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Primitive Methodist Circuits in the English-Welsh Borderland

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Abstract This paper enlarges our understanding about the Primitive Methodist Connexion by examining the denomination in a part of the country where it enjoyed considerable success during the nineteenth century. It takes as its starting point the relative lack of historical research on the Methodist circuit, which was an important innovation in religious provision. The circuit system gave Wesleyan Methodism and its break-away denominations considerable flexibility to co-ordinate their work in a highly effective way. The developing geography of Primitive Methodist circuits in the English-Welsh borderland is explored, as the denomination moved from enthusiastic evangelism towards consolidation. Particular attention is paid to the way in which changing missionary tactics, chapel building, local dissension, and the trend towards circuit sub-division shaped the geography and internal work of these circuits during the nineteenth century.

The creation of the 'circuit' during the eighteenth century was an important administrative innovation in religious provision, which provided the Methodists with 'the most flexible organisation of all the Nonconformist denominations'.[1] The circuit system not only enabled the Methodists to co-ordinate the movement of their preachers in a highly effective way, but also to organise and consolidate their efforts at the local level. This development was of considerable significance, providing as it did the crucial framework by which the Methodist movement adapted to different geographical regions, and thereby expanded throughout the country. The flexibility of the circuit system ensured that it was particularly well adapted to regions where the traditional parochial structure was inadequate and the Church of England was weak, for example in areas of widely dispersed settlement. Many different secessions took place from the Wesleyan Methodist Original Connexion, but each of the new Methodist denominations maintained the circuit system, bearing witness to its advantage and utility. Although historians have stressed the crucial importance of the Methodist circuit as an alternative mode of religious organisation, there has been little discussion of the spatial geography of circuits. With few exceptions, there has been almost no analysis of the ways in which Methodist circuits developed, as they evolved from areas of fresh missionary territory, into mature stations with a core of well-established societies. Nor has the relation between the geography of a circuit and its internal work been much considered.

As is well known, Primitive Methodism owed its origins to rifts within Methodism between 1807–12.[2] By 1851, Primitive Methodism had become strongly entrenched in

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large regions of the country, notably in the north-east, in parts of the north midlands and industrial north, in highly agricultural counties such as Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Wiltshire and Hampshire, and in the band of English counties along the Welsh border.[3] In particular, the Primitive Methodists enjoyed considerable success in the county of Shropshire. Located between the Midland plain and the Welsh mountains and culturally between the nations of England and Wales, Shropshire epitomises the diversity of the rural landscape of the English-Welsh borderland. Bounded on the north-west by Denbighshire, on the north by Flintshire and Cheshire, on the east by Staffordshire, on the south by Worcestershire, Herefordshire, and Radnorshire and on the west by Montgomeryshire, Shropshire is the largest inland county in Great Britain and can be naturally divided into two halves.[4] The river Severn forms a boundary between the plains of the east and north which extend into mid-Staffordshire and Cheshire forming 'one of the principal interruptions of highland Britain', and the upland country of the south and west.[5]

In terms of relief, the northern plain forms a distinct region of Shropshire, encompassing both arable and pastoral areas as well as expanses of heath and moorland. From the seventeenth century, the northern-most arc of the county, extending from Oswestry to Market Drayton and centring on Whitchurch, became increasingly known as a dairying district; while the area around Ellesmere, Cockshutt and Welshampton, with its richer clay soils, was predominantly arable. Settlement on the northern plain was characterised by small hamlets, scattered farms and occasional cottages.[6] In the extreme north-west the county boundary extends into the Denbigh hills, as the character of the region becomes increasingly Welsh, and pastoral farming and limestone quarrying dominate the landscape.[7] To the east of the county lie Wellington and the Shropshire coalfield, where coal-mining, iron and pottery manufacture transformed the scene into the only extensive industrial landscape in the region. However away from the centre of the industrial activity agriculture survived, and as the era of industrial prosperity waned after the 1840s, farming returned to many parts of the coalfield. In the south-east beyond the river Severn is the eastern sandstone plain. During the eighteenth century this region became known as the Ryeland, as the light sandy soils were perfect for the production of rye and barley.[8]

