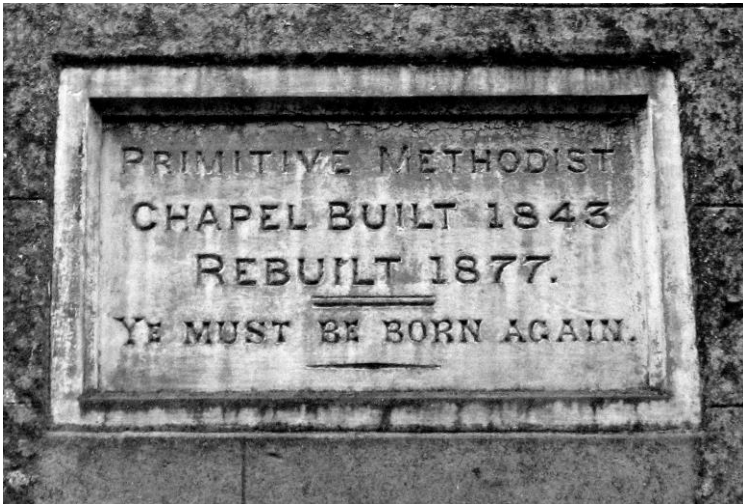


# THE PRIMITIVE METHODIST MISSION TO NORTH WALES

by

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Wesley Historical Society (Wales)

published by the  
**Wesley Historical Society (Wales)**

in association with Tentmaker Publications  
121 Hartshill Road  
Stoke-on-Trent  
Staffs  
ST4 7LU

[www.tentmaker.org.uk](http://www.tentmaker.org.uk)

[www.tentmakerpublications.com](http://www.tentmakerpublications.com)

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David M. Young ISBN 978-1-911005-03-02

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**British Library Cataloguing Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from  
the British Library

printed at the University of Chester

*Photo: plaque at Ffrwd chapel*

# **CONTENTS**

- 1. BURLAND, A FOOTHOLD IN WALES, 1819-25**
- 2. FROM CHESTER INTO WALES, 1821-52**
- 3. PREES GREEN CIRCUIT, 1825-52**
- 4. OSWESTRY CIRCUIT, 1833-52**
- 5. OSWESTRY CIRCUIT IN WALES, 1833-52**
- 6. SOME LATER DEVELOPMENT IN WALES**
- 7. COTTAGE MEETINGS**
- 8. THEIR OWN UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR  
SUCCESS**
- 9. SOURCES**

# **1. BURLAND, A FOOTHOLD IN WALES, 1819-25**

According to the Liverpool District Synod Handbook 1929, Primitive Methodists came from Burland via Huxley to Chester. The area was chiefly opened in 1819. Burland became a branch of the Tunstall (Staffs) Circuit, and, according to the Primitive Methodist Magazine (1819 p. 251) the Branch extended "to the borders of Wales". It was made into a circuit in 1822.

In his *Introduction of Primitive Methodism into the City of Chester and its Progress up to 1859* (dated 1859), John Sadler, the father of Rev John Sadler, explains that "places were opened and societies formed around and adjacent to the metropolis of the County judging this to be the best plan to adopt before they assailed the City itself."

The first missionary to Chester was Joseph Reynolds in 1820. He had hundreds of attentive listeners as he preached by the Cross from the steps of St Peter's, above where the town crier stands to today. The following year Thomas Brownsword preached there to an estimated five hundred people, "and many seemed much affected".

A society was formed and worshipped in Steven Street, Boughton, till the end of 1822, and then, till 1825, in a large room in King Street, where many were converted. The anonymously written *A Centenary Souvenir of the Introduction of Primitive Methodism into Chester and District 1819-1919* relates that the society was a house church in 1821, then worshipped in Steven Street, then in the room in King Street, adding that this was reached by two flights of stairs. Sarah Ellis (1798-1822) was born in Huxley and converted when aged 20 through the Primitive Methodists. She married in 1820 and moved to Chester where she joined the Primitive Methodists in 1821

and opened her house for the preaching: perhaps hers was the Steven Street venue. It is also reported that they acquired a chapel in 1823 in Steam Mill Street, Chester. More research is required to unravel these different accounts, and it may well be that all are correct as the society moved from place to place in its early days.

The 1823 Primitive Methodist Magazine (page 278) records that the large room in King Street was fitted with a pulpit and forms. There they were much disturbed by rowdy people. The magistrate was appealed to but said the Primitive Methodists should have stayed at home; thus, he blamed the Primitives for the disturbances they had to ensure. When minister John Ride visited, "so mightily did he engage in prayer, that some of the ringleaders capitulated, and surrendered themselves to the Saviour."



*St Peter's steps and the Cross, Chester*

## ***Bronington***

A centenary leaflet for the later chapel at Bronington records that Primitive Methodism was established in Bronington by 1824, and was in the Shropshire Station of Burland Circuit. Horse Moss Green (Horseman's Green) is also mentioned in 1824, but the later chapel there was Wesleyan. The 1838 Primitive Methodist Magazine contains an obituary (pages 77-8) of Sarah Preston, who died in 1834 aged 64. It records that in 1822 William Doughty preached at Bronington and called at her home on his family visiting. Preachers came to the village and several people were converted, including Sarah in 1827. Her son Joseph Preston (1803-96), born in Bronington, became a travelling preacher in 1824.

The 1837 Primitive Methodist Magazine (pages 388-9) gives a memoir of Edward Welch, born in 1770 in Bronington. It states that the Primitive Methodists visited the neighbourhood in 1822, and he invited them to his house, and then opened it for preaching, and he became the leader of the society that was formed. His wife and four daughters were converted, and a daughter became an itinerant preacher, and later a local preacher. He died in 1834. Thomas Adams wrote, "I preached his funeral sermon in the house in which he was born, and in which he died, to an overflowing congregation, for he was much beloved both by saints and sinners."

*Early Recollection of Mr. William Doughty, and of Primitive Methodism in Oswestry* by Thomas Minshall is the text of a speech given 8th June 1873, as he looked back to fifty years previously, when William Doughty was condemned in 1823 and sentenced to one month in Shrewsbury jail "for obstructing the thoroughfare or for creating a nuisance". He preached (Primitive Methodist Magazine 1825, page 410) at the Old Bailey. Minshall explains that Doughty's preaching was deemed a nuisance and obstruction "even though no traffic or thoroughfare were impeded". Persons of different denominations handed him water and more while he was

interned, and Minshall writes. "I well remember looking down through the grating at him." Then he was transferred to Shrewsbury jail, where he wrote a letter to one of the people who sent him provisions in jail:

*Dear Friend,*

*Rest assured, the grace of God is upon me in this place of confinement; and I feel the power of that world which is to come. I am blessed with submission to the will of God: in suffering, in being rejected and despised of men. I know my sufficiency is of God; by reason of which I count not the sufferings of the present life worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed by Christ...*

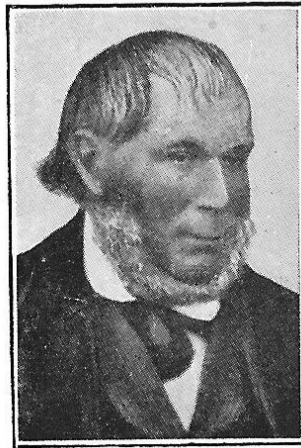
*The place is too dark to write clear. I feel at this time a love to every soul of man; even my enemies if I have any. But he that has put me in this place I do not count as an enemy, but a friend to me; for my happiness is increasing and the almighty presence of God doth attend me.*

*All shall be for His glory and the furtherance of the Gospel of Christ.*

There was however another perspective. The 1883 Primitive Methodist Magazine (pages 463-4) contains Thomas Bateman's reminiscences of Doughty:

*He was sent here by Tunstall Circuit, while Burland was still one of its branches, and, contrary to the custom of that day, he continued with us for several years, when he left our ministry and commenced to labour on his own account. This was a most unhappy move both for himself and many others. He had but little skill or power to rule, and soon came to*

*grief. In person he was ... in many things very eccentric. When he first came here he would not have either buttons or a collar to his coat, saying such things were superfluous, and resulted only from pride, or an improper disposition for empty show. He was rough and uncourtly, as many thought, in his proceedings. In singing, praying, or preaching his voice was very harsh and unpleasant to hear, especially when the steam was up - more resembling the roaring of a lion than the gentle wooings of a dove. He was ... more for driving than for drawing. Still I believe, with all his singularity, he was for some time very pious, sincere and earnest; yes, and very successful also, having many seals to his ministry. But when he began to assume authority and throw off restraint, both himself and his station rapidly declined. In his better days he was a man of much faith and prayer, bold and fearless in the mission work. Hence his great success.*



*William Doughty*



## 2. FROM CHESTER INTO WALES, 1821-52

Wrexham was missioned in 1821 by John Ride. The Primitive Methodist Magazine of 1823 (pp 69-70) supplies extracts from John Ride's Journal for 1822, sent in from the Tunstall Circuit:

*Sunday 3rd March, 1822 At 2 preached at Wrexham (a large market town in Wales) in the open air; and at 6 in a house. The meeting continued till 10 o'clock; many seeking souls.*

*March 4th visiting the people from house to house at Wrexham; one woman born again.*



*John Ride*

*Thursday morning, 7th March had a prayer meeting at Wrexham; at night preached at Lavister. It was a precious time. I gave the society their tickets and joined seven; the saving power of God came down, five souls were born again, their evidences were clear and striking,*

Chester became the head of a circuit in 1825. The *Centenary Souvenir of the Introduction of Primitive Methodism into Chester and District 1819-1919* records that the Chester circuit in 1825 included Wrexham, Rossett, Lavister, Pentremoch [by Northop Hall], Cefn, Broughton, Pentrobin and Mancot. It is not clear where Cefn is, for there are a number of villages with that word (which means *ridge*) in their name in the Wrexham area; nowadays the abbreviation *Cefn* usually refers to Cefn Mawr. In 1829 they added Bangor Bank, Ewloe and Golly.

The Primitive Methodist Magazine 1832 (page 435) includes a report from the Chester circuit sent in on 11th August by William Holt, who was in Chester 1831-4:

*The Almighty has been graciously pleased to pour out his Holy Spirit upon our circuit; so that backsliders are healed, wanderers are reclaimed, and the preachers, leaders and members in general are seeking after holiness of heart, and expecting a (more) general revival. In some places in the circuit the work has risen high this last fortnight; so that the preaching places have been crowded to excess, sinners have cried for mercy, and the meetings could not be concluded till eleven or twelve o'clock at night.*

The Primitive Methodist Magazine of 1833 (page 142) carries another report from W. Holt:

*Sunday 23rd September 1832 Wrexham. The preaching room was well filled; the meetings were attended with divine power; and though we had not any converted, yet I believe the work of conviction is going on.*

*Monday, 24th. I felt much blessed in visiting the members... we had a good meeting in the evening; we prayed with some who were convinced of sin, but they did not get converted.*

*Wednesday, 26th. Bangor Bank. We had a good meeting; by waiting upon the Lord, we renewed our strength, and were enabled to rejoice together in the God of our salvation.*

*Monday 22nd October 1832 Wrexham. Had great conflict in preaching, but felt the presence of the Lord at the prayer meeting after preaching. It was a powerful time; one man fell to the floor, and lay for a considerable time. When he came to, he lifted up his hands and his voice, blessing and praising God. Two appeared to be sanctified wholly. The Lord blessed me also; I had been labouring under temptation for some time, but the Lord delivered me.*

The Magazine 1833 (pp. 440, 447) records that on Sunday and Tuesday, 23rd, 25th December 1832, a chapel at Wrexham was opened. The chapel was situated at the Beast Market. The preachers were John Hallum [i.e. Hallam] of the Burland circuit, an Independent minister from the Wern, and on Christmas Day J. Pearce, Presbyterian minister in Wrexham, in the afternoon. "The congregations were large, a cry for mercy was heard to burst forth from some who had long been impenitent, and the people of God shouted aloud for joy. We succeeded in collecting more money than the most sanguine mind expected." The cost of the premises was

about £180 including a small cottage that stood with the chapel. There were pews to seat fifty worshippers. The report, sent in by J. Hutchinson, continues:

*Various are the places in the town where we have met to worship God, the Lord has given us a place of rest near the spot where the first Primitive Methodist sermon was preached. Two years ago we were nearly without a society, or a place to preach in. Now we have more than 40 members and a good chapel. A gracious outpouring of the Spirit of God has been felt in Wrexham and its neighbourhood, and many sinners have been turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.*

John Hallam's own Journal records the opening events as follows:

*Saturday 22nd December 1832. Set off for Wrexham in the Chester Circuit, to assist in the opening of a new chapel. I got there a little before dark. By making enquiry concerning the Chapel, I found, that the people in Wrexham have behaved very kindly. For, nearly £40 had been collected towards building it. Also, religion was reviving, which is still better.*

*Sunday, 23rd December, 1832. This morning was very wet which prevented many from coming to the opening of the Chapel. I spoke at 10 o'clock in the morning. An Independent minister spoke in the afternoon to a large congregation; and it was a profitable time. He described the wrath and mercy of God in such a manner, as I never heard them described. He took two texts, one out of Peter, and the other out of Luke. If he could have spoken good English, his discourse would have been much more profitable than what it was. But he being a Welsh Preacher, made it a little more difficult. At night I preached; the company was large; and upon the*

*whole, it was a good time. A prayer meeting was held after, but I did not feel much glory.*

The 1833 Primitive Methodist Magazine (pages 141 ff) carries a report of the Chester circuit which includes these words:

*Our brethren in Wrexham hold prayer meetings on Sunday mornings, with good effect, in the open air, in different parts of the town. And these meetings have not only attracted the attention of sinners, and drawn them to a place of worship, but some of the respectable inhabitants, who fear God, very much approve of these open air meetings.*

The 1834 Magazine (pages 292-5) gives the memoir of George Evans (1799-1833). He had been in a farmer's service, and was converted in a barn in 1819 amid a scene of persecution and the throwing of rotten eggs at Edgerton Bank. The family with whom he lived often locked him out after meetings, and he was obliged to sleep in a barn or stable. In 1832 he married and took a small farm at Cotton, and then moved to a farm at Bangor Bank, about a mile from Bangor-on-Dee, where the Primitive Methodists then preached. There was opposition, and the house was closed to them where they had been preaching. Evans then had his house licensed for worship. People were converted in it, and he also had an annual camp meeting in his meadow opposite his house, and often gave hospitality to the travelling preachers. In September 1833 a cart wheel ran over his head and killed him.

