

THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF ENGLISH METHODISM TO 1830: A MEMBERSHIP ANALYSIS

CLIVE D. FIELD*
UNIVERSITY LIBRARY AND SCHOOL OF HISTORY,
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

By 1830, when Wesleyan Methodism was almost a century old, there were 232,000 full members in England, a tenfold increase in number since records were first published in 1767.¹ There was also a substantial circle of adherents, successors to the multitudes who had thronged the early field preachers,² who regularly attended on Wesleyan worship but who postponed or avoided the commitment of membership, possibly in order to evade the financial, spiritual and disciplinary obligations of the weekly class meeting whilst continuing to enjoy the wider social and religious benefits of chapel life.³ A series of contemporary estimates between the 1780s and 1840s put the size of the total worshipping constituency (i.e. inclusive of members) at anything from twice to six times the membership, with a median of three

* The author is indebted to Dr J.D. Walsh of Jesus College, Oxford for his encouragement and practical assistance over the course of two decades, and to Dr E.D. Graham of Birmingham for drawing attention to a number of primary sources.

¹ R. Currie, A.D. Gilbert and L. Horsley, *Churches and churchgoers: patterns of church growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford, 1977), 139–40.

² Cf. S.J. Rogal, 'Counting the congregation: wishful thinking versus hard reality in the journals of John Wesley', *Methodist History*, 30 (1991–92), 3–9.

³ Cf. D. Luker, 'Revivalism in theory and practice: the case of Cornish Methodism', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 37 (1986), 614–15. It is beyond the scope of the present article to explore the nature and meaning of membership in early Methodism and to relate it to the wider polity of the movement. Readers wishing to learn more about Methodist constitutional arrangements in general should consult F. Baker, 'The people called Methodists: 3. polity', *A history of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. R.E. Davies, A.R. George and E.G. Rupp, 4 vols (London, 1965–88), i. 211–55 and *The works of John Wesley, volume 9: the Methodist societies, history, nature and design*, ed. R.E. Davies (Nashville, 1989), 1–29. On the class meeting see P.D. Mackenzie, 'The Methodist class meeting: a historical study' (University of St Andrews M.Th. thesis, 1969); H.D. Rack, 'The decline of the class-meeting and the problem of church-membership in nineteenth-century Wesleyanism', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 39 (1973–74), 12–21; W.W. Dean, 'The Methodist class meeting: the significance of its decline', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 43 (1981–82), 41–8 and 'Disciplined fellowship: the rise and decline of cell groups in British Methodism' (University of Iowa Ph.D. thesis, 1985); D.L. Watson, *The early Methodist class meeting: its origin and significance* (Nashville, 1985).

or four times,⁴ and a more exact survey conducted in ninety-seven English communities in 1834 revealed a ratio between 'communicants' (almost certainly to be equated with members in this context) and hearers of 1: 2.53.⁵ The Wesleyan Methodist population of England around 1830 may thus have been of the order of 600,000–800,000 souls.⁶

For all the extensive historiography and bibliography of Methodism, ranging from the critiques and apologetics published during and after John Wesley's lifetime to modern secondary works, we still do not have anything like a complete picture of the social profile of this huge Methodist community. Contemporary opponents of the movement laid down some markers, graphically uncovered in John Walsh's current research, still for the most part unpublished; they often portrayed the early Methodists as a threat to the stability of family life through their disproportionate recruitment of women and young people and their encouragement of an experiential religion which served to undermine the work ethic amongst the labouring population who formed their principal catchment area. Subsequent scholarship, largely inspired by Elie Halévy's writings at the beginning of this century, has focused mainly upon the second of these themes, upon the extent to which Methodism evangelized the English working classes and, more especially, the effects of such evangelism upon their behaviour in relation to political reform and, later, trade unionism. The literature stemming from this so-called Methodism and Revolution debate is substantial but still far from conclusive; space precludes a summary of the principal contributions, but they can be sampled from Olsen's recent

⁴ T. Olivers, *A defence of Methodism, delivered extemporary in a public debate (but now considerably enlarged) held in London, December 12th, 19th and 26th 1785* (Leeds, 1818), 18; J.A. Vickers, 'Documents and source material', *A history of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, iv. 290 (quoting Joseph Entwisle in 1797); S. Bradburn, *God shining forth from between the cherubim* (Bolton, 1805), 64; W. Jones, *A dictionary of religious opinions* (London, 1815), 140; T. Williams, *A dictionary of all religions and religious denominations* (London, 1815), 176; *The annual register; or, A view of the history, politics and literature of the year 1824* (London, 1825), Chronicle, 180; *The early correspondence of Jabez Bunting, 1820–1829*, ed. W.R. Ward (Camden Society, 4th ser., 11, London, 1972), 182 (quoting James Blackett in 1828); T. Cocking, *The history of Wesleyan Methodism in Grantham and its vicinity* (London, 1836), 130; J. Conder, *An analytical and comparative view of all religions now extant among mankind* (London, 1838), 450; S. Woodhouse, 'Ecclesiastical statistics', *Dearden's Miscellany*, 1 (January–June 1839), 56; *The Wesleyan Methodist kalendar and daily remembrancer*, 1850, 51. For late nineteenth-century evidence see C.D. Field, 'Methodism in metropolitan London, 1850–1920: a social and sociological study' (University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1974), 187–9.

⁵ 'A comparative view of the hearers, communicants and scholars belonging to Churchmen, Dissenters & Wesleyan Methodists in two hundred and three towns and villages of England', *Congregational Magazine*, new ser., 10 (1834), supplement.

⁶ This figure excludes Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the various non-Wesleyan Methodist groups.

anthology⁷ which remains useful despite its underrepresentation of local research. Only in very recent years has attention begun to shift towards an investigation of other social features of early Methodism, in particular to those issues of gender and sexuality which Henry Abelove's stimulating, but controversial, new study of John Wesley⁸ has now brought very much to the fore.

Building on these various historiographical foundations, the present article attempts to advance our understanding of Methodism's origins and progress through a quantitative analysis of three basic social characteristics of its membership (sex, marital status and occupation)⁹ that is more wide-ranging than any hitherto attempted. The evidence derives from the 108 membership lists which are tabulated in Appendix 1(a), abstracted from a probable majority of all the circuit membership registers which are extant for the pre-1830 period, and containing details of approximately 80,000 individuals. These lists are fairly well spaced in terms of chronology, the earliest being for London in 1745, although there is an undoubted bias to the years after 1780. In the light of what is known about the geography of early Methodism,¹⁰ the lists are reasonably well spread throughout the country, with a particularly good showing for the Methodist strongholds of Yorkshire and Lancashire (which account for some two fifths of the entire membership sample).¹¹ Because of the Methodist pattern of linking a large number of urban and rural societies within the same circuit (with a major town chapel at the head), the lists are also likely to be broadly representative of the principal community types. To an extent, therefore, they approximate, however unscientifically, to a national sample.

Gender

The major role played by women during the first century of English Methodism is widely recognized. However, the principal focus of scholarly attention has been on the contribution made by individual women as church founders and lay leaders in the eighteenth

⁷ *Religion and revolution in early-industrial England: the Halévy thesis and its critics*, ed. G.W. Olsen (Lanham, 1990).

⁸ H.D. Abelove, *The evangelist of desire: John Wesley and the Methodists* (Stanford, 1990), especially 49–73, chapter 5: sexuality.

⁹ Some of the earliest lists also attempt a classification of members by spiritual status (awakened, seeker, justified, sanctified, doubtful, etc.), but the data have not been analysed here.

¹⁰ The single most important reference is R. Currie, 'A micro-theory of Methodist growth', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 36 (1967–68), 65–73.

¹¹ It should be remembered that Methodist circuit boundaries did not coincide with those of the civil counties, especially in the early years of the movement when circuits (or rounds as they were then called) covered a very wide area. The allocation of circuits to English regions, on which some of the summary data in this article are based, must therefore be regarded as fairly approximate.

century¹² and as itinerant preachers in the sectarian Methodist movements of the early nineteenth century.¹³ With only a few partial exceptions,¹⁴ no real attempt has been made to substantiate the frequent claims of contemporaries that early Methodism attracted a disproportionately female following and that, as a corollary, it disrupted family life by enticing wives, mothers and daughters away from their domestic duties and encouraging them to disobey their unregenerate husbands and fathers, even to the extent of withdrawing conjugal rights.¹⁵ These charges surfaced both in the numerous literary assaults on Methodism, such as *The story of the Methodist-lady; or, The injur'd husband's revenge: A true history*,¹⁶ and in the physical opposition to which its supporters were subjected.

