SECESSION OR SUCCESSION?
CONGREGATIONS FORMED IN THE 20th CENTURY
BY DEPARTURE FROM THE METHODIST CHURCH

David M Young, MA, MPhil
Had I seen reason to abandon the doctrines to which I was pledged I would have deemed it just and right that I withdrew from the Church which laid the beliefs upon me.

- Dinsdale Young,
  President (1914) of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference

I concluded that the Wesleyan ministry is no longer open to an old-fashioned Methodist believer like myself: and, trusting in all things to God, very sadly I resigned my position.

- Harold Morton (1870-1936), Wesleyan minister
CONTENTS

1933-1999

Introductory

This article: genesis and method

Numerical background

Theological background in united Methodism

CONGREGATIONS FORMED BY SECEDING METHODISTS, 1960s to 1990s

MOTIFS AND PATTERNS

GAIN AND LOSS

Is secession right or wrong?

SUGGESTED BOOKS AND WEBSITES
1933-1999

Introductory

The 1886 Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review has an article under the title Primitive Methodism as it was, as it is, and as it should be on pages 692-702, by John Stephenson:

But it is to our doctrinal teaching that the attention of the Connexion will have to be chiefly directed. There never was a time in the history of the Connexion when our danger was so great in this direction as at present. ... As we are one organic body, we cannot but see how important it is that ... the same doctrines should be held by all. If not, we are simply a rope of sand. ... For a man, in our opinion, can no more be an honest man who teaches doctrines contrary to the doctrines of the Connexion while in it, than a soldier or any other man, who takes an oath of allegiance to her Majesty, and forthwith devotes himself to the interests of her enemy. To plead ‘sincerity’, or ‘liberty’, and ‘a man must preach what he believes,’ is no justification of such conduct.

Now our doctrines are so clearly and definitely set forth in our standards ... and the statement of them is in language so clear, full, and guarded, that to change or modify the doctrine is to destroy it.

Stevenson goes on to draw his readers’ attention to some of the mental and emotional distress that new “Liberal” theological teachings were
already creating, and to the painful decision to which they were driving some sensitive believers:

The sorrow often manifested by some of our most thoughtful members and officials on hearing certain doctrines taught from our pulpits is most distressing to witness. ... And yet to a man to whom truth is sacred, and who holds the doctrines of the Connexion as God’s truth, there appears no other course open to him as a conscientious man than to leave us.

Liberal theology was already contributing to the Connexion’s numerical decline. Most of this study focuses on a period eighty and more years later than the warning expressed by John Stephenson, for in the period beginning in the 1960s a range of new Christian congregations was formed by people leaving Methodism, and in nearly every case the cause was the Liberal theology which was still infecting Methodism, and sadly, still is.

At the point where I took the photograph on the cover, the track on the left has just diverged from the road on the right: the left-hand track is signposted Holy Spirit (referring to a church towards which it leads); the road on the right leads downhill towards a town. It seems to me to be capable of interpretation as a parable or illustration. A direction forks; people head in different directions. The stories in the following pages are of people who, for reasons of conscience, took the decision to secede from the Methodist Church of Great Britain that was formed in 1932 by the joining of the Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist denominations. The stories are told as they were related to me by mainly email and telephone.

Here is a photograph of the Church of the Holy Spirit towards which the track veering left in the cover photograph leads. It stands atop a
hill near the village of Fotinos, Crete: my wife and I walked up to it in 2016.

This article: genesis and method

A man whom Lewis Browning¹ names among the “good people among the Wesleyans” was William Miles, of Quick Building, one of the oldest dwellings in Blaenavon, Monmouthshire, allocated for colliers and miners. William and his wife Margaret were living there in 1832, and were still there in 1871. They were my greatgrandfather’s parents; how Methodism came into their lives has passed out of knowledge. My grandfather, Samuel, became a

¹ A Brief History of Blaenavon Monmouthshire ((1906, Abergavenny: Gwen Brothers) page 64
Wesleyan class leader following his conversion, which probably took place during the Methodist revival in the 1870s in Quebec, County Durham, where the family was living. Back in Blaenavon, his son Philip became a local preacher in 1903, some three years after his own conversion from a life of drunkenness. In 1923 the Rev. Norman Dunning of Cliff College preached at the Wesleyan church in Blaenavon, and under his ministry my father Dinsdale Thomas professed faith, and in time he also became a local preacher. I myself came to faith through the work of the Methodist Church in Basingstoke in about 1963, and began preaching in the Circuit in January 1965. Thus my Methodist roots go back a long way, and in some words of William Sangster (1938:39): “Who would not love the Church which nourished him in holy things?”

It is debatable whether the churches which form the focus of this study should be called secessions or successions. Certainly they left the Methodist Church as it had become in the twentieth century; but in many or all cases they came into being not because the seceders wished to leave Methodism, but because they felt that Methodism itself had changed: one might say, because they felt that Methodism had left them. This book focuses on congregations which opted out of the Methodist Church in the twentieth century. It does not cover earlier secessions, nor secessions from bodies other than those who joined to form the new “Methodist Church” in 1932; any other secessions, such as from the Wesleyan Reform Union, are not included.

Wherever possible, interviews were held face to face or by telephone with people still involved in the churches that were formed, and where possible, with people who were involved in the events of the secession at the time. Other information has come from

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correspondents by email or letter, and some printed histories, published and unpublished, have kindly been sent to me. The interviews were typed up and submitted to the interviewees for any corrections, deletions or additions they requested or suggested.

**Numerical background**

There was a brief and perhaps final increase in Methodist membership between 1921 and 1938, during which the Primitives increased from 198,806 to 202,591, and the Wesleyans from 414,928 to 445,584. For the Primitives, this represents an increase of 1.9%, and for the Wesleyans of 7.4%. At the same time, the population of the United Kingdom increased by 4.2%. Thus, the Wesleyans were making an overall increase, whilst the Primitives’ small increase actually masked a continuing decline in comparison with the growth of the population: they were still losing ground.

According to [http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures](http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures) the Methodist churches which united in 1932 brought 838,734 members into the new Church. By the time statistics were gathered in 1935, the membership had declined to 825,598, that is, had decreased by 13,136. Meanwhile, the population had increased from 46,330,000 to 46,879,000, about 1.16%. If the Methodist Church had simply kept pace with the population, it should, by 1935, have increased in membership by about 9730, that is, adding together the decrease and what should have been the 1.16% gain, a shortfall of almost 23,000 members. The statistics record 36,101 deaths among members. Two other categories of loss are “ceased to be members” (19,397 per year, a total of 58,191), and “to other churches” (8717 over the three years to 1935).

This has been expressed more eloquently, and more fluently, by William Sangster in *Methodism can be born again*: “Recent statistics

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3 London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938, page 14
are as dismally impressive as past statistics were startling in their triumphs. ... Concerning ourselves in Great Britain alone, we notice that in 1932 ... it was calculated that as many as 30,000 full members were lost, a dreadful reduction of nearly 600 a week.” By the end of the twentieth century, British membership had dropped to 353,330, a loss of about 58% of its 1932 figure; and whilst the population has continued to grow, Methodism’s percentage of the population has continued noticeably to shrink. Some of that shrinking has been brought about by Christians seceding from the Methodist Church and establishing new congregations.

Theological background in united Methodism

There were attempts to maintain and renew evangelical belief within the new Church. Two examples may be given. In an email dated 17.2.17, Rev. Dr Martin Wellings, superintendent of the Oxford Circuit, commented as follows in answer to questions I posed:

Q: Who sought to organise a conservative group in the 1930s?

A: Specifically John H. J. Barker, who tried unsuccessfully to organise a conservative group in the 1930s and found the people were reluctant to sign up.

