷

In 1882, Conference issued its chaplains with a *Manual of Information for Wesleyan Methodist Ministers working in the Army and the Royal Navy*. The guide highlighted that chaplaincy was distinct from circuit ministry, a full-time, dedicated, and specific form of service. The booklet contained extracts from Queen's Regulations and reminders of military hierarchy and protocol and instructions for hospital and prison visits. Ministers were advised

⁶⁵ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1878, 110.

⁶⁶ A. McCrea, *Irish Methodism in the Twentieth Century* (Belfast: Irish Methodist Publishing, 1931), 71.

⁶⁷ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 150-55.

of the rights of attestation and informed that ‘Hundreds, if not thousands, of Methodist youth’ had been enrolled as Anglicans. Rolls for each unit were to be checked to ensure that Wesleyan servicemen were accurately recorded. The manual emphasised the rights of attestation for young soldiers and sailors at government schools, on Royal Navy training ships and at Greenwich Hospital. A man’s right to change his denomination was stressed; however, chaplains needed to be wary of those seeking to change allegiance from ‘unworthy motives’. Soldiers and sailors had a right to attend Divine Service at a place of worship of their choice; every man was entitled to a Bible and a hymn book of his own church. The manual applied to marines and sailors in barracks and shore stations in addition to soldiers. Chaplains were instructed to establish Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Homes, permanent or temporary, at all major military stations. These Homes would help sailors guard against the moral ‘perils besetting them’ after ‘paying off’ in port following service at sea. Chaplains needed to avoid speaking ‘loudly about religion’ to soldiers and sailors, especially in barrack rooms and hospital wards. Also, discretion needed to be exercised in distributing religious literature, and ‘controversial tracts must be avoided’. ‘Sectarian bigotry’ was not acceptable, but ministers needed to ‘diligently foster the attachment of Methodist soldiers to the services of their own Church.’⁶⁸

A Royal Warrant of 1881 recognised the Wesleyans as a distinct denomination in the armed forces. From the same year, capitation allowances were paid on the same basis as civilian ministers to the army from the three established denominations. The acceptance of state payment was contentious within Conference, feared as possibly compromising Wesleyanism as a ‘Free Church’; however, ministers now had recognition, and the payments

⁶⁸B.L., I.O.R., L/MIL/7/3091, no.73.

proved useful to a perennially cash-strapped church. The Admiralty gave similar recognition; Wesleyan Methodism had the right to have chaplains in all ports, although they did not yet accompany sailors at sea. In 1890 Conference resolved: 'To take necessary steps to obtain the distinctive recognition of the Wesleyan-Methodist Church in the Royal Navy in order that Wesleyan ministers may be appointed officially as ministers with clearly defined duties, and that all necessary facilities for attendance at Divine Service may be secured for Wesleyan seamen and marines.'⁶⁹ Conference, though, resolved 'that it is not expedient to seek Commissions for our ministers serving with the army.'⁷⁰ Commissions would entail Conference yielding control over its ministers.

The India Office contended that the 1881 Royal Warrant did not apply to the one-third of the British Army stationed in the sub-continent. The Wesleyan Army and Navy Committee wrote to the Secretary of State in March 1882, requesting that the 'same distinctive recognition may be extended to Wesleyan Soldiers in the Army as is already given to soldiers in the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Presbyterian Church and that Wesleyan Ministers may receive the same status and maintenance grants as officiating Clergymen of those Churches now receive.' The Governor-General and the Viceroy expressed their support for the Wesleyan Connexion's request, leading the India Office to concede recognition to its soldiers and funding and official status for chaplaincy in 1883.⁷¹ The Wesleyan Army and Navy Committee maintained a regular and extensive correspondence with the India Office, promoting Methodist soldiers' rights and the recognition of its chaplains. The Committee was nothing if not persistent in seeking to

⁶⁹ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1890, 260.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁷¹ B.L., I.O.R., L/MIL/7/3091, no. 73.

secure parity of status with other recognised denominations. Before 1883, the Wesleyans had received no government funding for ministry to the armed forces in India, despite the church maintaining chaplains at ten garrisons, including Bangalore, Fort William and Trichinopoly. The India Office agreed to pay capitation allowances, of one rupee per man attending services, to Wesleyan chaplains. However, it resisted giving the same payments and allowances as those given to Roman Catholic priests ministering to soldiers, arguing that 'different systems have been established in order to meet the circumstances of each particular case' and that the analogy 'between the case of the Wesleyan Clergy, and the *other* Clergy in question is not well founded'.⁷² The Army and Navy Committee repeatedly pressed for the same financial support and recognition for its chaplains as the Roman Catholic and Presbyterian Churches. Having secured capitation allowances, the denomination then requested fixed salaries for chaplains, justifying this based on the proportion of Wesleyans serving compared to Roman Catholics and Presbyterians. The Army and Navy Committee successfully secured fixed allowances for Wesleyan chaplains serving in India in a similar manner to payments made in Britain and elsewhere in the Empire. For the Committee, the issues were 'religious equality' and the 'efficient pastoral oversight' of Wesleyan soldiers and their families.⁷³ By the 1890s, Wesleyan chaplains were ministering, not only to Methodists but also to 'all other Protestants'.⁷⁴ In its own eyes, and officially, the Wesleyan Church represented all Nonconformists in the Army in India.

The Army and Navy Committee continued, for twenty years, to engage with the India Office to secure just recognition, remuneration and resources for its ministry to the army. In

⁷² B.L., I.O.R., L/PJ/6/170, File 311.

⁷³ B.L., I.O.R., L/MIL/7/3095, 1890-1893.

⁷⁴ B.L., I.O.R., L/MIL/7/3104, File 16.

1899, Church of England bishops in India objected to consecrated churches being used for Nonconformist and Presbyterian services. The Bishop's permission had to be sought were an Anglican church required for worship by another denomination; the date and time had to be agreed, in advance, by the Church of England clergyman.⁷⁵ Unsurprisingly, this proved unacceptable to both the Church of Scotland and the Wesleyan Church.⁷⁶ Lord Curzon, Viceroy, agreed in 1900 that any new Protestant church would be unconsecrated and that the government would meet half the cost of building Wesleyan churches at major military stations.⁷⁷ The Wesleyans secured funding for fourteen full-time chaplains, with one of their number being paid an additional allowance as a Superintendent Minister. The Committee continued to fight perceived injustice; further lobbying led to concessions over the right of access to prisoners, accommodation and facilities for ministry, the payment of additional allowances and passage on troop ships for chaplains and lay workers.⁷⁸ By 1901, the status, numerical allocation, salary and allowances paid were on the same basis as were those of Roman Catholic priests ministering to the army.

Nonconformists in the armed forces, however, remained a small minority. In 1880, there were 12,198 Declared Wesleyans in the army, navy and militia (less than four per cent of the total strength), of whom 606 were members.⁷⁹ In that year, twenty-nine ministers were stationed to work full-time with soldiers and sailors, fifteen at home stations and fourteen on overseas postings. The following year saw the numbers of Declared Wesleyans in the army and the navy recorded separately for the first time, with 4450 soldiers and 2187

⁷⁵ B.L., I.O.R., L/PJ/6/762 File 1465.

⁷⁶ B.L., I.O.R., L/MIL/7/3127.

⁷⁷ B.L., I.O.R., L/MIL/7/3014.

⁷⁸ B.L., I.O.R., L/MIL/7/3095; IOR: L/MIL/7/3097; IOR: L/MIL/7/9404.

⁷⁹ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, 1880, 324-8.*

sailors, respectively. The largest numbers were recorded at Aldershot, Chatham, Devonport, Gosport, Plymouth, Jamaica, Malta and Simon's Town.⁸⁰ The numbers of chaplains and Declared Wesleyans increased steadily during the rest of the century. Additional chaplaincies were added at home and abroad, including Umballa during the Zulu War in 1879, Bombay and Burma in 1887, and in 1888, the Punjab and Hong Kong.⁸¹ In 1899, before the outbreak of the South African War, there were 24,853 Declared Wesleyans in Britain's armed forces.⁸² The denomination claimed that six per cent of the British Army in South Africa during the South African War, some 16,000 men, were Wesleyans.⁸³

Chaplaincy on Campaign

In 1860, the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, responding to the Crimean War, the Indian Rebellion and the influence of Rule at Aldershot, committed to appointing chaplains to major military stations. This change of policy also led to their ministers accompanying all major colonial expeditions thereafter.⁸⁴ Revd John Laverack was appointed in 1873 to accompany the Ashanti expedition to West Africa.⁸⁵ The war was undertaken because the Ashanti from the interior of the Gold Coast (Ghana) had attacked the newly-acquired fort at Elmina and other coastal settlements and trading stations.⁸⁶ Sir Garnet Wolseley, Commander-in-Chief of the campaign, presented his army as civilised and Christian, fighting

⁸⁰ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1881, 368

⁸¹ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1887, 277; 1888, 310, 316.

⁸² *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1899, 456.

⁸³ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1900, 451.

⁸⁴ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1860, 248.

⁸⁵ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, January 1874, 82.

⁸⁶ Byron Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 190–99.

against superstitious and backward natives.⁸⁷ Laverack was the first Wesleyan minister to accompany the military throughout a campaign and the first to be decorated. His role was specific to the armed forces, a military chaplain, not as a missionary to the Gold Coast. He believed that the fact that he was paid from voluntary contributions of Wesleyans, rather than by the government, was an advantage, 'unmistakable evidence of the care of the Wesleyan-Methodists for soldiers'.⁸⁸ Laverack's interpreter was a local preacher, and the expedition also employed other native Wesleyans, including 160 Methodist Fanti women who volunteered, without pay, to act as carriers for the British troops.⁸⁹ Owen Spencer Watkins recognised the significance of Laverack's chaplaincy: 'His appointment is, therefore, very important in that it marked a step forward in the direction of full recognition for which the Church was fighting.'⁹⁰

Arthur Male served as Acting Wesleyan Chaplain during the British Army expedition of 1879-1880 into Afghanistan led by Sir Frederick, later, Lord, Roberts. This campaign was designed to quieten insurgency on the North West Frontier of British India and check alleged Russian infiltration, often known as the 'Great Game'.⁹¹ He was present throughout the campaign, an advance through the valleys and mountain passes of the frontier as far as Kandahar, which succeeded, briefly, in subduing their Afghan opponents. Male developed a robust and practical ministry on the North West Frontier. Services were brief, a sermon of no more than fifteen minutes, 'straight truth put into plain words', and well-known hymns. He described close and cordial relationships with the chaplains of the other denominations

⁸⁷ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 224.

⁸⁸ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, April 1874, 370.

⁸⁹ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, June 1874, 561-5.

⁹⁰ Watkins, *Soldiers and Preachers Too*, 189.

⁹¹ Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars*, 200-10.

assigned to the expedition. His ministry included visiting the sick and dying, holding daily class meetings and writing letters for the men. Male was aware of how it consoled the men that they would, if killed, have a Christian burial conducted by a 'parson'. When stationed at Jellalabad, he had a temporary dug-out chapel built, 'the first and only Protestant Church in all Afghanistan'.⁹² Male believed that his place as a chaplain was not only the hospital and the base camp but also the battlefield. He was keen to accompany the cavalry on the march on Kabul, believing that his role was in the front line:

Where men fight and fall he has a post and work to do [. . .] he gains more influence with the men when he is willing to stand by their side in peril, and, though fighting be no part of his duty, face the same dangers as they, than when he tarries behind in a safe place and waits for them to be brought to him.⁹³

Male had returned sick from India when he and Revd Jabez Parkin volunteered to join Lord Wolseley's Egyptian campaign of 1882. Although not commissioned officers, they were given temporarily, for the first time, the rank, uniform, pay and allowances of a Chaplain Fourth Class. The expedition aimed to crush an anti-European, anti-British, populist and nationalist movement in the country. As in Afghanistan, Male was present throughout the campaign, being attached to the cavalry, the Life Guards, during the decisive battle of Tel-el-Kebir on 24 August 1882. At Tel-el-Kebir, he tended to two wounded troopers whom an Egyptian shell had hit. Male drew his revolver when he feared that these injured soldiers were in danger from the approach of what appeared to be Egyptian soldiers; fortunately, they were stretcher bearers of his own side.⁹⁴ He relished such service with the army, having

⁹² Arthur Male, *Scenes through the Battle Smoke* (London: Dean and Son, 1893), 119–34.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 354, 357.

a broad view of the chaplain's role. He routinely carried a revolver in Afghanistan and Egypt; both conflicts had religious dimensions, with Islamic opponents justifying a Christian minister being armed. After Tel-el-Kebir, he volunteered to carry despatches back to base, 'rather out of my line of duty. However, an army chaplain has to be a many-sided man, as I had learnt'.⁹⁵ One of the soldiers with whom he had served in Egypt, a Corporal Peace, described the men's esteem for Revd Male: 'He is a good minister and a kind man to all of us.' The freelance war artist and war correspondent, Frederic Villiers, wrote of the respect that he had developed from working alongside Male in Afghanistan and Egypt:

One man always stands out clear in my mind, out of the many excellent workers I have met that is the Rev. Arthur Male, a Wesleyan Minister, whom I met first of all in Afghanistan. He was always at the front whenever he could get a chance, ministering to the spiritual comfort of the fallen soldier. He, like the surgeons of the British army, not only risked his life in actual battle, but in the more dangerous duty of the cholera camp, or the numerous infectious diseases of the Base Hospital. He was always to the fore and better testimony it would be impossible to bring.⁹⁶

Male's identification with the troops, steadfast belief in the value of his service and successful adaptation to a military role became typical of the late Victorian period's Wesleyan chaplains.

The Wesleyans had been active in southern Africa since 1816, attracting large numbers of both settlers and 'natives'. There were large congregations in both the Cape and Natal and extensive mission work in Zululand. Such missionary activity helped create the

⁹⁵ Ibid., 369.

⁹⁶ Sid Barker, 'Arthur Hodson Male, Fragments of a Life', in *High Street Methodist Church, Maidenhead, Church Magazine*, 2013, 2 [accessed online 30.10.2018].

hostilities that led to the Zulu War of 1879 and 1880.⁹⁷ Revd Theophilus Woolmer was one of five Wesleyan chaplains who accompanied the army during the war. He was part of the party that recovered the colours lost at Isandlwana, later seeing action at Kambula and Ulundi.⁹⁸ Another was Revd T. H. Wilkin, who emphasised that being gazetted, under military jurisdiction, gave him the same status on the campaign as chaplains from other churches. 'I think that Wesleyan Chaplains ought always to be put in the same position as representatives of other churches. I believe I was able to do more good amongst the men by being put in orders.' Wilkin described close cooperation with Anglican, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian chaplains. He also emphasised that his ministry to the sick and injured was not only to men from his own church:

I talked and prayed with all the men, not confining my attention entirely to the Wesleyans, but speaking to all who would listen, and were glad to hear me read a chapter and pray with them. My plan was to get down by all the stretchers and talk to all who were Protestants; and then, before leaving, read a chapter and prayer. I did this in all the tents and marquees. I couldn't but enjoy it, as the men seemed so thankful for my visits.⁹⁹

When Wilkin's ministry had to cease owing to his contracting fever, Wesleyan services and meetings were led by Armourer-Sergeant Beeton and another sergeant in his regiment. Beeton recounted details of voluntary services held at Fort Tenedos for all Protestant men; this worship was jointly led by two Anglican and one Wesleyan chaplain, together with two staff officers and an officer of the Royal Engineers. At these 'entirely unsectarian' services, men enjoyed singing Sankey's hymns. Beeton also attended week-night meetings led by a

⁹⁷ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 226.

⁹⁸ Watkins, *Soldiers and Preachers Too*, 193.

⁹⁹ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, January 1881, 71.

Presbyterian sergeant major of the Royal Artillery. Ecumenism clearly flourished during this campaign.¹⁰⁰ The Edendale Contingent of the Natal Native Horse was a Wesleyan 'native' auxiliary troop of Zulus and Swazis from the Edendale Mission, which fought for the British during the Zulu War – 'the only black unit to serve faithfully throughout their war'. Methodist Troop Sergeant Simeon Kambula fought with great distinction in actions at Isandlwana, Hlobane Mountain and Kambula. Revd Owen Watkins believed that: 'Had he been a white man, he would have received the Victoria Cross'.¹⁰¹

Wesleyan chaplains accompanied other colonial campaigns, including Henry Cotton, who served during the campaign against the Basutos of 1880-1881, the first Wesleyan chaplain to be Mentioned in Despatches, and Joseph Bateson, later to be Secretary of the Wesleyan Forces Board, who was present during the 1885 Burma Expedition.¹⁰² Owen Spencer Watkins served during the 1897 Cretan Expedition and, in the 1898 operation to conquer the Sudan, led by Major-General Horatio Kitchener. Defeating militant Islam and the avenging of Gordon, the martyred hero, made this campaign an avowedly Christian crusade. Watkins was attached to the Royal Warwickshire Regiment; he served throughout the campaign, including the Battle of Omdurman and the occupation of Khartoum. He worked closely with the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian chaplains who also accompanied the expedition. All four led the memorial service for General Gordon at Khartoum and participated in the disinterment of the Mahdi's remains, which were 'quietly removed'.¹⁰³ Methodists and Presbyterians routinely shared services during the campaign.

¹⁰⁰ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, May 1880, 396.

¹⁰¹ The South African Military Society, *Military History Journal*, vol. 7, no. 6, December 1988; <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol076fm.html> [accessed 26.10.2017].

¹⁰² Watkins, *Soldiers and Preachers Too*, 193-9.

¹⁰³ Owen Spencer Watkins, *With Kitchener's Army: Being a Chaplain's Experiences with the Nile Expedition, 1898* (London: L S.W. Partridge, 1899), 55, 201; G. W. Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartoum* (London: Greenhill Books, 1990), 310-16.

The practical ecumenism in the Sudan, which Watkins describes, would have been inconceivable at home. The Wesleyan Church would not have countenanced one of its ministers working alongside a Catholic priest in Britain. The Kikuyu controversy of 1913 made clear Anglican disapproval of ecumenical worship held together with Presbyterians and Methodists.¹⁰⁴

Watkins adapted to army life; he enjoyed being in uniform, was at home with military hierarchy and discipline, and identified with the soldiers in 'Kitchener's Army'.¹⁰⁵ He held Sunday and week-night services, led Bible classes, prayer meetings and class meetings:

It was a strange picture that presented itself to my gaze on that Sunday evening – some twenty men kneeling on the ground in the dimly lighted hut, their uniforms torn and soiled, their gaunt faces tanned with the sun. But though the scene was strange and the surroundings unusual, we felt that God was there, and as together we sang the consecration hymn a spirit of deep earnestness fell upon us.¹⁰⁶

A letter by Geoffrey Brightman of the Lincolnshire Regiment, written before the decisive Battle of Omdurman, described Watkins holding class and fellowship meetings 'every night in his lines'.¹⁰⁷ Watkins visited and comforted the sick, conducted funeral services, led temperance meetings and assisted exhausted and flagging men marching to Khartoum, carrying their kit and rifles. Watkins' chaplaincy in the Sudan helped consolidate the pattern of Wesleyan chaplaincy, which became the model for later campaigns.

¹⁰⁴ David Law, 'Frank Weston, the Kikuyu Controversy, and the Necessity of Episcopacy' in *Internal Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, vol. 15, no. 3, (2015), 214-243. [https://doi:10.1080/1474225X.2015.1075348](https://doi.org/10.1080/1474225X.2015.1075348), [accessed online 15.01.2018].

¹⁰⁵ Watkins, *With Kitchener's Army*, 127–36.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁰⁷ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, August 1898, 127-8.

Eight Wesleyan acting chaplains accompanied the British Army in the South African War of 1899 to 1902; they were augmented by over forty officiating clergymen, mainly local ministers, who were sometimes refugees from areas under Boer control. Methodist chaplains also accompanied contingents drawn from Australia, Canada and New Zealand.¹⁰⁸ British chaplains included Owen Spencer Watkins, Thomas Wainman, who had previously served during the Bechuanaland Expedition, and Edward Lowry, who accompanied the Grenadier Guards. Lowry's chaplaincy included conducting Parade and voluntary services, hospital visiting, accompanying stretcher bearer parties during an assault on a Boer position and burying the fallen. He had tremendous admiration for the men, recognising the possibilities for evangelism: 'What a set of men for a chaplain to work among! What a superb mission field'.¹⁰⁹ Lowry described his battlefield ministry following the Battle of Modder River. 'Amid such surroundings it is that I am called to preach, as best I can, the Gospel of peace.'¹¹⁰

Practical ecumenism was present in South Africa as it had been during other campaigns. Lowry enjoyed close working relationships with chaplains from other denominations. 'The much-beloved Church of England chaplain I invited to share the shelter of my slateless roof (a Boer Wagon)'.¹¹¹ Lieutenant Charles Veal of the Welch Regiment was sent back injured on horseback to the field hospital during the advance on the Modder River where 'A Wesleyan parson took me off the horse and produced some brandy and beef tea

¹⁰⁸ Michael Gladwin, *Captains of the Soul: A History of Australian Army Chaplains* (Newport, N. S. W., Australia: Big Sky Publishing, 2013), 16–23; Gordon Heath, *A War with a Silver Lining Canadian Protestant Churches and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2009), 20–33; David Hall, *The New Zealanders in South Africa, 1899-1902* (Wellington, N.Z.: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1949), 97.

¹⁰⁹ H. K. [Charles Kelly], *Chaplains in Khaki. Methodist Soldiers in Camp, on the Field, and on the March* (London: C. H. Kelly, 1900), 80.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

which I gulped down with greatest relief.’¹¹² This ‘parson’ was probably Edward Lowry.

Accompanying the West Yorkshire Regiment on the attack on Spion Kop on 24 January 1900 was Revd Wainman. Together with the Anglican chaplain, he ‘attended the wounded of either Church, and dropped our ‘isms’ for the sake of the dear fellows who were suffering and fought so bravely for their Queen and country. We slept in a hayloft – Father Matthews, Roman Catholic Priest, on one side, Mr Gedge, Church of England, the other, and me in the middle.’¹¹³ Watkins shared a tent on a farm at Jonono’s Kop with Roman Catholic and Anglican ‘padres’, dubbed ‘Amen Corner’ by the men.¹¹⁴ Australian Methodist chaplain, James Green, described the ‘kindly feeling which existed at the front between ministers of widely-different faiths.’¹¹⁵

Open air services, the distribution of bibles, and visiting the sick formed the core of Revd W.C. Burgess’ work; his role also encompassed receiving and distributing to troops food such as eggs, butter, figs, apples and pears. His ministry was aided by several lay local preachers in the Derbyshire Regiment, including, inevitably, a sergeant and a sergeant-major.¹¹⁶ Wesleyan NCOs led ministry amongst prisoners of war, including Sergeant Dudley, who organised Methodist meetings of 500 to 700 men imprisoned at Pretoria Racecourse.¹¹⁷ Welsh-speaking Wesleyan chaplain Revd Frank Edwards conducted services and led hymn singing in Welsh for the men of the South Wales Borderers.¹¹⁸ He arranged

¹¹² Richard Carver, *The National Army Museum Book of the Boer War* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1999), 107.

¹¹³ H. K., *Chaplains in Khaki*, 219–20.

¹¹⁴ *Methodist Recorder*, 24 May 1900, 6.

¹¹⁵ James Green, *The Story of the Australian Bushmen: (Being Notes of a Chaplain)* (Sydney: W. Brooks, 1903), 89.

¹¹⁶ H. K., *Chaplains in Khaki*, 87–100.

¹¹⁷ Edward Lowry, *With the Guards’ Brigade: From Bloemfontein to Koomati Poort and Back* (London: Horace Marshall, 1902), 147; *Methodist Recorder*, 28 June 1900, 4.

¹¹⁸ *Methodist Recorder*, 5 June 1900, 3.

football matches and refereed them as well as organising camp concerts.¹¹⁹ The chaplains of the First World War had much by way of example in fashioning their combination of spiritual and temporal care for the men.

Watkins was present throughout the siege of Ladysmith; he was confident of the impact of ministry amongst the troops. 'Holding meetings as if in garrison, I said, but in my experience, I never had such congregations as I have had in camp here, and never saw such a wonderful manifestation of God's spirit working in men's hearts.'¹²⁰ Moreover, he was convinced that chaplains sharing the men's privations set a positive example; he turned down the offer of a horse for this reason. 'My honest endeavour thus to "endure hardness as a good soldier" is not without its influence for good on the men by whose side I march.'¹²¹ Lowry, too, had valued his time with the Guards' Brigade:

For over twelve months my association with them was almost absolutely uninterrupted. At meals and on the march, in the comparative quiet of camp life, and on the field of fatal conflict, I was with them night and day; ever receiving from them the courtesies and practical kindnesses immeasurably beyond what so entire a stranger was entitled to expect. Officers and men alike made me royally welcome, and won in almost all respects my warmest affection.¹²²

This close relationship between chaplains and the troops, evident in all denominations, was described by Snape as 'a strong and often overweening identification with the army'.¹²³

Cuthbertson goes further, accusing Wesleyan chaplains of 'militarism', 'sanctifying' war, and

¹¹⁹ H. K., *Chaplains in Khaki*, 323.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 270.

¹²² Lowry, *With the Guards' Brigade*, 242.

¹²³ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 174.

providing 'spiritual endorsement to British arms'.¹²⁴ Wesleyan chaplains indeed never criticised either the men that they served with or British conduct of the war.

Frederick Brown served as Acting Wesleyan Chaplain in the North China Command during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. The rebellion was, in large part, a reaction against growing Western Christian activity in China.¹²⁵ Over 200 Protestant and Catholic missionaries, priests and nuns, and some 32,000 Chinese Christians were murdered; Brown equated them with the early church's martyrs and those Protestants killed by Queen Mary in the sixteenth century. He saw this as a war for Christianity and civilisation: 'it was the dawning of the twentieth century victorious against the Middle Ages, a glorious future vanquishing an inert and lifeless past'. Brown rejoiced as 'all the Anglo-Saxon race joined in rescuing Europeans', united because: 'Blood is thicker than water'.¹²⁶ This was both a religious crusade and a racial conflict.

Brown accompanied the allied armies during the siege of Tientsin and the march to relieve the foreign legations surrounded in Peking, and was proud to have been 'the only chaplain of any church with the British force'.¹²⁷ He was given a temporary commission and attached to the Intelligence Department due to his knowledge of the country and the language; he was unique before 1914 as a commissioned Methodist chaplain. His role included translating for senior officers and overseeing the Chinese scouts who reconnoitred the allied advance. However, he declined the payment offered to join the Intelligence Department; he accepted a commission 'for humanity's sake, and not for the money'.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Greg Cuthbertson, 'Preaching Imperialism: Wesleyan Methodism and the War', in *The Impact of the South African War*, ed. by David Omissi and Andrew Thompson (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 164.

¹²⁵ Philip Haythornthwaite, *The Colonial Wars Sourcebook* (London: Arms & Armour, 1995), 191.

¹²⁶ Brown, *From Tientsin to Peking with the Allied Forces*, 61.

¹²⁷ Frederick Brown, *China's Dayspring after Thirty Years* (London: Murray & Evenden, 1914), 103.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

Brown noted the high proportion of Methodist soldiers who were NCOs: 'It is a fact worth noting that the proportion of our Wesleyan soldiers of non-commissioned rank is very high, showing that godliness is profitable for all things and that in the Army it means speedy promotion.'¹²⁹ Revd Brown, like Male in Afghanistan and Egypt, and Watkins in the Sudan, carried a revolver throughout the campaign. He was appointed to military chaplaincy because he happened to be available; he had had little previous experience with the armed forces. Despite this, he was comfortable in the company of both officers and men: 'My contact with military officers at mess and in tent, in camp and on march only increased my deep sympathy and regard for them, at least for the Anglo-Saxon portion of them, and it is these I know most about'.¹³⁰ He was impressed that officers, though gentlemen by birth, never complained about the conditions that faced them. He admired the men equally: 'I shall ever have a sincere regard for the soldiers and sailors, remembering the words of our divine master'.¹³¹ Brown admired the professionalism, the stoicism, and the self-sacrifice of those in the armed forces and made links to what he perceived to be Christian virtues. The nature of the campaign, a forced march, made regular services difficult; his ministry was exercised in the field hospital, in camp and on the move. In a description that presages the chaplain's role in the First World War, he recounted, 'it was my mournful duty to cheer them in their dying moments, and attend to their Christian interment'.¹³²

Male, Watkins and Brown were among the first Methodist chaplains to serve on campaign with the British Army. Although the contexts differed, there was much in common in their experiences and attitudes. With comparatively little by way of example, all

¹²⁹ Ibid., 119.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 89.

¹³¹ Ibid., 123.

¹³² Ibid., 221.

three came to similar conclusions about how best to fulfil their role. Services were short, rousing and included a 'sing song'; prayer, bible study and fellowship helped provide for the men's spiritual needs. These chaplains tended the sick and injured, comforted the dying and conducted funerals in the field. They assumed pastoral roles, including letter-writing, carrying kit for weary troops, consoling and cajoling. Male, Watkins, Brown and others seem to have adapted successfully to the demands and routines of military life. They enjoyed being in uniform, albeit that their status as chaplains was ambiguous. The late-Victorian muscular Christianity that they espoused allowed easy identification with the army. These Methodist chaplains admired and respected army comradeship, hierarchy, discipline and routine. Developing a considerable affection for, and admiration of, the soldiers they served alongside, they admired both officers and men. One should not underestimate the degree of danger and hardship faced on campaign. Wesleyan chaplains, and those of other denominations, were injured or became sick serving alongside the army during several colonial wars. Male's health was seriously affected by his experiences in Afghanistan and Egypt; Brown became ill at the end of the campaign in China. Most of these ministers were regularly in the front line, and several were under fire at times; these were steadfast, determined and brave chaplains. Their chaplaincy was characterised by practical Christianity, care and compassion, identification with, and huge affection for, the troops, successfully combining their clerical and military roles. These Wesleyans were amongst the first Nonconformist chaplains to serve alongside the British Army and therefore had little by way of example; they created precedents for the First World War and beyond.

Spiritual, Pastoral and Moral Welfare

Methodist engagement with soldiers and sailors was not confined to chaplaincy on campaign. The Wesleyan Conference's commitment to the army and navy, absent before 1854, was amply demonstrated by their Soldiers and Sailors' Homes. Like chaplaincy, they were part of the connexion's evangelistic endeavour, but they also had a major significance in terms of social welfare for members of Britain's armed forces. Covering most major garrisons and ports, they provided much-needed facilities for soldiers and sailors in Britain and overseas, meeting their spiritual and pastoral needs and contributing to raising morale.¹³³

The Soldiers' Home at Aldershot, opened in 1869, aimed to offer religious and temporal care. The Revd Richard Hardy wrote: 'The work at Aldershot is succeeding above expectation, and we want to make our Home a centre of spiritual influence and power far beyond this camp.'¹³⁴ Sarah Robinson, who visited shortly after its opening, was impressed by the spiritual, moral and pastoral provision offered to soldiers at the camp.¹³⁵ In an article in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* entitled 'The Soldier Christian', Major John Smith addressed the question: 'What is a Soldiers' Home?' He answered by detailing the facilities that the Homes offered:

In these institutions there is usually a refreshment bar and coffee-room where the soldier can procure non-intoxicant beverages and other refreshments at moderate charges. There is

¹³³ Harold Hanham, 'Religion and Nationality in the Mid-Victorian Army', in *War and Society: Historical Essays in Honour and Memory of J. R. Western 1928-1971*, ed. by M. R. D. Foot (London: Paul Elek, 1973), 170.

¹³⁴ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, January 1870, 81.

¹³⁵ Sarah Robinson, *The Soldier's Friend: A Pioneer's Record* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1913), 181.

also a library and reading room, in which he spends his leisure hours in companionship with greater minds, as in writing to his friends.

Facilities included a prayer room, a hall for 'entertaining and instructive lectures, or for select musical entertainments', bedrooms and bathrooms. 'The Homeliness of the Home' gave an important Christian message, one which his readers should support, 'Methodist Christians, suffer an appeal in the spiritual interests of the British Soldier. Here we have a good field for Godly enterprise second to none in the world'.¹³⁶

The Soldiers' Home was reminiscent of a middle-class home of the better sort, with a parlour, smoking room, library and reading room supplied with newspapers and periodicals; bedrooms were upstairs and separated from living accommodation, as were the spiritual and temporal functions. Louisa Daniell described the Home as looking like a 'gin palace', the design might have been a deliberate copy of public houses, but tea and coffee replaced beer, wines and spirits.¹³⁷ The Wesleyan Soldiers' Home influenced Louisa Daniell's work in Aldershot and elsewhere. Hendrickson stated, incorrectly, that Louisa Daniell was a Wesleyan; this Methodist initiative at Aldershot did, however, shape her pastoral and spiritual work with soldiers.¹³⁸ Most of the staff at Wesleyan Soldiers and Sailors' Homes were women; each establishment had a 'lady superintendent' running the establishment in a 'wise and motherly way', who espoused the virtues of Christian domesticity. Boy soldiers asked whether they could use the address 'mother' in their letters to one of the Homes' superintendents, Mrs Morphew.¹³⁹ All three Wesleyan Soldiers' Homes at Aldershot were

¹³⁶ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, June 1883, 443.

¹³⁷ Georgiana Daniell, *Aldershot: A Record of Mrs. Daniell's Work amongst Soldiers, and Its Sequel* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1879), 78.

¹³⁸ Kenneth Hendrickson, *Religion and the Public Image of the British Army*, 83.

¹³⁹ H. K., *Chaplains in Khaki*, 4.

cosy; there were plants and cut flowers on display. 'There is a cheerful fire, and tables with games, and comfortable seats, and pictures on the walls.'¹⁴⁰ The environment was modelled on the idyll of the pious, happy and respectable family home. This respectability was the manifestation of the Christian life of sobriety, Sabbath observance and sexual purity. The Homes tried to replicate the tea-drinking, temperance meetings, Band of Hope, tracts and Bible reading of Nonconformist 'chapel society' in the army and navy.

Wesleyan Homes were designed to counter the moral snares which entrapped soldiers and sailors. Aldershot had one bar for every thirty-four men; venereal disease was rampant in the town, with over a third of army hospital admissions as a result.¹⁴¹ Sarah Robinson described vice-ridden Aldershot when she and Louisa Daniell began their mission work at the camp. 'A perfect network of public houses, low music-halls, dancing saloons, and vile houses, entrapped the soldier who went in any direction outside his own lines, and the emissaries from these dens could even go into camp to entice the men'.¹⁴² Revd Robert Hazleton explained the purpose of the Soldiers' Home at the Curragh, which was completed in 1870: 'Its design is to supply a pleasant and attractive retreat to the men when they are off duty, and to counteract the fascinations of the surrounding ungodly places of resort, the allurements of the canteen and the public house.'¹⁴³

Wesleyans could practically address their concerns for 'social purity', the campaign against prostitution, gambling and drinking, through their Homes for servicemen whom they perceived to be particularly at risk. The Wesleyan Church campaigned against the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴¹ Kenneth Hendrickson, 'Winning the Troops for Vital Religion: Female Evangelical Missionaries to the British Army, 1857-1880', *Armed Forces & Society*, 23, no. 4 (1997): 617, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X9702300405>. [accessed online 20.10.2017].

¹⁴² Robinson, *The Soldier's Friend*, 72.

¹⁴³ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, August 1870, 754.

Contagious Diseases Acts, claiming that the government had ‘dragged some of our military centres to the very verge of hell’ by giving recognition to brothels.¹⁴⁴ Service in India was a cause of concern regarding perceived moral and spiritual pitfalls, especially promiscuity and drunkenness, which might overcome the British soldier; here, contacts with ministers might be rare. India became an important military mission field, primarily through lay ministry, temperance organisations, and the Soldiers and Sailors’ Homes.¹⁴⁵

Soldiers and Sailors’ Homes were part of a growing Methodist commitment to temperance. The Revd R. Hardy was convinced of the link between ‘abstinence, and conversion and success in the army’.¹⁴⁶ The sailor was, Sophia Wintz believed, even more at threat from the dangers of alcohol. ‘Drink has always been the seaman’s snare and the cause, as many a commanding officer has stated, of “nearly all the crime in the service”’.¹⁴⁷ Revd Joseph Bateson, a Wesleyan acting chaplain, was appointed Secretary of the Royal Army Temperance Association in 1889. Drunkenness in the army declined towards the end of the century, partly due to the growth of the temperance movement and other diversions for soldiers.¹⁴⁸ Owen Spencer Watkins, writing in 1899, believed that perils of sexual licence and drink were being overcome, ‘Purity and temperance are making headway against the once proverbial evils of military life.’¹⁴⁹

Wesleyan Homes were open to all servicemen; ‘These Homes are held on trust or by Special Regulations for the use and enjoyment of all members of H. M. Sea and Land Forces,

¹⁴⁴ Hugh Price Hughes, *Social Christianity: Sermons Delivered in St. James’s Hall* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1889), 140.

¹⁴⁵ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 151–53.

¹⁴⁶ Sarah Robinson, *Christianity and Teetotalism. A Voice from the Army* (London: W. Tweedie, 1876), 66.

¹⁴⁷ Sophia Wintz, *Temperance Work in the Royal Navy* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1879), 2.

¹⁴⁸ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 85–86.

¹⁴⁹ Watkins, *With Kitchener’s Army*, 9.

irrespective of Religious Denomination.’¹⁵⁰ In May 1897, the Church held two royal fundraising receptions at swanky London addresses in aid of their military Homes, attended by Princess Mary Adelaide and Princess Helena, Duchess of Albany.¹⁵¹ Soldiers, sailors, and Methodists were now clearly respectable. Wesleyan Homes contributed to the improvement in soldiers’ behaviour that occurred during the late Victorian period.¹⁵² Owen Spencer Watkins claimed that the Homes had been the major factor that transformed the British common soldier.¹⁵³ By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Wesleyans proclaimed the success of their military work: ‘The soldier or sailor is as handy and active as ever, as fit for the work that has not yet ceased to be necessary; but he is no longer without self-restraint, and conventionally a reprobate’.¹⁵⁴

The blueprint for Methodist mission to Britain’s armed forces, implemented during the First World War, was in place before the end of the nineteenth century. By 1899, the Wesleyan Church had commissioned twenty-nine Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Homes; expenditure was £39,633, in addition to funds received from the army and navy and payments made by individual servicemen. These Homes could together accommodate 565 men each night; during the year, a total of 73,534 bed nights were taken.¹⁵⁵ The largest Homes were at Chatham, Gibraltar, Lucknow and Sheerness. By 1902, the number of establishments had grown to thirty-four. During the South African War, additional Soldiers’ Homes were opened, including one at Bloemfontein, which distributed bread and butter and 200 to 700 cups of tea daily, as described by Revd Owen Spencer Watkins: ‘Here the men are welcome

¹⁵⁰ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1895, 419.

¹⁵¹ *Methodist Recorder*, 22 April 1897, 5.

¹⁵² Edward Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 145.

¹⁵³ Watkins, *Soldiers and Preachers Too*, 144.

¹⁵⁴ Herbert Workman, George Eayrs and William Townsend, *A New History of Methodism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909), 452.

¹⁵⁵ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference* 1899, 456; 1900, 441.

to sing and play, read and write letters to their hearts' content'.¹⁵⁶ Revd Frederick Brown was convinced of the benefits of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Homes:

Out in China I was in conversation with one of the chaplains, a Presbyterian, when he remarked, "How is it that nearly all the warmest hearted Christian men in the regiment are Wesleyans?" My reply was that it is probably because the Wesleyan Church has more Soldiers and Sailors' Homes both at home and abroad than any other Church, and in them it is easier to get into close touch with the men.¹⁵⁷

In contrast with the Wesleyans, other Methodist denominations did not prioritise the armed forces' needs. The United Methodist Free Church did not refer to the armed forces in its annual minutes of this period.¹⁵⁸ The only mention of the military in the annual minutes of the Methodist New Connexion is a statement of opposition to many of the more bellicose remarks made by others in support of Britain in the South African War, which were 'so alien to the spirit of the Gospel', with expressions of regret and sympathy for the fallen on both sides.¹⁵⁹ Neither church, nor the Bible Christians, made any specific provision for soldiers or sailors. Sarah Robinson stated that many Primitive Methodist soldiers attended the Aldershot Mission Hall, opened by Louisa Daniell in 1862.¹⁶⁰ The Primitive Methodists opened a mission in Aldershot in 1885; they also appointed a Bible Woman to work with the men at the camp.¹⁶¹ Two years later, encouraged by the positive response, they, too, established a Soldiers' Home 'to afford to the young men sent to the camps and barracks, a

¹⁵⁶ H. K., *Chaplains in Khaki*, 289.

¹⁵⁷ Brown, *China's Dayspring after Thirty Years*, 120.

¹⁵⁸ *Minutes of the United Methodist Free Churches Conference, 1877 – 1902*.

¹⁵⁹ *Minutes of The Methodist New Connexion Conference, 1901*, 96.

¹⁶⁰ Robinson, *The Soldier's Friend*, 86.

¹⁶¹ *Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference, 1885*, 106.

refuge from the temptations to which they are exposed from day to day'.¹⁶² Soldiers' Homes proliferated at Aldershot; the Primitive Methodists were among six denominations to provide such a facility. Its function was like that of similar establishments:

It is fitted up with every convenience, a home-like accommodation for soldiers and their friends. Temperance meetings, Bible classes, and various other services are conducted for the benefit of the military; and the means thus provided for their social and religious welfare has been greatly appreciated by the men for whose special benefit the home is designed.¹⁶³

William Mason was seemingly unusual as a soldier with a Primitive Methodist background. He enlisted in 1835, motivated, he claimed, by a desire to learn to read and write. During his service in Ireland, his piety led to hostility within the garrison; Mason was pelted with boots and shoes whilst praying.¹⁶⁴ After Ireland, he was posted to Gibraltar, where he worshipped at Revd Rule's Wesleyan chapel and was impressed by him.¹⁶⁵ Like many Methodist soldiers, Mason was promoted to sergeant 'over some others because I had never been brought up for any crime'.¹⁶⁶ After returning to England, he became a Primitive Methodist local preacher. Mason later served in the Crimea, being present at the Battle of Alma. During this battle, he picked up his regiment's fallen colours four times, a feat of arms which led to his being presented with a medal by Prince Albert and Queen Victoria, when he returned home injured in May 1855. Mason regretted that his church had not embraced military chaplaincy at this time. 'I am sorry to say that the Primitive

¹⁶² *Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference*, 1887, 102; Michael Hughes, 'Dilemmas of the Nonconformist Conscience: Attitudes Towards War and Peace within Primitive Methodism', *Wesley and Methodist Studies*, 5 (2013): 89.