¹² The most substantial modern works are: E.K. Brown, *Women of Mr. Wesley's Methodism* (New York, 1983) and P.W. Chilcote, *John Wesley and the women preachers of early Methodism* (Metuchen, 1991). Cf. D.J. Boulton, 'Women and early Methodism', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 43 (1981–82), 13–17 and M.P. Jones, 'Women in the Arminian/Methodist Magazine, 1778–1821' (University of Cambridge M.Phil. thesis, 1992). For regional case studies see E.M. White, "'Little female lambs': women in the Methodist societies of Carmarthenshire, 1737–1750", *Carmarthenshire Antiquary*, xxvii (1991), 31–6 and D.N. Hempton and M. Hill, 'Women and Protestant minorities in eighteenth-century Ireland', *Women in early modern Ireland*, ed. M. MacCurtain and M. O'Dowd (Edinburgh, 1991), 197–211. For details of biographies of Susanna Wesley and the Countess of Huntingdon and studies of John Wesley's relationships with individual women see C.D. Field, 'Bibliography', *A history of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, iv. 679–80, 693–4, 699–700 and *Women in the Wesleyan and United Methodist traditions: a bibliography*, ed. S.M. Eltscher (Madison, 1991), 29–38.

¹³ W.F. Swift, 'The women itinerant preachers of early Methodism', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 28 (1951–52), 89–94, 29 (1953–54), 76–83; D.M. Valenze, *Prophetic sons and daughters: female preaching and popular religion in industrial England* (Princeton, 1985); E.D. Graham, 'Chosen by God: The female itinerants of early Primitive Methodism' (University of Birmingham Ph.D. thesis, 1986) and *Chosen by God: a list of the female travelling preachers of early Primitive Methodism* (Bunbury, 1989); J. Field-Bibb, *Women towards priesthood: ministerial politics and feminist praxis* (Cambridge, 1991). Cf. *Women in the Wesleyan and United Methodist traditions*, ed. Eltscher, 115–20.

¹⁴ The two most important are J.L. Baxter, 'The great Yorkshire revival, 1792–6: a study of mass revival among the Methodists', *A sociological yearbook of religion in Britain*, 7, ed. M. Hill (London, 1974), 74 (on the proportion of women members in the Leeds and Sheffield societies in the 1790s) and various references by G. Malmgreen to her, as yet, largely unpublished research on early membership lists for Lancashire and Cheshire: *Silk town: Industry and culture in Macclesfield, 1750–1835* (Hull, 1985), 230; 'Introduction', *Religion in the lives of English women, 1760–1930*, ed. Malmgreen (London, 1986), 9–10; 'Domestic discords: women and the family in east Cheshire Methodism, 1750–1830', *Disciplines of faith: studies in religion, politics and patriarchy*, ed. J. Obelkevich, L. Roper and R. Samuel (London, 1987), 60. One of Malmgreen's sources is the Macclesfield circuit list for 1794, available in the Cheshire Record Office (EMC 1/4), which has not been used in this paper, preference having been given to a list for 1788 at Duke University.

¹⁵ D.H. Kirkham, 'Pamphlet opposition to the rise of Methodism: the eighteenth-century English Evangelical Revival under attack' (Duke University Ph.D. thesis, 1973), 214–19, 227–8; P.W. Chilcote, 'The women pioneers of early Methodism', *Wesleyan theology today: a bicentennial theological consultation*, ed. T. Runyon (Nashville, 1985), 180 and *John Wesley and the women preachers of early Methodism*, 47–9, 60–1; Abelow, *The evangelist of desire*, 64–5, 70–2.

¹⁶ Item 238–Gr. in C.D. Field, 'Anti-Methodist publications of the eighteenth century: A revised bibliography', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 73: 2 (Summer 1991), 194. Methodist women were also lampooned in contemporary prints; cf. R. Glen, 'The anti-Methodist campaign revisited: a study of gender in eighteenth-century satiric prints', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 304 (1992), 779–82.

Thus in the Norwich riot of 1752 one of the complaints against James Wheatley was that ‘Many journeymen who had worked hard till noon, going home, found their wives gone out to the *dear hearers*, and their children neglected and no dinner for them, and that by such avocations many mouths had come upon the parish.’¹⁷ As recent scholars have argued: ‘What frightened contemporaries about Methodism, as much as anything else, was the opening it provided to women.’¹⁸ They ‘interpreted the movement’s particular appeal to women as a revolutionary attack against a precarious society at its most vulnerable point. In their minds, it was but a short step from the evangelical proclamation of freedom in Christ to the feminist plea for emancipation in society.’¹⁹

The membership lists which form the basis of this article enable us to quantify, at a national level, the extent of female support for early Methodism. Although total accuracy would be quite impossible given the problems inherent in such manuscript lists (including illegibility, frequent deletions and/or additions, and the failure of the compilers to distinguish adequately between male and female forenames with similar spellings – for example, Francis or Frances – or shared contracted forms – for instance, Char. or Christ.), the data are almost certainly likely to be reliable to within a very few decimal points. The statistics for individual circuits are reproduced in Appendix 1(a) from which it can be seen that there was a very wide variation in the proportion of women members from one circuit to another, from a high of 70.5 per cent in London in 1745 to a low of 48.1 per cent in Colchester in 1823, but with a concentration (ninety of 108 cases) in the 50.2 to 60.8 per cent range. Summary data appear in Table 1 which shows a mean of 57.7 per cent for the combined sample of 80,361 members. Discounting the 1745 evidence, this figure was remarkably stable over time, with the partial exception of the 1770s and 1780s when the number of female members fell somewhat (decades during which Methodist membership in England grew by 116.7 per cent),²⁰ a finding which is somewhat at odds with Gail Malmgreen’s contention, based upon a preliminary study of Cheshire and Lancashire Methodism, that ‘in England, as in America, urbanization brought a “feminization” of the

¹⁷ J.D. Walsh, ‘Methodism and the mob in the eighteenth century’, *Popular belief and practice: papers read at the ninth summer meeting and the tenth winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. G.J. Cuming and D. Baker (Studies in Church History, 8, Cambridge, 1972), 224. For a fuller treatment of the episode see D.S. O’Sullivan, ‘The case of James Wheatley, Methodist’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, 36 (1974–77), 167–75; E.J. Bellamy, ‘Norwich Methodism in the 1750s, with special reference to James Wheatley’ (University of Bristol M.Litt. thesis, 1986) and ‘Norwich Methodism in the 1750s’, *Religious dissent in East Anglia*, ed. E.S. Leedham-Green (Cambridge, 1991), 91–4.

¹⁸ H.D. Abelove, ‘The sexual politics of early Wesleyan Methodism’, *Disciplines of faith*, 93 and *The evangelist of desire*, 64.

¹⁹ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the women preachers of early Methodism*, 47–8.

²⁰ Currie, Gilbert and Horsley, *Churches and churchgoers*, 139–40.

churches'.²¹ The south-eastern and south-western counties registered the highest percentage of women in membership, with the west central and far northern counties recording the lowest. The overall mean of 57.7 per cent compares quite favourably with the results of recent research into Baptist and Congregational membership in England where, between 1751 and 1825, 58.6 per cent of members were women.²² However, Methodism was rather more female in its composition than the adult population as a whole where, at the census of 1821, the statistic was 52.3 per cent for those aged fifteen and above.²³

Marital status

In his recent accounts of the sexuality of early Methodism Henry Abelove has contrasted John Wesley's teaching on the virtues of the single life for the converted sinner ('eunuchs for the sake of heaven') with the preference of his followers for the married state and an active sex life.²⁴ Although this assertion is consistent with research on a national sample of Methodists born between 1831 and 1890, which reported an average marriage rate of 97.0 per cent for ministers and 96.5 per cent for laymen,²⁵ the sole piece of empirical evidence cited by Abelove in support of his argument is a list of members in the Kingswood society in 1757, only 18 per cent of whom were single at that time with an estimated minimum of 90 per cent marrying at some stage during their lives. Fortunately, a substantial minority of the pre-1830 membership lists used in the present study include data on marital status, and the results are displayed in Appendix 1(b) and Table 2. These will be subject to a small margin of error, arising from two circumstances: first, marital status was denoted by the symbols 'u' or 's', 'm' and 'w', the last two sometimes being difficult to distinguish from each other because of poor handwriting;²⁶ secondly, marital status was not recorded for 5.9 per cent of members for whom a sex breakdown was available, and this 'non-response' has introduced a very slight bias towards men (women constituted 56.53 per cent of all members on the thirty-four lists and 56.36 per cent of those for whom information about marital status was given).

²¹ Malmgreen, 'Domestic discords', 60.

²² C.D. Field, 'Adam and Eve: gender in the English Free Church constituency', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 44 (1993), 66.

²³ B.R. Mitchell, *British historical statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), 15.