Eyton, or Eyton Pool, is hard to identify with precision. From Park Eyton Farm to Eyton House is about 2¼ miles, and if "Pool" is to be taken literally, there are many small bodies of water in the area. Eyton appears as a preaching place in an 1865 Chester Circuit Plan, and the 1833 Primitive Methodist Magazine (page 143) has this from William Holt of the Chester Circuit for Tuesday 25th

September, 1832: "Eaton Pool. The house was crowded, the people were attentive; believers rejoiced ... and I believe the blessing of the Lord attended the meeting." Sheard (page 952)<sup>1</sup> says it was missioned in 1826, and transferred to the Wrexham Circuit in 1836.

## **1836-1852**

The Alltami centenary booklet, and the *Souvenir of Veterans* (1914), record that, in the summer of 1836, Henry Brining, a local preacher of Chester, with others held a camp meeting with a large attendance in a field on Bryn-y-baal. More meetings followed, and a society was formed, with regular preaching at the cottage of Kitty Howell, a woman mighty in prayer, and in a thatched cottage at Alltami. The chapel opened 1838; this old chapel, now rebuilt and enlarged, is the Sunday School. The 1919 Primitive Methodist Magazine (page 845) contains an article by Rev. William Watson, which says that the 1836 camp meeting at Bryn-y-baal was in a field on Griffith's Farm. It was followed by regular preaching in Kitty Howell's cottage and an old thatched cottage at Alltami called Old Tailor's.

The 1837 Primitive Methodist Magazine reports the opening of Llay chapel 16th August 1836, which it describes as beautifully situated on the top of a hill, in the midst of a scattered population. It cost about £120. This was sometimes known as Ewle Chapel. A deed of the land dated 9th May 1717 refers to the messuage, lands and tenement commonly known by the name of Hewle-fadog. A deed of January 1742 refers to the messuage or tenement called Rhewlfadog. A will of 1808 refers to "those two closes or pieces of land, with the two houses, and their premises standing thereon ... in a certain place commonly called or known by the name of Youle Vadoc." An extract

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<sup>1</sup> Sheard, M. R. (1980). *The Origins and early Development of Primitive Methodism in Cheshire and South Lancashire 1800-1860*. Doctoral thesis University of Manchester

from *The Miners of Llay Main*<sup>2</sup> suggests the name Ewle Chapel may be presumed to derive from its proximity to the road (hewl or heol). The chapel deed was signed in 1837, the trustees being:

John Rathbone,	farmer,	of Burton
John Thomas,	labourer,	of Rosset
John Davies,	gardener,	of Llay
William Lewis,	labourer,	of Llay
William Bayley,	labourer,	of Llay
Edward Hughes,	farmer,	of Llay
Robert Bellis,	farmer,	of Llay
Thomas Ellis,	wheelwright,	of Llay
John Wynne,	labourer,	of Llay

William Lewis, William Bayley and Thomas Ellis were unable to sign their names and simply made a mark; John Davies's name is written Daveis; and Robert Bellis seems to have been absent, as there is neither mark nor signature for him. The high proportion of labourers and of men unable to write gives an indication of the social composition of the membership.

A 1962 booklet celebrating the new church, entitled *Along this Road*, states that "it is on record" that Hugh Bourne preached in Saltney. A society, formed in about 1844, first met in a cottage in West View, which was still standing in 1962, and a chapel was built in 1859 which, in 1962, was 177 and 179 High Street. There are now two new houses on the site, opposite the Corner Pin public house at the western end of Saltney.

Document FRO N/36/16 at the Flintshire county record office at Hawarden relates that the nineteenth century industrial revolution, and the railway, brought an English population to the Wrexham area and anglicised it more strongly. The populations of pit villages of the

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<sup>2</sup> Tyler-Jones, V. (Wrexham: Bridge Books, 2011, page 32)

1830s and 1840s were in general reported to be idle, deceitful, vicious, drunken and dangerous, comprising largely a working class divorced from the leadership of magistrates and clergy. The coal industry developed especially in the 1850s with new pits in the Buckley and Mold areas. Brickworks and collieries needed each other. In Ewloe the mid-century employment activities were mainly in coal, brick, potteries and farming. Outlying townships of Mold and Hawarden were transformed into a frontier zone. A population of newcomers from various parts lived in new settlements around the mines, brick works and tile works. Into all this came the Primitive Methodists.

An 1837 Chester Circuit Plan lists the following preaching places in Wales, whilst in the same plan, camp meetings were planned at Rossett and Alltami, and a weekly meeting on Mondays at Shotton:

Saltney  
Lavister  
Rossett  
Ewloe (2 pm) [chapel 1862]  
Ewloe Barn (6 pm)  
Mancott  
Hawarden  
Broughton  
Mold  
Brin-a-Bale  
Northop  
Allt-Ammy

The society at Buckley traces its origin to the efforts of the Alltami Primitives, assisted by others from Chester. The *Souvenir and*



*History of the Primitive Methodist Church, Buckley* (1920) and *Veterans' Souvenir* (1914) record the early work. There were open-air meetings in Lane End in 1838 and occasional Sunday services in a house in the smelt yard, which were later transferred to the parlour of the Duke of York inn. The 1919 Primitive Methodist Magazine (page 845) contains an article by Rev. William Watson entitled *Flintshire Primitive Methodism*, which says there were open-air meetings at Buckley in a timber yard, with occasional Sunday services in a house in Smelt Yard occupied by a bricklayer, Edward Jones. A chapel was built in Mill Lane in 1841 on land given for it, and the cause steadily grew, led by men with a burning zeal such as Edward Davies, "fervent and mighty in prayer", who was believed to have exercised his main influence in prayer meetings.

In Broughton there were services in a cottage and a smithy in 1841, and a chapel built in 1880.

The 1851 religious census gives the following further information concerning this area: "Bistre" the 1841 chapel attracted a morning congregation of 80, plus 30 Sunday school scholars, and an evening congregation of 119. (Bistre was comprised of about three quarters of the town of Buckley, along with Padeswood, Llong, Mynydd Isa and Bryn y Baal.) The 1851 census also shows the 1838 chapel in Mold drawing a congregation of 60, plus 37 in the Sunday school, and adds the note that the congregation had fallen off much of late due to lack of local employment.

The *Veterans' Souvenir* booklet (1914) also relates that men from Alltami and Buckley introduced Primitive Methodism to Penyffordd with open air meetings in the summer, of 1852. Meetings were also held in a pub. In the 1919 Primitive Methodist Magazine (page 845) the article by Rev. William Watson says there were open-air meetings in Penyffordd in the summer of 1852, and a small chapel was built that year but later abandoned because of a defective title.

### ***Wrexham branch and circuit***

The 1837 Primitive Methodist Magazine (page 301) records the making of Wrexham Circuit from Chester, with 140 members, one travelling preacher, 19 local preachers, and two chapels. In the anonymous *A Centenary Souvenir of the Introduction of Primitive Methodism into Chester and District 1819-1919* it is recorded that Wrexham became head of a circuit in 1841, with 19 other places and J Judson as minister. There is clearly some confusion here, but what is clear is that the Wrexham work was erratic. In 1846 it reverted to being a Branch of Chester circuit, with nine other places. The 1846 Primitive Methodist Magazine (page 311) carries a report from W. Rowe on the Chester Circuit which includes these words: "Had not the circuit taken up Wrexham circuit, and made it a branch, to save it from ruin, we should have been able to have sent a large sum."

Wrexham was obviously a difficult case. The Oswestry circuit quarterly meeting held in September 1848 resolved "That we consider three months about taking the Wrexham Branch," and in December 1848 "that we do not accept the Wrexham Branch."

### 3. PREES GREEN CIRCUIT

#### 1825-52

##### *The Circuit*

It is a quirk of language, in view of the expansion into Wales, that the word *prees* is really Welsh (*prys*); it means brushwood. Prees Green Circuit was formed from Burland in June 1825. Circuit reports of 1830 state that the circuit was in a prosperous state, except the chapels, "the Lord having greatly prospered the labours of his servants." The travelling preachers were John Walford, William Robotham, Thomas Payne, and John Pinches. The last was only 23 years old, with 3 years already behind him as travelling preacher. William Doughty was also a preacher, but local now, having left the itinerancy in 1825.

Thomas Russell, as recorded in his undated autobiography (published by James Knapp, London), was stationed in the circuit by the 1835 conference. He wrote: "There had been a great work of religion in that circuit for many years; the pious people had been much in mission work, and were deeply devoted to God." But Russell lived at Longton and does not appear to have taken part in the work in Wales.

The 1830 Primitive Methodist Magazine (pp. 68-9) quotes the Journal of John Walford for 1828:

*1st May spoke at Lightwood Green. Several shook and trembled under the word. Afterwards we agonized with the Lord... fourteen were brought to the ground, two got liberty, several received entire sanctification, and three*

*were caught into vision.*

*Sunday 4th May Camp meeting at Prees Heath. The work broke out in all directions, and especially the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. In the course of the day, many received the blessing of entire sanctification, several conversions took place, and some were in vision.*

*At night... lovefeast. The glory of the Lord came down, and there was much joy in the Holy Ghost.*

Lightwood Green is in the 1831 Prees Circuit Plan for 2 p.m. and midweek, and the Oswestry Circuit planned a camp meeting there in 1837.

Some extracts from Prees Green Circuit minutes give a flavour of Primitive Methodist life - including their spellings - at the time:

1837 preachers drunk, immorality, bad conduct, misconduct, not turning up for appointments, or late for them.

1839 the impropriety of working in the harvest field on the Sabbath day

That there be a Sacrament at every place where there be a Society if practical

1841 That William Gregory have a note of admonition respecting walking in company with a female from his appointment[s?].

1841 That Bro Leech [Travelling Preacher] see S Hall before making the plan respecting her dress wether her his to go on trial.

- 1843 The decrease has been occasioned by the persecution of the puseyite Clergy in many places.
- 1843 That Susan Turner (formerly Susan Clay) be put off the plan and that she and her husband be put out of society in consequence of the reproach which they have brought upon the cause of Christ in walking so much together previous to their marriage to and from her appointments and in sleeping together in the same room.
- 1844 Revival meetings shall be held in every place in the Circuit where the Travelling preachers goes
- 1846 That Bro Ikin be recommended to refer the circumstances of hiring his horse on the Lord's day to the scriptures of the old and new Testaments.
- 1847 13th September: That Dec 5th be a day of Abstinence and Prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Circuit, Connexion, The Church and the World.
- (There is still mention of bad or immoral conduct, and drunkenness.)
- 1848 28th December: That there be a Circuit Fast on Wednesday October 17th [1849] and be observed as a day of humiliation and prayer to Almighty God to avert the awful ravages of the colera and to pour out his Spirit on all the world, the Churches and on this circuit in particular.
- 1849 December: That a note be sent to Bro S. Burton stating that we disapprove of him interfering so much about dress and heir both in private and in

public. Nevertheless we advise all our preachers and members not to conform to the world in these respects.

Clearly there was a mixture of fervour, zeal, failure, and a stern moral, not to say legalistic, code. These were not "stained-glass-window saints", but fallible human beings, but God was graciously working in their midst bringing people to faith and new life. Several years' minutes disapprove of long preaching, and, commendably, people are frequently examined for their doctrines, presumably with a view to becoming local preachers or other office-bearers.

### *Into Wales*

Bronington became part of the Prees Green circuit 1825. A Prees Green Methodist commemorative booklet states that for six months in 1826-7 Sarah Welch was a travelling preacher from Bronington stationed in Prees Green circuit. The 1830 Primitive Methodist Magazine (pp. 68-9) gives extracts from the Journal of John Walford for 1828:

17th April preached at Knolton Brynn. Many fell, and one professed to get liberty.

Wed 7th May Spoke at Bronington. I urged the believers to strive for entire sanctification, and while we were at prayer, one woman fell to the ground. We agonized with God till one soul got liberty, and two professed to receive the blessing of entire sanctification.

In 1831 the Prees Green home branch included Bronington, whilst its Oswestry Branch included (using their spelling) Llangollen, Knolton Brin, Cloylane, Ruabon, Halton Lane, Overton, plus a place called *New B*, which may be Newbridge, near Rhosymedre,

comparing it with later references to Newbridge, but there are places by the same name also in Shropshire. It is assumed that Halton Lane is equivalent to Halton, near Chirk. To this day the place called Cloy consists largely of one long country lane, hence the name Cloylane or Cloy Lane.

The 1832 Primitive Methodist Magazine (pp 434-5) reports the opening of a chapel at Breaden Heath on Sunday 6th November, 1831, with a service at 10 a.m.. At 2 p.m. many could not get in, and at 6 o'clock there was an "immensely crowded" congregation in the chapel. Breaden Heath is partly in England and partly in Wales, with the boundary running close to the chapel wall: it may be assumed that dwellers in Wales made up a good part of the congregation.

