

Worship in Eighteenth-Century  
Anglicanism and Methodism

**PAPERS PRESENTED**  
**AT**  
**THE FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING**  
**OF**  
**THE CHARLES WESLEY SOCIETY**  
*October 1994*  
*Princeton, New Jersey*

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*Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society* 1994

Published in the United States by  
The Charles Wesley Society, 1996

*Editor*, S T Kimbrough, Jr.  
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# Charles Wesley and Methodist Religious Life, 1750–1775

## The Manuscript Sources

Gareth Lloyd\*

Charles Wesley's significance as a church leader, theologian, and hymn writer is beyond dispute. Yet he is a man who until recent years has been comparatively neglected by church historians. The Charles Wesley Archive at the John Rylands Library in Manchester is one of the largest 18th century manuscript collections in the field of Methodist studies. My article is based on the documents contained within that archive. It will seek to use them to illustrate aspects of Methodist religious life from 1750 to 1775, particularly in London where Charles Wesley exercised his ministry during this period.

The selection of material is based on the letters within the collection, many of which have never been published in their entirety. I have, however, avoided using letters written between the Wesley brothers for two reasons:

1. Most of these are already very well known to scholars through the collected edition of John Wesley's Works.
2. For the purpose of an article which must necessarily be quite limited in scope, I wish to concentrate as far as possible on Methodism as seen by Charles Wesley and his circle of correspondents.

The 1750s saw Methodism emerging from a period of upheaval. The decade since the movement was founded, had witnessed great expansion and controversy, as elements of church and state fiercely opposed the spread of evangelical influence. Outright persecution, was beginning to die away, but it left a lasting legacy of suspicion and resentment.

By 1750 also, Methodism had acquired an identity of its own, with characteristics which set it apart from the Church of England. The first preaching houses had been erected, novel forms of worship had evolved, and issues which were to dominate Methodist internal politics for several decades to come were emerging.

Charles Wesley's own role was also changing. In the first decade of the revival he traveled as extensively as his brother, and was very much in the forefront of the movement. This altered after his marriage to Sarah Gwynne in 1749. He established a permanent home in Bristol, and he gradually withdrew from the itinerancy to concentrate his labours on the Methodist strongholds of Bristol and London.

This change in Charles Wesley's life is reflected by the manuscript sources. His journal does not survive after 1756, which was the last year when he embarked on a major preaching tour. For information about his life we have to

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rely on the correspondence. He continued to spend long periods away from his home, supervising the London Methodist societies. His letters to his family are full of vivid descriptions of London life both in the chapels and outside. Equally interesting are the letters that he received from correspondents across the connexion representing a wide cross-section of social background and outlook.

The religious life described in the letters, is vigorous and emotionally charged, reflecting the great significance accorded to several aspects of worship, which were undervalued by the established church. These included preaching, the sharing of spiritual experiences in small intimate groups, and regular communion.

### Preaching

Something of the flavor of Methodist worship can be gleaned from the following three letters. The first, which is from Charles to his wife Sarah, was written from London on Easter Day 1749 [Extract 1]:<sup>1</sup>

The Lord is risen indeed & hath appeared unto his disciples! At 4 this morning I rejoiced with them in the glad tidings until 6. I preached again at the crowded chappel from the Epistle "If ye be risen wth Xt,<sup>2</sup> seek the things wch are above. . . ." I put myself & my hearers on the strictest examination of our own hearts & surely mine did not condemn me in any degree. . . . Many rejoiced in the answer of a good confidence. . . .

Never was I more carried out in prayers than after the sacrament. Our hearts were enlarged & knit together in love wch never faileth. . . . I concluded with a few strong words of exhortation, wch did not return empty.

Wesley preached again that evening and spent half an hour in fellowship with the bands. Another hour was spent at his lodgings with a group of friends, at which spiritual experiences were discussed.

The letter closes with the words:

From 4 in the morning to 8 at night I have been fully employed & am now stronger in body than before I began; only I have lost my voice at present. . . .

The second letter, again from Charles to Sarah, is dated 15th September 1766 [Extract 2]:

Yesterday we triumphed from morning till night. In ye morning my subject was Isaiah 26:1. . . . Several received the blessing of the Gospel; among others our dearest Mrs Davis . . . she did certainly find power to trust in the Lord entirely. . . . In the afternoon my text was "His blood be on us & on our children". The chappel was exceedingly full. Many had stayed there all day. . . .