Q: Can the enduring fundamentalism at grassroots level be established from matters beyond reminiscence and anecdote?

A: Mostly reminiscence. But this wasn’t necessarily militant, or even aware of doctrinal issues: people just took a traditional/conservative approach to the Bible and
to the message of salvation for granted, as normal Christianity.

In an email dated 20.2.2016, Prof. David Bebbington commented, “My sense is that Sangster was leading an Evangelical resurgence in the 1950s, institutionally through the Home Mission Department, but that the rise of radical theology, especially under the auspices of John Vincent, induced the Department under George Sails to insist on even-handedness between ‘traditional’ and radical approaches to mission. The authorities tried to expunge distinctly Evangelical circuits by stationing arrangements.”

My book *Primitive Methodism 1919 to 2019* (Stoke on Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2019) has forty pages on the survival of evangelical ethos and belief within the post-1932 Methodist Church, drawing examples from Hampshire, Derbyshire, Cornwall, Shropshire, Lancashire, the Isle of Man, North Wales, and the Methodist Revival Fellowship, especially in the period leading up to about 1970. It is not necessary to repeat that information here, save to observe that this ‘folk fundamentalism’, that is, a conservative view of the Gospel and a desire to see outsiders converted through coming to faith in it, was both widespread and persistent.

Before we turn to study seceding congregations, it is as well to take note of a letter from the Rev. Bob Kitching dated 7th February 2017, in which he explains that it was generally members of the congregation (“people”) rather than ministers who seceded, though there were also some ministers:

As regards secessions, generally in my experience it was people who seceded. Rev. Ron Taylor, Rev. Barrie Walton and Rev. Frank Ockenden left and joined the Free Methodists. Also Rev. the Hon. Roland Lamb became an F.I.E.C. minister. There were in the 1970s and 80s several
ministers who greatly influenced by the Charismatic movement left to head up “house churches” and independent churches. There was also great unease about the “liberal theology” which was the norm in the Local Preachers’ training courses and at New Hey near Rochdale the minister left the Methodist church, Rev Victor Budgen and many of his congregation followed.

A much fuller analysis of theological change within Methodism in the period 1919 to 2019 is undertaken in my book *Change and Decay* (see bibliography at the end of this article).

With these background factors in our minds, we can now turn in the next chapter to the seceding congregations themselves, looking at their stories county by county, area by area.
CONGREGATIONS FORMED BY SECEDING METHODISTS

In the letter from Bob Kitching quoted towards the end of the previous chapter he adds: “In the 1960s and 70s the High Church, liturgical trends towards the C of E concerned many, as did the Liberal theology that was often seen amongst the hierarchy.” In my own researches I have been told only of secessions prompted by alarm over liberal theology, though no doubt Mr Kitching is correct in stating that concern about High Church trends was also widespread.

Cornwall

We turn first to some secessions that occurred in Cornwall.

Camelford

I was told by a minister’s wife that there was secession in 1970s in Camelford over human sexuality, no doubt the matter of homosexuality which continues to rend the denomination to this day, half a century later. However, I have been unable to make contact with the congregation that was formed, and must leave this to other researchers who perhaps might have access to more local contacts and information.

Morval

In Morval, near Looe, there was a well-known secession, the story of which has been published in a 100-page paperback book entitled Not the perfect Church by Sue Weller (Liskeard: Day Three Editions, 2009, ISBN 978-1-904459-39-2). The new church took the name
Dear David,

Our former pastor, John Gillespie, came over from the USA as a Methodist and worked in the Looe circuit in SE Cornwall. They saw considerable growth from 1987 to 1993/4. At the time John felt that the Methodist conference had moved too far away from a belief in the Bible as the authoritative Word of God. It was widely publicised in the press at the time. They focused particularly on the issue of John’s biblical stance on same sex relationships. He and his family suffered much persecution. He and his assistant pastor started a new, independent church in 1994. It grew quickly. John has now moved on, but Grace Community Church continues as a strong independent evangelical church, affiliated to the FIEC. There are 3 congregations, in Morval near Looe, Torpoint and Bodmin.

I don’t know what branch of Methodism the church came out of.

Hope this helps.

Ian Thompson (Church Administrator)
Dear David,

some stayed with the Methodists, but a significant number came with John and started the new church.

Ian Thompson, (Grace Community Church)

9th February 2017 (email)

Dear David,

Our 3 churches are one charity, registered with FIEC as one church meeting in 3 different locations. We have one constitution. Our members are members both of the local fellowship where they meet each Sunday and of the wider family of churches. Each local body has their own pastor, but the pastor at Bodmin is the Senior Pastor, and has an overseeing role for all three local churches. All the employed staff (pastors and other workers) meet together once a week.

In answer to your other questions:

- The pastors are all of a reformed persuasion. Whilst inevitably this does affect aspects of their ministry, it is not something that is pushed from the pulpit. I’m sure there will be some of an Arminian persuasion who are happy to be a part of us without sensing any tension.
• We are not cessationist. We do not at the moment have gifts of the Spirit operating in our morning services, but are looking to develop this as God leads us. We will do this with care and sensitivity, as our congregations are ready to receive it. We do not encourage the open use of speaking in tongues in our main meetings.

• John Gillespie was (and remains) reformed. Not sure whether he always was or whether his views developed over time while in England. He came from the States as a Methodist. Like the present pastors, he made his views clear but was accepting of others who held a different position. John was the influence that shaped our core values in the transition from Methodism.

• On leaving Methodism we consciously opted for independency, but still felt the need to be affiliated to a larger body. The FIEC provided just what we needed, with a balance of a supportive framework whilst being able to retain independency. To my knowledge there was never any attempt to rejoin any branch of Methodism.

Kind regards,

Ian

Sue Weller, in her book *Not the perfect Church*, allows minister John Gillespie to recount much of the story in his own words. Chapter 4 begins with these words of his:

I never set out to contest Methodism. I felt that I was a faithful Wesleyan Methodist. I believed passionately in the
church’s doctrinal standards, and I was committed to the vision of John Wesley. ... Throughout my Christian life I have been convinced that the Bible is God’s Word ... and I believe that theology should be precise.

In 1993 (he tells us) the Methodist Church passed a resolution stating that, “We recognise, affirm and celebrate the participation and ministry of gays and lesbians in the church,” adding, “and I knew that I couldn’t agree with what was written. ... I believe the Conference was ... challenging the authority of the Bible.”

In April 1994 a denominational board in Exeter discharged Gillespie from the Methodist Church. Others chose to leave with him, including several long-standing local preachers. A prayer meeting was held to help decide what to do: a hundred people turned up.

Soon there was a regular congregation of 150, including children, and premises were sought and eventually purchased in Morval. In time it became necessary to seek planning permission to increase capacity from 250 to 500, but as permission was refused, churches were established in Torpoint and in Bodmin instead, and in 2002 an annual Bible week was begun, to which people from all three churches came.

**Scorrier**

We turn next to Scorrier, where the secession took place in July 1999 from the originally Wesleyan church. The seceders paid a full years assessment to the circuit in February 2000 so that they circuit would not be disadvantaged financially by their leaving: ‘year’ in Methodist parlance means September to August. There were a variety of reasons. One member with whom I spoke said, “I suggest we seceded because most of our fellowship were not members of the Methodist
Church and we wanted to ‘move on’. The remaining members did not have anything that they were particularly unhappy with in the local Circuit, but wanted to recognise that other people in the fellowship did not ‘belong’ with that structure. Our Methodist Minister at the time helped the process and because a Trust, separate to the Methodist Church, owned the premises it was relatively easy to secede.”

Sithney

The story at Sithney is rather different, and the following information was supplied by telephone, again in February 2017, by Amy Pascoe.