### ***Cloy - the first chapel, 1832***

The 1831 archives for Prees Green Circuit include "Cloylane". The area has been described as a cradle of Primitive Methodism, and indeed it was at Cloy that the first chapel in North Wales was built. In 1830<sup>3</sup> a wealthy farmer opposed the work by standing at the gate leading to the preaching house, swearing and disturbing the people, at other times raising a mob to make a great noise, by beating pans, hooting and other means. Finally, he wrote to the owners of the house where meetings were held to try to get the family living there evicted. He was found dead one Sunday morning: as the *Memoir* expresses it, "During the night the messenger came, and without further warning he was called to give up his stewardship. 'I will fight against them that fight against thee.'"

Two years later, the Journal of travelling minister John Hallam, from the Burland Circuit, for Sunday 21st October 1832 records:

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<sup>3</sup> *Memoir of the Life and Labours of J. Wedgwood* (Anon., London, 1870, p. 97)

*Came to Cloy Lane in Flintshire. There I found some of my old friends pressing on for eternal life. In the morning I spoke at the new Chapel which they have built. Much of the divine glory was felt. In the afternoon Brother Hutchinson, from Chester preached; but I had not the opportunity of hearing him, having to assist in the holding of a meeting in the open air, as the chapel could not contain the congregation. At night I spoke again, to a very large congregation. I do not know that I ever enjoyed better liberty in preaching an occasional sermon. I was obliged to stop in the midst of my discourse while the people shouted. Truly it was a glorious time. I feel much regard for this people, and should be glad to spend some time with them.*

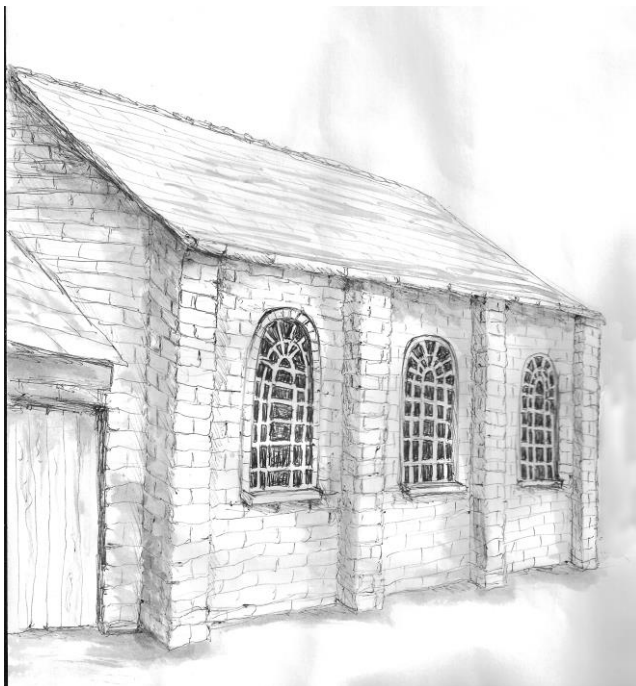
As recorded in the 1834 Primitive Methodist Magazine, on Thursday and Friday 17th and 18th October 1833, Hugh Bourne was at the anniversary of the chapel and wrote, "Some were affected." This would seem imply that October was the month when the chapel was opened the previous year (1832).

The artist's impression of this first chapel in North Wales, drawn by Pat Richards of Johnstown and printed on the next page, is based on a photograph of the much-altered building as it now is, as a house, and the reminiscences and confirmation of former Sunday school members from the 1940s and 1950s. Before the chapel was built meetings were held at Overton Poorhouse, at Lightwood Green. This 1832 red-brick chapel had seating for 65 people.

As this was the first Primitive Methodist chapel in North Wales, it might be appropriate to add a little more information about it. Twentieth-century worshippers entered by double doors in the porch and turned immediately right into the worship area, which had pews down each side and a central aisle. Another pew was at the side wall by the harmonium on the left in the front of the pulpit. There was a stove which burnt coke, in a gap between the pews, on the left, with



a chimney which exited at the back of the chapel. The chapel still had no electricity, and was lit with oil lamps.



There was no school hall. Railings stood in front of the chapel, with a small wooden gate leading through to the door to the chapel, and double gates giving access to the stable, which had its own entrance round the its side. Between the railings and the chapel wall was a pathway.

The congregation was drawn from local farms, including from Lightwood Green and Knolton Bryn. The leading light in the society was local preacher Ted Lea, along with his sister Maggie Lea. They lived at Lightwood Farm. Services or Sunday School were three

times a Sunday. The shed at the side, painted pale blue, served as a stable for the Leas' horse and buggy.

The Sunday School was taught by Ted and Maggie Lea, and one ex-scholar remembers being taken to Sunday School in their trap or buggy, and sometimes German bombers were seen overhead, presumably on their way to attack Liverpool. There were Sunday School parties and Nativity plays. Sunday School children sang "Jesus loves me, this I know" among other songs. When needed, such as at anniversaries and Nativity, a stage was erected at the front resting on the window ledge and the pulpit

A big tea party was held on Good Fridays, hot water being produced in a coal-fired boiler in the shed beside the chapel. Anniversaries were followed by a tea party and games at the Leas' farmhouse. There was also an annual trip to Rhyl for the Sunday School children, parents, and others, together with people from the Methodist society at Overton, the journey being made in four or five hired coaches. This was followed by a party at Lightwood Hall.



*Overton poorhouse as it is today*

(There is also a Lightwood Green in Cheshire, which still has a Methodist chapel. Some references to the North Wales Lightwood Green were probably overlooked in the course of the research into the North Wales mission. Anyone wishing to research the early North Wales work may consult the archives (which are at Shrewsbury, as the chapel was in the Prees Green, and later the Oswestry, Circuit). It will probably be obvious which place is referred to, by comparison with other nearby places where meetings were held on the same day.)

## ***Rhosymedre***

Kendall's *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (Volume 2, page 293, printed in instalments early in the twentieth century) records that at Rhosymedre a certain Mary Owens was for many years an active worker. She married Richard Williams, a local preacher. In 1827 they took a house and introduced Primitive Methodism to Rhosymedre and later assisted to do the same at Black Park. Richard Williams was also leader of a class at Ruabon for sixteen years. Mary Williams was local preacher for forty years. When the chapel at Rhosymedre was brought into financial straits through depression in trade and people needing to move away, Mary Williams got leave to beg throughout the extensive circuit to raise the sum for arrears of interest to save the chapel, and succeeded.

The 1835 Magazine (page 269) states that Primitive Methodists began their work in Rhosymedre in 1832, but had no great success till Mrs Williams had a school in her house. There was preaching, a large congregation developed, and the children had to move out to make room. After difficulty, land was obtained and a chapel began to be built. The society leader thought it would never be half full, and the minister was blamed for proposing it. It was opened on 7th

July 1833, with Primitive Methodist preachers, and on Monday evening two Independent ministers. The society grew, and the children were obliged to leave to make room as the chapel was too small. This progress was achieved especially because the English language was becoming common. This does not agree wholly with Kendall, unless Kendall be expanded to say: "In 1827 they took a house and five years later introduced Primitive Methodism." The 1834 Magazine quotes Hugh Bourne's Journal for Tuesday 15th October 1833: "I preached at Rhosymedre."

### *Circuit minutes*

As with the circuit more widely, references to places within Wales, found in the circuit minutes, supply an insight into the life of the circuit and its spread:

- 1837 Bettisfield is mentioned
- 1838 Bronington is mentioned
- 1840 the Lord's Supper at Bettisfield.
- 1842 revival meeting and love feast planned for Bronington
- 1843 Braden Heath chapel mentioned
- 1844 camp meeting at Bettisfield
- 1845 camp meeting at Bettisfield; a tea meeting for the benefit of the circuit.
- 1845 revival meetings at Braden Heath and Bronington
- 1847 camp meeting at Bettisfield
- 1848 Bronington camp meeting; protracted meeting at Bettisfield
- 1849 protracted meeting at Braden Heath
- 1850 protracted meeting at Bradenheath and Bettisfield unitedly.
- 1851 union protracted meeting at Bradenheath, Bettisfield and Lyneal; revival meeting at Bronington

"Protracted meetings" were introduced in the 1840s, especially following one at Congleton which ended on New Year's Day 1839 with sixty conversions, and was reported in the April Primitive Methodist Magazine. A chapel was open for up to a week every day or every evening, and one or two people would be present at all times. J. E. Minor (1982) in *The mantle of Elijah: nineteenth-century Primitive Methodism and twentieth-century Pentecostalism* (WHS Proceedings, XLIII, 141-91982:144) describes them thus:

*a series of nightly meetings in a particular chapel lasting a week or longer and with a different preacher or preachers each night. Usually held in December or January in rural areas when agricultural work was lighter, these meetings were largely intended to revive the lukewarm piety of those already "in", although they did succeed in bringing in outsiders and led to conversions.*

Bronington membership over the period 1841-1852 ranged from 19 to 26, starting at 19, and ending at 22. Bettisfield membership in the same period ranged from 29 down to 11, showing a gradual decline and closing at 12.

The 1850 Primitive Methodist Magazine (page 748) reports on the opening of Bronington Chapel in the Prees Green Circuit on Sunday 22nd September 1850. Three sermons were preached by T. Parr of Whitchurch, and two by minister James Pritchard. "The preachers enjoyed much liberty and power while delivering their message of mercy to crowded congregations, who listened with deep attention, and whose streaming eyes and shouts of holy joy betokened that they felt it good to be there... The opening collections amounted to £6/6/7, which are considered good taking into account the circumstances of the people, and what many of them had contributed towards the erection." A centenary leaflet records that

the ground for the 1850 chapel was bought for £8 by Charles Taylor, Gentleman, and the trustees were a limeburner, wheelwright, four farmers, a brick and tile maker, and four labourers.

An 1842 plan omits nearby Horse Moss Green.

Bettisfield is described in the 1879-1979 centenary leaflet. On 27th April 1851 cottage lectures in a village shop began, instigated by a group of Dissenters, but led by the vicar and a teacher. The vicar decided that a wooden chapel should be built to hold eighty people, with men on the right and women on the left. Circuit Minutes record that in June 1852 it was decided "That Bettisfield come off the plan and Millhouse come on instead of Bettisfield," presumably because of the Anglican wooden chapel.

### ***The 1851 Religious Census***

The 1851 religious census records these data for Primitive Methodist services on census Sunday:

Bettisfield (Hanmer parish) 1846 school house, 45 scholars a.m., afternoon 40; also evening 40 at Mill House (not used exclusively for worship)

Hanmer township (presumably Bronington) chapel 1850 a.m. school; afternoon 52; evening 82

Willington (Flintshire) chapel 1840 a.m. 82 plus 41 scholars; afternoon 84 plus 40 scholars; evening 230 (signed John Richard Thomas)

Willington [presumably Talwrn Green] 1845 average 54 plus 51 scholars (signed Richard Baker) no times of service given

Ffrwd chapel 1843: afternoon 30, evening 69

Rhosymedre, chapel 1832: afternoon and evening 74

Wrexham, Beast Market chapel, morning 50, evening 70

The Census also lists an 1833 Primitive Methodist chapel at Allington (now also known as Trefalyn) which drew 45 worshippers in the afternoon and 69 in the evening. The minister was Robert Hill. However, the later large-scale Ordnance Survey maps which identify chapels by their denominations show no such chapel, and the website [www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk](http://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk) has no minister called Robert Hill. This census listing remains therefore a mystery.

Apart from these, Primitive Methodist services in north Wales are listed on Census Sunday only at Ebenezer chapel (built in 1835), Rhose Common with 30 in the afternoon and 40 in the evening, though this might better be considered as mid Wales.

## 4. OSWESTRY CIRCUIT, 1833-52

### *The Circuit*

Oswestry Circuit was formed from Prees in 1833. The Circuit report for 1833 describes the state of the circuit as having some societies in a very low condition, others doing well but not increasing, whilst a few others were very prosperous. Explanation of disappointing or no progress where societies were low included a lack of peace, unity and charity among the brethren.

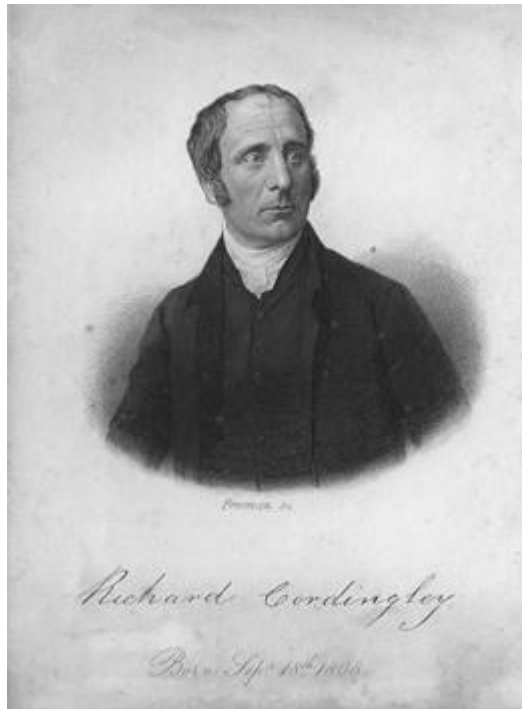
There was no debt, and the September 1833 circuit report recorded in contrast that the peace pervading amongst the travelling and local preachers was great. By April 1834 an increase of 103 was reported. "We desire to give glory to God and to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us more and more."

The 1834 circuit report, with ministers Richard Cordingley, William Bickerdike, and Henry Seymour, notes that the circuit currently contained 68 preaching places, of which 46 had societies. Cordingley (1808-88), born in Shipley, Yorks., joined the Primitive Methodists in 1821, became an exhorter and, in 1825, an itinerant minister. He married in 1834, and his wife was also a preacher.