To the south and west of the Severn there are two principal landscape types. The sandstone and limestone escarpments of Wenlock Edge contrast with the highland areas of wild, open heath and moorland of the Stiperstones and Stretton Hills, where the villages tend to be small and scattered. During the nineteenth century the open moorland was used for the grazing of hill flocks, while in other parts the mining of lead scarred the hillsides.[9] Finally, in the southern extremes of the county are two further areas, both isolated and remote although quite different in nature. In the east lie the sandstone hills of Clee, the highest in the county and the centre of various hillside settlements. On Brown Clee, common moorland gave rise to scattered farmhouses and the small cottages of squatters, while on Titterstone a significant transformation of the agricultural setting occurred, as extensive quarrying of dolerite and limestone encouraged a proliferation of cheap houses.[10] In the extreme south-west of the county lies the Clun Forest, a completely rural area of low population where tiny hamlets and isolated farmhouses dominate the landscape.[11]

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While predominantly agricultural in nature, it is clear that Shropshire was scarred throughout its limits by mining, quarrying and the activities of other isolated industries. Therefore the county provided an ideal breeding ground for the Primitive Methodist movement during the nineteenth century.[12] In this article, I will explore the experience of Primitive Methodist circuits in Shropshire and the English-Welsh borderland, looking in particular at the methods used by the Connexion to penetrate this region during the first half of the nineteenth century, and at the manner in which it created a solid and thriving network of circuits. I will also examine how factors such as changing missionary tactics, chapel building, local dissension and the trend towards circuit sub-division acted to shape the geography and the internal work of these circuits as the nineteenth century progressed.

Extending the Mission

Kendall has characterised the first half of the nineteenth century as the 'Heroic Period' of Primitive Methodist history. The relentless and often aggressive style employed by its missionaries ensured that, with 'the slenderest of means and appliances and in the face of difficulties neither few nor small', their plain and powerful message spread rapidly across the land.[13] Middleton has argued that Primitive Methodism went 'where other religious bodies *would* not, and *could* not go'.[14] Its missionaries brought excitement and provided distraction for isolated rural communities and industrial villages alike; and the simple evangelistic message, that salvation and sanctification were attainable by all who would repent and believe, was readily accepted by their unsophisticated inhabitants.[15] Primitive Methodists entered parishes without invitation, singing as they made their way to the village green or town market place, where on arrival they began their open-air appeal.[16] The element of surprise was one of the most successful techniques adopted during this period, as Middleton comments:

> It was not an uncommon thing in the early history of the Primitive Methodist Church, for her missionaries to enter a village or town suddenly, and to startle the inhabitants by their loud songs and ministrations ... and by these means hundreds of souls were startled and saved.[17]

The experience of Robert Key presented in *The Gospel Among the Masses*, gives a clear insight into the lengths to which missionaries would go in order to spread the word. On entering the village of Booton 'an entire stranger, having never seen the place before', Key invites himself into the home of one of the local inhabitants proclaiming 'I am come to preach in your house today'. To defend his unusual and somewhat brusque behaviour, he comments:

> Should my readers ask the question, what induced you to pursue such a course? I can only reply, I do not know: it is as contrary to my natural mind, as darkness is to light. I was led in a mysterious way.[18]

It is interesting that the occupants of the invaded home were all too willing to accommodate the roving missionary, not only inviting him to dinner and offering him

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a bed for the night, but also opening their house up for worship as requested. Although Key's tactics may have been somewhat unusual, all missionaries were keen to go into virgin territory, as the journal of William Doughty of the Oswestry circuit reveals:

> New Kenerley, a small village, lay on our way home...This place has never, I believe been opened by any denomination. It was much on my mind to call and preach there.[19]

Itinerants took to the lanes, fields and highways with the hope that their words would be the catalyst for further extension of the cause.

In 1834, the connexional magazine published the 'Missionary System', a plan of action that aimed to translate the initial excitement into a solid base for continued growth. The article provided precise instructions to assist the formation of a permanent congregation in the local setting, and therefore the ultimate creation of a solid missionary station. Every preacher sent out to mission was expected to: 'take up eight places, towns, villages or neighbourhoods: so that his missionary range covers a certain part of the country'.[20] Preachers were expected to obtain a place in which to hold a prayer meeting and carry out a weekly sermon in each. Moreover, they were also instructed to visit from house to house, so that they could 'bring forward the work of God' and establish a permanent society. Each quarter the itinerant preacher was required to make a general collection for the support of the mission. Although these collections were occasionally very successful, this was by no means the typical experience of missionaries.[21] In his biography of Samuel Atterby, Simpson describes the life of an early Primitive Methodist itinerant who

> frequently had to go without 'purse or scrip' into a town or village hitherto unvisited by any of his contemporaries, and to 'hold forth the word of life' to a wandering, staring crowd, who not unseldom gave him a shower of stones or filth for his pains, and left him to trust in Providence for his victuals and bed.[22]