Michael Pascoe (Amy’s husband) died in 1993. Amy’s family had been at Fishermen’s Chapel, Porthleven, for generations; Michael’s had been at Sithney for generations. The Methodists closed nine churches in the area in about 1989. “We got praying” – prayer meetings were held in a home – “and sought the Lord as to what to do.” We were invited to hear Trevor Dearing in London on a special weekend. A prophecy was given that the Lord had something special and imminent to set in motion, and Michael responded.

Amy and Michael were both attending Sithney Methodist in the morning, and in the evening. “We tried to buy the chapel at Sithney and the one at Nancegollan, but were not allowed to.” This refusal to sell a closing chapel to its worshippers is a repeated motif in the stories of secessions of the period.

Amy was going to a fellowship in Hayle, and a preacher from Plymouth came and said that a lady was present who was praying about which church to join because the Methodist is closing. “Worship where you live,” said the preacher. A friend suggested we convert a farm building, and first we converted an obsolete chicken house, where we saw mighty healings and people set free from demons. That was in 1989. Some Methodists went to Breague
Methodist chapel, and only one family joined us. Michael died in 1993. The services were packed out, not everyone could get in, people have even stood outside listening with umbrellas because of the rain. God told us to convert a barn, and we are now the Barn Fellowship, and it is really strong today, and includes old people from Methodism. People get converted and healed.

_Free Methodism_

Tidball’s 2013 article on Free Methodism is quoted in this study at greater length concerning Lancashire. He also records that:

Six of these churches are in Cornwall, the traditional heartland of Methodism, to which Free Methodism was committed at an early stage through the efforts of Ken Leech, who planted a church in Helston.

The last few years, however, have seen a new commitment to church planting and significant growth. The situation in Cornwall is a lively one and there the FMC has grown from one to five churches in the five years down to 2011.

_Devon_

_Liverton_

Raistrick’s biography of preacher George W. North (1913-2003) touches on Methodism in a number of places, but sadly the book is rather thin on dates. However, we do read that in 1926, that is, when George was 12 or 13, the family moved from East London to a house
rented from Old Soar Farm, Plaxtol, Kent, and “began their life in Plaxtol by attending a Methodist Church” (p. 33).

George’s parents “could find no satisfaction there, so they left the church and sought elsewhere. The last straw had been hearing the superintendent speak on ‘Why I am a modernist.’” Their departure as an individual family antedates the departures later in the century which are the principal focus of this study – but read on: there is more to come!

There was a chapel nearby in Dunks Green owned by Congregationalists but not operating as a denominational church. It was there that George North met his future wife, Dorothy (Dolly), whose family attended the chapel.

The chapel had a warm, thriving evangelical congregation with an evangelistic outlook, and in fact, when I preached at Plaxtol and at
Dunks Green in 1972-4 and perhaps later too at Dunks Green (my 1975 and 1977 diaries are missing), Dunks Green was, in my experience, a friendly and welcoming church with a warm evangelical ministry all those years later. It would seem that a deep work had gone on there whose effect was felt decades later.

In the course of time George began preaching, and was called to a number of pastorates, which in time led him into contact with the church that met at Rora House, Liverton, Devon. Raistrick tells us something of the story of that church on her pages 118-20.

A couple called Malcolm and Christine Ford were farmers at Ashburton and were attending Ilsington Methodist church, and were holding a fortnightly Bible study at their farmhouse “for those seeking Scriptural Holiness”, at which the numbers attending had grown rapidly. In time, the Fords and some of the young people they had
been leading in the Christian Endeavour meetings of the Methodist church came into the experience which they understood as the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. “This was not well received by the church ... and eventually a small group of them reluctantly resigned their church membership.” Other young people joined, “and the beginnings of a Fellowship began to form.”

As the farm was in financial difficulties, the Fords took the decision to put the farm on the market, and in 1968 they moved to the large Rora House, Liverton, which they also fitted out as a church and a conference centre. George North accompanied them to view the house before they purchased it. The story continues in the Rora House website www.rorahouse.org.uk:

The first meeting hall at Rora was registered as a public place of worship. We bought it for a token price of £5 in 1967, a year before we moved to Rora. ... It used to be the Red Cross hut at Teignmouth, and when the new road was to be put through, it had to be moved. We looked at it, decided it was right for our needs (at the time we thought it was to be erected at the farm for youth work), and paid for it. ... We didn't actually move it until we had moved to Rora. It was a sectional building and we moved it, and reerected it ourselves.

The first conference was held in 1970, and in 1986 a Summer Conference attracting people from congregations in various parts of the country had to be held there, as those attending had grown too numerous to continue holding the conferences at Cliff College, as previously.

A distinctive feature of this ‘stream’ of the Charismatic movement was George North’s teaching that regeneration and the baptism in the Spirit are the same event, with a special emphasis on the need for
holiness. He also introduced considerable use of Wesley’s hymns, publishing a hymnbook entitled *Hymns of eternal Truth*. Two of the blessings I enjoyed and have continued to search for wherever I go is preaching so nourishing that an hour is not a moment too long, and the ardent congregational singing of Wesley hymns. The memory of these blessings abides with me to this day, and it was not long ago that a member of one Methodist congregation said to me after I preached there, that he thought it was the first time he had been at a service where all five hymns were by Charles Wesley.

In time the churches associated with pastor North gained the affectionate and humorous nickname ‘the North Circular’. What we see in this story is a combination of two motives which prompted people to leave the Methodist Church: liberal theology, and embracing one or more aspects of Pentecostal teaching or practice. These two motifs will be encountered time and again in these pages.
Yorkshire

Many miles away in Yorkshire other people were coming to the decision that it was time to leave the Methodist Church. Stephen Emmott, formerly pastor of one of the secessions, sent me an email on 8.2.17 stating:

Regarding the churches / groups who seceded in the 1960s – 90s, ... For some it was a particular issue which drove them out e.g. the new handbook for training local preachers introduced in the early ‘70’s I think. But for most there was no particular crisis point, just the sad departure of the gospel and the frustration of an unconverted and sometimes militant liberal / heretical ministry (i.e. Ministers)

Two frequent motifs appear here: the new training book for local preachers, and liberal theology more generally.

Dewsbury

We look first at Dewsbury Evangelical Church, with information supplied in February 2017 by email from Colin Mountain. Colin was converted in the mid 1960s and a Bible study group and a coffee bar began in the Methodist circuit. In October 1972 four people left and formed Dewsbury Evangelical Church, because by then they felt that the Gospel was not being preached, ministers held Liberal theology and did not show evidence of personal conversion, and the main aim was to raise money. There were a few converted local preachers, but those who left were very radical and fervent.
The group listened to taped sermons in the mornings, including Alan Stibbs and perhaps Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and invited an occasional preacher. They hired premises in Dewsbury. Erroll Hulse became a friend of the new church, and there was help from Dick Eccles of Hebden Bridge Strict Baptist church, and from Leeds Reformed Baptist church. During the year before they left Methodism they studied church government, considering elders and deacons. Although there were only four of them, they obtained financial support, but not enough to support a pastor. However, they asked about possibly suitable men leaving Barry Bible School, and as a result invited 23-year-old Graham Heaps, who had been attending the Baptist church in Aberystwyth which was pastored by Geoff Thomas. He preached in the morning on Isaiah 53 and in the evening on Romans 14, and they felt he was a good preacher. He was called as pastor for a six-month trial period in September 1973, and got a part-time job, plus financial support from Aberystwyth and the Reformed Bible Preaching Trust. At that stage they were meeting in hired premises, and in a home midweek, which they did for ten years. Then they bought their own building, and in 2014 moved to their present premises. In 2017 they had about 90 members, and a congregation of about 110.