Minutes from circuit quarterly meetings held in 1836 give something of the flavour of the early life of the circuit: and show that not all was an experience of "the power and the glory":

That George Morris be suspended off our plan and membership untill he pay the debts and a certificate signed by his creditors to that effect.





*Richard Cordingley*

D. Jones suspended from preaching and removed from class  
leading for drunkenness

That the Preachers be payed there back salary

That the sacrament be in every chapel once a month.

Pressure for teetotalism was increasing in the denomination in the 1830s. Circuit quarterly minutes for December 1836 record the

resolution "That no teetotalism meeting be held in any of the chapels in this Circuit," but as soon afterwards as September 1837 the same board resolved that "there be a teetotal meeting in Oswestry chapel." Then in December 1837 the first resolution of preachers' meeting, prior to the full board meeting, was "That there be no discussion on Teetotalism at Quarter Day to hinder or prevent the progress of business."

The Oswestry circuit report for 1836 says that the circuit could not be said to be very prosperous. The causes included very frequent neglect of appointments by some of the local preachers, and the fact that much of the travelling preachers' time was taken to keep up the circuit in its temporal "consarns": otherwise their time could have been spent in turning sinners to righteousness. There had not been any remarkable decrease nor any very great increase. Circuit reports for 1837-8 describe the home part of the circuit as prosperous.

Quarterly meetings Minutes for 1835-8 often mention non-attendance at class. June 1838 records the decision that every member absent from class four sabbaths without sufficient reason shall be excluded; and also that money be procured to pay the travelling preachers off. If absence from class for a whole month was a significant concern, it implies that by this date zeal and fervour may have already been in decline.

The 1840 Primitive Methodist Magazine quotes the Journal of minister Richard Ward for 1839. He arrived in Oswestry on 17th July 1839 and records that "We had a very powerful prayer meeting at night: the Lord was in the midst." More can be learnt about Richard Ward from his obituary (Primitive Methodist Magazine 1881, pages 310-1), written by J. Butcher. He was born at Sunny Hill Farm, Farndale, North Riding, 31st October 1805, and attended occasional Methodist meetings in his youth, more for amusement than for spiritual benefit. As he grew more interested in spiritual matters, he bought a Bible and a Prayer Book, but the latter led him

to hope in baptismal regeneration for salvation, and to think that the guilt of his youth was the responsibility of his baptismal sponsors, and that a Church burial, if he died, would guarantee him the resurrection to glory. Primitive Methodists came to Bilsdale, led by William Clowes, and one of them brought the Gospel to Richard's home, answered questions, and sang two gospel hymns. The singing disturbed his confidences, and he decided to acquire a Primitive Methodist hymnbook and to attend meetings. In January 1821 a preacher named James Farrar came to the neighbourhood and preached with great effect, and shortly afterwards John Branfoot. Ward wrote: "I was alarmed, and saw that I had been led by the devil, allured by sin, corrupted by the world, and deceived by my own evil nature. My sins were set in battle array against me, and appeared like arrows that would pierce, or lions, tigers, and demons ready to devour." One day in May 1821 he withdrew alone for prayer "and by faith I saw the all-sufficiency of the atonement. Salvation was mine, even pardon, peace, happiness, rest and life." He joined the Primitive Methodists, and sometimes spent a whole night in prayer. He had to endure "not a little" persecution, with the sternest opposition from his own family, often on a cold winter's night being compelled to seek shelter in the outsheds, or, to keep up the heat of his body, to exercise for hours in the midst of frost and snow, for the voice of authority declared that no Methodist should abide in the house. Ultimately he was driven from home. He became an exhorter in 1822 and a local preacher in 1823. In 1824 the newly amalgamated Guisborough and Whitby Circuits asked him to become a travelling preacher. His brother John counselled against going, saying, "You have plenty of money, then you will have none. Those who are employed are not paid, and for three weeks you did supply you got nothing. It is a wandering life, and you will be likely to die in a Poor-house." But he decided to go, and set out in November 1824, and four hundred new members were added to his first circuit in his first six months.

His health declined from 1844, and in 1852, with chronic bronchitis "he became a confirmed invalid" and had to withdraw from the travelling ministry. He suffered for 36 years till his death in 1880, and towards the end, whilst reviewing his many years of enforced quietude, he commented, "It has been a tedious life, let not others covet the like." The intense cold of December 1880 exacerbated his condition, and on 21st December, a little before 9 o'clock, "we bowed in prayer, and commended him to God." His wife, to know the state of his mind, asked, "Is it all right?" Instantly, and emphatically, he replied, "Of course it is." He lingered a further hour in his chair by the fire, and then "without a groan or the slightest struggle, he passed from earth to heaven... His sufferings at times were great, but he rested fully upon the atonement of Christ, and his confidence was never shaken."



*Richard Ward*

Such was the life of one of their ministers. But to return to Oswestry in 1839, the year he arrived, the circuit report claims 20 places prosperous, 33 low. The 1840 report finds the circuit in a tolerably good state considering it is an agricultural district. They had enjoyed one of the best and greatest years, with strong union among preachers, leaders and members.

The quarterly meetings yield further glimpses into circuit life. Several meetings record people not attending class meetings, and preachers coming off the plan, including for immoral conduct or drunkenness, wasting time in the public house, or neglecting preaching appointments. The following decisions were minuted:

December 1840 That Brother W. (Tunley?) never attend the annual hunt at the Pant any more. The same restriction was placed on J. Jones.

That our Quarter Day board deem it highly improper for to buy ale on the Sabbath.

The Sacrament be administered at every place where there is a society.

September 1842 J. Gabriel expelled for embezzling £7/6/- of the trustees' money of Oswestry chapel

March 1843 that the Travelling preachers be requested to visit more

That we give thanks to Almighty God for his goodness in the late revival of souls being converted.

September 1843 That Brother Sundly is requested to Desist from spending so much time at Publick houses.

That there be a fast day the third Sunday in the new Plan through the circuit and Protracted meetings 3rd and 4th Sunday to close with a lovefeast.

The Circuit committee Minute book, September 1844, records that "The Committee much regret Mrs Moss's making use of the pawn shop twice to our knowledge."

The Circuit committee minutes for March 1844 resolve that Brother H Wheler have his back salary paid up. This may have been Henry Wheeler, who was stationed in the Burland Circuit in 1844. It was possible for one circuit to lend a preacher to another for a stated period. If this happened informally between Burland and Oswestry, it might have been due to the illness of a preacher, a time of expansion, or financial hardship within the circuit. In this case Oswestry would be have been expected to pay his wages. But whoever he was, it points to financial difficulties being experienced in the Oswestry Circuit at the time. The Circuit account book for 1844 and following years shows profits from tea meeting tickets and donations at tea meetings, sometimes including ones on Christmas Day, from the Golden System, and pew rents. The Golden System is explained at length in the 1841 Primitive Methodist Magazine, and in the present author's longer book, *The great River: Primitive Methodism till 1868* (Stoke on Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2016).

Oswestry circuit report for 1844 finds the circuit prosperous in finance and religion, but the depressed state of trade in the area was causing many members to move away.

Nonetheless, several local preachers imbibed and propagated erroneous doctrines, causing great disturbance, and were put out of their offices, left the society and tried to draw as many as possible with them. Samuel and William Fitzgerald, Edward Davies, John Jones, Thomas Hughes left and joined R. Thomas' society. They denied that man inherits a sinful nature when he is born. R Thomas, local preacher, held the same doctrine, and that man has the inherent ability to fulfil God's requirements. The 1845 circuit report regrets that the circuit is not so prosperous as they could wish, with unhappy differences between brethren, immorality, and people moving away for work.

Despite the dissension, the 1845 circuit recorded an increase of 82 members, and the 1846 report recorded a small increase in membership, though some official characters had left. Six men through disaffection with the connexional rules and system had formed a party themselves. Kendall (Volume II 285-90) says that Doughty joined the secession with William Fitzgerald in 1846. In 1846, the circuit quarterly meetings record quite a lot of bad feeling among members. More will be said on this period of division in the section on the 1851 Census.

The 1846 quarterly meetings also yield this interesting glimpse: "June 1846 That Brother William Chubb request John Mason not to ride his beast in such an unusual manner as he is in the habit of doing, as it has a tendency to disgrace the cause and cause people to speak evil of him."

Circuit quarterly meetings continue:

April 1847 "the embarrassed state of our Circuit" meant they could not help the Isle of Wight chapels.

June 1847 That Brother Andrew Mansell committed an act of gross immorality in going to his master on the Sunday to receive his wages, and that he be requested to cease from

such conduct forthwith.

June 1848 Bad relations are recorded with the Independent Methodists: "Several of our Local Preachers have occasionally preached for the Independent Methodists (so called) and as such conduct has been productive of more injury than good to the Primitive Methodist Connexion, and is likely to be attended with similar consequences, no Travelling or Local Preacher in this circuit shall be allowed to preach for, or amongst, the aforesaid party... and that their invitation to our preachers to labour amongst them be regarded as an expression of policy and design."

May 1849 mentions immorality, drunkenness, fray between man and wife.

June 1849 A female preacher is to have no appointments because of indiscretion with her husband. Brother Roger must go off the plan for "going to the conjurer"; W Brown because of his "wife being in the family way before their marriage"; P Jones for being drunk; while J Mason is to receive "a note requesting him to refrain from spending is time in public houses"

The September 1852 minutes, amid many references to neglected preaching appointments, resolve:

That Brother William Williams' name continue in the same position and that at the earliest opportunity a travelling preacher ascertain from him the state of his Christian experience, for the satisfaction of this board.

That the Sacrament be administered in each of the larger societies and the smaller ones that request it.



That the leaders be requested to lay the state of the circuit before the society requesting them to enter into a union of prayer for the outpouring of the Spirit of God.

The first Friday on the new plan be set apart as a day of fasting and prayer, that a meeting be held at night as may be suitable, and that the Sunday following be a day of prayer.

That there be a protracted meeting the following week at every place to end with a lovefeast.

That the Sacrament be planned at every place in the circuit.

Again, as so often in such writings, a mixture of fervour and frailty may be noticed.

## 5. OSWESTRY CIRCUIT IN WALES, 1833-52

The 1833 Primitive Methodist Magazine (pages 434-8) gives selections from the Journal of William Fitzgerald for that year:

Sunday 6th January 1833 At Knolton, Bryn and Overton. Also I went to the Cloy chapel, to hear Brother Lea preach, but he did not come, so I had to preach.

Wednesday 9th January 1833 Preached at the Sarn. A large congregation. A good time. Held a prayer meeting: many wept. One professed to be made happy.

Friday 11th January preached at Horse Moss Green. Had a good time in preaching from "Ye must be born again."

Mon 14th January Overton

Wed 16th Preached at the Sarn. Had a large congregation and a good time... they want<sup>4</sup> a chapel.

Wed 13 February At Cloy chapel. The people here have joined fourteen in society this last quarter.

Tuesday 19th February At Rhosy Medre. Had a good congregation, and a good time. Held a prayer meeting and the Lord converted one woman's soul. The friends at Rhosymedre have had to wade through great difficulties in building a chapel.

Sunday 24th February At the Sarn. These people have formed

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<sup>4</sup> lack? or desire?

a prayer meeting on the Sabbath morning. Sometimes one of the brethren gives a short exhortation. I went to the meeting and gave a short exhortation. This was a glorious time amongst us. In the evening was assisted by Brother Eaches. We had a powerful meeting and many wept because of their sins. At night led the lovefeast. The people spoke with great liberty. The converting power of God came down, and many were brought to the ground. Some of the friends told me there were six converted to God. Praise the Lord, in this place he is laying hold of our persecutors; in particular one young man who has been a great despiser of our people. It had pleased God to convert one of his sisters... and he said that if ever he should see her down, he would kick her... On Sunday night he went to the meeting; he cried to God for mercy; the praying labourers prayed for him, and in a little time God, for Christ's sake, set his soul at liberty. In this place we have hundreds coming to hear us. Our preaching house is not near large enough for the people; but our kind friend, Mr Holland, has fitted up his barn, which will hold some hundreds.

Monday 25th February At Overton. A Large congregation. The convincing power of God came down, and six or seven cried out for mercy, but did not get liberty. Here we are short of labourers.

Wed 27th February At the Sarn. I arrived at the place before the time, and it was crowded with people. [After the meeting] the people would not go away, so we formed two praying companies; the people prayed, and sinners cried for mercy; and the friends told me that many were converted to God. Truly this was a powerful meeting. We intend to build a chapel here in the spring.

The April 1834 circuit report notes that "In Wales we have opened various places and two or three of our local preachers regularly preach in that tongue." There were 68 preaching places, 46 with societies. In the 1834 Primitive Methodist Magazine (page 440) Richard Cordingley wrote:

On 3rd August a camp meeting was held at Llangollen. The morning was exceedingly fine. A company of us went from Rhosymedre; we sung through the Cefn, assisted by some of the elder scholars of the Sunday School. On our way we were overtaken by Brothers Doughty, D. Davies, Bynnor, Fitzgerald, and T. Morris. We were now very strong; and when we reached the town we sung through the whole, to a beautiful green. We were furnished with a new waggon, and were shaded with trees from the heat; and the people had timber to sit on. This green is situate in a beautiful vale; behind us and before were large mountains, and the praises of God sounded sweetly.

*Gogoniant moniert, bar a bre.*

We had English and Welch singing, praying, and preaching through the day; and such attention as I never saw before. I have attended many English, some Irish, and two Welsh camp meetings; but I think the Welch are the most attentive hearers.