Despite the appearance of a well formed set of tactics, Ambler has argued that the 'revivalistic fervour' demonstrated by missionaries during this early period, was in fact like 'the ostrich dropping its eggs ... scattering good that seldom or never comes to perfection'.[23] Converts were made but often deserted, as roving evangelists, keen to move on to pastures new, failed to consolidate their gains into permanent societies. Although it is likely that many simply neglected to follow the straightforward advice presented in the magazine, in reality missionaries regularly worked to establish new societies in the face of considerable adversity, particularly during the early decades of the nineteenth century. The problem of persecution was universal:

> Often the preacher had to labour unaided, the gazing stock of witless and godless spectators, the object of their buffoonery and vulgar sarcasm, or violent persecution ...[24]

Throughout the country, abuse from all quarters of society threatened the progress of the early movement, as landlords, magistrates, clergymen and even village labourers expressed animosity towards these 'God-talking' strangers. For landlords and magistrates, wandering missionaries not only demonstrated a complete disregard for traditional

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social boundaries, but also brought the labouring classes together in large and dangerous numbers. Valenze has argued that the ruling classes feared the effects of Primitive Methodism upon the local population. She notes that roving itinerants often acted as 'catalysts in bringing local antagonisms into the open', and that preachers soon discovered they could 'capitalise on a readiness to rebel'.[25] For example, the imprisonment of Shropshire missionary James Bonsor in August 1822 became the 'talk of the city', and 'resulted in calling attention to the missionaries and securing for them a large measure of public sympathy'.[26]

In many cases however, village labourers were all too willing to take encouragement from landlords and clergymen, eagerly persecuting the very people trying to reach out to them. The brutality of the crowd could be considerable, and preachers often narrowly escaped with their lives, as the experience of John Garner illustrates. Immediately on entering Sowe, a village near Coventry, the itinerant was attacked by a vicious rabble, amongst which was the clergyman of the parish.

> I necessitated to expose myself to the malicious rage of wicked men, who furiously drove me out of the village with stones, rotten eggs, sludge, or whatever else came to hand ... After being shamefully beaten with their hands, feet and other weapons, I was dragged to a pond, and the enraged mob seemed anxious to gratify their cruelty, by witnessing the death of one of their fellow-creatures.[27]

Although Garner was eventually rescued and was able to make his escape, such extreme violence was not untypical. A letter sent by Thomas Batty in June 1838 to Hugh Bourne clearly supports this:

> Your situation certainly calls for sympathy ... But many of the old soldiers in the field, many of our old preachers have clods, stones, and rotten eggs thrown at them. They have been hauled before magistrates, and have been cast into prison for the Gospel's sake ... In opposition, let patience possess your soul; exercise faith in a present saviour. If you have to suffer firmly endure it. Be firm as a rock ...[28]

However, what is clear from this letter is that the persecution experienced often acted to strengthen resolve. As Obelkevich has argued, the resistance which preachers endured in their missionary endeavours, only made them more determined to succeed 'for they considered themselves to be instruments of the Lord and were confident that He was actively advancing His kingdom.'[29]

The missioning of the Shropshire market-town of Bishop's Castle, located twenty miles to the south-west of Shrewsbury, presents an interesting insight into the hardships endured for the cause of Primitive Methodism in the county. Bishop's Castle was one of the first places to be visited by missionaries based in Shrewsbury. However, in a place notorious for 'wickedness, cruelty and hatred of the followers of Christ' and which was otherwise known by names such as 'Little Sodom' or 'Devil's Mansion', it is unsurprising that these early missionaries met with little success and were stoned away from the area. A second attempt to enter the town was made by itinerant Richard Ward and local preacher Thomas Evans, in 1828. But once more the Primitive Methodist cause met with opposition as the two men were refused permission from the bailiff to preach in the

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market-hall; however, not deterred, they decided to take to the open-air instead. When they began singing old women and children gathered round to listen, and the two missionaries were allowed to pray without interruption. But this peace did not last, and as they began a second hymn, an angry mob descended upon them hurling stones and shouting abuse. Fortunately luck was on their side, and the crowd was quickly quietened into submission by the words of a 'great fighter' who stood amongst those wishing to listen to the men's preaching. Sensing that a breakthrough had been achieved, Richard Ward preached again in the evening to a large gathering, and similarly the following Sunday afternoon and evening, and before long the first Primitive Methodist society was established in the town.[30]

However, even if itinerants managed to escape the attention of the mob, newly established societies continued to be vulnerable to the threat of persecution. Nineteenth-century Primitive Methodist literature provides countless examples of the trials faced by congregations, attempting to carry on their worship in the midst of considerable disruption. For example, Patterson notes the difficulties for worshippers wishing to attend services in the Hayloft, where the only entrance was a passage ten feet wide and 'it frequently became a case of ''running the gauntlet'' ... between the cross-fire of ribald jests and profane denunciations'.[31] At the north Shropshire society of Cloy, located in the Prees Green circuit, the members were greatly harassed by a local wealthy farmer.

