Between Church and Sect: The Origins of Methodism in Manchester

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In 1827 a Wesleyan Methodist minister called James Everett published the first volume of a history of Wesleyan Methodism in Manchester 'and its vicinity'.¹ In 190 pages he managed to reach only the building of the first chapel in 1750, three years after the foundation of the society, though he did indeed usefully range around a wide area and I shall keep to Manchester town and parish. Everett never produced his promised second volume but by a happy chance his notes for it have survived and are now in the Methodist archives.² Everett was (and is) a highly controversial figure because of his involvement in the splits and secessions in nineteenth-century Methodism, but his histories of Methodism in Sheffield and Manchester show him to be a pioneer local historian of surprisingly high quality and critical ability.³ The notebook also provides valuable insight into the material that lies behind these early histories — recollections and anecdotes from the 1820s of old people who directly or indirectly preserved information as far back as the first Methodist generation in the mid-eighteenth century.

Early Methodism in Manchester itself has not been treated since on Everett's planned scale though Alan Rose has published several

* This article is a revised version of a lecture delivered in the John Rylands University Library on 16 June 1997 in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the foundation of Methodism in Manchester.

¹ J. Everett, Wesleyan Methodism in Manchester and its vicinity (Manchester: S. Russell, 1827).
² Hereafter referred to as 'Everett notebook': folio MS volume in the Methodist Church Archives (hereafter MCA) in the John Rylands University Library (hereafter JRUL), Manchester (uncatalogued).
³ For Sheffield see his Historical sketches of Wesleyan Methodism in Sheffield and its vicinity (Sheffield: Montgomery, 1823) (also only one volume published).
model histories of societies in the neighbourhood and the north-west more generally. 4 Otherwise the most important contribution was a study of the origins by C.D. Little in the 1940s, with valuable details on the early trusts, though he missed some points by confining himself to Methodist sources. 5 It was, in fact, in the course of an attempt to study the whole range of Manchester’s religious life in the eighteenth century that I found cross-currents between the sources for Methodism and other groups. The story which follows therefore involves consideration of the problems of most of the religious bodies in Manchester as well as of some peculiarities in the general religious situation there. These, it will be suggested, help to explain how and why Methodism arose as well as some features of its development up to about 1780.

The Religious Scene in Early Eighteenth-Century Manchester

Manchester during the first half of the eighteenth century was already becoming a marketing and organizing centre for the emerging cotton industry. Its population rose from perhaps 9,000 in 1717 to over 24,000 in 1773 and then much more rapidly. 6 The known denominations present in the early decades were the Anglicans, Nonjurors, Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers and Roman Catholics. All but the Anglicans and Presbyterians were as yet generally insignificant in numbers and influence. However the Jacobite Nonjurors (who had left the Church of England after 1688 in loyalty to the exiled Stuarts) still had an influence on the local Anglicans; and the Baptists played a significant role in the story of early Methodism.

The first thing to understand about the religious situation in the town is that the Anglican church had inherited a medieval pattern of organization of an odd kind. The old parish of Manchester (which was only finally broken up in 1850) contained some thirty townships of which Manchester township was only one. Modern inner suburbs like Rusholme, Didsbury and Stretford, as well as more distant ones like Heaton Norris on the borders of Stockport parish, were as yet small and separate villages. The parish church was the present cathedral, but in those days a collegiate church. That is to say, it was a cathedral-like establishment with a warden and four fellows, assisted by chaplains. The warden and fellows did

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4 Of an impressive series of model local histories of Methodism the most relevant for the present study are: ‘Methodism in Cheshire to 1800’ in Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society (TLCAS), lxxviii (1975), 22–37 and ‘Methodism in South Lancashire to 1800’, TLCAS, lxxxi (1982), 67–91.


6 A.P. Wadsworth and J. de L. Mann, The cotton trade and industrial Lancashire 1600–1780 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931), 509. The 1717 figure is from F. Gastrell, Notitia Cestrensis, Chetham Society (CS), 1st series, xix (1849), II (1), 57 but with the numbers calculated at 4.5 per family.
little more than conduct services by rota while the chaplains
attended to baptisms and marriages which were open to the whole
parish. The obvious pastoral defects of this situation, however,
were relieved by the fact that by 1700 there were eight chapels-
of-ease scattered in the villages and one in Salford. St Ann's, in
1712, was the first new church in the town and the last until a new
crop from about mid-century, mostly from the late 1780s.

Just how this affected the church's efficiency is debateable. In
1742 the college clergy complained that it was impossible to
exercise discipline through the church courts because of disputes
among officials. They operated more effectively elsewhere in south­
est Lancashire; and no doubt there were more informal ways of
enforcing conformity. John Morris, a Roman Catholic later turned
Methodist, was forced to attend church by his Anglican master. 7

But in the villages some nonconforming Puritan ministers had held
on to Anglican chapels long after they were supposed to have been
ejected in 1662 — certainly in Birch and Denton and possibly in
Gorton. There were also quarrels with the college clergy over
patronage of the village chapels into the 1720s. The village clergy
depended mainly on voluntary subscriptions for their income and
the local gentry only supported those they approved of. As late as
1778 it was said that in Gorton no church dues could be collected
because of the hostility of Presbyterian farmers. 8

Politics made matters worse. The wardens of the college were
low church Whigs appointed by the crown but the fellows were
self-perpetuating high churchmen with Jacobite sympathies. So
were many of the other clergy, notably John Clayton, a former
associate of John Wesley at Oxford, who is said to have prayed for
the Pretender on his knees in the street during the 1745 invasion.
He certainly said grace for him and drank his health indoors. 9

There were also genuinely religious differences. Manchester
churches celebrated communion monthly — a high frequency by
contemporary standards — but in the 1730s the fellows increased
the college's celebrations to weekly against the warden's protests. 10

When St Ann's was founded in 1712 it is often alleged to have
been as a low church Whig counter to the college. Lady Bland,