In the praying companies there seemed sometimes to be a general move; "Deolk! Deolk!" cried the Welchmen. I give the *sound*, not perhaps the proper word. I understand it to mean "Thank God."

When we separated for dinner, it began to thunder, lighten, hail, and rain in a very tempestuous manner; but by the time we were to commence it cleared up, and was as fine as in the morning. About five o'clock we broke up, and the brothers

from Oswestry and beyond went home. Between six and seven in the evening M. A. E. Cordingley was to preach in the house; but the congregation becoming very large, she and Brother W. Owens preached in the open air, to a large and attentive congregation. Prayer followed. We then went into the house, when the people got into full glory. One was seeking the Lord in one part of the house, and another in another. One cried aloud, struggled a little while, and then rejoiced fully. Another sought till he could call the Saviour his. When we concluded one of the society of Llangollen began to exhort. I thought, When the heavenly baptism descends, the tongue of the stammerer gets loosened, and then they can prophesy.

The verse he quotes from a hymnbook is based on Psalm 100 and is in fact:

*Gogoniant, moliant, parch a bri,  
I'r Un a Thri, tragwyddol fyth,  
Y Tad, y Mab, a'r Ysprid Glân,  
Fal gynt, tra bo na chân na chwyth.*

The Primitive Methodist Magazine also reported, for August 17th, an unsigned notice from the Oswestry Circuit, saying, "By the desire of Brother E. Owens, of Glanywern, we held a small Camp meeting near Penley. Brother Owens thought there needed a quickening in the neighbourhood, and we believe this meeting fully answered the end. The congregation was very attentive, and the preachers were blessed with liberty and power."

There is a history of Ruabon<sup>5</sup> which relates that in about 1813 the

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<sup>5</sup> *Remembering Ruabon* by T. W. Pritchard (Wrexham: Bridge Books, 2000) page 70

Calvinistic Methodists built a chapel in the part of Ruabon called Tan-lan (or Tan-y-lan). In 1834 they built a new chapel called Rhagluniaeth, and the Primitive Methodists moved to old chapel. It has since been demolished and the area redeveloped. The 1836 circuit report explains that at Ruabon meetings had been held in a home, but this became difficult when people moved away. The 1851 religious census says that a chapel had been occupied by Primitive Methodists since 1849, and attracted 31 worshippers on the afternoon of the Census. Presumably it was in 1849 that the old Calvinistic chapel was taken. The report also records that the Welsh language mission has declined and has now been given it up.

Circuit quarterly meetings for 1836 contain the following notes:

Camp meeting at Llangollen, Sarn; Tallen Green. Chapel at Knolton Bryn if they can obtain one.

That Ruabon meeting house reopened on 18 of September

That Horsemossgreen go off Plan

That Rhosmadock [Rhosymadoc] service be at 6 o'clock and Ponkey<sup>6</sup> at 10

The 1837 circuit report notes the start of a Sunday school at Rhosymedre, and the quarterly minutes continue:

Dec 1837 That H. Wright be paid £1 for the rent of Ponkey preaching room and have the 14/- towards it that was collected for books.

Dec 1837 that Bowling Bank [Denbighshire, six miles from Wrexham] have travelling preachers one a month.

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<sup>6</sup> Ponciau

The 1838 circuit report notes Sunday schools at Afoneitha, Cloy, and Rhosymedre, whilst the quarterly meetings resolve:

That Llangollen go off plan.

That Bowling Bank be proffered to the Wrexham Circuit friends on the condition that they will pay the expenses incurred.

That Pontyblow and Halton go together.

Camp meetings at Bowling Bank and at Rhosymedre.

That the superintendent enquire after an house to preach in at Tallengreen.

That Bowling Bank go off plan and the conditions on which we will give it up to Rexham Circuit be if they will advance the sum of £2 for the furniture and also pledge themselves responsible for the ensuing years rent.

That William Woollams be requested to raise and lead a class at Pontablew.

That B Adams procure ground for a chaple at Pontvain.

Tallen Green and Threapwood go together on weeknight plan alternately.

Rhosmadoc go on plan at 10.30

A mixture of some advance, some financial strains, other difficulties, again are discernible.

The 1840 Primitive Methodist Magazine gives extracts from the 1838-9 Journal of William Doughty, now a local preacher in the Oswestry Circuit:

Sunday 9th September 1838 At Afoneithæ at 2.30, and Rhosymedre at 6.30... At the former place numbers flocked in, and the house was filled. At 5.30 re-missioned Rhosymedre. Made several stands to preach and pray. Then to the chapel; and at 6.30 preached and then held a prayer meeting. A good day.

Sunday 21st October Walked 15 miles to the town of Wrexham. Preached in our chapel at 2.30. A hard time. At 5 went out and held open air meeting three times in the first street, once in the second, once in the third, twice in the fourth, twice in the fifth, twice in the sixth, once in the seventh, and once in the beast-market before the chapel. At 6.30 preached in the chapel with good liberty. In the labours in the streets I should judge from six to seven hundred heard the gospel, who would not have heard it if I had not gone out.

25th November (Sunday) Being only planned at 6.30 at night I proposed to mission six neighbourhoods... Ponty Blew, Haltan, and Black Park

Sunday 2nd December Tallen Green 6 pm At half past one began to mission Tallen Green, going straight up to the Wood and preached eight sermons

Sunday 6th January 1839 Cloy Chapel 2.30 and 6. This afternoon it snowed heavy for a short time. At 1.30 I set off to visit as many families as I could. At 2.30 preached at the chapel; a mighty time; one man was much broken down. After 5 visited till preaching; but the pain in my side made against me.

Sunday 17th March Revival meeting at Rhosymedre. A good power in the meeting in the morning. At 1.30 went out, and through Rhosymedre, praying, singing, and preaching, then



in the chapel.

Sunday 26th May 1839 At Lightwood Green 10.30, and Knolton Bryn 2.30. There was a great melting down among the people, and the power of God was present to heal.

Sunday 7th July At 1.30 at Bronygarth limekilns [just inside England], a short sermon in the open air then another at the blacksmith's shop half a mile higher up, then at New Shop... there was great order and attention.

Sunday 4th August Pontfaen moving camp meeting. At 10.30 preached missionary sermon in the new chapel. [The camp meeting went thus: 1.30 Bronygarth limekilns; 2.15 Bronygarth; 3 the New Shop; 3.30 the Rose (Rhos, England); 5 the Lodge; 6.15 Prees Gwyne; 6.30 Chark Bank; 7 Chark; then Pontfaen chapel.]

Sun 25th August At Afoneitha at 2.30 and 6 pm, but it had been arranged by the Society here for me to preach at 10.30 at Placey-Eacuy [?], at the blast furnace works, and many came to hear.

Bronygarth, in the Ceiriog Valley, lies on the English side of the river. The 1840 Primitive Methodist Magazine (pages 432ff) quotes the Journal of Richard Ward for 1839-40:

Wednesday 14th August 1839 I visited many families, and preached at Afoneitha to a large and attentive congregation. The society is prosperous.

Friday 16th August I visited a few families, and preached at Pontfaen to a large congregation, after which there was a powerful move in the prayer meeting. This society in general is doing well.

Friday 27th September I visited and preached at Pontfaen. It was a moving time. The cause is rising. The society in general are in good earnest about religion and the salvation of others.

Sunday 29th September I assisted in preaching the anniversary sermons at Cloy. The congregations were large and attentive.

Thursday 7th November I visited several families on my way to Halton, and preached to a large congregation; the word has free course. Several appeared to feel its power and wept.

Friday 8th November. Pontfaen. At the time of preaching the chapel was crowded to excess. A powerful time in preaching, and a wonderful and surprising work in the prayer meeting. How many were converted I cannot tell. Many were weeping, others singing, others praying, others filled with joy, praising God for what he had done for them, others, overwhelmed with the power of God, lay on the floor for a considerable time, and these then rose up, praising the Lord, and exhorting others to seek the Lord. Men, women, and children, are engaged in this great work.

Sunday 10th November. In the morning preached at Pontfaen to a large congregation. Many wept. The Lord visited us. In the afternoon, at Bronygarth, we had a quickening time; the grace of God streamed down, hearts melted, tears flowed abundantly and many rejoiced in the Lord, and found it good to be there.

At night, at Pontfaen, A powerful time in preaching; one man near the door fell on his knees and began to weep and pray, and several others were weeping.

20th December 1839 I visited and preached at Pontfaen to a large and attentive congregation. The Lord was there, and set one soul at liberty.

He tells the story of the conversion of a young man from Chirk at the Pontfaen chapel on 15th December 1839, who was said to be an excellent scholar taught by the vicar of Chirk, and had occasionally officiated as clerk at that church. He was also said to have been very ungodly, and he hated and persecuted the Primitive Methodists. However, he became convinced of the Primitive Methodists' arguments, attended chapel, and was awakened under the first sermon he heard there. In the afternoon he came back to help in the Sunday school, and came again at night, when he cried mightily to God for salvation, and the Lord set his soul at liberty. He sprang from the ground, leaping, clapping, and praising God, and exhorting others to seek the Lord.

Friday 6th March, 1840: I visited at Cloy and Lightwood Green. I found two persons very ill, but ready to depart and be with Christ. I preached at Cloy. The revival has broke out here, and is going on well. We had a precious season: one seeking the Lord. Three joined the society.

The work at Pontfaen, just over the River Ceiriog in England, thus touched Chirk in Wales. Page 434 of the 1840 Primitive Methodist Magazine records "what is said to have happened at Chirk":

A young woman, in order to mock two of our female preachers, convened eight or ten young women or girls, in a house at Chirk, having a design to preach to them. She began to clap her hands, shake her head, stamp her feet, jump, dance, and make a noise. This greatly amused her congregation. But in a short time, their mirth was turned into terror, sorrow, and trouble. They say the devil came amongst

them, and they saw him; and he frightened them tremendously. The congregation cried aloud, and was powerfully affected. The preacher (so called) was irresistibly kept at her work for a considerable time. - She wanted to stop, but could not. She then began to cry, "O Lord, let me stop. - O Lord, do let me stop. O Lord, do let me stop!!" But she kept on jumping, &c. She then cried to the Lord to have mercy upon her; at which she ceased from jumping, but not from praying. Since that time, she and her congregation profess to have found the Lord; and she and most of them joined the society at Pontfaen... "What hath God wrought!"



*Pontfaen chapel (now a much altered house)<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Photo from page 78 of *100 Years in the Valley* by Dewi Parry and Robert Owen Jones (Llangollen: Ceiriog Press, 1998). The present author has been unable to trace the copyright owner, but would gladly enter into correspondence if possible.

The 1840 circuit report notes that Penley and Pontfaen are doing well, and the quarterly meetings add more details with these observations:

December 1840 That a letter be wrote to R. Williams of Rhosymedre requesting him to come to some terms with Mr W. Lea as soon as possible else something very bad will turn up.

March 1841 That Pontyblew, Black Park, Rhosymaddoc and Newbridge go off plan.

June 1841 preaching at Knolton Bryn at 10.30, Overton 2.30 and 6; Cloy at 6.30.

That there be a Welsh mission

Afoneitha have week night preaching every month by travelling preachers, and the other by local preachers.

That there be a camp meeting at Vron 15th August. [This may well be Froncysyllte, as Fron or Vron is a common abbreviation, but there are other places called Vron, including in Shropshire.]

Black Park to go back on plan

Dec 1841 tea parties at Rhosymedre and Overton on Good Friday; protracted meeting throughout the circuit for two weeks

A Sunday School at Ruabon to be started, and services at 2 and 6

June 1842 camp meeting at Tallen Green and Vron.

The 1842 circuit report notes Sunday schools at Talwrn Green, Penley, Overton, Knolton Bryn, and Ruabon, and the 1842 Primitive Methodist Magazine (pages 415-6) states: "In the last three years we have built Oswestry, Ellesmere, Lower Wych and Rhosymedre chapels, and bought the Wesleyan chapel, and house, at Overton. Debts on the chapels are Oswestry £700; Overton £170; Pontfaen £66/16/9." Income is recorded from the Golden System, and from profits from tea meetings.

The 1843 circuit report adds a Sunday school at Halton, and the March quarterly meetings note that Pontyblew is to come off plan, and a revival meeting to be held at Overton. The circuit committee minutes include:

June 1843 That Bro Evans take Halton and Black Park next Sunday [NB they are clearly separate]

December 1843 That there be Beeff and Mutton and cheeses for the Quarter Day Dinner as usual.

That the Quarter Day Dinner be held at Mr Price at the Sarn if Agreeable to them.

The circuit quarterly meetings state:

March 1844 revival meeting at Cloy

June 1844 Chirk Bank to go off plan  
Tallen Green 2.30 and 6.30  
Camp meeting at Rhosymedre, Tallen Green, Cloy

Sept 1844 revival meeting Rhosymedre, Cloy

The Circuit committee recorded the decision in November 1844 that the old chapel at Rhosymedre be sold to Richard Williams for £40.

The preaching plan in 1845 includes:

Cloy,  
Knolton Bryn,  
Overton,  
Penley,  
Rhosymedre,  
Afoneitha,  
Ruabon,  
Halton,  
Pontfaen,  
Tallen Green,  
Higher Vron,

whilst the 1845 circuit quarterly meetings continue with:

March Knolton Bryn, Newbridge off the plan; that a chapel be  
built at Talurn Green.