**Ingleton**

At Burton in Lonsdale, in North Yorkshire - the next village to Ingleton – in the early 1970s, there was a small group who, having seceded from Methodism, began a Free Methodist work in a farmhouse. John Mollitt preached there on several occasions before the group became part of Lancaster Free Methodists, when it commenced in the late 1970s/early 1980s.
When the Methodists seceded they met in a hired hall. The congregation was drawn from various Methodist chapels, but no entire congregation seceded.

Something of John Mollitt’s own story can be gleaned from his book *How shall they hear?* (pages 21-33). He was converted at a young people’s meeting in Carnforth in 1969, and “within weeks of my conversion I felt an inward compulsion to ‘preach the Word’.” So, as is the system in Methodism, he went ‘on note’ as a local preacher, then ‘on trial’, and, and became an accredited local preacher in December 1969. In the early 1970s he began to preach in the open air as well, for “in the 1970s people would still stop at an open air meeting. I can think of summer evenings on Morecambe promenade when many would sit throughout such a service.” He became pastor at Ingleton in 1979.

Eventually the congregation bought a building. I also asked John Mollitt himself about the history, having come to know him by speaking at the church and staying the night in his home afterwards. Here is what I learnt from him:

About a dozen people from Ingleton Methodist, and about half a dozen other Methodists, joined in the secession which took place in 1972. The main reason was Methodism’s departure from the Bible, a second reason was the desire of the Methodist Church to unite with the Church of England. The church has become Reformed.

The small number that had previously been dissatisfied attended the Pennine Evangelical Fellowship which we began, and which gave us a taste Reformed doctrine, before we came out. On the other hand, the Free Methodists tended to be Charismatic.
At first the new group met in a home, then in the village institute, then purchased a car showroom and fitted it out for a chapel. The church opted for independency, and a small number of members almost became heresy-hunters in their emphasis on doctrinal purity, more than on Christian fellowship; this was a separatist over-reaction to Methodism.

John Mollitt has various papers, articles &c on secession and the story of Ingleton Evangelical Church, which would doubtless supply further information for readers who wish to pursue the history further.

We have noted certain motifs: Methodist reluctance to sell closed chapels to its former worshippers; concern over a new training book for local preachers; liberal theology; ecumenism. We have now encountered another: the tendency for seceders to adopt Calvinist theology, independency, and believers’ baptism.

**Carlton Miniott**

We turn next to Carlton Miniott, with information supplied by telephone by Rev. Malcolm Peters.

There were three families, including two from Topcliff, near Thirsk, in the Boroughbridge Circuit. Mr Peters was in that Circuit from 1963 as a probationary minister, was ordained in 1965 and went to Pateley Bridge. By 1967 he was very uneasy in Methodism.

The circuit superintendent (John Newton) in the Thirsk Circuit was an Evangelical and was looking for a colleague, and at his invitation Mr Peters moved to the Thirsk Circuit, but it turned out that, as Peters perceived it, Newton was making many compromises. So he and his wife began the process of seceding, staying till August 1968, the end
of the Methodist year. Then they left, and went to stay with Willis Metcalf.

Three men came to see him, two from Topcliffe and one from Northallerton. They were on the point of seceding from Methodism, wanted to start a new work, and asked me to join them. On the first Sunday of 1969 they together began meeting in a farmhouse.

There was a chapel at Carlton Miniott about 2½ miles out of Thirsk, which had been one of Mr Peters’ charges when he was in that circuit. It closed down, but because its shape was unsuitable for conversion to a dwelling, no planning permission for that could be obtained, and it went up for auction. The seceders and one other person, who wished to use it as a store, were the only bidders, and the group were able to buy it for £2500 in 1975. The Methodist Church did not wish to let them have it, but on the other hand did not want to be saddled with a redundant chapel.

**Nidderdale**

Mr Peters also gave me information about Nidderdale Evangelical Church at Brow Chapel, Thornthwaite.

Frank and Hannah Boddy, Methodists of Wilsill and the Dobson family, members at Thornthwaite, seceded.

At first the Dobsons continued worshipping at Thornthwaite Methodist, though resigned their membership as a protest. The chapel closed, and the Dobsons and others met in the village hall.

Eventually the chapel was put on the market, with planning permission for conversion to a dwelling. It was a valuable site and sold for a lot of money, presumably to a builder. As noted elsewhere in this study, the Methodist Church had included a clause that it must
not be used for religious purposes, and this would have made it impossible, whatever the price, for the worshippers to buy it.

However, for whatever reason, the house-conversion did not go ahead, and the new owner put it back on the market – without the clause forbidding religious use. It went to auction, and the Dobsons bought it. Worship continues there.
I then had two telephone conversations, one with Stephen Gurney and the other with John Gurney. A somewhat muddled story emerged – which is said to be typical of accounts given by eyewitnesses and participants in events. Here it is. Before the secession from Methodism there were strong links with the Faith Mission and with Cliff College. The church had been Wesleyan, and was in the Pateley Bridge Circuit, which included Wilsill as well as Thornthwaite. The secession was made up of John and Alex Gurney and others, all from Methodism, and took place because of theology, especially the authority of the Bible. By February 2017, when I spoke with both the Gurneys, the church was moving gradually in a Reformed position, and was no longer paedobaptist. There was no pastor till 2016, and ministry was given by local men, including men of Reformed persuasion. There was nothing nearby that was both Evangelical and Methodist for the new congregation to join.

The secession was a group of Methodists belonging to Brow chapel. It started in the mid 1960s or 1974\(^4\). In 1982 the chapel was sold at auction for the new church; eight years previously the Methodists had sold it, and the seceders met in the village hall in Thornthwaite. The circuit steward had been one of the prime movers in the secession, being especially concerned about teaching concerning the way of salvation.

The new congregation ran Kettlesing Methodist chapel for a while, whilst it was owned by the Connexion, but the seceders were allowed to use it, and used Thornthwaite chapel at the same time. The Connexion sold Brow chapel for a lot of money, and the Sunday School and youth club connected with the seceders met at the village hall at Kettlesing for about 12 years.

\(^4\) I suspect the secession occurred probably in the 1960s; 1974 is the date the chapel was closed; and it was sold in 1982.
Clapham

Clapham is another village in Yorkshire with an Evangelical congregation set up by seceders from Methodism. Again, Malcolm Peters gave the first information I record concerning it. He related to me (by telephone) that almost a whole church seceded from Methodism, but they were unable to buy their chapel, which was ‘out in the wilds’ at Keasden in an area of farms, not in a village. They acquired a better site in the village and built a new chapel called Bethel, in nearby Clapham.

I then spoke with Jonathan Townley, one of the seceders, and learnt that they were all from Keasden Methodist Church. They were about ten families, whilst three families stayed in Methodism. The seceders
left in about 1971, because of the Connexion’s departure from biblical standard. Today Bethel is not Charismatic or Calvinistic, and wishes to preserve old-time Methodism. It is totally independent, not being affiliated to the FIEC or any similar body. Jonathan’s father, Ernest Townley, was a leading light. The chapel at Keasden is now closed. The seceders tried to buy it, but the Methodist Church refused. They joined Rural Ministries, but turned down the pastors Rural Ministries suggested, as the congregation wanted a minister who would preach Sunday as the sabbath, and was a teetotaller.
In telephone conversation with Rev. Malcolm Peters I learnt that the Rev Peter Brumby was minister at Sleights Methodist Church, near Whitby. He seceded from Methodism in 1971, and a number of people left with him including from other churches in the circuit and from other denominations. He went away for six months to allow the situation to settle down. Bill Leach came to the village of Russup, and called Brumby back. The work grew, and was moved to a school in Whitby, then to a property which they bought in Whitby.