<sup>1</sup>See list of letter extracts and their sources at the end of this article.

<sup>2</sup>The extracts from the letters are printed here with Charles Wesley's own abbreviations for certain words, e.g., Xt = Christ, wch = which, & = and, ye = the, yt = that, wth = with, shd = should, yr = your, cd = could.

The final account is by Joseph Williams, a non-Methodist who accompanied Charles Wesley to a meeting of the Bristol Society in October 1739. Despite the early date of the letter, it is worth quoting in detail as meetings like the one Williams describes were to remain a feature of the movement for the rest of the century [Extract 3]:

I then went with him to a meeting of a religious society, which met about seven in the evening & found the place so thronged yt it was wth very great difficulty we got to the centre of it; where was a convenient place provided for [Wesley] either to stand or sit. When we came to them they were singing a hymn, but ceased on Mr Wesleys mounting the rostrum. He first prayed, then expounded parts of ye 12th chapter of St John's Gospel, then sang a hymn, then proceeded for a while in ye exposition, then sang another hymn, then prayed over more then twenty bills wch were given up by ye society, respecting their spiritual concerns & concluded with the usual benediction. . . . Never did I hear such praying or such singing. Never did I see or hear such evident marks of fervency in spirit . . . as in that society. At ye close of every single petition, a serious Amen, like a rushing sound of waters, ran through the whole society: and their singing was not only the most harmonious & delightful I ever heard, but as Mr Whitefield writes . . . they sing lustily & with good courage. . . . Indeed they seemed to sing wth melody in their hearts . . . such evident marks of a lively, genuine devotion in every part of religious worship, I never in any place . . . have been witness to. . . .

In these accounts we see something of the great wealth of Methodist religious experience, ranging from formal services attended by many hundreds of people, to small meetings designed to deepen the faith of those who had made a Christian commitment.

While the services were centred around the liturgy of the Church of England, there was in practice considerable flexibility. The Wesleys were great believers in the benefits of extempore preaching, an unusual practice for a Church of England minister. Some insight into the thinking behind this innovation is provided by the following letter, which was written to Charles in January 1760 by the clergyman Walter Shirley [Extract 4]:

[I am] no longer making use of a formal written discourse. I only plan out the heads & so trust to the Lord for the rest. What is wanting of correctness in this method of preaching will be amply I hope made up in power & tis certain that one often finds a boldness of expression in an offhand discourse, which the cold chastity of a written one would shrink at . . . I think I observe that the word thus delivered makes stronger impression than formerly.

Exhortations could also last for over an hour, and extempore prayers were often attended by outpourings of emotion. One such occasion was described in a letter to Sarah on 9 May 1749 [Extract 5]:

At the alter we knew not how to part. I was constrained to pray again & again, with strong cries and tears. We all lay weeping & yet rejoicing at the foot of the cross.

Such energy and one suspects entertainment value, had crowds flocking to attend services and other meetings in the capital. 2000 were at the Foundery on 3 July 1759 [DDCW 5/95], 5000 on 4 June 1764 [DDCW 7/10], and on that same day during one service alone, 1200 received the Communion at Spitalfields Chapel.

### Spiritual Experience

Regular liturgical worship was only part of what Methodism had to offer. Much of the spiritual life of the societies was to be found in the classes and the bands. In such meetings the emphasis was on the sharing of spiritual experiences by small groups, in an atmosphere of mutual support and examination. On 1 May 1758 Charles wrote to Sarah [DDCW 7/55] asking to be excused from writing for the next few days, as he was going to be busy examining the London classes. Later in the same letter, which was written over several days, he explains that as the preacher John Jones was helping him, he could in fact spare her a few lines. He also made the observation that the people in the classes were generally alive to God and that there had been only one complaint about Jones's supervision.

The army officer John Walsh refers to several band meetings in a letter of 11 August 1762 [Extract 6], which describes some of the activities of the London Society over a period of approximately two years. An entry for 25 February 1761 reads as follows:

The Men Bands at West Street [Chapel] were a greater number than usual, & disputed much about Perfection; which I counted a false doctrine founded on spiritual pride. They who pleaded for it were many & showed much warmth.

