

THE BIRTH OF JOHN WESLEY'S JOURNAL

By Frank Baker

Among the several hundreds of books and pamphlets published by John Wesley, the best known and best loved, especially by non-Methodists, is his *Journal*—the only one to be included in "Everyman's Library." Although Wesley conceived the idea of keeping a diary in 1725, only after many years' gestation was the published journal finally born. Even American readers often forget that the first installment brought before the public eye was concerned solely with his American ministry, and indeed was published mainly because he could not otherwise shake off some of the harmful rumors about his behavior in Georgia which were maliciously being spread in England. Thus inauspiciously brought to birth, however, this "extract" from his journal was the forerunner of twenty more, issued every two or three years for the remainder of his long life, touching with illuminating fact and caustic comment almost every aspect of eighteenth century life and thought in the British Isles.

It may at first appear strange that not one of these journal extracts appeared less than two years after the last event to which they referred. Sometimes the interval was over six years, the average almost four. The only "rush job" was performed by the editors of the posthumous extract Number 21, which appeared a few months after Wesley's death, and only a year later than the date of its last entry.

There seems little doubt that this consistent delay in publication was brought about not only by Wesley's multifarious occupations and by the time taken to put his diary into literary shape, but also by his desire to let events settle into a better perspective before making public his own part in them. In this he was far more cautious than his colleague George Whitefield. Even when at last they appeared, Wesley's journals were for the most part not the unvarnished extracts which at first glance they appeared to be, but carefully edited accounts written up at a later date. Usually the bare bones of his diary annotations were clothed with remembered flesh. Sometimes earlier memoranda were faithfully transcribed into the *Journal*, sometimes they were revised. Wesley selected and presented his extracts, however, in the light of his knowledge of subsequent events, of his prejudices or his desire for diplomatic caution; occasionally his later versions seem strongly colored by imagination, or are marred by errors which would more easily have been eradicated had the published *Journal* been an up-to-the-minute document. It is the more important to discover just

when Wesley edited and published each of these extracts, and to bear this in mind when using them as evidence.

This pattern of publication was laid down at the outset by the American pioneer in this most famous of his many publishing ventures. The title page described it as *An Extract of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Journal, from his embarking for Georgia to his return to London*—i.e. from October 15, 1735 to February 1, 1738. The first edition was printed by S. and F. Farley of Bristol, and is undated. In his *Wesley Bibliography*, where it appears as No. 13 under the year 1739, Richard Green states that it was "printed this year [1739] or the preceding." Joseph Sabin's monumental *Bibliotheca Americana* follows Green in dating the work as "[1739]," and the same date is to be found in the printed catalogs of the British Museum and the Library of Congress, as in almost every biography of Wesley and book on Methodism. Even the Standard Edition of Wesley's *Journal*, though slightly more circumspect, states that "in about 1739 the *Journal* was issued to the public," failing to make the correct deductions from evidence carried within its own pages.¹ Had they known, these authorities could have quoted in their own support a contemporary witness, Patrick Tailfer, who in his *True Narrative of the State of Georgia* (p. 49) spoke of Wesley's *Journal* as "printed at Bristol, 1739." Even though Tailfer's testimony is often unreliable, especially where the hated Wesley was concerned, in this particular instance prejudice could hardly be involved, and his book was apparently published (at Charleston, South Carolina) as early as 1741. Yet all these datings of Wesley's *American Journal* in 1739 are just as incorrect as Green's diffident suggestion that it might even have been published in 1738. Demonstrable evidence exists that this volume, important in itself, and perhaps even more important as a publishing precedent for Wesley, did not see the light until the summer of 1740.

At least a small part of Wesley's first *Journal* did in fact find its way into print quite early. In his capacity as one of the foreign correspondents for the *Gentleman's Magazine*, his first dispatch occupied just over a page in the "Foreign Affairs" section of the issue for May, 1737. It was headed:

From GEORGIA

Extract of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Journal, Minister of Savannah; containing a Conference had with some of the Chickesaw Indians, shewing what a deep and habitual Sense of a divine Providence is imprinted on the Minds of those ignorant Heathens, and how excellently they are prepared to receive the Gospel.

