The importance of nonconformity in the social, economic and political life of nineteenth-century Britain has frequently led historians to examine the social composition of the nonconformist churches in the period. The make-up of church membership has been seen as being indicative of the different bases of particular churches, providing a measure of the extent to which they recruited and retained certain social groups. As well as its use for comparative purposes, the analysis over a period of time of the social composition of the nonconformist churches as a whole or of a particular church shows patterns of change within nonconformity. The variety of sources which can be used for this reflect the different administrative and spiritual preoccupations of the religious bodies who created them.

The records of church membership provide a considerable amount of material on which to base a study of the social composition of particular denominations although, like all sources of this kind the detailed information they contain is conditioned by the context in which they were drawn up. They indicate the extent to which particular churches attracted the support of certain social groups and are therefore useful as a measure of the social base of religious practice as well as for comparative purposes. However, even the relatively straightforward concept of church membership embraced a broad spectrum of attitudes from deep commitment to a degree of compulsory affiliation. Moreover, actual attendance at worship was enhanced by those who, although not full members, helped by their presence to set the tone of particular denominations.

* This paper is based on research on the social composition of nonconformist leadership in Lincolnshire, 1799–1871. The research was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (Reference RG00232354). The paper also incorporates some background material from work on the development of the dissenting churches in Lincolnshire, 1770–1900, which was supported by the British Academy. I am grateful to both bodies for their generous assistance and to Allan Reese of the Computer Centre of the University of Hull for his considerable assistance with data analysis.
or individual chapels. Chapels could become more or less attractive to potential attenders because of their ambience and particular groups might place considerable value on the social as well as the religious associations of a place of worship.

There was, however, within each local chapel community an inner core of leaders at the heart of chapel affairs. They provided the office holders, officials and delegates who maintained non-conformist church life and it was they who would help to set its tone. The importance of these leaders could vary with the polity of particular denominations. Among the various branches of Methodism itinerancy within the circuits as well as periodic removal from circuit to circuit made the influence of professional ministers less significant giving lay leaders greater power, but even the settled ministers of the Baptist and Independent churches often had shorter pastorates than is generally assumed. Moreover, settled ministers needed to be paid and to have the buildings where they ministered maintained so that the role of the laity, and in particular their leaders, was important in this context.

The functions performed by local office holders can be divided into those involving pastoral work – the work of lay preachers and class leaders, which were relatively more important in Methodism – and those which had more secular functions – stewards, treasurers and deacons for example.

One of these groups of lay officers, the trustees of chapels, had broadly comparable functions and responsibilities in the different nonconformist churches. Their main duty was to act as the guardians of the property of the churches by holding chapels, or indeed any other real estate such as manses or land for building, on trust, and as such their work can be seen as belonging to the group of nonconformist officers whose work was secular. However, in reality the pastoral/secular division was not absolute. Responsibility for chapel buildings included not only their fabric but what went on inside them. As well as being the arbiters, under the terms of the trust, of what was preached in chapels, the responsibility for the upkeep of chapels also involved their trustees in the arrangement of a variety of events in aid of local funds. The nature and content of these were a significant element in local chapel life.


2 Davies, Religion in the industrial revolution, 49, 151.


4 Currie, Methodism divided, 52.
As well as being the legal owners of the chapels for which they acted Methodist trustees also managed their finances, including the provision of funds for their maintenance and the payment of interest on any debt which had been incurred. Nonconformist trustees’ powers could, unless they were limited by the terms of the deed, extend to an influence over worship in a chapel through their control over ministers and ultimately their ability to close the building for which they were responsible. The considerable influence which trustees could exercise, either directly or even by default, is illustrated by the case of Lincoln General Baptist chapel. This had been built in 1701 and included a vestry which was let to a person who also acted as chapel cleaner but with the proceeds to be used for the benefit of the minister. By 1843 the tenant was neglecting his duties, letting the chapel burial ground for the drying of clothes and taking in disreputable lodgers while the trustees received the rent originally designated for the minister and had rendered no accounts since 1824. The powers of trustees also extended their influence into matters of principle. In the dispute over the nature of Sunday school teaching in Manchester in 1826 the influence of Methodist chapel trustees over the use of the buildings for which they acted was a determinant in the type of school which was established in them.

The office of trustee could also bring considerable financial liabilities. J.W. Cloake, a minister on the Wednesbury circuit in 1820, noted how many Methodist families were ‘greatly disturbed’ because of the ‘heavy burdens’ which had been brought on them by their fathers’ work as chapel trustees. The difficulties of meeting even interest payments on chapels in the Wisbech circuit in 1825 had brought at least one trustee ‘into difficulties on that account’. This meant that as well as ensuring the financial viability of chapels by endeavouring to maintain a high level of support, trustees also needed to be able to be of sufficient standing to provide security on chapel debts. A Wesleyan Methodist in the Coventry circuit was not a trustee because although a ‘proud man’ he was poor.

The need to maintain chapel income affected the nature of worship. In 1825 the trustees of the Coventry Wesleyan city chapels sought to influence the choice of preachers since it was felt that the full-time ministers attracted better congregations than local lay

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5 Thomas Cooper, *A treatise on the rights, duties and liabilities of trustees of Wesleyan Methodist chapels, &c: showing the time and manner of their origin, with remarks on Mr. Wesley’s Deed Poll or Deed of Declaration: the Model Deed for the settlement of Wesleyan chapels, &c; and on the present agitation in the Wesleyan connexion* (London [1850]), 44-7.