²⁴ Abelove, *The evangelist of desire*, 49–73; cf. his 'John Wesley's influence during his lifetime on the Methodists' (Yale University Ph.D. thesis, 1978), 88–133 and 'The sexual politics of early Wesleyan Methodism', 86–99.

²⁵ Field, 'Methodism in metropolitan London, 1850–1920', 275–82. For other ministerial evidence see K.D. Brown, *A social history of the Nonconformist ministry in England and Wales, 1800–1930* (Oxford, 1988), 171–3.

²⁶ Cf. J.H.S. Kent, 'Wesleyan membership in Bristol, 1783', *An ecclesiastical miscellany* (Publications of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society Records Section, 11, Bristol, 1976), 112: 'I have omitted a column in which J. Wesley recorded whether a person was married or widowed, because I could not interpret the sign used with sufficient accuracy.'

Table 1
Sex of English Methodist Members, 1745–1832: Summary Data

	No. of members	% of women members
1759–70	4,901	57.8
1771–80	1,739	56.4
1781–90	9,615	55.0
1791–1800	14,423	57.4
1801–10	9,555	57.8
1811–20	12,363	58.7
1821–32	25,730	57.5
South-eastern counties	6,268	60.8
South-western counties	12,054	59.4
East central counties	10,964	56.1
West central counties	11,479	55.9
Lancashire and Yorkshire	31,592	58.2
Far northern counties	5,867	55.7
Southern England	18,322	59.8
Central England	22,443	56.0
Northern England	37,459	57.8
Wales, Scotland, Ireland	2,137	56.1
TOTAL	80,361	57.7

SOURCES:- As Appendix 1(a).

The circuit level data in Appendix 1(b) reveal a wide degree of local variation, the proportion of single members ranging between 14.3 (Colchester, 1823) and 32.6 per cent (Stroud, 1798), of married between 52.8 (Barnard Castle, 1796) and 79.2 (Sheffield, 1789), and of widowed between 3.0 (Rye, 1796) and 15.9 (Barnard Castle, 1796). The summary figures in Table 2 clarify the situation somewhat and permit several tentative generalizations. Overall, 24.6 per cent of Methodist members were single, 65.1 per cent married and 10.3 per cent widowed. Although the comparable secular evidence is very thin for the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,²⁷ with census data

²⁷ Although a fair amount of research has been undertaken into English nuptiality since the publication of John Hajnal's classic paper of 1965 on the so-called European Marriage Pattern (which was characterized by a relatively late age of marriage and by a considerable proportion of individuals who remained celibate), the evidence has usually been presented in the form of mean ages at marriage, the number of celibate persons at particular ages, and crude marriage rates per thousand in the marriageable age groups. No serious attempt seems to have been made to construct a national profile of the marital condition of the adult population as a whole, although some data do exist for particular communities. Cf. C.M. Law, 'Local censuses in the 18th century', *Population Studies*, 23 (1969), 94.

only available from 1851,²⁸ the number of single persons in Methodism seems to have been significantly smaller than in the adult population as a whole, the proportion of married individuals correspondingly greater, and the number of widowed fairly similar. This preponderance of married and widowed members increased over time, rising from 74.0 per cent before 1781 to 76.9 per cent after 1800,²⁹ the equivalent figure for England and Wales as a whole in 1851 being 70.7. Regionally, there were fewest single and most married members in central England, and virtually matching proportions of single, married and widowed in the southern and northern counties. The biggest discrepancies, however, were between the sexes, there being 5.5 per cent more single women than men, 13.7 per cent fewer married and, predictably in view of the greater longevity of females, 8.2 per cent more widowed (in England and Wales in 1851 these differences were much less marked, at - 2.0, - 3.9, and + 5.9 respectively). This effect can be seen more dramatically when we recalculate the data to reveal the extent of the female majority in each marital grouping: for single Methodists it was 61.9 per cent, falling to 51.2 per cent for married, and then climbing to 75.9 per cent for widowed (for all adults in 1851 these figures were consistently lower, at 50.3, 50.3 and 66.5).

These gender-based disparities in marital status acquire added interest and significance when viewed in the light of both eighteenth-century comments and current scholarly debate about the extent to which evangelical Nonconformity as a whole, and Methodism in particular, was a stabilizing or destabilizing force for family life. Gail Malmgreen, for example, has offered an interpretation of the motivational patterns of early Methodist membership whereby 'For men, joining the Society apparently formed part of a "settling down" process, whereas for women, religious commitment may more often have represented an act of independence, part of a prelude, or postlude, to marriage and family responsibilities.'³⁰ Unfortunately,

²⁸ *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Population tables, II – ages, civil condition, occupations and birth-place of the people . . . vol. I* (House of Commons Sessional Papers, 1852–53, 88, Pt. 1), clxv. The percentages for adults aged twenty and upwards in England and Wales were:

	single	married	widowed
men	30.3	62.6	7.1
women	28.3	58.7	13.0
all	29.3	60.6	10.1

Since there were both short- and long-term cyclical movements in nuptiality, however, it would probably be unwise to relate these figures too closely to the Methodist data, even to the data for the post-1800 period.

²⁹ It is not known whether this trend was sustained beyond the first quarter of the nineteenth century. A stray piece of evidence for the Grimsby circuit in 1844 suggests that 72 per cent of members were married or widowed at that time: *Early Victorian Methodism: the correspondence of Jabez Bunting, 1830–1858*, [ed.] W.R. Ward (Oxford, 1976), 310.

³⁰ Malmgreen, 'Domestic discords', 60.

membership lists in isolation cannot offer conclusive answers to such questions, since they have three major deficiencies in this respect. First, members were grouped by society classes which were not necessarily centred on family units (often being single sex in composition), the attendant problems of nominal linkage thereby making it difficult to establish the nature of family relationships between members, including the exact proportion of members who were married to each other. Ideally, the lists need to be matched with other types of evidence in order to produce the kind of family reconstitution studies which have been attempted for the Baptists and Quakers.³¹ Second, the lists are essentially snapshot documents only, revealing the marital status of members at the date of their compilation, and not the marital status of individuals at the point of entry to membership, which would be the sort of information required to substantiate hypotheses such as Malmgreen's. Third, the lists offer no clues as to the age structure of Methodism, which will have had a direct bearing on the movement's marital base, especially if male and female members are found to have had significantly different age profiles.

Table 2
Marital Status of English Methodist Members, 1759–1823:
Summary Data

	No. of members	% of single members	% of married members	% of widowed members
Before 1781	4,246	26.1	63.1	10.9
1781–1800	14,882	24.6	64.7	10.7
After 1800	4,000	23.1	68.6	8.3
Southern England	4,726	25.7	63.9	10.4
Central England	6,864	22.1	67.6	10.3
Northern England	11,538	25.6	64.1	10.3
Men	10,092	21.5	72.8	5.7
Women	13,036	27.0	59.1	13.9
TOTAL	23,128	24.6	65.1	10.3

SOURCES:- As Appendix 1(b).

³¹ J. Caffyn, *Sussex believers: Baptist marriage in the 17th and 18th centuries* (Worthing, 1988); A.M. Urdank, 'Religion and reproduction among English Dissenters: Gloucestershire Baptists in the demographic revolution', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 33 (1991), 511–27; R.T. Vann and D.E.C. Eversley, *Friends in life and death: the British and Irish Quakers in the demographic transition, 1650–1900* (Cambridge, 1992).

There are, in fact, no age data for Methodism in the period under review which are comparable with those available nationally for the Roman Catholic community in the Papist Returns of 1767³² and for the Society of Friends in 1847.³³ Leslie Church argued that 'the children of the first Methodists were often admitted as members of Society at the age of nine or ten',³⁴ but his claim is not substantiated by the recent quantitative research of Tom Albin into eighteenth-century Methodist spirituality. In Albin's elite sample of 555 early Methodists, built up from autobiographical writings in the *Arminian Magazine* and other sources, the modal and median age of entry to society was twenty-one years with a mean of just under twenty-four and a minimum-maximum range from seven to sixty-nine years of age.³⁵ For the early nineteenth century we have a register of new members received in the Newcastle upon Tyne Circuit in 1825–29 and 1835. Age of entry was given in 280 of the 346 cases, the mean being 28.3 years (30.1 for men and 27.1 for women), with a minimum of thirteen years and a maximum of ninety-nine. The percentage of new members aged under twenty-one was 38.2, with 31.4 per cent in the twenty-one to thirty bracket, 15.7 per cent between thirty-one and forty, 9.3 per cent between forty-one and fifty, and 5.4 per cent aged fifty-one and over.