7 Manchester Central Library (MCL) MS M39/2/7/3,5,6; 'Life of John Morris' in
Arminian Magazine, xviii (1795), 20.
8 Struggles for the Manchester village chapels are shown in B. Nightingale, Lancashire
Nonconformity (Manchester: Heywood, 1880-83), v, 53-4, 151, 283-4; J. Booker, History
of the ancient chapel of Denton, CS, xxxvii (1856), 137-40, 149-50; Booker, History of the
ancient chapel of Birch, CS, xlvi (1859), 63-70, 78-109. For other Lancashire examples
see P.J.W. Higson, 'Some leading promoters of Nonconformity and Lancashire chapels'
in TLCAS, lxv (1961), 123-63. For Gorton see episcopal visitation returns in Chester
Diocesan Record Office (CDRO) MS EDV 7/1/159.
9 S. Hibbert-Ware, History of the foundations in Manchester (Manchester: Agnew and
Zanetti, 1834), ii, 100; J. Byrom, Private journal and literary remains, CS, xliv (1857), I (2),
394.
10 MCL MS M39/2/7/5 (account given in 1743).
its foundress, probably so intended, but in fact its early rectors were moderate men and the Nonjuror John Byrom and John Wesley when visiting in his high church days, attended there as well as at the college. Joseph Hoole, the rector from 1736 to 1745, was a moderate high churchman and an old neighbour of the Wesleys in Lincolnshire, perhaps fortunate to have died as the Pretender approached the town. His successor was a strong Whig partisan but what has been termed 'Jacobite culture' persisted until late in the century.\(^{11}\)

The situation was complicated by the Nonjurors led by Dr Deacon, a learned devotional and liturgical scholar. He was bishop in one section of the Nonjurors and the tragic father of three sons who suffered from joining the 1745 invasion.\(^{12}\) Through Clayton Deacon influenced Wesley at Oxford in his attempts to imitate the disciplines of the early church — such as triple dipping in baptism and Wednesday and Friday fasts. In terms of devotion as well as politics there was in fact a good deal of interchange and common ground between Nonjurors and conforming high churchmen.\(^{13}\)

The most formidable rivals to the established church were the Presbyterians, especially at Cross Street Chapel in the centre of the town, but also in four of the villages. The Presbyterians nationally were the most numerous and socially weighty of all the Dissenters who had gained limited toleration in 1689. Nationally, by about 1720 Dissent attracted only about six per cent of the population but in Lancashire Presbyterians alone had some eight per cent and in Manchester at least ten and possibly seventeen cent of the population. Cross Street claimed 1,500 'hearers'.\(^{14}\) Its trustees were drawn from leading and often related families in the town and they took a significant part in its administrative and social life as well as being the focus of an alternative culture to that of Anglicanism.\(^{15}\) Their significance was underlined in 1729 when there was a scheme for a workhouse to be administered by a


\(^{12}\) One was executed, one transported, one died in prison: H. Broxap, *A biography of Thomas Deacon* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1918), 190.


\(^{14}\) M. Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), i, 509; F. Gastrell, *Notitia*, II (1), 57 says 233 families (c.1,150 persons) for all Dissent; Evans MS, Dr Williams Library, MS 702. C33, fo. 58 says 1,500 Presbyterian 'hearers'.

committee containing equal numbers of high church Tories, low church Whigs and Cross Street Presbyterian Whigs — probably a unique composition for a scheme of this kind. This transparent attempt to dish the Tories was in fact defeated but that it was proposed at all says a great deal about the religious and political divisions in the town and the significance of Cross Street. In fact it may be said to have acted as an alternative ‘establishment’, which drew in those in search of respectability and social and business contacts as well as religious consolation if they were neither Anglicans nor attracted by the quirky Quakers and Baptists. Provincial Presbyterianism of this kind must temper claims that England was a ‘confessional state’ in the eighteenth century. Its one drawback, as we shall see, was its growing unorthodoxy in doctrine which later divided the ‘Dissenting interest’ as in the anti-Test Act agitation in 1789–90.

There is a third feature of the religious scene to be added. This was not really a matter of denomination but of theology and spirituality cutting across that barrier. It may be called ‘mysticism’ for want of a better word (and so contemporaries termed it). Although it could take various forms, its main characteristic was a search for inward religion centred on the notion of a divinely-given spark of light and truth present in all human beings which, if recognized and cultivated, gave enlightenment and salvation. Such beliefs appear to have attracted some at more than one social level. The most famous Manchester devotee was John Byrom, an inventor of shorthand, poet and author of ‘Christians awake’. He was a genial personality who seemed able to mix with people of many religious persuasions as his diaries and letters show. He was a reader of French Quietist mystics and of William Law, the most famous devotional writer of the century who influenced many future evangelicals. Through Law’s later and less orthodox writings Byrom encountered the work of Jakob Böhme or Behmen, a seventeenth-century German theosophical mystic whose system incorporated the notion of the divine spark. A man called Ralph Mather of Bolton (who was a Methodist for a time) wrote a letter to his friend Henry Brooke in 1775 which contained a kind of national gazetteer of obscure mystical devotees. He made special mention of Bolton where there was ‘a school of female

16 For this episode see MCL, MS fo. 362.51 M1; L1/55/5/13, fos 409, 413; House of Commons Journals, xxi (1727–32), 594 and passim; Byrom, Journals, CS, xlv (1857), I(2), 440–518 and Poetical works, CS (new series), xxxv (1895), II(2), 587ff. (journal fragment) give details of lobbying activities.

17 See the claim made in Jonathan Clark, English society 1688–1832 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), chapters 4 and 5.

18 Apart from the Chetham Society edition there is a useful selection ed. H. Talon (London: Rockliff, 1950) which has representative religious entries. The latest life by J. Hancox, The Queen’s chameleon (London: Cape, 1994) has to be read with caution for highly speculative theories and has little on his religious interests.
philosophers' and added that 'about Manchester and Bristol the spring of Truth would seem to show most of anywhere I know'.

As late as 1804 a Manchester Anglican visitation report revealed that there are 'people of a sober turn' who 'yet disregard public worship, who talk of Inward Worship, of the God within them, such as Mystics, Swedenborgians, readers and admirers of Jacob Behmen, Mme Bourignon, Mme Guion and others of that class and the Revd Mr Law'.

From this background it is not surprising that the new sect of visionary Swedenborgians in the late eighteenth century (which included a number of ex-Methodists) did well in Manchester. John Clowes, the rector of the new church of St John's, founded by Byrom's son, read William Law and then became a Swedenborgian propagandist while remaining rector until his death. A little earlier, the tiny millennialist sect, founded by their prophetess Ann Lee, also seems to have included some with earlier Methodist contacts. It looks as though, having made the break with conventional religion by becoming Methodists, some of those in search of yet more exciting charismatic experiences found it easier to gravitate to more extreme and exotic groups. But we shall also see that as far back as the 1740s and 1750s, such 'mysticism' had already been evident among Moravian visitors to Manchester and gave much trouble to the early Methodist society.

This then, was the range of religious life in Manchester in the 1740s when a new element was added — evangelicalism, of which Methodism was to become an early and a leading part.