7 Lincolnshire Archives Office [subsequently L.A.O.], 1 BAPT 6, Samuel Wright, *A statement relative to the General Baptist church Lincoln*, 19 June 1843.


preachers. In this case the conduct of Sunday services was the point at issue, but the financial imperatives with which trustees were bound could influence the whole tone of chapel life with worship and entertainment being joined to serve financial and institutional ends. The trustees of West Street Primitive Methodist chapel at Boston, Lincolnshire, included increased proceeds among the measures of the success of the chapel’s 1869 anniversary services and these were gratefully acknowledged to Almighty God. In 1872 they employed a female evangelist to preach special sermons to raise funds for the chapel’s heating apparatus.

Moreover, the way in which the exercise of the apparently secular work of the trustees had implications for the spiritual life of the chapels for which they acted was reinforced by the fact that the men who acted as trustees also exercised spiritual functions in their churches. David Beacock, a trustee of the Wesleyan Methodist chapel at Grasby north Lincolnshire in 1841, was also a class leader and appears to have led an active spiritual life. He was well acquainted with the works of eminent Methodist writers and had ‘digged deep into the mine of historical and religious truth’. Similarly, John Asman who acted as trustee for a Wesleyan Methodist chapel in Timberland, Lincolnshire, in 1837 also served as a prayer leader, exhorter and local preacher.

The significance of trustees in nonconformist life is matched by the quality of the material which is available on their social composition. The nature of their position meant that their names, occupations and place of residence was included in the title deeds of the properties for which they acted. These deeds provide, therefore, a source for the study of these local officers and they have been used to build up a picture of Methodist leadership in a range of local studies from a variety of places. Such pioneering work has, however, been largely dependent on the use of records that survive locally. This has meant that as well as there being an inevitably uneven geographical coverage, trust deeds have often only been used for property still in the possession of the churches, since as documents of title they have been dispersed when it has passed to other owners. The deeds which remain with local churches can be supplemented by material in central church records but this has also been gathered in response to current administrative needs, limiting its value as a source which reflects

10 Ward, Early correspondence of Jabez Bunting, 131.
11 L.A.O., Meth C/Boston, West Street Primitive Methodist (Boston Circuit)/24/1/Trust Minutes 1866–74, 15 October 1869; 30 September 1872.
13 P.R.O., C54/11818/24; Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, 5th series, xiii (1867), 479.
consistently the churches to which it relates. Indeed, in any consideration of nonconformist leadership the experience of chapels which have closed, and in particular an assessment of the role of their leadership in this process, is potentially as significant as that of chapels which continue. However, it is possible to obtain a relatively consistent coverage of chapel deeds from the eighteenth and up to the last quarter of the nineteenth century – a period of considerable significance in the development of nonconformity – by the use of enrolled trust deeds from the Public Record Office, London. These have been preserved as a result of an act of 1736 which, although it was passed with the intention of limiting the perpetual alienation of property for charitable uses, with the added benefit of later amendments it also provided nonconformist trustees with the opportunity to enrol their deeds on the Chancery Rolls giving additional security for church property. This has meant that between forty and fifty thousand copies of trust deeds have survived in this form. They therefore represent a considerable resource for the study of the social composition of nonconformist leadership in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their large number means that it is possible to make comparisons both between and within the various nonconformist churches as well as noting any changes which took place over time.

The Study Area
The use of computers to analyse data of this kind means that the material in the enrolled deeds can be exploited on a systematic basis. However, its bulk precludes the inclusion of the whole of the archive and its resources have to be exploited through more limited but none the less relatively large-scale studies. Work based on a well-defined geographical area or areas over a period of time is one approach which can be adopted.

The following analysis of trustees from enrolled trust deeds in the period 1800 to 1870 is based on the three registration districts of Caistor, Holbeach and Sleaford in the county of Lincolnshire (see Map). They included a variety of geographical areas with distinctive socio-economic characteristics and patterns of development. Apart from the town and port of Grimsby in the Caistor district the areas studied were predominantly rural with market towns

15 E.g. see Currie, Methodism divided, 299–303; Nicholas Orme (ed.), Unity and variety: a history of the church in Devon and Cornwall (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1991), 160.
17 9 Geo. III, c. 36, An act to restrain the disposition of lands whereby the same become inalienable; 9 Geo. IV, c. 85, 1828, An act for remedying a defect in the titles of lands purchased for charitable purposes; 24 & 25 Vict., c. 9, 1861, An act to amend the law relating to the conveyance of land for charitable uses.
Lincolnshire: The Caistor, Holbeach and Sleaford Registration Districts
providing services for the surrounding countryside. The population of all the districts grew in the period although there was a slight reduction in Holbeach between 1851 and 1861.\footnote{Parliamentary Papers (subsequently P.P.), 1852-53, LXXXVI (1632), Population (Great Britain); part II: Population tables I, 4; 1871, LIX (C381), Preliminary report, and tables of the population and houses enumerated in England and Wales . . . 1871, 25; W.O. Massingberd, ‘Social and economic history’, The Victoria history of the county of Lincoln (hereafter V.C.H.) ii, ed. William Page (Folkestone: Dawson for the University of London Institute of Historical Research, reprint 1988), 354-5.}

At the 1851 Census of Religious Worship there was a total of 166 nonconformist places of worship in the three districts (Table 1). Not all of these were, however, purpose-built chapels and twenty-eight were meetings in private houses or hired buildings. The Wesleyan Methodists were the strongest body of nonconformists in all the districts with eighty-six chapels and meeting places. In the Caistor district the total number of people at their best-attended service on the evening of Census Sunday, 30 March 1851, was greater than at the best-attended service of the Church of England on the morning of Census day. In the other two districts their best-attended service was second to that of the Anglican Church.

