

## CHAPTER 9

### **CULTURE FORMATION: THE ROLE OF METHODISM**

Because the secular and the sacred were intertwined in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the theme of 'national, regional and urban identities cannot be properly investigated without reference to religion' (Hempton, 1996a, 178). Therefore, unpacking the geography of religion and religious differences is a crucial element in reaching an understanding of cultural institutions and culture distinctiveness across territorial space. Indeed, Hechter goes so far as to use religion, along with language, as one of his 'cultural differentiae'; as measures of the distinctiveness of the Celtic lands of the British Isles in the nineteenth-century (Hechter, 1975, 167). And more recently, there has been renewed interest in identifying the detailed denominational geography of England and Wales, as a basis for identifying 'cultural regions' and interpreting regional variations in culture (Snell and EII, 2000, 4-10).

At the outset, we can note in the literature a broad two-way relationship between religion and identity. First, religion is viewed as expressing other identities in a surrogate fashion. In Britain, inevitably, religion was bound up with social class identity (McLeod, 1996, 62-65). Thus Hempton (1996a, 134) suggests that the sectarian conflicts of new dissent from the 1820s to the 1850s were caused by a finely fragmented class society. Conversely, Everitt (1972, 7) interprets the rise of dissent, old and new, as 'one of the many signs that local attachments, far from declining with the growth of national consciousness, were in many ways becoming stronger'. Robbins goes further: 'In the absence of devolved government, the churches have come to be perhaps the most significant institutional embodiments of regional or national identity' (Robbins, 1982, 468). In relation to Celtic Britain religion has been granted a special role

as giving rise to 'a form of surrogate nationalism in Scotland as well as Wales' (Bebbington, 1982, 503).

But, as well as giving expression to other, class and spatial, identities, religion may also be integrated into these identities. James (2001, 15) has claimed that Christianity has been a 'key element in Welsh national identity'. Similarly, in Ireland, the distinction between Celt and Catholic had already become blurred by the eighteenth-century. By then the tendency was to view 'all Irish as Catholics and all Catholics as Irish' (Boyce, 1982, 56). In this light, religion is not merely a surrogate expression of other identities but takes its place as part of an identity matrix. Snell and EII have, more recently, made the intriguing suggestion that religious allegiance were highest in areas 'where national and cultural identities were *least* ambivalent'. These were those places where 'the Welsh (or English), the Scottish, the Irish and perhaps (locally) ... the Cornish' provided 'more far-reaching cultural and national options' (Snell and EII, 2000, 417-418).

In this chapter we pursue the linkage between religious and territorial identity on a more micro-scale, seeking the reasons why 'Cornwall and Methodism are still inextricably linked' (Gay, 1971, 162). By 1801 Wesleyan Methodist membership, as a proportion of the total population, was higher in Cornwall than anywhere in England in 1801 (*Methodist Magazine* 3, 1824, 377-383)<sup>1</sup>. A few years later, in 1829, Richard Tyacke, Vicar of Sithney, gloomily wrote in his diary: 'Sunday – the Church was but thinly attended - the rain pattered down so thick and fast, though at evening I observed the roads that led to the Methodists' chapel were thronged in every direction' (CRO/AD 715, entry

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<sup>1</sup> Membership density of Wesleyan Methodism in Cornwall was also at this time considerably higher than that of Calvinist Methodism in Wales. Membership of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Connexion in 1838 was around 4.1 per cent of the Welsh population (calculated from statistics in Currie et al., 1977, 148). Wesleyan Methodist membership was 5 per cent in Cornwall in 1821. This suggests, however, that Calvinist Methodist density was higher in north Wales than Wesleyan Methodist density was in Cornwall.

for 5 April 1829). Methodist strength was reflected in the results of the 1851 Census of Religious Worship. Cornwall was the only county outside north Wales where attendances at Methodist chapels were in the majority (Coleman, 1980, 40). In his study of patterns of religious attendance in 1851 Coleman concluded that 'only Cornwall was remarkable for both the IA [Index of Attendance] and the PS [Percentage Share], and it is already apparent that, whatever regional homogeneity the rest of southern England might display, Cornwall has to be counted out ... Cornwall was *sui generis*' (Coleman, 1983, 157 and 172).

The reasons for this spiritual hegemony of Methodism have been well rehearsed by historians of Cornish Methodism (see in particular Shaw, 1965; Rule, 1971; Luker, 1987) and will be briefly reviewed below. But this chapter focuses on some hitherto less widely discussed issues. In 1981 Tom Shaw asked the interesting question 'Is there – or has there ever been – such a thing as Cornish Methodism?' Was Methodism in Cornwall distinctive? And can it be characterised as 'Cornish' in anything more than simple geographical location? Later in this chapter this issue is pursued through focusing on the role of revivalism and lay control within Cornish Methodism. Asking the question 'How did Cornwall re-form Methodism?' contrasts with the traditional focus of native scholarship and local Methodist history as to how Methodism reformed Cornwall.

In this chapter we also revisit three recurring themes of this thesis: (1) the elements of identity formation (distinction, integration, process, context and narrative); (2) the issue of scale; and (3) the institutionalization of regions over time. We start by looking at the reception and growth of Methodism in Cornwall, identifying the comparative patterns and briefly reviewing the reasons for its early spread. This links to the elements of context and process. As we shall see, the importance of an awareness of scale differences join context when the micro-geography of the 1851 Religious Census is analysed in the following

section. Distinction and integration then become the main focus as the claim is advanced that revivalism and issues of lay control helped to construct a distinctly 'Cornish' Methodism after the 1780s. This process, it is argued, played a key role in institutionalizing a Cornish identity in the early nineteenth-century. That institutionalization brings us, finally, back to narrative and the chapter ends by reflecting on the linkages between Methodism and private and public identities in nineteenth-century Cornwall.

### ***The reception of Methodism***

Hempton (1996b, 1) has stated that an important historical question about Methodism was 'Why did it grow when and where it did?' This and the following section explore this particular question to ask how and why Methodism came to dominate early nineteenth century Cornwall. Charles and John Wesley's arrival in Cornwall in 1743 was part of a broader evangelical awakening that included widely separated 'revivals' in Wales and the North American littoral in the 1730s and in Scotland in the early 1740s, preceding the re-awakening of religious enthusiasm in Cornwall. Nevertheless, Wesley's message was keenly received in the Cornish part of this transatlantic Protestant community. By 1767, when reliable membership statistics begin, Cornwall supplied more than 10% of all British members of Wesleyan societies.

Three elements explain the early establishment of Methodism in Cornwall: structural factors; the way Methodism communicated its message; and the actual message it carried. Walsh (1994, 30) has pointed out how, generally, Methodism moved 'into some of the yawning gaps of the Anglican parochial system, providing pastoral care to communities where little was on offer previously.' The weakness and indolence of the Church of England in Cornwall has long been cited as a major, sometimes the only, factor in Methodism's early

growth; 'the combined effect of large parishes, remote churches, pluralism and absentee clergy had produced a virtually heathen population in Cornwall' (Gay, 1971, 160). More sober assessments reiterate factors such as churches remote from the population centre of parishes, a situation exacerbated as rural industrialization reinforced dispersed settlement patterns (Coleman, 1991, 135). As we saw in chapter 8 the Cornish settlement structure and local traditions, including an independent-minded tinning population, together with loose and friable bonds of landlord and customary influence, provided several of those criteria cited by Everitt as underpinning religious nonconformity: independent groups with a sense of freedom, rural industrial villages and new settlements near parochial boundaries at a distance from the parish church (Everitt, 1972).

Luker (1987) has constructed the most sophisticated structural explanation of the growth of Methodism in Cornwall. He notes several 'external' structural factors - the size of parishes, the size of their populations, their economic and employment base and the absence of an effective, authoritative gentry - intersecting with internal factors such as the pastoral and administrative machinery of early Methodist societies and the degree of lay control within them (Luker, 1987, 85-105). Over time, the longer-term influence of social change accompanying industrialisation became an important issue. But at first 'environmental' factors were paramount in the rapid transformation of popular perceptions of early Methodism. The structure of Cornish society more generally gave Methodism a popular accessibility. For example, Methodism's band and class meetings ideally complemented the small groups that were the backbone of metal mining.