¹⁶³ *Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference* 1887, 102.

¹⁶⁴ Mason, *A Primitive Methodist Soldier in the British Army*, 17.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 25–27.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

Methodists have not sent out a few ministers'.¹⁶⁷ On discharge, he joined the militia and became known as the 'soldier preacher' and 'recruiting sergeant'.¹⁶⁸ Mason's example shows a considerable interchange between Methodist denominations. Associations and loyalties for men on overseas service were, of necessity, looser and less partisan than those that separated the churches at home. The differences in church government, tradition and form of worship were less critical to soldiers and sailors on active service for whom identification as Methodists was of more consequence than their denomination.

Methodism and Imperialism

Of all the Nonconformist traditions, Methodism, especially Wesleyanism, was the most pro-imperialist from 1854 to 1902. Close connections and overseas networks intertwined; Methodism was a worldwide movement by the middle of the nineteenth century; it thrived in the United States and colonial societies.¹⁶⁹ Wesleyan Methodism was the largest Protestant denomination in Canada, the second-largest in Australia and New Zealand, and the third-largest in South Africa. There was significant Primitive Methodist, Bible Christian and Methodist New Connexion presence in Canada and Australia, though numbers were much smaller than those of the parent Wesleyan Connexion. All connexions had established missionary societies in the first half of the century, and all despatched ordained and lay workers to the colonies and other foreign fields during the second part of the century.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 178.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 199.

¹⁶⁹ Carey, *God's Empire*, 59.

Whereas links within the empire were strong in all Methodist churches, the Wesleyans were particularly closely associated with imperialism and colonialism. The close bonds with Britain's armed forces distinguished them from other Nonconformists as Carey stated: 'From the beginning, Wesleyan Methodist work was linked directly to the call of British Patriotism'.¹⁷⁰ The role of the armed forces was to maintain the empire of a favoured nation. The Wesleyan Connexion supported imperial policy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They favoured imperial intervention, a civilising mission, humanitarianism and Christian paternalism. The British Empire was a blessing, a mission opportunity; the armed forces were instruments and objects of that calling.

The Wesleyan Methodist Conference's Loyal Address to the Sovereign in 1897 made clear its approval of the imperial greatness of Victoria's reign: 'Methodist people have rejoiced in the extension of empire it has witnessed.'¹⁷¹ *The Methodist Reporter* drew readers' attention to the participation of Wesleyan troops drawn from across the empire in the Jubilee celebrations. A great Methodist parade service was held at the Garrison Church at Chelsea Barracks for colonial troops participating in the celebrations. Their number included Sergeant Gordon of the West Indian Regiment, the first black Victoria Cross recipient.¹⁷² In addition, the review of the fleet was an occasion for Methodist approbation: 'On every one of these ships the Queen has Wesleyan Methodist bluejackets [. . .] Their church has every reason to be proud of the men who serve their Queen and country.'¹⁷³ Wesleyan Methodism had a good reason for celebrating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee; the movement had thrived throughout the empire during her reign. *The Primitive Methodist*

¹⁷⁰ Carey, *Empires of Religion*, 182.

¹⁷¹ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference 1897*, 402.

¹⁷² *Methodist Reporter*, 24 June 1897, 5.

¹⁷³ *Methodist Recorder*, 17 June 1897, 5.

Magazine also lauded the Queen's reign on the occasion of the Jubilee in an article entitled 'The Great Thanksgiving': 'We felt what a magnificently mighty Empire this Empire of ours is. This Empire is *ours!*' The writer, however, questioned what he believed to be the overly martial emphasis of the celebrations.¹⁷⁴

For Wesleyans, imperial policy and evangelistic opportunity had become one, an Anglo-Saxon mission to the world.¹⁷⁵ There were conflicts between colonial authorities and missionary enterprise, but each came to rely on each other in a mutually beneficial relationship. The high-water mark of Britain's imperial power occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century; this was arguably when Wesleyan Methodism was at its most powerful and influential. By the grace of God, Britain had been given stewardship of much of the world and its population. Britons of all denominations saw themselves as a chosen people; biblical comparisons were obvious. For Methodists, the extension of imperial power and wealth was evidence of divine favour for the nation, but it entailed responsibility and trusteeship. British military and naval power made the rule of law, order, peace, trade, good government, and Christian virtue possible.¹⁷⁶ Wesleyans believed that the suppression of the slave trade was a God-given responsibility that accompanied imperial power.¹⁷⁷ The *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* of January 1899, rejoicing in the re-conquest of the Sudan the previous year and linked the success of the Empire with evangelistic opportunity:

¹⁷⁴ *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, June 1897, 614.

¹⁷⁵ Hugh McLeod, 'Protestantism and British National Identity, 1815-1945', in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, ed. by Peter Van Der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 46.

¹⁷⁶ Andrew Porter, 'Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. by Andrew Porter, 22 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), III, 198-221.

¹⁷⁷ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, January 1889, 188-195.

We often write with a glow of patriotic pride how the English nation pushes out its borders; but with a purer pleasure we may recognise the creeping out of the borders of Christian civilisation [. . .] Deliverance of the Soudan by British valour from infamous misgovernment is another expansion of the kingdom of righteousness and humanity.¹⁷⁸

The Primitive Methodist Magazine also reported on the success of the campaign in Sudan, but without the Wesleyan celebratory tone: 'The slaughter was deplorable, and the record of it caused a sickening sensation [. . .] There is rejoicing in the nation over the effectiveness of the recent campaign in the Soudan, but to minds influenced by the spirit and teaching of Christ there is greater cause for sorrow and regret.'¹⁷⁹

For the Wesleyans, imperial power, not least as exercised by the armed forces, was essential for mission enterprise. A larger empire would lead to more conversions. The memoirs of Wesleyan army chaplains, Male and Watkins, are confident assertions of Britain's superiority. Imperial patriotism and Christian righteousness are combined in their accounts of colonial campaigns; at no point is there any questioning of the justice of the cause. Strong and stable control of Britain's overseas possessions created a climate in which missionary activity could flourish. Dennis Kemp served as General Superintendent of Wesleyan Missions on the Gold Coast of West Africa, including a brief period as an acting chaplain during the Ashanti Campaign of 1896. He saw a clear link between the armed forces and the success of a civilising Christian mission:

Although not necessarily avowed Christian men in every instance, yet the officers of the two services serving under Her Majesty's flag represent Justice and Humanity [. . .] Some of my readers who hold pronounced peace-at-any-price views may pityingly smile at the parson's

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 80.

¹⁷⁹ *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, December 1898, 878.

justification of the sword, but I should consider myself worse than despicable if I failed to declare my firm conviction that the British Army and Navy are to-day used by God for the accomplishment of His purposes.¹⁸⁰

The fusion of faith and imperial loyalty was potent throughout the white colonies. Methodists across the empire were united in a common zeal which was both evangelistic and imperialist. This enthusiasm for the empire was manifest in the ardent support from the pulpit that the Methodist churches of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand were to give for the South African War.¹⁸¹ Colonial ties were familial and faith-based. Australian Methodists felt pride in being British and Australian, and they were not to be outdone by the Anglicans in their imperial loyalty.¹⁸² Rev Dr Carman, Canadian General Superintendent, in a speech reported on in November 1900 by the *Christian Guardian*, explained the intertwining of faith and imperialism: 'God in his providence is making our Methodism and our British Empire'.¹⁸³ Methodism had a unique role in maintaining the ties of empire.

Hugh Price Hughes became particularly associated with Wesleyan support for British imperial policy, to the extent that Currie claimed that Hughes 'saw himself as the Cecil Rhodes of the Wesleyans'.¹⁸⁴ Hughes himself stated, 'British Rule is the best thing that could happen to the dark races'.¹⁸⁵ He was, however, no jingoist, as one of his sermons of 1889 made clear:

¹⁸⁰ Dennis Kemp, *Nine Years at the Gold Coast* (London: Macmillan, 1898), 232–33.

¹⁸¹ Gordon Heath, *Canadian Churches and the First World War* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2014), 17–24.

¹⁸² Hilary Carey, 'Religion and Society', in *Australia's Empire*, ed. by Deryck Schreuder and Stuart Ward, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 186–210.

¹⁸³ Quoted in Heath, *A War with a Silver Lining*, 96.

¹⁸⁴ Robert Currie *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber, 1968), 179.

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Hugh McLeod, 'Protestantism and British National Identity, 1815-1945', 56.

We are sometimes in danger of boasting that the sun never sets upon the British Empire, and that the beat of the morning drum of the British Army never ceases to rattle around the world. I am not sure that this is much to boast about, when I remember by what means we have acquired this world empire [. . .] We have been guilty of stealing the property of other nations, of murdering men in unnecessary wars.¹⁸⁶

Hughes was a member of the interdenominational Peace Society and spoke against war. In 1889, he publicly opposed Lord Wolseley's call to introduce conscription, describing it as 'deadly militarism'.¹⁸⁷ He did, though, support the South African War; Britain had acted from a moral obligation to maintain its imperial destiny and keep the empire safe. The church accused the Boers of enslaving black South Africans, including many Wesleyans. Two prominent Wesleyan laymen, Robert Perks and Henry Fowler, both MPs, were wholehearted in their backing for the South African War. Perks, known as 'Imperial Perks', believed that an expansionist policy would further spread Protestant Christianity.¹⁸⁸ Perks and Fowler in parliament, and Hughes through the pulpit and in print, were the voices of Wesleyan support for British policy in South Africa.¹⁸⁹

The Wesleyan Conference and the *Methodist Recorder* were fulsome in their support for the British cause in South Africa. Every edition of the paper published from October 1899 to the end of 1900, and most editions from 1901 and 1902, carried war news and commentary. Though solidly pro-war, the publication deplored attacks on 'stop the war'

¹⁸⁶ Hughes, *Social Christianity*, 135.

¹⁸⁷ Jennifer Tait Woodruff, 'The Methodist Conscience, Slavery, Temperance and Religion', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism*, ed. by William Gibson, Peter Forsaith and Martin Wellings (London: Routledge, 2016), 366, 377.

¹⁸⁸ Stephen Koss, 'Wesleyanism and Empire', in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 18, no. 1, (1975), 109–17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X00008694> [accessed online 20.11.2017].

¹⁸⁹ Greg Cuthbertson, 'Preaching Imperialism: Wesleyan Methodism and the War', 157–58; Michael Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict: Methodism, Peace and War in the Twentieth Century* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2008), 27–28.

meetings and defended the right of free speech.¹⁹⁰ A list of Wesleyan casualties was printed every week, with frequent stirring accounts from chaplains of battlefield and siege, often accompanied by photographs. Methodist women knitted and sewed in support of the troops, sending scarves, handkerchiefs, socks, shirts, and bandages to South Africa.¹⁹¹ The presence of Methodist soldiers from the colonies was regularly mentioned. 'Our Canadian Chaplain at Bloemfontein', Revd W. Lane, wrote: 'The cooperation brought about during this war has drawn the links closer between the colonies and the old country.'¹⁹² The war united Methodists across the empire.

Wesleyan ministers justified the war; for example, in April 1900, the Revd Beesley Austin preached on 'The Redemption of War':

Let no one think for a moment that those of us who think the present war to be just and righteous [. . .] are at all mindless of the awful horrors of war [. . .]. And it is only in the hope, the confident assurance, that this bitter strife will ultimately serve the greatest ends of the Kingdom of God that we are sustained and patient in the hours of bitterness and crying.

Austin claimed that this was a war fought against tyranny, for liberty, freedom and justice. British soldiers fighting for the Queen in South Africa were an example to his congregation and readers. 'War is not all dark. It is a fabric shot through with gold [. . .] splendid courage, beautiful generosity and Christlike ministry.'¹⁹³ However, not all Wesleyans supported the war in South Africa. Samuel Keeble's opposition led him to publish *The Methodist Weekly*, critical of British policy towards the Boers. Primitive Methodist leaders opposed British

¹⁹⁰ *Methodist Recorder*, 29 March 1900, 5.

¹⁹¹ *Methodist Recorder*, 12 April, 1900, 6.

¹⁹² *Methodist Recorder*, 20 September, 4.

¹⁹³ *Methodist Recorder*, 5 April 1900, 5.

intervention, sending a series of resolutions to the Colonial Office.¹⁹⁴ Free Methodists objected to a war fought against fellow Protestants.¹⁹⁵ However, it is too simplistic to view the Wesleyans as pro-war and the other connexions as anti-war. The *Primitive Methodist World* and the *Free Methodist* newspapers printed articles and letters opposing and supporting British aims and conduct in South Africa.¹⁹⁶ Methodism was divided over the war within, and between, connexions.

In contrast to the indifference shown to the military in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Wesleyan Connexion showed considerable pride in Methodist servicemen and those who ministered to them. The 1900 Wesleyan Conference sent 'sympathy and appreciation' to the chaplains serving in South Africa. The motion, proposed by Revd Dinsdale Young, who was to be president of Conference at the outbreak of the First World War, recognised 'the service which had been rendered by these brethren. They had exposed themselves to great peril, and they had brought great comfort to wounded and dying men.'¹⁹⁷

Wesleyan Methodism became increasingly associated with the Liberal Party, viewing the party as favouring its moral and social principles. Gladstone was viewed as a man of God; his comment that Nonconformity was the backbone of the Liberal Party clarifies how close the association was during the final two decades of the century. Gladstone's espousal of a moralist imperial policy found favour in Methodist churches. Hugh Price Hughes believed that the Church had broader responsibility than saving individual souls;

¹⁹⁴ Hughes, 'Dilemmas of the Nonconformist Conscience', 90–92.

¹⁹⁵ Greg Cuthbertson, 'Pricking the "Nonconformist Conscience": Religion against the South African War.', in *The South African War Reappraised*, ed. by Donal Lowry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 171.

¹⁹⁶ Michael Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict: Methodism, Peace and War in the Twentieth Century*, 31–2.

¹⁹⁷ *Methodist Recorder*, 2 August 1900, 37.

Wesleyanism should use its new-found influence to transform society, both in Britain and throughout the world. Hughes' Christian Socialism of the 'Forward Mission' included temperance, housing, education, unions for unskilled workers and 'healthy recreation'. The Bermondsey Settlement, and others in cities such as Birmingham and Manchester, provided accommodation, coffee and food for the poor; the Soldiers' Homes did not exist in isolation from Wesleyan social work. Revd Robert Wearmouth, who served as a United Board Chaplain during the First World War, likened these mission settlements' philanthropy and compassion to 'field ambulances' and 'first aid'.¹⁹⁸ For Wesleyan Methodism, it became impossible to divide its mission endeavours, its overseas evangelism and its work with soldiers and sailors.

The Rehabilitation of the Soldier and Sailor

From the Crimean War and Indian Rebellion on, soldiers and sailors were evangelistic targets, but their welfare was also a cause of concern. British soldiers became figures of pathos; they were long-suffering and in need of evangelistic endeavour and philanthropy. These were brave and stoic heroes, but like children, needful of Christian mercy because they could not care for themselves. The tone of Miss Agnes Weston's letters to sailors, *Our Blue Jackets*, was patronising. The sailor was incapable of looking after himself; he needed to be cherished spiritually and pastorally.¹⁹⁹ The late-Victorian public adopted the army and

¹⁹⁸ Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes, 1850-1900* (Leicester: E. Backus, 1954), 169.

¹⁹⁹ Sophia Wintz, *Our Blue Jackets: A Narrative of Miss Weston's Life and Work among Our Sailors* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1878).

navy; like orphans, they needed individual and collective benevolence — popular opinion identified with ‘our’ soldiers and sailors.

Florence Nightingale had helped to create the view of the soldier as patient, malleable and in need of female compassion. Miss Sarah Robinson acknowledged the influence of soldier preachers, Haime and Staniforth, and ‘those Methodist heroes in the Peninsular War’.²⁰⁰ Methodism was, according to Hempton, ‘without question preponderantly a woman’s movement.’²⁰¹ Mission to soldiers and sailors gave Methodist women opportunities for evangelism and service: visiting servicemen’s families, organising hospitality and outings, leading classes, giving testimony and temperance exhortations. Women could help men to be good soldiers and sailors and good Christians. Carey argues that soldiers’ masculine work was sustained throughout the Empire by the feminine work of missionary auxiliaries, fund-raisers, readers, and letter-writers and staff at Soldiers and Sailors’ Homes.²⁰² Florence Nightingale, Sarah Robinson, Louisa Daniell, Sophia Wintz, Elise Sandes and Agnes Weston were just the best-known members of a battalion of evangelical women who set about saving the soldier and the sailor.

Catherine Marsh’s *Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars, Ninety-Seventh Regiment*, published in 1856, was extraordinarily popular. The writer exalted the ‘manly hearts’ of her readers ‘to emulate the noble example of a CHRISTIAN SOLDIER’.²⁰³ After 1857 the ‘soldier saint’ emerged as epitomised by Sir Henry Havelock and General Gordon. Havelock was a Christian martyr and hero of the Empire, ‘a staunchly puritan man of blood’.²⁰⁴ His efforts to

²⁰⁰ Robinson, *The Soldier’s Friend*, 31.

²⁰¹ Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, 145.

²⁰² Carey, *Empires of Religion*, 3.

²⁰³ Catherine Marsh, *Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars: Ninety-Seventh Regiment* (London: J. Nisbet, 1856), xi.

²⁰⁴ Anderson, ‘The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain’, 51.

ensure his men's spiritual welfare, the 13th Light infantry, led them to be dubbed 'Havelock's Saints'. He was knighted and made Major General shortly before his death during the Indian Rebellion. His dying words were reported to be: 'See how a Christian can die.'²⁰⁵ Here was a combination of Anglo-Saxon authority, Protestant evangelical piety and martial prowess. Lord Hardinge described Havelock as 'every inch a soldier, and every inch a Christian'.²⁰⁶ Havelock's statue stood near Nelson's in Trafalgar Square, where that of Gordon later joined it. Gordon's death at Khartoum in 1885 made him, too, a national hero, an evangelical Christian murdered by the heathen whilst nobly defending the British Empire.²⁰⁷ Hugh Price Hughes introduced a sermon in 1888 by proclaiming: 'General Gordon is one of the most heroic and impressive characters of our time. Few have so deeply stirred the hearts and imaginations of men.'²⁰⁸ Since the 1640s, Britain had been wary of the synthesis of faith and the fighting man. Oliver Cromwell's statue in Parliament Square, unveiled in 1899, the tercentenary of his birth, marked his rehabilitation as a Protestant hero, especially amongst Nonconformists.²⁰⁹ On a troopship travelling to South Africa, Wesleyan chaplain Edward Lowry reminded his congregation, 500 Methodists and Presbyterians mustered for Church Parade, that Cromwell's 'Ironsides' provided for them an example of Protestant fighting men to which they should aspire.²¹⁰ Steadfast faith and military prowess could go hand-in-hand.

²⁰⁵ Quoted in Haythornthwaite, *The Colonial Wars Sourcebook*, 137.

²⁰⁶ Quoted in Byron Farwell, *For Queen and Country* (London: Penguin, 1981), 221.

²⁰⁷ Byron Farwell, *Prisoners of the Mahdi* (London: Longmans, 1967), 57–100.

²⁰⁸ Hughes, *Social Christianity*, 83.

²⁰⁹ Blair Worden, 'The Victorians and Oliver Cromwell', in *History, Religion, and Culture British Intellectual History 1750-1950*, ed. by Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore and Brian Young. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 112–35.

²¹⁰ H. K., *Chaplains in Khaki*, 61.

Thomas Jackson's *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, featuring the biographical and spiritual histories of several Methodist 'soldier saints', was re-published in 1865 and 1866.²¹¹ It was re-issued when the connections between early Methodism and the army had been rediscovered. The work drew parallels between the soldier's life of sacrifice, service and 'pilgrimage', and the deprivation and danger that faced the early itinerant preachers. Military metaphors were well established within Methodism. John Wesley's hymn book, *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists*, contained a section of twenty-nine hymns, mainly written by Charles Wesley, 'For Believers Fighting', including, for example, *Soldiers of Christ Arise* and *Equip me for the War/ To arm you for the fight*.²¹² Hymns with martial images were not confined to Wesleyanism. The Primitive Methodist hymn book had a section entitled 'Hymns on Prayer and the Fight of Faith'; *The Methodist Free Church Hymns* had twenty-six titles listed under 'Conflict and Courage'.²¹³ Hymns from the United States which became popular in the last third of the century included George Duffield's *Stand up, Stand up for Jesus!*, *Ye Soldiers of the Cross*, Julia Ward Howe's *Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord*, and *Onward Christian Soldiers* with words written by Sabine Baring-Gould.²¹⁴ The Christian soldier became a powerful image throughout all denominations.

The army enjoyed a late-Victorian popular appeal totally at odds with the perception of the first half of the century. William Booth, who had resigned his ministry in the

²¹¹ Thomas Jackson, *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers, Chiefly Written by Themselves* (London: Wesleyan Book Room, 1865/1866).

²¹² John Wesley *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1874).

²¹³ Hugh Bourne, *A Collection of Hymns for Camp Meetings, Revivals and Co. For the use of the Primitive Methodists* (Hanley: Primitive Methodist Connexion, 1832); *United Methodist Hymn Book* (London: United Methodist Publishing House, 1888); *Methodist Free Church Hymns* (London: Andrew Crumbie, 1889).

²¹⁴ Anderson, 'The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain', 70.

Methodist New Connexion in 1861, was later to found the Salvation Army.²¹⁵ The use of uniforms, rank, drill and discipline by Christian organisations such as the Salvation Army, Church Army and the Boys Brigade is evidence of this tide of Christian militarism, the fusion of faith and military service.²¹⁶ The Crimean campaign awakened public interest in the army; widespread outrage was prompted by articles in *The Times* and the publication of soldiers' letters. Florence Nightingale's activities at Scutari illuminated the conditions which British soldiers endured overseas. The Indian Rebellion presented the army to the British public as champions of Christendom against heathen barbarism. In 1857, the introduction of the Victoria Cross awarded 'for valour' recognised this changed status after the Crimea and Indian Rebellion; ordinary soldiers and sailors were now national heroes. Anderson described how the army's reputation had been transformed from 'the brutal and licentious soldiery' of Wellington's era to the 'thin red "eroes"' of the late Victorian period.²¹⁷

The changing perception of the army was reflected in reforms to conditions under which men served. From 1859 onwards, there was a major programme of barrack building and refurbishment. Edward Cardwell, Secretary of State for War from 1868 to 1874, reorganised and modernised the army's supplies, finances, and career structure; the purchase of commissions was abolished in 1871, and corporal punishment was reduced.²¹⁸ The Localisation Bill of 1872 was designed to connect battalions more closely with recruitment catchments. It intended to foster closer local connections, improve recruitment and attract a better class of men into the army. Taken together, these were attempts to professionalise the army and improve its popular image. These reforms did change the army

²¹⁵ John Wilkinson, 'The Rise of Other Methodist Traditions', 169.

²¹⁶ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 182.

²¹⁷ Anderson, 'The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain', 46.

²¹⁸ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 74–86.

but did not totally transform it; recruitment remained a problem; the army was invariably under strength, and pay remained meagre.²¹⁹ Rudyard Kipling's 1890 poem *Tommy* typified public ambivalence to the common soldier.²²⁰ Common sailors, too, achieved a measure of respectability in late-Victorian Britain. Boys of the upper classes wore the sailor suit, and the image of the rugged bluejacket advertised a wide range of products. Mary Conley has described this rehabilitation of the naval man. Older popular images of the sailor as a 'Jolly Jack Tar', whose character was defined by an insatiable thirst for grog, were reduced to a parody and were overshadowed by patriotic representations of the sailor as a British bluejacket whose duty, discipline and hard work came to the defence of nation and empire.²²¹ Although the image of the navy improved, the rollicking drunken sailor ashore remained a common trope. The soldier and sailor's conduct, his reputation for drinking, petty theft, profane language, and promiscuity continued to cause public concern. Tommy Atkins and Jack Tar had been improved but not transformed.

Officers' social and economic backgrounds had changed little since Wellington's day; most were from aristocratic, gentry and public school backgrounds.²²² Selection and promotion were based on background and 'character' rather than intellect; this was especially so of the elite regiments such as the Guards and cavalry, which were even more exclusive, requiring a sizeable private income; the Officers' Mess was a gentleman's club.²²³ Of the twenty-five officers in the Horse Guards in 1899, thirteen were peers or the sons of peers.²²⁴ The army became increasingly aware and tolerant of other denominations;

²¹⁹ Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, 147.

²²⁰ Rudyard Kipling, *Tommy* http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems_tommy.htm [accessed online, 31.10.2017].

²²¹ Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918*, 153.

²²² Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902*, 189–208.

²²³ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 74.

²²⁴ Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars*, 360.

however, in 1865, some ninety-two per cent of officers were Anglicans.²²⁵ Although Methodists, especially Wesleyans, were becoming wealthier during the late nineteenth century, they had neither the connections nor the aspirations to become officers. Lord George Hamilton stated: 'Socially and financially, the great mass of Nonconformists are below the status of the officer and above that of the private.'²²⁶ The army's typical Methodist was an NCO; the Wesleyan sergeant was ubiquitous in the nineteenth century.

The growing influence of Methodism in the armed forces reflected wider Christian influence within society. Religious observance and expression were normative behaviour in the later Victorian period. After the Crimean War, the army took the responsibility to make adequate spiritual provision for its men more seriously. The number of chaplains increased, and new pay rates and a defined hierarchy of rank created a professional career structure. Chaplaincy commissions and the wearing of uniforms recognised that the chaplain was an officer, in addition to being a clergyman.²²⁷ These changes served to integrate chaplaincy into army organisation and structure and raised the status of ministry to troops. Men recruited from the working class, especially those from large urban areas, had better access to spiritual ministrations than civilians from similar backgrounds. The admission of Roman Catholic and Presbyterian chaplains into the Army Chaplains' Department recognised, to some extent, religious pluralism and antagonised the Wesleyans who seized upon the precedent. The addition of chaplains from denominations other than the Established Church was proportionate to men's religious attestation on recruitment.²²⁸ Service overseas,

²²⁵ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 112.

²²⁶ Quoted in Snape, 122.

²²⁷ Alan Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home: The Recruitment and Terms and Conditions of the British Regular, 1859-1899* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 165.

²²⁸ Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*, 90–92; Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 100–160.

especially in Australia, Canada, the Cape and New Zealand, saw soldiers and sailors influenced by religious diversity in these colonies. Anderson asserted that by the mid-1860s, 'the British Army was less exclusively Anglican, but more ostensibly Christian than it had ever been since the Restoration'.²²⁹ However, Field Marshal Sir William Robertson suggested that, when he was a boy soldier in the 1870s, religious affiliation was not taken very seriously by soldiers or the army authorities.²³⁰

Spiritual concern for soldiers and sailors was by no means confined to military chaplaincy. A plethora of ecumenical and denominational endeavours reached into the British armed forces during the later nineteenth century. For example, the Bethel Society was influential in the Royal Navy; in 1860, the Society claimed that the Bethel flag was hoisted by ships in all major ports, including Gibraltar, Plymouth and Sheerness. In the same year, prayers were requested for the Royal Navy Prayer Union and The Royal Navy Scripture Readers Society.²³¹ Together with the Church of England, Wesleyans were also involved in the Scripture Readers Society. Several of the Readers were Wesleyan former NCOs; Methodism had a long tradition of lay ministry.²³² Scripture Readers, working with chaplains and local clergy, held Bible classes and distributed tracts.²³³ Non-denominational, but Protestant, voluntary religious work with the armed forces included The Soldier's Friend and various soldiers' institutes and homes, reading rooms, temperance and improvement

²²⁹ Anderson, 'The Reactions of Church and Dissent towards the Crimean War', 69.

²³⁰ William Robertson, *From Private to Field Marshal* (London: Constable, 1921), 9.

²³¹ *The Mariners' Church Gospel Temperance Soldiers' and Sailors' (AFTW, Solders and Sailors') Magazine.*, 1860, 60-67, 506, 511.

²³² Roald Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions: Their Origin and Early Growth* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1986), 400.

²³³ Anderson, 'The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain', 54–55.

societies. An article written by Major John Smith, published in 1883, made clear why it was in Wesleyan interests to work with members of the armed forces:

Methodist Christians, suffer an appeal in the spiritual interests of the British soldier. Here we have a field for godly enterprise second to none in the world. Come to the help of the soldier-Christian; you, to the help of yourself, your families, your neighbourhoods, and the nation, in seeking by every means to spread vital godliness in the British army.²³⁴

Britain's forces were targeted for evangelism; they were, in a way, totally unlike the period from 1815 to 1854, a mission field. To ask 'Tommy, 'ow's your soul?' became commonplace in the period from the Crimea to the South African War, not only throughout Methodism but in all denominations.²³⁵

Summary

The transformation in Methodist attitudes to Britain's armed forces was as sudden as it was remarkable. The Crimean War and the Indian Rebellion elevated the soldier and sailor in public and Methodist consciousness. There was an awakening of responsibility for, and interest in, Jack Tar and Tommy Atkins.²³⁶ Having previously largely ignored the army and the navy, Methodist connexions, Wesleyanism most notably, sought to give spiritual and pastoral support in Britain and overseas. The armed forces were a marketplace for souls and philanthropic endeavour; Methodism needed to challenge other denominations.

²³⁴ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, June 1883, 448.

²³⁵ Rudyard Kipling, *Tommy* http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems_tommy.htm [accessed 31. 10. 2017].

²³⁶ Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars.*, 69–94.

Wesleyanism actively and very successfully competed to achieve recognition and acceptance for its followers and its ministers. The achievement of parity of treatment, 'fairness', became a priority for the Church in the face of perceived discrimination. Whether at Aldershot or in India, Wesleyans demanded the same rights, privileges, recognition and representation as Roman Catholic clergy and servicemen.

A more confident Wesleyan Connexion than that of the first half of the century saw itself as the religious representative of all Methodists and all Nonconformists in the army and navy. Identification with imperial policy served to strengthen further ties between the Wesleyans and the armed forces. Methodism was now aware of its men in the British Army and the Royal Navy, and it actively sought to meet their religious and practical needs. The armed forces were a mission field similar to the Forward Mission to Britain's urban areas. Servicemen were offered ministry specific to their needs. The Wesleyan Army and Navy Committee was highly effective in its lobbying and the strategic planning of its work. Under its leadership and coordination, numbers of Declared Wesleyans were recorded both by the denomination and, through attestation, by the armed forces. The recording and broadcasting of these figures was a means of achieving religious rights for Methodists in the military. Such work enjoyed a high priority within Conference and in the denominational press. Soldiers and sailors' needs were addressed by providing chaplaincy at military stations, garrisons and ports, especially in India. From the Crimea War to the South African War, Wesleyan chaplains were present on all major campaigns in which the British Army was engaged. The examples of Alfred Laverack, Arthur Male, and Owen Spencer Watkins shaped Methodist chaplaincy during the rest of this period and beyond. There is a great deal

of continuity between the pattern and provision established in the nineteenth century and that which pertained during the First World War.

Chapter Five: The First World War

War with all its horrors is upon us [. . .] it is horrible [. . .] the Prince of Peace is forgotten. Oh! How this must wound His great loving heart. Nevertheless, now that war is with us the thing we must do, however much we deplore it, is to fight and WE must fight to win.¹

(Revd J. Mackay, Wesleyan Minister in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 1914)

Introduction

The Methodist Church marked the Centenary of the First World War by publishing a series of reflective essays examining its military ministry's legacy and contemporary relevance. The Church was seen to have risen to the war's challenges by displaying the highest ideals of Christian service. However, the tone of several of the articles reflects that the Methodist Church has, at times in recent years, been uncomfortable with the experience of military mission, almost embarrassed by it.² The support that the Methodist churches gave to the war's prosecution sits uneasily in contemporary Methodism. Jill Barber, Vice-President, Methodist Conference during 2015/2016 and Director of the Museum of Primitive Methodism, believed that the pro-war stance of Methodism drove radicals into politics rather than the Church, and may have accounted for the decline of Primitive Methodism: 'Perhaps

¹ I.W.M., 'Private Papers of Reverend J. Mackay', Doc. 74/135/1.

² Mark Powell, "Serving the Serving", in *Sacred Presence and Ethical Challenge*, ed. by Robert Jones (Peterborough: The Methodist Church, 2014).

by siding with the establishment, the Church has failed to be a voice crying in the wilderness.¹³ Michael Hughes saw 'that the debates about the rights and wrongs of war that took place in the main Methodist Churches in Britain during the 1914-1918 war revolved around many of the issues that still prove so painful for the Christian conscience in the contemporary world.'¹⁴

Pre-War Background

Nonconformists were under-represented in the pre-war army and navy; they were not unrepresented. There were strong historical links between Methodism and the British Army and the Royal Navy to a lesser extent. The Wesleyans had considerable background in ministry at garrisons, ports and on campaign. They were the largest and most influential of the Nonconformist denominations within the armed forces. The Wesleyan Methodist Church had vigorously campaigned for recognition for its servicemen and clergymen, albeit on its own terms. The experience gained by a small number of its ministers working with servicemen was to prove critical, especially in the early part of the First World War. The War Office and Admiralty, in turn, had shown a willingness to accommodate Nonconformists within Britain's armed forces.

In recognition of their role in South Africa, the War Office offered to commission five Wesleyan chaplains in 1903. The Wesleyan Church, however, rejected this invitation.⁵ The main issue was control of the ministers concerned; commissioned chaplains would be

³ Jill Barber, 'Primitive Methodism: A Community at War', <https://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk> [accessed online 15. 09.2019].

⁴ Michael Hughes, 'British Methodists and the First World War', *Methodist History* 41, no. 1 (2002): 316.

⁵ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 181.

answerable to an authority other than that of their church. The Wesleyans also questioned whether the acceptance of commissions would be more financially advantageous than the payment system for officiating clergymen.⁶ In 1910, following extensive correspondence between the Church, the War Office and the Royal Household, Edward Lowry and Owen Spencer Watkins, who had between them thirty-four years' experience of ministry to soldiers, were appointed as Honorary Acting Chaplains.⁷ The Wesleyans accepted recognition and status for Lowry and Watkins but not being in thrall to the army. The ambivalence is self-evident, wanting ministry to troops but not being beholden. This presages the debates that were to take place within Methodism on the outbreak of the First World War.

The approach made by the War Office offering to give a small number of Wesleyan chaplains commissioned status, and the recognition of Nonconformists, which also took place in 1903, are indicators that the army was aware of these denominations within its ranks.⁸ In 1910, a letter from the War Office stated, 'The Wesleyans though extremely energetic are far from being a strong body in the Army of which they number rather less than 1 in 20.'⁹ In 1913, the Army Council reported that of the denominations who had joined the British Army, 70% were Anglicans, 15% Roman Catholics, 7% Presbyterian, 4% Wesleyans, 2% Baptists or Congregationalists and 4% other Protestants and Jews.¹⁰ Fifteen per cent of the population would have considered themselves Nonconformists in the decade before the First World War's outbreak.¹¹

⁶ Michael Snape and Edward Madigan, *The Clergy in Khaki*, 11.

⁷ T.N.A., War Office, Proposal for two Acting Chaplains, August 1910, WO 132/5635.

⁸ Snape, The Royal Army Chaplains' Department, 181.

⁹ T.N.A., War Office, *Proposal for two Acting Chaplains*, August 1910, WO 132/5635.

¹⁰ Edward Madigan, *Faith under Fire: Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 47- 48.

¹¹ Peter Brierley, *UK Christian Handbook Religious Trends 2000/2001* (London: Marshall Pickering, 2001), Table 2.7.

The development of the Territorial Force, which took place from 1908, proved significant to the army's preparation for the First World War and chaplaincy in general, particularly Wesleyan chaplaincy. The Army List of July 1914 included, in addition to 117 commissioned chaplains, forty-one acting chaplains, of whom fourteen were Wesleyans. Several of these Wesleyan chaplains were to hold temporary commissions as members of the Army Chaplains' Department during the war. The experience of working with soldiers and with the army, albeit at times on a part-time or temporary basis, was important in developing the relationships that were crucial during the First World War.¹²

Responses to the Outbreak of War

The conferences of the three major Methodist churches, which took place during June and July 1914, expressed their concerns about European and World peace. The growth of militarism was condemned, as was increased Government expenditure on munitions. The Wesleyan Conference passed a motion calling on the Government to instigate 'a substantial reduction in armaments.'¹³ The Primitives and United Methodists agreed to similarly pacifistic resolutions.¹⁴ However, as was the case elsewhere in Britain, there was no inkling how near the threats of war were.

The *Methodist Recorder* of 6 August, the first edition published after the outbreak of war, proclaimed that 'It is a war that nobody wants [. . .] nobody among us wants to fight, and

¹² Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 181–83.

¹³ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1914, 105.

¹⁴ *Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference*, 1914, 9; *Minutes of the United Methodist Church Conference*, 1914, 47.

nobody sees the necessity of fighting [. . .] In the very nature of Christianity war is a crime. We cannot approve war. All we stand for is against war.'¹⁵ The *United Methodist Magazine* also deplored the outbreak of hostilities.¹⁶ By the following week, the tone of the *Methodist Recorder* had entirely changed: 'We could not stand by and see our weak neighbours outraged or watch, loftily, the spoliation of an ancient empire [. . .] We cannot think this is entirely evil, or that any other course lay before a clean and honest people.'¹⁷ From this point on, the major Methodist churches, in their journals, in sermons, and in speeches by their leading figures, gave their whole-hearted support to Britain's war effort and urged their followers to do likewise. John Wesley's letters to the Mayor of Newcastle and Commander of the Army during the Jacobite Rising were cited as a precedent for loyalty in the cause of righteousness.¹⁸ The *Methodist Recorder* informed its readers that pacifism was not an option for Methodists; 'We must go on; our sons must serve, we must steel our hearts, and bear ourselves with a serene and unflinching front, and pray God to give us the same deliverance from the Monster of Germany that he gave us a century ago from the Monster of France.'¹⁹

Revd T. Westerdale spoke for most Methodists when he wrote 'This is a just war'.²⁰ Germany's invasion of Belgium was the cause that united Methodists in support of Britain's actions. German 'atrocities', 'spoliation', and 'violation' of Belgium made this a righteous war. A Wesleyan soldier wrote: 'Mother [. . .] I enlisted because I read of what the Germans had done in Belgium, and I thought of you and my sister.'²¹ Belgium was a 'martyred country'.²²

¹⁵ *Methodist Recorder*, 6 August 1914, 3.

¹⁶ *United Methodist Magazine*, October 1914, 326.

¹⁷ *Methodist Recorder*, 13 August 1914, 5.

¹⁸ *Methodist Recorder*, 20 August 1914, 3.

¹⁹ *Methodist Recorder*, 3 September 1914, 3.

²⁰ *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, February 1915, 111.

²¹ Thomas Tiplady, *Poppies in the Wind* (London: At the Sign of the Cross, 1923), 71.

²² *Methodist Recorder*, 29 October 1914, 3.

Britain had gone to war to defend the weak against the strong. Free Churchmen had always supported David against Goliath. They were engaged in a godly struggle: good versus evil, righteousness versus brutality, virtue versus barbarism. Dinsdale Young, President of the Wesleyan Conference, assured Methodist soldiers and sailors that 'it is a righteous cause you defend.'²³ Although Methodists did not refer to the 'just war' tradition until much later in the century, they were, in the main, convinced that this was a just war being fought for the best of reasons.²⁴

Vivid descriptions from the Front, recounted in the published letters of chaplain O.S. Watkins, described various German outrages, including looting and drunkenness.²⁵ Nothing could have inflamed Methodist sensibilities more. German atrocities widely reported in the popular and Methodist press included the destruction of Louvain, the shelling of Rheims Cathedral, the murder and violation of civilians, particularly women and children, and brutal attacks on Belgian and French clergymen. Later 'outrages' — the shelling of Whitby and Scarborough, the first use of gas, Zeppelin raids and the sinking of the *Lusitania* — merely served to confirm this view.²⁶ The strongest language was reserved for condemnation of the Kaiser; Herod-like, he was leading 'the mass forces of evil to stamp out the Christ in the Bethlehem of this war.'²⁷ Kaiser Wilhelm, the Anti-Christ, was marshalling Devilish hordes against the just; Britain was 'at war with barbarism'.²⁸ The *Methodist Magazine* told readers to put aside concerns for the German people. The moral

²³ *Methodist Recorder*, 20 August 1914, 5.

²⁴ Hughes, 'British Methodists and the First World War', 328.

²⁵ *Methodist Recorder*, 1 October 1914, 3–5; *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, November 1914, 859.

²⁶ *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, June 1916, 401–2.

²⁷ T. L. B. Westerdale, *Messages from Mars: A Chaplain's Experiences at the Front* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1917), 17.

²⁸ *Methodist Recorder*, 13 August 1914, 8.

of the parable of the Good Samaritan was not that we should pray for the aggressors, but rather that we should give practical help to the victim.²⁹ Thomas Tiplady did not stint in either hyperbole or scriptural imagery in justifying the fight against Germany:

To the German Eagle every living creature is legitimate prey. No blood on the lintel can save the inmate; not even the Cross of Blood on the hospital tent or ship. Wounded or whole, combatant or non-combatant, the tender flesh of all is torn by the Eagle's beak and talons and its lust is not sated [. . .]
The innocent babe was left to suck the breast of its dead mother or was dangled on the point of a bayonet.³⁰

The *United Methodist Magazine's* language was somewhat less fiery, but its readers were left without doubt that German militarism was un-Christian.³¹ Primitive Methodists had the reputation of being, behind the Quakers, the most pacifist of denominations; many had opposed the South African War. On 2 August 1914, R. T. Guttery, prominent Primitive Methodist preacher and President of Conference in 1915, addressed 'the madness of Europe', urging Britain to avoid involvement in this 'infamy'. One week later, the editorial of *Primitive Methodist Leader*, written by Guttery, was entitled 'The Duty of Empire'. He wrote that Britain could not remain neutral and see smaller nations crushed; the 'Kaiser's ambition' had to be thwarted. Within three weeks of the outbreak of war, Guttery was urging Primitive Methodists to enlist: 'Our chapels are not the refuge of dissent; they are the citadels of liberty, and they train men who will break all tyranny in pieces.'³² Britain's obligations, he argued,

²⁹ *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, January 1915, 21.