This encouragement of intimate fellowship brought some problems in its train, as we shall see when we look at the controversy over *perfectionism* in greater detail.

The class meeting as a means of also enforcing discipline was well recognized, although Charles on occasion felt that this could be taken to extreme lengths. On 1 September 1773 [Extract 7] he complained of Miss Dryer of Bristol being

rashly & foolishly read out of the society, for not doing what she could not do, meet her class. How many of the sheep have been scattered by our nonsensical discipline [?]

The sharing of experience was encouraged in every way possible. It was common for people to give testimony of their faith during services, there are several references to the putting up of thanksgiving bills at the Foundery [DDCW 7/109], and hundreds of letters survive from ordinary Methodists across the country in which they describe to the Wesleys a variety of religious experience from conversions to "happy" deaths. Such accounts would be read out in chapel or incorporated in sermons.

The Methodist sense of solidarity was furthered by activities away from the chapels. Sick visiting occupied a prominent place in the preachers' daily routine, and ordinary members of the societies were encouraged to take an interest in each other's welfare. Anne Chapman of Bristol wrote to Charles on 21 August 1776 [Extract 8] that "Mr Salmon seldom comes to ye New Room, I must go see about them, but I assure you tis a great cross for me to visit fine folk." Another of Charles's correspondents, who described himself only as Omicron complained bitterly in 1780 of the unwillingness of the London preachers to visit the poor: "Those who are in good circumstances they will regularly attend without being sent for twice. Alas! does not the poor and wretched require a double attendance. Strange that a glass of wine and a biscuit should make such a difference."

Great importance was attached to charitable activities, although here again Charles could differ from his brother on points of detail. He complained to Sarah on 2 March 1760 [Extract 10] that no fewer than seven collections had been taken in London chapels from Thursday evening to Sunday including five in one day

from the same poor exhausted people. He [*i.e.*, John Wesley] has no mercy on them, on the giving poor I mean; as if in a haste to reduce them to the number of receiving poor.

The enthusiasm and intimate fellowship which characterized Methodist religious life was a source of both satisfaction and concern. The nature of the worship, which contained charismatic elements, had a tendency to lead to emotional excess and wild expectations. This was one reason why the Wesleys insisted on discipline and regularity. As early as 1739 the activities of the Millenarian French Prophets caused a split in the London membership, and there were several similar instances of excessive religious excitement. The worst occurred in the early 1760s when the London Society was torn apart over the issue of *perfection*, a doctrine which is defined in the *Encyclopedia of World Methodism* as a state of grace characterized by a heart cleansed from sin and filled with perfect love.

A number of vivid accounts of this episode have survived. These not only illustrate the tension that existed beneath the surface of the Connexion, but also provide a unique insight into religious life in the capital.

Between October 28th and December 18th 1762, William Briggs, a friend of the Wesleys sent at Charles's request, three letters detailing the activities of the advocates of the doctrine of *perfection*. The letter of 28th October [Extract 11] contained the following description of a meeting led by the preachers Thomas Maxfield and George Bell:

The meeting is in Beech lane. I was let in by an old woman & found a crowded audience singing with great alacrity . . . at the farther end under the pulpit I saw an hand waving about & soon found it was Mr Bell giving out the hymn. The speaker stood among the crowd without distinction. After the hymn he spoke a few minutes, to explain the intent of the meeting, which he affirmed to be . . . to awaken

those asleep in sin, whom curiosity should bring in . . . that all might come up to a state of perfection.

He next prayed & soon ran into such an extraordinary strain, screaming in such a violent manner to compel a blessing upon the present meeting, that he seemed to be in a rapture & in fact was as one raving with agony. . . .

In the midst of this rhapsody he fell into a hymn, which brought on a universal shout of singing. After some time spent in singing with expressions of their perfection & union with God as I never before heard of . . . he fell into a prayer again with most surprising familiarity and vociferation screaming for some token of almighty power. . . .

In the midst of this vehement supplication & praise, they fell into singing the glorious state of being free from sin. . . .

Mr Bell being perfectly well spent, Mr Maxfield stood up & with great propriety explained the intent of their meeting & assured us that they had no other scheme . . . than to promote the work of God & to bring souls up to a state of perfection. . . . He from exhorting suddenly fell into a prayer. . . . He ran into loud, familiar & rapturous expressions. . . .