Occupational status

The occupational structure of Methodism has been a topic of speculation from the earliest days of the movement. Contemporary critics were quick to dismiss its followers as coming from the lowest social ranks, doubtless hoping to prove thereby that it posed no fundamental challenge to the ongoing supremacy of the ecclesiastical and socio-political establishments. This view found common expression in the returns of Anglican incumbents to eighteenth-century episcopal visitation queries.³⁶ The judgement was echoed by successive generations of Methodist historians, albeit

³² J.-A. Lesourd, *Sociologie du catholicisme anglais, 1767–1851* (Nancy, 1981), 36–8 (national summary table) and *Returns of papists, 1767*, ed. E.S. Worrall, 2 vols (Catholic Record Society, Occasional Publications, 1 and 2, [London], 1980–89) (individual parochial returns).

³³ *The annual monitor for 1849; or, Obituary of the members of the Society of Friends in Great Britain and Ireland, for the year 1848* (York, 1848), table I. Cf. J.J. Fox, 'On the vital statistics of the Society of Friends', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, 22 (1859), 218, 225–6.

³⁴ L.F. Church, *The early Methodist people* (London, 1948), 245.

³⁵ T.R. Albin, 'An empirical study of early Methodist spirituality', *Wesleyan Theology Today*, 278, 287.

³⁶ Cf. H.M. Brown, *Episcopal visitation queries and Methodism* (Cornish Methodist Historical Association, Occasional Publication, 3, Redruth, 1962); H.A. Clarke, 'The Church of England and Methodism in Cheshire, 1778–1789', *Journal of the Lancashire and Cheshire Branch of the Wesley Historical Society*, 1 (1965–69), 73–9, 87–9; J.A. Vickers, 'Methodism in the diocese of Canterbury, 1758', *Bulletin of the London Branch of the Wesley Historical Society*, 4 (May 1967), 5–10; R.C. Swift, 'Methodism in Sussex and its influence in the life of the community (1756–1900)' (University of Sussex M.Phil. thesis, 1984), 11.

for quite contrary reasons. They extolled the achievements of the early preachers in making converts amongst a labouring class which was often largely untouched by organized Christianity and in creating a genuinely democratic religious community from which class distinctions were excluded. In the words of Leslie Church: 'the cleansing waters of the Spirit washed away many social barriers which had made for misery and injustice . . . The first Methodists had no respect of persons . . . They came together in an intimacy that could not recognize social barriers . . . Those who would enter a Methodist Society must first abandon all idea of caste.'³⁷ The numerous modern contributors to the Methodism and Revolution debate have also touched upon the issue, attempting to identify Methodism's hold on the industrial working classes and to determine whether, on balance, it was a force for conservatism or social change. Until very recently, their evidence has been almost wholly impressionistic and circumstantial, and when an attempt was made to synthesize knowledge about the movement's social structure in 1977, very few data were found to be readily available for the eighteenth century.³⁸

The membership lists which form the basis of this article enable us to carry the investigation a little further forward, the key statistics appearing in Appendix 1(c-d) and Table 3.³⁹ The data need to be treated with caution since they are far from complete (with employment status being lacking for an average 26.7 per cent of male members, some of whom, admittedly, may have been too young to be

³⁷ L.F. Church, *More about the early Methodist people* (London, 1949), 2 and, more generally, 1-56.

³⁸ C.D. Field, 'The social structure of English Methodism: eighteenth-twentieth centuries', *British Journal of Sociology*, 28 (1977), 199-225. Cf. H.D. Rack, *Reasonable enthusiast: John Wesley and the rise of Methodism* (London, 1989), 439-40.

³⁹ Four of the lists have been the subject of previous occupational analysis, but without any degree of methodological compatibility, thereby necessitating a complete re-evaluation here. For the Keighley Round in 1763 see C.I. Wallace, 'Religion and society in eighteenth century England: geographic, demographic and occupational patterns of dissent in the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1715-1801' (Duke University Ph.D. thesis, 1975), 217-28; J.Q. Smith, 'The origins and development of the Keighley Methodist Circuit: a study of Methodism in a Yorkshire textile community, 1748-1850' (Ohio State University Ph.D. thesis, 1985), 80-9, 106; J.Q. Smith, 'Occupational groups among the early Methodists of the Keighley Circuit', *Church History*, 57 (1988), 187-96; P. Rycroft, 'Church, chapel and community in Craven, 1764-1851' (University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1988), 205-6. For West Cornwall in 1767 see D. Luker, 'Cornish Methodism, revivalism and popular belief, c.1780-1870' (University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1987), 134-6, 165-7. For Sussex in 1774-79 see Swift, 'Methodism in Sussex', 19-20. For Blackburn in 1789-90 see N. Cunliffe, *The beckoning of the West: a Lancashire odyssey* (Blackpool, 1992), 52-3. Some membership lists which are known to have included occupational data no longer appear to be extant; for an example, see J. Noake, *Worcester sects; or, A history of the Roman Catholics & Dissenters of Worcester* (London, 1861), 334. Other lists which do survive are too fragmentary to be relied upon; see, for instance, a partial reconstruction of Methodist membership in Bristol in 1741 in W.A. Goss, 'Early Methodism in Bristol' (University of Bristol M.A. thesis, 1932), 69-81. A few lists have not been consulted for a variety of reasons; thus, on the Kingswood society in 1757, see K. Morgan, *John Wesley and Bristol* (Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, Local History Pamphlets, 75, Bristol, 1990), 12-13.

at work) and even more difficult to classify and interpret. The processing of occupational data in early modern and industrializing England, prior to the availability of a reasonably scientific classification scheme for the 1841 census, is quite problematical, as a growing body of modern studies clearly shows.⁴⁰ Although, following Lindert and Williamson,⁴¹ it has proved a relatively easy decision to use a revision of the contemporary accounts of social structure prepared by Joseph Massie in 1759 (as a contribution to the debate on sugar consumption) and by Patrick Colquhoun in 1801–03 (for his treatise on indigence) as the basis for a sixfold occupational categorization, it has been a much more complex and – doubtless – error-prone task to assign several hundred individual job titles to particular categories in a way that will equally reflect financial circumstances, social standing, and economic output sector. The meaning of occupational names was clearly subject to variation over time and space, so that, for example, an intrinsically specific term such as ‘gentleman’ might actually carry rather a wide range of social meanings. There was often a considerable overlap between occupational functions, especially in rural areas where there was a close relationship between the agricultural and industrial economies (a miller, for instance, could be regarded as a retailer, manufacturer or processor of agricultural products). In the urban commercial and manufacturing sectors there was frequently no clear dividing line between wholesale and retail trades, nor between production and distribution, and no certain means of differentiating masters from artisans sharing the same job title. Similarly, terms such as ‘manufacturer’ or ‘maker’ did not necessarily imply anything about the scale of the production process; thus, depending upon the context, the term ‘lacemaker’ might refer to an entrepreneur or, as with the twenty-eight women of the Bedfordshire Circuit in 1781, to a domestic operative. For all these reasons, the occupational coding used in this study, as detailed in Appendix 2, is at best only tentative and indicative; it is based largely upon an internal examination of each membership source moderated in the light of research by

⁴⁰ D. Cressy, ‘Describing the social order of Elizabethan and Stuart England’, *Literature & History*, 3 (March 1976), 29–44; K. Wrightson, ‘The social order of early modern England: three approaches’, *The world we have gained: histories of population and social structure. Essays presented to Peter Laslett on his seventieth birthday*, ed. L. Bonfield, R.M. Smith and K. Wrightson (Oxford, 1986), 177–202; G.S. Holmes, ‘Gregory King and the social structure of pre-industrial England’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th. ser., 27 (1977), 41–68; P. Mathias, *The transformation of England: essays in the economic and social history of England in the eighteenth century* (London, 1979), 171–89; P.J. Corfield, ‘Class by name and number in eighteenth-century Britain’, *History*, 72 (1987), 38–61; J.E. Bradley, *Religion, revolution and English radicalism: nonconformity in eighteenth-century politics and society* (Cambridge, 1990), 436–46; P. Glennie, ‘Distinguishing men’s trades’: occupational sources and debates for pre-census England (Cheltenham, 1990).

⁴¹ P.H. Lindert and J.G. Williamson, ‘Revising England’s social tables, 1688–1812’, *Explorations in Economic History*, 19 (1982), 385–408. Cf. Lindert, ‘English occupations, 1670–1881’, *Journal of Economic History*, 40 (1980), 685–712.

Phillips, O’Gorman, Bradley and other scholars on trade directories, local newspapers and other corroborating secular evidence.⁴²

Table 3
Occupational Status of English Methodist Male Members,
1759–99: Summary Data

	% of occupied males classified at					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
National population, 1759	4.9	13.0	23.8	24.6	5.6	28.1
National population, 1801–03	4.7	9.4	24.7	14.6	11.2	35.4
Methodist members, 1759–99	2.2	9.4	57.5	12.2	1.7	16.9
Roman Catholic population, 1767	1.1	10.8	30.4	31.1	2.4	24.1

SOURCES:- Methodist data as Appendix 1(c). National data from Lindert and Williamson, ‘Revising England’s social tables, 1688–1812’, 396–7, 400–1. Roman Catholic data calculated from Lesourd, *Sociologie du catholicisme anglais, 1767–1851*, 169–73.