> Sometimes he would stand at the gate leading to the preaching house swearing and otherwise disturbing both the people at the house and the congregation gathering to worship. At other times he would raise a mob, and encourage them to make a great noise, by beating pans, hooting and otherwise.[32]

Finally, in order to get the inhabitants of the house evicted, he wrote to the owners of property requesting their removal. However, as an example of the classic didactic tale regularly presented in nineteenth-century Primitive Methodist literature, the hand of God is seen to have been at work when the farmer was eventually found dead one Sunday morning.

The desire to extend the mission dominated circuit life, and dictated many of the decisions it made. As Kendall comments:

> When a circuit was hemmed in by preoccupied territory; when there was an available surplus at its quarter-day, however small, or, on the other hand, when the balance was on the wrong side; or when the circuit did not seem to afford work enough for the preachers labouring on it; then the circuit would set about beginning a new mission on virgin soil.[33]

In his thesis on Primitive Methodism in Hull, Hatcher has used quarterly account books to demonstrate how the Hull circuit very quickly 'set its sights on vigorous expansion'.[34] Despite having a significant debt, Hull circuit officials decided against a reduction in the number of itinerants, but instead employed more travelling preachers. While this course of action further increased financial liability, as Hatcher explains, it also acted to increase the circuit's potential revenue. In September 1819, the Hull circuit employed three itinerant preachers, and had a total deficit of £11. 7s. 4d. By the following quarter,

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the number of travelling preachers employed had been doubled, and the total debt carried by the circuit had risen to £30. 6s. 7d. However, by March 1820, the finances of the Hull circuit had seen a radical transformation; despite the fact that the circuit now employed a total of eight itinerants, its finances were now in balance. Hatcher notes:

> Not only had the coverage of greater territory led to the raising of more societies and secured income through their collections, but the sale of books by the travelling preachers to a wider audience, had provided a major source of revenue.[35]

Shropshire circuit officials also demonstrated an awareness of the need to employ sufficient numbers to help in the extension of the mission. In its annual report of 1845, the Shrewsbury Primitive Methodist circuit made a 'loud call for a third preacher to labour in the circuit'. Furthermore, the officials went on:

> We should like to call the attention of the Conference and the General Missionary Committee to the subject of town missions in our populous circuit towns. Thousands are ready to perish in Shrewsbury for the want of a town mission.[36]

In Ludlow too, calls were made for additional preachers to maintain the missionary work of the circuit, warning that 'We may lose ground in the country having 12 chapels and openings in a number of villages which we cannot have access to without another preacher'.[37]

However, Hatcher has argued that efforts to extend the missionary field of a circuit often had a negative effect and could in fact actually impede expansion. For example, many circuits loaded themselves with significant amounts of debt, when 'excessive evangelistic zeal' encouraged them to take on more preachers than they could actually maintain.[38] In the period between 1836 and 1842, the Ludlow circuit employed either five or six travelling preachers; however it is clear from the quarterly accounts that it regularly had difficulties providing wages for all of these ministers. In March 1840, the accounts reveal that £2. 2s. was paid to each of the five itinerants as back salary. Again in March 1841, each of the travelling preachers was paid £1. 3s. 1d. for wages owed to them from the previous quarter.[39] However, it was not only the salaries of the travelling preachers that suffered as a result of over-extension. The 1842 Annual Report of the Shrewsbury circuit explains that 'We should have paid off the bookroom debt . . . had we not had to raise between eight and nine pounds for the Newtown Mission'.[40]

The need for such a large number of travelling preachers not only placed greater financial strain upon a circuit, but also meant that a great many of those recruited had little previous training. Inexperienced ministers could quickly lead circuits into financial ruin through the excessive and inappropriate application of its funds. In 1828, Hugh Bourne made reference in his journal to the 'severe difficulties' experienced by Prees Green circuit in the period from 1825. He comments that many of these were 'caused by the conduct of a preacher who was stationed in it for the first year of its being a circuit, and from whom different things were expected, but who has since left the work of a travelling preacher'.[41] Moreover, during the early years of the nineteenth century, the demand for itinerants also led to the employment of many 'improper persons'. Classed