Page 13 of *The Banner of Truth* #485 February 2004 (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh) carried an obituary of Peter Brumby. He was born in Barnard Castle in 1940, studied at the Bible Training Institute in Glasgow, and then at Wesley College, Leeds. He was stationed in the Whitby Circuit in 1968, where there were many conversions “and a deepening commitment in the preacher to Reformed beliefs.” In 1973 a number, including new converts, seceded and formed Whitby Evangelical Church. Brumby was called as their pastor, and accepted the call, in 1974. He exchanged this ministry in 1990 for the “North of England Ministry” which was “born out of his long-felt burden for unevangelized areas, especially in the Dales and Fells of Yorkshire and Durham” and “a principle aim was to strengthen and encourage small groups of Christian in isolated causes.”

Once more we perceive the double motif of a move to Calvinism in belief and to independency in church order.

_South Craven_

Also in telephone conversation with Rev. Malcolm Peters I learnt that quite a number of people from Eastburn Methodist (but not the entire society) seceded and met in the home of Stephen Emmott, a former Methodist. In time they built a chapel just outside Skipton at Cross
Hills, and called their church South Craven Evangelical Church, after the whole area.

I also communicated with Stephen Emmott himself, who explained further. Three married couples and six children formed the secession. The chapel where they had been worshipping had been Primitive, and was the only Methodist chapel in the village of Eastburn. The secession happened in 1981, and there was nowhere else nearby for them to go because of Liberal theology. The ‘final straw’ for them, which brought the secession, was when the minister said it is not necessary to believe in the virgin birth.

This congregation too opted for independency and has become Reformed.

**Milnrow**

Stephen Emmott also told me about Milnrow. Rev Victor Budgen was the minister. The new book for training local preachers was deemed heretical, he wished to oppose it, and spoke against it at Conference. The vast majority laughed at him, and he and a large number of other people left Methodism and formed Milnrow Evangelical Church, in the early or mid 1970s.

When I telephoned in 2017 the pastor was David Harding, who supplied further details. The book *Doing Theology* for local preachers was the ‘final straw’ here too. The story is that the superintendent minister held a business meeting, and asked those who were Evangelical to raise their hands. When they did so, he told them there was no place for them in Methodism. Methodists from different chapels, led by Victor Budgen, seceded. They met in a house, and wanted Victor as their pastor. Then they met in a local hall and were called the “Huttites” as a derisory name. Victor held Calvinist views, and the congregation adopted believers’ baptism and became
Reformed. Known also therefore as “the Frozen Chosen” they moved to a local authority community centre, and later bought an old manor house. They are now unreservedly Reformed Baptist. They had an original membership in the 20s; the secession took place in the 1960s.

Batley

I learnt about Batley Evangelical Church via a telephone interview with Geoff Wildsmith. He informed me that in the late 1960s the Methodist minister, Rev Frank Ockenden, at Birstall Methodist Church (originally Wesleyan) was Evangelical, but the vast majority did not want him any more. Later he was in Voice of Methodism. He introduced us (said Geoff Wildsmith) to the Bible, which was rare in those days. He started a Bible study, and those in the church who wanted to listened to recordings of David Pawson every week. “This was meat and drink to us.” When a new minister came he did not want a Bible study and he never attended it, but it continued nonetheless. “My wife and I decided to leave: her family and mine had both been there since the 1890s, or in a different church in the same Circuit.” Ten people left Birstall Methodist; the majority stayed. The last straw was probably what Local Preachers were expected to do. They were told the Bible was equal to tradition, and it could be said that the Bible was ‘dodgy’ or not applicable today.

“We left in 1970, and the first service as Batley Evangelical Church was held in 1972. During the intervening two years we met in home, and my wife and I went to the Free Methodist. Then we rented an old Baptist church which was owned by Mencap. In the late 1970s a Methodist chapel was closing and was for sale for £15,000 in a 50% Muslim area. We offered £5000 and got it! We stayed there till 2000, but by then the area was 100% Muslim, and children coming to our children’s work had to cross a main road. So we rented the community centre for Sunday afternoon services, and continued in the old
Methodist chapel in the mornings. Then we sold the chapel and met only in the community centre. We now [2017] rent what was originally the blind centre.”

Theologically we are now a group of Evangelical Christians from various backgrounds. We are not decidedly Reformed or Charismatic. We opted for independency as there was nowhere else to go.

**Pudsey**

According an email from to Colin Dews of Leeds, dated 8th February 2017, a factor in many 1960s secessions was ‘Pentecostalism’. In Pudsey part of the congregation left to follow their minister out. I have not been able to confirm this.

**Drighlington**

Barry Strudwick, of Moorside Church, Drighlington, supplied information concerning that church, which originally was commonly called “The Wesleyan Reformers” or “United Methodist Free Church”. The information was set out as follows:

Moorside United Methodist Free Church, now Moorside Church, Drighlington

**1981**

A Mission was held in the church, was led by a group of students from Cliff College, Derbyshire. This was well attended all week. The Pastor at the time was Peter Norton who met his wife Susan while both were students at Cliff College.
1984

A tent mission was held on the Moor from 7th to 22nd July and drew a great amount of interest in the village and surrounding churches. Roger Carswell was the Evangelist. It was organised by Pastor Stuart Howarth and a committee of able supporters.

1989

Another tent mission was held on the Moor from 3rd - 17th June, and again it drew a great amount of interest. David Shepherd and Roger Carswell were the evangelists on this occasion, with Prof. Verna Wright speaking during the middle weekend. This was also organised by Pastor Stuart Howarth and a new outreach committee drawn from various like minded churches. The tent that was used for this mission was much larger than in 1984.

1992

In this year we had yet another chance to use the large tent we had used in 1989 so a mission was held on the Moor

1992

After the blessings at the previous three tent missions it was felt that the existing size of the worship area at Moorside was becoming too small to accommodate the number of people attending. A day of prayer was called by Pastor Stuart Howarth to ask for guidance from the Lord how He wished us as a fellowship to proceed. It was felt very strongly by a large majority of those attending that we should look to the possibility of building a new extension to the rear side of the existing building.
Moorside has never been, or sought to be, a financially wealthy church. So the undertaking of such an enormously expensive project was very daunting. However, there was no doubt that this extension was what the Lord would have us do; therefore, reaching out in faith, we approached an architect to have plans drawn up, and subjected them to Leeds City Council for approval. After some amendments they were finally passed on the 15 June 1993

1994

It was realised that the structural work outside was too big an undertaking for the fellowship and that the groundwork and building work should be put out to tender. However, several members of the fellowship were very conscious that the Lord had brought them together in order to use the skills they possessed, meaning that the inside and finishing work in the building should be undertaken by ourselves. Barry Rhodes an experienced joiner and building project manager. John Saville a joiner and man manager. Ken Smith an electrical engineer. Peter Haley an engineer. Stuart Howarth our Pastor was a draughtsman. Each of these had many years of DIY experience, and they, along with many others of the fellowship, spent many happy and enjoyable hours completing the lovely building we now worship in today. The Lord provided funds from many sources without any actual fund raising in the church.

1996

The new Church was finally opened as Moorside Church, the official opening and dedication of the building being carried out on Saturday 19 October. Previous pastors who attended the service and took part were Mr Tom Furness,
Mr Barry Charters, Mr Peter Norton, along with the pastor at that time, Mr Stuart Howarth.

The new extension was designed to be a place of Worship and a multi-function room. Part of the Communion Rail from the old building was used to make a lectern for the new building and the original Table and chairs now take pride of place on the platform which covers the baptistry.

2006

A mission was held from 17th to 25th July using a large tent erected on the car park and a number of well known names were invited to give their testimonies at these events.