NOTE:- The occupational classification derives from Lindert and Williamson, the categories being: A – gentry and professions; B – merchants, manufacturers and retailers; C – skilled craftsmen in textiles, wood, metal, building and mining; D – agriculture excluding labourers; E – maritime, naval and military; F – labourers, servants and paupers. For details of occupations included in each category, see Appendix 2.

A crude aggregation of the male membership data (Table 3) points to some major variations between Methodists and the nation as a whole, not least a substantial overrepresentation of skilled craftsmen (who seem, at first sight, to have formed the backbone of the movement) and significantly fewer labourers, servants and paupers. Comparison with the social structure of the Roman Catholic community from the Papist Returns of 1767 confirms this bias and also highlights the Methodists’ relative lack of success with farmers and husbandmen. Similarly, in relation to a sample of Quaker bridegrooms in the late eighteenth century, the Methodists had considerably fewer professional men, merchants, manufacturers and retailers, and rather more skilled craftsmen, labourers, servants and paupers.⁴³

⁴² J.A. Phillips, *Electoral behavior in unreformed England: Plumpers, splitters and straights* (Princeton, 1982), 321–2; F. O’Gorman, *Voters, patrons and parties: the unreformed electoral system of Hanoverian England, 1734–1832* (Oxford, 1989), 394–9; Bradley, *Religion, revolution and English radicalism*, 442–6.

⁴³ Vann and Eversley, *Friends in life and death*, 68–74. Contrasts between these Methodist and Quaker samples should not be pushed too far since there are considerable methodological differences between them. In particular, there is a great deal of double-counting of Quaker occupations.

Such disparities, however, could well have been more apparent than real. The wild fluctuations in the figures for each of the eighteen circuits in Appendix 1(c) (the minimum–maximum range for group C being 22.5–84.8 per cent, and for group F being 1.5–46.3 per cent) suggest, not some underlying and constant pattern of Methodist support, but a reflection of the local and regional diversity of the secular economy. In each case the dominant occupational groups amongst male Methodists are precisely those which would have been expected from a knowledge of that economy. Farmers and labourers were the mainstay of Methodist congregations in agricultural areas such as Sussex (38.5 per cent), Bedfordshire (45.9 per cent), Grimsby (60.1 per cent), Epworth (47.3 per cent), Yarmouth (39.8 per cent) and Walsingham (52.2 per cent), whilst weavers formed the largest group in the textile districts of Yorkshire (39.7 per cent in Keighley, 46.4 per cent in Bradford) and Blackburn (59.8 per cent). The tanners were strong in West Cornwall (48.6 per cent), the miners in the Dales (45.2 per cent) and to a lesser extent in Sunderland (13.8 per cent), and artisans in the major urban centres such as Dublin and Bristol, shoemakers being especially numerous (20.6 per cent in Bristol). Only detailed comparisons between each set of Methodist circuit data and a control group of the surrounding population would confirm the hypothesis, also recently advanced by David Hempton,⁴⁴ that the occupational structure of Methodism displayed a marked tendency to mirror the composition of its host workforce. Such an analysis would be too labour-intensive to fall within the scope of this present study, but it is interesting to note that Wallace's research on Keighley in the 1760s has demonstrated a reasonably good match between the occupational profile of Methodist members and that of Anglican bridegrooms, leading him to conclude that Methodism was 'a flexible movement' which 'both adapted to a given local situation and yet maintained a certain distinctive stance'.⁴⁵ Broad coincidences between the occupations of Methodist members and of the male population of four Craven parishes in the 1800s have also been reported by Rycroft.⁴⁶

The position with regard to female Methodist members, as set out in Appendix 1(d), was not dissimilar, but there were rather different emphases. Cities such as Dublin (10.4 per cent) and Bristol (6.8 per cent) had a fair number of Methodist women, mostly widows, described as being of independent means. There was a large skilled craft sector, mainly attributable to the influence

⁴⁴ D.N. Hempton, 'Religion in British society, 1740–1790', *British politics and society from Walpole to Pitt, 1742–1789*, ed. J. Black (Basingstoke, 1990), 217.

⁴⁵ Wallace, 'Religion and society in eighteenth century England', 221–8. Cf. Rycroft, 'Church, chapel and community in Craven', 205.

⁴⁶ Rycroft, 'Church, chapel and community in Craven', 207–8.

of the textile industry which employed spinners (19.2 per cent in Manchester, 68.1 per cent in Keighley, 65.4 per cent in Bradford, 40.6 per cent in Grimsby) and lacemakers (17.3 per cent in Bedfordshire). The ranks of group F were swelled by servants (11.1 per cent in Manchester, 19.4 per cent in Dublin, 15.1 per cent in Sunderland, 19.6 per cent in Bristol, 12.8 per cent in Epworth).

By the end of the eighteenth century there was mounting concern amongst many of the leading Methodist preachers about the growing respectability of the movement as evidenced by 'the steady rise of many of its members in the social scale'.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, the circuit membership lists which survive for the years 1800–30 do not tend to include details of occupation and therefore make it difficult to establish the legitimacy of this concern. The only specific set of membership data so far discovered for this period relates to the occupations of new male members received in the Newcastle upon Tyne Circuit in 1825–29 and 1835: of 112 members the vast majority were either merchants, manufacturers, retailers (25.9 per cent) or skilled craftsmen (53.6 per cent). For the rest, one is dependent upon a correlation of membership lists with secular sources which include occupational information, such as muster rolls,⁴⁸ trade directories⁴⁹ and the enumeration returns from the censuses of 1841 and 1851,⁵⁰ or upon having recourse to non-membership sources such as trust deeds⁵¹ or the non-parochial registers. A fair amount of work has now been undertaken on occupational data in Methodist baptismal registers, much of it tending to the same conclusion: skilled manual workers formed the backbone of the Church.⁵² Baptismal data, however, pose considerable methodological and interpretative problems arising from the significant number of Methodists who either did not marry

⁴⁷ J.D. Walsh, 'Methodism at the end of the eighteenth century', *A history of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, i. 308–10.

⁴⁸ For instance, Rycroft, 'Church, chapel and community in Craven', 206–8.

⁴⁹ For an example, a reconstruction of the social structure of Wesleyan chapels in Wolverhampton, Bilston, Dudley and Tipton in the 1820s, see R. Leese, 'The impact of Methodism on Black Country society, 1743–1860' (University of Manchester Ph.D. thesis, 1972), 370–5.

⁵⁰ A source used by B.J. Biggs in creating his Methodist Personnel Index: 'Methodism in a rural society: north Nottinghamshire, 1740–1851' (University of Nottingham Ph.D. thesis, 1975), 412–31.

⁵¹ Cf. Field, 'The social structure of English Methodism', 213–15 and R.W. Ambler, 'The social composition of church leadership: nonconformist trustees in Lincolnshire, 1800–1870', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 75: 1 (Spring 1993), 133–56.

⁵² The biggest published sample for England is in A.D. Gilbert, *Religion and society in industrial England: church, chapel and social change, 1740–1914* (London, 1976), 62–7, with equivalent figures for Wales to be found in the same author's 'The growth and decline of Nonconformity in England and Wales, with special reference to the period before 1850: an historical interpretation of statistics of religious practice' (University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1973), 164. However, Gilbert's methodology is not especially sophisticated, and a somewhat more reliable picture is likely to emerge from M.R. Watts's, as yet, unpublished research.

at all or who did not rear children, a continuing predilection for baptism in the parish church, the need to control for class fertility differentials, and – in the present context – the uncertain relationship between membership on the one hand and the wider worshipping community of members and adherents represented in the baptismal registers on the other.⁵³

Conclusion

This study of early Methodist membership lists seems to suggest that the profile of the movement was somewhat at variance with that of the wider society, albeit not to such a large extent as may have been anticipated from the comments of many contemporaries and historians. The proportion of female members was certainly rather greater than in the adult population, but only by about 5 per cent on average, whilst it was fractionally less than for the Old Dissent. There were fewer single persons in membership than one might have expected, but in part this may well have been a function of Methodism's age structure or a reflection of a tendency to delay admission to full membership until well into adulthood, circumstances about which virtually nothing is known. In occupational terms Methodism probably had a tendency to mirror the local economy, although there was some bias towards skilled craftsmen.