Briggs goes on to relate how the meeting was disrupted by a follower of George Whitefield, who screamed from the gallery that Maxfield and Bell were liars and blasphemers. Briggs finally left the building amidst scenes of what he described as Wild diabolical frenzy.

This outbreak of extreme *perfectionism* disturbed Charles Wesley greatly. In an annotation on a letter of the period [John Walsh to CW, 11 August 1762] he referred to the Perfectionists as ranters and disturbers. The tone and content of Briggs's letters provide a good indication of the nature of Wesley's concern, namely that public discussion of emotive subjects like *perfection*, were too easily misunderstood or deliberately twisted by opponents of Methodism, especially when accompanied by extravagant behaviour.

The hold which extreme *perfectionism* acquired over Methodists in London is revealed by a letter of John Walsh dated August 1762. Walsh identified six people in his band who professed to be perfect. One Mrs. Burroughs of Deptford told him that [Extract 12]:

she rejoiced so much when she was made perfect as to shed many tears; & saw daily, some time before & ever since the air full of spirits; the good resembling stars or pieces of silver . . . & fewer in number than the evil; which resembled eels & serpents . . . the shadows of the evil appeared to her also in the water when passing the Thames. . . .

Mr. Joyce, also of Deptford

has long counted himself perfect. He said Satan brought the figure of a naked woman to tempt him every night; but on his praying it disappeared, & a round light, above a foot diameter then appeared till he fell asleep. I have seen no evil in him, except it were his desiring me to make interest with the Countess of Huntingdon, & get him the place of Master Sailmaker at Deptford Yard; because of the great good a perfect man might do with such a salary. . . .



Issues like the doctrine of *perfection* caused a problem of interpretation. The point is emphasised in the manuscripts that care had to be taken to identify the source of such visions and revelations, whether from God or the Devil. Briggs states that Bell and Maxfield for a long time enjoyed the tacit approval of John Wesley, and it was certainly the opinion of some prominent preachers, that great good was being done.

The meetings of the Perfectionists grew more extreme. In Briggs's second letter of 10 November 1762 [DDPr 11], he reports that seven people were meeting in a dark room to see visions. They called upon a lame man to walk and a blind man to see and when their efforts failed, they blamed their patients for lack of faith. In his letter of 11 August, John Walsh stated he had heard Bell making the following claims, namely [Extract 13]:

that God had given him the gift of healing, which he had already practised, & of raising the dead, which he should perform in God's time, that the millenium had begun, & he shd never die, that he & several other men had seen Satan bound & cast into the bottomless pit. . . .

John Wesley's failure either to approve or to condemn the movement publicly, caused the opponents of extreme *perfection* some concern. Briggs opined that [Extract 14]

Your dear brother is not well qualified to govern those who will not be governed. His tender regard for the good of souls will make him bear with some evil where he thinks there is much good.

Finally doubts over Bell's extremism and the damaging division that was appearing within the Society forced John Wesley's hand. In January 1763 Mr. Butcher reported [Extract 15]:

yr brother has forbid Mr Bell's teaching anymore at the Foundery & the Chappel but my brother ?Owen notwithstanding that did publish publickly that Mr Bell would be there this night. . . . I think there is but 3 men that seem to stand close, firm and steadfast but what in some degrees withdraw or renounce the common preaching for to hear Mr Bell.

This major threat to Wesleyan leadership of Methodism in London was only averted when Bell was disowned over his prophecy that the world would end on 28th February 1763, a prophecy which resulted in his arrest for disturbing the peace. Maxfield also left the movement taking several hundred followers with him. The harm done to Methodism's image is impossible to estimate, although it says a great deal for the energy of the movement that the losses in membership were soon made up.

The controversy over *perfection* illustrates several aspects of the way that Methodism was developing which had implications for the leadership. The independence exhibited by the preachers, and the influence that they were acquiring over the membership, posed a potential threat to the leadership of the Wesleys.

Moreover, the great diversity of worship gradually served to widen the gulf with the Church of England. This division was reflected within Methodism, where questions about the nature of the relationship with the Church occupied an increasingly important place.

I would like to turn now to Methodism outside London.

Traditionally historians of provincial Methodism have concentrated their attentions on John Wesley's personal role, often at the expense of the significant contribution made by individual preachers and lay people. One of the most valuable and neglected bodies of evidence are the regular preachers' letters, of which there are many examples in the Charles Wesley Archive.