But similar structural factors had not led to vigorous religious dissent in the seventeenth and early eighteenth-centuries. Indeed, dissent was extremely weak in early eighteenth-century Cornwall (Barry, 1991, 87). Structural factors

provided the preconditions but did not guarantee the emergence of religious pluralism. The second element in Methodism's reception was communication. Walsh (1994, 29) has argued that the Protestant world of the early and mid eighteenth century made up a 'highly effective communications network'; Methodism was built on the processes of connecting communities through the operation of itinerancy. Early preaching was able both to feed and to meet the volatile mood of eighteenth-century communities linked by networks of gossip and rumour. John Reed, the son of a yeoman farmer at Stithians, recalled in his memoir how

in the year 1742 [*sic*], about the month of August, Mr Wesley and some of his preachers visited Cornwall. This soon occasioned a great rumour, and induced hundreds and thousands of people to assemble together, in various places, where notice was given for the new preachers to discourse to the people ... now there was no small stir among the people' (Kelk, 1804).

The comment of the Anglican minister at Gwennap to the 1744 visitation queries also reflects the restless fluidity of early Methodism: 'there is a constant succession of teachers, that run up and down the country' (Brown, 1962, 7). Itinerant preaching and pastoral work enabled Methodists to connect communities in ways that the traditional Anglican clergyman could not, with his static ministry bound to the physical fabric of the church. Such dynamic methods were clearly well suited to the work of evangelising mining communities. Outside towns such as Falmouth popular opposition to Methodism was sporadic and short-lived. Even in 1745, when some of the local landed class resorted to the law to oppose John Wesley's preaching, they failed to use their powers to the full and, at many critical points in mining districts, were confronted by large crowds mobilised in support of the Methodist itinerants (Wesley, 1864, 475). Wesley had

introduced a new, itinerant ministry to Cornwall. And, unlike in Wales, no native dissenting tradition of itinerancy had prepared the people for this (Jenkins, 1992, 147).

Yet structure and methods do not explain everything. The third factor explaining this religious change is the message itself. We need to restore the importance of the message that Wesley carried as well as the methods with which he disseminated it and the environment to which it was brought. The message of justification by faith and instant salvation was simple and attainable. It offered hope and security for labouring communities as the spread of market relations added to the already considerable uncertainties of life and death. It also helped to bridge the gap between formal church religion and popular spiritual beliefs. Taking their cue from Obelkevich's work on Lincolnshire, historians of Cornish Methodism have pointed to the coalescence of belief systems involved in Methodism (Obelkevich, 1976; Luker, 1987, 396). For example, Rule has argued that 'Methodism did not so much replace folk-beliefs as translate them into a religious idiom' (Rule, 1982, 63). In this respect it is also significant that Methodism in west Cornwall spoke in the dialect of the people. In explaining the popularity of the Methodist chapel in Sithney in 1829, Richard Tyacke wrote that 'the preachers of the persuasion are generally selected from their own sphere in life' (CRO/AD 715).

Together, structure, communication and message may allow us to explain the early implantation of Methodism in Cornwall. But a distinctive aspect of eighteenth-century Methodism in Cornwall may lie in the way it was diffused. Walsh has proposed that the iconography of early Methodism is misleading. The 'characteristic image of the English movement is *not* that of John Wesley preaching to great crowds in the sunken outdoor amphitheatre at Gwennap in Cornwall' but of him standing in 'a barn talking to a knot of people' (Walsh,

1994, 33-34). 'Patient persistent Evangelism' marked the spread of eighteenth-century Methodism in England rather than periodic mass revivalism. There were too many social barriers for swift diffusion, unlike in 'more open and egalitarian societies like those of North America' (Walsh, 1994, 32). So did the great outdoor Gwennap meetings indicate a pattern of diffusion in Cornwall more akin to America than to England? In 1764 it was reported from Wendron that 'the work of God greatly revived this year in almost every place in the circuit' (Kelk, 1804). This prefigured a pattern of diffusion in Cornwall marked by periodic surges of support rather than the 'patient evangelism' of English Methodism. But to investigate this further we must establish the exact patterns of Methodist growth and set them in their comparative context.

### ***Methodist growth***

Statistics for Methodist membership are available from 1767 for both Cornwall and Britain as a whole. (Cornish membership statistics can be found in Rule, 1971, 217; Edwards, 246ff and Hayden, 1982, 427ff. The author has also had access to John Probert's membership database. The British figures are from Currie et.al., 1977, 161-162.) Figure 9.1 shows the growth of members in Cornwall and Britain (excluding Cornwall) from 1767 to 1840.

As the British figures are for a larger population, regional variations are evened out. Nevertheless, the graph displays a pattern of growth in Cornwall marked by irregular surges. The actual numbers of members in Cornwall peaked during the revival of 1764/65 and then fell. The figures indicate another revival in 1770/71 (missing in the qualitative literature – see Rule, 1998-99), which was followed by similar 'backsliding'. It was the revival of 1781-84, one that began in west



Cornwall and spread to the east with a lag of a couple of years, that doubled membership within a few years. Membership fell off again, until the spectacular gains of the 1798-1800 revival. A similar pattern, of a virtual doubling of membership and then a fall, can be seen after both major revivals of 1798-1800 and 1814. By 1805-06 the number of Methodist members in Cornwall was a full 30 per cent below the peak year of 1800; by 1820-21 membership was 20 per cent below the peak of 1814. But the same effect was much more muted after the later revivals of the mid-1820s and early 1830s. This suggests that the penetration of Methodism had reached certain limits in Cornwall by the 1820s and the steadier pattern of growth may reflect the putting in place of a more sophisticated pastoral and administrative machinery.

Furthermore, as Table 9.1 indicates, the density of Methodist membership in Cornwall, expressed as a proportion of the total population, peaked at just over 10 per cent in the 1880s. This was over three times greater than the peak of Methodist density achieved in England.

Table 9.1: Methodist membership as a proportion of the population, 1771-1901,  
Cornwall and England

	Cornwall	England (excluding Cornwall)
1771	1.72	0.42
1791	2.85	0.75
1811	3.67	1.55
1831	7.89	2.29
1851	8.55	3.01
1871	9.37	2.78
1891	10.52	2.51

(Based on membership statistics from Currie et.al., 1977; Edwards; Hayden, 1982; John Probert's unpublished membership database and early population estimates from Wrigley and Schofield, 1989)

In terms of the diffusion of Methodism, Cornwall thus led the English experience by at least half a century. By the later 1790s Methodist density in Cornwall had already reached the peak rates that were to be achieved in England in the 1840s. The 1798-1800 revival took Methodist membership in Cornwall to relative levels never to be seen in England. When comparing Cornwall with Wales it is noticeable that Wesleyan Methodism in Cornwall did not suffer the setbacks that Methodism did in Wales in the 1750s as a result of personal and doctrinal disputes (Jenkins, 1987, 365). While Welsh Methodism had pre-dated the Cornish 'awakening' the difficult years of the mid century saw a haemorrhage of members to the dissenting churches. In Cornwall, relatively weak competition from dissent gave Wesleyan Methodism an effective monopoly of revivalist enthusiasm. As early as 1785 Methodist societies were present in 31

per cent of Cornish parishes, these including the largest and most populous (Coleman, 1991, 130; Luker, 1987, 82). But, by the end of the thirty years of Methodist expansion following 1785, Methodist societies had been organised in the vast majority (83 per cent) of Cornish parishes. These years included the two great revivals of 1799 and 1814 and saw Methodism establish itself as the hegemonic religious institution of Cornwall.

The years of Methodist expansion generally from 1780 to 1830 have been linked to an outburst of itinerant preaching. In turn, this dynamic growth period has been explained as a part of 'wider structural changes'. Relevant factors cited have included population growth, subsistence crises, the commercialisation of agriculture, warfare and a sharpened class conflict accompanying the rise of a clerical gentry, who had benefited from enclosures of land and tithe commutation (see Hempton, 1996a, 27). Where social changes dislocated older hierarchies and communities, 'cottage based evangelicalism' spread rapidly (Hempton, 1994, 314). Valenze has argued that cottage religion was a creative re-appropriation of religion by 'plebeian preachers', using the message of the gospel to legitimate the 'traditional' household economy of the labouring classes, one under increasing pressure from market relations (Valenze, 1985 and 1987, 32). As we saw in chapter 8 Cornwall's dispersed paternalist society of indirect landlord control and its discourse of moral economy would have made it particularly susceptible to cottage religion

In Cornwall, as elsewhere, the spread and consolidation of Methodism after the revival of the early 1780s can be related to this broader process of cottage religion in turn connected to economic and social change. Luker argues that the 'early externalisation' of economic structures associated with the rise of mining, added to by changes in agriculture from the 1790s, fragmented 'traditional' society and produced a 'new found impotence and insecurity' (Luker, 1987, 35-

41). This was fertile ground for planting the spiritual certainties of Methodism. But Methodism was aided also by the concomitant strength of custom, the access to smallholdings and the dispersed paternalism noted above in chapter 8. It was this particular combination of the new *and* the old which provided the space as well as the demand for Methodism.