June an afternoon camp meeting at Halton

September revival meeting at Tallen Green; salvation meeting at  
Overton; revival meeting at Rhosymedre; tea party at  
Tallen Green

December revival meeting at Vron, Overton; protracted meeting  
at Tallen Green

Drury Lane come on plan at 6 pm. camp meeting at  
Tallen Green

The 1846 circuit report notes that the Halton Sunday school has  
ceased because the people whose house it was in had moved away.  
The *State of the Chapels 1836-46*, which includes notes of income  
from seat rent and anniversary donations, lists the following:

		<i>sittings</i>
1836-7	Rhosymedre	40
	Cloy	38
1838-9	Cloy	30
	Rhosymedre	50
	Pontfaen	40
1840-1	Cloy	44
	Pontfaen	50
	Rhosymedre	50
	Overton	
1841-2	Rhosymedre	85 chapel not finished
	Cloy	44
	<i>debt £40</i>	
	Overton	70
	<i>debt £170</i>	
	Pontfaen	50
	<i>debt £66/16/9</i>	
1842-3	Cloy	40
	Overton	48
	Pontfaen	50
1843-4	Rhosymedre	78
1845-6	Overton	40
	Tallen Green	40
	<i>debt £60</i>	

The circuit quarterly and committee meetings of 1846-9 continue:

June 1846    camp meeting at Rhosymedre  
                  anniversary at Tallen Green [for the chapel built  
                  in 1845]



November 1846 Tea meeting at Overton on Christmas Day  
for the benefit of the chapel.

March 1847 revival meeting Cloy, camp meeting  
Rhosymedre. Trustees at Overton at liberty to  
sell the chapel.

June 1847 revival meeting at the Vron

September 1847 revival meeting at Overton

December 1847 revival meeting Cloy

March 1848 camp meetings Afoneitha, Tallern Green. Tea  
party Cloy Good Friday. Tea party Rhosymedre.

June 1848 camp meeting Overton; Overton trustees to meet  
to consider improvement of chapel.

December 1848 revival meeting at Overton, Tallen Green

March 1849 revival meeting Rhosymedre, Ruabon. Tea  
meeting Tallen Green

June 1849 Overton and Rhosymedre evangelising days

September 1849 revival meeting Rhosymedre, Overton; tea  
party Ruabon.

December 1849 revival meeting Cloy

For December 1849, the Primitive Methodist Magazine (1850  
p.115) cites John Waplington's report on Talwrn Green:

On December 30th, 1849, I conducted a lovefeast here; and  
while the assembly - before commencing a prayer-meeting,  
to relieve the dullness generally felt - sung a hymn on the  
efficacy of the Saviour's blood, the descent of the Holy Spirit  
was encouraging. Nearly as soon as we had started to pray, a  
man cried, "Lord, save me!" I exhorted him to believe

instantly for salvation; he complied, and shortly exclaimed, "I'm glad; I'm glad! I never thought there was so much happiness in religion as I now feel." Near him kneeled a young man who beseeched God for mercy, and was soon comforted. Not far from the latter, a young woman believed and was justified; and next a scholar of our sabbath-school, about nine years of age, cried for the forgiveness of his sins, and was enabled to believe after he had spent a bout an hour in unremitting and agonising prayer; then he cried, "I love Jesus, because he first loved me!" Just behind him his mother was praying for mercy; and hearing a child beside her rejoicing in God, she turned round to see who he was, and lo! he was her own son! She clasped him in her arms, and began to seek the Lord with increased fervour. Soon she too was adopted into the family of God, and then she united with her child to ascribe glory to their "great Deliverer." The man, the mother, and her son, have entered our Society, and are prospering in the Divine life.

On January 1st 1850, I was again appointed for Tallen-green; and beheld six fresh penitents obtain redemption... My soul thirsts for the salvation of precious souls; and the Lord will, if I be faithful, give me the desire of my heart.

Membership for September 1846 to September 1849, ranged between the numbers in the following table:

Halghton Lane <sup>8</sup>	7-10	Ruabon	5-19
Cloy	8-14	Afoneitha	7-9
Pontfaen	13-15	Overton	9-14
Penley	5-7	Rhosymedre	11-16
Talwrn Green	18-21	Halton	-----

Camp meetings were planned for June 1851 at Overton and Vron.

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<sup>8</sup> Halghton Lane is between Bangor-on-Dee and Bronington.

Pages 146-7 of *Mow Cop and the Camp Meeting Movement* by Arthur Wilkes and Joseph Lovatt (Leominster: Orphans, 1942), relate that Mrs Mary Peters of Talwrn Green (1806-1887) was a typical female local preacher who rendered tireless service in towns and villages on the border. Her husband was also a local preacher. They travelled long miles in all sorts of weather to their appointments. One place Mary went to was Llangollen, twelve miles away, on foot, carrying her own refreshment. Such service was long, strenuous, and self-sacrificing in the early days of the movement.



*Mary Peters (portrait facing p. 147 in Wilkes & Lovatt)*

The 1851 census records the following attendances; the numbers after the plus-sign (+) are Sunday school scholars:

Overton, chapel built 1816<sup>9</sup> afternoon congregation 27+33, evening 52

Cloy chapel erected 1832 morning 36 scholars; afternoon 32+12; evening 16+6

Penley: cottage not exclusively used for worship: morning 13, p.m. Evening Preaching house where a family resides evening 28. Both Penley returns were signed by Edward Williams.

Hope<sup>10</sup>: meeting in the home of Robert Griffiths, labourer: afternoon 8, evening 15

Allington township, Denbighshire, Primitive Methodist chapel built 1833: afternoon 43, evening 69. (But see page 31.)

In 1852 Knolton Bryn went off the plan; a tea meeting was planned for Cloy on Good Friday, and also a salvation meeting was to be held at Cloy. A tea meeting was planned for Rhosymedre on Whit Sunday. Camp meetings were planned for Talwrn Green, Ruabon and Rhosymedre. Bangor was taken on as a mission, and revival meetings were planned for Overton, Ruabon, and Rhosymedre, and protracted meetings at Pontfaen and Rhosymedre. A tea meeting was decided on for Overton on Christmas Day. The minutes continue their frequent mention of neglected preaching appointments.

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<sup>9</sup> originally Wesleyan

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the "mission near Hope Station" listed in 1854-5 Chester Circuit Plans. No mission building is marked on large-scale 1870 or 1899 OS maps.

### ***Froncysyllte (Vron?)***

From a gravestone at the first chapel in Froncysyllte it would seem that a society was raised there in the early 1850s. The stone says:

*Well done good and faithful servant. In loving memory of Richard Jones, Bee Bank, Vron, one of the founders and for over 60 years a devoted member of the Primitive Methodist Church, Vron, who entered the homeland August 16th 1913 aged 83 years.*

### ***Willington: the 1851 Religious Census***

Willington is a 'township' which includes Talwrn Green. As noted in Chapter 3, the 1851 religious census records the following Primitive Methodist services there:

Willington (Flintshire) chapel 1840 a.m. 82 plus 41 scholars; afternoon 84 plus 40 scholars; evening 230 (signed John Richard Thomas)

Willington [presumably Talwrn Green] 1845 average 54 plus 51 scholars (signed Richard Baker) no times of service given.

The probable solution of the mystery of two Primitive Methodist chapels in Willington in 1851 can perhaps be unravelled as follows. Oswestry circuit quarterly meeting minutes include these comments:

*December 1843 That it was very wrong of William Fitzgerald going up and down the circuit trying to cause Disturbance and Poison the People's mind not to give their Money to support the Travelling Preachers.*

*That it is wrong for Robert Thomas to try to prejudice the Local Preachers against the Travelling Preachers.*

The Oswestry circuit report for 1844 records that several local preachers had imbibed and propagated erroneous doctrines, causing great disturbance, and had been put out of their offices, left the society and tried to draw as many as possible with them. William Fitzgerald was among them. The 1846 circuit report again recorded the loss of official characters: six men, through disaffection towards the connexional rules and system, who formed a party themselves, and William Doughty who joined the secession with William Fitzgerald. Samuel and William Fitzgerald, Edward Davies, John Jones, Thomas Hughes joined the society of R. Thomas, a local preacher. They denied that man inherits a sinful nature when he is born. R Thomas believed that man has the inherent ability to fulfil God's requirements. The Preachers' Meeting of September 1850 resolved that Brother Tillitson speak to Brother Barrett respecting erroneous doctrine at Tallen Green – which, remember, is part of the area known as Willington.

John Dolan's book *The Independent Methodists – a History*<sup>11</sup> supplies in an appendix a list of Primitive Methodist groups which defected to the Independent Methodists in the period 1830-55. He includes some from Oswestry and Ellesmere from 1843 onwards, including eight in 1851. There are a number of references to William Doughty, who became an Independent Methodist minister. Some of the groups applied to join the Independent Methodists formally and were accepted, but never pursued their acceptance to actual membership. That was in 1852. They presumably included the other group listed in the 1851 religious census at Willington, who were meeting near the Sarn bridge.

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<sup>11</sup> Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2005

The Ordnance Survey maps show a Methodist chapel opposite Sarn bridge, not at all far from the 1845 Primitive Methodist chapel in Talwrn Green. Perhaps the 1840 chapel was listed in the 1851 religious census as Primitive Methodist, because it was led by people who had seceded from the Connexion along with William Fitzgerald but still called themselves Primitive Methodist, and who had taken over a building originally built in 1840. This might explain the reference to "so called" Independent Methodists in the 1848 Oswestry Circuit report quoted previously, if the group was not in formal membership of the official Independent Methodist body. The 1849 Oswestry circuit report records that William Sherwood, a local preacher, became an Independent Methodist.



*the largely unaltered 1845 chapel at Talwrn Green as it was in 2015*

By 1873 the Ordnance Survey marks the chapel by the bridge as "Methodist Chapel (United Free Church)", but later it disappears altogether from the maps as a place of worship.

Secessions probably happen from any religion, but it was rare for splits to be caused from Primitive Methodism on the grounds of doctrine. The Connexion's doctrines are listed in the 1836 and 1849 consolidated minutes, and a careful watch was kept that preachers should abide by them. They are:

- The innocency of man in his first state
- The fall of man [1849 add "and that of their posterity"]
- General redemption by Jesus Christ
- Repentance
- Justification by faith of the ungodly on their turning to God
- The witness of the Spirit
- Sanctification by the Holy Spirit, producing inward and outward holiness
- The doctrine of the Trinity
- The proper divinity of Jesus Christ
- The resurrection of the dead
- The general judgment
- Eternal rewards and punishments

The Minutes continue: "No person must be allowed to hold any office in our Connexion, who publishes or promulgates any doctrine contrary to those held by us." The Primitives rightly sought to maintain doctrinal purity in all their pulpits.



## *Membership*

Here are numbers of full members for Welsh societies 1840-52 taken from circuit account books:

	Dec 1840	March 1841	June 1841	June 1842	Sept 1850	March 1851	June 1852
Knolton Bryn				5			
Overton	6	8	8		18	23	23
Cloy	17	18	18	16	10	6	12
Penley	13	15	16	13	4	4	8
Rhosymedre	37	35	35	43	9	11	17
Afoneitha	19	18	18	18	10	10	8
Pontyblew	19						
Halton	16	16	10				
Pontfaen	41	31	41	35	7	11	21
Bronygarth	16	5					
Talwrn Green	11	12		13	28	25	12
Ruabon	11	7		12	20	15	8
TOTAL	206	165	146	155	106	105	109

## *Further afield*

Sheard<sup>12</sup> lists a number of other places in the Burland and Chester Circuits where Primitive Methodists had preaching places for a while in North Wales.

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<sup>12</sup> Sheard, M. R. (1980). *The Origins and early Development of Primitive Methodism in Cheshire and South Lancashire 1800-1860*. Doctoral thesis University of Manchester

## 6. SOME LATER DEVELOPMENTS

An 1855 Oswestry Circuit plan includes

Penley	Cloy
Overton	Rhosymedre
Afoneitha	Ruabon
Tallen Green	Higher Vron
Black Park	Erbistock
Halton Lane [perhaps the Halghton Lane listed earlier]	

Rhosymedre (the 1840 chapel is shown in the photograph below) became head of a new circuit in 1877. The Rhosymedre Circuit report for the year 1882 says “We have held several Open Air services, which have resulted in the increase of our congregations and the conversion of sinners. ... Circuit Holiness Conventions have been held quarterly, with very pleasing results.” The following year’s report states that “The circuit is doing well, principally the result of quarterly Holiness Conventions.”



## *Some Societies*

### *Llay*

Llay does not appear on the Chester Circuit preaching plan 1853-8, and must have been temporarily under the care of another circuit. Chester record office has no further plans till 1869, when Llay is back on, with J. Tilston as society steward. There was, in private hands at the house which was the former chapel, a bundle of reminiscences concerning the chapel at Llay. One is in a letter from Enid M. Hughes, undated in an enveloped postmarked 3rd June 1985, and concerns her grandfather George Williams (ca 1834-1913), with a photocopy of a photograph of him. She writes:

*According to my late father, Llay chapel was a very thriving place with weekly meetings such as Pray Meetings Church meeting and for younger members Christian Endeavour who visited other C. Endeavour meetings in Chester and Wrexham. At holiday time clad in 'Best Clothes' children of the Sunday School would have a parade through the village, then back to Chapel for a tea laid on by the lady members. This was a highlight in the Chapel's Year as holidays, as we know them were unheard of then.*

The same bundle contains a letter from Violet Williams, postmarked 9th July 1985, saying that "many earnest prayers." There are also some unsigned notes which record that in 1903-4 a Mr Cook came from London to preach for three weeks: people reached such a pitch and frenzy that 'the local ministers did not like it': there was *hwyl*, many people were crying and "penanent" [presumably penitent], which caused quite a stir and a newspaper reporter came - though the present author has been unable to find a report in the *Wrexham Advertiser* for 1903-4. Sadly the preaching plans for that period are not at Chester record office, if they have survived at all. A source located in the 1980s seems to have disappeared (perhaps when

material was transferred from Wrexham library to the new county archives): it recorded that a missionary from London, Mr J. H. Cooke, conducted a three-week mission at the Primitive Methodist chapel in Llay. He was the guest of Mr and Mrs Cheers, who lived at a farm near the junction of Smithy, Dark and Higher Lanes. He preached every night and during the first two weeks over a hundred people professed faith. The news spread to nearby villages. Quite a number of those who professed conversion eventually backslid. The 1901 Census lists, at Rackery Farm, Edwin John Cheers, aged 26, farmer, his wife Ellen aged 24, their children Elsie and Edwin, their two female servants aged 14 and 28, and their servant William Jones. Mr E. J. Cheers chaired a concert on the last Wednesday of 1904 at the Llay chapel. A more recently deposited writing by William Millington in Wrexham Museum (*A Walk in the Past: Llay and Gresford before 1920*) states that "Llay was awakened" by the visit of John H. Cooke in 1904, and that the *Wrexham Advertiser* sent a reporter to report on the meetings.