In October 1780 John Valton gave some insight into the hard conditions faced by preachers allocated to the expanding industrial towns, when he wrote from Altrincham in the Manchester Circuit [Extract 16]:

It is such a strange circuit that I have not yet been in every place of it. Probably you may have heard of the condition that it was in by my letter to your brother. . . . I have endeavoured to purge the society and gather out the things that offend. . . . I have never met a circuit that so abounded in scandals and of such an atrocious kind. . . . I find great difficulty to go on in my present situation. The journeys bring on a pain in the head and great sickness and when I get to my place, I have hard matter to get thro my discourse. . . . When I come off my journey, some of the accommodation feels hard to me, and sometimes the dirtiness of the people so turns my stomach.

Valton's letter attests to the difficulty of imposing discipline and regularity over circuits that extended over wide areas, and which often included a diversity of rural and new industrial communities. Compared to London where the Wesleys or an ordained assistant were often present, provincial Methodism relied very much on the lay preachers. John Bennet and John Nelson for example, were responsible for evangelising much of Northern England, and the quality of the preachers was therefore a vital factor in the health of the Societies.

In November 1751 [Extract 17] the female itinerant Sarah Perrin discussed with John Wesley some of the concerns that she shared with his brother. She reported the conversation back as follows:

I spoke my thoughts freely & told him the danger the work was in of being destroyed unless an immediate stop was put to those preachers who do not live the gospel. I likewise told him you cd not labour in ye work in faith unless he would agree by written articles between you to let none labour with you but such as both consented to. He told me if you would agree to take one third of ye travelling work . . . he would agree but otherwise he could not because it would be impossible for you to have any knowledge of the preachers. . . .

It is obvious from this extract that Charles's gradual withdrawal from the itinerancy was a source of annoyance to his brother, who felt that some of the problems that Charles reported, could have been alleviated by his brother's closer

involvement. Many years later, Charles wrote to John complaining bitterly of the preachers' independence. John wrote on the back of the letter, the telling comment "Charles the martyr" [DDWES 4/93].

In the same letter of November 1751 Perrin reveals some of the problems which John Wesley had to try to deal with:

. . . a good preacher is very much wanted in this round. . . . I hear yr brother . . . consented to Jo Hewish preaching again it seems he was drunk ye night before. Bro Jones was here he did what he could to prevent him but they tell me he still goes about in other places as one of Mr Wesley's preachers likewise I hear complaints of Edmund Wells but I heard at Bristol that your brother had been told enough of him to have stopt his mouth. . . .

This shortage of capable itinerants is supported by other authorities. In 1750 [Extract 18] John Bennet wrote from Cheshire to complain of the Wesleys' apparent neglect of the North of England. Charles replied on May 1 as follows:

We have but one body apiece. Whether you might not have had an exhorter more frequently spared you, I cannot say, not being the orderer of their motions: but I believe my brother makes the most of them: & disposes of them more wisely than I or you ed do.

Anne Chapman in a letter of 21 August 1776 [Extract 19] asked Charles to approach his brother on the behalf of the Bristol Society about the quality of particular preachers;

The people are moaning & complaining that ye best are taken away & we are likely to be left in the lurch . . . the people here are discouraged & say its no use for them to speak . . . they think of Mr Wesley as some do of our Ring, that he will not hearken to any remonstrance.

Dissatisfaction with some aspects of the way that Methodism was developing comes through strongly in some of the letters, and this is on occasion linked to John Wesley's leadership style. The veteran Joseph Cownley wrote the following to Charles from Newcastle on Tyne on 26 April 1760 [Extract 20]:

Any one that thinks about it . . . will find it extremely difficult to persuade himself that Methodism will continue to be always what it is now. . . . I think great confusion . . . almost unavoidable and my reason for thinking so is this—The door to preaching among us is as wide as our societies so that any ignorant or designing man . . . may preach without any more ado unless to procure somebody or other to inform your bro which is not always needful, that he is well enough qualified for it. And there is no man . . . tho never so unfit . . . but may find at least some old woman who will abide by it that he is the finest man they have ever heard. . . . Now these are to a man your bro's servants and implicitly obey him especially if he sets them on horseback. They make their parties among the people and your bro caresses them as the only men that have either zeal for God or love for him.