The Origins of Manchester Methodism

The older historians of the evangelical revival and of Methodism tended to see it as primarily a mysterious act of God and secondarily as a 'reaction' against the sub-Christian and worldly


20 Episcopal visitation (1804) in CDRO, MS EDV7/3/325 Qu. 4.


state of the existing churches. But even on this simple interpretation some awkward questions arise. Why, in England at least, from the 1730s and not earlier? Why more successfully in some areas and in some social groups than others? Why only a limited crop of converts in these apparently favourable circumstances? Why only a slow growth in the first thirty years and more rapid growth thereafter?

Modern investigations of these problems, though still not very far advanced for England, offer possible clues but suggest that a combination of causes rather than a single cause is likely. It has been noted that Methodism, like the Puritans and Dissenters earlier, tended to do best in large and ill-supervised Anglican parishes, especially where there was domestic industry and a growing population. Manchester looks like a case in point. John Bennet, the evangelist of the north-west, did focus on village communities and we shall see that he failed at first in central Manchester. Yet there are only limited and relatively short-lived signs of Methodist impact in the outlying villages of the parish of Manchester until later in the century. This contrasts, for example, with a pattern of village to town in the case of Leeds. It looks as though in outlying areas of Manchester parish the Anglican and Presbyterian presence may have left little room for interlopers until industry and population increased the possible audience. But in the centre the limited pastoral coverage of the college and St Ann's offered more scope as the population grew earlier. The first Methodist, Congregational and Baptist chapels were all in a limited area around Shudehill, High Street and Church Street where there was no Anglican presence for some years. The Congregationalists certainly mostly lived in this area and the history of Dissent and the story to be told here suggest that neighbourhood, family and employment helped to bind churches together though sometimes complicating their relationships with each other as well.

It has been suggested that economic depressions helped to pressurize anxious people into revival. There was certainly


25 Location of early members listed in Hunter's Croft (Cannon Street) Independent Church Book in JRUL, MS Congregational College Loan, Box 15, from fo. 34.
economic and social unrest in Manchester in the 1740s and 1750s: grain riots, industrial disputes, a tithe dispute, concern about the uppish poor; as well as the coming of war and the 1745 invasion.\textsuperscript{26} However, it looks as though revivals seldom relate exactly to the rhythm of economic depressions though religious anxieties could be stimulated by such events and natural disasters if only in the short term. Evangelical communities had their own internal cycles of revival though these may well have been heightened by external material pressures.\textsuperscript{27}

More plausible in Manchester's case may be the presence of political divisions strongly coloured by religious ones. But before considering these we should take note of what may be called the psychological and spiritual world of the early converts and its impact on their personal anxieties, for it is this which is most obvious in surviving Methodist life-histories.

Despite the image of the eighteenth century as the 'age of reason' the reality was more mixed and equivocal than the label implies. Educated people did by now generally disbelieve in witchcraft and they dismissed Methodist charismatic and conversion experiences as due to fraud or illusion or madness. Yet they often retained a sense of divine providence, believed in biblical miracles and even in divine judgements. Thus the rational Manchester Presbyterian physician Thomas Percival, though speculating on the material causes of earthquakes, did not doubt that they could be used by God for judgements on sinners.\textsuperscript{28} The London earthquakes in the 1750s provoked alarm and judgement sermons and not only by Charles Wesley. Manchester also suffered an earthquake in 1753.\textsuperscript{29} At a lower social level there was a far more wide-ranging belief in the supernatural world: God blasting sinners and saving saints; demon-possession; spiritual healing; dreams and visions. All of these figure in early Methodist lives. John Morris said that many saw the comet of 1744 as presaging great events and the 1745 invasion duly followed.\textsuperscript{30} Like many Methodists, Morris's early life

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was marked by religious anxieties; he noted cases of divine judgement and his conversion was precipitated partly through warning dreams. A Manchester woman in 1748 had a vision of Christ crucified (a not uncommon Methodist experience) which Wesley published in his *Journal.* In 1763 the nine-year-old daughter of Mrs Westell had a vision ‘by the eye of faith’ of her mother who had recently died, seeing her with Christ and the glorified saints. In the 1750s a young woman warned by her class leader that she needed the root of sin removed from her heart, had an intense mystical experience during meditation in which she saw her heart as black and with a bar across it. Eventually she saw a tree with white roots and blossom growing from it and had a vision of Christ crucified. She then felt her sin being literally plucked out.

Wesley himself sometimes believed more than his followers. He notoriously believed in witchcraft and published many stories of supernatural experiences as well as the fact that the rain stopped during his preaching (though not, it seems, in Manchester!) John Bennet suspended judgement on the healing claims of a Cheshire wise woman, but Wesley, hearing of her only at second-hand, had no doubt of her powers.

What we also know from early Methodist lives is that a high proportion had some kind of religious upbringing even if they typically criticized their parents for failing to understand the evangelical truths. This is likely to be true of many of the Manchester converts for the evidence broadly suggests that they had at least a nominal allegiance to Anglicanism or Dissent; and some at least had a pious upbringing. But what moved them to join a new religious community? Evidence elsewhere suggests that the intense and dogmatic preaching of the doctrine of justification by faith and the necessity of an instant conversion had a powerful effect, especially on people already subject to religious anxieties. This was perhaps particularly, though not exclusively, true of the young.

John Morris’s experience here is typical of many others. What may have aggravated these anxieties and encouraged people to seek new solutions was the situation in the town. Once cast loose from familiar moorings, with imperfect compasses for guidance, and

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32 *Arminian Magazine*, v (1786), 656.
33 Everett Notebook, fo. 439.
35 See Rack, *Reasonable enthusiast*, 387–8, 431–5. The mixed Anglican and Dissenter background is shown by Charles Wesley’s treatment of communicants in Manchester (see below, n. 44).
only occasionally supervised by revival leaders, they were easy prey for the variety of evangelicals and the mystically inclined who we shall see inhabited or invaded the town. Morris was only unusual in that he was under conflicting pressures from his Catholic family as well as an Anglican master, Methodist friends and his own conscience.

The problems of the Anglicans who are likely to have been the largest section of the society are less clear. In Bristol and London many early converts came from the older Anglican religious societies which were colonised by evangelicals. But there are far fewer examples of this elsewhere. Elsewhere in the area Bennet, later a Methodist, seems to have built partly on societies raised by David Taylor, through whom he was converted himself. Everett indeed speculated that John Clayton would have founded such a society because of his experience in Wesley's so-called 'Holy Club' in Oxford. But there is no evidence of this or any hint that Manchester Methodists emerged from such a society.