\textit{The Enrolled Trust Deeds}

There were 186 enrolled deeds from the three registration districts for the period 1800 to 1870. These were for 105 Wesleyan Methodist (56.4 per cent of the total); fifty Primitive Methodist (26.9 per cent); eleven Baptist (5.9 per cent); nine Wesleyan Reform (4.8 per cent); nine Independent or Congregationalist (4.8 per cent) and two other (1.1 per cent) properties. Except for the Baptists and Wesleyan Reformers this reflected the strength of the nonconformist churches in 1851 when 51.8 per cent of places of worship were Wesleyan Methodist; 30.1 per cent Primitive Methodist; 10.2 per cent Baptist; 4.2 per cent Congregationalist or Independent; 1.2 per cent Society of Friends; 0.6 per cent Wesleyan Reform; 0.6 per cent Unitarian; and 1.2 per cent belonged to various and undefined groups. The Baptist trust deeds tended to be concentrated in the period up to 1849 while the Wesleyan Reformers did not begin to build any chapels until their movement had become established in the 1850s (Table 2), thus missing the Census of Religious Worship. Their first new building was at Leasingham in the Sleaford district for which the land was purchased in October 1858.\footnote{P.R.O., CS4/15842/9.}

There are enrolled deeds from thirty-five places in the Caistor district, seventeen in Holbeach and twenty-two in Sleaford. The distribution of the properties to which they relate reflects the rural nature of the districts. Scartho, near Grimsby, had two nonconformist
<table>
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<td>No. Places of Worship</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>160</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>83</td>
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<td>3553 (2)</td>
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<td>2237 (3)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>215 (4)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>345 (5)</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOLBEACH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Places of Worship</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>1352 (2)</td>
<td>722 (4)</td>
<td>301 (5)</td>
<td>797 (3)</td>
<td>172 (6)</td>
<td>1 (8)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLEAFORD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Places of Worship</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>No. at Best-Attended Service &amp; Rank Order ( )</td>
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<td>2123 (2)</td>
<td>622 (3)</td>
<td>320 (5)</td>
<td>450 (4)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>110 (6)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>40</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Number of Trust Deeds by Decade, 1800–1870

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Wes. Meth.</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prim. Meth.</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wes. Ref.</td>
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<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bapt.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indep/Cong.</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
places of worship — one Wesleyan and the other Primitive Methodist — and there are eighteen places from the three districts which, like Scartho, have two trust deeds.\textsuperscript{21} However, most of the places, twenty-nine, for which there are deeds had one. The largest number relating to one place were the eleven and thirteen in Holbeach and Grimsby respectively. While the Holbeach chapels were scattered across the dispersed fenland settlements of one of the largest parishes in England, those for Grimsby represented the efforts of the nonconformists to meet the needs of the town which grew from a population of 1,524 in 1801 to 20,244 in 1871.\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{The Trustees — General}

The 186 deeds contain details of a total of 2,111 trustees — 2,110 men and one widow — of whom 1,263 (59.8 per cent) were Wesleyan Methodists; 484 (22.9 per cent) Primitive Methodists; 120 (5.5 per cent) Wesleyan Reformers; 108 (4.9 per cent) Baptists; 111 (5.7 per cent) described as Calvinist, Congregationalist or Independent, and Protestant Dissenters; 12 (0.6 per cent) for an interdenominational nonconformist burial ground and 13 (0.6 per cent) for a temperance hall. 299 trustees acted more than once for a total of 911 times — an average of three times each — and the largest number of trusteeships held by an individual was fifteen. Another acted thirteen times. However, no allowance has been made for these duplicated trusteeships in the calculations made for this study since each was held separately and each has a significance in its own right.

The names, occupations and places of residence of trustees are given on the Chancery enrolments together with a copy of their signatures to the deed, using a cross to indicate those who marked rather than signed it. An example is that for the Primitive Methodist chapel in Gedney, Holbeach district. On 25 March 1834 William Bailey, a farmer, sold a plot of land in the newly drained saltmarsh of the parish near the old sea bank to a group of Primitive Methodists for £5. The deed for the transaction was enrolled in Chancery on 7 June 1834. There were eight trustees: George Flint, a carpenter from Holbeach; William Jibb, a blacksmith from Gedney; either William Bailey, the vendor, or a person with the same name, who was described as a farmer; Edward Cullen, a cordwainer from Tilney Saint Lawrence in Norfolk; John Vincent, a farmer from Gedney; Thomas Almey, another Gedney farmer; John Bliss, a brickmaker also from Gedney; and Robert

\textsuperscript{21} P.R.O., C54/11602/18; C54/16702/13 for Scartho chapels.

Walker, a Gedney labourer. Five of these - Jibb, Bailey, Vincent, Almey and Bliss were shown as having signed the original deed with a mark.23

The description of trustees' occupations and places of residence depended on what they told the attorney drawing up the deed and his perception of their statuses or occupations. This means that the descriptions are not standardized nor are any conventions which might have been used explained. However, like contemporary census returns they can be seen as a reflection of the status and social worth of trustees and, as such, are a measure of the standing of an individual taking on the office.24

The occupations of the 2,111 trustees in the study area were described in 184 separate ways and in addition there were four people without any occupation given and one widow. As well as the use of different descriptions for a single occupation such as 'farmer' and 'yeoman' there are also the occupational descriptions which either elaborate or qualify the description of a single occupation or cover dual occupations of one person. This means that there are, for example, people described as farmers and yeomen, or farmers and graziers. Other examples are linen drapers as distinct from drapers, while the term grocer and draper can be taken as describing the range of functions of a person's business.