Another secession from Methodism of which I was told is Tinshill Free Church. There is a 7½ A4-page printed history of this church, dated 1987, entitled *Tracing Tinshill (a history of one local church)* by Margaret Williams, but although I possess a copy, sadly I have been asked not to quote from it. I also conducted a telephone interview with Glyn Williams, a relative of Margaret (father, husband, brother, son?), but again have been asked not to publish the story as he told it to me. I am therefore not at liberty to reveal more of what I have learnt.

*Lancashire*

*Heywood*

Concerning Heywood Evangelical Church, David Martin, the Methodist minister, led the people out in the mid-1960s and a new church was formed. “I believe the seceders came from Methodism, but they have all died, and the documents have all been lost”: this information was passed on by telephone by Peter Marson in February.
Capernwray

Something of the story of Capernwray Evangelical Church was discovered, also by means of a telephone interview in February 2017, from Alan Earl and a farmer, William Huddleston. “About 42 or 43 years ago” – that is, in the mid 1970s the congregation was at the Methodist church in Arkholme, Lancs., but a lot did not agree with the ecumenical movement and Liberal theology, and they looked elsewhere for a spiritual home. The church building at Capernwray was owned by Capernwray Hall Bible school and was vacant, and they were given permission to use it. Quite a few people from Arkholme Methodist left and went to the Capernwray church, but the Methodist at Arkholme also continued. We are still Methodist in doctrine. We opted deliberately for independency.

I have also been told that a number of ministers serving west of the Pennines seceded from the Methodist Church, joined the Free Methodists, and started new churches made up partly of individuals leaving the Methodist Church. However, as explained towards the close of this book, I have not included a study of individuals or congregations who opted to join the Free Methodists as this has been undertaken by Tidball, D. (2013) “Secession is an ugly thing”: the emergence and development of Free Methodism in late twentieth-century England (in Bebbington D. W. and Jones, D. C. Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism (Eds) (Oxford University Press). Tidball’s article is over 9000 words long, and a few brief extracts here should serve to draw attention to its most salient points concerning the theme of this present study:

The opposition to ecumenism was only the final straw in the estrangement the Methodist evangelicals in the north-west felt from mainstream Methodism. Major discontent focused on the circuit system, which meant that evangelical lay preachers or ministers could have their teaching
contradicted and undermined the following week, or even later in the same day, by a liberal preacher. It prevented the formation and nurture of an evangelical congregation and offended ‘folk fundamentalism’, especially that of lay Methodists. ... The Methodist Conference did nothing to allay their fears when, according to Adrian Hastings, it became at the time ‘more than ever committed to all progressive causes’ and when, according to Martin Wellings, it fractured its already fragile unity by embracing pluralism and giving an explicit place to those who advocated radical theology. ...

Barrie Walton, ... who had served in Methodist ministry for fourteen years, resigned in August 1971. He was the founding pastor of the Garstang, Great Eccleston and Crown Lane churches, and later the churches at Fulwood (1979) and Penwortham (1988) in Preston. Subsequently, in 1991, he became the superintendent of the FMC in the UK.

... the Methodist Conference wrote to the Free Methodists in North America demanding that they should send no more representatives to the UK. This the dissentients saw as a limitation of their right of free association and may have catapulted them into the arms of the Free Methodists even more quickly.

In March 1971 five churches had come out of Methodism to form three FM churches in Garstang, Catford and Great Eccleston. These were followed, the next month, by Morecambe, where Frank Mitchell had been
suspended from Methodist ministry and where lay preachers had been forbidden to preach in the circuit.

By 1983, these five churches, with their three ministers and 162 members, had become twelve churches. By 1998 there were eighteen ministers, thirteen congregations and 781 members. Six of these churches are in Cornwall, the traditional heartland of Methodism, to which Free Methodism was committed at an early stage through the efforts of Ken Leech, who planted a church in Helston.

The last few years, however, have seen a new commitment to church planting and significant growth. The situation in Cornwall is a lively one and there the FMC has grown from one to five churches in the five years down to 2011. Two new church plants have taken place in the north-west — in south-east Preston and Morecambe.

**Northamptonshire**

_Wappenham and Slapton_

An email of 18th January 2017 from Tim Martin, now retired by previous pastor at the joint church of Slapton and Wappenham, informed me that Slapton and Wappenham Methodist societies had always been stridently and fervently Evangelical in their stance and practice. Tensions were evident even before World War 2, when theologically liberal circuit supplies to the pulpit were “sent packing on no uncertain terms”! The members were well educated theologically, and more articulate, especially under the leadership of the last ‘Methodist’ pastor, Charles Lawrence, who ended his days as
a virtual ‘Strict Baptist’ after he left Wappenham, as devotee of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He was even acceptable in one or two Gospel Standard Baptist pulpits. A new church was reconstituted on the basis of the Westminster Confession through the services of Rev. Paul Cook.

Further information was obtained later in January 2017 by email from email from David Lawrence. Both Slapton and Wappenham were previous Wesleyan Methodist chapels. The two societies joined in 1976 as one church still using the two chapels. This was because the members of both were united in gospel truth and thus finding the growing drift and trends within the denomination to be opposed to that gospel.

Remarkably we had from 1961 a certain amount of independence with resulted in Mr Charles Lawrence, a Local Preacher, taking preaching charge of the two societies 1961-71. Lawrence was a personal friend of Martyn Lloyd-Jones and was much influenced by him. It was through this that the Calvinistic emphasis began to be taught. An attempt to leave the Methodist Church was made in the mid 1960s but failed as the church was not united on whether we should stay or leave. Calvinistic Methodism is still the theological position of the church now, but it must be stated that we did not leave over any Wesleyan or Calvinistic differences. We eventually came out in 1996. We had two ministers who, whilst not in total agreement with us, recognised that our desire to leave was on grounds of conscience firmly harnessed to biblical doctrine, not personalities. They became a great help to us in facilitating the process. The authority of scripture was the issue at stake, leading to those all-important questions: What is the gospel and what is the nature of saving faith?
Early in 2020, the following information was posted on Facebook by Christopher Willetts, whose church was able to secede from the Methodist Church and keep its building, as the building was not governed by the Model Deed and therefore the chapel did not belong to the Methodist Church. It was, he wrote, “the best thing we’ve ever done especially concerning the rapid decline of the Methodist Church.
and its voting concerning sex relationships. The denomination has lost its way.” There were eight churches in the Circuit when the church seceded. Only three remain, and “we would definitely [have] closed if we hadn’t become independent.” I believe it was in 1977 that we became independent, and we are Heath Street independent Methodist Church, Blackheath, West Midlands. We are not affiliated to the Independent Methodist connexion.

**The North-east**

*Greatham, Hebburn*

As related by Milburn (1977:47), in the 1960s two churches joined the Sunderland Circuit of the Independent Methodists when Methodist chapels were closed in Greatham in 1961 and in Hebburn in 1967. Each society wished to continue in existence and seceded from the Methodist Church in order to achieve this. The congregation at Greatham was able to purchase its building, and the congregation at Hebburn rented the Conservative Rooms until they acquired premises nearby.