Eighteenth-century cottage religion also had particular gender and territorial profiles. Unlike the Anglican version of evangelicalism, which tended to reinforce patriarchal authority within the family, nonconformity gave women the opportunity to move outside the home while re-affirming the idea of the household as a centre of labouring life. As a result the role of women in the outburst of cottage religion from the 1780s to the 1830s is now generally accepted. Examples of informal, spontaneous, rural cottage Methodism and the involvement of women abound in Cornwall. In 1771, Ann Gilbert of Gwinear was 'going one day to preaching in the adjoining village, the preacher happened not to come'. She gave out the hymn, went to prayer and was then 'constrained to intreat and beseech them to repent, and turn to the Lord. The people were melted into tears, and many were convinced of sin' (Taylor, 1795, 44). Ann, almost totally blind since the early 1750s, found in Methodism a role within the local community that granted her new respect and enhanced status. It is clear that Methodism appealed especially to women. In 1767 56.8 per cent of the members of the West Cornwall circuit were women (CRO AD 350), a proportion that approximates almost exactly to that in Macclesfield at the end of the 1700s (Hempton, 1984, 13). It is also noticeable that societies in the mining districts had particularly high proportions of female members. The role of women in early, eighteenth century Methodism in Cornwall may, indeed, still be greatly understated in the historiography.

Cottage religion was, if anything, entrenched in Cornwall well before its appearance in rural parts of England. Luker alerts us to the consequences of this early popular evangelicalism. Specifically, he points to an important distinction between west and east Cornwall (Luker, 1987, 281). The larger numbers joining the Methodist societies in the 1780s in west Cornwall assisted 'the essential indigenisation of local Methodism' and established its character at a time when the organisational structures of Methodism were still fluid and evolving. In contrast, in mid and east Cornwall, the later emergence of similar levels of Methodist support allowed connexional direction and circuit organisation to be more influential. This chronology led to a Methodism in west Cornwall at odds in many ways with the formal Methodism of the connexional authorities, something that continued well into the nineteenth-century and which helped to make local Methodism distinctively 'Cornish'. One outcome of this history was that 'cottage religion' in west Cornwall retained a clear Wesleyan strand. By contrast, in other areas non-Wesleyan Methodism, particularly the Primitives, after the 1810s became the 'dominant expression of cottage religion' (Hempton, 1994, 314).

William Hockin, clergyman at Phillack wrote in 1821 that 'of Westleian [*sic*] Methodists there are multitudes – this is indeed the predominating sect throughout the West of Cornwall which has nearly swallowed up all the others' (Brown, 1962, 18). In Cornwall, unlike in Wales, Wesleyanism and Methodism were synonymous before the 1820s. This, together with the weakness of old dissent, had helped to produce a homogenous religious culture that Ward describes as a 'Volkskirche'. Local lay leaders of Wesleyanism had established a popular church that 'did not bend easily to preachers' pressure' (Ward, 1972, 245-246). Methodism gave psychic reassurance for the individual in the face of economic and social change and created a framework for everyday life in the occupationally homogenous communities of west Cornwall. Such a 'cultural

exchange between religion and the everyday life of working people' seems to have been a rare achievement (Hempton, 1994, 315).

Thus, the appeal of Methodism in Cornwall was facilitated by the context of early industrialisation, together with the structural configuration of Cornish rural-industrial society. But it must be emphasised that the growth of Methodism was not simply that of a new religion suiting new times; nor was it a functional response to industrial capitalism, two influential previous interpretations. In adopting the former explanation, Rowe saw Methodism as the 'spiritual counterpart of the economic forces that, impatient of any and every restraint, blindly believing in infinite and unlimited progress, were driving forward' (Rowe, 1993, 261.20). Rule, in proposing the latter interpretation, echoed a widespread view among historians in the 1960s. Methodism 'provided an inner discipline which aided in breaking in the labour force to the new disciplines of the machine age' (1971, 82/83). But factors such as the role of cottage religion and the involvement of women in the early growth of Methodism suggest that Luker's more subtle interpretation of Methodism as a bridge between the old and the new, promoting individualist ideas but within structures of continuity and tradition, has more explanatory force (Luker, 1987, 408. See also Hempton, 1984, 28).

### ***Distinction: the denominational geography of mid nineteenth-century Cornwall***

By the later 1810s Methodism was providing the religious identity for the majority of Cornish men and women. Moreover, it added a qualitative, cultural distinctiveness to the Cornish society we have sketched over the previous three chapters. But how 'distinctive' was Cornwall's religious practice?

The 1851 Religious Census, because of its uniqueness, exercises an enduring fascination for the historians of nineteenth-century religion in England and Wales. The quantitative data of this Census have been used as the basis for a number of accounts of Victorian religious practice (The classic accounts are Gay, 1971; Inglis, 1960; Pickering, 1967; Thompson, 1967). Towards the end of the twentieth-century this quantitative approach to religious history was increasingly criticised for ignoring the actual religious experiences of men and women (see Hempton, 1996b, 28). Yet, during this same period, there were also renewed calls for a more rigorous analysis of the quantitative data contained in the Religious Census. Snell (2000) points out that there has been no detailed regional comparison using analytical quantitative methods such as explicit correlation coefficients. He had earlier argued that 'precise statistical descriptions of denominational regional strengths and complementary location' makes the variations more apparent and allows the conflicts (or lack of them) between denominations to be more fully understood (Snell, 1991, 54/55). Computerisation allows the testing of earlier generalisations, the construction of a more detailed descriptive geography and comparison between religious and other socio-economic variables (Ell, 1992; Ell and Slater, 1994; Crockett and Snell, 1997. These earlier contributions have been synthesized and expanded upon in Snell and Ell, 2000).

This new body of quantitative work rests on the central assumption that the 1851 Religious Census provides sufficiently robust data. When comparing reported attendances at registration district level with the provision of seating in the churches of the north Midlands, Snell found a 'reassuringly tight' fit and concluded that 'we can have considerable confidence in the internal consistency of the religious data of the 1851 Census' (1991, 14). His conclusions support those of earlier writers. Thus Thompson (1978) concluded that, 'although

containing minor errors and omissions, there is no other collection of statistical material which is as complete for comparing varying [religious] practice from place to place and from denomination to denomination'. Field also concludes, in his comprehensive bibliographical essay relating to the 1851 Census, that it 'still remains a broadly accurate quantitative tool for examining the state of English and Welsh Methodism at mid-century, provided that the unit of geographical analysis is kept sufficiently large' (1997, 201).