The *Wrexham Advertiser* for 2nd May 1903 reports that "a most enjoyable concert took place at the Primitive Methodist chapel" in Llay. The building had only one room, with no vestry, about ten pews and a few seats. The present central window was the door. Electricity was never installed, and lighting was with oil lamps.

A piece of writing produced by Llai Local History Group entitled *Llay through the Ages*<sup>13</sup> records the Primitive Methodist chapel "at the Vadog crossroads" in 1906. An extract from Tyler-Jones's *The Miners of Llay Main* states that "Bill Millington gives us an idea of what went on there in around 1916". There was a Bible class for teenagers on Sunday afternoons run by Miss Olive Sykes. He continues:

*The building had seating for eighty people but I have seen*

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<sup>13</sup> Tyler-Jones, V. (Llay: Llai Local History Group, 1999)

*many more get in and on some occasions chairs had to be borrowed from houses nearby in order for people to sit in the aisle which was very narrow... The chapel was lit by paraffin lamps, two hanging over the aisle and two on the wall each side of the pulpit.*

In 2014 an elderly Llay Methodist recalled reminiscences she had been told in the 1950s by people who were then elderly, that is, probably born around 1890, so probably reminiscing about the Edwardian period. The chapel was packed every Sunday; to get a seat one had to arrive early, and "the singing could be heard in Gresford." A book (*Llay - a History in Photographs Volume 2* (Llai Local History Group, 2000; editor Vic Tyler-Jones)) mistakenly says on page 29 that the chapel was a house in 1914. This is a confusion with the house next door, known as Chapel House. In 1894 and 1895 the Chester Circuit preaching plan gives details of some preachers living in Llay: G. Williams, Ellis Williams, T. Evans. The society steward was S. Wynne of Rackery.

William Millington, who wrote *A Walk in the Past*, was christened at the Llay chapel in 1894. He recalled that ministers came to preach only every ten weeks or so, but there were numerous local preachers (including his own father) who walked many miles in all weathers to fill their appointments. The chapel was the centre of social life for the village: an annual concert was given by people who came by pony trap from Chester; there was a Sunday School tea party every June, with races and games on a field that was lent for the purpose; and an autumn harvest festival with large amounts of flowers, vegetables and fruit, the flowers being afterwards given to the patients at Wrexham infirmary, and the fruit and vegetables sold on the Monday. There was also a Wednesday night prayer meeting, held in a cottage or house, with hymns, scripture, and prayer, which attracted ten to twelve people.

New trustees were appointed in 1924, and the lease on the chapel was surrendered in 1927: it would have expired in 1936. Stone-laying for a new chapel elsewhere in the village took place in 1925. The new chapel was still in use as a Methodist church when the present author was the minister of the Baptist church in Llay in the 1980s, but it has since been demolished.



*original Llay chapel (now a house): Chapel House is next door*

**Crab Tree Green**, formerly in Denbighshire, is listed in an 1857 Wrexham Circuit Plan. The Primitive Methodist Magazine for 1856 (pages 443-4) records the opening of the chapel in an account sent by W. Sapcoat. “Eaton” (sc. Eyton) was, he says, the first place visited by Primitive Methodist missionaries in “this station”, and the society had passed through various trials arising from preaching in cottages. Brothers E. Allen and P. Woodall (sc. Woodhall) had accommodated the meetings in their small cottages.

However, in the previous two years the Calvinistic Methodists had built a new chapel, no doubt the one at nearby Stryt-yr-Hwch, and their old chapel was rented for £2 a year “through the kindness of the owner”. The chapel was opened on 20th April 1856 when W. Sapcoat preached three sermons “to overflowing congregations”, and the following day 140 people sat down to an excellent tea.

The Wrexham Branch planned camp meetings at Crab Tree Green and elsewhere at their June 1868 quarterly meeting, as recorded in their minute book. However, in March 1869 the same meeting resolved that preaching services should be held at Eyton on Sundays at 2:30 and 6:00 p.m., and once a month on a Friday evening, with missionary meetings the following quarter at both Crab Tree Green and Eyton. In March 1870 the Wrexham quarterly meeting names Samuel Ellis as society steward at Crab Tree Green, and Paul Woodhall at Eyton. Then in September 1870 it was decided that Eyton should come off the Plan “as Paul Woodhall in whose house we preached has closed his door the chief reason he stated for doing so is, that for a considerable time past the preachers have neglected their appointments.” There were also to be protracted meetings at Crab Tree Green among other places. In December 1871 it was resolved “That Eyton be put on the plan instead of Crabtree Green, the society having commenced to worship in Eyton.” William Jones was to be class leader, and Samuel Ellis assistant leader. The Circuit’s chapel schedules for 1884 to 1892 include the rented chapel at Crab Tree Green.

In the 1851 population census, Paul Woodhall, aged 70, is an agricultural labourer living in Eyton, as is his son aged 29 (but more probably 33 or thereabouts): the entry is barely legible. In 1861, Paul Eyton, now aged 43, is a carter, living in Eyton; in 1871, still in Eyton and now aged 53, he is a coal dealer. The 1861 and 1871 population censuses have Samuel Ellis aged 53, agricultural labourer, living at Bryndedwin, an address which fell between two

addresses in Sontley, in the Stryt-yr-Hwch area. He died in 1872.

A quick search of the digitised "Wrexham Advertiser" newspaper, which has been digitised only up to 1900, found a number of references, but there are probably a lot more for anyone who wishes to take the time to search for them. Harvest services are mentioned in the 1890s, and an interesting article, on page 6 of the issue of 26th June 1875, tells of what should, I think, be called a 'camp meeting'. It was mounted by the people of the Primitive Methodist chapel, Crab Tree Green, the Calvinistic Methodists of Salem Chapel, Stryt-yr-Hwch, and the Independents of Ebenezer Chapel, Erbistock. The morning service, held in a field at nearby Gyfelia, attracted 200 people; the afternoon and evening ones, at Crab Tree Green, drew 500. The preachers were J. Meredith of Rossett and Rev. James Williams of Chester. The chapel stood at the bend in the lane at grid reference 335446.

By 1912 the chapel had disappeared from the Ordnance Survey maps. The lady now living in The Hawthorns, a house that stands back in its own ground, said that 30 to 40 years ago there were three cottages in front of her house, one of a different shape from the others. This must have been the chapel.

**Buckley** was included in the Chester circuit in 1853, and there was such growth by 1863 that the chapel had to be considerably enlarged, and during the next decade "an atmosphere of deep spirituality characterised the activities of the church". Buckley Circuit was formed from Chester 1871. The first chapel, built in Mill Lane in 1841, was enlarged in 1863, and Tabernacle was built in 1873.

The cause at **Drury Lane**, Buckley, began over a shop in 1872.

**Penyffordd** acquired a new chapel, which is now the school room, in 1855.



In **Connah's Quay** there were services in a cottage in 1858, chiefly led by workers from Buckley. They moved to the cottage of Captain Taylor, near the quay, and remained there till 1864 when the first chapel was built. A more commodious chapel was built in 1884.

**Ewloe** had its first chapel in 1862, and a new one in 1894.

**Sandycroft's** first chapel was built in 1864, before which services had been held in the home of Robert and Helen Carter.

**Kinnerton** was missioned by Edward Bellis of the Penyffordd society, together with Mr Duckers of Chester. Services were held in a small cottage, till the chapel was opened in the 1860s.

In **Bettisfield**, the Primitive Methodist chapel was built in 1879.

The 1853 Primitive Methodist Magazine (page 140) mentions a class at **Sutton Green**, near Holt, Denbighshire.

For **Golly**, enrolment of the deed cost £1/18/- in 1857; the chapel was built and registered for £2/10/- in 1861. It has vanished, and a house - Chapel House - now stands on the site. The present author has spoken with Mrs Winifred Alliss, who was evacuated from the slums of Liverpool to Burton (the parish in which Golly lies) in the War. Never having seen so much as a cow before, when she arrived in this agricultural area she thought she was in Heaven! In 1951, having married, she moved into Golly itself, when the Primitive Methodist chapel was a very real part of the community. She recalled that next door to the chapel lived a Mr and Mrs Kendrick Kaye, and that it was relatives of Mrs Kaye who had built the chapel. People were poor, and walked to chapel; indeed, anyone who owned even a bicycle was deemed lucky, and few people owned cars. But the chapel was well attended by the farming community. Mrs Alliss particularly commented on the delightful harvest festivals, with real country produce, sheaves of corn, and home-made cakes, which would be auctioned the following day.

The Allisses' son was the last person to be christened in the chapel. Not only the chapel, but also the school and the Anglican church have been knocked down.

**Coedpoeth** was in Wrexham circuit in plans dated 1891-1915; 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.

The year 1862 saw the conveyance of the land and chapel in **Caergwrle**.

There are documents and photographs relating to Zion Primitive Methodist chapel in **New Brighton**, which is near Mold and not to be confused with the New Brighton near Wrexham. New Brighton was missioned (according to notes at the County Record Office) in 1869. In 1872 the chapel was purchased from the Welsh Wesleyans; it had been built in 1844. The minute book goes up to 1987. The documents also include a list, from 1891-3, of people who signed the Blue Ribbon Army pledge, "We promise by Divine Assistance

to Abstain from all Intoxicating Drinks as a Beverage." There are 72 names, all of local people except one from Manchester. Ten of them have been crossed out, presumably meaning they either changed their minds about teetotalism, or were unable to sustain their commitment to the pledge.

In the 1870s there was a Primitive Methodist chapel in the hamlet where squatters dwelt on **Newtown Mountain** above Penycae. It is impossible now to locate the ruins of the building, as the area has been densely covered with a plantation. George Borrow happened across the hamlet in 1854, as related in *Wild Wales* Chapter LXI. According to Ifor Edwards in *Country Quest*, August 1989 (pages 16-7), the 1851 population census records fifteen cottages inhabited by colliers and labourers. Remains of the hamlet were still visible in 1962. By 1871, according to the *Evening Leader* (6th June 2009, pages 14-5), the community was significantly depleted, with many of the remaining residents being single women and elderly men. An article by "Aradrwr", on page 28 of *The Leader* of 8th December 2009, says that the squatters came from North Wales, Shropshire and Chester to work in the coal mines, whilst the Route 9 leaflet of *Walks around Wrexham* says they worked in the coal pits and the quarries.

Confirmation that the chapel was Primitive Methodist comes from the 1871 population census, where two cottages are listed as inhabited by Mary North and Thomas Davies, with the "Primitive M. Chapel" listed between them. That census page is headed Cynhunlle Ucha, and the houses are listed as Newtown Mountain. It may be that two different buildings were used as a chapel at different times – or perhaps though less likely there were two chapels in the hamlet – for, on a sketch map from 1860<sup>14</sup>, a chapel is marked in a different location from next to Mary North's house; but perhaps Mary North herself moved. The answers to these riddles

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<sup>14</sup> Document D BD 72, Flintshire country record office

may lie in the archives of the Cheshire, Denbighshire and Wrexham counties and of the Ordnance Survey, awaiting discovery by further research.

A Chester Plan for 1865 gives “Newtown” after Minera and before Rhosllanerchrugog and Rhostyllen, and it is presumably a reference to this hamlet. In 1868 the Wrexham Branch quarterly minute book records the decisions to hold camp meetings at “Newtown” and other places, and to have Thomas Jones junior as society steward at Newtown. In December 1869 the same meeting resolved to send a deputation to see “Brother W. Davies Newtown” about “rumors” concerning his moral character. In March 1870 mention is made of a donation that was sent “for Newtown Chapel”, and the society steward is now to be Samuel Hughes. Not all was well at Newtown Mountain: in June 1871 William Davies, local preacher and leader, was expelled from the Connexion, having left his family and the country with a woman who left her family. The same meeting decided on another camp meeting at Newtown. In July 1872 a preacher surnamed Evans was requested to preach at Rhos in the afternoon and “Newtown” in the evening of 21st, confirming that references to Newtown are indeed to the hamlet on Newtown Mountain and not some other settlement. In the 1871 population census Samuel Hughes, aged 43, is working as a “game watchman” and William Davies as a coal carrier; ten years later Hughes is still there, still working as a “game keeper”.

In June 1896<sup>15</sup> “that messuage or building formerly a chapel but now in ruins” was granted on a 21-year lease to George Senior of Wrexham, for an annual rent of £1/10/- on the understanding that he would substantially rebuild it and convert it into a dwelling.

At **Copperas** the cause started in the late 1880s, in the open air, and a room in a home. In February 1890 a spacious shed, formerly part

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<sup>15</sup> Document DRO/RO/13 at Ruthin, Denbighshire county record office

of the zinc smelting works used by a blacksmith for shoeing horses of the smelt works, was taken to be used as the chapel. One of the pioneers was Edward Hughes, a postman, known as "Ted the Bishop".