The need to be able not only to analyse these occupations but to also use the analysis for comparative purposes means that the occupations given in the deeds have to be classified in a way which is comparable with similar studies and which can be understood against the general background of work on the social composition of nineteenth-century society. The scheme of social classification drawn up by the Registrar-General in 1951, but with origins in 1911, provides a basis for this.25

The scheme comprises five classes and structures the description of occupation by levels of skill. In so far as skill can be equated with economic status it provides a measure of esteem. Where it is less valid is in the way in which it covers the position of employers of labour - a measure not only of status but also of influence in many communities. The descriptions on trust deeds do not generally distinguish between employers and employed so, although Class I in the scheme of social classification includes large employers they cannot be identified from the deeds alone. While detailed local research might elucidate this question in some cases this is not

23 P.R.O., C54/11197/11.
feasible with relatively large samples of trustees. However, studies of areas large enough to produce sufficient data for comparative purposes and where it is possible to take account of the social nuances behind occupational descriptions can overcome some of these problems. The Lincolnshire registration districts of Caistor, Holbeach and Sleaford fit these criteria having readily identifiable social and economic characteristics which permit the evaluation of the occupational description of trustees.

As well as the large employers already referred to, Class I also includes professional occupations as well as property owners, bankers and merchants. In the three registration districts which are the subject of this study the largest single occupational group in the 107 trustees in Class I was the forty-two gentlemen. There were also thirty-two ministers of religion who appeared on some chapel trusts on the same basis as laymen. Other comparatively large groups in this class were ten surgeons and nine accountants.

Class II includes occupations intermediate between Class I and the skilled artisans and craftsmen who comprise Class III. These include retailers as well as clerks. This class was particularly important in Lincolnshire because it included the 679 farmers, forty-eight yeomen, nineteen farmers and graziers, fourteen graziers, and sixteen cottagers in the trust deeds. The next largest groups in this class were the sixty-six grocers, sixty-one drapers, and thirty-seven grocers and drapers. There were also fifty-seven millers, thirty-nine merchants, thirty builders, twenty-five shopkeepers, and smaller numbers of timber merchants and coal merchants, together with six schoolmasters.

Class III covers skilled artisan occupations and has members of such service groups as cordwainers or shoemakers, tailors, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and carpenters. The largest group from the study area were the sixty-seven cordwainers, to which should be added twenty-five shoemakers, a bootmaker, two boot and shoemakers, and a boot manufacturer. There were fifty tailors, together with another eighteen who combined tailoring with being a draper and in one case a grocer. Forty-five blacksmiths, thirty-three carpenters and nineteen joiners, twenty-three joiners who were both joiners and either builders or cabinet makers, and fifteen bricklayers with the same number of wheelwrights made up the largest groups of craftsmen in this class. There were also twenty-five butchers.

In Class IV, covering the partially skilled occupations, the largest group from the three Lincolnshire registration districts was 179 labourers. Although no person on the deeds who is a labourer is specifically described as being employed in agriculture, the general predominance of agricultural labourers in the adult male working population of the three registration districts – 1,973 outdoor agricultural labourers out of a total adult male population of 5,011
in Holbeach in 1851; 2,212 out of 6,462 in Sleaford and 2,378 out of 9,623 in Caistor — means that most of the labourers in the deeds were in fact employed in agriculture.26 The next largest groups were twelve gardeners and nine braziers. There were only four people in Class V: the unskilled occupations. They were hawkers.

The Trustees: the Social Composition of the Trusts of Particular Denominations

Analysis of the social composition of the trustees in the study areas shows that there were both marked differences as well as similarities in the overall composition of the trustees of the various denominations (Table 3). The Baptist and Independent/Congregational churches had a greater proportion of their trustees in Class I than the other main denominations and over 70 per cent each in Classes II and III combined — a total only exceeded by the Wesleyan Methodists. Neither body had any trustees in Class V. However, Baptist leadership was less concentrated in the first two classes with more trustees in Classes III and IV than the Congregationalists. On the other hand, while the social composition of the trustees of all the three main branches of Methodism — the Wesleyan Methodists, the Primitive Methodists and the Wesleyan Reformers — were distinct from that of the other two main dissenting churches, there were significant differences within Methodism. These were based on the greater numbers of Wesleyan trustees in Class II — 71.2 per cent compared with thirty-eight per cent in the Primitive Methodists and 39.2 per cent among the Wesleyan Reformers.

Moreover, the overall balance in the social composition of trustees altered during the period from 1800 to 1870 (Table 4). While the cumulative percentage in Classes II and III did not change significantly over the period there was a substantial growth in the percentage of trustees in Class IV in the 1830s which was the basis for a continuing presence of members of this social group on nonconformist trusts in the area up to 1870. It was not, however, based on any fundamental shift in the proportion of other social groups, so that overall nonconformist leadership in the study areas continued to be overwhelmingly composed of men from Classes I and II. Any changes which took place in the period were based on the creation of new trusts for new denominational growth — in this case the Primitive Methodists from the 1840s and to a lesser extent the Wesleyan Reformers from the 1850s. It is a process which can be examined in greater detail through a consideration of the trustees of the separate denominations.