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as 'impostors' by the Annual Conference, these were people claiming to have come from Primitive Methodist circles elsewhere, who took advantage of the hospitality offered them.[42] In 1831, the Annual Conference ruled that more caution should be taken with regard to strangers, noting that 'during the last twelve months some of these have actually dealt out abuse against our own people, on our own platforms'.[43]

Considering the fine balance between security and financial ruin that many Primitive Methodist circuits maintained, particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century, these impostors could have a major impact upon the work of a circuit. Finally, as missionaries extended the distance between circuit boundaries and the centre of command, it became increasingly difficult to ensure that discipline was maintained throughout its limits. Hatcher argues that this 'was the most serious problem of all as it undermined the whole of circuit life'.[44] In his work on the Primitive Methodist circuits of the old Sunderland District, Patterson has noted how William Clowes was called upon to:

> repair the damage done by Thomas Johnstone, a Hull Circuit preacher ... who had entered the Brompton Circuit and sought, with some degree of success, to alienate the societies, and get hold of the Hutton Rudby Chapel, which had been willed to the Connexion.[45]

Another example can be seen in the Oswestry Circuit's Annual Report of 1839. In the report, Oswestry circuit officials lamented the failings of its Irish mission; however, while they note that the poverty of the people had been one of the mission's main problems, they argue that these difficulties had been exacerbated by 'the bad conduct of some of the official characters'.[46]

Obelkevich has argued that the turbulent character of the denomination during these early years was reflected in the precarious state of many of its local societies. He notes that:

> In its first phase the sect was aggressive, ambitious, speculative; offering itself to villagers 'on approval,' it had many failures ... societies were founded, flourished briefly, then subsided and even disappeared.[47]

Circuit quarterly accounts provide us with the names of each society within an individual circuit, and also the number of members on its roll book. These are therefore a valuable source, which enable us to both identify the changing location of Primitive Methodism within a particular setting, and to track the varying fortunes of each individual society. As we may expect, the evidence of Shropshire Primitive Methodist quarterly accounts provides us with an image of considerable change during the first half of the nineteenth century. In the decade between 1836 and 1846, a total of 32 new societies were added to the Ludlow circuit quarterly accounts.[48] This was a pattern of activity that was repeated throughout the region during this period. For example, the Prees Green circuit missioned a total of 20 different places between 1841 and 1852. Again, in the Church Stretton branch of the Bishop's Castle circuit, 15 societies were added to the circuit accounts between 1847 and 1856.[49] Many of these new additions did not survive long. Of the 32 different places missioned by the Ludlow circuit in the

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decade from 1836 to 1846, a total of 17 had disappeared from the quarterly accounts by 1850. This was a considerable rate of turnover, which clearly reflects the vulnerability of many newly established preaching locations.[50]

Minutes of circuit quarterly meetings reveal that the continuance of preaching places was carefully deliberated, with proposals 'That all those places at which we have no interest nor likely to have, be submitted to the Quarter day for consideration of continuing service'.[51] However, it is not always possible, even when examining committee-meeting minutes, to ascertain exactly why certain places were pursued, and others were not. Generally the minutes simply stated which locations were to be terminated: 'That we give up Goldfield on the weeknight and take up the Hundred'.[52] Clearly, many societies were discontinued when it became evident that there was to be 'no opening of the work'; many places, which appeared in the quarterly accounts one year, had simply vanished by the next.[53] For example, Aston Pitch appeared in the Ludlow circuit accounts in March 1841, but was gone by March 1842. Similarly, Rowley's Field was present in March 1847, but had also been removed from the accounts by the following March. Little Hill, listed in the accounts of 1848, vanished without trace within the year.[54] Often great numbers of locations were given up by a circuit during a single year, for example in the period between March 1843 and March 1844, a total of eight preaching places were removed from the quarterly accounts of the Prees Green circuit. Similarly, in the period between March 1847 and March 1848, a total of seven different preaching places were given up.[55] Generally such places appeared in the quarterly accounts with only a few members on trial, and in many cases with no membership at all. In March 1840 the Annual Return of the Shrewsbury circuit noted that 'We have opened 2 new places ... but have founded no societies at those places'.[56]