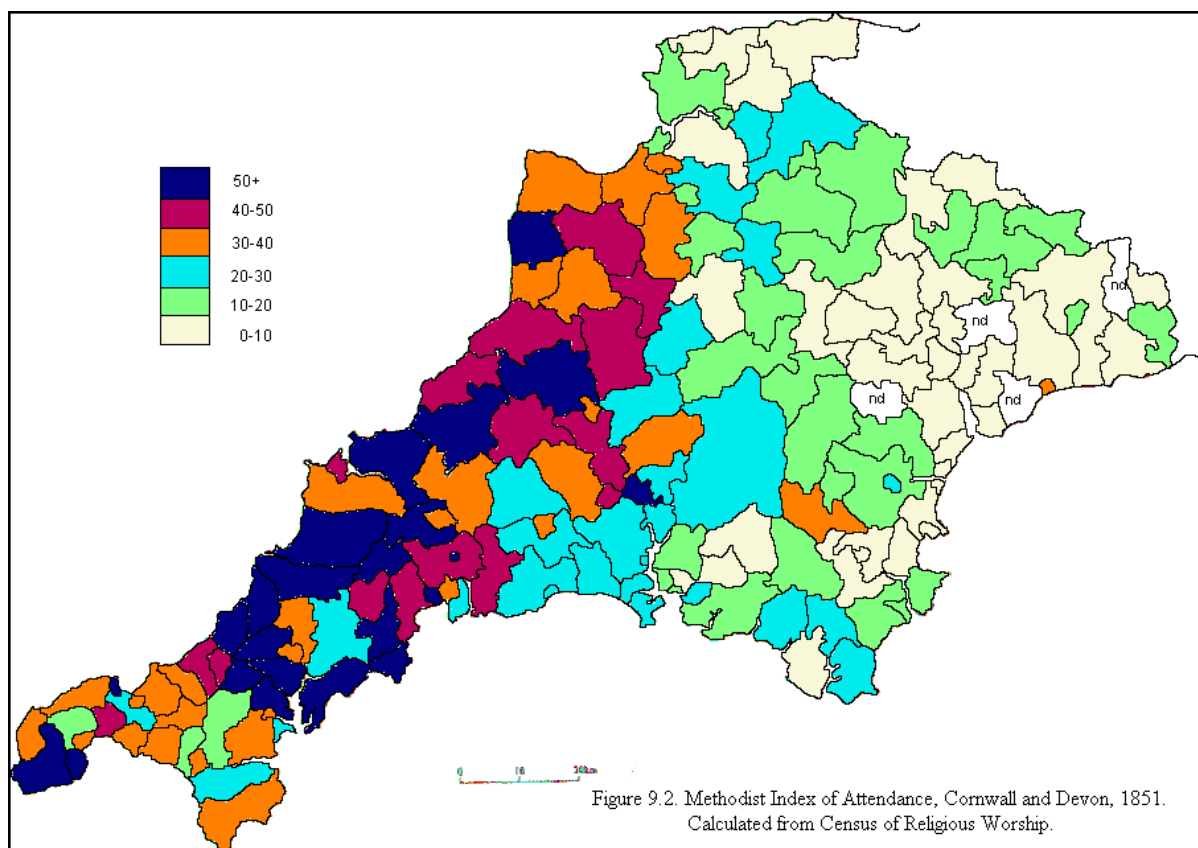
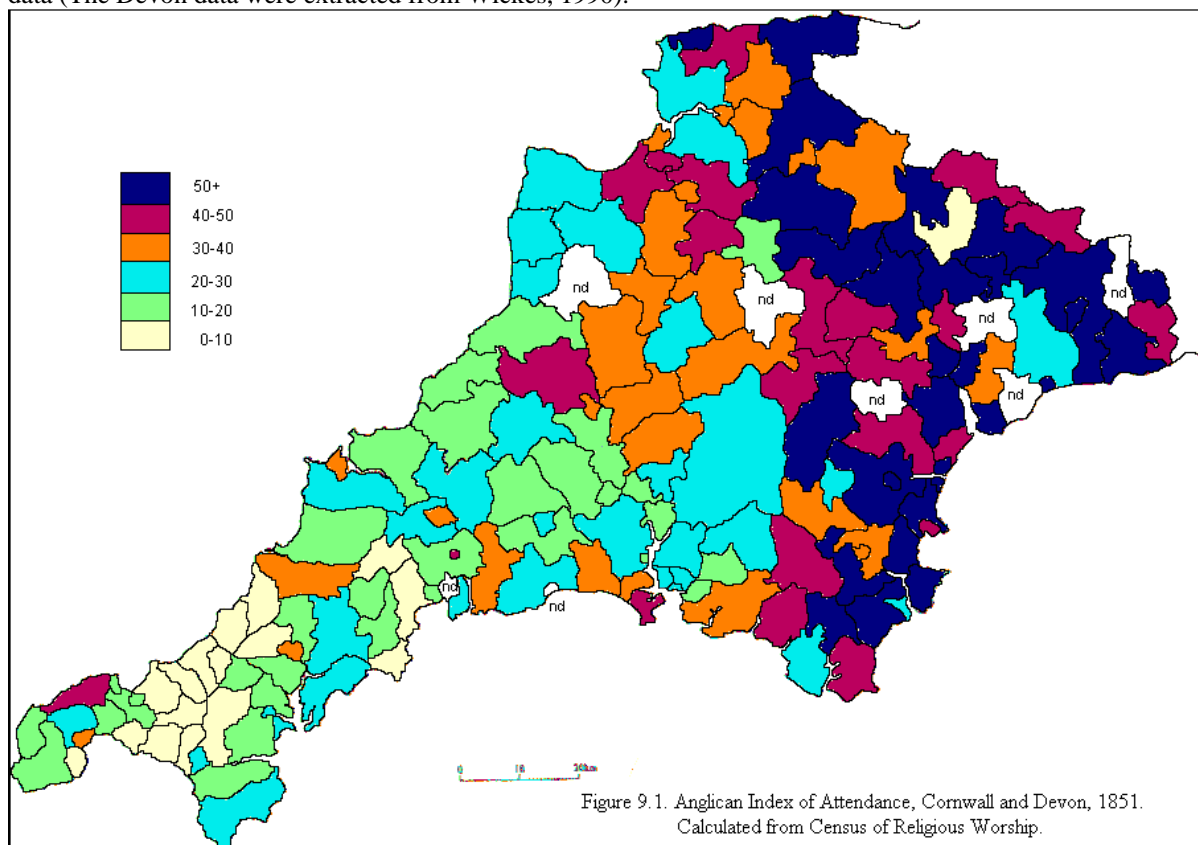
However, what is 'sufficiently large'? Both Snell (1991, 8) and Ell and Slater (1994, 48) conclude that county level data are 'clumsy' and 'inadequate' and prefer to use registration districts, adjusting to correct for missing data. If the purpose is to draw broad regional distinctions and test regional denominational reciprocities then this level of analysis no doubt suffices. Nevertheless, Snell also expresses misgivings that 'the registration district is slightly too large a unit', failing to do justice to small towns and the intricacy of local 'pays' (1991, 52). At the same time the parish level is too small for rigorous analysis and, in any case, may not reflect the perceptual geography of dissenters, who looked beyond parish boundaries. This raises the possibility of analysis at an intermediate spatial level – at sub-registration district level but revising boundaries to distinguish market towns separately – which is the level of analysis adopted in this thesis. This produces a far more detailed geography than registration districts (76 units in Cornwall as opposed to 13 registration districts) and allows us better to understand intra-Cornish differences. It also requires building up the data from the original returns rather than relying on the published report.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In doing this, missing Anglican attendance returns were replaced by the average of the returns for the Church of England in the other parishes of the sub-district, if the latter amounted to more than half the population size of the district. This method results in just one sub-district in Cornwall, Tywardreath, with no COE data, although, in extending the analysis to Devon it was discovered that three sub-districts, East Budleigh, Broadclist and Christow, had insufficient data for inclusion and a further two, North Tawton and Holsworthy, insufficient COE

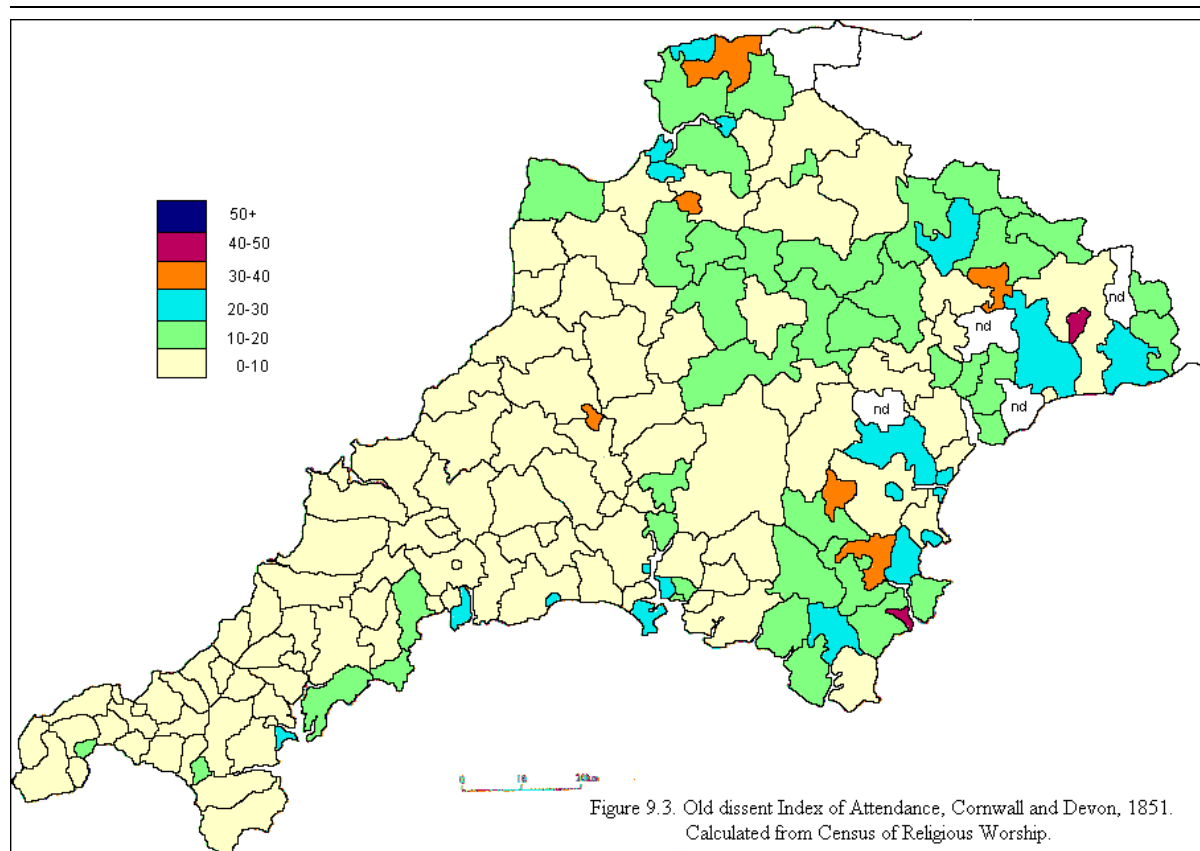


data (The Devon data were extracted from Wickes, 1990).