### Table 3: Social Composition of Trustees, Number and Percentage ( ), by Denomination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Wesleyan Methodists</th>
<th>Primitive Methodists</th>
<th>Wesleyan Reformers</th>
<th>Baptists</th>
<th>Congregationalists/Independents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>47 (3.7)</td>
<td>14 (2.9)</td>
<td>7 (5.8)</td>
<td>15 (13.9)</td>
<td>20 (18.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>900 (71.2)</td>
<td>184 (38.0)</td>
<td>47 (39.2)</td>
<td>60 (55.5)</td>
<td>67 (60.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>269 (21.3)</td>
<td>122 (25.2)</td>
<td>30 (25.0)</td>
<td>25 (23.2)</td>
<td>19 (17.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>46 (3.7)</td>
<td>161 (33.3)</td>
<td>34 (28.4)</td>
<td>7 (6.5)</td>
<td>3 (2.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2 (0.4)</td>
<td>2 (1.7)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 (0.1)</td>
<td>1 (0.2)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>2 (1.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1263</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Wesleyan Methodists

Members of Class II preponderated on the Wesleyan Methodist trusts in the three study areas (Table 3) and together with the 21.3 per cent of trustees in Class III they were the dominant influence in Wesleyan Methodist leadership in the area. This was due to the importance of farmers who constituted 43.4 per cent of trustees, a far greater proportion than in the whole population of the three districts where the percentage of farmers in 1861 varied between 14.1 per cent in Holbeach and 6.6 per cent in Caistor. Their presence meant that the Lincolnshire trusts were much more polarized than in other parts of the country for which there is evidence based on samples of trustees made up from a variety of sources and places – Cornwall, Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire and Lancashire – where between 50 and 53 per cent of trustees were in Class II in the early nineteenth century, while the proportion was 59 per cent in Cornwall and 56 per cent in Northumberland in the later part of the century. This polarization was less marked in the Caistor district where the percentage of trustees in Class II was 66.5 per cent compared with 80.5 per cent in Holbeach and 74.3 per cent in Sleaford.

The inclusion of Grimsby, with the market towns of Caistor, Brigg and Market Rasen, modified the overall structure of the trust deeds in Caistor district. Here the bricklayers and tailors from Class III, who provided the services on which the trade and business of the towns was based, played a more important role in chapel life. Their presence may have softened the profile of Wesleyan trustees but it did not eliminate the considerable influence of men from Class II, and although farmers were less prominent in town trusts they were replaced by tradesmen from this class such as the mercer, draper and grocer; two drapers and grocers; the tailor and draper, and merchant who served on a Market Rasen Wesleyan Methodist trust in 1857.

Most of the Wesleyan trusts in the study area date from the first half of the nineteenth century when a total of seventy-three were established (see Table 2). Leaders of this earlier period therefore controlled Wesleyan affairs into the third quarter of the century. Farmers continued in their place as 'the backbone of many a village society', giving them a pre-eminent position in Lincolnshire Methodism. Even among the newer trusts of the period from 1850 to 1870 members of Class III did not move into positions of leader-

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30 E.g. see C54/15139/4.
Table 4: Cumulative Totals of Trustees by Social Class by Decade, 1800-1870, with Percentage (%) for each Decade and Total Overall Percentage Increase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>1800-1809</th>
<th>1810-1819</th>
<th>1820-1829</th>
<th>1830-1839</th>
<th>1840-1849</th>
<th>1850-1859</th>
<th>1860-1869</th>
<th>1870</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>3 (7.5)</td>
<td>12 (5.7)</td>
<td>24 (6.3)</td>
<td>42 (5.3)</td>
<td>66 (5.1)</td>
<td>84 (5.2)</td>
<td>105 (5.0)</td>
<td>107 (5.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>24 (60.0)</td>
<td>128 (61.2)</td>
<td>238 (62.6)</td>
<td>484 (61.5)</td>
<td>789 (61.3)</td>
<td>983 (60.7)</td>
<td>1256 (60.2)</td>
<td>1267 (60.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>10 (25.0)</td>
<td>52 (24.9)</td>
<td>96 (25.3)</td>
<td>178 (22.6)</td>
<td>292 (22.7)</td>
<td>368 (22.7)</td>
<td>472 (22.6)</td>
<td>475 (22.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>3 (7.5)</td>
<td>16 (7.6)</td>
<td>20 (5.3)</td>
<td>80 (10.2)</td>
<td>137 (10.6)</td>
<td>178 (11.0)</td>
<td>244 (11.7)</td>
<td>253 (12.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 (0.1)</td>
<td>1 (0.08)</td>
<td>2 (0.1)</td>
<td>4 (0.2)</td>
<td>4 (0.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 (0.5)</td>
<td>2 (0.5)</td>
<td>2 (0.2)</td>
<td>3 (0.2)</td>
<td>4 (0.2)</td>
<td>5 (0.2)</td>
<td>5 (0.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative Total with % increase</td>
<td>40 (422.5)</td>
<td>209 (81.8)</td>
<td>380 (107.1)</td>
<td>787 (63.7)</td>
<td>1288 (25.7)</td>
<td>1619 (28.8)</td>
<td>2086 (1.2)</td>
<td>2111 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ship in large numbers and the percentage, based on under a fifth of the number from the earlier period, nearly halved to 12.4 per cent. In other parts of the country there was also a decrease of trustees in Class III although the proportion in Lincolnshire still remained lower.32

**Primitive Methodists**

The overall social composition of Primitive Methodist leadership differed fundamentally from that of the Wesleyans (Table 3). Trustees from Class II still constituted the largest number, but at 38 per cent of the total were a far lower proportion than among the Wesleyans, although the percentage in Class III was broadly comparable between the two denominations. It was, however, the proportion of trustees in Class IV which distinguished the Primitives (33.3 per cent) from the Wesleyans (3.7 per cent). Moreover, 127 of the 161 Primitive trustees in this class, or 78.9 per cent were described as labourers.