It may be suggested that for Anglicans we should ponder on the effects of the Jacobite invasion of 1745 and its impact on the town. It certainly led to much anxiety and bitterness. For example, we have seen that Hoole, the moderate high church rector of St Ann's died as the Pretender was approaching Manchester and that his successor was an outspoken polemical Whig. It was only fourteen months later, in January 1747, that the Methodist society was formed after a visit by Charles Wesley though Bennet had been trying for some time to establish a meeting without success. It may be suggested that the invasion and its tragic aftermath may have helped to precipitate in some minds a religious crisis. Charges of Jacobitism were often levelled at Methodists and though this was largely the product of invasion hysteria, the Wesley family had suspect Jacobite as well as Tory associations. It has also been suggested that there was some congruity between Methodist moral rhetoric and Jacobite and Tory propaganda against Whig corruption.

In Manchester there were certainly individual shocks and crises of conscience for future Methodists. Morris's family suffered from an aggressive soldier. Richard Barlow, a strapping young man, was approached by a Jacobite soldier as a potential recruit but hastily

38 Everett, Manchester, 11-2; John Wesley, Letters in Works, xxxv, 350-2.
39 Hoole's successor was Abel Ward, on whom see Bardsley, St Ann's, chapter 2.
It is conceivable that some in Manchester may have found the reputation of Methodists as Jacobites an attraction. But it is equally, perhaps even more likely that some religiously sensitive people were then finally disillusioned with the savagery of religious politics and their now shocking consequences. Methodism could then appear as an attractive non-political form of religion, especially as it was now newly presented by Anglican clergy with a high church background already known from earlier visits. Bennet’s effectiveness perhaps suffered from his Presbyterian background and lay status. Also, it may be significant that the first recruits were young men more open, perhaps, to a fresh start away from the existing religious divisions in the town. Methodism was also, the Wesleys claimed, a society in the Church of England and not a new sect. It must, however, be recognized that there was a good deal of mob violence in the early years so that only a deeply concerned minority was likely to join.

Sources from Dissent in the early years are rather clearer. Some with this background may have reacted from the same politico-religious disillusionment suggested for Anglicans; but in this case the religious motivation is clearer. We know that by 1761 and possibly as early as the 1740s, Cross Street’s growing unorthodoxy on the Trinity and other doctrines had precipitated a secession which fed into a new Congregational church which will be discussed in a moment. Evangelical preaching could also make recruits from this source. Thus David Taylor had drawn off members from Chinley Presbyterian chapel in the early 1740s and his converts included John Bennet. He also visited Manchester. In 1756 Charles Wesley says that the ‘Arians and Socinians’ in Manchester ‘gnashed on him with their teeth’ but that there were also Dissenter members of the society is also clear. Wesley sent some of them to their respective meetings for communion, though on another occasion he gave them a separate communion himself and some even attended the Anglican service. This was a promising sign of reduced religious hostility. Methodism, despite its Anglican origins, was a society open to all on the basis of a shared religious experience and so might be a reconciling force at times. Some indeed had a mixed background. Richard Barlow had

41 MCA, Tyerman MSS (no index number), ii, fo. 337; ‘Life of John Morris’, 19.
42 The secession story apparently first appeared in Anon., The Manchester socinian controversy (London: 1825), 146. It was denied in Baker, Memorials, 36 but receives confirmation from the fact of people in the Cross Street baptism register later appearing in the Cannon Street Church book. Such secessions from unorthodox Presbyterian churches were common in this period.
43 For Taylor see note 37 above; and for criticisms of his antinomianism by the Chinley minister see James Clegg, Diary, ed. V.S. Doe (Derbyshire Record Society, 1978) 8 October 1741, 4 January 1742 (Original MS in JRUL).
44 Charles Wesley, Journal, ii, 129, 137. A few joined in the Anglican service and later Wesley gave communion to ‘about a score of Dissenters’ (Journal, ii, 138).
an Anglican father and a strong attachment to the Church of England. But he had a Dissenter mother who drew on family tradition to assert that the first, orthodox minister of Cross Street had doctrines similar to those of the Methodists. Barlow seems to have been converted after being convinced that Methodist doctrine conformed to church teaching but he had also been reading a book by John Bunyan. A Dissenter in Derbyshire said the Methodists preached like the old Puritans. By reaction from unorthodox Dissent and a feeling of affinity to new Methodism recruits could be drawn from Dissent as well as Anglicanism.

Then there was the 'mystical' tradition already mentioned which could affect people of any denomination. This had links with the widely-read William Law and with Wesley himself. Despite his criticisms of Law and the mystics Wesley continued to have a selective liking for them as sources for his doctrine of perfection. It will be shown later that tastes of this kind were much more marked and less restrained among some early members of the Manchester society even if such people usually left it or were expelled in the end.

Whether or not material anxieties, political revulsion and religious divisions played a part in Manchester Methodism's genesis, it is certainly the case that the impact of evangelicalism from outside combined with internal divisions to produce new religious bodies. The best example of this is the origin of the new Independent (that is, Congregational) church in the late 1750s which also had an impact on early Methodism. The traditional story, which can be confirmed to some extent by surviving evidence, is that this church was made up of seceders from Cross Street over its unorthodoxy, plus Scottish immigrants and those affected by Calvinist and Methodist preachers from Yorkshire. But to this has to be added an important source in the Manchester Baptist church.

The history of the Baptists in Manchester is obscure but there are hints that it was not always regarded as soundly Baptist in the eyes of the stricter sort. It may have been a cave of Adullam for the disaffected for some time. At any rate it acquired a new assistant pastor in 1755. This was Caleb Warhurst, who originated from an orthodox Independent chapel in Hatherlow. In

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45 Everett Notebook, fos 412-4, 453; Everett, Sheffield, 27.
46 Rack, Reasonable enthusiast, 101-2, 401.
47 B. Nightingale, Lancashire Nonconformity, v, 107-16 details the story of Cannon Street origins though not making it clear that its minister originally served the Baptists. But C. Leach, Manchester Congregationalism (London: Woodford Fawcett, 1898), 20, recognizes the connection.
48 Caleb Warhurst, MS diary in MCL, MS M185, Box 1 for 18 May 1755. (This diary is in fragments, later bound but sometimes in the wrong order and wrongly dated in a later hand. Dates are corrected here). For his Hathersage origin see H.D. Rack, 'Survival and revival: John Bennet, Methodism and the Old Dissent' in K.G. Robbins, ed., Protestant evangelicalism: studies in church history, Subsidia 7 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 18 and n. 108.
November 1756 he was ordained as an Independent minister by three ministers from outside the town. They were John Pye of Sheffield, James Scott of Heckmondwike and the aged Peter Walkden of Stockport — all with evangelical sympathies and associations though also with roots in old Dissent. Warhurst is clearly the ‘new young Baptist preacher’ referred to by Charles Wesley at this time as ‘getting himself a meeting’ out of the Methodists. What happened was that Warhurst formed a church on Congregationalist and Calvinist principles out of the mixture of sources already mentioned and for good measure evidently drew in some of the new Methodists as well. By a process which remains obscure this emerged into a separate existence from the old Baptist church and built a meeting house in 1762. We shall see that there was a fair amount of interchange between this church and the confused Methodists described by Charles Wesley.