³⁰ Thomas Tiplady, *The Soul of the Soldier: Sketches of Life at the Front* (London: Methuen, 1918), 33.

³¹ *United Methodist Magazine*, April 1915, 113.

³² *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 20 August 1914, 593.

were Divine as well as international. The Primitive Methodist Conference of June 1915 acknowledged just how far the position of the Church had moved in the past twelve months:

For the first time in our history the Church had heard the call of Nation, and though, as a Church, all our beliefs and training have made us averse to war, the Church has responded to the Nation's needs. Her sons have given themselves to what they and we believe was the call of God and duty. Nothing but the deepest conviction that the nation was fighting for the right would have led our Church, of all the Churches, to have responded to the call as valorously as it has done.³³

Alan Wilkinson described how easy it was for Nonconformists to transpose the rhetoric developed in previous social and political campaigns to this spiritual and moral crusade against Germany.³⁴

This war was an opportunity to put aside differences over Ireland, the franchise and industrial relations. The Irish Conference championed participation in the conflict.³⁵ Methodist churches in the Dominions supported Britain's decision to go to war. Methodists throughout the empire believed that the British government had acted with honour and integrity in protecting Belgium and resisting German aggression. A minister in Bendigo, Australia, told his congregation: 'Britain's attitude is justifiable not only before the courts of men, but also before the face of God.'³⁶ The rallying of the empire behind Britain's war effort was a cause of considerable Methodist pride.

³³ *Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference*, 1915, 4.

³⁴ Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches, 1900-1945* (London: SCM Press, 1978), 45.

³⁵ Keith Jeffrey, 'Irish Methodists and the First World War', in the *Bulletin of The Methodist Historical Society of Ireland* (2015) 5-29.

³⁶ Michael McKernan, *Australian Churches at War: Attitudes and Activities of the Major Churches, 1914-1918* (Sydney: Catholic Theological Faculty and Australian War Memorial, 1980), 215; see also Robert Linder, *The*

The close relationship of Nonconformity and the Liberal Party, forged since the 1880s, helped consolidate support for the war. When Asquith described the war in Christian terms, he met with strong Methodist approval.³⁷ The Free Churches' trust in the Liberal party was vital in securing support for British policy.³⁸ Lloyd George, 'the greatest living Welshman', in the words of the *Primitive Methodist Leader*, was crucial in achieving Free Church support for Britain's war effort.³⁹ An address he gave on 10 November 1914 to 3000 Free Churchmen at the City Temple, flanked by leading Nonconformists, presented the war in biblical language as a holy war fought for freedom. Roy Hattersley held that his eloquence would not have been out of place in a Welsh Baptist chapel.⁴⁰ Lloyd George invoked the spirit of Cromwell, a godly army fighting a just cause against tyranny.⁴¹ Nonconformists lapped up his praise for their voluntarism and references to their puritan forbears. Over the previous forty years, Methodists, especially in their symbiotic relationship with Liberalism, had come to view themselves as the equals of the followers of the Church of England and the other churches. The war was an opportunity to prove that they deserved parity of status in society through service in Britain's armed forces.

Voluntarism had always been at the heart of the Methodist movement. From all Methodist traditions, young men enlisted in 1914 and 1915, with their churches' encouragement, fired with the idealism of this citizens' crusade. They were not naively unmindful of the dangers of war but saw in the Cross an example of sacrifice. The *Methodist*

Long Tragedy: Australian Evangelical Christians and the Great War, 1914-1918 (Adelaide: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 2000), 34–36; Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 395–413; Jonathan Vance, *Death so Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), 3–40.

³⁷ *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, October 1914, 721.

³⁸ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?*, 6.

³⁹ *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 4 March 1915, 139.

⁴⁰ Roy Hattersley, *David Lloyd George: The Great Outsider* (London: Abacus, 2012), 360.

⁴¹ I.W.M., *David Lloyd George, Appeal to Nonconformists*, 10 November 1914, Doc. K08/1635.

Times, edited by Scott Lidgett, in its leader of 20 August 1914, expressed pride that so many Wesleyans Methodists had already enlisted. 'Those who bear the name of Wesley have always exhibited a loyalty to King and Country equal to that of their founder.'⁴² Volunteers included ministers, theological students and lay preachers; many students at the Methodist theological colleges — Didsbury, Handsworth, Headingly, Richmond, Hartley, and Victoria Park — enlisted. Some joined the Royal Army Medical Corps; others served in a variety of military roles.⁴³ Twenty of the Wesleyan theological students who joined the RAMC were later ordained and commissioned as chaplains.⁴⁴ O. S. Watkins commented that Methodism had sent the 'very cream' of its young men, including ministers, to the war.⁴⁵ Men could serve their country and the empire as Methodists, a source of considerable pride for their churches. Most young Methodists would never previously have considered the army as a career. Many, though, had voluntarily joined Church-led youth organisations: The Band of Hope, the Boys' Brigade or the Scouts. Adrian Gregory believes that the support of Nonconformity for The National Cause was much stronger because of this spirit of voluntary action which appealed to Free Church sensibilities rather than 'totalising' compulsion.⁴⁶

Wesleyan chaplain William Sellers was at pains to point out that the army which Methodist volunteers joined had changed. His ministry at Aldershot had convinced him that the influences of universal education, the Sunday School, the temperance movement, Wesleyan Soldiers' Homes and the Soldiers' Christian Association had improved the British soldier's morality and spiritual background. Sellers asserted that there were more Christians

⁴² Quoted in Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?*, 26.

⁴³ William Sellers, *With Our Fighting Men: The Story of Their Faith, Courage, Endurance in the Great War* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1915), 4–10.

⁴⁴ M.A.R.C., Wesleyan Methodist Armed Forces, Service Records, 1914–1919, MA 1999/1.

⁴⁵ *Methodist Recorder*, 9 December 1915, 5.

⁴⁶ Adrian Gregory, 'Beliefs and Religion', in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, 3 vols, ed. by Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), III, 432.

in the army than had hitherto been the case.⁴⁷ The *United Methodist Magazine* described 'Our New Army'. Although many men were, the journal asserted, 'utterly irreligious', many were also 'the cream of our churches, and Sunday schools and Brotherhoods'.⁴⁸ Robert Rider, who had been about to train for the Wesleyan ministry in August 1914, joined the 'Birmingham Pals'. Like him, his fellow recruits were from lower middle-class backgrounds: clerks, librarians, teachers, shop assistants, 'the majority church-going, non-swearing teetotallers, literate and often grammar school educated but lacking any previous acquaintance with military discipline and mindset.'⁴⁹

Nonconformity saw evangelistic opportunities in the war. The active involvement in Britain's armed struggle was a chance to counter a tide of secularism and sin. Their evangelical theology led many Methodists to view the war through their reading of scripture. The war was an opening, a providential opportunity, to win souls and renew the nation's spirituality and morality. Memories of the Welsh Revival of 1904 and 1905 led to hopes that this conflict would lead to a similar awakening.⁵⁰ This was a holy war, a crusade, that would bring nation and empire into closer identification with God's will. The *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church* reassured its readers: 'Our war is spiritual and as we face our trials which are refining our national character, we may echo John Wesley's words "The best of all is, God is with us".'⁵¹

The Methodist churches also perceived the war as a moral campaign. Faith and duty could vanquish not only Germany but also moral foes. Several of the causes most dear to

⁴⁷ Sellers, *With Our Fighting Men*, x-xi.

⁴⁸ *United Methodist Magazine*, January 1918, 4.

⁴⁹ Robert Rider, *Reflections on the Battlefield: From Infantryman to Chaplain, 1914-1919* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 3.

⁵⁰ *United Methodist Magazine*, October 1914, 327.

⁵¹ *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, January 1916, 1.

Methodism could be championed by active involvement with the armed forces. The uppermost of these *bêtes noires* was drink. Temperance was the public position of all Methodist denominations. The war was a 'golden opportunity' to bring the 'drink evil' under control, claimed the *United Methodist Magazine*.⁵² The strength of these temperance views was illustrated in the Wesleyan Church's publication of a poster quoting Lloyd George claiming that drink was a greater foe than either Germany or Austria.⁵³ The King's decision to take the pledge was lauded as a fine example to Britain and the Empire.⁵⁴ Methodist families were anxious about the availability of alcohol to men in the services, especially 'wet canteens' at British camps and the practice of 'treating' soldiers. Methodists in Ireland and the Dominions shared the belief that teetotalism was integral to this conflict.⁵⁵ The churches, especially the Wesleyans, attempted to address this issue by moral persuasion and practical action. Soldiers' Homes and huts offered 'dry' alternatives to the faithful; millions of anti-alcohol tracts were distributed, presented together with New Testaments and pocket prayer and hymn books. For Methodists, moral and spiritual messages were one and the same.

Nonconformist churches were, Alan Wilkinson argued, under tremendous pressure to conform in 1914. They had struggled for social acceptance for much of the past century. Now they felt compelled to show duty and their patriotic credentials. Nonconformity, Wilkinson claimed, abandoned dissent in 1914 for the sake of national unity. He was surprised how few Methodists expressed their opposition to the war.⁵⁶ In reality, from the leadership down, most

⁵² *United Methodist Magazine*, May 1915, 181.

⁵³ I.W.M., Poster Published by the Temperance Department of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, PST 13358.

⁵⁴ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1915, 454.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey, 'Irish Methodists and the First World War', 16–17; David Marshall, "'Khaki Has Become a Sacred Colour", the Methodist Churches and the Sanctification of World War One', in *Canadian Churches and the First World War*, ed. by Gordon Heath (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2014), 108.

⁵⁶ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?*, 5, 20, 25.

Methodists believed in what they viewed as a just and righteous war.⁵⁷ There was little difference between the rhetoric of the churches in 1914 in supporting the war effort.⁵⁸ However, Stuart Bell believes that the Free Churches were somewhat more 'nuanced and qualified' in their support for the war than was the Church of England.⁵⁹

Opposition to the War

Freedom of religious and moral conscience had always been cherished beliefs in Methodism. Whereas the Methodist churches prided themselves on their volunteering principles and urged young men to enlist, the issue of compulsory service was much more divisive. William Sellers asserted that many of the Methodists who had enlisted had been opposed to conscription; they had joined up as 'Free Churchmen' and 'free Englishmen'.⁶⁰ Although most Methodists, of all hues, supported the war, some, a minority, reached different conclusions. John Wilkinson was training for the Primitive Methodist ministry at Hartley College at the time of the outbreak of the war. Although the principal, H. J. Pickett assured students that the war was a righteous cause, and most other students enlisted, chiefly in the RAMC, he became a pacifist and supporter of the Fellowship of Reconciliation.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 62–63.

⁵⁸ For an examination of Nonconformist responses to war in one city, see Martin Wellings, 'Oxford's Free Churches and the Outbreak of the Great War', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 60/4 (2016): 154–65.

⁵⁹ Stuart Bell, *Faith in Conflict: The Impact of the Great War on the Faith of the People of Britain* (Solihull: Helion, 2017), 71.

⁶⁰ Sellers, *With Our Fighting Men*, 4.

⁶¹ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?*, 12.

The Military Service Act of January 1916 sharpened divisions in Methodism. Fault lines can be discerned between the Wesleyans, who, by and large, felt that conscription was equitable, and some Primitive Methodists who balked at removing individual freedom of conscience. The Methodist press illustrated these disagreements. The Wesleyan *Methodist Recorder* saw no alternative to conscription: 'we have been driven at last to compulsory military service', volunteerism had failed, and in order to prevail in the war, 'There is nothing for it but to set our teeth and go ahead, and win it by compulsion, conscription, martial law, or anything else.'⁶² The *Primitive Methodist Leader*, an advocate of voluntary enlistment, opposed compulsion as a 'grievous and fatal mistake'; likewise, *The United Methodist* described its introduction as 'a step backwards', which destroyed 'one of the cherished tenets of Liberalism'.⁶³ The *Methodist Recorder* refuted the idea that conscription was an attack on Free Church ethics: 'Nonconformity has never claimed freedom from civil or national responsibilities. Nonconformity has never rejected all form of compulsion, never refused to accept compulsion as meeting certain necessities and having august sanctions.'⁶⁴ Consistently more bellicose than any other Methodist journal, the *Methodist Recorder* was not a platform for Wesleyans who opposed conscription.

In contrast, Samuel Keeble in the *Methodist Times* called on 'Progressive Methodists everywhere' to oppose compulsory military service.⁶⁵ On 25 May 1916, the *Primitive Methodist Leader* published a letter defending the conscientious objectors' rights, signed by John Clifford, Scott Holland, A. S. Peake, F. B. Meyer, the Bishop of Lincoln and other leading

⁶² *Methodist Recorder*, 6 January 1916, 11.

⁶³ *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 13 January 1916, 19; *The United Methodist Magazine*, 6 January 1916, 5.

⁶⁴ *Methodist Recorder*, 20 January 1916, 3.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Michael Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict: Methodism, Peace and War in the Twentieth Century*. (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2008), 66.

churchmen.⁶⁶ Arthur Guttery believed that 'The Church, however patriotic', had a duty to protect 'troublesome' and 'misguided' conscientious objectors who based 'their passive resistance on loyalty to Christ'.⁶⁷ A letter published in the *Primitive Methodist Leader* in July 1916 asked:

When one considers the attitude of the Church and ministers of the Gospel to the Conscientious Objector, it seems so inconsistent, and very perplexing [. . .] Perhaps it is easier to go into the trench than face the scorn and sneers that many have had to endure for conscience sake from those who ought to have given some sympathy.⁶⁸

A. S. Peake presented a resolution to the Primitive Methodist Conference of 1916, defending the rights of COs but also lauding the far larger numbers of their followers whose conscience led them to enlist. The resolution called on Christians to obey civil authority but stressed that freedom of conscience was at the core of Free Church values. The Church requested that authorities give COs more equitable treatment, condemned brutality, and called for a broader range of national service for those whose conscience precluded them from activities associated with the war.⁶⁹ In 1918, the Primitive Methodist Conference called for the 'inalienable rights of conscience to be upheld'; the exercise of individual conscience had won freedoms for the Free Churches.⁷⁰ The Wesleyans took a different view; their Armed Forces Board regarded War Office methods of dealing with COs as 'satisfactory'.⁷¹ Whereas all three main Methodist connexions were broadly supportive of Britain's

⁶⁶ Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1974), 161.

⁶⁷ *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 16 January 1916, 11.

⁶⁸ *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 27 July 1916, 7.

⁶⁹ *Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference*, 1916, 222–23.

⁷⁰ *Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference*, 1918, 4.

⁷¹ M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Royal Navy and Army Board, 26 February 1917, 383.

participation in the war, small pacifist organisations, such as the Wesleyan Peace Fellowship led by Samuel Keeble, were formed independently of the churches.⁷²

One of the best known Methodist conscientious objectors was Bert Brocklesby, a Wesleyan local preacher. He quoted the Sixth Commandment justifying why he would have no truck with any of the compromises offered. He refused any form of non-combatant service, including sewing mailbags that might carry military mail or peeling potatoes which could feed soldiers. Brocklesby was one of three Methodists amongst sixteen 'absolutists' imprisoned in Richmond Castle. The 'Richmond Sixteen' were sent forcibly to France, where they were sentenced to death by firing squad for refusal to obey orders. However, their sentences were commuted to ten years hard labour.⁷³ Brocklesby was regularly visited in Maidstone Prison by a Wesleyan minister who gave him great comfort. Revd Robert Wardell had lost both of his sons in the war, 'Yet never did he,' wrote Brocklesby, 'by word, look or gesture, express any condemnation of my attitude.'⁷⁴ In turn, Wardell described the 'very intelligent' conscientious objectors to whom he had ministered as a prison chaplain.⁷⁵

'Conscientious Objection, indeed, has received disproportionate attention considering that only 16,500 claimed exemption on such grounds.'⁷⁶ This figure represented 0.33% of the total number of men recruited to the armed forces, either voluntarily or by conscription. Some 10,000 agreed to serve as non-combatants; however, 6,000 refused to appear before tribunals or would not accept their verdict. These men were subject to civil or

⁷² Hughes, 'British Methodists and the First World War', 323–27.

⁷³ Will Ellsworth-Jones, *We Will Not Fight: The Untold Story of the First World War's Conscientious Objectors* (London: Aurum, 2008), 83–228.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁷⁵ *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, October 1918, 631–2.

⁷⁶ Ian Beckett, Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 125.

military detention. A hard core of 1300 'absolutists', like Brocklesby, would not compromise their anti-war principles in any manner, leading to brutal treatment, periods of imprisonment, hard labour, and even the threat of the death sentence. This number included those who refused conscription on political, moral, and religious grounds or a combination of these reasons. It is not easy to divide conscientious objectors into religious and secular categories. These were, for the most part, individuals whose political and spiritual beliefs merged.⁷⁷ Of those COs who cited religious belief, the majority were Nonconformists. In a survey of 820 imprisoned 'absolutists' undertaken by the Society of Friends in 1917, 252 gave religious reasons for their stand, a third of the total. Of these, twenty-one were Methodists.⁷⁸ There were 578 conscientious objectors who identified themselves as Methodists: 297 Wesleyans, 159 Primitive Methodists, 44 United Methodists, and 78 other 'Methodists', including some Free and Independent Methodists.⁷⁹ Their numbers need to be compared with the figures for Methodists who did join the army and navy. By 1918, 280,000 Wesleyans, 150,000 Primitive Methodists and 80,000 United Methodists had joined the armed forces, a total of over half a million.⁸⁰ Methodists made up 8.5% of those who served during the war, broadly in line with their percentage of the population. Of the 16,500 COs, 3.5% identified themselves as Methodists. Historians of Methodism have tended to pay far more attention to these pacifists than their numbers

⁷⁷ Keith Robbins, 'The British Experience of Conscientious Objection', in *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced*, ed. by Hugh Cecil and Peter H. Liddle (London: Pen & Sword, 2003), 691–98; Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, 88–90.

⁷⁸ Ellsworth-Jones, *We Will Not Fight*, 89.

⁷⁹ <https://www.myprimativemethodists.org.uk> [accessed online 14.02.2019].

⁸⁰ *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1918, 227; *Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference*, 1918, 3; *Minutes of the United Methodist Church Conference*, 1918, 4; Owen Spencer Watkins, 'Dedication of the Wesleyan Memorial Chapel at Catterick Camp' in *Royal Army Chaplains Department Quarterly Journal*, vol 2 (1927), 24, 47.

warrant.⁸¹ The conscientious objectors of the Great War are far more important in retrospect than they were at the time.

The Organisation and Operation of Military Ministry

The Wesleyan Methodist Church had experience of ministry to the British armed forces in every major campaign since the Crimean War. In the Royal Navy and Army Board, they had an effective body, with delegated authority from Conference, to coordinate, promote and lead its chaplaincy. This Forces Board was seasoned in taking on the War Office, Admiralty, India Office and senior officers. Bateson, the Board's Secretary, was a sound administrator, a good publicist, and a highly effective lobbyist. The Board's minutes record the many and tenacious ways he challenged the War Office and Admiralty. Part of Bateson's authority came from the composition and experience of the Board; in addition to the current and previous Presidents of Conference, its membership included five ex-military officers, Members of Parliament and, at times, Watkins. The Board had the unequivocal support of the Conference to run all military matters, including the appointment and deployment of suitable chaplains, the directing of their ministry and their relationship with the War Office and Admiralty.⁸²

Wesleyan Methodism was able to respond rapidly and effectively to the challenge of meeting the needs of its men in the British Expeditionary Force and a new citizens' army.

⁸¹ Hughes, 'British Methodists and the First World War', 316–28.

⁸² M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Wesleyan Methodist Navy and Army Forces Board, August 1914-June 1919.

The Board met on 6 August 1914 and immediately decided to abandon their scruples and accept the War Office's standing offer of commissions for chaplains first declined in 1903. Wesleyan chaplains accompanied the British Expeditionary Force; their number included Edward Lowry and Owen Spencer Watkins, two chaplains with extensive pre-war familiarity on overseas campaigns, and Milton Morrow, the first Nonconformist chaplain to land in France on 12 August. Their experience proved invaluable, particularly in the early months of the war, examples for other chaplains to follow, Wesleyans and those from the other Free Churches. The latter modelled their military ministry on that of the Wesleyans.

The Wesleyan Armed Forces Board offered to take 'pastoral oversight' of men from other Nonconformist denominations.⁸³ The other Free Churches declined this somewhat imperious offer. Other churches wanted their followers to be represented by their ministers in much the same way as that afforded to Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians and, more latterly, Wesleyans.⁸⁴ However, the War Office and the Admiralty were anxious not to deal separately with several additional denominations.⁸⁵ Baptists, Congregationalists, Primitive and United Methodists acted in concert because they all sought official recognition and representation from the War Office, giving them status and evangelistic opportunity.⁸⁶ By the second decade of the twentieth century, the differences between these four Nonconformist denominations were increasingly minor; beliefs, chapels, ecclesiastic organisation, worship style, and associated voluntary activities were similar.⁸⁷ Over public

⁸³ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Wesleyan Methodist Navy and Army Forces Board, Meeting of the Emergency Committee of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, 6 August 1914.

⁸⁴ A.L., Minutes of the United Board, 11 November 1914.

⁸⁵ A.L., Minutes of the United Board, 20 November 1914; 4 March 1915.

⁸⁶ Neil Allison, *The Official History of the United Board: The Clash of Empires, 1914-1939* (Great Britain: United Navy, Army and Air Force Board Press, 2008), 12-18.

⁸⁷ Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1985* (London: Collins, 1986), 112.

issues such as morality, politics and social policy, they presented a united front; acting together, they presented a powerful lobby.

According to Lloyd George, there was opposition from Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, to the admittance of Nonconformist ministers into the Army Chaplains' Department.⁸⁸ There are no Cabinet minutes to substantiate Lloyd George's claims; however, a letter from Prime Minister Asquith to George V, dated 30 September, informed the King that the cabinet discussed Free Church chaplaincy.⁸⁹ Kitchener had experienced Wesleyan acting chaplains in the Sudan and South Africa, and five Wesleyan chaplains were operating with the BEF by this date. It surely did not require too much imagination on his part to envisage the commissioning of ministers from other denominations. It is also fair to assume that the Secretary of State for War had more pressing priorities in September 1914. Although Lloyd George's version of this 'row' needs to be treated with circumspection, it is fair to assume some disagreement about extending denominational representation in the army. The alliance with Nonconformity had served the Liberal Party well, Lloyd George especially so. It suited him to present himself as a powerful advocate of the Free Churches throughout the war.

J. H. Shakespeare, Secretary of the Baptist Union from 1898 to 1924, was the main driver in ensuring Free Church ministerial representation in the armed forces, his close association with Lloyd George strengthening his hand. Shakespeare invited Congregational, Primitive and United Methodist Churches representatives to approve a common approach to armed forces representation. All four churches agreed to form a United Congress to

⁸⁸ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, 2 vols (London: Odhams, 1938), I, 752.

⁸⁹ Peter Howson, *Muddling Through: The Organisation of British Army Chaplaincy in World War 1* (Solihull: Helion, 2013), 45.

promote the Free Churches' interests with the army and navy. On 14 January 1915, this became the United Navy and Army Board. In November 1915, the United Board established that chaplains would be appointed by a ratio of one third for the Baptists, one third for the Congregationalists and one sixth for each of the two Methodist churches. The United Board requested chaplaincy nominations from each denomination, according to these quotas, and deployed them in response to Chaplaincy Department requests.⁹⁰ Separately, each of the four United Board churches funded their chaplaincy and other war work, such as huts and 'comforts' for the troops. Welsh Calvinist Methodists took part in initial discussions but decided to eschew this coordinated approach, favouring seeking direct recognition.⁹¹

Overtures from the four denominations, and suggestions from the War Office that the Wesleyans join the United Board, were rejected, Bateson insisting that 'Wesleyan ministers be appointed to the pastoral oversight of Wesleyan soldiers.'⁹² There was an element of Wesleyan superiority, of zealously guarding the status that had been so hard-won over the previous sixty years. During the later years of Victoria's reign, the Wesleyans viewed themselves as representing Protestant Nonconformity in Britain's forces. However, the Wesleyans did 'rejoice' at the United Board's formation as increasing Free Church influence in the services.⁹³ In turn, the *Primitive Methodist Leader* acknowledged the debt of gratitude that the other Free Churches owed to Wesleyan work with the armed forces, whilst claiming, with considerable justification, that it would have been better if all Methodists were united in their military ministry.⁹⁴ One body representing all Free Churches and their followers would have increased their influence within the army and navy.

⁹⁰ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 198–200.

⁹¹ A.L., Minutes of the United Board, 20 November 1914.

⁹² M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Royal Navy and Army Board, 25 November 1914, 175.

⁹³ M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Royal Navy and Army Board, 25 January 1915, 188.

⁹⁴ *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 13 January 1916, 19.

Denominational arithmetic would have secured chaplaincy representation on a par with the Catholic and Presbyterian Churches. In the armed forces of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, where Methodist unity had already occurred, Methodism enjoyed equality of status with that of the other three major denominations.⁹⁵

The role of the chaplain was ill-defined during the early stages of the war.⁹⁶ Revd P. Middleton Brumwell, a Wesleyan chaplain from May 1915 until the end of the war and beyond, criticised the Army Chaplains' Department's lack of preparedness. He claimed that there was no mobilisation table nor plans for attachment, no plans for rations or accommodation.⁹⁷ During the first two years of the war, most recently appointed chaplains relied upon others' example and the direction provided by their denomination. A few Wesleyan chaplains, such as Watkins and Lowry, had gained experience during the South African War; others such as Sellers had ministered to troops in peacetime at garrisons such as Aldershot. Fifty-three Wesleyan ministers served in the ranks before being commissioned as chaplains, and seven more had gained useful experience as officiating chaplains with the Royal Navy before becoming army chaplains.⁹⁸ These examples, though significant, are exceptions; most Methodist padres had no previous military experience. For some, it was the first ministerial appointment after ordination. It was not uncommon that they found themselves serving on the Western Front less than a week after learning of their commission. Richard Rider described having had no role model before he was appointed

⁹⁵ Crerar, "'Where's the Padre?'" , 143; David Marshall, "'Khaki Has Become a Sacred Colour'", 102-31; Michael Gladwin, *Captains of the Soul: A History of Australian Army Chaplains* (Newport, N. S. W, Australia: Big Sky Publishing, 2013), 11–97; Samantha Frapnell, 'Methodism and the Crisis of Nationalism' in *New Zealand's Great War: New Zealand, the Allies, and the First World War*, ed. by John Crawford and Ian McGibbon. (Auckland: Exisle, 2007), 137–41.

⁹⁶ Howson, *Muddling Through*, 45.

⁹⁷ Percy Middleton Brumwell, *The Army Chaplain: The Royal Army Chaplains' Department: The Duties of Chaplains* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1943), 45.

⁹⁸ M.A.R.C., Wesleyan Methodist Armed Forces, Service Records, 1914-1919, MA 1991/1.

chaplain, no previous contact with a padre, and 'not having received any information about what was expected of him, he had to plough his own furrow. No one took over a position with less to guide him than a Chaplain in those days.'⁹⁹

Methodist ministers joined the Army Chaplains' Department dominated by the Church of England. There were 117 commissioned chaplains in the British Army on the outbreak of war: eighty-nine Anglicans, seventeen Roman Catholics and eleven Presbyterians. Most chaplains, including the first Methodists, were deployed to field ambulance units and base hospitals. As the army expanded rapidly, these allocations proved to be inadequate in both numbers and location. The broadening denominational background of the army also created tensions in chaplaincy provision and organisation. By August 1915, there were 1,164 commissioned chaplains, a ten-fold increase over the previous year. Seven denominations were now represented rather than the three recognised at the start of the war.¹⁰⁰ Wesleyan, United Board, Welsh Calvinist and Jewish chaplains had joined the Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Presbyterians. Principal Chaplain, Irish Presbyterian Dr John Simms, had authority over chaplains from all denominations on the Western Front. The Department struggled to manage the increased number and diversity of its chaplains.

In July 1915, the War Office divided chaplaincy on the Western Front into Anglican and non-Anglican. The Bishop of Khartoum, L.H. Gwynne, was appointed as Deputy Chaplain General responsible for all Church of England chaplains in Flanders. Simms remained responsible for the other denominations. Although the aim was to improve the

⁹⁹ Rider, *Reflections on the Battlefield*, 76.

¹⁰⁰ *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914-1920* (London: War Office, 1922).

management and oversight of Anglican chaplains on the Western Front, two parallel structures were now in place. This arrangement was organisationally and administratively flawed, and it caused concerns to the Free Churches.¹⁰¹ Similar models were not followed in either other theatres of war or the Dominion armies. Anglican separateness and superiority were now confirmed. A Wesleyan chaplain commented on how this arrangement divided Anglicans from other denominations: 'Some C. of E. Chaplains have retained, with their separate organisation, a certain exclusiveness and still cling to the idea that they have the undefined right in the way not held by Roman Catholics and Nonconformists.'¹⁰²

A repeated complaint from the Nonconformist churches was over the matter of attestation. This issue was significant for two reasons: chaplains were allocated based on the number of men recorded as identifying with a denomination, and the churches wanted to show that their followers were doing their bit for the national cause. Recruiting Sergeants unsurprisingly had other priorities than correctly recording religious affiliation. Men who were not Roman Catholics were routinely listed as 'Church of England', and others informed that their 'fancy religions' were not recognised. G. V. Dennis' experience in a 'Kitchener Battalion' of the King's Royal Rifle Corps was that the army was cavalier about a soldier's denomination:

Every man in the battalion had to declare his religion, for, of course, there were church parades. Those with no recognised denomination quickly found one, or the Sgt. listed him as C. of E.. I declared to be a Wesleyan because, as soon as I joined the army, the only minister who took the trouble to seek me out and correspond

¹⁰¹ A.L., Minutes of the United Board, 22 September 1915.

¹⁰² Tiplady, *The Soul of the Soldier*, 45.

was the Rev. C. H. Hubbert, a Wesleyan minister. [. . .] Not that the army was so particular as to the care of its men, from a religious point of view.¹⁰³

Bateson claimed that recruits were given two denominational choices: C. of E. or Catholic. As a result of lobbying by the Board, numbers of Methodists recorded in one division rocketed from 'a few dozen Methodists [. . .] to a couple of thousand.'¹⁰⁴ The United Board claimed that the War Office had 'exploited their patriotism'.¹⁰⁵ The Methodist churches regarded the matter as crucial to securing their military ministry: 'This whole question of registration vitally affects our ability to minister to our own men in the Army.'¹⁰⁶ With some irony, the United Board believed that their followers were sometimes recorded as Wesleyans.¹⁰⁷

The Methodist churches complained of unequal treatment of their chaplains and adherents.¹⁰⁸ An example of such discrimination was the refusal, by the Adjutant General, of the Wesleyan Church's request that its senior chaplain, O. S. Watkins, be allowed the use of a car to visit the fifty-two Wesleyan chaplains for whom he had responsibility; this, despite the facts that a Methodist layman had supplied the vehicle, and that Anglican, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian senior chaplains had use of a car.¹⁰⁹ Another irritation was the fact that it cost Nonconformist soldiers more to get married than their Anglican comrades.¹¹⁰ Such petty unfairness reinforced the Methodist view of War Office and army discrimination.

¹⁰³ I.W.M., Private Papers of G. V. Dennis, 78/58/1, 57.

¹⁰⁴ *Methodist Recorder*, 14 January 1915, 4.

¹⁰⁵ A.L., Minutes of the United Board, 10 February 1916.

¹⁰⁶ *United Methodist Church Minutes of Conference*, 1918, 25,

¹⁰⁷ A.L., Minutes of the United Board, 22 September 1915.

¹⁰⁸ R.A.Ch.D.A., The War Office, Complaint of Wesleyan Army & Navy Board of Unequal Treatment with Church of England, Cl/ Gen No./4502 Precedent Book (Wesleyan and Other Denominations), (May 1915); A.L., Minutes of the United Board, 22 September 1915.

¹⁰⁹ M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Royal Navy and Army Board, 24 January 1916, 280; 28 February 1916, 241.

¹¹⁰ M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Royal Navy and Army Board, 4 June 1917, 408.

Wesleyan and United Board frequent complaints that the Church of England enjoyed exalted status in army chaplaincy had substance. The 'Non-C. of E.' churches felt aggrieved at the preferment given to Anglican chaplaincy: separate organisation, representation, allocation of resources and even military honours. In March 1916, Lloyd George spoke to officer trainees in North Wales of his efforts to end the Church of England's dominance in the army.¹¹¹ He was a supportive ally when he became Secretary of State for War in June 1916, expressing concerns about the organisation of army chaplaincy: 'There is considerable risk of inequalities of treatment being established by reason of the different authorities representing different denominations with which the War Office is at present dealing.'¹¹² Dr Simms attended a meeting of the Wesleyan Forces Board in June 1916 to discuss unequal treatment.¹¹³ A deputation of all non-Anglican Protestant churches, a 'coalition of the disaffected' as Michael Snape termed it, met with Lloyd George on 26 July 1916.¹¹⁴ They were disaffected for a good reason. Lloyd George was informed that Anglicans were over-represented and favoured in promoting chaplains; the other churches had suffered discrimination.¹¹⁵ The meeting's result was the creation of the Interdenominational Advisory Committee (I.A.C.), at which all major Christian denominations were represented. Lloyd George's role as a champion of Nonconformity was important, as was the non-Anglican denominations' willingness to work together.

Peter Howson believes that the I.A.C.'s creation saw arguments and infighting over numbers and allocations calm down.¹¹⁶ Lord Derby chaired the I.A.C., which consisted of

¹¹¹ Morgan Watcyn-Williams, *From Khaki to Cloth: Autobiography of Morgan Watcyn-Williams*. (Caernarvon: the Calvinistic Methodist Book Agency, 1949), 66.

¹¹² Quoted in Howson, *Muddling Through*, 107.

¹¹³ M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Royal Navy and Army Board, 26 June 1916, 327-9.

¹¹⁴ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 202.

¹¹⁵ M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Royal Navy and Army Board, 5 September 1916, 344-5.

¹¹⁶ Howson, *Muddling Through*, 101.

representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Scotland, the United Free Church, the Presbyterian Church of England, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the United Board and the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists. The Chaplain General, who was, naturally, Anglican, also attended. The I.A.C. functioned remarkably well, given the diversity of faith traditions that it represented.¹¹⁷ Despite this broad representation, Shakespeare, the United Board spokesman and Bateson, Secretary of the Wesleyan Forces Board, dominated meetings. Chaplaincy was now allocated on a more equitable basis, reflecting better the army's religious composition. Simms appointed senior chaplains from each of the four main non-Anglican denominations to exercise pastoral and spiritual authority over chaplains from their church; Watkins fulfilled this role for the Wesleyans and J. Penry Davey, a United Methodist, for the United Board. The numbers of United Board and Wesleyan chaplains increased due to these improved allocations, and the I.A.C. gave voice at the highest level to Free Churchmen. J. H. Thompson saw this as a 'coming of age' for Nonconformity, a challenge to Anglican dominance in the army.¹¹⁸

Ministry on the Western Front: Meeting Spiritual, Pastoral and Military Need

Methodist chaplains were particularly well-equipped for the type of peripatetic ministry which faced them on active service. Itineracy had been a feature of the movement since its

¹¹⁷ Allison, *The Official History of the United Board*, 38–42.

¹¹⁸ Thompson, 'The Free Church Army Chaplain, 1830-1930', 367.

earliest days. Circuit preaching was some preparation for ministering to men scattered across a Division or numerous and frequently changing battery positions. Methodist chaplains often travelled considerable distances on foot, by bicycle, on horseback or by cadged lifts. Revd H. A. Meek, a chaplain to a South Midland Division, likened his role to that of Wesley's travelling preachers: 'The chaplain in the firing line may well claim to be an old-fashioned Methodist preacher. He moves from place to place on horseback and holds services in any shelter that presents itself: a shattered house, a great barn or more often in the open air.'¹¹⁹ Methodism had, since the 1740s, thrived as a result of its flexibility; its ministry's ability to adapt to rapidly changing and highly challenging circumstances served it well during the Great War.

Wesleyan chaplain Herbert Cowl described to his mother a service held before the Battle of Loos:

On Sunday morning I had a fine parade service, with about 150 present. It was held in a field, with a fine east wind sweeping through our pillarless temple and a flood of sunlight. I had the men formed in three sides of a square; and I ordered them to sit down while I 'preached'. I wish you could have seen them listen! I will not soon forget it. I did not give them a 'text'—but it would have been "To me to live is Christ".¹²⁰ I do trust that some chose and some re-chose Christ.¹²¹

Cowl was wounded at Loos, and the hospital ship, returning him home, hit a mine in the Channel, injuring him further. During his convalescence, he gave a talk on his chaplaincy experience, describing holding services in cowsheds, barns and open fields:

¹¹⁹ *Methodist Recorder*, 29 July 1915, 10.

¹²⁰ Philippians, 1. 21.

¹²¹ Sarah Reay, *The Half-Shilling Curate: A Personal Account of War and Faith 1914-1918* (Solihull: Helion, 2016), 70.

In those strange places the Word of God was preached Sunday to Sunday [. . .] There the men sat on the floor with their rifles and munitions, and with their faces besmeared with mud they had brought from the trenches. There they sat and listened [. . .] There was no place for creeds, or sects, or theories — they must tell those men that there was a Christ in their midst — a Christ who belonged to them, and to whom they belonged, to whom they could reach out their hands and grasp his even while they were there, and were going back to the dread scenes of the trenches, and the message was — be not afraid, because He is with you.¹²²

Men were generally held to hate Parade Services, but United Methodist chaplain R. Strong claimed that the troops enjoyed the continuity and familiarity: ‘The whole of their life here is more or less abnormal; the parade is a constant feature of their life so that the average Tommy doesn’t grouse about Church parades, so far as I have seen, unless the padre finds a foolish time for it.’¹²³ Sergeant G. V. Dennis, who served in the same company as Anthony Eden, described services conducted by Wesleyan chaplain Sayer Ellis: ‘The quiet morning service followed by Holy Communion was very impressive. The occasion was one of simple reverence.’¹²⁴

Such organised services were only a part of the Methodist chaplain’s spiritual ministry; much of their work was far more extempore. For example, during the Battle of Loos, November 1915, Primitive Methodist chaplain, George Kendall, visited men of the 12th Division in their front line trenches on the night before they went into battle, reassuring them with words from Revelation: ‘He that overcometh shall inherit all this; and I will be his God and he shall be my son [. . .] and they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations

¹²² Reay, 119.

¹²³ Henry Smith, *Stories from the Front / by United Methodist Chaplains* (London: Henry Hooks, 1917), 62.

¹²⁴ I.W.M., Private Papers of G. V. Dennis, 78/58/1, 57.

into it.¹²⁵ Before the Battle of Arras, in April 1917, Kendall was attached to the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers, when, following a boxing match in a farmyard, he leapt onto a dunghill to deliver an impromptu Easter Service:

Boys, I am not much of a boxer, but I am a fighter. How do the words run? Listen. Fight the good fight. That is it, and what a great warfare. Hear the advice of a man of long ago. Who had witnessed such scenes in the arena: "I fight, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway".¹²⁶ We need to keep in training just as our friend here, who has given us so much amusement. But there is a time for everything; you have had your turn, now I want mine. It is Easter Sunday, and our loved ones at home are singing praises to God for the greatest victory of all. We are all soon to enter into action, and before another Sunday comes, we may have fought our last fight. Just let us sing a few hymns and be at one with those at home on this day of all days. Come along: who will join me?

Not surprisingly, 'not one moved, they all joined in [. . .] it brought infinite comfort, and strengthened the bond of friendship between the men and the chaplain'.¹²⁷ Philip Fisher, Primitive Methodist padre, frequently found conditions for a formal Sunday service impossible, and such worship was infrequent. Instead, he exercised his ministry through week-night meetings or classes and chats with the men.¹²⁸

Nonconformist soldiers frequently went for many weeks between chaplains' visits, especially during the rapid movement that typified the first months of fighting in Belgium

¹²⁵ Revelation 21. 7, 26.

¹²⁶ 1 Corinthians 9. 26-27.

¹²⁷ George Kendall, *Daring All Things: The Autobiography of George Kendall (1881-1961)* (Solihull: Helion, 2016), 101.

¹²⁸ Philip Fisher, *Khaki Vignettes* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1917), 74.

and France and later in other theatres. Methodist soldiers had pre-war experience of local preachers and society meetings led by the laity. Men maintained their faith through informal worship and classes, which had always been a feature of Methodist observance at home. Small groups met, often led by an NCO, for hymn singing, prayer and Bible study. The *Methodist Recorder* of 28 January 1915 reassured its readers that the faithful at the front attended class meetings led by lay preachers.¹²⁹ Lay preachers were sometimes clergy serving as enlisted men, former ministerial students or experienced local preachers. Such flexibility in worship distinguished the Free Churches from the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. It was a reminder of how Methodists in the army had kept their faith alive during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The strong faith which had imbued men in civilian life helped support them during their war service. Ernest Goodridge was from a typically committed Wesleyan Methodist background: two Sunday services, weekly Bible class and prayer meetings, Band of Hope, and Sunday School. On enlisting and becoming a corporal in the King's Royal Rifle Corps, he used the Wesleyan small red book, 'On Active Service for God and King', which he referred to as the 'Wesleyan Soldier's Rosary', as the basis of his daily devotions.¹³⁰ Hymnody was especially significant to Methodist soldiers. Singing familiar hymns was a comfort, an attachment to the home church and family, and an expression of belief. When asked to choose, Tiplady said that men opted for: *Rock of Ages, Fight the Good Fight, Oh God Our Help in Ages Past, Abide with Me* and *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*.¹³¹

¹²⁹ *Methodist Recorder*, 28 January 1915, 4.

¹³⁰ I.W.M., Earnest Goodricke, 'The Same Stars Shine' : The Great War Diary and Letters of Corporal Ernest Goodricke, 00/1077, 113; The Wesleyan Methodist Church, 'On Active Service for God and King', Private Papers of A. W. Davies, 01/48/1.

¹³¹ Tiplady, *The Soul of the Soldier*, 29, 46.