**North Wales**

*Coedpoeth*

Finally we turn to the “Open Christian Fellowship”, Coedpoeth. Coedpoeth was in Wrexham Primitive Methodist circuit; the chapel was up a path between Smelt Road and Old Smelt Road. The Trust was formed in 1861. An amateur local historian of Wesleyan Methodism living in Minera (which adjoins Coedpoeth) believes that the Primitive chapel was transferred to the Roman Catholics in the 1950s before the Catholics built their new church on a different site.
in the village. The chapel is not listed in *Methodist Church Buildings, Statistical Returns for July 1st 1940* (published 1947), so if the amateur historian is correct, it must presumably either have passed into the hands of the Roman Catholics before the 1950s, or been put to some other use (or simply unused) before they acquired it. The Roman Catholic archivist believes the chapel was acquired by the Catholics in 1950. However, in March 2016 an elderly inhabitant of Coedpoeth related that Roman Catholic children from Liverpool, who had been evacuated to Coedpoeth in the Second World War, were taken to the chapel. This, coupled with its absence from the 1940 *Statistical Returns* of Methodist chapels, points to an earlier acquisition by the Roman Catholics than the 1950s. The mystery may never be fully solved, and the building has subsequently been demolished and the area redeveloped.

*Bob Thomas 8.2.2017:*

There were widows in Coedpoeth who did not drive, and two couples. I have not been able to ascertain whether they were former adherents or members of the now-demolished Primitive Methodist chapel, or were other Methodists living in the village. A “lay pastoral assistant”, Bob Thomas Jnr, visited such as were on the membership role but were attending nowhere and drew them together. Bob (Snr) and Agnes Thomas were attending Moss Brake Methodist chapel. From 1988 about 15 people (widows, couples, Bob and Agnes) began attending Methodist services in Rehoboth Welsh Wesleyan chapel, rented for English afternoon services, supported by the English circuit, and were put on the Plan in September 1988. Forty adults attended their first service under the new arrangements on 4th September 1988, and the second service (11th September) drew nine adults plus three more who came from around the circuit to support the new work. The service on 18th September drew 13 adults and 5 children. They took the name “Coedpoeth English Methodist Society”.
The Circuit wanted these people to become a class of Moss Brake society, but Moss Brake was not willing because it would increase their financial assessment. When the lay pastor (Bob Thomas Jnr) left the circuit, the people of the Rehoboth services grew more conscious of the role of the circuit based on Regent Street due to preachers being appointed and sent by the Circuit, and they started to send money to the circuit, but pastoral oversight was withdrawn in 2000, contrary to the wishes of the local congregation.

The superintendent minister told the fellowship that the circuit was “withdrawing pastoral oversight” at the end of 1999, to prevent the minister becoming overworked. About the same time the group lost the use of Rehoboth, and the congregation numbered about ten week by week, sometimes more, sometimes fewer. They approached various groups with a view to joining, including the Free Methodists, but nothing came of it. Nonetheless, the Circuit said they must change their name as they were now not part of the Methodist Church, and they took the name Open Christian Fellowship. By then not everyone attending was from a Methodist background. They were able to rent Salem chapel, Coedpoeth, for their services, but appeared for the final time on the Methodist Plan in the quarter beginning March 2000.

As I write (2020) they have dwindled to a handful of worshippers, who rent the Old Library in the village and are still led by Bob Thomas Snr, now in his 90s. Here is a congregation who did not so much secede from the Methodist Church, but found the Church withdrew from them. My suspicion is that if they had called a pastor, maybe a decade or so ago, the cause might have thriven, but it now seems sadly likely that it must soon fade out.
MOTIFS AND PATTERNS

The seceding congregations I discovered came from the streams of pre-1932 Methodism shown in the chart below, where WM = Wesleyan, UM = United Methodist, and PM = Primitive Methodist. Columns with or mean there were chapels in the town or circuit from more than one stream of Methodism and I have not discovered from which the seceders came.

METHODIST SECESSIONS AFTER 1932

FROM THE FOLLOWING ‘STREAMS’:

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NB At Carlton Miniott there was one man from Northallerton which may have been the ex-Primitive chapel there; there was also a WM chapel. The secessions at Dewsbury and Heywood may have been
from any or all of the former branches of Methodism. Hebburn had Wesleyan, United and Primitive chapels, and I have been unable to discover which one, or which combination, formed the transfer to the Independent Methodists; I have therefore not included it at all in the above chart.

It is immediately plain that the overwhelming majority of seceders had belonged to previously Wesleyan congregations, and it would be interesting to ponder why, not least because if adulthood began at age of twenty-one, to have been both adult and Wesleyan, or indeed United or Primitive Methodist, those taking part must have been born in or before 1911, meaning that all seceders, that is, in their mid 50s or a good deal older. It seems more likely that the majority, or at least a high percentage, of seceders had been born after Reunion, and if this is so, it implies that there were particular characteristics of Wesleyan societies which persisted into the 1960s and well beyond. Were they better educated theologically? wealthier, so as to be in a position better to fund the secession? from strata of society where people traditionally took more initiative? Whatever the characteristics of Wesleyan Methodism, it seems that they enabled the members to be more determined and more active in their loyalty to the evangelical message.

Little more need be added here, as other comments and observations have been offered in the preceding pages. In brief, we have noticed:

- All the churches that were set up in the last four decades of the 20th century by people who seceded from the Methodist Church opted for independency rather than a circuit or connexional system. This not does mean they opted for isolation, as there has been a considerable amount of fellowship between some of them and others of them. But each church is autonomous. This, I believe, is easily explained: they wished to avoid any external authority acquiring the right or power to determine their doctrines.
• I have not included a study of individuals or congregations who opted to join the Free Methodists. This has been undertaken by Tidball, D. (2013) “Secession is an ugly thing”: the emergence and development of Free Methodism in late twentieth-century England (in Bebbington D. W. and Jones, D. C. Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism (Eds) (Oxford University Press). Rev. Kevin Jones, formerly superintendent of the Gornal and Sedgley Circuit, wrote to me saying “the article... does not seem to cover the formation of Free Methodism in Lancashire, Northern Ireland or Cornwall. Almost all the current Free Methodist Churches came out of Methodism in the 1970s over the links with the Church of England and over the liberal drift in Theology. I believe they are an authentic inheritor of the Wesleyan movement. Almost all are Arminian Evangelical and Charismatic. It is of course part of a the larger Free Methodist Movement, that has repented publicly in the 1990s of its legalistic past and is generally today IN GROWTH.”

• None has joined the Primitive Methodist Continuing churches, and I am not aware of any who have affiliated to the Independent Methodists.

• Few have retained their Methodist belief. Most of the ones studied in the preceding pages have turned Calvinist, though they prefer the term ‘Reformed’. I have encountered no mention of a belief in entire sanctification among them – though that may not mean it is nowhere held. They have however preserved a belief in evangelism, outreach and the offer of the Gospel, not having become ‘High Calvinists’ in the manner of the Gospel Standard Baptists. Rather, they hold the more moderate Calvinism which developed from the time and teaching of Andrew Fuller.
- Some have moved in a different direction, into Pentecostal or Charismatic belief and ethos.

- The overwhelming cause of secession has been the adoption and promulgation by the denominational leadership of liberal theology, with the desire for union with the Church of England being another prompt.

It is interesting, and comparable, that the Methodists in Brittany, which enjoyed such blessing in the period 1885 to 1913, especially in the Bigouden region, have all joined a liberal denomination or become Pentecostal, except one which has become evangelical Baptist. There are no Methodist churches there today. For more details see the article on missionary William Jenkyn Jones, missionary to Brittany, in website www.primitivemethodism.com.

Secessions from Methodism seem to come in waves and to be prompted by different causes, including: concern over lay involvement or ministerial authority; the question of the rightness or otherwise of maintaining a paid ministry; perceived laxity regarding tobacco and alcohol. Individual members have on occasions left over doctrinal matters such as entire sanctification or eschatology, and others over a perceived wrongly applied use of church discipline. But it is worthy of repetition that the secessions formed in the second half of the twentieth century occurred overwhelmingly because of concern over departure from adherence to the authority of the Scriptures.
GAIN AND LOSS

Certain questions arise in my mind from all this:

What did they gain?
What did they lose?
Were they right or wrong?