As Coleman has pointed out, religious practice in Cornwall was 'far from uniform' (1991, 47). But a registration level perspective is too broad to identify the detail of this heterogeneity. For instance, Coleman also states that the 'six districts in which Primitive Methodism showed (in 1851) were all in the western half of the county, where they seem to have drawn support from mining communities' (Coleman, 1991, 47). But a closer look at the ten sub-districts where Primitive Methodist attendances were significant suggests it was not just miners who provided support. Seven of these sub-districts were, indeed, dominated by mining. However, relatively high attendance at Penryn would indicate that non-mining town dwellers were also attracted and the highest Primitive Methodist attendances of all – at St. Ives and Paul – reveal that fishing, not mining, communities were in fact the most fertile ground for Primitive Methodists.

Turning to the broader picture of religious attendance in Cornwall revealed by the 1851 Census, Snell and Ell (2000, 58) note that the Church of England was



weak in 'most of Cornwall' as well as in Wales, south Lancashire, west Yorkshire, Durham and the Pennine uplands and urban industrial areas. Cornwall was the 'exception' to the generally strong Anglican index of attendance in southern England. Figure 9.1 shows the detailed picture of Anglican attendances across Cornwall and Devon. While in Cornwall an Anglican IA (the total number of attendances as a proportion of total population) of higher than 30 was exceptional, in Devon districts with an Anglican IA lower than 30 were in a minority. The heartland of Anglican strength in east Devon near the cathedral city of Exeter is clearly shown in this map and this district has been described as one of the Church of England's 'core areas' (Snell and Eil, 2000, 73).

Explanations for local patterns of religious attendance have been sought either in terms of denominational reciprocities, the spatial relationship between the denominations, or in terms of socio-economic factors, relating patterns of attendance to non-religious variables. Our data allow us to investigate each aspect in turn. The dominant thesis, put forward originally by Tillyard (1935) and later restated by Currie (1967), is that there was an inverse relationship between old and new dissent. Methodism flourished in areas where Congregationalists, Baptists and Presbyterians were not strong. Similarly, old dissent was correlated positively with Church of England strength. Therefore, prior Anglican and old dissent strength would have been counter-productive for new Methodist expansion. Simply mapping the geography of Methodist and old dissent attendances in 1851 (see Figures 9.2 and 9.3) and comparing these with Figure 9.1 suggests that the situation in Cornwall bore out this simple relationship. Methodism in all but the far south east of Cornwall was strong; the Church of England and old dissent were both weak. In south and east Devon the opposite was the case.

But Snell goes further, using an explicit measure of correlation, Pearson's correlation coefficient, to test the relationship between two different denominations statistically. He finds that the negative correlation of old and new dissent and of the Church of England and new dissent is broadly true at registration district level in the north Midlands. However, when applying the same method to southern counties he finds 'considerable variations'. In particular there is a 'lack of any correlation between the Anglican Church and Methodism in Cornwall, which is contrary to expectation' (Snell, 1991, 49). If this were the case it would, indeed, mean a major revision of the accepted picture. Thus Gay (1971, 159) stated that 'over much of England the success of Wesleyanism varied in an inverse proportion to the strength and vitality of the Church of England in any particular locality. Nowhere was this more true than in Cornwall'.

However, further examination of the Cornish data at sub-district level restores the Tillyard/Currie thesis as Table 9.2 below indicates.

Table 9.2 : Correlation coefficients between denominations, using the total attendances for each denomination expressed as a percentage of the sub-district population, by county

	Cornwall	Devon	Cornwall and Devon combined
Anglican & Methodist	-0.202	-0.197	-0.571
Anglican & old dissent	+0.343	+0.113	+0.360
Methodist & old dissent	-0.196	-0.213	-0.400

The figures suggest the expected negative correlation between Anglican /old dissent attendances and Methodist, with a positive correlation between Anglicanism and old dissent. This in turn suggests that a relationship not apparent at registration district level re-appears at sub-district level.

Interestingly, the reverse occurs in Devon.

In terms of the impact of external variables, the strength of the denominations has been related to urbanisation, with old dissent and Wesleyan Methodism supposedly appealing to lower middle class support in the towns. Conversely, Anglicanism had failed to win the support of the growing urban populations and remained more rural-based. In testing this assumption in the north Midlands Snell found that old dissent was, indeed, positively correlated with urbanisation (measured in terms of the number of persons per acre) whereas the Church of England and Wesleyan Methodism were negatively

correlated, with the Wesleyans the most 'rural' denomination. The pattern in Cornwall was somewhat different.

Table 9.3: Correlation coefficients between index of attendance and urbanisation for selected denominations

	Cornwall	Devon
Church of England	+0.256	-0.166
All old dissent	+0.378	+0.049
All Methodist	-0.163	-0.032
Wesleyan Methodist	-0.073	-0.007
Bible Christian	-0.190	-0.180
Wesleyan Methodist Association	-0.017	insufficient data

As expected, old dissent showed an urban bias in Cornwall. However, Wesleyan Methodism was far less 'rural' in Cornwall (and even less so in Devon) than in the north Midlands, although there is still a weak inverse correlation. The Bible Christians show the anticipated bias towards the countryside, although not, perhaps, as marked as some commentators have implied (see Probert, 1998). But the real contrast concerns the Anglican Church. When analysed at a sub-district level the Established Church in Cornwall appears to have been associated with urban rather than rural districts. This may be a feature of Cornwall's settlement pattern, with its lack of large towns, and scatter of small market towns. In these latter, notably Penzance and Truro, the Anglican Index of Attendance held up well (see Figure 9.1). In addition, the lower IAs for the Church of England in nearby rural districts suggest that congregations were being pulled into the larger, more prestigious urban churches from surrounding

rural areas. This was a pattern apparent, also, at Exeter, even though in Devon the relationship between the Church of England and urbanisation at this local spatial level conforms more closely to the expected pattern.

What makes Cornwall even more distinctive is that fact that in rural areas the Church of England had lost its dominance. The explanation for this can be found in the presence of mining across large swathes of rural Cornwall. In arguing for the 'indigenisation' of Methodism in Cornwall, Luker also suggests that it was in the mining and fishing communities that Methodism took on a popular functionality (1987, 398). These claims for a relationship between Methodism and the socio-economic basis of the community can be tested more explicitly using the sub-district data of the 1851 Religious and Population Censuses.

Table 9.4: Relationship between selected denominations and proportions of the adult male population engaged in selected occupations in Cornwall

	mining/fishing	agriculture
Church of England	-0.622	+0.186
Old dissent	-0.400	-0.397
All Methodist	+0.260	-0.059
Wesleyan Methodists	+0.309	-0.261
Bible Christians	+0.013	+0.155
Wesleyan Methodist Association	-0.353	+0.259

Much stronger correlations are obtained when relating denominational strength to these occupational variables than when studying inter-denominational reciprocity. Wesleyan Methodism was positively correlated with mining and fishing communities in Cornwall, while the Wesleyan Methodist

Association seems to have found its appeal more in agricultural communities. But even more strikingly, old dissent was negatively related to both mining and fishing and agricultural communities, reinforcing the point that its strength in Cornwall lay in urban, more middle-class communities. The strongest relationship of all, however, was the negative one between Anglicanism and mining/fishing communities. By the mid-nineteenth century, the people of these places clearly felt little attraction for the Established Church. To some extent, the religious vacuum had been filled by Methodism (although we might note that there is also a negative correlation of  $-0.322$  between mining/fishing communities and total church attendances in 1851, suggesting a degree of working class secularisation, at least in terms of formal church attendance).