Dennis Wilson, from Clavering in Essex, came from a Primitive Methodist background. In 1916, aged 18, he joined the Essex Regiment before transferring to the 11th Battalion of the Border Regiment and active service in Belgium. His correspondence to his family quoted lines from well-loved hymns, including *Lead Kindly Light* and *God Be with You Till We Meet Again*. In addition, he referred to the mainstays of Primitive Methodism: the Circuit Plan, Camp Meetings, Sunday School Anniversaries and services at home in rural Essex. His cards and letters make it clear that his faith sustained him on active service. His poignant last letter home, written on 7 July 1917, three days before his death near Nieuwpoort, talks of memories of home, family and his enduring faith:

My Dears, I am longing for the time to come when I shall see your dear faces again but whatever is our lot I can say. Heaven is my abiding home. Jesus is my Refuge, my Helper & Comforter & in him I am trusting for all things. It does cheer the child of God to know that we have a Fatherly care over us, & whatsoever pathway have to tread, I can say, it is well with my soul.¹³²

Throughout the early months of the war, the Methodist press predicted and reported signs of a revival among the soldiers at home and at the Front.¹³³ In November 1915, the *Methodist Magazine* described 'a remarkable revival of religion.'¹³⁴ In the early months of the war, John Boullier, who served twenty months in the Royal Field Artillery before being commissioned as a Wesleyan chaplain in 1916, described conversions of soldiers, British and Belgian. The celebrated evangelist, 'Gypsy' Smith, visited the Western

¹³² Dennis Wilson, Private Papers, 1916-1917, Clavering History Society, Essex (Grateful thanks to Mrs Jacqueline Cooper, Clavering Local History Recorder, Clavering Local History Collection, who kindly drew my attention to, and supplied me with, copies of this material).

¹³³ *Methodist Recorder*, 22 October 1914, 3; 5 November 1914, 3.

¹³⁴ *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, November 1915, 884.

Front on revivalist missions.¹³⁵ More akin to Methodist worship at home than the more formal Parade Services, voluntary services and YMCA meetings provided opportunities for men to make a Christian commitment. Such services were often revivalist in tone and concluded with an 'altar call'. Allison believes that in some units, especially those with a strong Nonconformist presence, there were elements of a religious revival on the Western Front in 1914 and 1915.¹³⁶ Although there was no mass religious 'resurgence', he stated, 'chaplains were satisfied with their revivalist work during the war'.¹³⁷ Snape, too, concluded that revivals among some soldiers did occur but that deaths, injuries, troop transfers and reorganisation snuffed out these nascent movements.¹³⁸ The published accounts by Methodist chaplains are much more circumspect. Herbert Cowl differentiated between the evangelistic opportunities in camps at home and those at the Front, where he saw no evidence of conversions.¹³⁹ Thomas Tiplady longed for such an awakening: 'There will surely be a revival of religion in France. There is a revival.'¹⁴⁰ Philip Fisher was more sceptical: 'Great manifestations of a revival character may have occurred in some instances, but they have not within the range of my knowledge.'¹⁴¹ During the first months of the war, L. B. Westerdale witnessed spirit-filled Methodist meetings at Aldershot and Salisbury Plain but saw the belief in a 'Holy Crusade' fade.¹⁴² In 1919, Revd W. Rushby was emphatic: 'The alleged "revival in the trenches" never took place.'¹⁴³ The evidence is inconclusive; as

¹³⁵ John Boullier, *Jottings by a Gunner and Chaplain* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1917), 68.

¹³⁶ Neil Allison, 'Free Church Revivalism in the British Army during the First World War', in *The Clergy in Khaki*, ed. by Michael Snape and Edward Madigan, 41–56.

¹³⁷ Allison, *The Official History of the United Board*, 74.

¹³⁸ Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London: Routledge, 2005), 167–68.

¹³⁹ Reay, *The Half-Shilling Curate*, 144.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas Tiplady, *The Cross at the Front* (London: Flemming H. Revell, 1917), 75.

¹⁴¹ Fisher, *Khaki Vignettes*, 133.

¹⁴² Westerdale, *Messages from Mars*, 84.

¹⁴³ W. Rushby, 'The Soldiers' Ideas of Religion', in *The Christ of the Soldier: Essays Chiefly by Wesleyan Methodist Ex-Chaplains*, ed. by F. L. Wiseman. (London: Epworth Press, 1919), 50.

Westerdale judged, the conflict had neither a positive nor a negative impact upon the faith of those who fought. 'Among the Nonconformists we find things much the same as at home. The men who were religious there are religious here, with a few exceptions.'¹⁴⁴

The chaplain's role on active service encompassed an extensive range of roles; his contribution to the men went beyond the narrowly spiritual. Most chaplains were based at either advanced dressing stations during battle, described by a United Methodist chaplain as 'the Good Samaritan's cave', or casualty clearing stations.¹⁴⁵ A. F. Knott described his experiences at the First Battle of Ypres in November 1914 for readers of the *Methodist Recorder*: 'I have just returned from the field dressing station this morning. The scenes were awful. I have not heard how many were killed, but I have seen nearly a hundred wounded this morning.'¹⁴⁶ During the Battle of Loos, United Methodist Revd W. H. Jefferies tended wounds and ministered to dying men for three days and two nights, ignoring denomination: 'I felt that the Master himself would never have noticed these discs. Sufficient for Him that there were men in need. I felt glad that in this ministry I could act as though they were not there. Those wounds had united us, even by blood.'¹⁴⁷ Robert Rider described his role during the Battle of the Somme. At the advanced dressing station, he bandaged wounds, administered anaesthetics, assisted with fitting splints and helped with the evacuation of the injured. Later, he identified the dead, collected effects to be returned to the bereaved, conducted burials and carefully noted the position of graves.¹⁴⁸ John Boullier was attached to the 91st Field Ambulance during the first days of the battle. He attended the wounded, comforted the dying, buried the dead and wrote to the families of 'his flock'. At other times,

¹⁴⁴ Westerdale, *Messages from Mars*, 84.

¹⁴⁵ Smith, *Stories from the Front*, 35.

¹⁴⁶ *Methodist Recorder*, 10 December 1914, 6.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, *Stories from the Front*, 45.

¹⁴⁸ Rider, *Reflections on the Battlefield*, 121.

his roles included acting as billeting officer and visiting the Field Cashier to collect and distribute money for his unit. His duties encompassed accompanying a man sentenced to death for cowardice and desertion.¹⁴⁹ Ministers attached to the Royal Flying Corps, Royal Naval Air Service, and later the Royal Air Force also wrote letters to the bereaved.¹⁵⁰ The chaplain was often the unit censor checking hundreds of letters a week; perhaps not surprisingly, Rider made an informal agreement with the men in the unit to which he was attached to 'lightly censor' their letters home.¹⁵¹

Frank Fairfax, United Methodist chaplain, ran a 'Free Church Institute' in a disused college. It had a canteen providing: 'chocolate, boot laces, writing paper, metal polish, baking powder, pipe cleaners and all things desirable to a Tommy', sold at lower prices than in French shops. There was a bar dispensing tea, buns and biscuits, a lecture room, 'our university', and an 'Inner Room' with a gramophone, newspapers, games and a piano. He describes services jointly taken by a Wesleyan lieutenant, Primitive, United and Wesleyan private soldiers, and a United Board chaplain.¹⁵² Fairfax saw no dichotomy between meeting soldiers' practical and religious needs. Wesleyan padre, John Clark Gibson, saw the temporal and spiritual sides of his role as inextricably linked: 'He must first become a man's friend if he is to lead him to Christ. He must live with him, smoke with him, march with him, suffer with him, before he could attempt effective spiritual ministry.'¹⁵³ Clark Gibson's experience

¹⁴⁹ Boullier, *Jottings by a Gunner and Chaplain*, 68–87.

¹⁵⁰ Nigel Steel and Peter Hart, *Tumult in the Clouds: The British Experience of the War in the Air, 1914-1918* (London: Coronet, 1998), 77.

¹⁵¹ Rider, *Reflections on the Battlefield*, 121.

¹⁵² Smith, *Stories from the Front*, 77.

¹⁵³ John Clark Gibson, 'What Is the Church For?', in *The Christ of the Soldier: Essays Chiefly by Wesleyan Methodist Ex-Chaplains*, ed. by F. L. Wiseman, 75.

serving alongside men at the front had caused him to abandon the Nonconformist disapproval of tobacco that had been commonplace before the war.

The *Primitive Methodist Leader* published an appeal from a 'P. M. Local and Sherwood Forester' for books and games for the men in camp.¹⁵⁴ Another letter from a Primitive Methodist soldier thanked readers for a box of 'comforts' containing cigarettes, socks, and Gospels.¹⁵⁵ Wesleyan soldiers were given a book of prayers and hymns, *On Active Service for God and King*, together with a 'housewife', a small sewing kit. Individual churches sent parcels of 'comforts' to their worshippers serving in the army, made up of 'shirts, pants, Balaclava helmets, socks, scarves, body belts and handkerchiefs', but also containing testaments and temperance pledge cards.¹⁵⁶ Practical and spiritual 'comforts' were delivered and distributed together. It is clear from the memoirs, letters, diaries and reminiscences of the men who served this connection with the church at home was of great comfort.¹⁵⁷

Amongst the best-known chaplain entertainers was the Australian Methodist Padre Gault. His 'fun nights' in France, delivered to audiences of up to 2000 men, Australian and British, and separately for the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, included quizzes and parlour games with prizes, drawing competitions, humorous monologues and ditties, and the singing of favourites such as *Tipperary* and *Goodbye*. They concluded with the hymn *Abide with Me*, a ten-minute address, the twenty-third psalm and a prayer. Amusing the men and women and meeting their spiritual needs was 'a priceless evangelical opportunity' for

¹⁵⁴ *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 4 March 1915, 139.

¹⁵⁵ *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 6 January 1915, 5.

¹⁵⁶ *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, January 1916, 4.

¹⁵⁷ I.W.M., Private Papers of G. V. Dennis, 78/58/1; William Chapman, Interview 7309; Tom Barker War Service, 09/48/1.

Gault.¹⁵⁸ Although not all chaplains proved as effective entertainers as Gault, organising such diversions as boxing and football matches, concerts, and 'stunts' was the chaplain's lot. It was a vital part of his role in maintaining morale and providing an alternative to less wholesome diversions.

The concern that chaplains were devoting their time and energy to activities other than meeting soldiers' spiritual needs was apparent during the war. Anglican chaplain, Geoffrey Gordon, summed up what he saw as army chaplaincy's dilemma: 'Mr. God or M. Cinema — for which does the chaplain stand? Does the soldier think of his Padre in the main as the representative of God, or chiefly as the provider of canteens, cinemas, and creature comforts?'¹⁵⁹ Among those who later criticised chaplains for substituting 'Holy Grocery' for their spiritual purpose was Stephen Loudon, who claimed that 'the specifically religious activities of chaplains took second place', especially for clergymen without a strongly sacramental ministry'.¹⁶⁰ He maintained that there was an absence of spiritual references in the writings of these padres. That is certainly not the case for Methodist chaplains such as Kendall, Cowl and Tiplady. Such criticism was unmerited. In effective ministry, spiritual, moral, and practical needs were dealt with together.¹⁶¹ For forty years, Wesleyan Soldiers' Homes had provided accommodation and meals in addition to fellowship and worship. Methodist ministers at home organised and led a broad range of associational and recreational activities; chapel life was social, educational and philanthropic, as well as spiritual. Wesley had sought to ensure that the poor were fed and clothed and that the

¹⁵⁸ Linder, *The Long Tragedy*, 136–38.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Pym, *Papers from Picardy, by Two Chaplains, the Rev. T.W. Pym and the Rev. Geoffrey Gordon* (London: Constable, 1917), 108.

¹⁶⁰ Stephen Loudon, *Chaplains in Conflict: The Role of Army Chaplains since 1914* (London: Avon Books, 1996), 43, 59.

¹⁶¹ Sellers, *With Our Fighting Men*, 19.

movement cared for widows and orphans. Anglican chaplain Harry Blackburne recounts how he discussed with Bishop Gwynne his concerns that too much of his attention was devoted to the provision of buns: 'I rather moaned to the Bishop that I had to spend so much of my time looking after buns, but he cheered me by saying, "Never mind, they are sanctified buns." Certainly, tea and buns can be a kind of sacrament to these dear fellows, so that, if club-running is "holy grocery," it is at any rate "holy".'¹⁶² The term 'Holy Grocery', rather than being derogatory, is a singularly apt description of providing practical support as a mark of Christian ministry.

Gary Sheffield believed that maintaining morale was at the heart of the chaplain's mission.¹⁶³ In a denominationally pluralist citizens' army, chaplains from all traditions sustained the morale of the men they served. Although the General Staff and unit commanding officers were never hostile to chaplaincy, there was a widely held view in 1914 and 1915 that the padre's role was at the hospital with the injured and well behind the front line. Sir Douglas Haig, Commander in Chief from December 1915, realised the value of chaplaincy. Snape describes a definite change in the attitude of the General Staff to military ministry from the date of his appointment. Chaplains needed to be encouraged and seen at the front because they inculcated the values that Britain was fighting for and boosted morale.¹⁶⁴ Good morale, Haig believed, could help to win this war of attrition. Haig told Harry Blackburne: 'tell your chaplains that a good chaplain is as valuable as a good general.'¹⁶⁵ His stout Presbyterian faith convinced him that this was not only a military crusade. Most of Haig's senior officers were also devout, including the

¹⁶² Harry Blackburne, *This Also Happened on the Western Front* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), 60.

¹⁶³ Gary Sheffield, *Command and Morale: The British Army on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2014), 156.

¹⁶⁴ Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, 91–96.

¹⁶⁵ Blackburne, *This Also Happened on the Western Front*, 115.

five Army Commanders on the Western Front: Horne, Plumer, Byng, Rawlinson, and Gough. Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Horne, Commander of the First Army, met with the chaplains in his army in March 1916 and made clear his view of their military value:

‘History tells us how men fight for a cause which concerns their religion. If we have religious enthusiasm with a high standard of devotion to duty and self-sacrifice which inspires our troops, we gain a great deal.’¹⁶⁶ John Boullier, present at that meeting, realised the military importance that the army attached to chaplaincy work: ‘Today religion is not only tolerated, but it is strongly encouraged by the officials. They realise as they have never done before, the importance of religion and the influence which the Padre can bring to bear upon Tommy.’¹⁶⁷ In February 1919, Haig wrote to George Kendall expressing his appreciation of:

The wonderful work which ministers of religion of all churches have carried out with so much steadfastness and courage through four and a half years of war.

To the chaplains of all denominations serving with our forces the war was a crusade [. . .] They taught our soldiers what they were fighting for, strengthened their resolution in the time of trial, comforted the stricken and at all times set an example which had a powerful influence for good upon the daily life of all.

No man can lightly estimate how much they have contributed to the triumph of our cause.¹⁶⁸

It is difficult to question the bravery, moral and physical, of chaplains of all denominations. Twelve Methodist chaplains, nine Wesleyans and three United Methodists,

¹⁶⁶ R.A.Ch.D.A., General Horne, An Address to the Chaplains, 1st Corps, 6 March 1916,

¹⁶⁷ Boullier, *Jottings by a Gunner and Chaplain*, 77–78.

¹⁶⁸ Kendall, *Daring All Things*, 135.

were amongst the 192 chaplains who died either on active service or shortly thereafter.¹⁶⁹

Five of these ministers were killed in action, six died from disease, and one committed suicide.¹⁷⁰ Thirty-nine Methodist padres: five Primitive Methodists, seven United Methodists and twenty-seven Wesleyans, received the Military Cross; many were awarded other honours. They included Herbert Leggett, Primitive Methodist, who was awarded the MC twice, once 'for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty' in attending to wounded men in an advanced aid post, and on the second occasion, for rescuing casualties under heavy machine gun fire. William Jefferies, United Methodist, also received an MC 'for three times swimming across a river with the wounded after a bridge had been blown up'. Wesleyan padre Theophilus Harris was awarded his MC 'while helping extricate men from fallen masonry and debris' at Ypres in August 1915, bravery which cost him a leg.¹⁷¹

Irrespective of danger, the chaplain's place was with the men as United Methodist W. P. Rhodes explained:

If a chaplain thought first of his own skin, he had better stay at home, for his duty takes him constantly amidst danger. "But you don't have to go into the trenches?" I am sometimes asked; and there is no surprise to hear that many of us have practically lived in the trenches for months at a time. "Aren't you afraid?" they ask. And I can't deny that I am. But when duty has called, my trust has always overcome my fear.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Peter Howson, 'Deaths Among Army Chaplains, 1914-1920', *The Journal for Army Historical Research* 85 (2005): 63-77.

¹⁷⁰ M.A.R.C., Wesleyan Methodist Armed Forces Service Records 1914-1919, MA 1991/ 1; *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1919, 101.

¹⁷¹ Allison, *The Official History of the United Board*, 61, 63, 128-29; M.A.R.C., Wesleyan Methodist Armed Forces Service Records 1914-1919, MA 1999/1.

¹⁷² Smith, *Stories from the Front*, 81.

O. S. Watkins' experience in the first two years of the war, and previously in Sudan and South Africa, convinced him that a chaplain's place was in the front line. In November 1916, Watkins told his chaplains to ignore an order forbidding them from front-line service. He was reportedly threatened with court martial but responded by asking how it would look if a senior chaplain were to be court-martialled for insisting on ministry to the injured and dying. The order was withdrawn.¹⁷³

Successful chaplains of all denominations won their men's respect through their example; they were the embodiment of their preached doctrines.¹⁷⁴ James Green, Methodist Senior Chaplain Australian Imperial Force, who had served in Egypt, Gallipoli, and France (and during the South African War), articulated what was demanded of the chaplain:

His spiritual equipment is in his mind and heart. The soldier does not enquire about what college the padre comes from, or what qualifications and titles before and after his name stand for. Whether he is a bishop, a great evangelist, or a popular preacher means little to the men. What the men ask is, "What sort of chap is he? How is he sticking it? What has he got to say? Does he help a fellow?"¹⁷⁵

G. V. Dennis greatly admired Sayer Ellis MC, chaplain to the 124th Infantry Brigade, describing him as a 'Man of zeal, determination and good heart. There was something about him that compelled our respect from first knowing him. The Church of England padre [. . .] had not the same personality.'¹⁷⁶ Dennis' memoirs describe Ellis as 'our beloved Wesleyan

¹⁷³ E.C. Knight, 'Obituary for Revd O. S. Watkins', *Royal Army Chaplains' Department Journal*, no. 3–12 (1957), 4–5.

¹⁷⁴ Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Changed Religion for Ever* (Oxford: Lion, 2015), 113–4.

¹⁷⁵ James Green, *News from No Man's Land* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1917), 110.

¹⁷⁶ I.W.M., Private Papers of G. V. Dennis, 78/58/1, 44.

Padre' and 'so much loved by all'.¹⁷⁷ Walter Hare admired his unnamed Wesleyan chaplain, realising that he had risked his life to bring cigarettes to men in the front line.¹⁷⁸ In the *Methodist Recorder* of October 1916, 'a gunner' wrote of an unnamed chaplain:

Before closing, I must tell you what the boys think of . . . He has proved himself worthy of his calling and his manhood. He always went over the parapet as a stretcher bearer when his Battalion were making an attack and attached himself so bravely and fearlessly that he has won the care of the men, one and all [. . .] They judge a man out here not by his words but by his deeds.¹⁷⁹

Methodist clergy, Wesleyan and United Board, felt that they had had more experience with working class men than their Anglican counterparts or many officers. G. E. Minnear, United Methodist, wrote: 'I have lived and moved among the workers all my life'.¹⁸⁰ In *A Student in Arms*, Donald Hankey stated that Nonconformist chaplains were more in touch with common soldiers than Anglican clergy.¹⁸¹ A 'Sergeant from France', writing in the *Methodist Recorder* about his padre, affirmed: 'I know the lads because I work with them, and they are constantly praising him and his work. He is a Tommy with us, as some lad said, and I like him because first of all, he is a parson and not an officer.'¹⁸²

The padre was an officer in addition to his calling as a clergyman. This status as an officer could, potentially, create a divide between the chaplain and the other ranks.¹⁸³ Sheffield described the chaplain's dichotomy: 'There was inherent tension between the

¹⁷⁷ I.W.M., Private Papers of G. V. Dennis, 78/58/1, 72, 130.

¹⁷⁸ I.W.M., Walter Hare, Interview 11440.

¹⁷⁹ *Methodist Recorder*, 19 October 1916, 6.

¹⁸⁰ Smith, *Stories from the Front*, 23.

¹⁸¹ Donald Hankey, *A Student in Arms* (London: A. Melrose, 1918), 202.

¹⁸² *Methodist Recorder*, 12 July 1917, 8.

¹⁸³ J. G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 156.

padre's spiritual role and his position in the military hierarchy.¹⁸⁴ Herbert Cowl felt that the officers in his battalion were 'snobbish' and that he had more in common with the doctor and the quartermaster, a ranker, than the other officers in his battalion.¹⁸⁵ Having spent two years in the ranks, Robert Rider felt uncomfortable with his officer status:

He felt shy at the altered relationships between the men and himself [. . .] He was conscious of a clumsy amateurishness in most of his work [. . .] It was difficult to decide whether a Padre was part of the Army or only attached to it – whether with honorary rank he was really an officer, or just shown the courtesies of rank by fellow members of the mess.¹⁸⁶

This anomalous status could, however, allow an adept padre to move between ranks. E. Thompson (father of the historian E. P. Thompson), who served in Mesopotamia, wrote approvingly of a chaplain's ability to befriend 'an unknown Tommy [. . .] without being suspected of patronage or deliberate will to be a Christian'.¹⁸⁷ James Green found officer's rank invaluable in giving the padre 'status, authority and separateness'.¹⁸⁸ The successful chaplain had to overcome this distance from the men that came with his officer's status.

Chaplains have been condemned as military functionaries. Loudon believed that ministers of religion lost sight of their spiritual purpose and integrity and became, instead, mouthpieces of the generals. He argued that it should have been no part of their role to articulate British war aims.¹⁸⁹ Clergymen were used by the army to sanction and

¹⁸⁴ Gary Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with King's College, London, 2000), 96.

¹⁸⁵ Reay, *The Half-Shilling Curate*, 62.

¹⁸⁶ Rider, *Reflections on the Battlefield*, 76–77.

¹⁸⁷ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, 96.

¹⁸⁸ *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, February 1918, 111.

¹⁸⁹ Loudon, *Chaplains in Conflict*, 48–51.

sanctify slaughter on a massive scale, claimed Joanna Bourke.¹⁹⁰ Good morale sustained the British Army in the field for over four years. Chaplains were perceived at the time as critical in this regard. There is no suggestion in the writing of Methodist padres that they felt exploited by the military, that their religious functions took second place. There was no more incongruity in maintaining morale than in meeting the men's spiritual and pastoral needs.

Ministry in other Theatres

Methodist chaplains served in most theatres in addition to the Western Front, including the Dardanelles, Egypt, Salonika and Mesopotamia. United Methodist chaplain J. Penry Davey served at Gallipoli. He described how conventional services were often too dangerous. He moved along the trenches having short conversations with men of the Lancashire Fusiliers: 'God bless you; take care of yourselves boys.' By night, he buried the dead in a crater between British and Turkish lines, quietly whispering the words of the burial service.¹⁹¹ Penry Davey was also present at the Battle of Romani, in Egypt, in August 1916. He was moved by conducting services in Biblical lands:

On Sunday night we had a voluntary service in the palm groves of Quatia. It was gloriously impressive. I alone had a hymn book, and, selecting some of the best-known hymns, I read each verse. Officers and men were gathered around and

¹⁹⁰ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 304–5.

¹⁹¹ Smith, *Stories from the Front*, 124.

joined in the singing and service, and many afterwards spoke of the impressive time.

The text? Acts VIII, 36, “See *here* is water”. The Ethiopian eunuch *must* have passed through Quatia on his way to and from Palestine.¹⁹²

Between periods of extensive service on the Western Front, George Kendall served in Salonika and Ireland. En route to Salonika, he became involved in a fight in a ‘rather notorious nightclub’ in Marseilles whilst attempting to extricate a group of officers needed for embarkation, an experience somewhat alien to a Primitive Methodist minister.¹⁹³ The main enemy in Salonika was disease; Kendall buried men who had died of dysentery, enteric fever (typhoid) and malaria. He was evacuated from Salonika suffering from dysentery and malaria.¹⁹⁴ After recovery, he served in Dublin during the Easter Rising, burying both civilians and soldiers and visiting James Connolly in hospital on the eve of his execution.¹⁹⁵ Kendall seems to have had a remarkable number of ‘close shaves’ during his three and a half years of active service, much of which was near the front line. He attributed his survival to providence and the power of prayer.¹⁹⁶

Wesleyan minister, Leslie Weatherhead, was rejected from military service as medically unfit in 1915. He took up a mission appointment to India the following year and applied for chaplaincy in the Indian Army, being twice turned down. On 1 January 1917, he recorded in his diary: ‘I am not doing my necessary for my country in her hour of need.’¹⁹⁷ At the third attempt, he passed a medical, the Indian Army was very short of officers, and was commissioned in May 1917. Weatherhead was posted to Mesopotamia, and whilst there, in

¹⁹² Smith, 105.

¹⁹³ Kendall, *Daring All Things*, 77.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 80.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 87-8.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 116–17.

¹⁹⁷ A. Kingsley Weatherhead, *Leslie Weatherhead: A Personal Portrait* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), 38.

March 1918, his application for army chaplaincy was finally accepted despite his poor health.¹⁹⁸ Weatherhead's background had been very sheltered, and his first contact with soldiers came as an awakening. He was shocked by the gambling, swearing and drinking that he witnessed and initially daunted by the apathy that his ministry provoked: 'Not unbelief but indifference we have to fight. They have all heard but not seen.' Attendances at the voluntary services that he led for men of the 'lovable agnostics' of the Devonshire Regiment were initially as low as four men in a battalion of 800, but interest rapidly improved.¹⁹⁹ In addition to preaching, Weatherhead organised debates, lectures, football teams and choirs. However, he was frequently ill, 'hospital sick on several occasions', and never really at home in the army.²⁰⁰ His son's assessment of his chaplaincy was that 'on the whole his experiences seem to have been unhappy'.²⁰¹

Owen Spencer Watkins enjoyed a much more distinguished chaplaincy career. After serving on the Western Front from August 1914, Watkins became Principal Chaplain to British forces in Italy during the war's final months. Some in the Roman Catholic Church opposed his appointment, objecting to Watkins having authority over their chaplains; however, he had a private audience with Pope Benedict XV, who told him: 'You have been like a father to my priests. I think it is a beautiful thing that Christians should work together. The whole army must be edified together.' Watkins, who had received the Distinguished Service Order in South Africa, was Mentioned in Despatches on five occasions, made Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George, and awarded the CBE and the Italian

¹⁹⁸ Michael Snape, 'The First World War and the Chaplains of British India', in *The Clergy in Khaki*, ed. by Michael Snape and Edward Madigan, 161.

¹⁹⁹ John Travell, *Doctor of Souls: A Biography of Dr. Leslie Dixon Weatherhead*. (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1999), 28.

²⁰⁰ M.A.R.C., Wesleyan Methodist Armed Forces Service Records 1914-1919, MA 1999/ 1.

²⁰¹ Kingsley Weatherhead, *Leslie Weatherhead: A Personal Portrait*, 48.

Order of St Maurice and Lazarus. After the war, he became Deputy Chaplain General, and he was the first Free Churchman to be made an honorary chaplain to the King.²⁰²

Ministry to the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force

No Free Church chaplains served at sea during the war despite Wesleyan and United Board protestations.²⁰³ Unlike the Royal Australian Navy, which had denominational pluralism in its chaplaincy from within a year of its creation in 1912, the Royal Navy remained a bastion of Anglican hegemony.²⁰⁴ The Wesleyan and United Board tried and failed to get their chaplains posted to ships on active service; the Admiralty declined their requests despite the 28,022 Methodists serving in the navy by the end of the war.²⁰⁵ The number of acting and officiating Wesleyan chaplains based at shore stations was increased; nine were recruited during the war (compared to 153 additional posts for Anglican acting chaplains), they were joined by one United Board chaplain, a Baptist, from 1916, but neither served at sea until 1920.²⁰⁶ Although Bateson described these arrangements as ‘very satisfactory’ and wrote that chaplains were in ‘the closest touch with our men in the Fleet’, the lack of ministerial provision at sea remained a source of frustration.²⁰⁷

²⁰² E.C. Knight, ‘Obituary for Revd O. S. Watkins’, *Royal Army Chaplains’ Department Journal*, no. 3–12 (1957), 4–5; Andrew Pickering, ‘Wesleyan Chaplaincy on the Western Front during the First World War’ in *Wesley and Methodist Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2017, 161–183.

²⁰³ Matthew S. Seligmann, *Rum, Sodomy, Prayers, and the Lash Revisited: Winston Churchill and Social Reform in the Royal Navy, 1900–1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 97.

²⁰⁴ Rowan Strong, *Chaplains in the Royal Australian Navy: 1912 to the Vietnam War*. (Kensington, N.S.W.: University of New South Wales Press, 2012), 34–56.

²⁰⁵ A.L., Minutes of the United Board, 25 September 1918.

²⁰⁶ Allison, *The Official History of the United Board*, 12; Hagerty, *Priests in Uniform*, 282.

²⁰⁷ *Methodist Recorder*, 3 September 1914, 5; 24 September 1914, 5.

There are fewer examples of edifying published accounts of Methodist activity in the Royal Navy than those referring to the army. The *Methodist Recorder* regularly tried to assure its readership that the well-being, spiritual and temporal, of men in the fleet was in good hands. Reports included descriptions of services held on warships in port and the supply of testaments, tracts and 'comforts'. William Sellers, an army chaplain, describes a 'strong Nonconformist element' in the crews of 'some ships' based at Devonport.²⁰⁸ Although Nonconformists were widely dispersed throughout the service, the crews of some trawler minesweepers, drawing men from West Country ports and the Lancashire coast, saw Methodist sailors in the majority.²⁰⁹ When at sea, the men themselves conducted Methodist observance. Readers of the *Methodist Recorder* were supplied with descriptions of 'Methodist Work in His Majesty's Ships of War', including services led by 'officers, warrant officers, petty officers, stokers, seamen and Royal Marines'.²¹⁰ The *Methodist Times* described services led by lay preachers on a warship:

I must tell you that we had a grand meeting last Sunday. We had thirty present. More would have been there as we were rolling and pitching heavily in a full gale, which lasted five days — the worst I have experienced for many a year. Can you just picture us trying to keep our feet and clutching the piano [. . .] occasionally.

The service included popular hymns from the Methodist sailors' 'Little Blue Book' such as *Rock of Ages*, *Nearer My God to Thee*, and *All Hail the Power of Jesu's Name*; 'You should have heard us sing!'²¹¹ A Wesleyan Sunday evening service, held in the 'fo'c'sle' of a cruiser, attracted seventy men who listened to a sermon by a local preacher and sang Sankey's

²⁰⁸ Sellers, *With Our Fighting Men*, 153.

²⁰⁹ *Methodist Recorder*, 19 March 1916, 5.

²¹⁰ *Methodist Recorder*, 19 March 1916, 5.

²¹¹ Quoted in Sellers, *With Our Fighting Men*, 164.

hymns to the accompaniment of a harmonium and two violins that had been presented by Miss Agnes Weston, the celebrated campaigner for teetotalism and sailors' souls. On this ship, class meetings occurred twice weekly and Bible study five nights a week.²¹² In October 1914, in port, a Methodist chaplain led a voluntary service aboard HMS *Hawke* on the Sunday before she was sunk. Thirty men gathered to hear a sermon on Romans Chapter 8 and sing hymns from *On Active Service for God and King*.²¹³ There are several accounts in the Methodist press of services aboard warships shortly before they were sunk; readers were reassured that sailors had received the Church's ministrations before their deaths.²¹⁴ After the Battle of Jutland, the *Methodist Recorder* described the funeral services held for Methodist sailors at two naval bases and a joint Nonconformist memorial service aboard one of the fleet's ships. The same edition also reported on the funeral service held for Methodist men lost after HMS *Hampshire*'s sinking; this was the ship on which Kitchener was killed.²¹⁵

A letter from a chief gunner on a battleship bemoaned the lack of a Methodist minister at sea, especially felt at times of danger. His fellow Nonconformists were satisfied with the provision in port, 'but frequently they go for weeks, sometimes for months, without seeing or hearing, a minister of their own Church.'²¹⁶ A warrant officer described the service he attended off Salonika, led for men in the fleet by army chaplain Revd A. T. Cape, as the first he attended in a year.²¹⁷ The lack of Methodist services on board meant that some sailors relished the opportunity to attend civilian worship when ashore. The *Methodist*

²¹² Sellers, 165.

²¹³ Ibid., 170.

²¹⁴ *Methodist Recorder*, 8 October 1914, 5; 8 June 1916, 3–5.

²¹⁵ *Methodist Recorder*, 8 June 1916, 3–5.

²¹⁶ *Methodist Recorder*, 4 March 1915, 5.

²¹⁷ *Methodist Recorder*, 17 February 1916, 5.

Recorder reported many Nonconformist sailors attending services at Gibraltar, Malta and Port Said and using Wesleyan Homes.²¹⁸ Charles Stamp spoke of his joy at attending a Wesleyan chapel in Simonstown, South Africa, in 1916; 'What a lovely service! The real old hymns but full of new meaning. It is hard to believe one is all these miles from home. It made me forget the mixed congregation; it was like a little gospel service [. . .] It did me a world of good.' Stamp also described voluntary evangelical services on board the cruiser, HMS *Astraea*, led by a Salvationist leading seaman at which they sang Sankey's hymns, and he took the Bible reading.²¹⁹ Such accounts are much like those of small groups of Methodist men meeting their own spiritual needs at sea a century earlier.²²⁰

Before the Royal Air Force's formation in April 1918, chaplaincy arrangements for the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service were those pertaining respectively to the army and the navy. Visiting padres met spiritual and pastoral needs, frequently travelling long distances to minister to small and scattered units. Dedicated RAF chaplaincy arrangements were agreed upon in June 1918 but not implemented until after the war's end. The model was more akin to that of the army in Flanders than the Anglican exclusiveness of naval chaplaincy. There were two distinct departments, one for the Church of England and another for 'Other Denominations' (O.D.), with a Chaplains Advisory Board (C.A.B.) representing all the major churches and church groupings. Bateson, the Wesleyan representative, and Shakespeare for the United Board brought their extensive experience of the army's Interdenominational Advisory Board's ecclesiastical politics to the C.A.B..²²¹ O.D.

²¹⁸ *Methodist Recorder*, 3 February 1916, 5.

²¹⁹ Quoted in Christopher McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailor Lives in the Royal Navy, 1900-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 152.

²²⁰ For similar Roman Catholic frustration with the Anglican dominance of naval chaplaincy see: Hagerty, *Priests in Uniform*, 277-310.

²²¹ Michael Snape and Eleanor Rance, 'Anglicans and Aviators: The First World War and the Forgotten Origins of Royal Air Chaplaincy', in *Journal of Religious History*, 45 (2), (2021), 257-74.

chaplains were assigned to units with over 500 men of that church or group of churches; this meant that Wesleyan and United Board ministers were appointed only to the largest RAF stations such as Cranwell and Marston.²²²

Theological Developments

At the start of the war, the Methodist denominations were united in common theological themes: a belief that the war was redemptive, a sense that Christian and patriotic duties were one and the same, and a passion for social and moral reform within the army and beyond. Some questioned the idea of a loving and merciful God; others, as described, were critical of Methodism's close association with the cause of war. More common became the notion of salvation through sacrifice as a way to cope with individual and collective loss. The image of Christ crucified as a symbol of sacrifice and everlasting life became increasingly popular.²²³ The *United Methodist Magazine* linked the nation's suffering with that of Christ.²²⁴ As Jesus had died to save mankind, so British soldiers were giving their lives for humanity's sake. The world could be redeemed through their blood. Each death was an atonement; each soldier, a fellow sufferer who emulated Christ. Redemption could be assured by dying for the national cause.²²⁵ Death in battle made saints of the fallen, 'the canonisation of front-line soldiers', as Edward Madigan described it.²²⁶ Those who survived

²²² A.L., Minutes of the United Board, 27 July 1918; 4 December 1918.

²²³ David Marshall, "'Khaki Has Become a Sacred Colour'", 102-117.

²²⁴ *The United Methodist Magazine*, April 1918, 97.

²²⁵ Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, 156.

²²⁶ Edward Madigan, "'Sticking to a Hateful Task': Resilience, Humour, and British Understandings of Combatant Courage, 1914–1918", ed. Edward Madigan, *War in History* 20, no. 1 (2013): 81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344512455900> [accessed online 20.02.2020].

this time of trial would be purified. This was not only the King's army; these were soldiers of Christ, fighting for a godly cause.²²⁷

One of the most controversial issues was whether death in battle would result in salvation. G. E. Minnear, United Methodist, was in no doubt: 'They died valiantly in the name of righteousness. It is probable that in life they were not all saints. But such a death for such a cause reflects a touch of nobleness: places them in the ranks of a long line of honoured martyrs, and links them to Calvary.'²²⁸ This belief that every fallen British soldier was guaranteed salvation became commonplace among Protestants during the war, though not universally accepted.²²⁹ Few serving chaplains challenged the acceptance of this view. It gave comfort to the bereaved and helped them to make some sense of their loss. This challenged orthodox Protestant beliefs that redemption could be achieved only through Christ's death and, especially, Methodist belief in salvation by faith and saving grace. One of the few Methodist padres who cautioned against this universalism was the New Zealander, H. L. Blamires.²³⁰ A Wesleyan minister on the Isle of Man who preached that this popular view could not stand theological scrutiny was arrested under the Defence of the Realm Act.²³¹

The war served to break down denominational barriers. George Kendall described holding joint services with Anglican Revd J. O. Aglionby and sharing billets with several Roman Catholic chaplains: 'I seemed, all through the war, to have as my close companions,

²²⁷ George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 139.

²²⁸ Smith, *Stories from the Front*, 28.

²²⁹ Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War*, 100; Michael Snape, "Civilians, Soldiers and Perceptions of the Afterlife in Britain During the First World War" in *The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul*, Papers Read at the 2007 Summer Meeting and the 2008 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society, ed. by Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 2009), 371-403.

²³⁰ Allan Davidson, *New Zealand Methodist Chaplains and Ministers at War: The First World War through Their Eyes* (Auckland: Wesley Historical Society (New Zealand), 2016), 457.

²³¹ *Methodist Recorder*, 12 November 1918, 5.

Roman Catholic Padres, and I found them men of sterling qualities and very brave. They were always ready to cooperate with me. We could argue about different views but always with sympathy and understanding.²³² Wesleyan officiating naval chaplain, G. C. Danbury, based ashore at Salonika, shared a tent with a Catholic army chaplain whom he described, in language that would not have been used in the middle of the previous century, as 'one of the most saintly men I have ever met'.²³³ Philip Fisher had a good relationship with the Church of England chaplain to his brigade; together, they organised concerts, billiard tournaments, football matches and a weekly newspaper. On other occasions, this Primitive Methodist minister shared a billet with Roman Catholic and High-Church Anglican chaplains.²³⁴ Seemingly at opposite ends of the denominational and doctrinal spectrum, it is difficult to envisage such warmth before the war's outbreak.

The realities of military ministry helped to shift some of the barriers to ecumenism. The *Methodist Magazine* reported on joint Anglican/ Free Church services held in a Roman Catholic church: 'The united Communion services have been such as Protestantism has never witnessed.'²³⁵ Wesleyan John Boullier took part in a united parade service at Bethune, held on 6 August 1916, to mark the war's second anniversary, together with Anglican and Presbyterian chaplains. He remarked that such concord would have been impossible twelve months earlier.²³⁶ In March and April 1918, chaplains' instruction in France included several 'mixed schools' for Church of England and 'Non-C. of E.' serving padres.²³⁷ During the German 1918 Spring Offensive, on Easter Sunday, Julian Bickersteth shared a parade service

²³² Kendall, *Daring All Things*, 102, 107.

²³³ *Methodist Recorder*, 3 February 1916, 5.

²³⁴ Fisher, *Khaki Vignettes*, 5.

²³⁵ *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, November 1915, 847.

²³⁶ Boullier, *Jottings by a Gunner and Chaplain*, 77.

²³⁷ C.U.L., *The Chaplains' Bulletin*, Numbers 3 and 4, January and March 1918.

with the Wesleyan chaplain attached to The Queen's Westministers: 'Nonconformists and C. of E. men have fought and died side by side two days before. Surely, we were not wrong to kneel together and partake of the same cup.'²³⁸ Robert Rider agreed, 'persuasion' was only a label, 'there was only one Church, and that Universal'.²³⁹ Methodist denominations worked with the broadly ecumenical YMCA; 260 Free Church ministers served overseas with the organisation.²⁴⁰ O. P. Rounsefell, a United Methodist YMCA worker, described a hut service taken by ministers from the English Free Churches, an elder of the United Free Church of Scotland and two Anglican laymen.²⁴¹ Such military ecumenism was not new, as Methodist chaplains' memoirs who served in late-Victorian conflicts make clear, but this became the norm, rather than the exception, during the First World War.

Such 'eucharistic promiscuity' only went so far. The Kikuyu controversy occurred only a year before the Great War's outbreak and showed the Church of England's attitude to sharing worship with other denominations.²⁴² Some newly-arrived Anglican chaplains made clear to Assistant Chaplain-General Harry Blackburne that they felt that ecumenism on the Western Front had gone far enough, especially in their outright opposition to united communion services.²⁴³ Stuart Bell contrasted the compassion shown by padres of all denominations with the ecclesiastical boundaries at home, which existed when the war

²³⁸ Ella Bickersteth, *The Bickersteth Diaries, 1914-1918*, ed. by John Bickersteth. (London: Leo Cooper, 1995), 248.

²³⁹ Rider, *Reflections on the Battlefield*, 143.

²⁴⁰ Michael Snape, *The Back Parts of War: the YMCA Memoirs and Letters of Barclay Baron, 1915-1919* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), 39; Thompson, 'The Free Church Army Chaplain, 1830-1930', 377.

²⁴¹ *United Methodist Magazine*, January 1918, 4.

²⁴² Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1974), 48-49; Bell, *Faith in Conflict*, 150-51.