¹ *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, Standard Edition, edited by Nehemiah Curnock, London, Epworth Press, 1936, Vol. I, p. vii.

This interesting document is longer than the version later published in the *Journal*, and contains many variants as well as additions. One important variant occurs in a statement of one of the "two chiefs" [N.B. not the "two chiefs" of the four head men, as the *Journal* reads], Postubee [who appears in the *Journal* as "Paustoo-bee"]: "We believe the souls of bad men walk up and down the place where they died"—the "red men" of the later *Journal* is almost certainly an error. An important addition is in the interpreter's statement about the funeral which the Indians had seen Wesley conduct. The actual name of the deceased is given—Miss Bovey—thus making it clear that the occasion when they were present was the funeral two days earlier.²

One important piece of evidence for dating Wesley's first published *Journal* is to be found in the second paragraph of his preface:

2. Indeed I had no Design or Desire to trouble the World with any of my little Affairs: Neither shou'd I have done it now, had not Captain Williams's Affidavit, publish'd *as soon as he had left England*, laid an Obligation upon me, to do what in me lies in obedience to that Command of God, "Let not the good which is in you be evil spoken of."³

Robert Williams was a Bristol merchant who settled in Savannah for a time during Wesley's ministry there, and joined forces with the clique that harassed him. Williams' affidavit was "Sworn at the City of Bristol aforesaid, the 14th Day of March 1739, before me (one of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace and for the said City) Stephen Clutterbuck, Mayor."⁴ The mild opening of his accusation was that in Georgia Wesley "seduced the common persons, there settled, to idleness." He added that "it was then common fame, and a current report and received opinion amongst most of the principal settlers there, that the aforesaid Wesley had been guilty of using too great familiarities with one Mrs. Sophia Christiana Hopkey," that after her marriage Wesley had asked her "to meet him at divers unseasonable hours and places in the night," and that he broke his promise to her husband that he would "desist from such proceedings and practices." The document went on to claim that Wesley was summoned before a Grand Jury (of which Williams himself was a member) for "endeavouring to seduce her as aforesaid," that two

² *Gentleman's Magazine*, London, 1737 (Vol. VII), pp. 318-9; cf. *Wesley's Journal*, I, 246-250. The September issue of the same magazine (p. 575) printed a letter from Wesley pleading for helpers in the Georgia mission, in which he stressed not only its promise but also its dangers. (Cf. *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, edited by John Telford, London, Epworth Press, 1931, Vol. I, pp. 211-2.)

³ *Journal*, I, 83-4; cf. pp. 85-6.

⁴ *The Life and Conversation of . . . John Wesley. . . . The Affidavit of Mr. Robert Williams*, folio broadside, Bodleian Library, Oxford (Rawlinson MSS, J. Fol. 5.) Cf. note 7.

Savannah freeholders went bail for Wesley's appearance for trial before the next Sessions, but that he deserted his bail and slipped away "in a secret clandestine manner."

At a hasty glance it might indeed seem that Wesley's *American Journal* was prepared as a defense against such rumors circulating in Bristol at the very time that he was beginning his epochal field preaching there, on April 2, 1739. However false the reports might be, however mingled the half-truths with slanderous lies, unless publicly refuted they were almost bound to undermine his promising evangelism. His diary does indeed show that on April 6 he "writ Journal," which sounds like formal preparation for publication rather than the routine entering up of daily details in his diary.⁵ These entries, however, continue at intervals throughout the year.⁶ More damaging still to the 1739 theory is the fact that the "March 1739" of the Affidavit is the Old Style dating, more fully given as March 1739/40—in other words, by our modern reckoning, March 1740. This is clearly proved by a scrutiny of Williams' other statements therein. He left Georgia on June 3, 1739 and "arrived at the Port of London the Beginning of November last (to wit) 1739." It seems likely that in the spring of 1739 Wesley had indeed been pondering and preparing for the publication of his *Journal* as a defense against misunderstanding, but the statement in the preface about the direct influence of Williams' affidavit could not have been true before the end of March 1740.