In 1842, Ightfield appeared in the Prees Green circuit accounts despite the fact that it had no members attached to it. Unsurprisingly, this place was given up within the year and was never tried again.[57] However, there were certain exceptions to this. In 1842, a society was formed at Rook Lane, and a total of twenty members were noted as being 'on trial' in the Ludlow circuit quarterly accounts. By March 1843, this number had dwindled to 13, and by March 1844, Rook Lane was no longer listed in the accounts.[58] Clearly, the Primitive Methodists often found it difficult to sustain the enthusiasm generated by their initial missionary efforts and, as Obelkevich argues, such considerable fluctuations in membership were the inevitable result.[59]

Although circuit authorities had to be realistic about their ability to establish a thriving cause in certain locations, quarterly accounts reveal that many places where they had little previous success became the focus of new missionary endeavours. In March 1847, Edgebolton appeared in the quarterly accounts of the Prees Green circuit. Although it failed to attract a membership and was given up the following year, a second attempt to form a society in this location was made in 1852. However, once more, the Primitive Methodist cause failed to establish itself in Edgebolton.[60] This was not an isolated case, there are countless other examples of this throughout the county and throughout the century. For example, after having failed to form a membership at Rhosygadfa in the period between 1841 and 1843, preachers in the Oswestry circuit made a second attempt in 1865, again with the same result.[61] In the Shrewsbury circuit,

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three separate attempts were made at different points during the nineteenth century to establish societies at both Falls Green and Barkers Green.[62]

What encouraged Primitive Methodist preachers to return to locations in which they had previously failed? Perhaps it is possible to gain some understanding of the impetus behind their actions from the attempts made to form a society at Whittingslow Heath. Whittingslow Heath first appeared in the Shrewsbury circuit quarterly accounts in September 1828, although it had no membership at that point. However, by December 1828 Whittingslow Heath was making progress and a total of 12 members were recorded as being attached to the society. But this success was only short-lived, and Whittingslow Heath disappeared from the accounts in 1832. In March 1852, no doubt inspired by the memory of previous achievements in this location, the Church Stretton branch of the Bishop's Castle circuit made a second attempt to establish there. However, the success that had been enjoyed between 1828 and 1832 could not be duplicated, and the society was removed from the accounts in March 1853. Although two further attempts were made to establish a society in Whittingslow Heath in 1854 and 1860, no membership was ever formed there again.[63]

While there were many situations in which repeated attempts to form a thriving society failed, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* presents numerous examples where such persistence ultimately produced considerable success. In 1842, the connexional magazine published information about the triumph of Primitive Methodism in the market town of Whitchurch:

> It was missioned again and again, both by Burland and Prees circuits, and ultimately given up by both. A few years ago we decided to give it another trial, and our preachers went and preached in the streets for a considerable time, when a small house was opened for preaching in a principal street and many came to hear.[64]

Eventually their success was so great that a chapel was built, and the town became the head of a new circuit. This account is interesting, not only because it provides us with an understanding of the process by which Primitive Methodism became established in the local setting, but because it also raises an important question about the conditions required for success. Why did the cause fail continuously in Whitchurch for such a long time, and what were the ingredients present in 1842 which enabled the Primitive Methodists to establish a healthy and thriving society? Why did certain preachers enjoy success where others had previously failed, and why did those societies which had struggled for a long time suddenly become animated and experience growth? One of the factors for success, as highlighted by the above example, was the need for a 'permanent place of worship'. In 1852, the Ludlow circuit committee debated the continuance of the Bleathewood society, noting that 'The Brothers Cundel and Thomas be appointed to go to Bleathewood and enquire if it be possible to obtain a house to preach in, and if it be impossible that we take it off the plan'.[65] Clearly, a meeting place not only provided the denomination with a secure foothold in the community, but also gave local members a focus for their worship. Another example of the need to obtain a permanent place in which to carry out regular worship is offered by the efforts of the Leintwardine circuit to establish a society at Craven Arms. For two years, circuit officials attempted to set up

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worship in this location; however when it eventually became clear that they could not acquire a permanent meeting-place, Craven Arms was given up and removed from the plan.[66]