²⁴³ Blackburne, *This Also Happened on the Western Front*, 152.

ended. Ecumenical Remembrance services were held in civic spaces; few Free Church ministers participated in such services held in parish churches.²⁴⁴

Whereas the United Board had been, certainly for J. H. Shakespeare, a prototype of Free Church union, barriers still existed. The existence of three separate Methodist conferences was increasingly incongruous, at odds with the experience and spirit of unity shown by chaplains at the front. Wesleyan E. Osborn Martin wrote:

Every Methodist Chaplain returning from the front would agree that it has been one of the most difficult and perplexing problems of his work that Methodist Churches have not been united in worship or in chaplaincy work during the war, but have been under different control [. . .] the men are even more perplexed and annoyed by the division of the churches which should be united in common worship. This is true of the whole body of Christians; it is still more true of Methodism.²⁴⁵

Communion became much more important for Methodist chaplains than in pre-War civilian ministry; this was especially so for the non-Wesleyans. Although Wesley had stressed the eucharist's significance, it usually occurred monthly in peace-time Wesleyanism and less often in other Methodist churches, worship being frequently led by lay preachers.²⁴⁶ Nonconformist worship was based around the sermon, in contrast to the Anglican stress on the sacrament; this was often impractical in worship at the front. Chaplains discovered that men found communion hugely comforting and especially so before going into action.²⁴⁷ For the bereaved, the fact that a loved one had participated in communion before death was a

²⁴⁴ Stuart Bell, 'The Ecumenical Spirit of the Trenches', in *Methodist Recorder*, 2 November 2018, 11.

²⁴⁵ E. Osborn Martin, "'The Immediate Duty of the Churches'", in *The Christ of the Soldier: Essays Chiefly by Wesleyan Methodist Ex-Chaplains*, ed. by F. L. Wiseman, 93.

²⁴⁶ Hastings, *A History of English Christianity*, 110.

²⁴⁷ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?*, 133.

comfort. Primitive Methodist chaplain Robert Callin's letters to the parents of deceased soldiers were met with: 'Will you tell us about a communion service our boy attended on the Sunday night before the battle?'²⁴⁸ In denominations that had routinely attacked sacramentalism, there was a move to seeing God's real presence in the eucharist, bringing Methodist theology at the front much closer to that of Anglo-Catholicism.²⁴⁹ Methodist ministers conducted communion services in Roman Catholic churches and even attended Catholic services, unthinkable before 1914.

The character of the chaplain mattered more to men on active service than his denomination. If a padre could speak of Christ in a way connected to their experience at the front and be seen to share the dangers and hardships of the men, he gained their respect. Anglican David Railton wrote to his wife in July 1916 that men did not care which faith tradition a chaplain espoused: 'So far, I have only learnt that our Englishmen do not care a pin whether a man is High or Low, Broad or Catholic, or a Dissenter, whether he gives allegiance to Canterbury, Rome or General Booth.'²⁵⁰ Neil Allison, with his own experience of modern army chaplaincy to guide him, wrote:

Theology could, therefore, only be understood through their Chaplain's personality and his shared experience; he needed to be 'incarnational' as well as 'proclamational' in approach to his chaplaincy service. In spite of these lofty sounding words this often came down to whether the chaplain was a 'good bloke' and had shared their common experience.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Kenneth Lyons, *Robert Wilfred Callin (1886-1951): Parson, Padre, Poet* (Houghton-Le-Spring: The Gilpin Press, 1996), 16–17.

²⁴⁹ Allison, *The Official History of the United Board*, 80; Hastings, *A History of English Christianity*, 100–120.

²⁵⁰ Andrew Richards, *The Flag: The Story of Reverend David Railton and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior*. (Oxford: Casement Publishers, 2017), 40.

²⁵¹ Allison, *The Official History of the United Board*, 57.

W. P. Rhodes' experience was that men were 'willing to hear about the things that matter'.²⁵² Wesleyan chaplain G. H. Crossland's experience was that the men wanted 'free and easy' services rather than formal liturgy.²⁵³ Soldiers had attended in large numbers and enjoyed services in YMCA huts, barns, cellars and fields. Kendall agreed; the war had shown, in the words of one soldier, a need for 'a pure unvarnished religion [. . .] untrammelled by ecclesiastical additions'. The men had disdain for any form of denominationalism, 'It's all the same religion and we would like to see a stronger unity in spirit of the cause, neither the maker of this universe, nor the Nazarene, was narrow-minded. We want to believe [. . .] we have had a dose of hell [. . .] give us a dose of Heaven'.²⁵⁴

The Army and Religion Report of 1919 concluded that soldiers' beliefs were more broadly deistic than conventionally Christian.²⁵⁵ Soldiers were often superstitious; 'God', 'luck', and 'fate' were frequently interchangeable. The use of charms, keepsakes, and totems was common; sometimes, these were overtly religious such as a New Testament, crucifix or scapular. Familiar rituals, spiritual and secular, were viewed as being protective.²⁵⁶ James Gault's experience was that the men believed in the power of prayer and especially so at times of danger. Furthermore, 'Tommy' believed in life after death, a 'companion gone west'. He did not share the churches' view of sin regarding drink, swearing and gambling, but abhorred 'letting his pals down'. Soldiers consistently showed the qualities of selflessness, courage and sacrifice, 'that finds amongst men their best expression in the life

²⁵² *United Methodist Magazine*, May 1916, 151.

²⁵³ *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, November 1918, 727.

²⁵⁴ Kendall, *Daring All Things*, 108.

²⁵⁵ D. S. Cairns, *The Army and Religion: An Enquiry and Its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation* (London: Macmillan, 1919), 58.

²⁵⁶ Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 98.

of Christ'.²⁵⁷ Soldiers' letters and diaries show frequent expressions of Christian belief and 'religious literacy'; they accurately quote the Bible, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* was popular and often cited.²⁵⁸ The Third Army's chief censor concluded that the soldier was essentially religious, not in an orthodox fashion, but in having an inward faith and trust in the Divine.²⁵⁹ The *Methodist Magazine*, previously highly optimistic about the possible evangelical harvest that the war would produce, conceded in March 1917 that 'Tommy' was not interested in conventional Christianity. The men consistently showed noble virtues: unselfishness, generosity, charity and humility without connecting them to the Church.²⁶⁰

Methodist chaplains gained experience from serving alongside working class men. Lessons learned included the need for a doctrine of social ethics. Theology needed to encompass the pressing concerns of the poor. This was not new in Methodism, it had been at the core of Hugh Price Hughes' Social Gospel, but it did represent a demand for a change in emphasis. Too much stress was laid on morality, disapproving of things, and not enough on practical Christianity. Methodism's strict attitudes to alcohol, gambling, swearing and promiscuity were difficult for many soldiers to accept. The United Methodist Church was preoccupied with five 'temptations' that faced Tommy: gambling, profanity, alcohol, sexual impurity and 'the desecration of the Lord's Day'.²⁶¹ The moral welfare of the Woman's Army Auxiliary Corps caused considerable consternation.²⁶² Chaplains believed that soldiers exhibited values: self-sacrifice, comradeship and courage, that needed to be reflected in

²⁵⁷ James Gault, *Padre Gault's Stunt Book* (London: Epworth Press, 1920), 175.

²⁵⁸ Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War*, 115–16.

²⁵⁹ Cited in Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 96.

²⁶⁰ *Magazine of the Wesleyan Methodist Church*, March 1917, 163.

²⁶¹ *United Methodist Magazine*, January 1918, 4–5.

²⁶² M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Royal Navy and Army Board, 25 March 1918, 30.

their churches and chapels.²⁶³ John Clark Gibson, who had served at Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia, called for Wesleyanism to re-examine its social and economic purpose. He believed that the Methodist padre had been 'instinctively at home' with working-class men and that in peacetime, the Church should intercede with labour and change its worship to make it more accessible to working men.²⁶⁴

Wilkinson claims that Nonconformist chaplains' writings lacked the theological and ethical rigour of their Church of England counterparts. He sees 'no severe and ethical struggles' in their published articles, speeches and books. There is no Methodist who bears comparison with Studdert Kennedy or Hankey.²⁶⁵ Wilkinson speculates that such agonising must have gone on in private or that military authority somehow made Free Churchmen more deferential than Anglicans. Were they perhaps worried about losing the status that had been so hard-won?²⁶⁶ This is mere speculation. Save for anguish about the horrors of war from men who had seen its realities, the sources consistently show a firm belief in their spiritual and moral purpose.

²⁶³ Peter Catterall, *Labour and the Free Churches: Radicalism, Righteousness and Religion, 1919-1939*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 20–21.

²⁶⁴ Gibson, 'What Is the Church For?', 75.

²⁶⁵ Geoffrey Anketell Studdert Kennedy, *Rough Talks by a Padre: Delivered to Officers and Men of the B.E.F.* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1918); Linda Parker, *A Seeker after Truths: The Life and Times of G.A. Studdert Kennedy ('Woodbine Willie'), 1883-1929* (Solihull: Helion, 2017); Hankey, *A Student in Arms*.

²⁶⁶ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?*, 40.

Summary

By the end of the war, there were 331 commissioned Methodist chaplains in the British Army: 256 Wesleyans, forty-three Primitive Methodists and forty-two United Methodists.²⁶⁷ There were, in addition, fourteen Welsh Calvinist padres. Considering Methodist ministry's status in the armed forces before the war, numbers alone are noteworthy, a tenth of the Chaplains' Department, their achievements even more so. Methodist chaplains were well-led. The Wesleyan Forces Board was already operating very capably before the war. The leadership of Bateson in coordinating chaplaincy was highly effective. The achievements of the United Board were even more remarkable. The United Methodists had no experience of military work, the Primitive Methodists marginally more so. Neither denomination had established relationships with the British military establishment before 1914. Though divided into two separate entities, both Wesleyan and United Boards had a shared vision of the purpose of their mission to Britain's armed forces.

There is a wealth of evidence concerning Methodist ministry to the armed forces, particularly the army, during the First World War. Much of that material emanates from the churches themselves: Conference and Forces Boards' minutes, denominational journals, chaplains' books, letters and memoirs. These sources give an assured portrayal of Methodist military mission. There is little critical contemporary evidence, save for the, now largely dismissed, comments that derided chaplaincy in general and that of the Church of England

²⁶⁷ M.A.R.C., Wesleyan Methodist Armed Forces Service Records 1914-1919, MA 1999/1; A.L., Minutes of the United Board, 4 December 1918; Twenty-four Irish Methodist ministers served as chaplains during the war, see McCrea, *Irish Methodism in the Twentieth Century* (Belfast: Irish Methodist Publishing, 1931), 80.

in particular.²⁶⁸ As expressed in their letters, memoirs, diaries, and recorded interviews, soldiers and sailors are affirmative in their assessment of Methodist military mission; their chaplains' retrospective accounts are equally positive. Recent research on Free Church chaplaincy, though sparse, confirms its effectiveness.²⁶⁹ The evidence leads to the conclusion that Methodist mission to Britain's armed forces during the First World War succeeded.

²⁶⁸ Michael Snape, 'Church of England Army Chaplains in the First World War: Goodbye to "Goodbye to All That"', in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 62, no. 2 (2011): 318-340.

²⁶⁹ Allison, *The Official History of the United Board*; John Thompson, 'The Nonconformist Chaplain in the First World War', in *The Clergy in Khaki*, ed. by Michael Snape and Edward Madigan, 17-40; Michael Hughes, 'Methodism and the Challenge of the First World War', in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 60 (2015): 3-17.

Chapter Six: The Interwar Period

‘Pacifism has seemed always a direct and simple implication of our Christian faith.’ (Donald Soper, letter to the *Methodist Recorder*, 30 March 1933).

‘It is wrong to assert that the way to peace is for every Christian man to refuse to bear arms at any time, or under any circumstances.’ (Archibald Harrison, ‘The Churches and War’, the *Methodist Recorder*, 30 March 1933).¹

Introduction

There is a paradox in that the period in which Methodist union was achieved, after over a century of division about Church politics, styles of worship and the relative importance of the clergy and the laity, heralded divisions over the most critical issue that faced the nation: whether it was right to go to war. Yet, remarkably, this most schismatic of Christian movements managed to accommodate pacifists and those who took the opposite position during the 1920s and 30s and at the Second World War’s outbreak. The Methodist Church of Great Britain, united in 1932, retained within it such diametrically different views.

Methodist mission to Britain’s armed forces came of age during this period. Since the 1860s, the Wesleyans had provided military ministry at home bases and on a series of

¹ *Methodist Recorder*, 30 March 1933, 3, 17.

colonial campaigns. The First World War had seen all three major Methodist churches providing commissioned chaplaincy to the army, the navy in a much more restricted manner, and the nascent air forces. Unity within Methodism was hugely beneficial in continuing and extending this mission to the armed forces. In both the British Army and the Royal Air Force, but not the Royal Navy, Methodism enjoyed near parity of status with the established churches. Methodists no longer struggled for recognition and representation; they had become part of the armed forces' religious establishment.

There was considerable continuity in Methodist mission to the British armed forces during these two decades. Those who shaped and led this ministry had gained experience during the First World War. Despite strong pacifist elements within Methodism, the respective denominations' armed forces boards did not question that the Church needed to maintain, and later extend, presence within the army, navy and air force. This sense of moral and spiritual purpose, coupled with good organisation and clear leadership, was evident between the wars and at the outbreak of the Second World War.

Methodist Union

There was a genuine desire for ecumenical cooperation amongst the Protestant churches in the aftermath of the war. Ministry to the army was a catalyst for moves towards a more organic union. The United Board had proved an example of effective cooperation. Influenced by practical ecumenism during the war, Methodism tried to look in two different directions in this period. One possibility was a more comprehensive Christian union or at

least a closer relationship with the Church of England; the other was the more practical proposition of Methodist unity and closer affiliation with other Nonconformist churches. In 1916, J.H. Shakespeare, the leading Baptist, proposed creating a Free Church of England; the Wesleyan Church firmly rejected this suggestion.² There were two reasons for the rebuttal of overtures from the other Nonconformist Churches. The first was that unity with the Primitive and United Methodists was paramount, and the second was that Wesleyanism sought a much broader union of churches, including the Church of England. The *Methodist Recorder* also stated that Wesleyanism was not a 'dissenting Church'.³

In 1917, some Wesleyan ministers had met with the Bishop of London to discuss terms for unification, but they made it clear that 'Methodist Union comes first'.⁴ The Lambeth Conference of 1920 saw definite proposals from the Church of England to the Nonconformist Churches with unification terms. The 'Lambeth Appeal', agreements among the Anglican bishops over the centrality of scripture, the Creed, the sacraments and ministry, might, if accepted by the Free Churches, have been the blueprint for a united Protestant Church of England. The Methodist Churches, certainly the Wesleyans, could have accepted agreements over scripture and the sacraments, perhaps even the episcopate, but the Anglican insistence that Free Church ministers be re-ordained was never going to be a basis for union.⁵ In subsequent years, unsurprisingly, the appeal failed to secure the acceptance of the Nonconformist churches. Failure to produce agreement on Protestant union meant that closer relationships with the Church of England were improbable; Methodist efforts now were directed at other ecumenical endeavours. Somewhat

² *Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference*, 1917, 49.

³ *Methodist Recorder*, 27 July 1917, 3.

⁴ *Methodist Recorder*, 12 July 1917, 8.

⁵ George Thompson Brake, *Policy and Politics in British Methodism, 1932-1982* (London: Edsall, 1984), 100-101.

reluctantly, the Wesleyans joined the Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches in 1920, one of two umbrella Nonconformist organisations; neither was a precursor of a more comprehensive union.⁶ Methodism could not respond to calls for broader unity if it remained divided.

Perhaps understandably, Methodism was concerned with its internal affairs during the late 1920s and early 1930s. The experience of chaplaincy had accelerated moves towards Methodist unity, but the pace proved to be snail-like; fifteen years of anguished debate led to union in 1932.⁷ The Wesleyan Conference had discussed the issue in 1918 and, typically, deferred a decision. Although the move had powerful advocates in John Scott Lidgett, Arthur Henderson and Sir Robert Perks, there were opponents of union within Wesleyanism. The Primitives and United Methodists were generally more positive about union than the more conservative Wesleyans. The failure to achieve the necessary seventy-five per cent majority in favour of unity at the Wesleyan Methodist Conferences of 1925, 1926 and 1927 caused further delay. It was not until the 1928 Conference that the Wesleyans agreed in sufficient numbers to accept union, the bill receiving the necessary parliamentary approval in March 1929.⁸ Union was a compromise between the more clerically dominated Wesleyans and the more lay orientated Primitive and United Methodists. 'Standards' of doctrine, rather than a doctrinal system, included the Creeds, 'fundamental standards of the Reformation' (which were not defined), and John Wesley's

⁶ Rupert Davies, Raymond George, and Gordon Rupp, *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 4 vols (London: Epworth Press, 1965-1988), III, 309–59.

⁷ Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, 77–81.

⁸ Brake, *Policy and Politics in British Methodism*, 90–94.

writings. Almost all the 'People Called Methodists' agreed with these basics, and there were, eventually and remarkably, very few dissenters.⁹

The much delayed coming together of the Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist Churches probably occurred too late. In retrospect, the previous thirty years had seen missed opportunities to create a dynamic Methodist Church. Scott Lidgett was appointed the first President of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, and Sir Robert Perks its Vice-President. Both were former Wesleyans, reflecting their pre-eminence in the united Church, and both belonged to the movement's past. Adrian Hastings aptly described Methodist union as having a sense of 'rather elderly achievement – well-earned rest after a long day's work'.¹⁰ By 1932, Methodist support and influence had reached a plateau and were starting to decline.¹¹ Union did not lead to the anticipated revival. Robert Wearmouth passed stark judgement, 'Statistically appraised, the Methodist Union of 1932 was a failure.'¹² The 1920s had seen modest growth in membership and allegiance in all three Churches.¹³ Union, coming as it did at the height of the 'Slump', was ill-timed. The depression hit especially hard occupational groups such as miners, fishermen and agricultural labourers who had been the Methodist churches' mainstays.¹⁴ Economic necessity had been one reason for unity; although it rationalised resources, too few chapels were closed, especially in rural areas. There remained a division between Methodism's middle-class Wesleyan heritage and

⁹ Rupert Davies, 'Methodism', in *The Testing of the Churches, 1932-1982: A Symposium* (London: Epworth Press, 1982), 32–53.

¹⁰ Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1985* (London: Collins, 1986), 263.

¹¹ Davies, 'Methodism', in *The Testing of the Churches*, 32-53; Clive D Field, 'Gradualist or Revolutionary Secularization? A Case Study of Religious Belonging in Inter-War Britain, 1918-1939', in *Church History and Religious Culture*, vol. 93, no.1 (2013), 57-93. <http://www-jstor-org.ezhost.dur.ac.uk/stable/23923496> [accessed online 06.04.2020].

¹² Robert Wearmouth, *The Social and Political Influence of Methodism in the Twentieth Century* (London: Epworth Press, 1957), 58.

¹³ Matthew Grimley, 'The Religion of Englishness: Puritanism, Providentialism, and "National Character," 1918–1945', *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 4 (2007): 867–68.

¹⁴ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures, England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 282.

its working-class Primitive and United traditions.¹⁵ Methodist unity was achieved in 1932 after nearly a century and a half of schism. However, during the 1930s, the newly united Methodist Church of Great Britain 'had to grapple with the divisive issues of rearmament, collective security and the diverse stands of pacifism and pacificism.'¹⁶

Pacifism and Pacificism

During the 1920s and early 1930s, Methodism had put its hopes for peace in the League of Nations.¹⁷ Peter Catterall describes the Free Churches as having been 'cheerleaders' for the League.¹⁸ Typical of this conviction was the Address of the President of the Primitive Methodist Conference in June 1924: 'We re-affirm our passionate faith in the League of Nations [. . .] We commend the League of Nations to all people and Churches, and urge them to join it individually and corporately and so increase the moral force behind this international institution.'¹⁹ Alan Wilkinson believed that the churches, especially the Free Churches, felt considerable guilt about their support for war between 1914 and 1918.²⁰ All the Methodist churches, but especially the Primitives, showed growing pacifist tendencies during the 1920s. In 1927, the Primitive Methodist Conference pronounced 'That this Conference affirms its conviction that all war is a violation of the principles and spirit of

¹⁵ Davies, 'Methodism', in *The Testing of the Churches*, 39.

¹⁶ John Broom, 'Faith in the Furnace: British Christians in the Armed Services, 1939-1945', 25.

¹⁷ Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, 79–86.

¹⁸ Peter Catterall, *Labour and the Free Churches: Radicalism, Righteousness and Religion, 1919-1939* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 73.

¹⁹ *Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference, 1924*, 243.

²⁰ Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches, 1900-1945* (London: SCM Press, 1978), 98–100.

Jesus Christ, and that it should not be countenanced by the Church.’²¹ At the following year’s conference, a further resolution for peace was passed, expressing enthusiasm for the Kellogg-Briand Pact.²² During the 1920s, Methodist tensions over peace and war were concealed by a shared hope that the League and international diplomacy could prevent future wars.

Revd Leslie Weatherhead was a bellwether of Methodist attitudes to peace and war between 1919 and 1939.²³ He embodied the strong strands of pacifism and pacificism that emerged during the interwar period.²⁴ Weatherhead had served as an army chaplain in Mesopotamia in 1918; he was appointed to the Wesleyan Forces Board after the war but appeared never to have attended a meeting.²⁵ He later joined the Peace Pledge Union stating: ‘I felt that pacifism must be my position.’²⁶ All churches faced divisions; John Munsey Turner stated that ‘Pacifism and re-armament divided Methodism as they did other communions.’²⁷ There was no consensus during the interwar period, but rather, deep divisions between pacifists and those who argued that pacifism was politically naive and a betrayal of those who had died in the First World War.²⁸ On the one hand, Archibald Harrison, former army chaplain and writer of *Christianity and Universal Peace* (1926) and *Christianity and the League of Nations* (1928), argued that armed force could be justified

²¹ *Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference*, 1927, 243.

²² *Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference*, 1928, 252.

²³ John Travell, *Doctor of Souls: A Biography of Dr. Leslie Dixon Weatherhead*. (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1999), 117–25.

²⁴ Leslie Weatherhead, *Thinking Aloud in War-Time: An Attempt to See the Present Situation in the Light of the Christian Faith* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1939), 21.

²⁵ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Wesleyan Methodist Navy and Army Forces Board, January 1918–January 1925, Meeting of 25 November 1918, MA 6001 (Box 2).

²⁶ Weatherhead, *Thinking Aloud in War-Time*, 21.

²⁷ John Munsey Turner, *Modern Methodism in England 1932–1998* (London: Epworth Press, 1998), 31.

²⁸ Michael Hughes, ‘Methodism and the Challenge of the First World War’, in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 60 (2015): 3–16.

given international sanction.²⁹ On the other hand, Leslie Weatherhead, in 1929, told readers of the *Methodist Recorder* that war was ‘utterly unchristian’, and he condemned military medals as emblems of ‘murder, mutilation, tears and treachery, lust and lies.’³⁰

During the 1930s, Methodism was strongly influenced by the broader peace movement.³¹ 1933 saw the famous Oxford Union debate, which resolved: ‘This House will in no circumstances fight for its King and Country’. The outcome of the debate stimulated considerable interest in the pages of the *Methodist Recorder*. Whilst making condescending remarks about the Oxford students’ youth and finding the resolution ‘needlessly provocative’, the paper conceded that it indicated a rising tide of pacifist opinion in Britain.³² Anti-war organisations proliferated within the largest popular mass movement in Britain between the wars.

The Manchuria Crisis of 1931 to 1933 and the failure of the World Disarmament Conference between 1932 and 1934 sharpened emerging divisions within Methodism. Some of the denomination’s leading figures, such as Donald Soper and Henry Carter, took prominent roles in the Peace Pledge Union and helped establish the Methodist Peace Fellowship, an offshoot of the Fellowship of Reconciliation.³³ Soper became the best-known Methodist minister of the 1930s due to his public speaking at Tower Hill and Hyde Park, his regular talks on the BBC, his ministry at the Islington and Kingsway Halls and his fervent espousal of pacifism.³⁴ Soper had ‘a supremely optimistic view of humankind’ according to

²⁹ Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, 85.

³⁰ *Methodist Recorder*, 7 November 1929, 3.

³¹ Alan Billings, *The Dove, The Fig Leaf and the Sword: Why Christianity Changed Its Mind About War* (London: SPCK, 2014), 119.

³² *Methodist Recorder*, 9 March 1933, 3.

³³ Catterall, *Labour and the Free Churches*, 75; Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 126.

³⁴ Mark Peel, *The Last Wesleyan: A Life of Donald Soper* (Lancaster: Scotforth Books, 2008), 55–57.

Alan Wilkinson. There was something of God in everyone, even Hitler and Mussolini, he claimed. Soper volunteered to be part of a 'peace army' that would stand between the combatants in Manchuria. In 1936, he conceded that a nation that had renounced war might suffer 'crucifixion', but that possibility was a 'small one' and would not 'involve any loss of life'.³⁵ Soper was by no means untypical of those leading Methodists for whom Christian socialism and Christian pacifism were one and the same. In March 1931, Charles James Simmons, Labour MP and Primitive Methodist Lay Preacher (and an opponent of Methodist unity), was one of three pacifist members who proposed in parliament the abolition of the RACHD.³⁶ Army chaplains were, he stated, beholden to the state rather than to God: 'If the government pay, they control what the chaplains may preach and, in doing that, we are likely to have a repetition of what happened when the Church crucified Christ on the Cross of Armaments.'³⁷ Samuel Keeble, who had opposed British involvement in both the South African War and the First World War, remained a steadfast and influential pacifist throughout the decade.³⁸ Arthur Henderson, Methodist local preacher and regular delegate to Conference, was the only British Foreign Secretary to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. His commitment to peace, disarmament and internationalism was religious as well as political. Leading Methodists lobbied in favour of the 1934 'Peace Ballot' in which nearly twelve million expressed support for the League and its peace work. Several of the peace organisations of the 1930s, such as the League of Nations Union, the No More War

³⁵ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 126-128.

³⁶ Donald Ryan, 'Charles James Simmons (1893-1975): Primitive Methodist and Christian Socialist', in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 62, Part 3 (October 2019), 133-142.

³⁷ Hansard, 'Proceedings of the House of Commons', 10 March 1931, cols 1137-1144 [accessed online 20.01.2020].

³⁸ Hughes, 'Methodism, Peace and War, 1932-45', 147-49.

Movement, the Peace Council and Christian pacifist groups, enjoyed strong Methodist support, including that of many ministers.³⁹

The Methodist Peace Fellowship had a membership of nearly 800 ministers and 3,000 lay members by 1938.⁴⁰ Methodism and pacifism became synonymous for some during the mid-1930s; some congregations, such as Donald Soper's Islington and West London Missions, saw pacifists dominate.⁴¹ Most ordinands at Wesley House, Cambridge, were in the pacifist fold.⁴² William Spray, who later became a conscientious objector, inherited his pacifist views from his father, a Methodist minister.⁴³ Senior Anglicans, Dick Sheppard and Charles Raven, had leading roles in the Peace Pledge Union, and pacifism was strong in all churches.⁴⁴ These tensions occurred when the three 'branches' of Methodism, Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodists, joined together to form the Methodist Church of Great Britain.

The *Methodist Recorder* illustrates this profound divide in British Methodism over the issues of peace and war. In March 1933, Henry Carter informed readers that Christians should renounce war as contrary to their faith. World events, specifically the Manchurian crisis, were strongly suggestive of July 1914, he argued. To 'avert disaster', Christians must resolve 'that there shall be no more war'; that commitment to peace must be 'without qualification or reservation'. He committed himself to 'preach, act and write against any future war', urging all Christians to do likewise.⁴⁵ The following week saw a rebuttal from Dr

³⁹ Richard Overly, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization, 1919-1939* (London: Penguin, 2010), 221.

⁴⁰ Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, 96.

⁴¹ Catterall, *Labour and the Free Churches*, 103.

⁴² Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, 101.

⁴³ I.W.M., William Spray Interview, 10551.

⁴⁴ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 261.

⁴⁵ *Methodist Recorder*, 23 March 1933, 5.

Harrison, which stated that Carter did not speak for the whole Church. He argued that it was easy to renounce war but wrong to assert that there were no circumstances in which armed force could be justified. Harrison urged readers to support collective security to avoid another war:

It seems far better for Christian men to do all that is possible to safeguard the peace we desire so passionately by strengthening the weak barriers against war erected by the Pact of Paris and making the most of the one gain that had come to mankind out of the Great War, namely the League of Nations.

In that week, the paper published fifteen letters in response to Carter's article, twelve of which, including one from Donald Soper, applauded his pacifist stance. Colin Roberts, a lay correspondent, agreed that Christian discipleship led to a complete rejection of war. On the other side was Revd E. Kirtlan, who argued that people needed collective security in a world of 'Hitlers and Chinese War Lords'.⁴⁶ The following month, a letter from T. W. Cowap warned that the issue could split the newly united Church.⁴⁷ The editorial of 4 May 1933 stated that pacifists 'do not have any monopoly of hatred of war or enthusiasm for peace' and that 'the argument that pacifism finds its justification in the Cross [. . .] fails to carry conviction when it is examined'.⁴⁸ The *Methodist Recorder* continued to advocate collective security whilst expressing increasing misgivings about the League of Nations' failures and condemning events in Nazi Germany.

⁴⁶ *Methodist Recorder*, 30 March 1933, 5, 7, 17.

⁴⁷ *Methodist Recorder*, 6 April 1933, 7.

⁴⁸ *Methodist Recorder*, 4 May 1933, 3.

The first resolution passed at the 1932 Conference of the Methodist Church of Great Britain was on disarmament; the issue resurfaced at each succeeding Conference.⁴⁹ In 1933, the Church passed a declaration that stated that war was a 'crime against humanity' and acknowledged the differences between pacifists and 'those who believed that national, international and humanitarian loyalties led them to another conclusion.'⁵⁰ This open acknowledgement of the deep divisions in Methodism over peace and war was sufficient to keep those on both sides within the Church, but it certainly did not settle the matter. The 1934 Conference saw unusually acrimonious debates around the pacifist agenda or 'acknowledged differences of opinion within Methodism'.⁵¹ There were arguments about whether it was appropriate for Methodist public schools to have Officer Training Corps and whether military tattoos were unacceptably bellicose. Conference resolutions called for world peace and disarmament and condemned the Government for increasing spending on the Royal Air Force.⁵² A significant minority of delegates, led by Henry Carter, made it clear that they could not support a government in war under any circumstances. In this context, a stormy debate occurred between Revd Percy Carden, who wanted a re-examination of whether ministers should serve as military chaplains, and the redoubtable Owen Spencer Watkins, who argued that chaplaincy provided invaluable spiritual guidance to the members of the armed forces.⁵³ Not untypically, the 1935 Conference saw a fudge, a stage-managed attempt to heal the wounds, with unanimous agreement that all Methodists equally 'hated war'. The leading Methodist pacifist Henry Carter and the former army chaplain Archibald

⁴⁹ *Minutes of the Methodist Church Conference, 1932–39*; Brake, *Policy and Politics in British Methodism, 1932–1982*, 90–94, 443–45.

⁵⁰ Hughes, 'Methodism, Peace and War, 1932–45', 151.

⁵¹ *Methodist Recorder*, 19 July 1934, 10.

⁵² *Minutes of the Methodist Church Conference, 1934*, 158.

⁵³ Hughes, 'Methodism, Peace and War, 1932–45', 153.

Harrison jointly proposed the resolution.⁵⁴ Conference expressed considerable relief at this apparent show of unity.

Despite these public expressions of concord, Methodism remained deeply divided about its relationship to the armed forces.⁵⁵ John Broom saw the division as principally between high profile pacifist clerics and the more 'pragmatic' and less dogmatic laity.⁵⁶ This summary is a little simplistic; discord in the Church was more nuanced. Surprisingly perhaps, the most influential Methodist pacifists of the 1930s, Soper, Carter and Weatherhead, were former Wesleyans rather than those from Primitive backgrounds. In 1936, Conference acknowledged that both pacifism and non-pacifism were legitimate expressions of Christian conviction. Commitment to 'liberty of conscience' acknowledged the divisions within Methodism. The Conference of that year also passed a resolution condemning the invasion of Abyssinia by Italy. Leslie Weatherhead had previously suggested that Mussolini be offered an unspecified part of the British Empire as an alternative imperial prize.⁵⁷

As Richard Overy pointed out, Pacifism was 'a broad Church' but not a 'united front'.⁵⁸ That was certainly the case for Christian pacifism which was, as Alan Wilkinson wrote, as 'fissiparous' as Nonconformity.⁵⁹ Following Sheppard's death in 1937, the peace movement declined in influence and became even more fractured.⁶⁰ The Abyssinian crisis, the Spanish Civil War, and perceptions of Hitler's threat led to the growth of belief in collective security and a move away from unconditional pacifism. By 1938 and 1939, most

⁵⁴ Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, 77–81, 92.

⁵⁵ *Methodist Recorder*, 26 July 1934, 10–24.

⁵⁶ Broom, 'Faith in the Furnace: British Christians in the Armed Services, 1939-1945', 25.

⁵⁷ Turner, *Modern Methodism in England 1932-1998*, 31.

⁵⁸ Overy, *The Morbid Age*, 221.

⁵⁹ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?*, 128.

⁶⁰ David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 223.

Methodists shared the broader public opinion that war was inevitable if German aggression was to be resisted and Christian civilisation saved. The *Methodist Recorder* questioned Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement and condemned the German 'Anschluss' with Austria.⁶¹ The Munich Agreement, though joyfully greeted by most churches, caused misgivings. Leslie Weatherhead asked his City Temple congregation: 'Do you feel just a little as though you had just made friends with a burglar?'⁶² Isaac Foot, Vice President of Conference during 1937-8 and former Liberal MP, condemned appeasement in general and Chamberlain's capitulation at Munich in particular; war had been avoided at the price of national 'shame'. Methodists should never become 'subservient to any dictator', stated Foot.⁶³ The defeat of Republican Spain, the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and the British guarantee to Poland during the same month proved tipping points in Methodist opinion.⁶⁴ According to Michael Hughes, there was little theology in these debates, almost no influence of either Karl Barth or Reinhold Niebuhr. Hughes found the Methodist Church 'surprisingly impervious to the broader theological and philosophical arguments on war and peace that were being advanced in Europe and America during these years [. . .] it is perhaps even more surprising that so little of the discussion was couched in the more familiar framework of the "just war"'.⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Methodist Recorder*, 24 February 1938, 3; 17 March 1939, 3.

⁶² A. Kingsley Weatherhead, *Leslie Weatherhead: A Personal Portrait* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), 178.

⁶³ *Methodist Recorder*, 20 October 1938, 7.

⁶⁴ Overy, *The Morbid Age*, 347-51.

⁶⁵ Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, 99, 109.

Mission to the Armed Forces

Methodism maintained its support for chaplaincy to the armed forces, despite growing pacifist support within the Church and country. Before 1932, the annual conferences of the three main Methodist Churches received reports of ministry to the military, including the numbers of adherents and members in the forces and the work of homes and institutes for servicemen. As in the Great War and before, the Wesleyans' military outreach greatly exceeded the two smaller Conferences. The reorganisation of army chaplaincy in 1919 saw commissioned Wesleyan and United Board chaplains incorporated within the Royal Army Chaplains' Department. The Methodist connexions accepted commissions for their chaplains once it was established where the boundaries lay between ecclesiastical and military discipline.⁶⁶ Five Wesleyans were granted permanent army commissions in 1920, including O.S. Watkins, P. Middleton Brumwell and H. Peverley Dodd; there were also four temporary chaplaincies. In addition, the denomination had three RAF commissioned chaplains and four in the navy, a total of sixteen posts; these approximate numbers were maintained throughout the 1920s.⁶⁷

The Wesleyans zealously guarded their hard-earned status within the armed forces. In 1922, in response to overtures from J. H. Shakespeare and the United Board that the Free Churches cooperate in interdenominational services in the RAF, the Wesleyan Church agreed, but on a specific and expedient basis overseas, and in England, only as a 'temporary arrangement without prejudice'. Representatives of the other churches were 'distinctly

⁶⁶ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 261.

⁶⁷ M.A.R.C., *Minutes and Papers of the Wesleyan Methodist Navy and Army Forces Board*, January 1918-January 1925, Meeting of 27 June 1920, MA 6001 (Box 2).

informed that the Wesleyan Church must be left to make its own arrangements for the pastoral oversight of Wesleyans in RAF camps in England.⁶⁸ Attestation for RAF cadets was an issue during the 1920s; posters were sent to all churches and chapels, reminding potential recruits of their religious rights.⁶⁹ The Wesleyan Forces Board continued to press the India Office for parity of status with the Anglican Church in the Indian Army without much success.⁷⁰ The board regularly addressed concerns about morality in the forces; typically puritanical was refusing to allow dancing at the Welcome Hall, Devonport and other Soldiers and Sailors' Homes.⁷¹ The appointment of O.S. Watkins as Deputy Chaplain General in January 1925 was recognition, not only of his service and achievements in the army over nearly thirty years but, more widely, of Wesleyan ministry to the armed forces.⁷²

Both the Primitive and United Methodist Churches supported commissioned chaplains and broader military mission organised through the United Board, albeit with smaller numbers of both servicemen and chaplains.⁷³ For most of the period leading to Methodist union, there were two or three commissioned Primitive and two United Methodist chaplains in the forces operating under the United Board's aegis. Although numbers were small during the 1920s, between them, these two connexions had commissioned chaplaincy representatives in all three services, including key posts. George Standing became Deputy Chaplain General to His Majesty's Forces, Joseph Firth was Staff

⁶⁸ M.A.R.C., *Minutes and Papers of the Wesleyan Methodist Navy and Army Forces Board, January 1918-January 1925*, Meeting of 26 March 1923, MA 6001 (Box 2).

⁶⁹ M.A.R.C., *Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, March 1925-October 1932*, Meeting of 25 September 1925, MA 6001 (Box 3).

⁷⁰ M.A.R.C., *Minutes and Papers of the Wesleyan Methodist Navy and Army Forces Board, January 1918-January 1925*, Meeting of 22 March 1920, MA 6001 (Box 2).

⁷¹ M.A.R.C., *Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, March 1925-October 1932*, Meeting of 23 November 1931, MA 6001 (Box 3).

⁷² M.A.R.C., *Minutes and Papers of the Wesleyan Methodist Navy and Army Forces Board, January 1918-January 1925*, Meeting of 24 November 1924, Cat. MA 6001 (Box 2).

⁷³ Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford, *Minutes of the United Forces Board, 1919-1931; Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Conference, 1919-1931*.

Chaplain RAF, and Owen Roebuck was the most senior Free Church chaplain in the navy.⁷⁴

These denominations took evident pride in the status of their chaplains. Despite the rising tide of pacifism during the decade, the Primitive Methodist Forces Board's minutes do not reveal any apparent questioning of uniformed ministry to the armed forces.⁷⁵ It is unlikely, however, that any discord would be recorded in such minutes.

In advance of union, the three Methodist Churches met regularly from 1926 onwards to discuss armed forces ministry.⁷⁶ They agreed to one armed forces board and one secretary. Although the Wesleyans had a considerable numerical advantage in chaplaincy and servicemen, half of the committee members were drawn from the two smaller connexions.⁷⁷ Whilst these negotiations were taking place, discussions were also undertaken on a more comprehensive formal arrangement for a Free Church board in response to overtures from the four churches represented by the United Board.⁷⁸ A joint Free Church Chaplaincy Department, extending the United Board's scope, was rejected by the Wesleyan Conference, which wished to retain authority over its ministers, finances and forces mission.⁷⁹ 'Fraternal cooperation' with the Baptists and Congregationalists was, however, welcomed.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Special Army Committee and United Navy, Army and Air Force Board 1914-1932, Meeting of 30 April 1929, MA 6001 (Box 7).

⁷⁵ M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Special Army Committee and United Navy, Army and Air Force Board 1914-1932, MA 6001 (Box 7).

⁷⁶ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, March 1925-October 1932, Meeting of 22 November 1926, MA 6001 (Box 3).

⁷⁷ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, March 1925-October 1932, Meeting of 26 March 1928, MA 6001 (Box 3).

⁷⁸ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, March 1925-October 1932, Meeting of 29 September 1930, MA 6001 (Box 3).

⁷⁹ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, March 1925-October 1932, Meeting of 29 September 1930, MA 6001 (Box 3).

⁸⁰ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, March 1925-October 1932, Meeting of 31 March 1932, MA 6001 (Box 3).

Before union, a joint committee of the three Methodist churches had reached agreement with the Admiralty, War Office and Air Ministry to transfer existing Wesleyan and United Board chaplains, and that men in the three services could now attest as 'Methodists'.⁸¹ In 1932, there were 18,688 Methodists in Britain's armed forces: 13,629 Wesleyans, 3404 Primitives and 1655 United Methodists.⁸² The newly constituted Forces Board also had under its care eighteen commissioned chaplains (five in the Royal Navy, nine in the army and four in the Royal Air Force), twenty-eight Reserve and fifty-three Territorial chaplains, 264 officiating ministers and twenty-seven Soldiers and Sailors' Homes.⁸³ On union in 1932, delegates at Conference were reminded of more than a century of Methodist witness to the armed forces, the struggle for religious liberty and representation in the army and navy, and Soldiers and Sailors' Homes in Britain and overseas.⁸⁴ Following the first conference of the united Methodist Church, the three armed forces boards formally joined together on 2 October 1932.⁸⁵ Joseph Bateson, who had served as Secretary of the Wesleyan Forces Board for the previous 23 years, 'with zeal and devotion of the highest order', was appointed Secretary of the Methodist Royal Navy, Army and Air Force Committee (Forces Board).⁸⁶ Former members drawn from all three Churches comprised the Forces Board, although its Wesleyan traditions dominated it, and some three-quarters of Methodist chaplains and servicemen were former Wesleyans.⁸⁷

⁸¹ *Minutes of the Methodist Church Conference, 1932*, 41.

⁸² *Minutes of the United Methodist Church Conference, 1931*, 175.

⁸³ *Agenda of the Methodist Church Conference, 1933*, 155.

⁸⁴ *Minutes of the Methodist Church Conference, 1932*, 41.

⁸⁵ Percy Middleton Brumwell, *The Army Chaplain: The Royal Army Chaplains' Department: The Duties of Chaplains, and Moral* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1943), 16.

⁸⁶ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, March 1925-October 1932, Meeting of 19 September 1932, MA 6001 (Box 3).

⁸⁷ *Minutes of the Methodist Church Conference, 1932*, 41.