The **Wrexham** "Colliery Chapel" cause began in 1856, and became Primitive (from United Methodist) in 1893; it was rebuilt 1936-8 because of subsidence. It is in the part of Wrexham called Rhosddu.

The 1912 25-inch Ordnance Survey map marks a Primitive Methodist chapel in **Caer Estyn** at grid reference 381 575. A 92-year-old man living nearby in 2013 remembered it as a tin chapel, and says it became a dwelling perhaps about the time of the Second World War. A man called Hughes lived there; later a certain Jim Williams and his family. Elderly Methodists at the ex-Primitive chapel in nearby Caergwrle also remember the tin chapel. There is a photograph of the minister and others outside the chapel in *A History of Hope and Caergwrle* by Rhona Phoenix and Alison Matthews (Wrexham: Bridge, 2006). The present author has not discovered which circuit it was in.

There was also a chapel, in the Chester Circuit, at **Commonwood**, of which no visible trace remains. There are several reports on the work of this chapel in the *Wrexham Advertiser*. The 26th September 1903 issue states that "The Primitive Methodists held their annual meetings in the Iron Chapel, which is situate within one-and-a-half miles of the town of Holt." The cash book listing the weekly offerings at Commonwood for 1926-30 has survived. Some examples are: 5.9.1926, 2/4½ (= ca 14p) 14.11.1926 4/9 (= about 24p). By mid 1927 the entry "no service" begins to appear some Sundays. By 19.1.1930 the offering dropped to 1/9 (= ca 9p), and the following month dropped to 9d (= ca 4p).

**Wrexham** became head of a circuit again in 1868.

## ***The 1904-5 Revival and later***

The Rhosymedre Circuit preachers' meetings minutes contain this resolution:

*6th March, 1905 That we most thankfully record that the past Quarter has been a time of very special visitation. A most blessed awakening has been experienced in the Circuit and many have been truly converted and added to the church. We will rejoice in the Lord always, and seek to retain the uplifting atmosphere and the saving power, and expect still greater things from Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us.*

In the Wrexham Circuit plan for October-December 1911 the superintendent minister's letter (Joseph Grainger) says:

*The most remarkable feature of the last Quarterly Meeting was the deep spiritual fervour that pervaded and enriched all business. It was unanimously agreed to hold on October 11th, a Circuit Convention for the Deepening of the Spiritual Life. We are especially favoured inasmuch as Rev John Whittle, of Southport, has kindly promised to be with us for the afternoon and evening. ... Will the Members connected with each society do their best in self-preparation, by attending the week's special Prayer Meetings as arranged? ... Truly the signs are that God is with us, and I anticipate that the coming winter will be a season of rich blessing in our respective Churches.*

By 1940 there were the following chapels in these circuits:

<u>Wrexham Circuit</u>	<u>Buckley &amp; Mold</u>	<u>Chester</u>	<u>Connah's Quay</u>
Wrexham	Buckley	Golly	Bethel, Chapel Street
Ffrwd	Mold	Llay	Ewloe
Moss	Alltami	Rossett	Queensferry (Zion)
Caergwrle	Kinnerton	Saltney	Sandycroft
Rhostyllen	Drury Lane	Commonwood	
Rhosddu	Penyffordd		
Rhosnesni	Broughton		

<u>Rhosymedre &amp; Chirk</u>	<u>Whitchurch</u>	<u>Ellesmere</u>	<u>Wem</u>
Rhosymedre	Talwrn Green	Knolton	Bettisfield
Rhosllanerchrugog		Penley	Bronington
Ruabon			
Copperas			
Froncysyllte			
Black Park (= Halton)			
Chirk (Station Avenue)			
Pontyblew			
Overton			
Cloy			

The map on the next page, drawn by Graham Tennant, shows diagrammatically the routes into North Wales which the early preachers followed, and some of the locations where they preached and established societies.

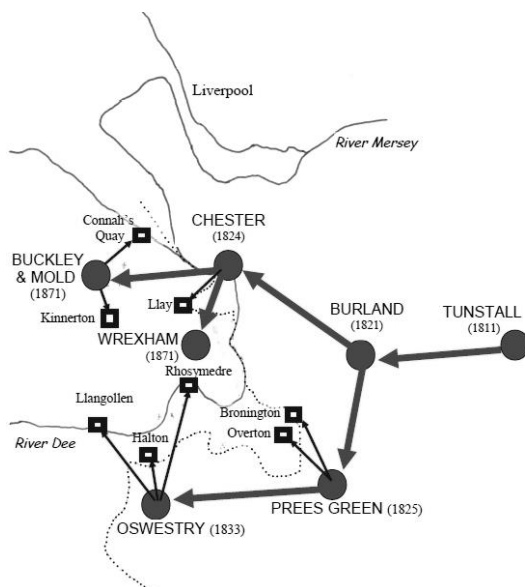


Figure XX. Growth of Primitive Methodist circuits from Tunstall (in North Staffordshire) across Cheshire and Shropshire into North East Wales.





## 7. COTTAGE MEETINGS

We have not discovered a description of the cottage meetings of north Wales of the period, but Henry Woodcock, writing in his *Piety among the Peasantry: Primitive Methodism in the Yorkshire Wolds*<sup>16</sup> looks back over the previous 60 to 70 years – that is in round terms ca 1820 to 1890 - and describes cottage meetings in the period in another agricultural region (pages 179-82). He says:

The preachers were glad to find shelter, and to preach where they could, when they could not preach where they would. ... cottages, with mud walls and thatched roofs, were their most common meeting places; while lonely farm-houses, where, in kitchen or parlour, little knots of farmers and farm labourers listened, with kindly attention, to the word of life – these rooms, with plenty of fresh air and sunshine in summer, and the glow and warmth of a coal and wood fire in winter, *were their cathedrals*, and a pleasant thing it was to worship under such circumstances.

Some of these cottage rooms were small, dimly lighted and badly ventilated. The Rev. C. G. Honor thus describes one of these cottages:- ‘It consisted of one room, and a small house only, and yet in that room two married couples lived by day and slept by night. A door from that cottage opened into the next, where there were also two beds occupied by a man and his wife, and several children. Our congregation usually filled both these rooms, and the latter was also a preacher’s home, the good brother having, of course, to sleep in very close proximity to the bed of the man and his wife. When preaching I used to stand by the side of one of the beds, and

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<sup>16</sup> 1889 London: Joseph Toulson, Primitive Methodist Bookroom

often, on lifting up my voice like a trumpet, I knocked my knuckles against the rafters of the ceiling, ...’

When the sun shone brightly outside, and the air was stuffy and stifling within, with windows closed and ventilation inadequate – as was often the case – it was difficult to keep the people awake on a Sunday afternoon. ... Sometimes, on a winter night, a room would be so crowded that the candles, anciently called ‘penny-dips,’ refused to burn, wrapping the people in funereal gloom; ... When a wick expired in its own fat, the air became rank, which, together with the united respiration of fifty or sixty people, reminded us of the Black Hole of Calcutta. Modern science has not improved matters in this respect. The pernicious smell of mismanaged paraffin lamps often made us long to re-light the candles of olden times. ... Sometimes the preachers had to walk, lantern in hand, to prevent them falling into holes and furrows in newly-ploughed fields or into deep ruts along the imperfectly made roads, common sixty or seventy years ago. ...

But in the best apartments of some of these Wold cottages services – preaching, class-meetings, prayer-meetings - have been held for years together, for which the occupants never received so much as a farthing. There are no perquisites, though a lighting collection is occasionally made, each one giving what he pleases.

... Primitive Methodism owes more to its peasants than to its merchant princes; more to its village cottages than its town chapels. Not fewer, perhaps, than 1,000 of these cottages are used throughout the Connexion twice or thrice a week the year round.

## 8. THEIR OWN UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR SUCCESS

It is appropriate, in concluding, to consider where the Primitive Methodist leaders believed the key to the movement's success lay. A frequent slogan which they employed was "What hath God wrought!" to be seen, for example, over the door on the 1839 chapel at Ponfaen. The words are drawn from the book of Numbers, chapter 23, verse 23, in the Bible.

The pioneer preachers, both itinerant and local, were unquestionably of heroic type and attained astonishing achievements. Nationwide, the movement numbered over 106,000 members by 1851, and gathered over half a million attendances on census Sunday (Snell and Ell (2000:135))<sup>17</sup>. But against this must be set the subjection to weaknesses and temptation, physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual, sometimes recorded among them. They did not always triumph blamelessly in every snare or difficulty. Yet their mistakes, frailties, follies and sins do not negate the respect and admiration of which their characters, lives and achievements are worthy.

Dissension, drunkenness and other misdemeanours, real or cultural, plagued the circuits. The same problems occurred in other areas of the country. Sheard (1980:452-3)<sup>18</sup> writes concerning the Preston Brook circuit in the years straddling 1840 that "the major problem was created by what was called 'some serious cases of immorality

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<sup>17</sup> Snell, K.D.M., & Ell, P.S. (2000). *Rival Jerusalem: The geography of Victorian religion*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>18</sup> Sheard, M. R. (1980). *The Origins and early Development of Primitive Methodism in Cheshire and South Lancashire 1800-1860*. Doctoral thesis University of Manchester.

which occurred in the circuit'. More than a dozen local preachers were dismissed for drunkenness, immorality or 'other improprieties' between 1840 and 1843." He then refers to "a similar situation in Macclesfield circuit a few years earlier." He also uncovered dissension among members. Johnson (1989)<sup>19</sup> says: "Of all the occasions for expulsion or censure, those troubles related to drunkenness appear to have been the most frequent reason. Adultery and indebtedness were other persistent failures. Primitive Methodists were not stained-glass window saints, but men." Similar weakness are chronicled and discussed in *The great River: Primitive Methodism till 1868* (David M. Young. Tentmaker Publications, Stoke-on-Trent, 2016) in the circuits of northern Hampshire.

With that caveat in mind, we turn to the theme of this chapter: where, despite all the difficulties, frailties and setbacks, did the leaders believe the key to the movement's success lay? In a nutshell, their understanding of the nature of revival was that it was a work of the Spirit of God; hence the frequent slogan, "What hath God wrought!" They believed revival must be a work of God. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it," says Psalm 127. They were aware that Jesus Christ stated, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3.8). There are such a things as "the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:44), and "the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1:7). Psalm 110:3, in their 1611 translation, referred to "the day of thy power". 1 Peter 2:12 says, "whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may... glorify God in the day of visitation." Isaiah 55:6 invited men: "call ye upon him while he is near": there are times when God is near, and by implication times when he is not in the same way.

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<sup>19</sup> Johnson, W. J. (1989). *In Triumph of Faith: Primitive Methodism and the labouring People in the N. Midlands, 1812-1862*. Doctoral thesis, University of Keele.

Revival is when he is near in a particular society. The early Primitive Methodists saw their movement as such a time.

They chose the word “Primitive” to denominate their connexion because their goal was to revive and live out the spirit and methods of the original Methodist movement of the previous century, led by John Wesley and given such heart through the fervent and believing singing of Charles Wesley’s hymns. Here are two verses from hymn 218 in John Wesley’s 1780 collection, also number 211 in the Primitive Methodists’ 1824 Hymn Book, *See how great a flame aspires*:

*When he first the work begun,  
Small and feeble was his day;  
Now the word doth swiftly run,  
Now it wins its widening way;  
More and more it spreads and grows,  
Ever mighty to prevail,  
Sin’s strongholds it now o’erthrows,  
Shakes the trembling gates of hell.*

*Sons of God, your Saviour praise!  
He the door hath opened wide;  
He hath given the word of grace,  
Jesu’s word is glorified;  
Jesus, mighty to redeem,  
He alone the work hath wrought;  
Worthy is the work of him,  
Him who spake a world from nought.*

Especially to be noted is the line, “He alone the work hath wrought.”

In his 1747 published letter to the Bishop of London, Wesley wrote: “I am a poor worm that of myself can do nothing. But if God sends, by whomsoever he will send, his word shall not return empty. All

the messenger of God asks, is, *no help of man*<sup>20</sup>! The arm of the Lord is revealed.” Charles Wesley’s Journal for Sunday 24th June 1739 records: “I prayed with West, and went forth in the name of Jesus Christ. I found near ten thousand helpless sinners waiting for the Word, in Moorfields. I invited them in my Master’s words, as well as his name: ‘Come unto Me, all ye that travail, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ The Lord was with me, even me, His meanest messenger, according to His promise... The Lord was my strength, and my mouth, and my wisdom.”

In 1744 John Wesley charged his preachers, whom he called his ‘helpers’:

*You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. ... It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord.*

The Primitive Methodists’ aim was to recover primitive Methodism. Foregoing chapters in this book, drawing on writings of the Primitive Methodists who ministered in North Wales, demonstrate that, like the Wesley brothers before them, they ascribed the power and success of their ministry to the working of God by his Spirit, and gave the glory of it to him alone. This is encapsulated in the words quoted above from the Oswestry Circuit in 1834: “We desire to give glory to God and to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us more and more.”

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20 Wesley gives the quotation in Greek as well as this translation.

## SOURCES

Besides publications specifically mentioned in the foregoing chapters, the research for this booklet drew on the county archives and local studies literature at Wrexham (for the new county of Wrexham), Hawarden (Flintshire), Ruthin (Denbighshire), Chester (Cheshire) and Shrewsbury (Shropshire), and the issues of Primitive Methodist Magazine kept at the Primitive Methodist museum at Englesea Brook. A word of thanks to the staff of these places is both appropriate and sincere.

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