Evangelists from Yorkshire and elsewhere were, however, involved much earlier, back in the early 1740s and over the next ten or fifteen years had a significant impact on the rise (and confusions) of Methodism as well as on the Congregationalists and Moravians.

The first recognizable ‘evangelical’ preacher in Manchester seems to have been the celebrated George Whitefield who preached at John Clayton’s invitation in his Salford church in December 1738. But this derived from their Oxford contact and was before Whitefield had blotted his copy-book with field preaching and other irregularities. From 1749 he visited occasionally and helped to enliven the local evangelicals. In 1747 and several times in the 1750s, William Grimshaw the evangelical vicar of Haworth in Yorkshire also visited and gave some supervision to the Methodists. But the most significant Yorkshire connections came in the 1740s with Benjamin Ingham and John Nelson. Ingham had been Wesley’s companion in Georgia and then founded a chain of societies in Yorkshire and Lancashire though he soon placed them under the Moravians. In May 1742 Ingham preached in the open air in Manchester. ‘The greater part of the auditory’, it was recorded, ‘were senseless and secure and under a veil at the truth, yet some such heard with tears in their eyes’. John Bennet

49 Warhurst, ‘Diary’, 10 November 1756. Scott was principal of Heckmondwike Academy, founded to combat Arianism; Walkden had originated in churches conventionally classed as ‘Presbyterian’. See Rack, ‘Survival and revival’ 18–19.

50 Charles Wesley, Journal, ii, 129.

51 It is unclear from his diary whether Warhurst after his ordination ministered to the Baptists, a separate or a mixed congregation.


53 F. Baker, William Grimshaw 1708–63 (London: Epworth Press, 1963), 152, 219 gives references to these visits and correspondence with Col. and Mrs Gallatin who supported the society while posted to Manchester in the 1750s.

54 John Bennet, Diary, 6 May 1742.
accompanied Ingham and later brought John Nelson, the Yorkshire Methodist stonemason and preacher. He preached at Manchester Cross and was mobbed. This seems to have been early in 1743 and was the first distinctlyively Methodist preaching in the town from Wesley’s connexion. Yet despite this and all Bennet’s efforts it seems that he could find no base in the town and no society until Charles Wesley’s visit in January 1747.

But was the society then created virtually out of nothing by that visit? Perhaps not quite in the light of two sorts of evidence. First, if we compare the records of Ingham, Bennet and later the Congregationalist Warhurst, a sketchy but suggestive picture emerges of a scattering of concerned people apparently open to a variety of evangelical preaching. In May 1742 Ingham and Bennet had stayed with a family called Valentine, apparently in Salford. In 1747–48 Ingham visited them again, on one occasion preaching to as many as ‘near sixty’ people. In July 1743 Bennet preached in Stretford, almost certainly at the house of a man called Jonathan Holme or Hulme; and certainly he and Nelson had taken refuge with this man when they were mobbed earlier that year. Ingham, too, preached at Holme’s house in October and December 1747 as well as at Valentine’s, and on the second occasion the Bacup Baptist minister, Joseph Piccope preached as well. We last see Holme being visited by Caleb Warhurst from 1756 and Warhurst officiated at his funeral in 1759. Warhurst also visited families in outlying villages who had been part of Bennet’s network before he left Methodism.

What this suggests is that there was emerging, before Methodism was organized, a small public open to evangelical preaching of all sorts and apparently denominationally uncommitted or at least tolerant of variety and perhaps even resistant to formal organization. This was perhaps another part of Bennet’s problem in trying to organize a Methodist society. In July 1744 he had hopes for the house of a Daniel Taylor but Daniel’s mother-in-law stopped it! Unfortunately Bennet’s diary is missing for two years before Charles Wesley’s visit and only refers in general terms to Charles’s visit to the north-west without mentioning Manchester.


56 Bennet, *Diary*, for 5 May 1742; JRUL, MS Eng. 1062 (W. Batty’s account of Ingham based on the latter’s lost diaries) 2 October and 3 December, 1747, January 1748.

57 Bennet, *Diary*, 26 October 1742; *Early Methodist preachers*, i, 65.

58 JRUL, MS Eng. 1062, 2 October and 2 and 3 December 1747.


60 Bennet, *Diary*, 13 July 1744.

61 The relevant diary fragment for 25 December to 25 February 1747 is located in the American Methodist Archives at Drew University and I am indebted to Professor Kenneth Rowe for a copy.
The second piece of evidence for the immediate antecedents to the society being founded is the rather enigmatic account Charles Wesley gives in his *Journal* for his visit on 24 January 1747. He simply records that he baptised the unnamed child of a Thomas Taylor and that ‘our Brother B.’ found ‘a divine proof that infant baptism is of God’. Taylor might be related to the mother-in-law dominated Daniel and ‘Brother B.’ was clearly a Baptist. (It is perhaps only a coincidence that earlier that month the college register records the baptism of the son of a Thomas Taylor with the blatantly Jacobite name of Charles Edward.) The implication of this account must surely be that someone (most probably Bennet) had invited Charles to Manchester and at last found a room and collected an audience. Indeed some years later William Grimshaw claimed that the Manchester work began in 1746 (not 1747) when a few ‘met together being awakened and brought to faith by one John Bennet’. At all events, after Charles’s visit Bennet wrote to John Wesley saying that ‘some young men in Manchester (that spoke with Mr Charles when he was with us last) had begun a society and taken a room and subscribed their names to a letter to Mr Charles desiring you will own them as brethren and visit them in your return. They also desire any of us helpers in the gospel to call on them’. John Wesley duly visited them in May 1747. In his diary Bennet recorded that he ‘visited the young men that had begun a society. I found a room full of serious persons and spoke to them of the nature of a society’. So if Bennet had indeed collected some hearers they evidently took the initiative to form a society and find a meeting place once Charles Wesley had stirred them up, even though they needed guidance on the system to follow.

Now at last we are on solid ground. Christopher Hopper, a travelling preacher, recorded a well-known description of an early meeting-room (apparently the second used) in ‘a little garret by the riverside’ where he preached to ‘twenty or thirty people’. It was borrowed from a work-mate of Richard Barlow’s and contained his furnishings, coal and all. The numbers then increased and shook the room with their weight. They then borrowed the Baptist meeting house, many more were awakened and in 1750–51 they proceeded to build a preaching-house of their own.