The Methodist Church maintained the commitment to forces mission that the Wesleyans had shown since the 1860s. The Forces Board reported to Conference, its members included the President and past-President, and the Church invested significant resources, ministerial and financial, in its armed forces work. After union, there were fourteen Methodist chaplains in the Indian Army, a number the board pressed the India Office to increase.⁸⁸ The Royal Air Force's growth from 1935 saw an increase in Methodist numbers in the service and improved chaplaincy representation.⁸⁹ The RAF were recruiting 1400 additional personnel a month, including 100 Methodists. In 1936, the Church's allocation of commissioned ministers increased from four to six, and during the following year, officiating chaplains were appointed to minister to all new RAF stations.

Methodism arguably enjoyed ecclesiastical equality in the army and the RAF during the interwar period, but that was far from being the case in the navy. The Royal Navy maintained the Church of England's privileged position for far longer than was the case in the army. The First World War had barely dented that Anglican hegemony. Anthony Carew believed that the Admiralty colluded with Anglican domination of naval chaplaincy during the interwar period because it viewed conservative Church of England padres as bulwarks against radical and potentially revolutionary ideas in the fleet.⁹⁰ Sidney Knock and his fellow sailors of the First World War and the post-war period were, so he claimed, scornful of Anglican chaplaincy in the navy. 'The ship's company is composed of a host of sceptics, bitterly antagonistic towards the orthodox Church, and contemptuous of its servants.'⁹¹ Glyn

⁸⁸ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932-January 1945, Meeting of 22 May 1933, MA 6001 (Box 3).

⁸⁹ Patrick Bishop, *Air Force Blue: The RAF in World War Two* (London: William Collins, 2007), 48–64.

⁹⁰ Anthony Carew, *The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1900-39: The Invergordon Mutiny in Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), 132.

⁹¹ Sidney Knock, *"Clear Lower Deck": An intimate study of the men of the Royal Navy* (London: Phillip Allan, 1932), 261.

Pryor agreed, 'many sailors had an ambivalent response to organised religion'.⁹² That 'organised religion' was the Church of England.

The navy chaplain's officer status and elevated background created a social barrier between him and the lower deck. According to Captain John Wells, the parson's position in the wardroom, yet not wearing uniform or badges of rank, and the variety of non-spiritual tasks he undertook, made his position 'anomalous'.⁹³ Christopher McKee agreed that the padre's officer status distanced him from ratings, especially when at sea. In contrast to the more meritocratic RAF, officers often came from naval families, a self-perpetuating elite.⁹⁴ The service tended to recruit its men from the areas around its bases in southern England: Devonport, Portsmouth and Chatham; many boys followed fathers and uncles into the service.⁹⁵ Naval chaplaincy during the interwar years reflected this closed society.

Free Church chaplains had served at shore stations between 1914 and 1918, but not on warships. The Admiralty agreed in 1920 that the war service of the twelve non-Anglican chaplains who had held temporary commissions at the end of the war could be pensionable. In the same year, Revd R. W. Charlesworth, one of the Wesleyan chaplains who had served during the war, was appointed to the *Royal Sovereign* for a 'trial run' around the Mediterranean.⁹⁶ The Wesleyan Forces Board expressed delight at this apparent progress and requested that such arrangements, Free Church chaplains serving at sea, be made permanent. Revd Percy Hallding was also given a 'cruise' with the Mediterranean Fleet in

⁹² Glyn Pryor, *Citizen Sailors: The Royal Navy in the Second World War* (London: Viking, 2011), p. 393.

⁹³ John Wells, *The Royal Navy: An Illustrated Social History, 1870-1982* (Stroud: Sutton in association with the Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth, 1994), 211.

⁹⁴ Bishop, *Air Force Blue*, 31-41.

⁹⁵ Brian Lavery, *Hostilities Only: Training the Wartime Royal Navy* (London: National Maritime Museum, 2004), 10.

⁹⁶ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Wesleyan Methodist Navy and Army Forces Board, January 1918-January 1925, Meeting of 22 March 1920, MA 6001 (Box 2).

1921, but neither example set a precedent.⁹⁷ An Order in Council of October 1922 saw four Wesleyan and two United Board chaplains, all of whom had extensive war service, granted temporary commissions. The lack of progress in securing improved ministerial representation in the navy remained a concern for the Forces Board.⁹⁸ On the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939, there were only five Methodist chaplains on the Navy List representing the 7,750 Declared Methodists in the service. One of these five, Revd Douglas Spear, who served as a naval chaplain from 1938 to 1964, finally as Principal Chaplain, referred to 'Anglican exclusiveness' in naval chaplaincy during the 1920s and 1930s.⁹⁹ During the interwar years, any concessions in chaplaincy for the Free Churches in the navy were grudging and hard-won.

Joseph Bateson led the Forces Board of the Wesleyan and Methodist Churches for twenty-six years until his death in October 1935. He had developed military ministry through a period that included the First World War, commissioned chaplaincy under the reorganised Royal Army Chaplains' Department, and Methodist union. Bateson had been responsible for much of the detailed planning of the amalgamation of Methodist armed forces ministry; the success of the marriage owed much to his leadership.¹⁰⁰ In addition, he had proved adept at negotiating with the military authorities and presenting the interests of the armed forces within Methodism. Bateson's replacement was Henry Peverley Dodd, a former First World War chaplain who had been one of the first five Wesleyans to receive a permanent commission in 1920. Following Peverley Dodd's death in 1938, the role was held

⁹⁷ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Wesleyan Methodist Navy and Army Forces Board, January 1918-January 1925, Meetings of 27 September 1920 and 26 September 1921, MA 6001 (Box 2).

⁹⁸ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932-January 1945, Special Meeting of 21 June 1938, MA 6001 (Box 3).

⁹⁹ T.N.A., *History of the Church of Scotland and Free Churches (Naval) Chaplains' Branch*, DFEE 69/584.

¹⁰⁰ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932-January 1945, Meeting of 28 October 1935, MA 6001 (Box 3).

by George Standing and then Joseph Firth, two of the first two Primitive Methodist chaplains to enlist at the start of the First World War. Methodism benefited hugely from this experience and continuity at the head of its ministry to Britain's armed forces.¹⁰¹

The Outbreak of The Second World War

Leslie Weatherhead, who previously described himself as 'almost' a pacifist, spoke for many prominent Methodists on the outbreak of war.¹⁰² He tore up his Peace Pledge card, believing that the European situation in 1939 required of all Christians deeper thinking than merely rejecting armed conflict. The self-evident evils of Nazism and a firm conviction that the British Government had done everything possible to avoid war changed his views. Writing in October 1939, he explained the grim dilemma for Christians between pacifism and national service: 'You are not deciding between black and white but between two greys.'¹⁰³

Weatherhead believed that the Government had to be supported in resisting Hitler by the use of reasonable force. The atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis justified taking up arms: 'And if war be, at our present stage, the only way of delivering people from such outrages, would Christ not bid us make resistance?'¹⁰⁴ The war itself was not righteous, but its aims were: 'We dare not compromise with evil, nor can we calmly contemplate the existence of a Europe in which the very ground principles of morality and religion are flouted.'¹⁰⁵ George

¹⁰¹ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932-January 1945, Meetings of 10 January and 21 March 1938, MA 6001 (Box 3).

¹⁰² Weatherhead, *Thinking Aloud in War-Time*, v.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

Tomlinson, a Methodist local preacher and a conscientious objector during the First World War, was elected in a by-election of January 1938 as a Christian Pacifist, committed to the League and disarmament. However, for him, as for many other Methodists, the outbreak of war saw a complete volte-face:

The rise of Hitlerism demonstrated the impracticality of my theories. I came to the conclusion that there was nothing else to do but fight for the things in which I believed, even if fighting appeared contrary to my Christian principles. Until Hitlerism was destroyed, that in which I believed had no value.¹⁰⁶

On the outbreak of war, Richard Pyke, President of Conference, announced in a 'Message to the Methodist People' that this was a just conflict: 'If ever there was a war where only a desire to resist aggression and to save freedom for the world were the reasons for which it was waged, it is this war.' Although cherished liberty of conscience must be retained, he strongly encouraged young men to fight:

The evils of the world have to be fought; and if in fighting them we fail, it were better so to complete our work in the world than to escape into a safe place, while wickedness continues to afflict and ravage those who have not deserved the aggression, the persecution, and the imprisonment which is now the lot of thousands.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Catterall, *Labour and the Free Churches*, 173.

¹⁰⁷ *Methodist Recorder*, 7 September 1939, 3.

Summary

Although late in the day, union consolidated Methodism's position; however, its political and social influence had declined since the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras.¹⁰⁸ Methodist pacifism was much more significant in the interwar period than during the First World War and earlier. Though influential, especially in the 1930s, pacifism was never dominant in Conference or the Methodist press. Attitudes towards peace and war in the Church reflected broader political and social opinions.

Though questioned by some in the Church, mission to the armed forces remained a priority in Methodism. The formation of a single Forces Board increased the denomination's influence in the military. A common Free Church Board, or closer cooperation between the non-Anglican Protestant churches akin to the RAF 'Other Denominations' model, would have given these churches' ministry more weight. Methodism further consolidated its position in the RACHD; it had been part of the spiritual establishment of the air force since its inception, but the denomination struggled for recognition and representation in the navy.

The outbreak of war saw most Methodists support what they believed was a just conflict against an evil and aggressive state. There was no tub-thumping as there had been a generation earlier. Unlike the previous war, the conflict was not portrayed as a 'crusade' but, rather, a necessary struggle for Christian civilisation. Most Methodists accepted war

¹⁰⁸ Philip Williamson, 'Archbishops and the Monarchy: Leadership in British Religion, 1900-2012.', in *The Church of England and British Politics since 1900*, ed. by Tom Roger, Matthew Grimley and Philip Williamson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2020), 59–61, 64.

with Hitler, as they had accepted war in Belgium's defence twenty-five years earlier, albeit with more regret and more tolerance of those who could not accept it.

Chapter Seven: Second World War

‘War is wrong [. . .]. Yet I don’t see how we could have avoided this wrong without bringing a still greater wrong to generations ahead [. . .]. So, I believe in Britain’s cause.’¹

(Leslie Weatherhead, *This is the Victory*, 1940).

Introduction

The majority of Methodists, including most of the leadership, agreed with Leslie Weatherhead in supporting the national cause, believing that war could not have been avoided and must be fought to a successful conclusion. Moreover, that cause was equated with a spiritual and moral struggle against Nazi Germany’s obvious evils. Like the population as a whole, Methodists were mindful of the experiences of 1914-1918 and certainly not blind to the horrors of modern war.

Unlike during the First World War, a single Forces Board led Methodist military chaplains, giving common purpose and direction to ministry to all three services. This mission benefited from an established base in the army, the RAF, and the navy to a much lesser extent. Ministry by both commissioned chaplains and civilian clergy was to meet all the demands made of it. The recognition and representation that the Wesleyans had striven

¹ Leslie Weatherhead, *This Is the Victory*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), x-xii.

for since the 1860s, achieved in the army and air force, but not the navy until the later stages of the war, was arguably more than that of the Church in wider British society. Many Methodist chaplains gave distinguished service, spiritual, pastoral and military, as examples described will show. As during the First World War, civilian ministry was also extensive, and here too, the Church's mobilisation of its lay resources helped to meet the needs of the men and women of Britain's armed forces.

Divisions in the Church

The outbreak of war saw sharp divisions in Methodism between pacifists and pacifists. Many of the former agreed with Weatherhead in concluding that war against Hitler was a lesser evil than inaction. Pacifists could no longer argue that war could be avoided. Donald Soper conceded that 'By 1939 the anti-war movement of the previous eight years or so had demonstrated that if nothing succeeds like success, nothing fails like failure.'² Some, notably Soper, steadfastly continued to preach pacifism, seeing themselves as a redemptive minority. He argued that Christian belief could not justify taking up arms and that the outbreak of war had only served to increase the suffering of the Jews. 'I am alone sustained by the Christian faith which assures me that what is morally right carries with it the ultimate resources of the universe.'³ The Church retained a strong and influential pacifist lobby throughout the war.

² Quoted in Mark Peel, *The Last Wesleyan: A Life of Donald Soper* (Lancaster: Scotforth Books, 2008), 65.

³ Quoted in Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 289.

Conscription caused disagreements in Methodism as it had done during the previous conflict. In May 1939, when the Government introduced compulsory military service, Leslie Weatherhead had written to the Minister of Labour, Ernest Brown, regarding the Military Service Bill. As a result, the bill was amended to allow a clergyman, or a friend, to accompany a conscientious objector at a tribunal or speak in his defence.⁴ Methodist ministers supported applicants in many cases, although they did not necessarily agree with their stances on the war.

Those who expressed profound religious and ethical convictions were generally given a sympathetic hearing and given conditional exemptions from military service and the option of work in agriculture, civil defence or service in the Non-Combatant Corps.⁵ COs were treated with 'comparative tolerance' according to Wilkinson.⁶ In November 1939, for example, a tribunal in Manchester was quite happy to accept the offer of Rex Lawson, a Methodist local preacher, to serve in either the RAMC or as a naval writer.⁷ Tribunals were perceived as being much fairer than those of 1916-1918. In Manchester during April 1940, Charles Thornton, President of the Independent Methodist Conference, gave evidence supporting a young man who had applied for registration as a conscientious objector. The chairman of the Lancashire Tribunal, Judge Essenhigh, stated: 'We don't want anyone to go away from this or any other tribunal thinking that we are here as a net to drag these young men into military service.' Mr Thornton replied: 'You are far too fair for that, and too

⁴ John Travell, *Doctor of Souls: A Biography of Dr. Leslie Dixon Weatherhead*. (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1999), 121.

⁵ Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-45* (London: Cape, 1986), 495.

⁶ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 291.

⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 'Grounds for Conscientious Objection': 10 November 1939,⁷ <https://www-proquest-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/historical-newspapers/grounds-conscientious-objection/docview/484736902/se-2?accountid=14533> [accessed online 03.02.2020].

humane, far different from the last war. I am grateful for that.’⁸ Soper, who represented several COs, believed that ninety-nine per cent of tribunal judgements were fair. The British Government had ‘seized the moral high ground’, according to Martin Ceadel.⁹

There were some 59,000 registered conscientious objectors in Britain during the Second World War (compared to 16,500 in the First World War). The advent of the National Service (No.2) Act, passed in December 1941, enabling the call up of single women aged twenty to thirty, led to 1000 women becoming COs. Although numbers were greater than they had been between 1916 and 1918, COs made up only 1.2 per cent of the five million Britons conscripted between 1939 and 1945.¹⁰ Methodists were COs in larger numbers than during the First World War. In South West England, Methodists made up fifteen per cent of all those who objected on religious grounds, more than any other denomination.¹¹ Even in Methodism, however, conscientious objectors were massively outnumbered by those who served, either as volunteers or conscripts, in the armed forces.

Most in the Church identified with the national cause; nevertheless, Methodism remained divided over pacifism, especially in the early months of the war. In May 1940, the Bolton and Rochdale Synod passed a resolution deploring the victimisation of conscientious objectors in employment and other spheres. However, Revd C. H. Pitt opposed the resolution, remarking that the synod ‘should repudiate any suggestion that the Methodist Church was more on the side of the conscientious objector than on that of the men who

⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, ‘Peace Pledge Union Blamed for Interference’ 19 April 1940, 10. <https://www-proquest-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/historical-newspapers/peace-pledge-union/docview/484714389/se-2?accountid=14533> [accessed online 06.02.2020].

⁹ Martin Ceadel, ‘Opposition to War’, in *The Great World War, 1914-45, vol. 2, The Peoples’ Experience* ed. by Peter Liddle, John Bourne and Ian Whitehead. (London: Harper Collins, 2001), 443.

¹⁰ Sonya Rose, *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 171 (f.n.).

¹¹ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 291.

were serving.¹² Though generally supportive of the war, Methodism was much more accepting of anti-war views than it had been a generation earlier. This tolerance, though, had its limits. In June 1940, in the week after the Dunkirk evacuation, a time of grave national crisis, the President of Conference, Revd Richard Pyke, wrote an appeal entitled 'Pacifism in the Pulpit', urging pacifists not to preach their views:

But at such a moment as this time, these brethren should silence themselves, or at any rate they should on no account go into the pulpit and thrust their opinions upon a congregation who have no option but to suffer in silence [. . .]. Instead, in worship, pray for our King, our ministers of state, and especially for the brave men who stand between us and the barbarism that has crushed small and helpless nations.¹³

Later that month, a letter from Sir William Letts, one of five published in the *Methodist Recorder* that week expressing broadly similar views, deplored the number of pacifist Methodist ministers and hoped that Conference would not accept into the ministry any more individuals with anti-war convictions. He wrote: 'There is a feeling that Methodism is becoming a refuge for pacifists, peace-cranks and conscientious objectors. Thank God for the thousands of young men from Methodist homes who have accepted the call of duty and are taking up arms in defence of Home and Country and Empire.' Letts further objected to the journal's acceptance of 'Situation Wanted' notices from conscientious objectors and pacifists (five such 'small ads' appeared in that edition). The editor replied that freedom of conscience and the right to earn a living were inviolable precepts of 'Christian Civilisation'.¹⁴

In the Commons four days earlier, Winston Churchill had stated that this war was a struggle

¹² *Manchester Guardian*, 'C.O. Tribunal: Non Combatant Service', 7 May 1940, 6. <http://www-proquest-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/historical-newspapers/c-o-tribunal/docview/484784542/se-2?accountid=14533> [accessed online: 06.02.2020].

¹³ *Methodist Recorder*, 6 June 1940, 1.

¹⁴ *Methodist Recorder*, 27 June 1940, 12.

for the 'survival of Christian civilisation'.¹⁵ One letter published that week provided a balance by arguing the case for Christian pacifism. Ronald Mallone was one such Christian pacifist, conscientious objector and member of the Peace Pledge Union and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. As a Methodist lay preacher in Eastleigh, Hampshire, he preached three Christian pacifist sermons every Sunday during 1940, to the congregations' general approval, so he believed.¹⁶

Henry Carter, Secretary of the Methodist Social Welfare Department, long a stalwart of Methodist pacifism, argued the anti-war case on public platforms and in print, publishing a pamphlet advising men facing tribunals. Dr William Brough, who became a conscientious objector in 1939, described his pacifism as having developed through his association with the Methodist Church in Northumberland and the advice of Carter.¹⁷ Carter also helped create and sustain Christian Pacifist Forestry and Land Units, service with which would satisfy tribunals adjudging COs.¹⁸ In 1942, some 600 men worked on these schemes; forty-four per cent of them were Methodists.¹⁹

Membership of the Peace Pledge Union peaked at 136,000 in April 1940, but several of its leaders subsequently recanted in the face of the threat from Nazi Germany and the peace movement fractured.²⁰ The Methodist Peace Fellowship, the largest denominational peace organisation, grew during the first two years of war; by the middle of 1941, there were 5,000 members, including 845 ministers, although support declined sharply

¹⁵ *Hansard*, HC Deb 18 June 1940, vol. 362 cc 51-64 [accessed online 14.04.2020].

¹⁶ I.W.M., Ronald Mallone Interview, 4581.

¹⁷ I.W.M., William Brough Interview, 12103.

¹⁸ *Methodist Recorder*, 29 February 1940, 6.

¹⁹ Hughes, 'Methodism, Peace and War, 1932-45', 162.

²⁰ Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945*, 222.

thereafter.²¹ Soper remained a passionate anti-war voice, albeit heard less when the BBC banned pacifists from the radio during 1940. As the war continued, the pacifism of Soper and Carter became less influential but not insignificant within Methodism.²²

Michael Hughes' *Conscience and Conflict: Methodism Peace and War in the Twentieth Century*, the most comprehensive work on the subject, devoted three times as much space to Methodist pacifism as it did to how the Church met the war's practical challenges. He described the Methodist Peace Fellowship's activities in far more detail than chaplaincy work, which warranted only a single paragraph.²³ However, most Methodists believed that the war was irreproachably justified. Scott Lidgett spoke for the majority in the Church when he wrote: 'Never [. . .] did a nation take up arms in a more momentous cause than in the present case [. . .]. If the will of Germany [. . .] prevails, then all the accepted spiritual values of the Christian faith will be persistently outraged throughout Europe and beyond.'²⁴ On 17 September 1940, at the height of the Battle of Britain, Walter Armstrong, Methodist minister and first moderator of the newly formed Free Church Federal Council, in his opening address to the Council, praised the 'exploits of our young airmen' and strongly repudiated 'the general impression that the Churches, and the Free Churches, in particular, largely subscribed to pacifist teaching. That was not true [. . .] the overwhelming body of Free Churches stand by the Prime Minister in the gigantic and almost overwhelming burden that lies bearing upon him.'²⁵ It was a message that Revd Armstrong, now President of Conference, needed to reiterate in his induction speech of July 1941; it was 'simply, plainly

²¹ Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, 113–17.

²² Peel, *The Last Wesleyan*, 70–77.

²³ Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, 117–32.

²⁴ *Methodist Recorder*, 28 March 1940, 3.

²⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 'To Speak for all Free Churches: A New Council', 17 September 1940, 5. <https://www-proquest-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/historical-newspapers/speak-all-free-churches/docview/484797122/se-2?accountid=14533> [accessed online 06.02.2020].

and definitely not true that the Methodist Church had committed itself to pacifism.²⁶ Also, in 1941, William Sangster, Minister of Central Hall, Westminster, presented a commentary on war aims that made clear that pacifists did not have a monopoly of Christian ethics:

To the people who raise the plain pacifist issue by asserting that the only Christian comment to be made on our war aims is that we ought not to have any, one must simply say: "Please believe that we are as conscientious in our views as you are in yours: that we have spent years of torturing thought on this problem and that we now have peace of mind concerning our duty in this dark hour. We cannot act with strict impartiality as between the right on the one hand and the wrong on the other."²⁷

Sangster used quotations from ten British and Commonwealth statesmen to articulate these war aims, including Churchill, Attlee, Smuts and Mackenzie King. The arguments are primarily political and ethical rather than spiritual, giving substance to Hughes' contention that the Methodist Church did not engage in a serious theological debate about the war's rights and wrongs.²⁸ Neither side in these debates used the language of 'Just War' or quoted Thomas Aquinas.

Wilkinson believed there was less of a divide between civilians and the armed forces than during the First World War.²⁹ Now, with extensive German bombing of British cities, all were in the front line. Indeed, the *Methodist Recorder* regularly included photographs and stories of blitzed chapels; 2,067 Methodist buildings were destroyed or damaged by enemy

²⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 'Methodist Church Not Pacifist: President's Address', 15 July 1941, 6 <http://ezphost.dur.ac.uk/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/historical-newspapers/methodist-church-not-pacifist/docview/484846185/se-2?accountid=14533> [accessed online 06.02.2020].

²⁷ William Sangster, *Ten Statesmen for Jesus Christ: A Christian Commentary on Our War Aims* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1941), viii.

²⁸ Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, 133.

²⁹ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 247.

action. Westminster Methodist Central Hall's basement became an air-raid shelter; nearly half a million people spent at least one night in its sanctuary.³⁰ Its minister, Revd Sangster, arranged various activities and diversions for those who took refuge. This ministry was primarily social rather than specifically spiritual; 'service before services' clarified his priorities. The 1941 Conference affirmed Methodism's patriotic credentials, strongly supporting the government in pursuing 'this sacred cause', 'the triumph of righteousness, truth and freedom, brutally outraged at the present time'. This resolution received 136 votes in favour to sixteen against with nine abstentions.³¹ The Methodist Church managed these profound differences well, maintaining both liberty of conscience and support for the state whilst keeping both sides within the fold.

Army Chaplaincy

The armed forces, including their chaplaincy services, were prepared for war, the outbreak of which was by no means unexpected; mobilisation had occurred five months earlier. The RChD was in a much better position in 1939 than it had been in 1914. Michael Snape has comprehensively described the Department's mobilisation, expansion, organisation and training at the outbreak of war and throughout its duration.³² Chaplains were recruited for the war's duration, giving far more continuity than had been the case between 1914 and

³⁰ Ibid., 273–75.

³¹ Hughes, 'Methodism, Peace and War, 1932-45', 165.

³² Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 280–97.

1918.³³ Compared to the First World War, chaplains of all denominations undertook more systematic preparation for their roles which later included battle training.³⁴

The Methodist Church was also far better prepared for the outbreak of war in September 1939 than its predecessors had been in August 1914. Several writers have stressed the continuities of experience between the First and Second World Wars.³⁵ The experience of military ministry gained during the First World War and in the interwar period proved invaluable for the organisation and operation of Methodist chaplaincy and in providing role models for individual chaplains. Following the Munich Crisis of 1938, when war became probable, the Forces Board prepared to increase the number of chaplains in the Regular Army to fifty, with twenty more in the Reserve forces and an additional ten RAF chaplains.³⁶ In May 1939, following the introduction of conscription, all Methodist ministers were asked to consider volunteering for chaplaincy, and members of the Forces Board canvassed theological students, despite the strong pacifist tendencies prevalent in the 1930s.³⁷ Methodist ministers held commissions in the Regular, Reserve and Territorial forces of all three services. There had been, of course, no Methodist commissioned chaplains at the outbreak of the First World War. When Conference was held in July 1939, there were twenty-three Methodist chaplains, permanent and temporary, in the armed forces: nine in each of the army and the RAF and five in the Royal Navy. There were also fifty ministers in

³³ Ibid., 277.

³⁴ Ibid., 286–97.

³⁵ Hew Strachan, 'The Soldier's Experience in Two World Wars; Some Historiographical Comparisons' in *Time to Kill: The Soldier's Experience of War*, ed. by Paul Addison and Angus Calder (London: Pimlico, 1997), 369–379; Michael Gladwin, *Captains of the Soul: A History of Australian Army Chaplains* (Newport, N. S. W, Australia: Big Sky Publishing, 2013), 101–103.

³⁶ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932–January 1945, Meeting of 11 October 1938, MA 6001 (Box 3).

³⁷ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932–January 1945, Meeting of 23 May 1939, MA 6001 (Box 3).

the Regular Army Reserve, forty-two chaplains holding Territorial Army commissions (Twenty-one Active and twenty-one Reserve) and 352 officiating chaplains.³⁸ These numbers gave the Church considerable ministerial heft on the outbreak of war.

The Church's Navy, Army and Royal Air Board operated very effectively. The Church was united, with one Forces Board, unlike the two bodies representing Methodist denominations during the First World War. The Board had authority delegated to it by Conference; its members included serving and former chaplains, ministers and laymen. Responsibilities included selecting suitable ministers and monitoring reports sent by chaplains and civilians ministering to the forces. Like its Wesleyan and United Board antecedents, the Board generally provided sound leadership; in Alan Robinson's view: 'The Board was efficiently run, apart from a typical Methodist tendency to create a sub-committee for every conceivable purpose.'³⁹ It provided both supervision and support for chaplaincy and broader outreach within the services.

Unlike the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist Church recruited sufficient ministers to fill chaplaincy vacancies.⁴⁰ The connexional structure, with its system of circuit ministry, enabled Methodism to deploy suitable clergymen. Gaps were filled by reducing the number of ministers serving a circuit and making more use of lay preachers in a way that neither Anglicans nor Catholics could replicate.⁴¹ In July 1942, the Church appealed, both at Conference and through the *Methodist Recorder's* pages, for more young ministers to become chaplains; commissions were needed in the Army, the RAF and

³⁸ *Minutes of the Methodist Conference 1939*, 222.

³⁹ Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, 69–72.

⁴⁰ James Hagerty, *No Ordinary Shepherds: Catholic Chaplains to the British Forces in the Second World War* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2020), 40–60; Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 288.

⁴¹ Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, 88.

‘probably in the near future the Navy’.⁴² Henry Lannigan was one of those who responded, recruited straight from his final year at Hartley Victoria College; aged twenty-six, he was one of the youngest chaplains in the RACHD. He described how rigorous was his interview with George Standing, Secretary of the Board, and other senior ministers.⁴³ As demand increased throughout the war, the Methodist Church continued to recruit to all chaplaincy posts allocated to the denomination. Therefore, Methodists in the army and RAF were more favourably represented by chaplains of their Church than men and women of other denominations.⁴⁴ In 1941, for example, Methodists made up 5.6 per cent of men in the army and 7.5 per cent of chaplains employed by the RACHD. The ratio of soldiers per chaplain in that year was 924: 1 for the Methodists, compared to an overall figure of 1232: 1. Due to the Board's efforts to recruit suitable ministers for chaplaincy, this ratio improved; by 1944, it was 800: 1.⁴⁵ When it came to senior positions in the RACHD, though, Anglican dominance was maintained. In 1943 Anglican chaplains made up fifty-two per cent of the Department but held seventy-one per cent of its promoted roles. 430 Methodist chaplains were commissioned during the Second World War (compared to 331 in The First World War), six of whom, five serving with the army and one with the RAF, were killed on active service.⁴⁶

The recruitment of large numbers of Methodists into the armed forces was, as in the First World War, a cause of considerable pride for the Church. Albert Aspey, a chaplain serving in Iceland, proclaimed: ‘Methodism has the right to be proud of her soldier sons, for

⁴² W.H.L., *Agenda of the 1942 Methodist Conference*, 293.

⁴³ M.A.R.C., Henry Lannigan, ‘Forty Years On’: Some unpublished, recollections of World War 11, Chaplains: War-Time History, 232/12, MA 9842 (Box 9).

⁴⁴ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains’ Department*, 289.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁴⁶ M.A.R.C., Service Records of Methodist Chaplains who retired between 1933 and 1953, MA 9842 (Box 16); Peter Howson, ‘Deaths Among Army Chaplains, 1939-1946’, in *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, vol. 85, no. 342 (Summer 2007), 162-172.

their hearts are firm and true.’⁴⁷ Photographs of Methodist soldiers and airmen, but not sailors, appeared regularly in the *Methodist Recorder*.⁴⁸ The war was both an evangelical opening and a sacred pledge: ‘our Church is covenanted to care for the Methodist men and women in the services, and the covenant must be kept.’ Moreover, this was an opportunity to minister to both Methodists and ‘outsiders’:

There are Methodist Chaplains in Army Divisions and at Naval and RAF stations who are facing a new interpretation of our Church to many whose previous knowledge was either biased or limited. They are not proselytising, but by their character and the quality of their work, they are revealing the high standards of conduct and service inherent in our Church.⁴⁹

The lack of overt proselytising was in stark contrast to the First World War. Evangelism was one element of the Church’s mission to the services rather than an end in itself. Ministry to members of Britain’s armed forces presented opportunities for Christian witness, but there was little optimistic talk of revival in the services, either at Conference or in pages of the *Methodist Recorder*.

All churches recognised that they had been presented with openings for spiritual enterprise. As between 1914 and 1918, the war brought Methodist clergymen into contact with a broader range of men than in peacetime. Revd W. Jamieson believed that the war offered a unique opportunity:

The Second World War, with conscription of all able bodied men from 18 years of age to 41, and later to 51, [. . .] offered a fresh start to the Church to recruit men for the Ministry who were in close touch with the laity in a way that the traditional ministry had not experienced.

⁴⁷ *Methodist Recorder*, 19 February 1942, 3.

⁴⁸ For example, a photograph of a service in the Libyan Desert led by Methodist RAF padre Revd M. W. Horswill, *Methodist Recorder*, 18 June 1942, 3.

⁴⁹ *Methodist Recorder*, 30 July 1942, 17.

There was no life more intimate than life in the barrack room or on the field of battle. [. . .]

In this new area the ministry would not be confined to drinking tea at the Women's Guild, amusing children in play groups, meeting the prim and proper at the cocktail party, but ministers and priests alike would extend their ministry to the needs and aspirations of men.⁵⁰

Ronald Selby Wright, the celebrated 'Radio Padre', pointed out that the war had given the clergy the opportunity for dialogue with large numbers of service personnel who had been provided with Bibles, testaments and prayer books.⁵¹ Millions, including servicemen and women, listened to religious broadcasting on the BBC.⁵²

Henry Lannigan admitted his naivety on becoming a chaplain, 'I was much of an innocent', he wrote. He admitted that his prejudices about 'sin' were challenged by his ministry experiences in North Africa and Italy, where he saw, especially amongst NCOs, strong morality but disdain for his previously held views on swearing, alcohol and sexual fidelity:

Having been brought up to believe that drink, gambling and womanising were sure signs of damnation, I had many a shock [. . .] I would have trusted my life to any of them and they would have given their life for anybody. There was no trace of hypocrisy.⁵³

Methodist servicemen would always make up a minority in any unit. That said, Methodist chaplains enjoyed an advantage over their Church of England colleagues in that service personnel who positively identified themselves as 'Methodist' or 'Free Church' had a

⁵⁰ M.A.R.C., Unpublished article by Revd W. Jamieson, Chaplains: War-Time History, 232/12, MA 9842 (Box 9).

⁵¹ Ronald Selby Wright, *Soldiers Also Asked* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), v.

⁵² Hannah Elias, 'Radio Religion: War, Faith and the BBC 1939-1945' (PhD thesis, Canada, McMaster University, 2016), Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/12709/> [accessed online 19.03.2020].

⁵³ M.A.R.C., Henry Lannigan, 'Forty Years On': Some unpublished, recollections of World War 11, Chaplains: War-Time History, 232/12, MA 9842 (Box 9).

stronger denominational allegiance than those who were Anglicans by default. Chaplains saw their role as meeting the needs of all those in their care. Albert Gibbins described holding a service on the Liberty Ship which transported his regiment to Normandy in June 1944: 'Denominational differences were forgotten and as the men knelt on the deck at the communion service, compo boxes with a blanket making the table, but all felt His presence.'⁵⁴ Revd Victor Donald Siddons informed readers of the *Methodist Recorder* that most Methodists in the army were not Church members; their affiliations were fairly loose; however, they valued being cared for by a Methodist chaplain. Henry Lannigan did not doubt that his church had a responsibility to minister to the armed forces. 'On the general question as to whether a minister of the Gospel can be part of this evil of war is easily answered. The youth of the nation was there, therefore the Church must be there.'⁵⁵

There can be few Methodist chaplains who brought to their ministry the military experience of Donald Siddons. Having served as a Territorial in the Northamptonshire Yeomanry from 1910, he was accepted for Wesleyan ministry in 1914, but the outbreak of war curtailed his training. Siddons served in Belgium and France, being commissioned in July 1915, and was then posted to Egypt, where he transferred to the Royal Flying Corps, qualifying as a pilot in October 1916. Based in Sinai, and later Hejaz, he flew T. E. Lawrence three times. In April 1919, he re-commenced his ministerial training at Handsworth, remaining on the Army Reserve List throughout the 1920s and 1930s. He was commissioned as a chaplain in the Regular Army Reserve in February 1939 but relinquished his ministry following the outbreak of war. Siddons saw active service with the Pioneer Corps in France

⁵⁴ Albert Gibbins, *Infantry Padre* (Durham: Pentland Books, 2001), 4.

⁵⁵ M.A.R.C., Henry Lannigan, 'Forty Years On': Some unpublished, recollections of World War 11, Chaplains: War-Time History, 232/12, MA 9842 (Box 9).

from January 1940 until the Dunkirk evacuation. He described chaplaincy in France: short services with a Bible reading and one or two well-known hymns. Transferring to the RACHD, he saw service in Egypt, Tunisia and Greece, ending the war as Deputy Assistant Chaplain-General. In January 1944, Siddons jointly led a conference in Jerusalem for twenty-one men serving in the Middle East who were candidates for the Methodist ministry. In addition to the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Order of 'El Nahda' awarded for service in The First World War, he was Mentioned in Despatches and received the MBE for his chaplaincy work during the Second World War.⁵⁶ In one of many letters to his wife, Siddons described a carol service attended by eighteen men in his small tent in the Western Desert on Christmas Day 1941. 'There are 4 Christmas Hymns in the Army P. B. [Prayer Book] & we had printed sheets with Nowell, Wenceslas, Good X men, I saw 3 ships and Once in Royal printed on, & I think we sang them all twice!' ⁵⁷

Unlike much of the ministry that had taken place on the Western Front for extensive periods of the First World, most chaplaincy overseas was undertaken during highly mobile campaigns. The itinerant Methodist preacher, familiar two centuries earlier, reappeared during the Second World War. Revd Harold Key had volunteered for army chaplaincy within twenty-four hours of the outbreak of war, but he was rejected as he wore glasses. He reapplied and was accepted in February 1940, being posted to France with a Light Anti-Aircraft and Light Anti-Tank regiment. Key recalled his ministry during the rapid retreat, under fire, of part of his unit through Normandy and Brittany to Brest, from where they were evacuated, a 'Time of Deliverance', according to his description:

⁵⁶ I.W.M., MA 9842 Private Papers of Victor Donald Siddons, 99/521; M.A.R.C., Service Record of Chaplains Who Retired Between 1933-1953 (Box 16)

⁵⁷ I.W.M., Private Papers of Victor Donald Siddons, 99/521.

I am proud Methodism has a place in the army and that her young circuit ministers so largely fill that place. To serve our boys in the heroic struggle for God's Kingdom and Freedom and Family is the greatest privilege that will ever come to us.⁵⁸

The war in North Africa was fought across huge distances. Donald Siddons' diary of 16 November 1941 described '57 miles motoring, 6 services and HC [Holy Communion] 5 times, 29 communicants were Indians.'⁵⁹ Revd John Williams ran a mobile canteen and ministry, travelling between isolated units covering 1500 miles from El-Alamein to Sfax. Men appeared equally grateful for the opportunity for worship as they were for the refreshments and toiletries distributed.⁶⁰ Revd Richard Mort was killed at Tobruk on 11 June 1942.⁶¹ In an article entitled: 'A Challenge from the Middle East', published posthumously, he described his ministry in the desert. Mort was deeply aware of the significance of the lands in which services had been held; they had 'worshipped in ground made sacred by Jesus, by St. Paul, by Elijah, by Moses and by Abraham'. He had led men to 'sing the songs of Zion in a strange land'.⁶² He held only one service in a consecrated building during the previous year and only three services in any building — huts. He had preached to congregations, varying from two to 500, in fields, orange groves, vineyards, vehicle pits, slit trenches, tents, dugouts and in a cave. Oil drums, sandbags, water carriers, and even a beer box, had been utilised as the communion table. Revd Mort concluded: 'Methodism can be proud of her sons in the lines for they know that you need not be vulgar to be tough [. . .] Methodist men — to use that descriptive Americanism "Can take it"'.⁶³ Revd Earnest 'Smokey' Funnell was also killed, on

⁵⁸ *Methodist Recorder*, 15 August 1940, 3.

⁵⁹ I.W.M., Private Papers of the Revd Victor Donald Siddons, 99/521.

⁶⁰ *Methodist Recorder*, 13 April 1944, 8.

⁶¹ M.A.R.C., Service Records of Methodist Chaplains who retired between 1933 and 1953, MA 9842 (Box 16).

⁶² Psalm 137, 4.

⁶³ *Methodist Recorder*, 24 September 1942, 4.

30 March 1942, during the retreat from Burma. In his obituary published in the *Times*, the troops with whom he served, 'rough, hard soldiers' who 'deeply mourn his loss; he was their pal', described 'his big-heartedness, his cheerful disposition, and not least his saintly influence.'⁶⁴

Revd R. Edward Cubbon found army chaplaincy a sharp contrast to his ministry experience on the Isle of Man: 'Coming from country Methodist circuits into the army found me as a new recruit indeed and I had to learn quickly.'⁶⁵ He ministered to the 3rd Indian Division, part of Orde Wingate's 'Chindits', during the Burma campaign of 1943 and 1944.⁶⁶ The nature of this guerrilla warfare behind Japanese lines was such that chaplains were armed.⁶⁷ He was issued a sten gun that he discarded as too unreliable, exchanging it for a revolver. Cubbon described bitter fighting against the Japanese in appalling conditions. No prisoners were taken; the enemy fought to the death or committed suicide.⁶⁸ He described his role in a similar fashion to those chaplains who served in other theatres, as a 'grave-digger, Parson and mourner'.⁶⁹ Services took place only when there was a lull, mostly for small numbers of men, as the battalion was broken up into patrols and small companies. An article published anonymously, but in all probability written by Cubbon, described their existence when surrounded by the enemy:

It was a little too thrilling at times, but we never looked like being overrun by the Japs and our troops fought magnificently. It was a horrible business, but things have

⁶⁴ *The Times*, 23 October 1942, 11, <http://www.link.gale.com/apps/doc/cs118700596/TTDA?-cambuni@sid.TTDA@xid=8b39961> [accessed online 03.02.2020].

⁶⁵ R. Edward Cubbon, *Methodist, Mad and Married* (Douglas, Isle of Man: Hospice Care, 1993), 16.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁷ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 324–25.

⁶⁸ Cubbon, *Methodist, Mad and Married*, 41–44.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

quieted down now and we are able to attend to the ordinary routines of life [. . .] We had some fine services in the besieged area yesterday. Everyone who came seemed sincere in worship and generally thankful for deliverance.⁷⁰

After the Battle of Pyawbwe, he suffered from bubonic plague, scrub typhus and pneumonia. Cubbon was one of ten typhus patients evacuated by plane to India; the other nine died. He attributed his recovery to Providence.

Michael Gladwin described the 'intimacy' of chaplaincy in the Pacific and South East Asian combat theatres.⁷¹ Often one chaplain, irrespective of denomination, ministered to small groups of men during periods of intense hardship and danger. Edgar Richards, another Methodist 'Padre Behind Japanese Lines', described such ministry with Wingate's 'Chindits': 'A padre's role on a "column" is not an orthodox one. You cannot sing hymns or preach sermons in the jungle when you are liable to be ambushed at any moment.' Despite these conditions, Richards led family prayers each night and invited men to join him. He buried the dead, gathered personal effects and wrote to bereaved mothers and wives. On one occasion, he led a communion service for a small group a hundred yards from where mortar shells were landing. Such danger positively impacted belief, he contended: 'Men do not sneer at religion when they are about to go into battle.'⁷²

Wilfrid Hill accompanied the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry during 'Operation Husky', the invasion of Sicily in July 1943, and the subsequent campaign in Italy. His notebooks describe the assault and subsequent operations. He bemoaned his kit's weight and wished that he had carried less 'stuff': only a Bible, a printed order of service, an Army

⁷⁰ *Methodist Recorder*, 30 March 1944, 6.

⁷¹ Gladwin, *Captains of the Soul*, 119.