Wesley was in fact present in Bristol during most of March 1740, and may well have heard about Williams' charges immediately. It seems likely, though not quite certain, that the affidavit was printed as a broadsheet at the time, and the street hawkers would certainly have a field day, particularly if the same title were used as for the only copy known, a later edition—*The Life and Conversation of that Holy Man Mr. John Wesley, during his Abode at Georgia. The Affidavit of Mr. Robert Williams, of the City of Bristol, Merchant.*⁷ Unfortunately Wesley's diary is missing from November 10, 1739 until April 13, 1740, so that it is not possible to pinpoint his first acquaintance with the affidavit. The opening entries after the diary again becomes available, however, show that Wesley was busy preparing his *Journal* for publication. His labors thereon

⁵ *Journal*, II, 175; cf. p. 177.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 229, 230, 244, 252-3, 258-9, 261, 276, 281, 297, 299-302, 312-3.

⁷ Broadside noted above (note 4). In his reply of July 16, 1742 (*A Letter . . . to Capt. Robert Williams*, a copy of which is associated with the Williams broadside in the Rawlinson MSS in the

Bodleian Library, Oxford) Wesley referred to it as "an Affidavit made some time since, and lately re-printed." The "re-printed" surely implies the printing of the original affidavit or at least of an early reprint. Whitefield's rebuttal of the 1741 issue of the affidavit similarly terms it a reprint (cf. note 11).

occupied an important part of the week beginning April 14, and also of that beginning May 5. Both of these weeks were spent in Bristol, and it seems fairly certain that he was writing copy and revising proofs for the Bristol printing firm of Farley—the brothers Samuel and Felix had not yet parted company. During a large part of the morning of May 12, his diary shows that he “corrected for Farley”—presumably reading the proofs of copy handed over in April.

On Friday, May 23, came the most significant entry: “I writ Preface to Journal; 11.30. . . .” This could hardly refer to Part 2 of his *Journal* (even though he was probably preparing copy for this already) because the published preface for this latter installment was written in London and is dated September 29, 1740. In any case the ten numbered paragraphs of this September preface would hardly have occupied two and a half hours of John Wesley's time.⁸ Nor would the preface alone for Part 1 prove a lengthy chore, except together with the account of the Holy Club to which paragraph three of the preface pointed as a prologue to the *Journal* proper. The press signatures for the initial gatherings of the first edition of the *Journal* confirm the near certainty that this preliminary material was all set up after the *Journal* itself had been printed.⁹ The complete *Journal* was probably offered to the public shortly before Wesley left Bristol on June 2 to deal with serious problems in London, and at the latest by the time that Charles Wesley replaced him on June 21.¹⁰

The publication of Wesley's *Journal* did not quite obviate any need for further defense, even in the matter of Williams' charges. Rumors continued to circulate, and his printed affidavit continued to work its subtle mischief. A reprint of the broadside was issued in the summer of 1741, with an invitation to apply to George Whitefield for confirmation of Wesley's misdemeanors. This was a subtle move, for the two leaders were now at theological odds, and Wesley's enemies might well have expected Whitefield to jump at a chance of maligning him. Whitefield, however, ignored their doctrinal differences, and in the pages of the *Weekly History* firmly vindicated Wesley from Williams' accusations, adding that he himself had nothing to do with the reprint of the affidavit. For a true account of the Georgia incident, as far as he had been able to reconstruct it from inquiries on the spot, he pointed critics to Wesley's

⁸ *Journal*, I, 429-31.

⁹ The *Journal* is signed A-14, K2, with two preliminary unsigned leaves left for the title page and a brief preface; the added material about the Holy Club is signed b-d4.