Before moving away from the 1851 Census and its statistical treasures to the more intriguing but equally more elusive question of the religious experience and its effect on identity we might explicitly address the issue of Cornwall's regional distinctiveness. As we have seen, Coleman (1983, 157) argued that religious practice in Cornwall was exceptional in 1851. Yet he later qualified his conclusions about the distinctiveness of Cornwall to suggest, instead, that the significant frontier was not the Tamar River, which actually ran through districts that 'were not very different from each other in religious (or indeed socio-economic) character' (Coleman, 1991, 144). The distinctiveness of Cornwall was now replaced by a three-zone model. The 'eastern half of Devon' along with west Dorset and west Somerset made up a zone of Anglican strength with modest nonconformity. The second zone, 'west Devon and the eastern districts of Cornwall' was one of cultural transition, where the Church of England was weaker and Methodism stronger, whereas the third zone was 'central and west Cornwall' where Methodism was dominant and the Church of England very weak.



Figure 9.4 allows us to compare the Methodist and Anglican IAs of registration sub-districts in Devon and Cornwall by means of a scattergram. This emphasises the contrast between the dominant Devon pattern of low Methodist/high Anglican IA and that in Cornwall, with high Methodist and relatively low Anglican attendances. Nevertheless, the scattergram also contains a middle area containing both Devon and Cornish sub-districts. But does this middle area coincide with Coleman's zone of transition? When these sub-districts are mapped (Figure 9.5) things become less clear. In Devon most intermediate districts are, indeed, to the west of the county, to the north-west and west of Dartmoor. Yet, in Cornwall, while some intermediate districts abut the border, notably in the far north and in the south east, such districts are also scattered across mid and west Cornwall. The conclusion from this map is that there is no unambiguous middle territorial zone crossing the county border. Taken in conjunction with the findings of a strong relationship between denominational strength and occupational profiles we might conclude that socio-economic variables are more important in explaining the detailed spatial distribution of the denominations in 1851 than territorial differences per se. It was these variables that underlay and produced the differences that were perceived by contemporaries as regional.

But this implies that differences of context required different narratives to be transformed into the distinctions that produced identity. In exploring further this notion of narrative it is time to move from the patterns of religious practice in 1851 to the more qualitative issue of the distinctiveness of the Methodist experience in Cornwall. In doing so we address the second of Hempton's key questions about Methodism, what he termed the 'nature of the Methodist experience' (Hempton, 1996b, 1).

### ***From Methodism in Cornwall to Cornish Methodism***

Cornish Methodists were quick to adopt the dominant narrative of a moral regeneration of West Barbary (cf. chapter 3 above), and to inject a crucial strategic role for Methodism in this progress from darkness to civilisation. In 1820 the local Methodist Francis Truscott wrote that, in the 1740s, Cornwall 'needed to be humanized as well as evangelized; it was a dark place of the earth, filled with habitations of cruelty' (Truscott, 1820, 539). Truscott had been influenced by Warner's observations on the role of Methodism in Cornish society (1809, 299-302) and happily accepted the responsibility of Wesleyan Methodists, who had 'completely reformed a large body of men, who, without their exertions, would probably still have been immersed in the deepest spiritual darkness, and grossest moral turpitude' (Truscott, 1810). Not only nineteenth-century Methodists concentrated on the role of Methodism in the moral regeneration of Cornish society. For Gay, 'Methodism completely transformed Cornwall' (1971, 161). Yet this interpretation can surely be questioned.

While the role of Methodism was certainly important in preparing the ground for the remarkably widespread and rapid adoption of teetotalism in the later 1830s, its role as moral regenerator has been exaggerated. For example, Methodist critics failed to dislodge popular support for wrestling, often associated with excessive consumption of drink and with gambling. In the mid-1850s wrestling tournaments were reported (by a Methodist press) as attracting 'at least 3,000' spectators, with prize winners coming from all parts of Cornwall (*WB*, August 1855; July 1856). Indeed, wrestling seems to reflect rises and falls in the mining economy, only itself finally declining as a major public spectacle after the traumatic years of the late 1860s. Other regularly condemned aspects of popular culture such as smuggling had remained important activities even as Methodism was establishing its cultural dominance at the end of the eighteenth

century (see Carter, 1894). Luker, indeed, goes so far as to suggest that 'social-cultural custom and behaviour showed a remarkable degree of continuity' into the early 1800s. This qualifies the 'model of Methodism as an agent of social modernization' (Luker, 1987, 380).

As Hempton points out, as well as actively shaping society, Methodism was shaped by its 'local environment, context and locale' (Hempton, 1996b, 16). By the 1790s the Wesleyanism that had developed in Cornwall had taken on some specifically local attributes, attributes that began to distinguish it and allow it to be more easily imagined as 'Cornish' Methodism.

The first of the two ways in which Cornwall changed Methodism was by giving it a particularly revivalist aspect. For Ward the distinctiveness of Cornish Methodism lay in the way extreme revivalism persisted within the Wesleyan connexion (Ward, 1972, 245). As we have seen, the two great surges of Methodist membership occurred around the revivals of 1799 and 1814. But such quantitative conclusions fail to do justice to the emotional turmoil surrounding and imbuing these and later years of revival. In 1832 at St. Just on a Saturday night, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1832, a revival began at a meeting in the chapel:

The report of what was going on soon spread through the town; and the people came out of the public houses, as well as their own, to see this strange sight. Though many came to look, none mocked, but rather stood amazed. The scene at this time was truly affecting. The loud and piercing cries of the broken-hearted penitents drowned the voice of prayer; and all that could be done at this stage of the meeting was to stand still, and see the salvation of God. At length, the penitents were conducted and upheld, each of them by two persons, into one part of the chapel. And now, when their cries and groans were concentrated, one of the most affecting scenes appeared before the people. Their humble wailings pierced the

skies. Sometimes a burst of praise from the pardoned penitents mingled with the loud cries of the broken-hearted; and this greatly encouraged those that were in distress (Trezise, 1832, 84-85).

Mass revivals of this kind reverberated across local communities and established the conversion processes of revivalist Methodism at the heart of local society. But what made Cornwall, and especially west Cornwall, distinctive was the later survival of such mass revivalism to at least the early 1860s and the continuation of revivalism within the Wesleyan body after the 1820s. Unlike the north-east of England, where revivals were associated with the Primitive Methodists, revivalism 'was not the function of any particular segment' (Colls, 1987, 118-189; Rule, 1998, 185).

In the most recent account of Cornish revivalism Rule argues that its persistence is best explained by internal factors, rejecting earlier attempts to link revivals with exogenous economic and political events. (For an example of this latter see Hobsbawm, 1964, 32ff.) Revivalism 'operated in the space between the fully committed membership and those attached but not yet signed up for God, rather than in that between the membership and the more distanced community' (Rule, 1998, 182). In Cornwall there was a high overall ratio of adherents, occasional and regular chapel-goers, to members (Luker, 1986). The number of such 'borderers', those interested in and affected by the language and practices of Methodism, had already reached numbers sufficient to support spontaneous community revivals in the west by the 1760s. The revivals of 1799 and 1814 in particular, by drawing ever-larger numbers into chapel-going, albeit sometimes temporarily, created the 'critical mass' on which future revivals could in turn flourish. In short, a popular culture of revivalism had been created. The Chartist missionary, Robert Lowery, in 1839 observed that 'the population possesses all the materials for such explosions, being full of warm religious

feelings, which overrules knowledge. Their daily languages and religious services they attend are replete with rapturous exclamations' (cited in Rule, 1998, 176). Lowery was describing a situation where, by the late 1830s, the discourse of Methodism had, perhaps, become the everyday 'structure of feeling', particularly among the mining population (Barham, 1842, 760). Mass revivalism was thus both cause and effect of a popular, folk religion. Once a certain threshold of adherents had been attained, a point reached early in Cornwall, a potential pool of converts was created. As successive generational cohorts came of age there were 'recurring generational pulses', as revivalism became a local tradition (Hempton, 1996a, 30). In support of the existence of a revivalist culture it is noticeable how many of the subjects of Methodist biographies report their own parents as 'sober' and 'honest', conscientious attenders of the parish church, or, more common later, of the Wesleyan chapel (Kelk, 1804; Trethewey, 1842; Tabb, 1845).

By the 1810s the recurrent collective conversion of new generations of young people in a broadly Methodist-orientated chapel-going cultural stratum had become a 'local tradition'. But, as Wesleyan Methodists elsewhere turned their faces against revivalism in favour of steadier, sounder expansion based on systems of pastoral oversight and administrative efficiency, Cornish revivalism came to be seen, especially after the 1820s, as divergent. Revivalism, by this time, was confined to Cornwall, Wales, Scotland and Ulster and became prone to being attributed to Celtic excitability (Hempton, 1996a, 30). This interpretation was clearly established by 1841, when Barham attributed the 'tendency to enthusiasm ... in part ... [to] ... their Celtic origin' (Barham, 1842, 760). But, whether 'Celtic' or not, revivalism has been viewed as the 'most explicit part of a popular indigenisation of Methodism' (Luker, 1987, 303). A revivalist culture, established by the 1780s in west Cornwall, then became an implicit 'critique of

"foreigners" from up-country,' channeling local antagonisms into a continuing preference for revivalism (Luker, 1987, 123, 49-50).