⁷² *Methodist Recorder*, 26 September 1944, 5.

Prayer Book and notebooks to record details of burials were necessary to fulfil his role. 'As a Free Churchman I would not carry a communion set or wine but would improvise when necessary.'⁷³ Methodist emphases on hymnody and preaching, rather than the liturgy and sacraments, lent themselves well to a ministry of mobility and extemporisation.

Hill was adamant about the importance of burying bodies as soon as feasible, that every burial must be 'as decent as possible', and that the chaplain should 'tackle the worst of it himself'. He wrote: 'I believe this to be of great practical importance and am quite sure that it has an important bearing on morale.' His notebooks from Sicily and Anzio describe the exact location of burials, including those of Italians and Germans, with detailed maps, diagrams, and directions. He recorded the names, units, next of kin and denominations of the dead; interestingly, not one of the many British casualties he buried is recorded as a 'Methodist'. It is clear from these 'burial books' that he wrote to the relatives of all those that he buried. His papers contain sixteen letters from bereaved relatives thanking Padre Hill for writing to them. Hill was awarded the Military Cross for actions at Sicily and Anzio, the citation attests to his courage:

On occasions too numerous to mention, he has gone out under fire to the aid of wounded men, never distinguishing between one unit and another, between friend or foe. Whenever conditions have been difficult this Officer has always been up at the front, cheerful and encouraging. He has had a great effect in maintaining the morale of our troops whilst his constant indifference to his personal safety has been an example to all.⁷⁴

Henry Lannigan agreed that burying the dead as soon as possible was vital to morale. During the Battle of Monte Cassino, he and his Catholic colleague cooperated. Lannigan

⁷³ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd Wilfred Hill, 20546.

⁷⁴ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd Wilfred Hill, 20546.

recovered bodies from the heights, and Father Ward buried them in the valley, telling him: 'Send them down. I shall bury them. God will know the address to send them to.' He buried several German soldiers using the German Army Catholic Prayer Book, including thanking God that they had died for 'Führer, Volk and Vaterland'. A Sikh sergeant's request that Lannigan bury three of his co-religionists caused a theological problem, resolved by the amendment of the funeral service's words to: 'In not so sure hope of the resurrection.'⁷⁵

Leslie Skinner is believed to have been the first British chaplain ashore on the morning of 'D' Day, 6 June 1944.⁷⁶ The Sherwood Rangers, the unit which he served, suffered heavy casualties, 153 deaths in eleven months, and much of his ministry, like that of Wilfrid Hill and Henry Lannigan, was displayed in the way in which he sought out the remains of the dead and ensured that they had Christian burials, often at considerable personal risk to himself. He frequently removed bodies, buried men and conducted funerals whilst under fire. David Render, an officer who served with him in the Sherwood Rangers, wrote: 'Our padre put the spiritual needs of our dead soldiers above any army red tape and he was severely rebuked by the military chaplain's chain of command.'⁷⁷ Skinner took meticulous care to record every burial's exact details, as evidenced by his casualty book.⁷⁸ The removal of the remains of those men killed in tanks that had been 'brewed up', burned, was especially gruesome, but he insisted that he carry out this task due to the impact on

⁷⁵ M.A.R.C., Lannigan, 'Forty Years On', MA 9842 (Box 9).

⁷⁶ *The Guardian*, 'Devoted military padre in the D Day firing line', 21 November 2001, 20 <https://www-proquest-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/historical-newspapers/reverend-leslie-skinner/docview/188816795/se-2?accountid=14533> [accessed online 19.11.2019].

⁷⁷ David Render, *Tank Action: An Armoured Troop Commander's War 1944-45* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2016), 10.

⁷⁸ R.A.Ch.D.A., Leslie Skinner, 'The Man who worked on Sundays', The Personal Diary from June 2, 1944, to May 16, 1945 (unpublished manuscript diary and casualty book).

others' morale. After severe fighting at Gheel in Belgium, he remained behind to recover the dead and bury their bodies:

He searched the ash of burned-out tanks for the remains of crews and stitched what was left with grey army blankets, chain smoking furiously in an attempt to ward off the stench of charred and putrefied flesh. [. . .] The padre had been given two medical orderlies to help him, but when the frightful nature of the task became too much for them, he worked on alone.⁷⁹

Like other padres, John Humphries buried the dead in Normandy and wrote letters to the bereaved. Conducting his first funeral in the field, for a Scot, he tried to follow the form of the Church of Scotland:

As I imagine his mother would have wanted it – without any ostentatious prayers or gestures. Just simply, as though we were saying “Goodnight” and hoping to meet in the morning! It’s true enough anyway! [. . .] “Dust to dust,” – the old familiar words, but I have never been surer of the “Resurrection to Eternal Life through our Lord Jesus Christ”.⁸⁰

Albert Gibbins was also a chaplain in Normandy. The basic military training he received at the ‘Padre’s Battle School’ proved invaluable during combat, especially when the Battalion sustained heavy casualties in July 1944 during the Battle for Caen. The imminence of death brought men closer to God, Gibbins believed:

Their sense of helplessness was forcing them back to God. Here is the secret of true religion. It is when we lose all artificial ‘props’ that we realise that Christianity is not an extra or a luxury but the one thing we cannot live without. These men were learning to live without all

⁷⁹ Render, *Tank Action*, 186.

⁸⁰ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd John H. Humphries RChD with No. 84 General Military Hospital 1944-1945, 27 June 1944, 11797.

the things they had previously regarded as essentials: home, sleep, food, entertainments, but they could not do without God, and they admitted it.⁸¹

During combat, he manned the Regimental Aid Post. Following this battle, he spent twenty-eight hours finding and burying bodies. He then had the task of writing some 300 letters to the relatives of the dead. David Willcocks, an Intelligence Officer in the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, wrote an appreciation of Gibbins' work: 'I shall always remember the dignity with which he conducted simple funeral services for the dead, both of our own and of enemy soldiers, the compassion he showed to the wounded; and his concern for all members of the battalion, regardless of denomination.'⁸²

Revd John Humphries, a miner's son from Rotherham, had extensive Wesleyan and Methodist ministry experience before joining the RChD in 1940. His first chaplaincy experience in a combat area was when he landed with No. 84 General Hospital in Normandy on 17 June 1944. Humphries admitted to being unsure of what was expected of him; his diary is full of self-doubt and questioning. He asked himself what a patient would demand of a padre, concluding that men needed two things: a friendly disposition, engaging in conversation about home and family, and that the chaplain should represent a 'Benign Providence which cares about human beings who suffer'. Men did not want pious talk, but firm conviction expressed by 'implication rather than direct reference'.⁸³ The hospital unit to which Humphries was attached dealt with seriously injured men, and he found this experience very challenging. On 23 June 1944, he wrote:

⁸¹ Gibbins, *Infantry Padre*, 16.

⁸² *Ibid.*, fwd.

⁸³ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd John H. Humphries, 19 June 1944, 11797.

Today I have walked around the beds and have seen grimmer sights than I have ever known. Heads, legs, eyes, hands, feet, heavily bandaged [. . .] God damn those mortars! I just can't write about it. [. . .] For a time I sympathise deeply with the folks who ask, "Where is God?" But I can't lay the responsibility for the war at the door of the Almighty! [. . .] Oh, that awful stench of blood and wounds – it is all new to me. And the pain endured. God Almighty! – and there is no more of prayer in this phrase than of blasphemy – how do they bear it? I'm proud to be counted one with the lads of the Second Army. What men! One of my jobs is to boost morale and I always set out to do it. I return with my morale boosted.'⁸⁴

Humphries held Sunday services in the 'chapel' of the hospital, a tent; 'I hope the worship put them in touch with God and their home folks for that is what I hoped and prayed for.' He also led Methodist Fellowship Meetings in the evenings, 'We sing of course, as all good Methodists should, but our minds are mainly on the folks at home and we talk of similar meetings in better surroundings.' He sent home copies of the prayers used at their meetings so that loved ones could share their fellowship. Humphries evoked John Wesley, this ministry being at the core of Methodism.⁸⁵ As his unit moved through Northern France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, he became more self-assured about the value of his ministry and more confident in his role. In Brussels, he tended three or four cheerful wounded Tommies; impressed by their fortitude, he wrote: 'I am glad to have joined the army if only for moments like these which make me proud to be an Englishman.'⁸⁶

Working relationships between the churches represented in the RACHD were usually cordial and cooperative; necessity broke down barriers. There were, however, denominational differences. Thus, for example, sick in a hospital in Italy at Christmas 1943,

⁸⁴ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd John H. Humphries, 23 June 1944, 11797.

⁸⁵ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd John H. Humphries, 7 July 1944, 11797.

⁸⁶ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd John H. Humphries, 12 September 1944, 11797.

Henry Lannigan found it 'hurtful' that the Anglican padre refused him communion, although he understood why he felt unable to do so. This experience, though, was untypical:

My war experiences had completely shattered all denominational thinking in me. The war had revealed the stupidity of our divisions. A man was a man, and a Christian was a Christian. [. . .] The most important effect that it had on me was to show in totality the stupidity of our Church differences. In the face of the evil of war, our differences were of a trivial nature.⁸⁷

Although generally enjoying good relationships with Roman Catholic and Church of England chaplains, John Humphries described disagreeing strongly with his Anglican colleague on at least one occasion. The RAMC Post Corporal was killed by enemy fire, his friends made a wooden cross for his grave, but the C. of E. chaplain refused to have it placed on the grave, 'It's a waste of time and materials! But you can put it up', he told Humphries; he did. 'The man is just a damned, unfeeling fool! [. . .] His Master — and mine — never considered the cross a waste of time.'⁸⁸

Leslie Skinner was one of several Methodist chaplains who showed quite extraordinary bravery and selflessness. His memoirs describing the invasion and the campaigns which followed display a combination of insouciance and courage.⁸⁹ The Tank Landing Craft bringing his unit ashore on 'D' Day hit a mine, badly injuring the men on either side of Skinner. There were no RAMC personnel present on that part of the landing beach, so he tended injured men, administered first aid and gathered the wounded to positions of relative safety. Later in the morning, he helped a party of Royal Engineers demolish a pillbox

⁸⁷ M.A.R.C., Lannigan, 'Forty Years On', 232/12, MA 9842 (Box 9).

⁸⁸ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd John H. Humphries, 16 July 1944, 11797.

⁸⁹ R.A.Ch.D.A., Leslie Skinner, 'The Man who worked on Sundays', The Personal Diary from June 2, 1944, to May 16, 1945.

that prevented vehicles from leaving the beach. On 25 June, while he was bringing in a wounded soldier, Skinner was hit in the head by shrapnel, knocked unconscious and returned to England for treatment. Hospital chaplain, John Humphries, met Skinner, a fellow Methodist chaplain, as a casualty. Skinner was, he wrote, 'incensed' at being evacuated back to Britain, leaving the men to whom he was assigned: 'He has the right spirit, but which seeks to serve the men — he was helping to carry a stretcher when a mortar splinter got him. I'm glad he's a Methodist Parson!' ⁹⁰ After a month, he discharged himself from hospital and removed his chaplain's shoulder flashes in order to re-join his unit. According to David Render, the men were delighted by their padre's return to Normandy: 'Skinner was revered in the regiment and there was not a man who was not glad to see him back.'⁹¹ Towards the end of the war, a man went missing during combat. Skinner found the lost soldier who was suffering from severe shell shock. As the battle raged around them, the padre discussed poetry with the traumatised man before gently leading him back to the Regimental Aid Post. Skinner accompanied the Sherwood Rangers for eleven months to the end of the war in Europe as they fought through Belgium, Holland and Germany, receiving more battle honours than any other British unit.⁹² Leslie Skinner's muscular Christianity, his service and his courage, resulted in his being Mentioned in Despatches and the awards of the French Croix de Guerre with Palm and the Belgian Chevalier of the Order of Leopold II with Palm. The citation for the latter read:

During the operations which terminated in the liberation of Belgium and since, he was always to be found with the most advanced troops subjecting himself to very considerable danger. So far forward did this gallant officer go that he was almost always at the side of the

⁹⁰ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd John H. Humphries, 24 June 1944, 11797.

⁹¹ Render, *Tank Action*, 138.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 10.

wounded and dying men on the battlefield. It is difficult to praise too highly the conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty of Captain Skinner.⁹³

Robert Talbot Watkins was one of the first two chaplains to undertake training with airborne troops.⁹⁴ He was attached to a medical dressing unit in Sicily in 1943, being Mentioned in Despatches.⁹⁵ Watkins served with distinction at Arnhem, accompanying the 1st Battalion of the Parachute Regiment during the first landing on 17 September 1944. He administered first aid and gathered and tended the wounded; these were typical tasks of padres in the field. His role at Arnhem, however, went far beyond that expected of a chaplain. Being the most senior officer in rank during the confusion that arose during German attacks on 19 September, he took control of a group of men and gave them orders. He undertook reconnaissance of the battlefield and recovered and organised scattered groups of men from several units. Revd Watkins set up a Vickers machine gun to defend the first aid post that he commanded.⁹⁶ He organised the evacuation of thirty walking wounded men, bringing them to safety across the river by boat, then returned to help more escape. Watkins was one of only three of the fifteen chaplains who landed, not killed or taken prisoner.⁹⁷ For his bravery and service at Arnhem, he was awarded the Military Cross, the citation of which read:

During the entire operation at Arnhem, 17-25 September, Padre Watkins conducted himself with magnificent fortitude and dash. Operating within the Divisional perimeter he made

⁹³ T.N.A., 'Commendation for CF 4th Class Padre (Captain) Leslie Skinner', 3 October 1945, WO/373/111/819; M.A.R.C., Service Records of Methodist Chaplains who retired between 1933 and 1953, MA 9842 (Box 16).

⁹⁴ *Methodist Recorder*, 28 January 1943, 3.

⁹⁵ *Methodist Recorder*, 27 July 1943, 7; *Daily Express*, 'Paratroop Padre in Bridge Battle', 21 July 1943, <https://www.ukpressonline.co.uk>. [accessed online 11.02.2020].

⁹⁶ Chris Van Roekel, *The Torn Horizon: Airborne Chaplains at Arnhem* (Oosterbeek: Hans Voor De Poort, 1998), 69.

⁹⁷ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 298.

himself responsible for carrying information from commander to commander invariably through intense shell and mortar fire and always where need was most great. His endless tending of the wounded under fire, and his continued organisation of the evacuation to Dressing Stations – often under fire, only made possible by his untiring personal effort and example - afforded an unparalleled inspiration to all ranks. His demeanour throughout, his unflinching courage and his complete disregard for his own safety guaranteed the morale of the entire force which never once wavered in the least.⁹⁸

Ministering to the men and being an officer sometimes caused conflicts of loyalties.⁹⁹

In India, Edward Cubbon was attached to a Royal Artillery unit, before a series of disputes with his regiment's Commanding Officer, over the latter's treatment of soldiers, saw him posted to the Special Forces.¹⁰⁰ At the heart of Revd Humphries' chaplaincy was compassion for all those in his care: patients, British and German, and RAMC staff. He found it highly challenging when the hospital admitted many men with self-inflicted wounds; writing letters to these soldiers' families was very hard. However, Humphries believed that these men, like all casualties, were equally deserving of his ministry. He fell out with the colonel in charge of the hospital, who believed that this compassion was misplaced.¹⁰¹ Henry Lannigan admitted to feeling ill at ease with officers for class reasons and being more comfortable in the company of sergeants and warrant officers. 'I found myself so very much more at home in the Sergeants Mess with them than with the officers.'¹⁰²

⁹⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 'Arnhem Colonel Crossed the Rhine in Daylight: First Awards to Airborne Men', 20 November 1944, 3. <https://www-proquest-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/historical-newspapers/arnhem-colonel-crossed-rhine-daylight/docview/478492554/se-2?accountid=14533> [accessed online 03.02.2020].

⁹⁹ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 330–31.

¹⁰⁰ Cubbon, *Methodist, Mad and Married*, 41.

¹⁰¹ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd John H. Humphries, 12 September 1944, 11797.

¹⁰² M.A.R.C., Lannigan, 'Forty Years On', 232/12, MA 9842 (Box 9).

In theory, the introduction of Army welfare and education officers, neither of whom existed during the First World War, freed chaplains to focus on a purely spiritual role.¹⁰³

However, Methodist chaplains' experience in action made it impossible to isolate their ministry's religious and social elements. In an article in the *Methodist Recorder*, Padre Robert Kerr described the Church's work with service personnel in Bombay. Ministry in the city included vibrant and well-attended services and the activities of Wesley House, which offered hospitality and entertainment to the large numbers of soldiers, sailors and airmen, who were in transit through the city. On offer were the Sunday social hour, cinema shows, lectures, missionary talks and free refreshments. This ministry appeared primarily social; however, Kerr made no apology for this: 'Possibly some who may read what I am saying will criticise this work as being too largely social service in character, but I should like myself to be told where in such work for Christ social service ends and spiritual service begins.'¹⁰⁴

Other Methodist chaplains shared Kerr's views; their responsibility was for the well-being of the men and women they served; there were no barriers between their spiritual and pastoral roles. Alan Robinson concluded that 'Methodist chaplains showed a greater willingness than Anglican chaplains to undertake welfare work, while Catholic chaplains avoided secular activities.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Percy Middleton Brumwell, *The Army Chaplain: The Royal Army Chaplains' Department: The Duties of Chaplains* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1943), 37.

¹⁰⁴ *Methodist Recorder*, 20 January 1944, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, 200.

Naval Chaplaincy

There were two facets to chaplaincy in the Royal Navy, according to Revd W. J. Piggott. He told readers of the *Methodist Recorder* that when ashore, the function was chiefly social, organising sports and recreation and distributing 'comforts'; at sea, the chaplain's role was to give religious and moral guidance.¹⁰⁶ Few Free Church or Presbyterian chaplains, though, accompanied crews at sea. Consequently, Methodist sailors had far less contact with chaplains of their own Church than was the case for Methodist airmen. There were 7,750 Declared Methodists in the navy on the outbreak of war and almost the same number, 7,726, in the air force. There were, however, five Methodist chaplains in the navy and nine in the RAF. None of these Methodist padres served on warships during the first two years of the War.¹⁰⁷ The domination that the Church of England retained over chaplaincy reflected the broader issues of class in the Navy's officer cadre, which remained, despite wartime exigencies, socially exclusive.¹⁰⁸

By the end of 1941, there were 145 commissioned Methodist army chaplains, fifty in the RAF, but only ten in the Navy.¹⁰⁹ Norman Burns, one of those few Methodist naval chaplains, wrote an article: 'Down to the Sea in Ships: From Seaman to Chaplain in the Royal Navy', in which he described his career and journey of faith and also the nature of naval chaplaincy. He also explained why Methodist chaplains did not serve on battleships but at

¹⁰⁶ *Methodist Recorder*, 25 July 1940, 33.

¹⁰⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 'Our London Correspondence: Padres', 2 November 1939, 6. <http://www-proquest-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/historical-newspapers/our-london-correspondence/docview/484686570/se-2?accountid=14533> [accessed online 03.02.2020].

¹⁰⁸ Glyn Pryor, *Citizen Sailors: The Royal Navy in the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 2011), 109–16.

¹⁰⁹ *The Times*, 20 January 1942, 7. <http://www.link.gale.com/apps/doc/cs118700596/TTDA?-cambuni@sid.TTDA@xid=8b39961> [accessed online 11.02.2020].

ports, visiting sailors on board. Burns stated that the Church needed an increased chaplaincy presence in the Navy.¹¹⁰ An article on increased chaplaincy provision in the army and the RAF published in the *Methodist Recorder* in February 1942, commented: 'In regard to the Navy the distribution of chaplains was not so good, but arrangements were being made with the Church of Scotland and the United Board for a more adequate quota of chaplains.'¹¹¹ Although public remarks about the inadequacy of ministerial presence in the Royal Navy are muted, the issue was a persistent irritation for the Church.

In one of the few articles on navy chaplaincy that appeared in the *Methodist Recorder*, Revd J. Curry described his ministry at Simonstown, the major naval station in South Africa. He visited ships in port, hospitals, the detention centre and conducted services for male and female naval personnel and civilian dockyard workers. Curry wrote that his work was akin to that of a circuit minister at home. It is difficult to envisage an army or RAF chaplain on active service making a similar comparison.¹¹² Revd J. L. Simpson Lee was the Methodist chaplain attached to the Royal Marines during 'Operation Husky' in 1943. He created a chapel and canteen in Augusta, Sicily, in a similar fashion to army and RAF padres on campaign, allowing him to minister to men on active service in a manner that would not have occurred on a warship.¹¹³

Douglas Spear, who served as a naval chaplain from 1938 to 1964, for the final two years as Principal Chaplain, was forthcoming about the status of 'Non-Anglican' chaplains in the service. He was one of the five Methodist chaplains serving in the Royal Navy on the

¹¹⁰ *Methodist Recorder*, 25 July 1940, 33.

¹¹¹ *Methodist Recorder*, 5 February 1942, 4.

¹¹² *Methodist Recorder*, 20 July 1944, 5.

¹¹³ F. Lovell Pocock, *With Those in Peril: A Chaplain's Life in the Royal Navy* (Upton-upon-Severn: Self-Publishing Association, 1989), 160–62.

outbreak of war. Spear was posted to Scapa in January 1941, based on a former liner used as a transit accommodation ship; he felt this illustrated his “‘being in” yet not “of” the Royal Navy’. Despite his pre-War service, ‘When it came to the crunch and ships sailed on an operation, I was left behind.’ He believed that Non-Anglicans were regarded by Church of England chaplains as ‘intruders’, ‘manifest arrogance that we found so very hurting’.

According to Spear, such a bar on going to sea was a disincentive to young Methodist ministers volunteering for naval chaplaincy. He claimed that this prohibition was unofficial but was led by ‘some’ senior C. of E. chaplains. Furthermore, the administering of communion was used to justify only Anglican chaplains accompanying ships at sea; Methodist sailors could receive the eucharist from a Church of England chaplain but not vice versa.¹¹⁴ Spear believed that the definitive history of naval chaplaincy, Gordon Taylor’s *The Sea Chaplains*,¹¹⁵ was written from the Anglican standpoint and only told ‘half the truth’.¹¹⁶

He wrote to Taylor, reiterating the sense of injustice that he and other Free Church chaplains felt owing to their exclusion from operating in ships, which had been ‘most unsatisfactory’ and ‘not a little humiliating’. By being assigned to a fleet, not one ship, the Captain of the Fleet would not let him leave Scapa. ‘But the real difficulties that I experienced were not from the practical difficulties advanced by the Captain of the Fleet but from the intransigent attitude shown by some C/E Chaplains, who stated that “we were not needed in ships”’.¹¹⁷ Notwithstanding that some Free Church naval chaplains had twenty years’ experience, their service’s ‘temporary’ nature diminished their standing.

¹¹⁴ T.N.A., ‘History of the Church of Scotland and Free Churches (Naval) Chaplains’ Branch’, DFEE 69/584.

¹¹⁵ Gordon Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains: A History of the Chaplains of the Royal Navy* (Oxford: Oxford Illustrated Press, 1978).

¹¹⁶ T.N.A., Letter by Spear to Revd John Creber, Principal Chaplain RN, dated 1 August 1978; ‘History of the Church of Scotland and Free Churches (Naval) Chaplains’ Branch’, DFEE 69/584.

¹¹⁷ T.N.A., Letter by Spear to Gordon Taylor, dated 26 July 1977; ‘History of the Church of Scotland and Free Churches (Naval) Chaplains’ Branch’, DFEE 69/584.

In common with the other Free Churches, the Methodist Church tried to challenge Anglican hegemony in Royal Navy chaplaincy. Only by acting together were the Church of Scotland and Free Churches (CSFC) able to achieve a modicum of recognition in the service. Working in concert from the end of 1942, the Free Churches and Presbyterians began to improve their representation in the Royal Navy. However, progress occurred only after an MP asked a question in Parliament about the ban on Church of Scotland chaplains. Joseph Firth, Secretary of the Methodist Forces Board, also acted as the Secretary to the Chaplaincies Services Advisory Committee, which coordinated CSFC lobbying of the Admiralty over attestation, the accurate recording of denominational statistics, the numbers and status of chaplains, and for a senior full-time chaplain to coordinate their work in the navy.¹¹⁸ In the forward to the Minute Book of this committee, Firth summarised the discrimination they had laboured under in a far more open manner than that expressed in the Methodist press. 'The story of Church of Scotland, other Presbyterian, Methodist and United Board Chaplaincy work in the Royal Navy over many years can only be described as one of halting progress.' The Admiralty had been 'sympathetic', 'but that has usually been the end of the matter' The response to the Non-Anglican Churches' requests had been 'very disappointing' and 'frustrating'. 'Though increasingly recognition was given to the churches in the Army and Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy revealed a strange reluctance to meet their just demands.' At the start of the war, he emphasised, there were 'Only 3 Church of Scotland, 5 Methodist and 2 United Board chaplains in the Royal Navy'.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ T.N.A., Admiralty (5) and RN Officers (71), Chaplaincies Services Advisory Committee; position of Senior Chaplain and Chaplains of Free Churches, ADM 1/14039.

¹¹⁹ M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Naval Coordinating Committee December 1943-1955, Meeting of 2 December 1943, MA 6001, (Box 7).

Irving Davies, who had been serving as an Acting, then Temporary Wesleyan/Methodist Chaplain since 1919, was made Senior Chaplain of the Free Churches in January 1943 for the duration of the War.¹²⁰ Coordinated lobbying of the Admiralty by the CSFC Committee, led by Davies, to use accurate denominational statistics as the basis for the allocation of chaplaincy posts saw the numbers of CSFC chaplains increase considerably during the final two years of the war.¹²¹ By May 1944, there were sixty-six Free Church and Presbyterian naval padres, including twenty-four Methodists, compared with the ten posts of September 1939.¹²² Some of these chaplaincies were Regular appointments, albeit that the majority were to shore stations rather than ships. Seven of these Methodist naval chaplains were, though, serving at sea by the end of 1944. Naval churches were made available for the use of all denominations during the final year of the war.¹²³ Though their position improved, these churches remained unhappy with their status compared with the Church of England; in 1945, they requested changes to King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions.¹²⁴ At the end of the War, Irving Davies was made Honorary Chaplain to the King, a tribute to Revd Davies and 'to the Church of Scotland and the Free Churches as a whole.'¹²⁵

Gordon Taylor's *The Sea Chaplains* describes the marginal role of the Free Churches and Presbyterians in Royal Naval chaplaincy. Taylor acknowledged the disadvantages under

¹²⁰ T.N.A., RN Officers (71) Senior Chaplain of Free Churches to be a full-time appointment (1943), ADM 1/13998.

¹²¹ M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Naval Coordinating Committee December 1943-1955, Meeting of 2 December 1943, MA 6001, (Box 7).

¹²² M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Naval Coordinating Committee, December 1943-1955, Meeting of 5 May 1944, MA 6001, (Box 7).

¹²³ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932-January 1945, Meeting of 9 May 1944, MA 6001 (Box 3).

¹²⁴ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932-January 1945, Meeting of 2 February 1945, MA 6001, (Box 7).

¹²⁵ M.A.R.C., Minutes of the Naval Coordinating Committee December 1943-1955, Meeting of 21 September 1945, MA 6001, (Box 7).

which chaplains of denominations other than the Anglicans served and that these were 'painful'. However, he excused these 'unavoidable differences', such as a shortage of cabin space, due to conditions at sea during wartime.¹²⁶ Realities of warfare in the army and the RAF did not result in discrimination and marginalisation, such as that suffered by non-Anglicans in the navy.¹²⁷ In the other two services, and the navies of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, Methodists and other Free Church chaplains proved themselves perfectly capable of exercising effective ministry to men and women from other faith backgrounds.

Air Force Chaplaincy

According to Revd Arthur Hitchens, an RAF chaplain had to be, like St Paul, 'all things to all men'.¹²⁸ Hitchens was first based at a training establishment, then later posted to a bomber station at Coningsby.¹²⁹ His priority had been to get to know the men by asking about their families and sweethearts. He also used his ability to play the piano to good effect for 'sing songs'. Like army chaplains, Hitchens visited the sick and injured at hospital and led Sunday morning parade services and Sunday evening and mid-week voluntary services. In addition, he 'went up' in an aircraft at the invitation of a young pilot and was a regular presence in the crew room before an operation. In an article in the *Methodist Recorder* entitled: 'Broken Threads', he described trying to console the wives and parents of the many aircrew who

¹²⁶ Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, 368.

¹²⁷ For similar issues with Catholic naval chaplaincy see: Hagerty, *No Ordinary Shepherds*, 69–71.

¹²⁸ 1 Corinthians 9. 22.

¹²⁹ M.A.R.C., Service Records of Methodist Chaplains who retired between 1933 and 1953, MA 9842 (Box 16).

died during raids on occupied territories. 'I have talked with many heartbroken widows whose young husbands have been killed in action.'¹³⁰

Such published accounts of Methodist RAF chaplaincy were less frequent than those of the army (albeit more numerous than those for the navy). One example was an article in the *Methodist Recorder*, 'When the Balloon Goes Up: Methodist Fellowship with Air Force Men and Women'. Revd Albion Trebilco described the practical difficulties of caring for small, isolated RAF and WAAF detachments such as those operating barrage balloons.¹³¹ Revd Robert Clemitson instructed pilots in astronomical navigation, evidence of the breadth of the air force chaplain's role.¹³² A. W. Hoskins' description of 'Men to whom we owe existence' is a eulogy to the faith and fortitude of the 'few', fighter aircraft crew, rather than an insight into his ministry.¹³³

Revd C. Ayden Fisk was the chaplain to an operational bomber unit in North Africa during 1943. He described his peripatetic ministry of 'An Unusual Church in the Desert': a communion table fashioned from aeroplane fabric stretched on a wooden frame, a communion rail made from wood from a German lorry, shell cases as flower vases, bomb boxes as seats and a harmonium which was 'a find'. Fisk was the only chaplain attached to this RAF unit, which necessitated non-denominational ministry, including Bible study, a 'TOC - H' group, choir practice and discussion groups; the Church Council comprised Anglicans, Congregationalists and Methodists.¹³⁴ Successful 'Other Denominations' ministry, cooperation between the Church of Scotland, United Board and Methodists, was described

¹³⁰ *Methodist Recorder*, 25 February 1943.

¹³¹ *Methodist Recorder*, 25 June 1942, 3.

¹³² *Methodist Recorder*, The Revd Robert Clemitson Obituary, 1977 (n.d.), (kindly supplied by his grandson David Wright).

¹³³ *Methodist Recorder*, 17 December 1942, 5.

¹³⁴ *Methodist Recorder*, 23 December 1943, 3.

by Revd Eric Chaplain.¹³⁵ 'The King's Way', a joint Free Church and Presbyterian evangelism scheme run across the Air Force, was perceived to have been successful, both in its spiritual impact and as an exercise in ecumenical cooperation.¹³⁶ This led to further cooperation in leading Moral Leadership programmes in Britain and overseas.¹³⁷ In Italy, Methodist RAF chaplains held services in Waldensian Churches; their congregations included nursing sisters, officers and men from New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and Britain.¹³⁸ Leading Aircraftsman Lowis, a 'Methodist Local Preacher in the Desert', described chaplaincy and lay ministry in the Middle East, including services, midweek meetings and lectures.¹³⁹ 'An Airman' writing in the *Methodist Magazine* described lay leadership of spiritual activity in North Africa. In the absence of a chaplain, a committee drawn from various Protestant denominations arranged well-attended Sunday morning and evening services in a tent, the NAAFI and a barn, 'the Endeavour Church', and organised discussion groups.¹⁴⁰ Also serving in the Middle East was the Revd Alex Kissack, who described holding a Covenant service at RAF Abu Sueir, Egypt in January 1945:

I collected a quantity of roughly hewn bread which I wrapped in the current edition of The Egyptian Gazette, and I went off to the Garrison Church in Ismailia. By 3.30, there were about 150 men in the Church, so we had our Covenant service. Over 100 communicated. I told them that we were met on almost the same spot where the children of Israel had gathered to cross into Sinai for the first Covenant.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ *Methodist Recorder*, 23 March 1944, 3.

¹³⁶ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932- January 1945, Meeting of 19 January 1943, MA 6001 (Box 3).

¹³⁷ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932- January 1945, Meeting of 11 January 1944, MA 6001 (Box 3).

¹³⁸ *Methodist Recorder*, 22 June 1944, 3.

¹³⁹ *Methodist Recorder*, 6 July 1944, 3.

¹⁴⁰ *The Methodist Magazine*, September/ October 1944, 238-40.

¹⁴¹ Quoted in The Methodist Church, *Celebrating 150 Years of Ministry to the Armed Forces: 1860-2010*, ed. by Emma Kennedy and Alison Pollard (London: Methodist Publishing, 2010), 17.

Revd Stanley Keen, Principal Chaplain, toured RAF bases in North Africa, the Middle East, India and Burma during late 1944. In the *Methodist Recorder*, he paid tribute to both 'Methodist chaplains who have helped to make epic history' and to the effectiveness of cooperation with Presbyterians and the United Board: 'In the RAF there is one congregation, not three, and rarely save in the very large stations, do these chaplains of the Free Churches work alone.'¹⁴²

Chaplaincy to Prisoners of War

Twelve of the eighty-six chaplains who were Prisoners of War were Methodists.¹⁴³ (There had been two Wesleyan POW chaplains and one Wesleyan and one United Methodist sent to minister to those interned in neutral states during the First World War).¹⁴⁴ Revd Joseph, 'Jock', Ellison Platt was one of the thirty-three chaplains, including four Methodists, captured in France and Belgium during 1940.¹⁴⁵ He was detained when the RAMC Casualty Clearing Station at Krombeke, to which he was attached, was overrun by the Germans on 29 May, before the evacuation from Dunkirk, an event he described 'as the greatest rout since Napoleon's Moscow, perhaps the greatest in history'. Platt described the breadth of role during the chaotic two days before capture: 'During the past forty-eight hours I have turned my hand to anything, nay everything. I have been stretcher-bearer, grave-digger, surgeon,

¹⁴² *Methodist Recorder*, 8 February 1945, 7.

¹⁴³ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 317; Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, 175.

¹⁴⁴ John Thompson, 'The Free Church Army Chaplain, 1830-1930' (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1990), 372.

¹⁴⁵ R.A.Ch.D.A., *The British Weekly*, 26 September 1940, press cutting in a file compiled by a staff chaplain [P. Middleton Brumwell].

anaesthetist, nursing orderly, ambulance driver, traffic policeman, yes; everything.’ His diary makes clear that he could have escaped but that he and three fellow chaplains decided that it was their duty to remain ‘as long as there are wounded, dying and dead men who need our ministry’. His first task as a POW chaplain was to find and bury several hundred British war dead. ‘The description of that experience — the finding of bodies that have lain out in a blistering sun for an indefinite period is best glossed over with the tag “I did my duty”.’ A German chaplain was engaged in the same task, and they each stood side-by-side and saluted each other’s war dead.¹⁴⁶

One of the first allied officers to be imprisoned at Colditz Castle, *Oflag IVC*, the ‘crime’ which justified Ellison Platt’s confinement in this ‘Straflager’ camp for serial escapers, was being discovered at Spangenberg Camp with a ‘jemmy’, a coat hanger which he had bent in order to keep his attaché case open. He was very aggrieved at being accused, having chosen to be captured, a ‘voluntary prisoner’. Platt had ‘no intention of escaping since I hope for repatriation under the Geneva Convention’.¹⁴⁷ However, in August 1941, changes to the status of chaplains who were POWs, agreed by Britain, Germany and Italy, under Articles 9-13 of the Convention, meant that they were no longer to be repatriated but were treated as other officer prisoners.¹⁴⁸ He was, instead, imprisoned in Colditz for four and a half years.¹⁴⁹ Ellison Platt believed that he and his Church of England counterpart, Hobling, were confined at this ‘Bad Boys’ Camp’ due to their frequent requests to transfer to a camp for the men rather than confinement with officers.

¹⁴⁶ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd J. Ellison Platt, 22101a, 20-30.

¹⁴⁷ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd J. Ellison Platt, 22101a, 91.

¹⁴⁸ Gladwin, *Captains of the Soul*, 131.

¹⁴⁹ Patrick Reid, *Colditz* (Sevenoaks: Coronet, 1986); Reinhold Eggers, *Colditz: The German Story* (London: Robert Hale, 1961).

Margaret Duggan, who edited the diary Ellison Platt kept from May 1940 to April 1945, contends that it contains little theological material.¹⁵⁰ This is to misunderstand the nature of his ministry to POWs. Despite the almost mythic reputation that Colditz acquired, life for its inmates was more about endurance than light-hearted 'Boy's Own' escapades.¹⁵¹ As in other camps, chaplaincy at Colditz was as much about pastoral care and the maintenance of individual and collective morale as it was about spiritual leadership. Ellison Platt's ministry was highly practical, concentrating upon the well-being of all his flock, British and those of other nationalities. Few prisoners were from Nonconformist backgrounds, still the exception for officers. Being one of the oldest prisoners and coming from a different social milieu from most of his fellow captives, he was not infrequently ill at ease with the public school humour and jolly japes that seem to have been such a feature of Colditz. Hugo Ironside, one of his fellow prisoners, described Colditz as 'more socially exclusive than other camps', in that, 'the majority had been to public schools', and that the 'atmosphere was very much [. . .] the country gentleman set up.'¹⁵² Ellison Platt was sometimes profoundly uncomfortable with the language and behaviour of 'sex-starved, virile young men': ribald humour, frequent references to homosexuality and masturbation, and cross-dressing in shows.¹⁵³ Notwithstanding his somewhat censorious manner, Ellison Platt was a popular parson according to fellow prisoners, Major Pat Reid and Captain Airey Neave; the latter

¹⁵⁰ Jock Ellison Platt, *Padre in Colditz: The Diary of J. Ellison Platt*, ed. by Margaret Duggan. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1978), 10.

¹⁵¹ S. P Mackenzie, *The Colditz Myth: British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁵² Quoted in Mackenzie, 182.

¹⁵³ Platt, *Padre in Colditz*, 103, 151.

described him and his C. of E. colleagues as 'A source of guidance to the unruly and of consolation to the unpopular and the heavy laden.'¹⁵⁴

Given that there were initially only twenty-three other British prisoners, Ellison Platt, Hobling and Richard Heard, the High Anglican former Dean of Peterhouse, Cambridge, decided to pool their resources. Services were shared, although they varied between Anglican and Free Church in form.¹⁵⁵ More Nonconformists arrived at Colditz as more British captives were imprisoned from 1941 onwards; however, ecumenical cooperation was generally maintained. He respected Heard, but Hobling's prissiness and insistence on High Churchmanship traditions caused considerable irritation. Ellison Platt also ministered to French and Dutch Protestant prisoners who found the nature of his Free Church ministry more familiar than that of the Established Church. On at least one occasion, he led prayers in Afrikaans.¹⁵⁶ In his diary and a letter to the *Methodist Recorder*, he described the practical difficulties of ministry in Colditz: maintaining the physical, emotional and spiritual health of men confined in cramped conditions for long periods, prisoners suffering from, in his description, 'war melancholia'.¹⁵⁷

Douglas Thompson's ministry was both 'unmistakably Methodist' and 'distinctively pastoral', according to Alan Robinson.¹⁵⁸ Thompson believed that the core of his chaplaincy 'in the bag' was 'to keep men alive, all sorts of men'.¹⁵⁹ Maintaining morale was the key to his role, as it was for other POW chaplains. In a number of camps in North Africa, Italy and

¹⁵⁴ Patrick Reid, *The Latter Days at Colditz* (London: Cassell Military, 2003), 252; Airey Neave, *They Have Their Exits* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953), 60.

¹⁵⁵ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd J. Ellison Platt, 22101a, 103.

¹⁵⁶ Reid, *Colditz*, 87.

¹⁵⁷ *Methodist Recorder*, 27 January 1944, 7.

¹⁵⁸ Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, 176.

¹⁵⁹ Douglas Thompson, *Captives to Freedom* (London: Epworth Press, 1955), 32.

Germany, he strove to ensure the well-being of the men he served. Many prisoners were broken; Thompson believed his ministry's essence was to lift POWs in mind and spirit.¹⁶⁰

Thompson was serving at a Regimental Aid Post with 1/4th Battalion Essex Regiment in the Western Desert near El Alamein, when he was shot in the stomach as he was captured by the Germans on 2 July 1942.¹⁶¹ Following surgery and recuperation from serious injury at an Italian base hospital near Sidi Barrani, Thompson was held at a number of camps in Libya where he ministered to men from several allied nations. He led services at Derna for British, Australian, New Zealand and South African prisoners, many of whom had been captured at the fall of Tobruk:

We stood in a tight circle where a subdued light fell on a torn copy of the New Testament pocket edition which someone had given me. We sang, we read and talked, and then prayed for the King Emperor, homelands and our homes, and finally in the historic Methodist phrase for “travelling mercies”.¹⁶²

After transfer to Italy, he was chaplain at a large camp near Bari. Thompson was held with other officers, including fifteen chaplains, but managed to ‘cross the wire’ to minister to the men held in the adjacent camp by one means or another. He described one such service that he conducted:

They set up a table in an open space in the late afternoon, and I stood on the ‘pulpit’ surrounded by the milling throng of men, representative of all nations in the desert. A corporal of my own unit, who had often played for me, scrounged a piano accordion from Italian stores, and played hymn after hymn as the men requested them. We prayed

¹⁶⁰ I.W.M., Douglas Thompson Interview, 4650.

¹⁶¹ Thompson, *Captives to Freedom*, 22; Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, 176.