A further indication of the character of the Primitive trustees is provided by their levels of literacy. There is an indication on enrolled deeds whether trustees signed or used a mark on the transactions to which they were a party. A total of eighty-six (4.1 per cent) of all trustees in the study area used a cross and sixty-two of these were Primitive Methodists – nearly 13 per cent of their total. None the less, even if the leaders of Primitive Methodism were proportionately more illiterate than their counterparts in other denominations, they were distinguished from the communities in which they lived by their comparatively high levels of literacy. Most of the illiterate Primitive trustees acted in the 1830s and 1840s when the percentage of bridegrooms using a cross to mark marriage registers in Lincolnshire in general, and for some of the time in the study area in particular, was between 28 and 30 per cent.33

The extent to which Lincolnshire Primitive Methodist chapel trusts were weighted towards Class IV was not radically different from that in other parts of the country, although there were differences between the three districts studied.34 These are indicative of the extent to which Primitive Methodist trusts reflected regional nuances in the particular social and occupational groups among which they recruited, but the interpretation of these differences also illustrates the importance of basing an analysis of this type in a firm local context.35

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35 See above, 144.
The Sleaford district leadership had the largest proportion of trustees in Class IV of the three districts which were studied, with 47.9 per cent in this group. Holbeach had 37.9 per cent while the lowest was Caistor with 30.6 per cent. However, the composition of trusts altered during the period of the study. This reflected developments within Primitive Methodism as its leadership moved away from its proletarian base and is a measure of the connexion's changing nature in the nineteenth century. The institutionalization of the Primitives and the associated period of chapel building in the 1830s and 1840s followed a period from 1817 in which its early preachers ranged across Lincolnshire, attracting hearers. The majority of these were said to be 'farmers' servants, day-labourers and village mechanics'.36 The nine trustees for a chapel at Lutton in the Holbeach district in 1834 consisted of six labourers, three of whom used a mark to sign the deed, together with a carpenter, a blacksmith and a cordwainer, who also signed with a mark.37

In the 1830s, 83.3 per cent of trustees in the Sleaford district were in Class IV and because of these early appointments the area's Primitive Methodist trustees remained the most working class of the whole of the three areas studied. Similarly the highest proportion of working class trustees in Caistor was appointed at this period when 41.2 per cent were in Class IV. However, in Holbeach district the cumulative percentage of trustees in Class IV grew in the 1840s and remained relatively high in the 1850s at 51.8 per cent – a time when that in the other two districts declined. These working-class trustees were almost exclusively labourers – twenty-five out of a total of thirty-six in Holbeach; twenty-one out of twenty-three in Sleaford and eighty-one out of 102 in Caistor.

Whereas the strong working-class base of the early Primitive Methodist trusts in Sleaford district meant that trustees from Class IV retained their predominant position up to 1870 the position was different in Caistor and Holbeach. The reasons for this were particular to these districts. From the 1840s there were increases in the proportions of trustees in Classes II and III in the Caistor district, but it was more marked in Class III where the cumulative percentage continued to grow to the end of the period whereas there was a slight decline in Class II in the 1860s. This paralleled changes in the Wesleyan Methodist trusts in the towns of the district except in the case of the Primitives the growth in the number of tradesmen and craftsmen was at the expense of a lower social group – the working-class trustees. In Holbeach district the balance of trustees between the social groups also changed but in this case it was Class II which grew at the expense of Class IV. Those in Class III fluctuated but

37 P.R.O., C54/11219/15.
did not show any significant changes. This suggests that the social composition of the trusts in the Holbeach district was polarizing. However, in this context the local background provides an explanation which modifies the perception of change which results from data analysis alone.

As with the Wesleyan Methodists, farmers who were members of Class II, played an important, even if less significant, part in Primitive Methodist affairs. There were 115 farmers and yeomen on trusts in the study area – 23.8 per cent compared with 43.4 per cent among the Wesleyans. However, the description of farmer on a trust deed subsumed the occupiers of a considerable range of types and sizes of farms. The Holbeach district was predominantly an area of small farms, a number of which were freehold. The way of life of many of these farmers was often very little different from that of the labourers who served alongside them on the chapel trusts and indeed the occupation of one of these small farms was a step which was often taken by farm workers who had accumulated sufficient capital.38

Even after these particular circumstances have been considered and despite the long-term changes which were taking place in the composition of Primitive Methodist trusts, the proportion of labourers continued to be representative of their position in the population of the districts as a whole up to 1861.39 The trust for Long Sutton Primitive Methodist chapel which was drawn up in October 1870, does, however, illustrate the changes that had taken place in the composition of Primitive Methodist trusts by that date. There were eleven trustees one of whom was an architect, four were farmers and one a miller, making a total of six in Classes I and II. There was one in Class III, a mason, while two gardeners, a tollgate keeper and a single labourer were from Class IV. This contrasts with the 1834 deed from neighbouring Lutton discussed earlier where all the trustees were in Classes III and IV, and six out of nine were labourers.40