Members, of course, accounted for only a minority of Methodist congregations, as was made clear in the opening paragraph, and as Henry Ablove has recently reminded us.⁵⁴ It would be ill advised to generalize from the membership to the total Methodist constituency. Other research on Nonconformity, for

More localized studies of Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist baptismal registers in the early nineteenth century include: M.R. Sheard, 'The origins and early development of Primitive Methodism in Cheshire and south Lancashire, 1800–1860', 3 vols (University of Manchester Ph.D. thesis, 1980), ii. 500, 541 and iii. 1101–20; R.W. Ambler, 'Social change and religious experience: aspects of rural society in south Lincolnshire with specific reference to Primitive Methodism, 1815–1875' (University of Hull Ph.D. thesis, 1984), 322–7, 400; J.A. Vickers, 'Methodism and society in central southern England, 1740–1851' (University of Southampton Ph.D. thesis, [1986]), 419–21; M.A. Smith, 'Religion in industrial society: the case of Oldham and Saddleworth, 1780–1865' (University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1987), 366–70; Luker, 'Cornish Methodism', 275–80; Rycroft, 'Church, chapel and community in Craven', 216–19; W.J. Johnson, "'In triumph of faith": Primitive Methodism and the labouring people in the north Midlands, 1812–62' (Keele University Ph.D. thesis, 1989), 51–5, 257–8; K.D.M. Snell, *Church and chapel in the north Midlands: religious observance in the nineteenth century* (Leicester, 1991), 41–4.

⁵³ Cf. Field, 'The social structure of English Methodism', 200.

⁵⁴ Ablove, *The evangelist of desire*, 44: 'Since the 1970s there has been a small surge of good scholarship on the demography of Methodism . . . But this scholarship attends almost only to the full-fledged, ticket-carrying Methodists. This is anachronistic. It is to treat the Methodism of Wesley's day as though it were the same as the closed-in, sectarian Methodism of the nineteenth century. But the Methodism of Wesley's day was not a sect. It was a revival, a field of force. It kept many adherents and affected many others without involving them in formal membership ...'

example, has indicated that the amount of male support in a lay religious community is inversely related to the level of commitment – spiritual, intellectual, social, financial – demanded of that community; the less that is required by way of active participation or personal sacrifice, the greater the number of men.⁵⁵ If this theory holds good for early Methodism, then the sexes would probably have been quite evenly balanced in the circle of non-member adherents. Single people, socially restless and valuing their freedom, may have chosen to shun the high degree of involvement and self-discipline implicit in formal membership and to have remained on the periphery of the movement, whereas their married neighbours, seeking to rear their children in a religious and moral environment, may have positively courted an association that separated them and their families from a fallen world. This effect would certainly help to explain why, according to John Walsh's research, contemporaries believed that Methodism appealed disproportionately to the young and was an assertion of adolescent independence against parental authority. The financial costs of membership, not least the weekly class money and the quarterly ticket money, may have deterred the labouring poor from becoming members, but no such penalties would have applied to their joining in Methodist worship or turning out to hear the Methodist field preachers (the weekly congregational offertory, it should be noted, was not adopted in Methodism until the very end of the nineteenth century).⁵⁶ Allowing for these possibilities, there may still be some grounds for regarding early Methodism as an approximation of an authentically democratic movement, in that it represented, to a greater or lesser extent, most segments of the population. Such a suggestion may not entirely disprove the charges brought against Methodism by some historians that it served as a counter-revolutionary force or an instrument of social control, but it would certainly make them rather less credible.

⁵⁵ Field, 'Adam and Eve', 78.

⁵⁶ Field, 'Methodism in metropolitan London, 1850–1920', 120–1.

Appendix 1 Circuit Level Data

(a) Sex

Date	Circuit	No. of members	% of women members	Source
1745	London (Foundery)	2,035	70.5	John Rylands UL, Manchester, Methodist Archives, Colman Collection, xx
Date	Circuit	No. of members	% of women members	Source
1759–60	Manchester	297	50.2	John Rylands UL, Manchester, Methodist Archives, MAW LHB 44.2
1763	Keighley	1,806	54.7	Keighley PL, BK15/1/3/1/b
1767	West Cornwall	1,158	57.6	Cornwall RO, AD.350
1769	Grimsby	739	59.3	South Humberside Area AO, 326/1/2
1770	Bristol	901	65.7	The New Room, Bristol
1773	Dales	1,096	56.0	William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, George Story Collection, 5
c.1775	Dublin	386	55.4	John Rylands UL, Manchester, Methodist Archives, John Wesley Sermons iii.14
1776	Sussex	257	59.1	East Sussex CRO, NMA4/1/1
1781	Bedfordshire	304	59.5	Bedfordshire CRO, MB1 and <i>Bedford St Paul's Methodist Circuit class book</i> (Bedford, 1977), 1–8
1781	Bradford (Yorks.)	1,074	56.6	West Yorkshire AS, Bradford DA, 17D81/17
1782	Sheffield	512	52.9	Sheffield City Archives, NR348
1782	Sunderland	1,006	53.5	Tyne & Wear AS, 1032/11
1784	Scarborough	598	53.0	North Yorkshire CRO, R/M/SC 1/1/1
1785	Sarum	427	51.8	William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, George Story Collection, 6
1787	Glamorgan	150	66.0	I. Lewis, 'Early Methodist societies in Glamorgan and Monmouthshire', <i>Bathafarn</i> , 11 (1956), 57–9
1787	Stockport	892	51.1	Stockport PL AD, Methodist Shelves, D1492

Date	Circuit	No. of members	% of women members	Source
1787	York	920	53.2	Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, MRC 1/1/1
1788	Epworth	685	58.0	Lincolnshire AO, Meth. B 32/1
1788	Macclesfield	1,208	57.4	William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, George Story Collection, 7
1788	Worcester	209	66.5	Noake, <i>Worcester sects</i> , 330-3
1790	Blackburn	1,005	52.6	Blackburn Circuit Archives
1790	Grimsby	625	56.2	South Humberside Area AO, 326/2/2
1791	Alnwick	312	50.6	Northumberland CRO, M1/425
1791	Derby	786	55.5	Derbyshire RO, D2670 J/MW/3/1
1792	Leeds	2,119	59.8	West Yorkshire AS, Leeds DA, Brunswick Circuit 41(7)
1792	Margate	299	61.9	West Kent AO, N/MC3/8
1793	Chester	613	52.0	Chester City RO, CR55/7
1795	Bradford (Wilts.)	522	54.8	John Rylands UL, Manchester, Methodist Archives, MAW LHB 9.34
1795	Leicester	284	57.4	Leicestershire RO, N/M/179/52
1796	Barnard Castle	458	57.6	Durham CRO. M/BC2
1796	Ripon	589	52.8	North Yorkshire CRO, R/M/RI I 8/1
1796	Rye	467	57.8	East Sussex CRO, NMA4/1/1
1797	Bristol	1,465	58.3	Bristol RO, 21780/22/a
c.1797	Gloucester	226	65.0	Gloucestershire RO, D3187 1/3/6
1797	Middleham	704	58.5	North Yorkshire CRO, R/M/W/1/1/1
1798	Stroud	472	65.5	John Rylands UL, Manchester, Methodist Archives, MAW LHB 59.43
1798	Yarmouth	574	52.6	Norfolk RO, FC16/2 = MF/RO/342/2
1799	Manchester	2,658	58.6	Manchester PL AD, M60/2 addnl.2
1799	Walsingham	175	58.3	Norfolk RO, FC18/1
1800	Stockton	692	59.8	Durham CRO, M/Da12
1800	Sunderland	1,008	51.5	Tyne & Wear AS, 1032/12
1801	Keighley	871	59.5	Keighley PL, BK15/1/3/4/c
1801	Norwich	357	58.5	Norfolk RO, Dep NNGS 12/9/83 S 152 C
1801	Sheffield	1,061	63.9	Sheffield City Archives, NR349
1802	Bradford (Yorks.)	1,204	60.8	West Yorkshire AS, Bradford DA, 17D81/18