Cownley goes on to contrast John Wesley's treatment of these new preachers with the neglect of veterans like himself, now that they are no longer physically capable of keeping up with their leader, who was incidentally 20 years older—

If they can live without him well, if not the Lord must pity them for he has no further care about them . . . there are several of my brethren who might make the like complaint . . . who have not fled either to the gown or cloak for succour [*i.e.*, entered the Anglican or dissenting ministries] and who . . . have no thought of doing it unless they could do it and be Methodist preachers still.

### **Holy Communion**

One of the most important requirements of an 18th century Methodist was regular attendance at the Lord's Table. In London this did not pose a problem as sacramental services were held on a weekly basis in Methodist chapels. Elsewhere however it was very different. Irregular celebration of communion in many parish churches and the Wesleys' insistence that only ordained clergymen of the Church of England could officiate, imposed a strain on the loyalty of the societies. In 1760 the preachers stationed in Norwich defied the leadership and administered the sacraments to local Methodists.

Charles reacted with vigour. He recognized that this action if sanctioned, would amount to final separation from the Church of England. The letter he wrote to Nicholas Gilbert on 6 March 1760 [Extract 21] shows his strength of feeling together with some doubt as to his brother's sympathies:

My soul abhors the thought of separation from the Church of England. You & all the preachers know if my brother should ever leave it, I should leave him; or rather he me.

In a letter of 27 March 1760 [Extract 22], he told John Nelson:

I love thee from my heart; yet rather than see thee a dissenting minister, I wish to see thee smiling in thy coffin.

John Wesley, after some initial hesitation, drew back from separation and emphasised his commitment to the Church of England.

Episodes like the sacramental dispute raise the interesting question of how removed was Charles Wesley from opinion within the Connexion. In the last section of my article, I wish to look briefly at how Charles was viewed by his contemporaries, with particular regard to what they tell us of the conflicting loyalties, which divided the movement.

The first point that can be made is that he was a man who invited extremes of reaction. This was very much in keeping with his temperament, which was characterized by mood swings from despair to exhilaration. His response to other people was often open and affectionate. He was intensely loyal, but also possessed a quick temper and when angry was apt to strike out verbally. In defence of his principles he was unyielding and his letters indicate that he could be

petty,—in one letter of 1783 to his wife he mentions that John was preaching in Bristol with the rather cutting aside [Extract 23] “By the way I never heard a wise good man, so fond of being heard as he is. . . .”

All these personality traits can be detected in his relations with the preachers, although increasingly after 1750 it is what many of them would have regarded as his negative side, which came through the strongest. In November 1779 John Valton must have spoken for many of his colleagues when he wrote Charles the following lines [Extract 24]:

Was it likely to do good to the cause of God to tell a friend of mine that Mr J Wesley had a hard matter to keep us [*i.e.*, the preachers] together, pride had got such a footing among us and that as soon as your brothers head was laid, you foresaw what would be the consequence? Did you not speak stronger things in your sermon on the fast day . . . Dr Sir it will irritate the men of little grace and distress the sincere preachers of the word. . . . Again did you not after an earnest prayer for your brother . . . say “O Lord he has nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against him.”

Valton’s protest pales by comparison with the violent language used by the preacher Michael Fenwick in his undated letter [Extract 24]:

Mr [John Wesley] I know has a mind bent to help his preachers but he says that you have done ym more hurt than ever you will be able to do them good while you live . . . for some years I have looked upon Mr Charles Wesley among his brothers preachers like one that had caught the plague, while God was increasing their number Mr Charles I could only compare to a wild bull in a net . . . as for evil speaking and little tattle this nation Sir cannot compare with you. . . . It really seems as if God had permitted Satan to devote you to this. . . .

While few of the preachers would have agreed with the savagery of this attack, the letter illustrates very graphically the personality clashes which were so much a feature of early Methodism. Such disputes were ignored or merely hinted at by 19th century historians like Thomas Jackson. It is only by going back to the original manuscript sources that the full picture emerges.