Although in many cases it is hard to ascertain what was the stimulus for growth, the connexional magazine presents us with several examples where one particular factor was highlighted as having a positive effect upon a failing society. In June 1832, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* published an article about the 'work of God' in Kinver, a large village situated close to the county boundary of Shropshire and Staffordshire. The article notes the 'barbarous and inhuman' opposition, which had led to the failure of the Methodists, Baptists and Independents over the previous fifty years. In 1825, the Primitive Methodists managed to establish a small society in the village. However, the society did not make rapid progress, and the total number of members remained at either three or four, for the following five years. The connexional magazine notes that the Kinver society's prospects were considered 'gloomy' and 'discouraging', and if it had not been for the 'moving entreaties of the three members', circuit officials would certainly have discontinued it. Fortunately, from 1830 the society's fortunes started gradually to improve; however it was not until a lovefeast was held, that the size of the congregation rocketed to 28 and the future of the society was made secure.[67] Camp-meetings were also regularly cited as being the instrument by which new growth was initiated. In 1842, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* detailed the opening of Bircher's Common chapel, a location in which the Connexion had struggled to establish a thriving society: 'The cause in this place was for some years low, and it was frequently in contemplation to put it off the plan'.[68] However, after several young men from Bircher's Common became converted at a camp meeting in a neighbouring village, the fortunes of the society began to change.

> The word of God was rendered quick and powerful; sinners were pricked in their hearts, some of whom found peace with God ... and joined the society at Bircher's Common. From that time the work began to move; many were brought to know God, and the preaching house became crowded to excess.[69]

Hatcher explains that camp meetings were a 'part of the Primitive Methodist strategy to stimulate an atmosphere of curiosity through the staging of high profile events', and notes that they could have a considerable impact on a wide geographical area. He argues that people could be drawn from a radius of twenty miles or more, therefore returning 'unofficial devotees to areas that had not been officially reached'.[70] In 1851, Joseph Grieves of the Wrockwardine Wood circuit sent a report to the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* noting:

> I have long been persuaded, that these mighty field-days are among the most powerful means now employed for the evangelisation of the masses of this nation, and for the conducting of which God has raised up the Primitive Methodist Connexion.[71]

Although the initial impetus for growth at Bircher's Common resulted from a camp meeting, it is clear from the membership figures that the building of the chapel itself also

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played an important role in the society's development. Between March 1840 and 1842, the membership of Bircher's Common increased by 167 per cent. Although this level of growth could not be sustained, and numbers began to decline in the following year, membership figures were never as low as they had been before the chapel was built. At Leintwardine too, we can see how the erection of a chapel did much to stimulate its membership. 'Here we have had a steady society for about five years; but our labours have been much impeded for want of a more convenient place of worship'.[72] Membership of the Leintwardine society expanded considerably after the chapel was built in 1842, increasing by 111 per cent between 1842 and 1844.[73] The provision of a permanent place of worship not only removed the pressure from those attempting to carry out worship in tied cottages, but also provided a greater flexibility and freedom from conflict with domestic activity.[74] By enabling greater numbers to be accommodated, a chapel also created a new base for further recruitment. Gilbert has argued that a chapel was regarded 'as the most effective magnet for holding a congregation together, and for drawing outsiders into a Nonconformist community'.[75]

Clearly, the construction of a chapel put a considerable financial burden upon a local society, and this coupled with the pride in a new building may have encouraged adherents to make a firm spiritual and economic commitment by becoming full members of the Connexion.[76] However, although the pressure to service debts and maintain church fabric created a solidarity in a common cause and thereby boosted chapel life, the increasing focus upon financial priorities did much to curtail continued missionary endeavours.[77]

The Developing Geography of Shropshire Circuits

As we have seen, during the first half of the nineteenth century, Shropshire witnessed an explosion of Primitive Methodist activity as missionaries endeavoured to form new societies and to extend circuit boundaries. Missionary activity in the southern regions of Shropshire began in the 1820s. Within the space of just a few years, numerous of Primitive Methodist preaching places were established, as missionaries sent out by the Darlaston circuit travelled through Ludlow and across the extremes of the county, and others from Shrewsbury made their way towards the town of Bishop's Castle.[78]

The first circuit to be formed in the area was Hopton Bank in 1824. Situated approximately half-way between Kidderminster in the east and Presteigne in the west, 'in one of the wildest areas of squatter settlement on the Clee Hills', Hopton Bank was the head of a vast circuit which extended for many miles across southern Shropshire and into the surrounding counties.[79] Unfortunately, a lack of evidence for the period from 1824 to 1831 prevents us from establishing the precise geographical development of the circuit in its infant years. However, minutes of the quarterly committee meeting reveal that the circuit had made sufficient progress by 1830 for it to be divided. The minutes record 'That the Kidderminster branch be made into a circuit'.[80] In the consolidated minutes of 1836, the Annual Primitive Methodist Meeting stipulated that there must be sufficient evidence to prove that any new circuit would be able to support itself. New circuits were not only required to support two travelling