Date	Circuit	No. of members	% of women members	Source
1802	Launceston	882	50.6	Royal Institution of Cornwall, Courtney Library, Shaw Collection
1803	Retford	351	53.8	Retford PL, q L26.3
1804	Belper	505	55.6	Derbyshire RO, D2492 J/MW/1
1805	Loughborough	709	59.5	Leicestershire RO, N/M/207/6
1806	Bedford	825	60.4	Bedfordshire CRO, MB1 and <i>Bedford St Paul's Methodist Circuit class book</i> , 148-65
1806	Edinburgh	268	54.1	Scottish RO, CH 11/1/22
1806	Glasgow	304	52.3	Scottish RO, CH 11/23/1
1806	Weymouth	425	62.6	R. Pearce, <i>Methodism in Portland and a page of church history</i> (London, 1898), 186-9
1808	New Mills	237	57.4	S. Evans, <i>New Mills Wesleyanism: Its history, traditions, rise and progress</i> (New Mills, 1912), 65-7
1809	Blackburn	527	56.2	E.S. Shelton, <i>The centenary volume of the Wesleyan Methodist chapel, Clayton Street, Blackburn, 1885</i> (Blackburn, 1886), 62-70
1809	Wolverhampton	351	52.1	Wolverhampton PL AD, MC/DS/43
1810	Dudley	678	53.5	Dudley PL AD, Acc. 8363
1811	Nantwich	598	54.3	Cheshire RO, EMC 2/4/1
1812	Barnstaple	363	57.6	North Devon RO, 2347D/12
1812	Scarborough	632	53.6	North Yorkshire CRO, R/M/SC 1/1/2
1813	Alnwick	253	58.5	Northumberland CRO, M1/425
1813	Halifax	1,420	63.7	West Yorkshire AS, Calderdale DA, Misc. 546
1813	St Neots	285	63.2	<i>The circuit book of the St Neots Methodist Circuit, 1813-1837</i> , trans. D.W. Bushby (St Neots, 1977), 1-3
1814	Bath	635	65.8	Bath RO, M1/68
1814	Mansfield	542	60.7	J.E. Alcock, <i>Notes on the progress of Wesleyan Methodism in the Mansfield Circuit</i> (Mansfield, 1900), 16-23
1816	North Shields	363	52.3	Tyne & Wear AS, 1096/1
1816	Uttoxeter	380	52.4	Dove Valley Circuit Archives

Date	Circuit	No. of members	% of women members	Source
1816	Winterton	553	54.2	Lincolnshire AO, Meth. B 32/1
1817	Selby	749	53.8	North Yorkshire CRO, R/M/SB 1/6
1817-18	Guernsey	790	63.7	Guernsey Circuit Archives
1818	Bristol	2,685	60.7	Bristol RO, 40304/C1/1(b)
1818	Clitheroe	520	52.3	Lancashire RO, MC1 acc. 6775, box 1
1818	Walsingham	446	50.9	Norfolk RO, FC18/1
1819	Derby	898	60.0	Derbyshire RO, D2670 J/MW/3/3
1819	Evesham	251	54.6	Hereford and Worcester RO, 898.7312 BA 8608/4(i)
1821	Carrickfergus	532	58.3	Wesley Historical Society (Irish Branch) Archives
1821	Manchester	3,056	60.1	Manchester PL AD, M60/2/6
1821	Spilsby	287	51.9	Lincolnshire AO, Meth. B 32/1
1822	Belper	1,051	55.8	Derbyshire RO, D2492 J/MW/1
1822	Bury	685	54.2	Bury AS, 1136/18W
1822	Grantham	836	52.2	Lincolnshire AO, Meth. B 32/1
1822	Guisborough	579	59.1	North Yorkshire CRO, R/M/STY I 1/1
1822	Newtownberry	497	54.7	National Library of Ireland, MS 16858
1822	Stockport	1,245	59.4	Stockport PL AD, Methodist Shelves, S/K 72
1823	Colchester	530	48.1	Essex RO, Colchester and North-East Essex Branch, D/NM 2/1/14
1823	Horncastle	621	50.2	South Humberside Area AO, 326/2/2
1823	Launceston	651	48.2	Royal Institution of Cornwall, Courtney Library, Shaw Collection
1823	Loughborough	933	56.6	Leicestershire RO, N/M/207/6
1823	Maidstone	541	54.0	West Kent AO, N/MC1/4/1 and A.W. Smith, <i>Wesleyan Methodist Church: a short history of the Maidstone Circuit, 1814-1914 and of the Union Street chapel, 1823-1923 (Maidstone, [1923])</i> , 43-7
1823	Salisbury	644	58.1	Wiltshire CRO, 2485/1
1824	Cambridge	256	56.6	Cambridgeshire CRO

Date	Circuit	No. of members	% of women members	Source
1824	Chester	856	57.1	Chester City RO, CR55/8
1824	Leeds	3,168	61.3	West Yorkshire AS, Leeds DA, Brunswick Circuit 43 (15)
1824	Melton Mowbray	509	58.5	Leicestershire RO, N/M/219/13
1825	Darlington	775	57.5	Durham CRO, M/Da12
1825	Ripon	502	57.6	North Yorkshire CRO, R/M/RI I 8/1
1825	St Albans	152	63.8	Hertfordshire CRO, NM5/8 and J.G. Greaves, <i>Wesleyan Methodism in the city of the Proto-Martyr and the St Albans Circuit</i> (St Albans, 1907), 150–2
1825	Sherborne	235	60.0	Dorset CRO, NM6: C1/MS 2/1
1825–35	Newcastle upon Tyne	346	58.7	Tyne & Wear AS, 1041/3
1826	Wolverhampton	424	58.5	Leese, 'The impact of Methodism on Black Country society, 1743–1860', 370–2
1828	Keighley	1,322	63.5	Keighley PL, BK15/1/3/4/d
1828	Retford	947	55.2	Retford PL, q L26.3
1828	Stockton	654	59.2	Cleveland AS, M/Sto19
1829	Middleham	550	53.6	North Yorkshire CRO, R/M/W/1/1/1
1830	Halifax	1,665	57.7	West Yorkshire AS, Calderdale DA, Misc. 546
1831	St Neots	250	60.8	<i>The circuit book of the St Neots Methodist Circuit, 1813–1837</i> , 29–31
1832	Oxford	431	52.2	Oxfordshire Archives, MS. D.D. Oxford Methodist Circuit e. 3

NOTES:- (1) The total members recorded in each circuit may not necessarily correspond with the figures printed in the annual *Minutes* of the Methodist Conferences for the year in question. Some totals are lower than the published returns because not all members could be classified by sex. Others will be higher as a result of the fairly widespread practice whereby local superintendent ministers held on to a reserve of members (generally as a form of insurance against losses by death, backsliding or removal), which was not reported to Conference. The evidence from fourteen membership lists between 1788 and 1831 suggests that the mean level of underreporting was of the order of 2.7 per cent.

(2) The author is grateful to the Revd T. Shaw, Dr J.L. Baxter and Ms L. Rose for supplying abstracts of the 1767 West Cornwall, 1782 and 1801 Sheffield, and 1812 Barnstaple lists respectively.

(3) The lists for Manchester in 1759–60, Dublin in c.1775, Worcester in 1788, New Mills in 1808, and Wolverhampton in 1826 are incomplete.

(4) The figure of 287 given as the total for the Spilsby Circuit in 1821 actually represents only 47.2 per cent of the membership of 608 in that year – initials rather than forenames were used in the remaining cases. Similarly, the figure of 3,168 given for the Leeds Circuit in 1824 represents only 58.5 per cent of the membership of 5,415 in that year – the sex of 570 members whose surnames were given could not be determined from the context, and the names of 1,677 members were not given at all.

(5) The figure for Newcastle upon Tyne in 1825–35 relates to new members received not to all members.

(6) The following abbreviations are used in the source column: AD Archives Department, AO Archives Office, AS Archives Service, CRO County Record Office, DA District Archives, PL Public Library, RO Record Office, UL University Library.

(b) Marital Status

Date	Circuit	No. of members	% of single members	% of married members	% of widowed members
1759–60	Manchester	276	32.2	58.3	9.4
1763	Keighley	1,527	21.3	71.3	7.4
1767	West Cornwall	1,141	28.7	57.3	13.9
1773	Dales	1,059	28.3	59.4	12.3
1776	Sussex	243	26.7	59.7	13.6
1781	Bedfordshire	276	16.3	70.3	13.4
1781	Bradford (Yorks.)	1,072	21.4	70.8	7.8
1782	Sunderland	853	22.0	64.9	13.0
1784	Grimsby	976	15.8	70.2	14.0
1785	Sarum	340	25.9	62.6	11.5
1788	Epworth	680	16.5	70.3	13.2
1788	Macclesfield	1,105	27.7	63.3	9.0
1789	Sheffield	726	14.7	79.2	6.1
1790	Blackburn	993	31.5	60.3	8.2
1791	Derby	786	20.0	65.9	14.1
1792	Margate	299	23.7	67.9	8.4
1795	Bradford (Wilts.)	519	24.1	64.4	11.6
1795	Leicester	269	27.1	61.3	11.5
1796	Barnard Castle	453	31.3	52.8	15.9
1796	Rye	372	28.2	68.8	3.0
1797	Middleham	685	31.5	58.1	10.4
1798	Stroud	466	32.6	56.4	10.9
1798	Yarmouth	573	23.7	68.8	7.5
1799	Manchester	2,591	27.7	61.7	10.6
1799	Walsingham	168	20.2	67.9	11.9
1800	Stockton	680	27.6	58.1	14.3
1801	Norwich	311	29.9	59.5	10.6
1803	Retford	280	18.6	74.3	7.1
1806	Bedford	573	28.8	65.1	6.1
1811	Nantwich	591	20.0	72.9	7.1
1812	Scarborough	623	22.6	64.5	12.8
1819	Derby	875	25.9	68.3	5.7
1819	Evesham	250	23.2	64.8	12.0
1823	Colchester	497	14.3	77.1	8.7

SOURCES:- As Appendix 1(a) except for: Grimsby, 1784 (South Humberside Area AO, 326/2/2) and Sheffield, 1789 (Sheffield City Archives, NR348).