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63 Collegiate Church baptism register (microfilm in MCL).
65 John Bennet to John Wesley 7 March 1747 in *Armenian Magazine*, i (1778), 472–3; Everett, Manchester, 53–5.
66 Bennet, *Diary*, 21 March 1747.
67 *Early Methodist preachers*, i, 201.
68 For a more detailed account of the location and character of the ‘room’ see Everett, *Manchester* 57–9.
They persevered despite mob violence, which is often referred to by John Morris, until, so John Wesley says, a local magistrate stopped it. Meanwhile Morris, who was a hefty fellow, acted as doorkeeper to deter the rowdies. On one occasion he is said to have dealt with three at once and on another occasion to have thrown one over a wall. He was also a great smoker which he told Wesley was to 'keep himself down'. Observing his large frame Wesley jokingly remarked 'what an astonishing effect it seems to produce'.

If the first trust deeds are read in conjunction with some non-Methodist sources we can see further hints of support from non-Methodists or at least short-term Methodists. There are two sets of documents dated 1750 and 1751. The 'lease' of 1750 makes no mention of Wesley or Methodism but simply says that land was conveyed from Samuel Hope, bricklayer, to twelve named men, eight from Manchester, three from Daveyhulme and one from Altrincham. The 'release' of that year (which defined the trust) empowered them to fill vacancies from those 'of the profession of the people called Methodists' but that was all. The 1751 deed, however, omitted the men outside Manchester and only four of the original Manchester men remained. The right of the Wesleys to preach here was clearly secured, followed on their deaths by William Grimshaw and this became the pattern for the Methodist 'Model Deed'. It was the type preferred by Wesley to prevent local trustees from controlling the pulpit though in fact some houses did not use it which caused much trouble later. Here Methodist 'connexionalism' and Wesley's central control clashed with localist and 'congregationalist' tendencies.

The original deed of 1750 clearly left the house in the hands of local trustees — and were these all Methodists or at least did they remain so? It looks as though the first trustees as well as the early supporters included sympathizers who balked at the terms of the second deed of 1751 which gave Wesley and Methodism final control. Samuel Hope who gave the land was a Methodist according to Everett. Henry Hope, however, though probably of

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69 Everett Notebook, fos 446, 492; MCA, Tyerman MSS, iii, fo. 521.
70 John Wesley, Journal for 21 April 1759 in Works, xxii, 188. So also in Daveyhulme: Journal for 7 May 1747 in Works, xx, 173 and n. 28.
71 Everett Notebook, fos 426, 418.
72 For details of the trust see C.D. Little, 'Early Methodism in Manchester', PWHS, xxvi (1948), 18–21. The first deed ('lease') gave possession and the second ('release') gave the interest in the land conveyed, including declaration of the trust: E.B. Perkins, Methodist preaching houses and the law (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 26 n. 11.
73 On the Model Deed see Perkins, Methodist preaching houses, 31–41.
74 Bennet, Diary 14 May 1748 and Cross Street baptism register, 1741 (microfilm in MCL and original MS in JRUL); Everett Notebook, fo. 435.
the same family, was only in the first deed. He seems to have originated in Cross Street and later gravitated to the Congregationalists where he was a trustee and deacon.75 Isaac Antrobus also was only in the first deed and people of that name were also Congregationalists later.76 Arthur Clegg was not a trustee but a leading Congregationalist yet he gave hospitality to preachers at the Methodist Conference in Manchester in 1765 and was apparently owner with another Congregationalist of the land on which the new Oldham Street chapel was built in 1781.77 So he was evidently a sympathizer. Hugh Stott, a carpenter in the 1751 deed, was his foreman.78 In the 1751 deed a new name was Daniel Fanshaw, a baker from St Ann’s. He was host to Bennet, the Wesleys and Grimshaw in the 1750s, but in 1756 Charles Wesley evidently saw him and his wife as waverers. Later he also supported Warhurst.79 The Ryder family, apparently originally from Cross Street (at least Mrs Ryder was later buried there) also supported a variety of evangelicals including the Methodists.80 Charles Wesley in 1756 had to readmit the trustee Adam Oldham to membership — he had apparently briefly turned Baptist.81 Warhurst had a convert to Methodism who had then turned Baptist.82 Warhurst himself sometimes attended Methodist services. Charles Wesley, he said, ‘has some oddities, but I hope he is a Christian’. John he found ‘a judicious good man, but not a popular preacher’ — not bad as summary characterizations!83

These indications of some cooperation but also of diverse and vacillating allegiances come into stronger focus in Charles Wesley’s account of his visit in 1756, especially when read along with the non-Methodist sources. By then John Bennet had broken with Methodism, obtained a chapel in Cheshire and been ordained as a Congregationalist. He tried to keep some of his old network though with limited success except in Bolton and he also failed in a projected arrangement with the Baptists in Manchester before Warhurst arrived. Warhurst in fact seem to have mopped up some outlying Methodist members but the main societies stayed with

75 Cross Street register 1751, 1752, 1755; Warhurst, Diary, 25 June 1758; Cannon Street Church Book, fos 35, 59, 75.
76 Cannon Street Church Book, fos 35, 37.
77 Clegg: Warhurst Diary, 10 November 1756; Cannon Street Church Book, fo. 57. Conference of 1765: PWHS, xviii (1933), 130. Clegg and Oldham Street: Oldham Street Trust Deed in MCL MS M60/4 additional.
78 Everett notebook, fo. 445.
79 St Ann’s baptism register, 1750 (microfilm in MCL); Charles Wesley, Journal, ii, 129, 134, 135; Warhurst Diary 3 July 1758. Warhurst attended Fanshaw’s funeral on 28 August 1758 (Diary).
80 Charles Wesley, Journal, ii, 129; Warhurst Diary e.g. 16 October 1756 and funeral at ‘the Great Chappell’ — clearly Cross Street — on 14 December 1758 (Diary).
82 Warhurst Diary, 19 September 1758.
83 Warhurst Diary, 20 April 1758, 21 October 1756, 16 March 1758.
Wesley. According to Charles Wesley in 1756 the society in Manchester had been reduced from 200 to 100 though he claimed to have raised them back to 150 during his visit.