Wesleyan Reformers
As has been noted, the first Wesleyan Reform deed in the Caistor, Holbeach and Sleaford districts was drawn up in 1858. The social composition of the leadership of the Reform movement and that part of it which developed into the United Methodist Free Churches is an important consideration in the discussion of its origins. The

40 P.R.O., C54/17168/4; see above, 150 for Lutton.
schism from the Wesleyan Methodist church has been seen in terms of the developing aspirations of the laity. Changes in levels of education and wealth meant that they were less inclined to accept the domination of a relatively small elite of ministers and laymen. It has been suggested that in the Louth, Lincolnshire, circuit which was deeply divided by the Reform movement, it was the skilled craftsmen and small, self-employed shopkeepers with their desire for greater freedom and democracy in church affairs, who provided the driving force behind Wesleyan Reform. The enrolled deeds enable the Reform leadership in the Caistor, Holbeach and Sleaford registration districts to be compared with that of the parent Wesleyan Methodist body and other nonconformist churches. There were nine chapels with 120 trustees belonging to the Reformers or the United Methodist Free Churches. Their analysis indicates some of the complexities of the development of the Reform movement in these parts of Lincolnshire.

The changes which were taking place in the occupations of Wesleyan Methodist trustees in the towns of the Caistor district shows that at least some of the social groups who are said to have provided leadership for the Reformers were still finding outlets for their aspirations within the parent body. The overall composition of the Lincolnshire trusts suggests that the leadership of the Reform movement in the Caistor, Holbeach and Sleaford districts was not coming from them but had a distinctively proletarian character more akin to that of the Primitive Methodists.

After the Primitive Methodists, the Wesleyan Reformers had the largest group of trustees in Class IV (28.4 per cent) of any of the nonconformist churches in the study area (Table 3). Indeed, since the proportion of Primitive Methodist trustees who were labourers had begun to decrease by the time the first Reform trusts were established the differences between the two denominations in the percentage of trustees in Class IV was diminishing. Moreover, with 39.2 per cent in Class II and 25 per cent in Class III the proportions in these classes among the Wesleyan Reformers did not differ significantly from the Primitive Methodists. Also, the proportion of Reform trustees in Class III was not significantly higher than the Wesleyan Methodists suggesting that large numbers from this class did not move into positions of leadership in the Reform movement from which they had been excluded in the parent body. However, the practice of including ministers in Reformers’ trusts meant that the proportion of their trustees in Class I was increased by 2.1 per cent.

43 See above, 147.
The comparatively large percentage (17.5) of labourers who acted as Reform trustees enhanced their proletarian character. It is also noteworthy that, although it had no effect on the overall distribution of trustees by Class, 4.2 per cent of the 26.9 per cent of Reform trustees who were farmers were described as cottagers – that is smallholders – a much larger proportion than either among the Wesleyans where they were 0.5 per cent, or the Primitives, where they were 0.8 per cent.

On the other hand the largest groups in the Reform trusts after the farmers and labourers were blacksmiths, cordwainers and tailors, all of whom were more important in percentage terms than they were among the Wesleyan Methodists and all of whom belonged to Class III. However, these blacksmiths and cordwainers were each only 5 per cent of the total of Reform trustees while the tailors were 5.8 per cent, so it is their occupations as much as their numbers which are significant in this context.

The absence of a well-defined new set of leaders in the Reform movement and the closeness of its social composition to that of the Primitive Methodists raises the question as to why a distinct denomination emerged in the 1850s. Some of the reasons for this can be understood through a study of the local background to the building of Reform chapels. Five of the nine chapels in the study area were described as being Wesleyan Reform, the other four as belonging to the United Methodist Free Churches. The Wesleyan Reform Union had been formed in 1857 from the 27,496 Reformers left when the Wesleyan Methodist Association had joined with some Reformers to form the United Methodist Free Churches. The trusts from Caistor, Holbeach and Sleaford districts described as Wesleyan Reform had all been established after the Union was set up and belonged to that particular strand of the Reform tradition. They differed from the United Methodist Free Churches in that, except in the market town of Sleaford, where the Wesleyan Reform chapel had closed by 1899, they were all in places for which there are no Primitive Methodist trust deeds. On the other hand, all the United Methodist Free Churches were opened in places which also had Primitive Methodist places of worship.

There is a need to be cautious when analysing subgroups within what is a relatively small sample, but the existence of two strands within the Reform movement represented by the Wesleyan Reform Union and the United Methodist Free Churches is borne out by a more detailed study of their deeds. The contrast between the trust for the Wesleyan Reform chapel at Ruskington Fen in the Sleaford registration district, which was opened in 1858, and that for the

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44 Currie, Methodism divided, 230.
45 Wesleyan Reform Union year book containing the annual meeting of the Jubilee Conference 1899 (Sheffield: Wesleyan Reform Union, 1899), 12.
Market Rasen United Methodist Free Churches chapel of 1860 illustrates this point. There were eight trustees, excluding the minister, in Ruskington Fen. These included four labourers, two of whom were illiterate, one yeoman, two farmers and a horsebreaker. This trust, which would not be out of place acting for a Primitive Methodist chapel, was very different in its composition from Market Rasen. This had twenty-one trustees none of whom were labourers but one was described as a gentleman, one was a veterinary surgeon, seven were farmers, two were tailors, or tailors and drapers, one was a draper and grocer, while two were braziers. There were also two shoemakers, a currier, a plumber and glazier, a maltster, a blacksmith, and a coal agent.46

These differences demonstrate clearly the way in which the composition of trusts reflects the particular ethos of nonconformist churches. The similarity of the leadership of the Wesleyan Reform Union to that of the Primitives meant that the distinctive type of chapel life they offered could function in places where the Primitives were not represented. This differed from that of the United Methodist Free Churches whose trustees were much more akin to the parent Wesleyan Methodist body and who were potentially a rival community to them.