¹⁶² Thompson, *Captives to Freedom*, 61.

together, and I opened my tattered copy of the New Testament to preach from the text 'Paul, the prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ.'¹⁶³ They listened quietly to the story of how that tough little man had come, a prisoner to this very Italy, at his own demand, because he was a life-prisoner to One whom he loved. Our choices, not our chances, alone can make us really prisoners.¹⁶⁴

The suicide of a prisoner further convinced Thompson that the 'general welfare' of the men, pastoral care, was the gist of his ministry. Survival relied on men looking after themselves and each other, so he set up a 'Personal Service Covenant', in which men would promise to watch over their fellows and report worrying signs before it was too late.¹⁶⁵ His memoirs and the interview he gave to the Imperial War Museum testify to dynamic spiritual and pastoral leadership in this and other camps.¹⁶⁶ Three chaplains, Church of England, Roman Catholic and Methodist, ministered to eight thousand men in a camp near Porto San Giorgio, but when his Anglican colleague was repatriated due to illness, Thompson was chaplain to all the 'non-Catholic' men in camp. He enjoyed a good relationship with Father Coates, the Roman Catholic padre, asking, 'Had our ancestors burned each other?'¹⁶⁷ Thompson encouraged the men to copy well-known hymns onto pages torn from exercise books, and up to a thousand men gathered for services. He also created a structure of classes in the Methodist model. Although Thompson's ministry was distinctively Methodist, his ecumenism extended to leading a course on the Old Testament prophets for Jewish soldiers. He also taught a Royal Marine sergeant how to create a system of classes to train men to be communists, convinced that any sense of purpose was good for the men's well-

¹⁶³ *Ephesians 3.1.*

¹⁶⁴ Thompson, *Captives to Freedom*, 78.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁶⁶ I.W.M., Douglas Thompson Interview, 4650

¹⁶⁷ Thompson, *Captives to Freedom*, 98.

being.¹⁶⁸ He believed that prisoners needed both stimulus and discipline, and he ran a wide variety of courses in subjects including Bible studies, Church membership, Freudian psychology and Chinese.

Thompson was offered repatriation but declined it, as he believed that the men needed his ministry too much for him to abandon them. He also spurned the opportunity to escape with many fellow prisoners when Italy surrendered in September 1943. Instead, Italian capitulation saw Thompson become a prisoner of the Germans. In late 1943, the Germans 'axed' him from one camp after he preached a sermon on social justice, based on the Hebrew minor prophets, which was deemed to have potentially 'incited the men to unrest'.¹⁶⁹ He spent time in several German camps, including the East Camp, *Stalag Luft III*, a vast complex, where he was the only chaplain of any denomination in a camp for 2,000 RAF officers.¹⁷⁰ This was the camp from which the 'Wooden Horse' break and 'the Great Escape' took place. Thompson gave communion to the men who took part in the mass break out and buried the ashes of thirty-three escapees shot by the SS.¹⁷¹ Although escape dominated the thoughts of many POWs, Thompson believed that his ministry was to the majority who did not escape, 'the padre was the friend of those who must wait'.¹⁷² 'Escaping was a bit of a dead loss really'; his role was to 'keep men alive, and to improve them [. . .] to send them home as useful citizens.'¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ I.W.M., Douglas Thompson Interview, 4650.

¹⁶⁹ Thompson, *Captives to Freedom*, 142.

¹⁷⁰ Arthur Durand, *Stalag Luft III: The Secret Story* (Wellingborough: Stephens, 1989); David Rolf, *Prisoners of the Reich: Germany's Captives 1939-1945* (Sevenoaks: Coronet, 1989), 37–39, 72, 97, 102.

¹⁷¹ I.W.M., Douglas Thompson Interview, 4650.

¹⁷² Thompson, *Captives to Freedom*, 165.

¹⁷³ I.W.M., Douglas Thompson Interview, 4650.

Christopher Ross combined extraordinary bravery and fortitude with a clear understanding of what the men to whom he ministered required of him. Ross spent three and a half years ministering to Prisoners of War of the Japanese following the Fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942. He was one of three Methodist chaplains captured on this date, and he was still listed as 'missing' some four months later.¹⁷⁴ On the first Sunday of incarceration, his lesson was from Acts 16, Paul and Silas imprisoned; the parallels were obvious.¹⁷⁵ He also introduced the example of John Bunyan's captivity in Bedford Gaol. Ross discussed imprisonment, faith and belief, urging the men not to grumble but to pray and sing. This ministry was, from the outset, highly practical as well as being deeply spiritual. In Changi Prison in Singapore, Ross, together with the Congregationalist chaplain, John Haigh, created a 'Free Church University', one of a number of similar schemes on offer in Singapore's prison camps, which offered an extraordinary range of theological and other lectures, courses, and activities.¹⁷⁶ Men needed the structure of such activities.

When working parties were sent to labour on the Burma to Thailand Railway, Ross insisted that they be accompanied by a chaplain, substituting himself for a lieutenant selected by the Japanese. He was the only chaplain at Non Phaduct [sic] Camp for much of the time, serving 6000 men drawn from several nationalities. The Japanese removed all the camp's officers for several weeks except Ross, two dentists and six doctors. Ross and the men to whom he ministered endured appalling conditions; he described the Japanese policy as 'overcrowding, underfeeding, overwork, beating and disease'. Their captors recognised neither the Geneva Convention nor his status as a minister of religion; hymn singing and

¹⁷⁴ T.N.A., War Office, Prisoners of War, Far East: Royal Army Chaplain's Department; Nominal Roll, 1942, WO 361/2156; Malaya: Royal Army Chaplains' Department: Missing Personnel, June 1942, WO 361/319.

¹⁷⁵ Acts 16. 16-40.

¹⁷⁶ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd J. F. Haigh, 20604.

religious services were banned, public prayer restricted, and no preaching was allowed for long periods. In the infamous camps and construction sites, death was ever present. Twelve thousand allied servicemen, and perhaps 90,000 civilian slave labourers, died in constructing the 'death railway'.¹⁷⁷ Ross trained some fifty men to lead interment and funeral services so that all those who died on scattered details would have a Christian burial. He urged men to 'face death, not fear it'. 'Now I care not what the japs [sic] may do. Death is not "Journey's End" for the Christian - not even for me - that is the Faith that sustained me.' When allowed to preach, he led simple services designed to cater to men of all beliefs and none. 'I remained true to my Methodist training and tradition but worked on inter-denominational lines.' Church notices for the camp list the Roman Catholic prayers, Church of England and Free Church communion services and evening worship that took place when permitted.¹⁷⁸ Ross administered 250,000 individual communions during his incarceration, and some 300 men were admitted into Church membership. He believed that faith flourished in this dire adversity: 'Despite the persecution the Church prospered. God is not without witness and some gallant souls.'¹⁷⁹

A report by the Assistant Chaplain-General in Malaya on chaplains' work during captivity (which highly criticised several padres from other denominations) said of Ross that 'He has a wonderful influence with all ranks and denominations. A first class chaplain.'¹⁸⁰ Frank Tantom, one of the POWs who survived the ordeal at Non Phaduct Camp, testified to Ross' contribution to maintaining the morale of his flock: 'Even when Padre couldn't help

¹⁷⁷ Ellie Taylor, *Faith, Hope and Rice: Private Fred Cox's Account of Captivity and the Death Railway* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2015), xi.

¹⁷⁸ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd Christopher Ross, 80/12/01.

¹⁷⁹ R.A.Ch.D.A., Christopher Ross, 'A Methodist Chaplain's Experience in Japanese Prison Camps' (unpublished manuscript).

¹⁸⁰ R.A.Ch.D.A., Royal Army Chaplains' Department, South East Asia, Advance Report on Chaplaincy Services in Malayan POW Camps, August 1945.

immediately or materially, he had a way of gripping the hand (and what a grip) that inspired hope and increased courage.’¹⁸¹ Ross was convinced of the value of his ministry; the men ‘won’ he claimed. In a letter written during his journey home, he wrote:

Semi-starvation, overcrowding in bug and lice-ridden bamboo huts, overworking in the tropical sun, assaulted, hated, beaten for real or imagined infringements of orders — that was our constant lot. Very often when tired and hungry, I have tended sick and dying and tortured men. How I kept going is a wonder.

Thoughts of his wife and child and friends praying for him sustained him together with ‘the assurance that I was doing real Christ-like service. I was given almost super-human strength and cheerfulness’. In an article in the *Methodist Recorder*, ‘A Methodist Padre’s Prison-Circuit in Siam; Ministry to Men of All Creeds and None’, he wrote: ‘In short my experience in this “Japanese Prison Circuit” is one where I was able to do the real job for which I was ordained.’¹⁸²

Brian MacArthur’s study of prisoners of the Japanese described chaplains of all denominations as ‘inspirational figures’.¹⁸³ Not all, however, inspired like Christopher Ross. Another Methodist chaplain captured at the Fall of Singapore, Robert Pridmore, struggled to deal with imprisonment’s hardships and sheer boredom. He grappled with dengue fever and dysentery, and his diary strongly suggests that he suffered from depression, describing himself as being frequently ‘very browned off’. Nevertheless, he describes with some enthusiasm Easter and Christmas services:

¹⁸¹ I.W.M., Private Papers of Revd Christopher Ross, 80/12/01.

¹⁸² *Methodist Recorder*, 21 February 1947, 7.

¹⁸³ Brian MacArthur, *Surviving the Sword: Prisoners of the Japanese 1942-45* (London: Abacus, 2006), 212.

Friday 25th December 1942 Wan Lung Wan Rang [a work camp on Burma-Thailand Railway].

But strange to say a happy day [. . .] Communion at 9.15 (200 present). Service in the square at 10.30. A very good service. Good to hear the strains of Charles Wesley's "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" in a tropical climate as a POW Communion at 11.45 (100 present) [. . .].

Communion at 7.15 for any mess orderlies who may have missed the other opportunities owing to camp duties. Concert at 8.15. The choir will sing a few carols in the programme. A very good show.

His diary entries were laconic on many other occasions: 'Monday 4 May 1942: Pleasant day. No rain. Went to the 25th Suffolks. Nothing of interest to note.' There is little indication of uplifting ministry and much self-questioning.¹⁸⁴ Unkindly undoubtedly, but probably accurately, Pridmore was dismissed by his superiors in the RACHD as 'the wrong type'.¹⁸⁵

Chaplains were not able to meet the spiritual needs of all POWs. In Germany, they were concentrated in *Oflags*, officers' camps, rather than the *Stalags*, which held the men.¹⁸⁶ Lay preachers and fellowship groups sustained faith by supporting chaplains' work, where a chaplain was not present or was inadequate. There is some evidence of revival amongst POWs, not least amongst those held by the Japanese.¹⁸⁷ However, S. P. Mackenzie believed that the influence of organised religion in POW camps was less than claimed. He dismissed many captured members of the RACHD as ineffective, seeing lay ministry as a way of compensating for their deficiencies.¹⁸⁸ Charles Davis, in a letter published in the *Methodist Recorder* entitled 'Inside a Prisoner-of-War Camp', described how, during six

¹⁸⁴ R.A.Ch.D.A., The Journal of The Revd. Robert Pridmore (1941-1945).

¹⁸⁵ R.A.Ch.D.A., Royal Army Chaplaincy Department, Reports on Chaplaincy Services in Malayan P.O.W. Camps, 15 February 1942-10 June 1944.

¹⁸⁶ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 315-22.

¹⁸⁷ Ernest Gordon, *Miracle on the River Kwai* (London: Collins, 1963); Douglas Firth, *The Spirit of the River Kwai* (Keighley: Self-published, 1995); J. N. Farrow, *Darkness before the Dawn: Diary of a Changi POW 1941-1945* (Peterborough: Stamford House Publishing, 2007).

¹⁸⁸ Mackenzie, *The Colditz Myth*, 159.

months without a chaplain, and later when he and other Free Church soldiers adjudged the ministry of the Anglican padre to be unsatisfactory, he and other Methodist men led services and conducted fellowship meetings. Prisoners copied hymns as had occurred in French prison fortresses during the Napoleonic Wars. Davies believed that the ability to retain spiritual activity through lay leadership distinguished Free Churchmen from Anglicans: 'It has been noticeable throughout that Nonconformists, especially Methodists, are much more capable and willing to assist in organising and conducting public worship than members of the Established Church.'¹⁸⁹ RAMC sergeant Alec Reed, repatriated from *Stalag* VIII in 1943, also described vibrant Methodist POW activity. Encouraged by an inspiring Australian Methodist Chaplain, Rex Dakers, 'the Boxing Padre', the camp's spiritual activity included Sunday evening services with an attendance of 400, regular worship leaders' and society stewards' meetings, hymn singing, band and choir practice and class of trainee local preachers numbering fifteen.¹⁹⁰ Wilkinson made the comparison between the POW ministry of the Second World War and First World War chaplaincy: 'Perhaps only in the POW camps was there intense comradeship which characterised the trenches and which afterwards Toc H and the British Legion attempted to keep alive.'¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ *Methodist Recorder*, 16 September 1943, 5.

¹⁹⁰ *Methodist Recorder*, 25 November 1943, 3.

¹⁹¹ Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?*, 293.

Civilian Ministry to the Armed Forces

The ministry that Methodism offered to servicemen and women extended beyond commissioned chaplaincy. Throughout Britain and the Empire, churches offered spiritual and practical hospitality to members of the armed forces. Ministers readily volunteered for the role of officiating clergymen. Some 1060 Methodist clergymen served as Officiating Chaplains to the Forces (OCFs), a disproportionately high number mirroring the pattern for commissioned chaplaincy. The Assistant Chaplain General for Southern command recorded the eagerness of Free Church clergymen to volunteer to be OCFs:

As soon as war was declared the office was deluged with applications for the appointment of Officiating Chaplains all over the Command. Evidently instructions had been sent out through the medium of the Nonconformist press that wherever there was a body of troops in a town or village, the local minister should apply immediately for an appointment.¹⁹²

It was not only ministers who volunteered their services. Halls and schoolrooms were opened as they had been during the First World War. 'Women of the Church' knitted and sewed copiously, wrote letters, collected and dispatched parcels of games, writing paper and 'comforts' to the troops.¹⁹³ Beta Hornabrook and Margaret Sangster, who coordinated these efforts, were proud of Methodist endeavours: 'So far as we can hear, there is no other Church that has done what we have done for the lads, and we want the boys to continue to feel that their Church not only prays for them, but works for them

¹⁹² Quoted in Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, 133.

¹⁹³ *Minutes of the Methodist Church Conference*, 1940, 222; *The Times*, 28 September 1939, 11, [http: www.link.gale.com/apps/doc/cs118700596/TTDA?-cambuni@sid.TTDA@xid=8b39961](http://www.link.gale.com/apps/doc/cs118700596/TTDA?-cambuni@sid.TTDA@xid=8b39961). [accessed online 11.02.2020].

too.¹⁹⁴ In July 1940, the *Methodist Recorder* reported on Methodism's splendid 'war effort'. Some 300 canteens had been opened by this date, staffed mainly by female volunteers: 'The women of Methodism had been simply magnificent.'¹⁹⁵ Joyce Henderson was one such volunteer; she helped three evenings a week at the canteen at Ashford Methodist Church which offered refreshment, fellowship and entertainment to British and American troops stationed in the area.¹⁹⁶ In Portsmouth, the Wesley Church was open to servicemen every evening, providing rest, recreation and refreshment. A 'family tea' was provided on Sunday evenings, followed by a 'singing service' that 'all the men attended' and hymn-singing afterwards.¹⁹⁷ When stationed in Eastbourne, RAF navigator John Taylor, though an Anglican, chose to attend the local Methodist Church on a Sunday because of the 'very friendly services' and because members of the congregation always invited him and his comrades back for dinner.¹⁹⁸

Methodist soldiers, sailors and airmen were supplied with 'wallets' containing prayers, hymns and statements of belief.¹⁹⁹ Ministers wrote to those in the forces, reassuring them of the welfare of their families.²⁰⁰ At Christmas 1940, civilians were urged by the *Methodist Recorder* to offer hospitality to servicemen: Christmas dinner with families, suppers, teas, concerts and games. Rev P. Middleton Brumwell, Deputy Chaplain-General, wrote that this fellowship was paramount: 'The men do not want sermons and

¹⁹⁴ *Methodist Recorder*, 7 March 1940, 7.

¹⁹⁵ R.A.Ch.D.A., *Methodist Recorder*, 25 June 1940, press cutting in a file compiled by a staff chaplain [P. Middleton Brumwell].

¹⁹⁶ I.W.M., Joyce Henderson Interview, 28690.

¹⁹⁷ *Methodist Recorder*, 7 November 1940, 12.

¹⁹⁸ I.W.M., John Taylor Interview, 30416.

¹⁹⁹ *The Methodist Magazine*, April 1942, 148.

²⁰⁰ Stephen Parker, *Faith on the Home Front: Aspects of Church Life and Popular Religion in Birmingham, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Peter Lane, 2005), 132.

prayer meetings as a first introduction. Comradeship is the badge of their tribe.'²⁰¹ A 'Methodist Fund for Soldiers' raised £5000 for 'comforts' in January 1940; the Secretary of the Forces Board made it clear that, 'Our appeal is to Methodists for Methodists'.²⁰² The *Methodist Recorder* regularly carried articles and photographs of social and religious hospitality for the forces. The *Times* of 20 January 1942 reported on 'Methodists' War Effort': commissioned chaplains, officiating chaplains, canteens, Soldiers and Sailors' Homes and goods distributed.²⁰³ By the middle of 1944, 600 canteens had been opened, and thirty-nine tons of knitted goods and fourteen tons of books and games had been distributed.²⁰⁴ Although all denominations ran canteens and collected 'comforts' for the armed forces, Methodists, with their social responsibility traditions, could mobilise practical and spiritual resources considerably in excess of their numbers. The Church did not differentiate between the practical and the spiritual needs of servicemen.

In training as an electrical technician in the Royal Signals at Catterick Camp during 1943, Dennis Newland regularly attended a local Methodist chapel whose members made him most welcome: 'They liked to get soldiers involved in small duties like being a server. People were very kind and hospitable to soldiers in these places. No doubt many of them had their own sons in faraway places.'²⁰⁵ David Warren was a Methodist soldier who benefitted from ministry and fellowship in such 'faraway places'. When in Durban in 1942, en-route to the Middle East with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, he and a

²⁰¹ R.A.Ch.D.A., *Methodist Recorder*, 5 December 1940, press cutting in a file compiled by a staff chaplain [P. Middleton Brumwell].

²⁰² *Manchester Guardian*, 'Methodist Fund for Soldiers' (9 January 1940) 9. <http://www-proquest-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/historical-newspapers/methodist-fund-soldiers/docview/484764152/se-2?accountid=14533> [accessed online 03.02.2020].

²⁰³ *The Times*, 20 January 1942, 7. <http://www.link.gale.com/apps/doc/cs118700596/TTDA?-cambuni@sid.TTDA@xid=8b39961> [accessed online 11.02.2020].

²⁰⁴ *Minutes of the Methodist Church Conference*, 1944, 350.

²⁰⁵ I.W.M., Private Papers of Dennis Newland, 121907.

friend worshipped in the Methodist Church and took advantage of the Wesley Hall's free canteen. Warren found such Christian hospitality a refreshing contrast to the swearing and obscenity that he found commonplace in the army. The denomination's international nature was shown when he tried to attend a Methodist evening service in Cairo, only to discover that the service was to be conducted in Afrikaans.²⁰⁶ Edgar Ford, a Methodist lance corporal, described the work of Wesley House in Cairo. Men from several nations used the facilities for letter writing, reading, games, rest and refreshment in a distinctively 'Methodist' environment. Fellowship meetings, hymn singing, and local preachers' classes were regular occurrences. 'Wesley would have been proud to bestow his name on a work such as this.'²⁰⁷ Writing two years later, Corporal M. Goodman also thoroughly appreciated both the fellowship and the facilities on offer at Wesley House in Cairo, which he described as being a centre of a Methodist 'world-wide brotherhood'.²⁰⁸ In Britain and overseas locations, such as Alexandria, Gibraltar and Jerusalem, Wesley Homes and Halls offered accommodation, meals and Methodist fellowship. Before the opening of the Second Front, the Forces Board decided to focus upon opening Wesley Houses rather than the mobile canteens that the YMCA and other organisations provided for Allied forces.²⁰⁹ Within a few days of liberation, Wesley Houses were established in Naples, Rome, Florence, Brussels and Antwerp.²¹⁰ The facility in Antwerp, the former headquarters of the Gestapo in the city, was, according to Gunner R. F. Smith, 'a haven of rest for the spirit, mind and body for war-weary Methodists.'²¹¹

²⁰⁶ I.W.M., Private Papers of David Warren, 17214.

²⁰⁷ *Methodist Recorder*, 15 October 1942, 7.

²⁰⁸ *Methodist Recorder*, 31 August 1944, 9.

²⁰⁹ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932-January 1945, Meeting of 9 May 1944, MA 6001 (Box 3).

²¹⁰ *Methodist Recorder*, 30 November 1944, 5 and 25 January 1945, 7.

²¹¹ *Methodist Recorder*, 30 November 1944, 7.

Throughout the war, the Methodist Church railed against the availability of alcohol to members of the armed forces.²¹² The extensive provision of canteens, institutes and Homes was motivated, in large part, by a determination to counter the dangers of drink. Women serving in the armed forces, away from the protecting influence of family and home church, caused moral concern.²¹³ The fact that members of the ATS, WAAF and WRNS could drink in 'wet canteens' alarmed the *Methodist Recorder*. 'Girls who have always lived at home are being urged to join the Women's services, but why should such temptation be placed deliberately in their way?' A photograph of several women in uniform drinking proved the article's veracity, which concluded with an exhortation to readers to write to their MPs about this 'Drink Scandal'.²¹⁴

Letters from male Methodists, lay and ordained, questioned female conscription as inappropriate; women writing to the paper were in favour.²¹⁵ The recruitment of women religious workers in the services could, in part, allay the alarms caused by such moral perils. Two Methodist chaplain's assistants, Eleanor Mellor and Olive Jones, were among the twelve initially recruited during the summer of 1942.²¹⁶ Conference overruled its Forces Board over this issue; the *Methodist Magazine* approved of their appointment.²¹⁷ The Forces Board discussed the morals of WAAFs, recommending restricting late passes to midnight, the earlier closure of bars at bases and that dances should finish earlier.²¹⁸ Concerns over

²¹² See for example: Sangster, *Ten Statesmen for Jesus Christ*, 152–54.

²¹³ Marjorie Fletcher, *The WRNS: A History of the Women's Royal Naval Service* (London: Batsford, 1989); Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948* (London: Routledge, 2006); Beryl E Escott, *The WAAF: A History of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in the Second World War* (Princes Risborough, Shire Publication, 2003); Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 314–16.

²¹⁴ *Methodist Recorder*, 20 November 1941, 3.

²¹⁵ *Methodist Recorder*, 15 January 1942, 3.

²¹⁶ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932-January 1945, Meeting of 19 May 1942, MA 6001 (Box 3).

²¹⁷ *The Methodist Magazine*, October/ November 1942, 164 and May/ June 1943, 67.

²¹⁸ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932-January 1945, Meeting of 11 January 1944, MA 6001 (Box 3).

individual and collective morality led to appeals for restrictions to pubs' opening hours, Sunday closure of cinemas and theatres, and the abandonment of horse and greyhound racing for the war's duration.²¹⁹ The Board expressed concerns about 'profanity and filthy language' in camps and factories.²²⁰ Government appeals for self-restraint found receptive ears in Methodism, calls to abandon 'personal extravagance, waste, slackness in work' appealing to the puritan traditions of the Church. The *Methodist Recorder* could not resist extending the call for discipline to the Established Church and 'the restrictive influences of ancient tradition' and 'stranglehold of vested interests'.²²¹

In his Presidential Address to the 1945 Conference, Archibald Harrison paid tribute to the contribution of the Church to members of the forces:

Methodism's war-work has been widespread and varied. In town and country there has been a continuous effort to provide amenities and hospitality for service personnel [. . .] This effort has never been allowed to slacken. All over the world, there are men and women with happy memories of the canteen on Methodist premises and the friendship shown in Methodist homes.²²²

²¹⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 'Raid Shelter Abuses: Methodists and Earlier Closing Hours' 12 September 1940, 8. <https://www-proquest-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/historical-newspapers/raid-shelter-abuses/docview/485004428/se-2?accountid=14533> [accessed online 06.02.2020].

²²⁰ M.A.R.C., Minutes and Papers of the Methodist Navy, Army and Air Force Board, November 1932-January 1945, Meeting of 22 September 1942, MA 6001 (Box 3).

²²¹ *Methodist Recorder*, 5 March 1942, 3.

²²² *Minutes of the Methodist Church Conference*, July 1945, 163.

Summary

Revd Harrison had due cause to take pride in Methodism's 'war effort'. Whilst accommodating a significant pacifist minority, the Church had been highly effective in its wartime ministry to the armed forces. Chaplaincy had met all the demands made of it; the Church recruited sufficient and suitable ministers to serve effectively in all three services and all theatres. Unlike in 1914, the Church did not have a standing start to its military ministry. Methodist ministry benefitted hugely from experience gained during the First World War and the interwar period. A single Church also represented Methodism, this again in contrast to the First World War. The Methodist Forces Board had fused Wesleyan and United Board military chaplaincy to create one coordinated and effective body which provided organisation, representation and leadership of the Church's work with the armed forces.

Methodist chaplaincy was, above all, pragmatic. Work with the armed forces was underpinned more by the tradition and practice of social witness than by distinctive theology. Arminianism and the universalist tradition, 'The world is my parish', meant that there were no defining boundaries to mission; chaplaincy was to all. Ministry was offered to Methodist servicemen and women, Christians of other denominations, and those with no faith background. There were no artificial divisions between spiritual and temporal ministry, either in commissioned chaplaincy or civilian ministry. The Church saw its role to meet the needs of all members of the armed forces, religious and practical.

Ministry operated differently in each of the three services based on operations and the organisation's chaplaincy provision parameters. In the army, the experience and

framework provided by the RACHD created a generally effective structure for the ministry of all denominations. Although there were tensions between churches, there was much ecumenical cooperation, especially between individual clergymen on campaign. When the Methodist army chaplain worked in isolation from his RACHD colleagues, he alone represented organised Christianity to the men in the unit to which he was attached. Ministry to POWs illustrated effective collaboration between padres of different denominations and also examples of chaplains working singly in highly challenging circumstances. In the RAF, where few bases were large enough for chaplaincy representation from several churches, ministers met the needs of men and women from various faith backgrounds. All the Free Churches worked effectively together in Other Denominations ministry. The exception to this ecumenism was chaplaincy to the Royal Navy, which remained, primarily, a preserve of the Church of England, effectively marginalising the ministry of all non-Anglican Churches.

From Methodist union to the outbreak of war, pacifists had been a vocal and influential minority within the Church. Although the Second World War saw a significant shift to support the national war effort, divisions, though managed, remained throughout the war's duration. Mission to the armed forces needs to be viewed in this context. This work was more creditable when viewed in the context of the enormous damage that Methodist premises, particularly in large population centres, sustained. Therefore, it is remarkable that the Church and its members showed such extraordinary commitment to its Christian witness to the army, navy and air force in Britain and overseas.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion.

For the most part the Padre's role was diverse, difficult and dangerous. On occasions he had to run the officer's mess, superintend the men's canteen, sell the cakes, the tea, the woodbines at five a penny, accompany the troops on their long marches, footslog it on the cobbled roads, be exposed to sweltering sun or the pouring rain, grope his way through the intense darkness, live with the lads in the narrow trenches, the flimsy shelters, the battered houses, the destroyed villages, the shelter of the ridges. Although unarmed he went sometimes with them over the top, into the fury of battle, not to fight, but to rescue the fallen, attend the wounded, minister to the dying, reverently bury the dead, write to their loved ones, break the sad news about wounds or death, or to comfort all who suffered or were in distress.

Through all this and much more he was expected to show the brave face, maintain a stout heart, exercise a fine courage and fortitude, preserve and display a very high standard of morale and cheerfulness.¹

(Robert Wearmouth, *Pages from a Padre's Diary: A Story of Struggle and Triumph, of Sorrow and Sympathy*)

Robert Wearmouth was a Primitive Methodist Chaplain who served on the Western Front during the First World War. His account, though, is representative of Methodist chaplaincy from the Crimea to the Second World War. His role's spiritual, pastoral, and military elements are seen in Methodist mission to the armed forces throughout the period.

¹ Robert Wearmouth, *Pages from a Padre's Diary: A Story of Struggle and Triumph, of Sorrow and Sympathy* (Cullercoats, Northumberland: Self-published, 1958), 34.

Ministry was 'diverse, difficult and dangerous' in all the armed services and during all conflicts and campaigns; it was, indeed, as Wearmouth described, 'a story of struggle and triumph, of sorrow and sympathy'.

From John Wesley to the Second World War, engagement with Britain's armed forces was a constant feature of Methodist history. The Wesleyans showed this commitment throughout, for the smaller conferences this was principally in the twentieth century. This involvement was maintained by exchanging correspondence, creating societies and classes amongst soldiers and sailors, providing scripture, maintaining contact with worshippers at home and military chaplaincy from the middle of the nineteenth century. The development of Methodism owes much to these connections with the services. Mission to the armed forces, and that undertaken by servicemen, helped establish and consolidate Methodism overseas. The movement expanded along imperial routes, carried by the faithful in the British Army and Royal Navy; soldiers and sailors helped establish a strong and enduring Methodist presence in the colonies. These links made Victorian Methodism a movement of the British Empire. The Wesleyans, in particular, embraced imperialism because of the opportunities it allowed for Methodism to flourish.

Participation in military mission raised questions about the Methodist churches' status; recognition and representation in the services mirrored wider societal and political acceptance. From 1860 to 1914, reflecting growing confidence and assertiveness, the Wesleyans sought active involvement in the army and navy's religious life, claiming equal representation to Presbyterians and Roman Catholics.² The Wesleyans were the best organised, the most influential and most politically active of the Nonconformist

² Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, 146–50, 155–60.

denominations, and they led the way in their military ministry. Until the First World War, they chose to retain the detachment that would have been surrendered had they accepted commissions for their ministers. Military ministry, however, necessitated constructive engagement with the state. Methodism became increasingly established in civic and national politics, business and education during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By this time, the Wesleyans demanded the same opportunities for their ministers and followers as those afforded to adherents of the established churches. By the end of the First World War, the three major Methodist churches had achieved a broad degree of recognition and representation in the army, and the RAF was mainly pluralist from its beginnings. However, equality of status was not achieved in the navy until the last two years of the Second World War. The acceptance of Methodism in the armed forces, which had followed the granting of similar concessions to the Presbyterians and Roman Catholics, paved the way for the admittance of other faith traditions, Christian and non-Christian, into the services' religious life.

From the 1860s, when the Wesleyans made military mission a connexional priority, the denomination sought to ensure that its followers in the forces were adequately represented in chaplaincy provision. Methodist churches recruited to all the chaplaincy posts apportioned by the military authorities. The organisational structures of the denomination made possible the redeployment of ministers to roles in the armed forces; however, this was also an indication of the importance that Methodism attached to its military mission. Allocations of chaplaincy posts in the army and the air force were broadly aligned with denominational strength, but that was not the case in the navy. Unlike some other churches, there were no unfilled positions in any of the services during either World War. Methodism met all the demands that the military made of it.

Continuity of commitment to armed forces ministry features throughout this study. Methodist servicemen and those who ministered to them were aware of their antecedents in previous conflicts. The experience and traditions of previous generations had a powerful influence on later ministry. Methodists in the late Victorian army looked to the soldier preachers in Flanders during the 1740s. The South African War of 1899 to 1902 strongly influenced chaplaincy in the First World War; Second World War ministry was inspired by that of 1914 to 1918.³ Several of those who took prominent leadership roles in armed forces ministry had chaplaincy experience in previous conflicts.

All denominations represented in forces chaplaincy had to reconcile clerical control between the church and the military authorities. Although Wesleyan ministers served with the army and the navy from 1855 to 1914, they were not commissioned, remaining under their church's authority. When Wesleyan and United Board chaplains accepted temporary commissions during the First World War, they became subject to military discipline in addition to that of their sending churches. This might have created tensions for Catholic chaplains, but there is no evidence that Methodist ministers felt unease in being under state and church control.⁴ These chaplains were managed, at a distance, by the forces boards, but they were outside the usual Methodist structure of superintendents, circuits and districts. When on active service, they enjoyed considerable independence of action. Although some Methodist ministers achieved senior chaplaincy posts, this was due to their military service rather than their status within the denomination. Methodist clergymen were frequently under the supervision of clerics from other churches. The movement's padres cooperated

³ Jackson and Telford, *Wesley's Veterans*; Watkins, *Soldiers and Preachers Too*.

⁴ James Hagerty, *No Ordinary Shepherds: Catholic Chaplains to the British Forces in the Second World War* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2020), 69–87.

well with those from other traditions, often considerably in advance of the relationships between the churches outside the armed forces. There is little evidence of preciousness by Methodist ministers in erecting denominational barriers. The battlefield produced an ecumenism of necessity.

The essence of Wesleyan theology was pastoral rather than systematic; the conviction that God's love was available for all was manifest in outreach to the military. The armed forces were an evangelistic opportunity; however, outreach was never just to Methodists. In no military unit of any size were Methodists in the majority; most chaplains' work was with those who adhered to other churches or none. When conditions allowed, chaplains led worship, parade services and, more commonly, less formal voluntary services. They also ran Bible study, fellowship and prayer meetings, organised classes and societies and ministered to men in many informal settings. This undertaking was spiritual, but it was also pastoral, meeting the needs of body, mind and soul. Far from 'belittling' their religious purpose, as Loudon claimed, Methodist chaplains' wider roles were integral to their spiritual function.⁵ Thus, ministry to the forces deserves to be judged in its totality. It is artificial and anachronistic to separate the purely religious from other aspects of this mission; it was inclusive and holistic.

Mission was to all; however, military work was much more than attempting to win souls. The Methodist movement consistently offered practical support to members of Britain's armed forces. Aspects that particularly distinguished their mission included Wesleyan Homes for soldiers and sailors, canteens, the provision of 'comforts' to those serving overseas, and maintaining close connections with the home churches.

⁵ Loudon, *Chaplains in Conflict*, 20.

Correspondence between ministers and servicemen maintained these links; the denominational newspapers served the same purposes. This pastoral theology, the activism which was a feature of Methodism, underpinned care for Britain's servicemen and women. The laity, at home and abroad, was especially significant in this social mission. Such practical ministry was not unique to Methodism; other churches and organisations such as the YMCA did similar work with Britain's service personnel during both World Wars. That others embraced similar methods and tactics to support Britain's armed forces does not detract from Methodist achievements in this area.

Methodist chaplains accompanied the British Army, serving in all theatres during every major conflict from the Crimean War to the conclusion of the Second World War. Naval ministry was more restricted, with most Methodist chaplaincy delivered in ports rather than at sea. Royal Air Force ministry was, by necessity, carried out at ground stations. Few Methodist chaplains had professional military backgrounds. This was especially the case when large numbers served during the World Wars, albeit that those few with prior experience were influential role models. Little in their training or previous careers had prepared them for military chaplaincy's challenging, immediate and practical nature. Ministry was unfamiliar, testing and often dangerous; tending the wounded, burying the dead, being under fire, hardship and coping with the savagery of war were the chaplain's lot. Some were injured, imprisoned or died as a result of their service. Military ministry required strong faith and fortitude.

Chaplains were ministers of religion and officers, afforded rank and status; they wore service uniforms, except those in the navy. Methodist chaplains appear to have bridged this

divide well; there was no apparent dichotomy in fulfilling both roles, no paradox.⁶

Methodist military chaplains were ministers in the armed forces; they were not soldier priests. Most saw themselves as parsons first and officers second, but there were exceptions when boundaries were crossed due to military emergencies, such as Watkins's actions at Arnhem. Joining the officer class was sometimes difficult, becoming part of an unfamiliar social and cultural milieu; the High Anglican, more socially exclusive, Royal Navy was particularly alien to Methodist ministers. The broadening of the intake of officers, which occurred during the World Wars, made the transition somewhat easier. The majority of Methodist padres remained citizen clergymen in much the same way as most personnel in the British forces were citizen soldiers, sailors and airmen, recruited for the duration of hostilities. Likewise, many ministers were not separated from the men by dint of background, social class or education, which was sometimes the case for Anglican chaplains. Those in the ranks generally regarded Methodist padres favourably, admiring them for sharing their dangers and hardships. These chaplains were often more at ease in the Sergeants' Mess than the Officers' Mess. However, most officers in all three services accepted Methodist ministry, seeing it as supportive of military hierarchy and discipline. Conflicts occurred on rare occasions when clergy overstepped the mark and interceded on behalf of the men, such as Cubbon in India and Humphries in Normandy during the Second World War. Senior commanders such as Haig and Montgomery recognised the value of military ministry. Their chaplains helped instil loyalty, reliability, individual and corporate discipline, devotion to duty, bravery and resilience.

⁶ Loudon, 4–7; Wilkinson, 'The Paradox of the Military Chaplain'; Gordon Zahn, *Chaplains in the RAF: A Study in Role Tension* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969).

There is firm evidence of extensive and successful Methodist ministry to the armed forces during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The sources attest to the vibrancy of Methodist ministry to Britain's armed services. Frequently, and particularly during wartime, this witness was incarnational, offering comfort and Christian presence in life-threatening circumstances. It remains all the more surprising that this ministry has aroused so little previous interest among scholars of Methodism.

Most Methodists embraced the national cause throughout Britain's conflicts of these two hundred years. However, mission to the armed forces needs to be set against the pacifism, which became increasingly influential and vociferous in Methodism throughout the period from the Boer War to the outbreak of the Second World War. This pacifism, though a minority position, tends to dominate the historical record.⁷ Debates about peace and war, on all sides, were framed in ethical and political, rather than theological, terms. Significantly, 'Just War' is not mentioned in a single contemporary Methodist source studied. In addition to a significant anti-war undercurrent, disdain for soldiers' and sailors' morality was a persistent feature of attitudes to the armed forces. This distaste runs from John Wesley's comments about the behaviour of some of the soldiers he encountered to concerns about the moral perils facing servicewomen during the Second World War. Throughout, Methodists expressed concerns about the evils of alcohol, sexual licence and swearing in the armed forces. Moreover, military mission was not always accepted, or seen as a priority, by all Wesleyans, and certainly not by many in the smaller connexions. This was partly down to a lack of resources but also a perception that piety and the military

⁷ Kenneth Greet, 'War and Peace', in *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000); George Thompson Brake, *Policy and Politics in British Methodism, 1932-1982* (London: Edsall, 1984), 443-56.

profession were incompatible. The fact that a significant minority within the Methodist movement questioned the very basis of military mission makes its achievements all the more creditable.

The influence of religion on Britain's armed forces has not been given sufficient attention in the historical record. Ministry to the forces has elicited little interest because it runs counter to the pacifist mindset of the Church in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Whereas this is the case for all British churches to a greater or lesser extent, it is particularly true of Methodism. There has been a dearth of research in this field by historians of Methodism. Scholars and, indeed, the Church itself, have shown more interest in the First and Second World Wars' conscientious objectors than the numerically far greater number of Methodists who joined Britain's armed services.⁸

Although Snape and others have sought to explain the links between Christianity and the armed forces, there remain significant gaps regarding Methodism.⁹ There is far more detailed scholarship on the relationship between the Church of England and Britain's armed services than that for other denominations, especially the Methodists. The analysis of the role of chaplains in the First World War is more comprehensive than that of the Second World War.¹⁰ Most studies of religion and war have focused on the army; the connections

⁸ Jack Woodruff, 'Testimony of Peace', in *Methodist Recorder*, 19 March 2021, 16.

⁹ Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*; Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion*; Snape, *God and the British Soldier*; Michael Snape and Edward Madigan, *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013); Edward Madigan, *Faith under Fire: Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); John Thompson, 'The Free Church Army Chaplain, 1830-1930' (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1990); Tom Johnstone and James Hagerty, *The Cross on the Sword: Catholic Chaplains in the Forces* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1996); Neil Allison, *The Official History of the United Board: The Clash of Empires, 1914-1939* (Great Britain: United Navy, Army and Air Force Board Press, 2008); Peter Howson, *Muddling Through: The Organisation of British Army Chaplaincy in World War 1* (Solihull: Helion, 2013).

¹⁰ Two exceptions being: Alan Robinson, *Chaplains at War: The Role of Clergymen during World War 11* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008); James Hagerty, *No Ordinary Shepherds: Catholic Chaplains to the British Forces in the Second World War* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2020).

between British churches and the Royal Navy, other than that of the Church of England, remain a lacuna. There is undoubtedly room for research that complements Gordon Taylor's *The Sea Chaplains*, which looks almost exclusively from the Anglican perspective.¹¹ Nothing like Rowan Strong's study of chaplaincy in the Royal Australian Navy exists for the Royal Navy.¹² This gap applies equally to the rather shorter history of chaplaincy to the Royal Air Force.¹³ Likewise, most research in this area has examined chaplaincy; the laity's role in promoting Christianity in the armed forces is under-explored. This thesis has examined ministry in the army, navy, and air force in the later chapters. Most work has been focused exclusively on one of the services; there is a need for more comparative scholarship. This research has focused upon Methodism in the Wesleyan tradition; there is undoubtedly the potential to study the military ministry of other Christian denominations such as the Welsh Calvinists and the Salvation Army and, particularly, that of other non-Christian faiths.¹⁴

This study examines the period from the birth of Methodism to the end of the Second World War. The Church's mission to the armed forces after 1945 is an area that warrants further exploration, especially so in the context of widespread Methodist opposition to British participation in conflicts such as the Falklands Conflict of 1982, the Gulf Wars of 1990-1991 and 2003-2011 and Afghanistan from 2001-2014. British Methodism's imperial and Commonwealth links have been explored in this study, but there is scope for investigating military mission across the dominions. Unlike Britain, Methodist churches form

¹¹ Gordon Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains: A History of the Chaplains of the Royal Navy* (Oxford: Oxford Illustrated Press, 1978).

¹² Strong, *Chaplains in the Royal Australian Navy*.

¹³ With the exception of an article by Michael Snape and Eleanor Rance, 'Anglicans and Aviators: The First World War and the Forgotten Origins of Royal Air Chaplaincy', in *Journal of Religious History* 45 (2) (2021), 257-74.

¹⁴ Jonathan Lewis, 'British Jewish Chaplaincy in the First World War' (n.d), [https:// www.jewswww.co.uk](https://www.jewswww.co.uk) [accessed online 15.03.2021].

the most extensive Protestant tradition in the USA; a comparative study of Methodist mission to British and United States armed forces would prove a fruitful area for further research.

In 2010, the Methodist Church published a booklet celebrating 150 years of military chaplaincy. Stephen Hancock, a serving Army Chaplain, introduced the collection of vignettes by stating, 'The Methodist Church has a significant heritage of sending John Wesley's preachers to serve among the British Armed Forces.'¹⁵ It is a heritage that deserves far more attention.

¹⁵ *Celebrating 150 Years of Ministry to the Armed Forces: 1860-2010*, ed. by Emma Kennedy and Alison Pollard (London: Methodist Publishing, 2010), 4.

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