What had gone wrong? First, says Charles, a 'still sister' with 'visions and revelations' forbade them to pray or go to church. Then came Quakers, predestinarians and 'dippers' (Baptists). Then Bennet, Williams, Wheatley, Cudworth, Whitford and Ball. (These men were a mixture of predestinarians and renegade Methodists). Then there was the 'new young Baptist preacher' (Warhurst) at work. What was involved here was not simply a chaos of competing evangelical groups or outright sheep-stealing — for evidently there were some friendly gestures from both sides. The problem was how to interpret and implement the new evangelical teaching. Justification by faith easily led in some minds to predestination and even antinomianism (so great a reliance on grace as to neglect moral law). Calvinistic Baptist and Congregationalist churches could then appear sounder than Wesley's anti-Calvinism as well as being locally controlled. Some people were attracted by charismatic phenomena and the doctrine of the inner light rather than the grace and faith way to salvation. The 'still sister' is most likely to have emerged under Moravian influence for this was a problem which troubled several Methodist societies from that source in the early 1740s. It was the teaching that one should abstain from all means of grace and simply wait for God to give saving faith. Ingham was under Moravian influence and Moravians from Dukinfield were working in Manchester from the mid-1750s. But the visions and revelations suggest that this influence was mingled in the Manchester context with its own 'mystical' tradition.

Thus 'Mr Hill a gentleman' had apparently been the first temporary host of the Methodists in the late 1740s and Bennet said he had a following with a version of the 'stillness' doctrine though Hill also had doubts about the Bible. One woman 'took many imaginings of her heart to be dictated by God's Holy

84 For Bennet's career as an Independent (Congregationalist) minister see Rack, 'Survival and revival', 13–23. He was ordained on 9 November 1754 and thereafter associated with Warhurst and other local Dissenter ministers, some ex-Methodists. (The ordination date is given by J.S. Simon, John Wesley and the advance of Methodism (London: Epworth Press, 1925), 225 citing MSS now lost but probably including one mentioned in Rack, 'Survival and revival', 17 n. 103.)


87 For the somewhat obscure subject of the Moravians in Manchester town, see E.A. Rose, Methodism in Dukinfield (privately printed, 1978), 4; E.E. Titterington, Historical sketches of the Moravian Church in Dukinfield (Ashton, 1910), 15. There were Moravian preachers in Manchester in 1755–56 and Chorlton in 1762 and a society was founded in Manchester in 1755, attached to Dukinfield and still active in 1767. A chapel was hired in 1773: J. England, Short sketches of the work ... of the Moravian Church in Lancashire (Leeds: privately printed, 1888), 6, 7, 19, 20. Ingham threw in his lot with the Moravians in 1742 so his contacts in 1742 and 1747–48 could be added (see note 56, above).
In the 1750s John Morris recorded that ‘many of our leaders imbibed the notions peculiar to the mystics and disseminated their principles into the minds of the people under their care’. Noone, they said, could be a Christian who ‘dressed neat or wore a watch’; fear is a surer sign of grace than peace and love. Salvation by faith they rejected in favour of the belief that everyone has a ‘seed of God’ in them to be matured by good works for salvation. This is the unmistakeable Behmen-Law teaching.

In 1761, in an incident not recorded in John Wesley’s *Journal*, John Byrom records that he was visited by Wesley and a Mr Phillips. Byrom called Wesley ‘Pope John’ for expelling six members for reading Behmen and Law, though Wesley characteristically claimed it was only for forcing their opinions on other people. ‘Mr Phillips’ was probably Thomas Phillips, a Methodist leader but also in Byrom’s circle.

Then there was the predestinarian controversy which led to a clash between Charles Wesley and the roving antinomian Roger Ball. In 1756, when Ball was ‘picking up their pence and their persons’ among the Methodists (as Charles put it), Warhurst liked his preaching rather better than Wesley’s but deplored the polemical spirit of both. Yet he himself found that Ball had persuaded one of his own members to give up religious exercises.

John Morris emerged from the snares of mysticism only to be challenged by predestination. Then he was exposed to Wesley’s favourite doctrine of Christian perfection which he says was little known in Manchester in the late 1750s. However, during the perfectionist revival of the early 1760s Wesley reported accepting sixty out of sixty-three claimants to the gift in Manchester as genuine. This was in 1762, though by 1766 he reckoned fifty of them had lost it, as often happened. This was indeed the case with John Morris, through business worries, though he seems to have regained peace before his death. He led the first perfectionist ‘select band’ in Manchester from 1763. Richard Barlow was probably also speaking of perfection when he said he conquered everything in zeal and love for fourteen years though he was not as ‘triumphant’ in the first seven years. However, a member of his class meeting said that the world ‘got a little hold of him at last’.

It may be a symptom or a cause of greater stability that in the early to mid-1760s there are signs of revival, of missionary work in the villages and of innovatory prayer-meetings in the town. John

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88 Bennet *Diary*, 30 October 1747, 5 December 1748.
89 ‘Life of John Morris’, 74.
92 *Warhurst Diary*, 22 October 1756, 23 April 1758.
94 ‘Life of John Morris’, 124, 126; Everett Notebook, fo. 443.
95 Everett Notebook, fo. 426.
Furz, the travelling preacher, says that in 1761–63 in Cheshire and Lancashire there was 'the most rapid work of God that I ever saw' — that is, a local revival. At a lovefeast in Manchester, eighteen people were justified in an hour and many experienced cleansing from all sin. In 1763 Adam Oldham wrote to Wesley that there was 'a happy union in your little society here'. He was receiving new members and conversions. He himself appears to have received 'solid peace' (perhaps meaning the gift of perfection). Many leaders evangelized in the villages and villagers came to town. John Morris was heavily involved in Chorlton and Droylsden and farther afield; also in the prayer-meetings which he seems to have pioneered. Rusholme and Levenshulme first appear in the circuit accounts in 1766, implying regular societies there. Samuel Bardsley's diary shows a similar pattern of work — it is full of meetings in town and preaching in the villages; and he too visited Levenshulme and Droylsden as well as Openshaw. However, although a number of outlying societies first appear in these years only Levenshulme seems to have been permanent at this stage. Others appear in the 1780s. It was in that period that further revivals took place. John Pawson in 1784–85 said that a revival in south-east Lancashire brought 'great numbers of the most profaned and abandoned' to conversion, though local accounts suggest that many were existing members advancing to conversion or perfection. There were startling scenes of trembling and roaring with anxiety as in the early years of revival, and at least one case of spiritual healing. Child conversions were also a feature of these revivals and sometimes visions occurred. A Manchester jeweller's wife fell into an apparent fit, eventually crying 'Lord, help me; Lord, save me; Lord, pardon my sin'; and later, 'Glory to God, he has pardoned all my sin'. On recovering she described a vision of the mouth of hell — gaping and the fear that she was about to fall into it. Then a vision of Christ in glory with his angels.