**Baptists**

The eleven Baptist properties from the study area for which there are enrolled title deeds represented various aspects of Baptist church life. They were not a homogenous group and included four General and four Particular Baptists chapels, two belonging to the New Connexion of the General Baptists and one General Baptist Unitarian. Any discussion of Baptist trusts has to take account of these differences which reflect both doctrinal and institutional developments among the Baptists.

The earliest Baptist trust to be enrolled was a Particular Baptist chapel at Helpringham built in 1809. It had two trustees who were ministers, two farmers, a miller, a grocer and a draper.47 Doctrinal developments within the General Baptists, including the growth of Unitarianism in the eighteenth century, are reflected in the deed for the General Baptist Unitarian chapel at Lutton in 1843. This was a reconveyance to new trustees, replacing a trust established in 1812, but it is representative of the ethos of a church which was gathered in pursuit of a particular set of doctrines from out of the local communities of the area. The place of residence of its ten trustees which included a dissenting minister, two farmers, an auctioneer, a carpenter, a cordwainer, an ironmonger, a grocer, a printer and bookseller, and a merchant’s clerk shows that its adherents were

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46 P.R.O., C54/15842/8; C54/16548/19.
47 P.R.O., C54/8549/5.
The development of the New Connexion of the General Baptists with a more outward-looking attitude and linked together by a connectional organization is reflected in the deeds for the chapels at Sutton St Edmund and Holbeach where trustees came out of the local communities and reflected their social and economic life. That at Sutton had been built in 1840 as a result of the Connexion's expansion. Its trust of five farmers and graziers together with one tailor was very firmly rooted in the rural economy of the area. On the other hand, the trustees at Holbeach, where land in the newly laid out Albert Street was conveyed for a chapel in 1844, were much more socially varied and representative of the Baptist New Connexion's concern with evangelism among the poor and in towns. They included two labourers as well as three farmers, two masons, a shoemaker, a druggist, a draper and grocer together with a machineman.

These various strands of development mean that the Baptist deeds encompassed a wide range of situations. However, despite the changes which were taking place nearly 70 per cent of all Baptist trustees were in Classes I and II. Only 6.5 per cent were in Class IV, although this still made them more proletarian than the Wesleyan Methodists (Table 3).

Congregationalists/Independents and Other Dissenters
The trustees of the nine chapels described as Calvinist, Congregationalist, Independent, Protestant Independent and Protestant Dissenters were the most concentrated into Classes I and II of those in the study area. Just over 78 per cent of their 111 trustees fell into this group while there were only three (2.7 per cent) in Class IV. Like the Baptists, their chapels contained a variety of congregations and the composition of their trusts reflected their origins. Some, like the Sleaford Calvinists from the town's Hen Lane Meeting House had been established during the eighteenth century and remained as isolated examples of this aspect of the evangelical Revival. Others, like the Independent chapel at Market Rasen, were a result of missionary work in the early nineteenth century. Preaching had been initiated in Rasen as a result of the evangelistic efforts of the students of Hoxton Academy, later

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48 P.R.O., C54/13021/2.
49 Minutes of an association of the New Connection of General Baptists, held at Derby, June 22nd., 23rd., 24th., and 25th., 1819 (Derby: New Connection of General Baptists, [1819]), 7; Minutes of the seventy first annual association of the New Connection of the General Baptists, held at Spalding, Lincolnshire, June 30th., July 1st., 2nd. and 3rd., 1840 (Nottingham: New Connection of the General Baptists, [1840]), 13; P.R.O., C54/12463/11.
Highbury College, with the support of Thomas Wilson its Treasurer. Wilson, with the Revd Dr William Harris, also of Hoxton Academy, was a trustee of the chapel although their support did not, in this particular case, guarantee its long term success. Similarly, three Hoxton tutors, together with Thomas Wilson and his son, Joshua, were among the thirteen new trustees for the Independent chapel at Grimsby in 1820.\textsuperscript{51} Men from this type of middle-class social background imparted through their leadership their particular qualities to the churches they were instrumental in establishing in Lincolnshire.

The men who became trustees of nonconformist property qualified for the office they held because of the status they had attained within their churches. This status had been earned in a variety of ways including the exercise of spiritual leadership as well as secular responsibilities. The enrolled deeds of the trusts on which they served provide a considerable body of evidence on their social composition which can be analysed to determine the characteristics of the leadership of the various nonconformist churches. When this is related to a particular locality, such as the three Lincolnshire registration districts which have been the subject of this study, and the composition of this leadership compared with that of the population of the districts as a whole the profiles of the various churches can be defined with greater precision and their place in local society more clearly understood. While it would be over simplistic to use only these factors, an understanding of them provides significant insights into the history and development of the nonconformist churches both locally and nationally.

\textsuperscript{51} P.R.O., C54/7528/15; C54/10104/8; C54/9946/57; [James Creasey], \textit{Sketches illustrative of the topography and history of New and Old Sleaford} (Sleaford: James Creasey, 1825), 79; G.F. Nuttall, 'The rise of Independency in Lincolnshire: Thomas Wilson and the students', \textit{Journal of the United Reformed Church Historical Society}, 4, no. 1 (October, 1987), 35–50.