¹⁰ *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, edited by Thomas Jackson, London, Wesleyan Methodist Book-Room, n.d., Vol. I, p. 242; cf. Charles Wesley's letter of June 30, 1740, quoted below.

Journal.¹¹ In order to reinforce the value of this latter printed *apologia*, Wesley himself made a twelve-page extract from his larger extract, and commissioned William Strahan of London to print three thousand copies with the title, *An Extract from the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Journal, with regard to the Affidavit made by Captain Robert Williams*. This pamphlet, issued in September 1741, reprinted verbatim from the *Journal* a selection of passages describing his acquaintance with Sophy Hopkey, his trial, and his departure from Georgia.¹² Summer fever again infected Wesley's enemies in 1742. Again the reprinted broadside urged readers to approach Whitefield for confirmation; again the *Weekly History* printed his repudiation. Wesley countered with two broadsides of his own, *A Letter from the Rev. Mr. John Wesley to Capt. Robert Williams*, dated July 16, 1742, and *A Second Letter to Capt. Robert Williams*, dated October 17, 1742. The first replied to the further reprint of the affidavit, the second was "occasion'd by a Letter from Thomas Christie, Esq; (so call'd,) sometime Recorder of Savannah." In the latter Wesley showed how Christie's and Williams' accounts of his trial and departure were at cross purposes, and advised them to make their perjury more plausible by discussing it with each other beforehand.¹³

Once the date when Wesley published his *American Journal* is established, several other puzzling things fall into place. On March 15, 1739/40 Wesley drew up a list of his publications to that date, without mentioning the *Journal*—a very strange thing if in fact it had appeared in 1739.¹⁴ The opening sentence of the preface to

¹¹ The Bodleian copy of the *Affidavit* ends: "N.B. He who desires farther Satisfaction, may apply himself to the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, who is lately come from Bristol." A file of *The Weekly History* is to be found on deposit in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, from the Archives of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, and number 11, p. 4, contains Whitefield's rebuttal, which is repeated in Number 12, p. 4. No. 18 was published August 8, 1741, so that No. 11, though bearing no date, would almost certainly be issued June 20. When Whitefield's vindication was printed (in expanded form) in the issue for August 21, 1742, the date added to the document was June 22, 1741.

¹² Copies of this are preserved in Victoria University, Toronto, and Drew University, Madison, New Jersey. For its printing see the entry in the manuscript lodgers of William Strahan, British Museum Additional MSS 48800.

¹³ A copy of the *Letter* is at the Bodleian Library, Oxford (see notes 4 and 7), and of the *Second Letter* in the Methodist Archives, London.

¹⁴ See Richard Green, *The Works of John and Charles Wesley, A Bibliography*, 2nd edn., London, Methodist Publishing House, 1906, p. 10. In this list Wesley does not mention more than one *Collection of Psalms and Hymns*, possibly because the second was regarded as a new edition of the first; he also overlooked *Two Treatises [from] the Works of . . . Dr. Barnes*, which he published in 1739; neither of these, however, was in the same obtrusive category as his personal *Journal*.

this first *Journal* extract is much more true for May 1740, than for any time in 1739:

The Preface.

It was in Pursuance of an Advice given by Bp. Taylor, in his *Rules for Holy Living and Dying*, that about fifteen years ago, I began to take a more exact Account than I had done before, of the manner wherein I spent my Time, writing down how I had employed every Hour. . . .

In fact he had begun his first Oxford diary on April 5, 1725, fifteen years before writing this preface on May 23, 1740.¹⁵

This delayed publication also explains some otherwise puzzling nuances in the letters of George Whitefield, who had left England for his second American visit in August 1739, and did not return until March 1741. There is no indication that Whitefield knew of any published version of Wesley's *Journal* before his departure, though he certainly knew that Wesley kept a diary, and had seen some of the lengthy journal letters which Wesley sent to groups of his friends as well as individuals—indeed he had himself received at least one.¹⁶ Whitefield had already printed four lengthy extracts from his own *Journal* before he left for America, extracts whose undiplomatic candor and somewhat effusive religiosity drew the fury of Methodism's critics upon him rather than upon the more circumspect Wesleys, and also furnished the latter with a salutary warning about the danger of any hasty putting into print of their own journals. Had Whitefield known of such a work by his senior colleague and former tutor, he would surely have mentioned it.