(c) Occupational Status: Males

Date	Circuit	male members with occupation recorded		% of occupied male members classified at					
		no.	% all males	A	B	C	D	E	F
1759-60	Manchester	126	85.1	2.4	7.1	60.3	15.1	2.4	12.7
1763	Keighley	647	79.0	1.1	6.2	70.3	15.5	0.2	6.8
1767	West Cornwall	442	90.0	1.1	7.0	72.4	12.0	1.1	6.3
1773	Dales	241	50.0	2.1	3.3	69.7	19.9	0.0	5.0
c.1775	Dublin	137	79.7	3.6	24.8	47.4	0.0	8.8	15.3
1776	Sussex	91	86.7	6.6	14.3	28.6	13.2	0.0	37.4
1781	Bedfordshire	122	99.2	3.3	11.5	34.4	13.9	0.0	36.9
1781	Bradford (Yorks.)	394	84.5	1.0	16.2	75.4	2.8	0.3	4.3
1782	Sunderland	377	80.6	3.2	5.0	53.1	14.1	5.0	19.6
1783	Bristol	218	79.0	7.8	26.6	55.0	0.0	1.8	8.7
1784	Grimsby	391	94.9	1.3	4.6	22.5	24.3	1.5	45.8
1785	Sarum	45	21.8	4.4	33.3	40.0	4.4	2.2	15.6
1788	Epworth	262	91.0	1.5	5.3	35.1	22.1	1.9	34.0
1788	Macclesfield	108	21.0	3.7	6.5	62.0	19.4	0.0	8.3
1790	Blackburn	388	81.5	1.0	7.7	84.8	4.6	0.3	1.5
1791	Alnwick	33	21.4	3.0	18.2	63.6	12.1	0.0	3.0
1798	Yarmouth	269	98.9	2.2	8.6	39.8	4.8	5.9	38.7
1799	Walsingham	67	91.8	3.0	10.4	23.9	13.4	3.0	46.3

SOURCES:- As Appendix 1(a) except for: Bristol, 1783 (Kent, 'Wesleyan membership in Bristol, 1783', 113-32) and Grimsby, 1784 (South Humberside Area AO, 326/2/2).

(d) Occupational Status: Females

Date	Circuit	female members with occupation recorded		% of occupied female members classified at					
		no.	% all females	A	B	C	D	E	F
1759-60	Manchester	99	66.4	6.1	8.1	55.6	7.1	5.1	18.2
1763	Keighley	612	62.0	1.1	4.1	81.0	8.8	0.2	4.7
1767	West Cornwall	342	51.3	3.2	13.2	57.6	9.4	0.9	15.8
c.1775	Dublin	67	31.3	22.4	11.9	29.9	0.0	0.0	35.8
1781	Bedfordshire	162	89.5	4.3	7.4	51.9	9.9	0.0	26.5
1781	Bradford (Yorks.)	243	40.0	3.7	5.3	84.0	2.5	0.0	4.5
1782	Sunderland	126	23.4	4.8	11.1	25.4	11.1	5.6	42.1
1783	Bristol	235	45.2	12.8	13.2	34.9	0.0	0.0	39.1
1784	Grimsby	539	94.9	3.9	2.6	53.8	16.7	1.7	21.3
1788	Epworth	179	45.1	7.3	6.7	16.8	11.7	6.7	50.8

SOURCES:- As Appendix 1(c).

NOTE:- The classification is based upon the occupations followed by female members or, in the absence of this information, upon the occupational status of their husbands (if known).

Appendix 2 Classification of Occupations

As noted in the text, the occupations of Methodist members have been classified according to a recent revision of the social tables for England and Wales originally prepared by Joseph Massie in 1759 and by Patrick Colquhoun in 1801–03: Lindert and Williamson, 'Revising England's social tables, 1688–1812', 394–404. Lindert and Williamson do not offer any detailed guidance on the assignment of individual occupations to their sixfold hierarchy, and the following selective list may therefore be helpful by way of explanation of the categorization procedures used in this study and, perhaps, as an aid to further applications of the social tables.

A Gentry and professions

Alderman, attorney, counsellor, doctor, excise officer, gentleman, independent, parish clerk, schoolmaster, singing master, surgeon.

B Merchants, manufacturers and retailers

Agent, alehousekeeper, apothecary, baker, barber, boatbuilder, bookkeeper, bookseller, brazier, brewer, broker, butcher, butter buyer, chandler, chapman, chemist, chinaman, clerk, clockmaker, clothier, clothmaker, coachmaker, collector, confectioner, corn dealer, currier, customhousekeeper, dairy keeper, dairyman, dealer, distiller, draper, druggist, drysalter, factor, fellmonger, fishmonger, flour dealer, flowerseller, fruitseller, glassman, glue manufacturer, goldsmith, grocer, haberdasher, hairdresser, huckster, innkeeper, ironmonger, jeweller, jobber, lace buyer, leatherseller, linendraper, maltster, match merchant, mealmaker, mercer, merchant, milk seller, miller, muffin baker, muffin seller, oilman, packman, paperseller, pedlar, piemaker, printer, publican, ragman, rag merchant, shopkeeper, shopman, silversmith, skinner, soapboiler, stationer, stone merchant, storekeeper, stuffmaker, sugarbaker, tinman, tradesman, turnpike keeper, upholsterer, warehouseman, watchmaker, whitecloth maker, woolbroker.

C Skilled craftsmen in textiles, wood, metal, building and mining

Apprentice, basketmaker, blacksmith, bleacher, blockmaker, bonnetmaker, bookbinder, bottlemaker, breechesmaker, bricklayer, brickmaker, brushmaker, builder, buttonmaker, cabinetmaker, cala weaver, cardmaker, carpenter, carver, caulker, chairmaker, china painter, clearstarcher, clogger, clogmaker, cobbler, collarmaker, collier, comber, combmaker, cooper, cordwainer, cottoner, cottonwinder, cutler, dishturner, dressmaker, dyer, enginekeeper, engine tenter, engraver, farrier, fitter, flaxdresser, foundry worker, fuller, gearmaker, gilder, glasscutter, glassgrinder, glazier, glover, grinder, gunsmith, handknitter, harnessmaker, hatliner, hatmaker,

hatter, heelmaker, hosier, inkhornmaker, joiner, kilnkeeper, lacemaker, lapidary, leadworker, leathercutter, limeburner, mantuamaker, mason, matmaker, mechanic, melter, milliner, millwright, miner, nailer, netmaker, netmender, ore sampler, painter, paperglazer, papermaker, patternmaker, penmaker, perukemaker, piecemaker, pipemaker, pitman, plasterer, potter, printcutter, pumppmaker, quarryman, quilter, quiremaker, refiner, ropemaker, roper, saddler, sailmaker, sawyer, seamstress, shipwright, shoemaker, shovelmaker, shroudmaker, silker, silkweaver, silverplater, slater, smelter, smith, spinner, staymaker, stockingmaker, stonecutter, stonegetter, stonemason, tailor, tanner, thatcher, threadmaker, tilemaker, tiler, tinner, tinplate worker, toymaker, turner, twinespinner, twister, waggonwright, warper, weaver, wellsinker, wheeler, wheelmaker, wheelwright, whitelimer, whitesmith, wigmaker, winder, wiredrawer, wireworker, woodcutter, woodturner, woolcomber, woollen weaver, wright.

D Agriculture excluding labourers

Crofter, farmer, grazier, husbandman, yeoman.

E Maritime, naval and military

Boatman, captain, fisherman, keelman, mariner, officer, pilot, sailor, shipmaster, soldier, staithman, waterman, wherryman.

F Labourers, servants and paupers

Almswoman, carter, cartman, chairman, coachman, cook, cripple, gardener, housekeeper, infirm, invalid, labourer, laundress, mole catcher, nurse, pauper, pensioner, ploughman, poor, poorhouse, porter, rag gatherer, rat catcher, reaper, servant, shepherd, steward, usher, waggoner, waggonman, washerwoman, workhouse.