It would be a mistake to assume that Charles Wesley was isolated in his love of the Church of England. Many of the preachers sought ordination as Anglican ministers, including Dr. John Jones, Joseph Benson, and the pioneer of American Methodism, Joseph Pilmore. As late as 1826, Adam Clarke, one of the greatest Methodists of his generation, described the Church of England as the purest national church in the world [Extract 25]. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the animosity which many of the preachers showed to Charles Wesley, sprang as much from his attitude towards them, as from his attachment to the Church of England.

Charles Wesley’s unpopularity with the preachers was not reflected elsewhere in Methodism. At the height of the Norwich Sacramental dispute, he boasted to his wife [Extract 26] that

Peggy Jackson hugs me as a man after her own heart. So does her sister & all the old women of the Society. I hope my brother will never call for a poll. If he does he will miss the principal of the flock. Many of ym have assured me, if he leaves the Church he will leave them also.

This loyalty was particularly marked among wealthy Methodists like the London merchant John Horton, who wrote the following to Charles on 6 August 1773 [Extract 27]:

Yr brother is drawing up a plan for settling all the preaching houses in one general trust, if he can accomplish this there may be a possibility of keeping the preachers in some tolerable order, but if something is not done to ye purpose & that soon, I should not wonder if many will shake off his authority & if HE is unable to govern what can be expected from those who succeed him in ye management of these headstrong gentlemen. . . .

Horton was representative of a body of opinion within the lay leadership, which was very much opposed to separation. Such men as Horton, William Pine, and Henry Durbin represented an important conservative element well into the 19th century.

### **Conclusion**

I would like to emphasise that the primary object of my article has been to show how a comparatively neglected collection like the Charles Wesley Archive can be used to shed a new light on early Methodist history. When considering Charles Wesley's contribution to Methodism and the universal church, it is very important to return to the manuscript sources, given that the printed material, much of which was written in the nineteenth century, is very selective in the facts that are presented. The result has been an unbalanced view not only of Charles Wesley but of the Methodist movement itself. This is particularly true when examining the conflicts within the movement and the question as to whether Methodism could have continued to be contained within the Church of England.

**List of Manuscript Sources**

- Extract 1 CW to Sarah Gwynne, 28/3 1749 DDCW 5/45  
Extract 2 CW to Sarah Wesley, 15/9 1766 DDCW 7/58  
Extract 3 Joseph Williams to CW, 17/10 1739 DDP 93  
Extract 4 Walter Shirley to CW, 12/1 1760 DDP 69  
Extract 5 CW to Sarah Wesley, 9/5 1749 DDCW 5/52  
Extract 6 John Walsh to CW, 11/8 1762 Preachers' Folio  
Extract 7 CW to Sarah Wesley, 1/9 1773 DDCW 7/32  
Extract 8 Anne Chapman to CW, 21/8 1776 DDCW 2/13  
Extract 9 Omicron to CW, 16/5 1780 DDP 59  
Extract 10 CW to Sarah Wesley, 2/3 1760 DDCW 7/57  
Extract 11 William Briggs to CW, 10/10 1762 DDP 10  
Extract 12 John Walsh to CW, 11/8 1762 Preachers' Folio  
Extract 13 John Walsh to CW, 11/8 1762 Preachers' Folio  
Extract 14 William Briggs to CW, 10/11 1762 DDP 11  
Extract 15 William Briggs to CW, 10/11 1762 DDP 11  
Extract 16 John Valton to CW, 12/10 1780 DDWes 2/84  
Extract 17 Sarah Perrin to CW, 4/11 1751 Wesley Folio  
Extract 18 CW to John Bennet, 1/5 1750 DDCW 1/34  
Extract 19 Ann Chapman to CW, 21/8 1776 DDCW 2/13  
Extract 20 Joseph Cownley to CW, 26/4 1760 DDP 16  
Extract 21 CW to Nicholas Gilbert, 6/3 1760 DDWes 4/92  
Extract 22 CW to John Nelson, 27/3 1760 DDWes 4/92B  
Extract 23 CW to Sarah Wesley, Aug. 1783 DDCW 7/86  
Extract 24 John Valton to CW, 13/11 1779 Preachers' Folio  
Extract 25 Michael Fenwick to CW, n.d Preachers' Folio  
Extract 26 Adam Clarke to Geo. Wilkinson, 27/1 1826 PLP 25/7/8  
Extract 27 John Horton to CW, 6/8 1773

After the date, the designation of the location in The Charles Wesley Archive is given.