The first clue to Wesley's *Journal* in Whitefield's own *Journal* or in his correspondence, however, comes in a reply to Wesley written from Savannah on June 25, 1740. Whitefield wrote: "I should have rejoiced at the sight of your Journal." Evidently Wesley dispatched a copy, which Whitefield read for the first time at the end of August, writing from Charleston on August 25, 1740: "Last night I had the pleasure of receiving an extract of your Journal.—This morning I took a walk and read it. I pray God to give it his blessing. Many things, I trust, will prove beneficial, especially the account of Yourself."¹⁷

One or two passages in the correspondence of Charles Wesley confirm and fill out our knowledge of the infant history of his

¹⁵ *Journal*, I, 37, 83.

¹⁶ *Letters*, I, 281-4; cf. those written to Hutton while Wesley was with Whitefield in Bristol, and after Whitefield had moved on to London, *ibid.*, 292-327.

¹⁷ *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield, M.A.*, London, for Edward and Charles Dilly, Vol. I, 1771, pp. 189, 204.

Whitefield's last reference can hardly have been to the Aldersgate autobiography, which did not appear until much later that year in the second extract, but to the closing pages of the first extract, viz. *Journal*, I, 415-24.

brother's *American Journal*. It was probably published just before John Wesley left Bristol on June 2, 1740, and certainly before Charles arrived on the 21st, for on June 30 Charles wrote informing John that the immediate sales to the Methodist public were apparently slacking off. "The Journals are no longer called for here."¹⁸ It appears that John thought it desirable to do a little advertising so as to ensure the adequate circulation of his defense, and it may well have been on his suggestion that James Hutton inserted an advertisement in the *London Evening Post* for July 29, 1740 of (among other items) "An Abstract of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Journal, Price bound 1s." On July 30 Charles Wesley again reported on the situation in Bristol, "Peter Brown is the bookseller Farley has employed to sell the Journals."¹⁹

During that same month of July 1740, John Wesley passed on to William Strahan of London the final copy for the second volume published under the title *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, with its important doctrinal preface. This done he turned vigorously to preparing a second extract from his *Journal*, finishing it in September. On the 29th of that month he wrote the preface, and took it to Strahan's well known establishment on the following day.²⁰ From the evidence of *The Christian's Amusement* it was published in late October or early November, within six months of the first extract.²¹ This *Journal* contained Wesley's "Aldersgate" account of his spiritual pilgrimage as well as other important statements on his religious development, especially his experiences with the Moravians in Germany. Together these two extracts from his *Journal* furnished a full account of the foundations of Wesley's evangelism. After their separate first editions they were thereafter always printed and bound together as a unit.

Not only did these early extracts from Wesley's *Journal* provide a worthy introduction to the first rise of Methodism, they also laid the foundation of a literary monument which that statesman-author Augustine Birrell—no prejudiced Methodist—could speak of as "the most amazing record of human exertion ever penned or endured . . . a book full of plots and plays and novels, which quivers with life and is crammed full of character."²²

¹⁸ Manuscript letter in Methodist Archives, London.

¹⁹ Manuscript letter in Methodist Archives, London.

²⁰ *Journal*, II, 363-9, 377-9, 389.

²¹ A file of the *Christian's Amusement* is deposited in the National Library of Wales (see note 11). Cf. *The Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Burnley, Nuttall, Vol. XI, p. 182. Number 7, in which the advertisement of "A new *Journal*" appeared, is undated, but was

apparently issued on November 15, 1740. Strahan's extant ledgers contain no record of this, but the same is true of other items which he certainly printed for Wesley.

²² The Rt. Hon. Augustine Birrell, *John Wesley*, London, Epworth Press, 1938, pp. 13, 16.