Gain

Those who secede gain the opportunity to worship according to their conscience in a context where they feel the truth is upheld and honoured, and to which they feel able to invite their families and friends without the fear that those invited will imbibe poisonous or blasphemous doctrine to the peril of their souls. They are able to devote time, effort and money to establishing and strengthening something which they are happy to bequeath to the next generation.

Loss

In a letter from John Mollitt dated 16th February 2017 he says, “Secession did divide families. For example, two godly ladies were in membership with us at Ingleton, whilst their husbands – both lay preachers – continued in Methodism. Thankfully, in their cases, this did not cause marital disharmony but there were instances in families where ill feeling continued for many, many years.”

During my years as director of the Albanian Evangelical Mission (1986-2011) I took meetings on behalf of the Mission from Cornwall to Aberdeenshire, Sussex to Glasgow, North Wales to South Wales. I
received hospitality in many people’s homes and often heard something of their own stories. A memorable number had left the Methodist Church, not together with others as original members of a seceding congregation, but individually.

It is thus apparent that many people have felt constrained for conscience’ sake to sever themselves from the denomination in which they were brought up, or had their early Christian experience. William Sangster asked the question in his book *Methodism can be born again*: “Who would not love the Church which nourished him in holy things?” The experience has been described along these lines: “I do not feel that I left the Methodist Church, but rather that the Methodist Church left me” – that is, that the Church was led further and further from its beliefs and ethos, whilst the seceder wished to remain loyal to both. Such people may well retain a sense of loss and exile for years and decades, if not for the remainder of their lives. They may feel that they no longer really belong anywhere.

Allow me to draw towards a close with a few personal paragraphs. The photograph is of Park Street Methodist Church, Blaenavon. Here my greatgrandfather Samuel Young was a class leader, having moved to Blaenavon in the early 1860s. Here, after his son, my grandfather Philip Young, had been on trial as a local preacher for four quarters, reports were presented in June 1903 of his services, and after an examination conducted by the superintendent minister of the Circuit it was unanimously resolved to admit him to the full Plan. In 1904 he took fifty-one services. That was about the time the Welsh Revival broke out. Here is an extract from the *Monmouthshire Free Press* of 13th January, 1905:

Upper Wesley Chapel [presumably Park Street, which had seating for 500 people] was the scene of the afternoon service, and for some time prior to the time announced for starting (2.30), crowds of the inhabitants took their seats in
the large building. The chapel was, in fact, practically filled long before Mr Evans [the evangelist] arrived, but the congregation filled up the interval with various well-known hymns and choruses. Mr Evans lost no time in making his way to the pulpit... A man sitting under the gallery broke out into prayer pleading most earnestly for the conversion of all the sinners in Blaenavon - it was only with the greatest difficulty that he proceeded with the prayer, his emotion almost overcoming him on several occasions, but he concluded triumphantly in repeating the verse “Jesu, lover of my soul.” The congregation answered with “Whiter than snow”, but long before the conclusion of the hymn a man in the gallery was seen to rise and pray most earnestly. For a time it was impossible to hear his utterances, but gradually, as the singing died away, he was heard to say that he was one of the forty men who the previous day had left their stalls in the mine, and attended a prayer meeting in the bottom of the pit. “I have not been looking for Christ for years, and I did not find him until I attended that blessed prayer meeting in the mine.” ...

It was about 4 o'clock when Mr Evans appealed to those who had surrendered themselves to Christ to stand up. “O happy day” was started, and as verse followed verse the spirit of the meeting grew in fervour. Further appeals rang out. Another attempted to pray, but the strains of “For the Lion of Judah” swept all before them.

Dusk was setting in, but the meeting showed no sign of abatement. “Save my fellow workmen by me” came an agonised appeal from a voice in the gallery, and the
audience helped to add conviction by singing “Come, sinner, come,” followed by “I need Thee, Oh I need Thee.”

...Mr Evans again earnestly appealed to the congregation to offer their petitions for the evening service. The doxology then closed the afternoon proceedings, darkness settled upon the scene, and the people went to their homes with their spiritual appetites sufficiently whetted to give anticipation of a glorious night meeting.

Here too my father Dinsdale Thomas Young, born in Blaenavon in 1903, professed faith through the preaching at Park Street of Cliff College evangelist Rev. Norman Dunning, probably on Sunday, 25th March 1923.

*Park Street, Blaenavon*
The family moved to Basingstoke after my father lost his job as a coal-miner in the depression of the 1920s, and in Basingstoke they began worshipping at the central Wesleyan church, to which I also was taken. Through the ministry in that Circuit I came to faith in about 1963, and began preaching in 1965. That makes more than a century of Methodism if I look only into the direct male line. Such roots, such a sense of identity, go deep; severance from them is no light and easy matter.

*Oakley Methodist chapel, where I preached my first sermon, January 1965*

*Is secession right or wrong?*

We have seen that there are gains and losses which accrue from secession. But it may be asked – indeed, it may be more important to ask - Were the people we have studied in this book right or wrong not to unite with other Methodists, or to secede from them when they felt Methodism was no longer remaining loyal to its beliefs and practices?
I can only give a personal opinion on this, and my answer is: there was no right or wrong that applied in the same manner to each and every case.

These words from George Brabbs of the Primitive Methodist Continuing Church, Hull, were expressed after four Primitive Methodist congregations opted not to join the 1932 Methodist Church of Great Britain but to remain as a separate Primitive Methodist grouping. They seem appropriate to this question:

The Recorder quotes George Brabbs (brother of Robert), by then in his 50s, as saying, “Denominationalism is not entirely separatism. One umbrella Church is not the answer. We have had much help from serving ministers and supernumeraries and laymen in the Methodist Church, while our laymen go out into other churches. This is unity rather than union.”

So when, in 1966 at the National Assembly of Evangelicals organised by the Evangelical Alliance, Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones urged secession from doctrinally mixed denominations, and John Stott opposed his call, in the present author’s view, both were right, neither was wrong: for I have no difficulty in believing that God called some to leave, and some to remain. They will stand or fall by their Maker and Master. Meanwhile, each of us today must follow his or her own conscience.

**Summary**

Those who opted out of a proposed union, and those who seceded, gained the freedom to worship and serve according to their own
beliefs and thus with a personally clear conscience devoid of compromise, and gained the opportunity to pass those beliefs and that ethos on untarnished to succeeding generations and to hold their own chapel premises securely. Some, perhaps many, especially men and women who left individually rather than as members of a seceding congregation, suffered a prolonged and maybe lifelong sense of exile outside their personal religious and cultural background and possibly from that of their ancestors.

Those who remained retained the opportunity to pass on the faith to a new generation of Methodists, and, if it should please the Lord to call the churches back to their beliefs and their evangelical ardour, to play a part in that restoring work.

Much has been written about the rightness of staying ‘in it to win it’, and conversely about the rightness of coming out and forming a pure Gospel witness in each locality, to which people may be invited without the fear that they may be infected with compromised doctrine or ethics. It is not intended here to answer these questions – only to acknowledge them, and to point readers to the need to consider them seriously and prayerfully before the Lord, if or when a similar decision has to be made.
SUGGESTED BOOKS AND WEBSITES


Robson, W. J. (1910) *Silsden Primitive Methodism* (Silsden: Briggs)


Young, D. M. (2016) *The great River: Primitive Methodism till 1868* (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker)

Young, D. M. (2017) *Change and Decay: Primitive Methodism from late Victorian times till World War 1* (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker)

Young, D. M. (2018) *Primitive Methodism in North Wales* (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker)


https://primitivemethodism.com

https://www.methodistevangelicals.org.uk