A second feature of local Methodism that later became synonymous with Cornish Methodism was the general lack of deference shown by lay members to the itinerant ministers and the desire of the former to govern their own societies. This was well established by the 1840s. In 1848 a minister arriving at Camborne was told 'uppish men are an abomination here and, not seldom, get awkward thumps and communications more frank than welcome' (cited in Luker, 1987, 294). Another minister, superintendent at Helston, wrote in 1815 that the Cornish Methodists were 'less friendly and affectionate, than any I have met before. I am told this circuit is the worst in the district in respect of religion and attachment to Preachers'. Furthermore, 'not a few of the Cornish Methodists are filling their heads with foolish notions about Conference corruptions' (Shaw, 1963, 163-64 and 175). Similar notions were, after this date, to fuel a series of vigorous secessions from the Wesleyan organisational framework (see Rule, 1971, 264-282). By 1856, non-Wesleyans comprised over 40 per cent of all Methodist members in Cornwall, a proportion maintained throughout the remainder of the nineteenth-century (from statistics in Hayden, 1982, 428-429).

John Wesley himself had noted the long-standing independence of some Cornish Methodists. In 1788 he wrote to a minister that 'it has been observed of many years that some at Redruth were apt to *despise* and [be] very willing to *govern* their preachers' (Wesley, 1841, 102). Indeed, it was on Redruth, in the heart of the mining district, that 51 leading Cornish lay members converged in June, 1791 to discuss the administration of affairs after Wesley's death. They demanded a whole series of democratic reforms: for example that 'the members constituting every class (or a majority of them) shall chose their Leader'; that 'the People in every Society (or a majority of them) shall choose the Society

Stewards'; that the circuit stewards in turn possess a right of veto over the selection of travelling ministers (Smith, 1862, 702). The language of the document is resonant of the opening sentence of the Constitution of the United States of 1787 – 'We, the People ... do ordain and establish this Constitution' – and should, perhaps, be viewed as a part of that 'transatlantic revolution' proposed many years ago by Palmer (1959). As Probert observes, this document, had it been accepted, 'would have revolutionised Methodism' (Probert, n.d., 2).

The independent temper of this group of men, among whom can be identified merchants and mine captains (see Rowe, 1993, 261.3), was encouraged and fostered by their entrepreneurial role in the expansion of mining and trade. In a society of dispersed paternalism, where Methodist societies had, by the 1790s, produced an organisational structure paralleling, while still overlapping, the hierarchy of the Anglican church, 'traditional' pastoral responsibility was devolving to and was being appropriated by this class of newly financially secure and self-made men. Their legitimation flowed from the egalitarian and socially homogenous communities through which they moved, communities seemingly only intermittently responsive to the enfeebled ties of landlord paternalism. From the vantage point of traditional paternalism this was a vicious circle. Independent communities gave rise to Methodist societies possessed of their own self-importance. In turn, the plethora of self-governing Methodist communities fostered a sense of independence and self-confidence among their growing adherents. Observing the parish church attenders at Hayle in 1836 a regular visitor wrote:

There is not so much deference paid to the higher ranks. At one time no person left the church after the service was over until the parson had walked out and he received the obediences of the congregation as he went

down the aisle. Now the congregation leave at once without waiting for the parson' (Appleby, 1985, 15).

The rise of Methodism reinforced a sense of self-confident independence and had helped to break old patterns of deference. In doing this the foundations of a new public identity for Cornish Methodists, as part of a wider nonconformist identity, had been laid.

### ***Narratives of identity: from the private to the public***

The remaining task in this chapter is to reflect on Methodism's role in the formation of Cornish identity. Luker offers the most explicit claim that Methodism acted as a surrogate regional identity: 'the particular regional identity sensed by the Cornish became more clearly defined and expressed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and as with nonconformity in Wales Methodism in Cornwall came to serve as a badge of regionalism, and as a buttress to Cornish "nationalism" in the face of encroaching forces and influences from "up-country" England' (Luker, 1987, xi). However, Luker goes on to suggest that the 1840s marked a watershed, as by then there had emerged an 'increased consciousness among the local middle class of a national [i.e. English/British] rather than a regional identity, and an intense desire to demonstrate their own credentials, both as middle class citizens and as Methodists, on the national stage' (Luker, 1987, 356). Such a picture, of a turn away from regional consciousness and an attack on indigenous Methodism, appears to be at odds with the situation in Wales (Griffith, 2001).

As we have seen, in the context of Wales there was a consensus that to be Welsh was to be nonconformist, and to be nonconformist was to be politically Liberal (Hempton, 1996a, 51; Jenkins, 1987, 385). The Welsh turn to Methodism, perhaps because of a prior dissenting tradition, had, if anything,



lagged behind the Cornish, despite the earlier evangelical awakening in the Wales of the 1730s (Jenkins, 1992, 157-163). It was only after the mid-1780s that Calvinist Methodism was to begin to be widely embraced by the ordinary people of Wales (Jenkins, 1987, 347). The extremely rapid industrialisation of Wales in the early nineteenth century is supposed to have resulted in the multiplication of nonconformist chapels, which offered security and identity for those living through rapid social change. As a result, by the 1840s nonconformity was embedded in Welsh language and culture (Hempton, 1996a, 54). However, this took a widespread political form only after the 1860s, with the increased activity of the Liberation Society in Wales and with the Electoral Reform Act of 1867. It was the 1860s that produced the 'confluence of nonconformist religion, Liberal politics and Welsh national identity' that many have noted (Hempton, 1996a, 59; Bebbington, 1982, 495).

The distinction between a public and private identity is crucial here. In Cornwall the rise of Methodism had helped to construct, legitimate and reinforce a particular private identity in the eighteenth-century. This revolved around a desire for close fellowship, and a valorisation of the family and the home, sentiments that were both cause and effect of the upsurge of cottage religion and of further Methodist growth in the later eighteenth-century. The private identities of individual Methodists focused on a loyalty to small-scale localised moral codes, looking to local dynasties for leadership (Everitt, 1972, 64-66). Such re-fashioned private identities fitted neatly into the small-scale, dispersed social geography of Cornwall. But, revivalism transformed pockets of Methodism into a community religion, notably in the two great revivals of 1799 and 1814. These revivals were to 'indigenise' Methodism in Cornwall and made it into a folk religion that exercised a cultural hegemony within local communities. In doing so, Methodist allegiances began to take on a public identity, as the identity not

just of God-fearing individuals but of whole communities. From the 1810s, the oft-repeated narrative of early persecution, a story of a time when Methodists suffered 'the most fierce and determined opposition throughout the county' (Truscott, 1820) added another dimension to Methodist self-identification. Indeed, with the rise of Methodism to hegemonic status by the 1820s and 30s it was easy to read this as the previous persecution of whole communities, who had re-discovered themselves in their passage through a baptism of fire. But in Cornwall revivalism was not explicitly associated with historical dreams of heroic ages, as happened in the Scottish Secession movement of the 1730s, with its explicit allusions to Covenanting principles of the seventeenth century (Roxburgh, 2001, 205). Similarly, there is little evidence of that public articulation of the people in clearly nationalist terms that can be observed in Wales in the preaching of Edward Matthews or Ieuan Gwynedd (Griffith, 2002, 63).

Moreover, as in Wales, Methodism was not unambiguously welded to a Liberal political identity until the 1860s. Hayden (1982, 76) has pointed out that it was not until after 1867 that individual Methodists became much more directly engaged with formal Parliamentary politics. In contrast, Jaggard (1999) has more recently re-affirmed a role for Methodism in reform politics in Cornwall from the 1820s onwards. But Jaggard fails to capture the precise role of Methodism in Cornish political identity in that crucial period from the 1820s to the 1860s because of an over-readiness to conflate Methodism with dissent. Both Hayden and Jaggard agree that Wesleyan Methodists were involved in the anti-slavery campaigns of the 1820s, this involvement flowing easily from their religious commitment to the overseas missions movement. Yet, as Jaggard also notes, there was little contemporaneous support from Methodists for the repeal of the Test Act and even less for Roman Catholic emancipation in 1828-29. On

these issues, significantly, Methodists in Cornwall stood apart from dissenters more generally and other reformers; they had 'chose to stand firm with the Established Church against any concessions to the Catholics' (Jaggard, 1999, 69). At public meetings at Truro, Helston and Callington in early 1829 prominent Methodists were vociferous in asserting their continued attachment to the Church of England and their loyalty to the Establishment (*West Briton*, 9 and 16 January 1829).