What can be seen here, it seems, is a combination of increasing strength in the town with local revivals exploiting population increase and industrialization to stimulate growth in a wider area. Even so, it was only in Anglican visitations of around 1800 that we eventually see an incumbent in a place like Heaton Norris complaining that his church is inadequate, the population shifting

96 'Life of John Furz' in Early Methodist preachers, v, 127–8.
97 Arminian Magazine, v (1782), 331–2.
98 'Life of John Morris', 76; MS Manchester Circuit Accounts, fos 100, 104 (copy in my possession).
99 Samuel Bardsley MS Diary in MCA, Diaries Box, fos 31–46.
100 John Pawson, 'Some account of the life of Mr John Pawson', MS in MCA Diaries Box, fo. 27. For the revivals of the 1780s see Rack, Reasonable enthusiast, 492.
101 John Alien to John Wesley, 5 January, 13 February 1783; end of January 1782 in Arminian Magazine, lx (1786), 664–5; xiii (1790), 334.
and disobedient and Methodists from nearby Stockport evangelizing flexibly and so becoming a real threat. 102

This impression is strengthened by what we know of the growth of the society. When Richard Barlow joined in 1747 he was probably the fifteenth or sixteenth member though there were no doubt more hearers. 103 In 1753 Grimshaw said there 250 members but in 1756, as we have seen, Charles Wesley said they had sunk from 200 to 100 and then improved to 150 by his efforts. 104 There are said to have still been only 200–300 in 1771. 105 Everett says that at a date which is probably 1779 there were 450 and the new chapel in Oldham Street in 1781 probably held at least 1,000. (The original chapel seems to have held less than 200 though enlarged for 300 in 1753). 106 In 1799, however, the first surviving membership list totalled an impressive 2,225. 107 One may add that it may be a sign of Manchester’s increasing significance in Methodism that the annual Methodist conference was first held there in 1765 — the first to be held outside the traditional triangle of London, Bristol and Leeds. This innovation has not been explained — the experiment was not repeated there or elsewhere until 1787.

On social composition we have few hints. National Methodist membership had above the average population of artisans and below the average of merchants and labourers. 108 Trustee lists tend to include people of a higher social status than the membership but in 1750–51 they were only artisans and tradesmen. In 1780–81, however, they included merchants and even two ‘gentlemen’ though the latter were not from Manchester. 109 The original members, we have seen, were young men, though a later tradition says old women which, if not a commonplace sneer, may also have been true on occasion. 110 We also have some examples of upward mobility which Wesley worried about in later years for fear of spiritual decline. Thus Adam Oldham prospered as a hatter and later became constable, the second-ranking official in the town.

102 See above, n. 24.
103 Everett Notebook, fo. 453.
105 Everett Notebook, fo. 426. This was less than the slowly increasing number of Roman Catholics — 373 in the Papist Returns of 1767: THSLC, new series, xviii (1902), 214.
107 MCL, MS M60/2 additional.
109 C.D. Little, ‘Early Methodism in Manchester’, PWHs, xxvi (1948), 19, 20; MCL, MS 60/4 additional.
110 Everett, Manchester, 132–3 (quoting Richard Barlow’s nephew).
hierarchy. But in 1772 Wesley was lamenting that his daughters had been damaged by finishing schools and Adam ceased to be a Methodist. Thomas Phillips is said to have taken offence at Wesley’s attack on the American rebels in the 1770s and left for Cross Street — a sign that Methodism was not immune from political divisions. Richard Barlow, like some others, was a humble warehouse packer in the 1740s. Advancing to merchant status, they remained Methodists, Barlow until the 1790s. However he was a ‘Church Methodist’ and churchwarden and he then left, partly over the introduction of Methodist sacraments at Gravel Lane, Salford, though also over the travelling preacher Samuel Bradburn’s ‘democratical’ tendencies. For a time the Church Methodists took their communion at Cornelius Bayley’s St James’s church, the first evangelical Anglican church in Manchester. Bayley was an ex-Methodist but turned against them, though his former curate, Edward Smyth, who also had Methodist connections, was more welcoming in his own new church. The most spectacular example of Methodist social success was that of John Mosley, who from humble origins as a hatter rose to acquire the family baronetcy and lordship of the manor of Manchester. Everett says he married Bayley’s sister. But he, too, ceased to be a Methodist though he seems to have been an evangelical Anglican and probably helped Bayley acquire land for his church. Oldham Street remained a Church Methodist strong hold into the early 1800s, only administering sacraments from 1814, and this no doubt helped to still some uneasy Church Methodist consciences.

I have attempted to trace the origins of Manchester Methodism in the setting of local and more traditional religion and the rise of evangelicalism. What emerges from this sometimes patchy and at times speculative account? The initial phase of the revival, which was also the most troubled and unstable period, may be said to have lasted from the early 1740s to the mid-1760s. Hitherto, the major religious bodies in Manchester were the Church of England and its rival the Presbyterians. Quakers and Roman Catholics were essentially confined to families hereditary in the faith. So were the Baptists except that they seem periodically to have acted as refuge for the disaffected. Within Anglicanism and its Nonjuror offshoot,

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112 Everett Notebook, fo. 445.
113 Collegiate Church Churchwarden list in MCL, MS M3/3/10 for 1783. He also signed the baptism register of St Ann’s as a churchwarden in 1772 (microfilm in MCL). For his break with Methodism see Everett Notebook, fo. 453; MCA, MS PLP 14. 7: S. Bradburn to R. Rodda, 7 December 1791; 4 January, 19 April, 23 June 1792.
115 O. Mosley, *Mosley family memoirs* (privately printed, 1847), 57; Everett Notebook, fo. 482.
or independently, some pursued a private mystical piety. Then, for some twenty years, this pattern was disturbed by a variety of evangelical preachers from outside the town. They gained a hearing from those already suffering from religious unease, very possibly aggravated by the social, economic and political pressures of the time as well as by divisions in and between the churches and personal fears. The new preaching both heightened their anxieties and provided a solution, though in many cases this led to recurring uncertainties about defining their new faith and deciding to which group they owed allegiance. Problems over predestination, mystical experience, faith and works and perhaps church government and discipline are characteristic.

The result of all this was to create a new, small, but growing version of Christianity in the town. It was clearly drawn in part from existing communities though to an unknown degree from those little affected by conventional church life. In the end, though at varying speeds, it produced three new churches: the Methodists, Congregationalists and Moravians, though such distinctions took time to develop and some individuals switched allegiance more than once. Less directly, the more charismatic side of evangelicalism and the existing mystical tradition in the town helped to provoke more extreme and less orthodox sects for those not satisfied with the limits imposed by more conventional evangelical groups.

As to the Methodists — they perhaps only began to stabilize in the mid-1760s and to grow more rapidly in the 1770s and after, partly through population changes, partly through evangelism and local revivals. This, however, was accompanied by a crisis of identity in relation to the Church of England and the question of separation from it. This was already a problem in Wesley’s lifetime and erupted more openly after his death in 1791. But that is another story.