Methodists were thus still rejecting the label of 'dissenter' in the 1820s and early 1830s and this delayed their commitment to Liberal politics. Indeed, in the decades from the Reform Act of 1832 to the mid 1850s the evidence of electoral behaviour in Cornwall suggests that propertied Methodists could still vote Conservative in large numbers, this being a period when the Conservatives 'held their own' in the Cornish boroughs (Jaggard, 1999, 131). Because of the numerical dominance of new dissent and the relative weakness of old dissent, radical politics were slow to emerge in the second quarter of the nineteenth-century. It was only in the 1860s that the distinction between dissent and Methodism declined. When that happened Methodists more wholeheartedly embraced Liberal and reforming politics. In 1881, a letter from the Liberal solicitor, William Grylls, pointed out that Wesleyan Methodist 'preachers and people may now be depended on, much more than 25 years ago, as Liberals' (cited in Jaggard, 1999, 203). The period from the 1820s to the 1850s had seen a growing coalescence of Methodists and reforming politics over such specific issues as Church rates. But in the 1840s and early 50s, whilst the links between Methodists and the Church of England were still not entirely broken those between Methodism and Liberalism had not yet been fully forged. By the 1880s Methodism and Liberalism had become almost one and the same thing.

Within the transition from a private to public identity the 1840s were, as Luker suggests, a significant decade. But, in reality, the effect of that decade was much more complex than he assumes. He is right to pinpoint an emerging, town-based middle-class respectability that eschewed the popular revivalism of local Methodism. This, together with other factors such as mass emigration, began to undermine folk religion. But respectability was not merely associated with a simple replacement of regionalism by a sense of national identity. In fact, these small town middle classes were the same people who had avidly consumed the burgeoning dialect literature of the 1840s and 1850s; who attended literary and antiquarian societies and began to cherish aspects of local heritage. Thus Edward Boaden, who entered the Wesleyan Methodist Association ministry in 1849, had written a copy of the Apostles' Creed in Cornish as well as in English, while a solicitor's clerk in the early 1840s (Anon, 1973). In a similar way, two of the mid-century leading Methodists in the central mining district, George Smith and Charles Thomas, also professed an interest in antiquities and the Cornish language respectively (Thomas, 1965, 17). 'Respectable' Methodists such as Boaden, Smith or Thomas are evidence not of a disappearing regional identity after the 1840s but of a re-made, much more public and more articulate regional identity. As part of this identity Methodism had begun to take on symbolic overtones as the allegiance of the mass of the Cornish people, at the very time that popular, revivalist fervour had begun to wane, sapped by emigration and by the diversion of energies into the need to maintain the institutional and administrative fabric of the various Methodist denominations. By the mid-1860s Methodism, along with mining and a Celtic heritage, was being cited as aspects that distinguished Cornwall from Devon (Morrish, 1983, 247). Methodism was becoming an element in a symbolic repertoire of distinctiveness. Furthermore,

this was, paradoxically, occurring at the very point that local Methodism was irrevocably mutating and losing its distinctiveness.

Growing 'respectability' among Cornish Methodists (Shaw, 1967, 100; Luker, 1987, 356) coincided with a gradual but unmistakable mid-century shift to an explicit non-conformity, which in turn fused with a wider nonconformist Protestant identity. In the emergence of a wider political identity for nonconformity after the 1840s the fear of Tractarianism has been cited as crucial (Hempton, 1996a, 149). It is no coincidence that, in Cornwall, Tractarianism was an important element in the counter-offensive of a renewed Anglicanism after the 1840s (Brown, 1978). For many Methodists the ritualist leanings of large numbers of Cornish clergy at mid-century eased the transition from the borders of Establishment religion to explicit nonconformity. Anti-Catholicism, as well as reforming politics and an appeal to local patriotism, could all be seen, for instance, in the biography of the early nineteenth-century Methodist reformer and merchant, Thomas Pope Roseveare of Boscastle (1781-1853) (Shaw, 1986: Luker, 1987, 232). Roseveare prefigured the explicitly nonconformist Cornish Methodist who in the 1870s and 1880s provided the voting strength for Gladstonian Liberalism.

Yet, as later support for Liberal Unionism in Cornwall might indicate, nonconformists were also pulled by anti-Catholicism into a wider British, and imperialist, Protestant nationalism (Hempton, 1996a, 71; Bebbington, 1982, 501). Indeed, mass emigration from Cornwall from the 1840s may have acted to make the Cornish Methodist and nonconformist identity more susceptible to imperialist tropes, especially after the 1860s, when population began to decline and economic stagnation in Cornwall undermined the self-confidence and dynamism of local Methodism. Religious nonconformity thus pulled in

contradictory and complex directions after the 1840s, directions that were often in tension.

### ***Conclusion***

We can now clarify the role of Methodism in relation to Cornish identity formation and link it to the interpretation presented in the earlier chapters of this thesis. The economic and social changes of Cornwall's early mining based industrialisation (chapter 6) produced fertile ground in which Methodism rooted itself. By the 1810s it was established, particularly in the core western zone of Cornwall's industrialisation, as a cultural institution deeply embedded in the everyday life of local communities. It had become part of the institutionalization of the region, reproducing the proto-industrial society that had grown out of Cornwall's social relations of dispersed paternalism (chapter 8). It was more than a surrogate in this period. Instead it had become a part of the regional identity matrix, adding its quota to processes of distinction and integration and playing its part in the symbolic shaping of Cornwall.

In the generation from the 1810s to the 1840s Methodism in Cornwall became more clearly 'Cornish', clinging to revivalism when other parts of Methodism, especially the Wesleyan Connexion, rejected it and becoming hyper-sensitive to issues of local autonomy. Periodically, this sensitivity led to secessions from the Wesleyan parent body. This was a period of divergence, when the symbolic shape of Cornwall became more explicitly differentiated from other parts of the British Isles. Methodism became the most relevant institution for labouring and working class communities, its world-view stitched onto older discourses of popular moral economy and custom. It thus helped to make Cornish proto-industrial society distinctive from both other urbanising industrial regions and from rural, agricultural regions. This period of 'divergence' in the

early nineteenth century accompanied a parallel emergence of a more explicit consciousness of being 'Cornish' (chapter 4).

By the 1840s, the regional institutions produced by the local middle classes had given birth to a vigorous and more articulate sense of regional pride and 'difference', one underpinned by the continued role of the mining sector in Cornwall. However, by that decade, social changes were beginning to undermine older proto-industrial social relations.

Some of the dynamics of this process, for example the growth of a respectable (often Methodist) middle class, can be seen as factors leading to a convergence of Cornwall with other industrial regions. Conversely, as we saw in chapter 7, the onset of mass emigration after the 1830s guaranteed that no dominant settlement would emerge. This meant that local allegiances remained strong rivals to a Cornish territorial identity even as the final growth decades of mining spread the industry into parts of east Cornwall relatively untouched by earlier industrialisation. For a short, but important, period, this meant that the geography of Cornwall's historic identity based on the administrative territory and its re-formed industrial identity with its core in the west overlapped. During this phase, as the unique social relations of proto-industrial Cornwall were fading into history, a more confident and assertive territorial identity established itself, centred in the towns and the middle class and fed by the local press, dialect literature and literary institutions.

In this period, too, Methodism merged into a broader public and more political nonconformist identity. In practice less distinguishable from a general nonconformist identity, Methodism in Cornwall at this stage began to fill a role as a symbol of Cornish uniqueness. Perhaps the high point of the nineteenth century Cornish territorial identity was seen during the campaign to achieve a separate Anglican diocese for Cornwall from 1846 to 1876. During this long

drawn out but ultimately successful struggle Anglicans consistently referred to Cornwall's Methodism as a unique factor, marking it off, along with its 'Celtic' history, from neighbouring Devon (Morrish, 1983).

But this territorial identity, the symbolic shape of which meshed tightly by the 1860s with nonconformity, was only briefly dominant in the public sphere. Just as the lived identity of Cornwall's proto-industrial communities was undermined by social change from the 1840s, so was Cornwall's re-forged territorial identity challenged by other narratives. In the final quarter of the century competing narratives joined those of mining-Methodist Cornwall, exposing the limits of the territorial identity that had emerged during Cornwall's industrial period.