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preachers, but also to demonstrate that they had the necessary staff in the form of stewards and circuit committee members to ensure careful management. The Annual Meeting was adamant that 'No new circuit shall be made if proof can be given that the forming of such a circuit will injure the welfare of the parent circuit'.[81]

Evidently, the Hopton Bank circuit had grown sufficiently between 1824 and 1828 to make such a division a necessity.[82] Our first glimpse of the precise dimensions of this circuit is obtained from its roll book of 1831. This reveals that the circuit spanned nineteen miles from Broadstone near Wenlock Edge in the north, to Leominister in Herefordshire in the south, and covered approximately 195 square miles.[83] While we are unable to make any exact judgements about the level of growth experienced between 1824 and 1831, committee meeting minutes show that circuit officials were determined to follow a course of expansion. Between 1831 and 1840 the Hopton bank circuit turned its attentions to 'New Ground' to the north of its territory, the minutes noting: 'That this meeting recommend to the next quarterly meeting the propriety of sending a missionary on the Wenlock side of this circuit with all possible speed'.[84]

Using information about societies from circuit roll books, quarterly accounts or preacher's plans, it is possible to construct a scaled map of an individual circuit. For an example of a nineteenth-century Primitive Methodist Preachers' plan see figure 1. These are extremely valuable, not only because they enable us to discover the area covered by an individual circuit at a given time, but because they also reveal the location and density of societies within them. Moreover, a series of diagrams can allow us to chart the geographical development of an individual circuit over a period of time. These maps can also be used to compare the progress of two or more circuits, and also to help establish the boundaries of each circuit; this is of particular value when examining the relationships between neighbouring circuits. For example, maps reveal the close proximity of many societies located in different bordering circuits, which, as we shall see, helps to explain why disputes between certain societies regularly occurred.[85]

Figure 2 depicts the Hopton Bank circuit in the years 1831 and 1835. It is clear that this was indeed a period of significant missionary activity for the Hopton Bank circuit; in just four years the number of preaching places had risen from twenty to 34, and the circuit had expanded eleven miles to the north. By 1835 the Hopton Bank circuit spanned approximately 293 square miles.[86] In 1835, the northern societies were formed together into the Much Wenlock branch, and missionary activity in the northern extremes of the circuit intensified. It is clear from the evidence of Hopton Bank that the drive to expand territory and increase the number of preaching places could often lead to disputes with neighbouring circuits. In 1831, the Annual Meeting ruled that 'Any circuit has always been, and still is, at liberty to send out any missionary either at home or abroad; providing that such missionary does in no way interfere with any circuit or station already occupied'.[87] The missionary activity of the Hopton Bank circuit in the area of Much Wenlock, brought it into direct 'competition' with the Wrockwardine Wood circuit. The committee minutes record the decision 'That Friend Rich be authorised by the committee to write to Wrockwardine Wood respecting the infringement at Little Dawley, that we consider preaching at Burrows Bank be not an infringement on their circuit'.[88]

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PRIMITIVE METHODIST PREACHER'S PLAN

FOR THE MINSTERLEY CIRCUIT, 1856.

PLACES AND TIME.	M.	A.	E.	JULY. 6	13	20	27	AUGUST. 3	10	17	24	31	SEPTEMBER. 7	14	21	28
School Lecture.....	11						1				5					1
Minsterley.....		2½		3	15	16	1	CM	9	20	8Q	17	28	10	25	1
			6	3	15	16	1	5	9	20	8Q	17	28	10	25	1S
School Lecture.....	11							CM								
Asterley.....		2½		2Q	26	10	4	CM	11	22	9	7	MS	3	19	27
			6	2Q	26	10	5	1L	11	22	9	7	M.M	3	19	27
School Lecture....	11					CM					19					12
Pontesbury.....		2½		4	AS	CM	28	2	24	10Q	27	25	24	9	3	10
			6	5	AS	1L	28	6	24	10Q	27	25	24	9	3	10
Pontesford.....			6	9	13	CM	18	25	19	6Q	29	12	2	22	6	17
School Lecture	11					3					1					
Perkin's Beech,.....		2½		7	28	23	8Q	9	32	11	1	15	26	24	29	25
			6	7	28	23	8Q	9	32	11	1S	15	26	24	29	25
Snape LC.....		2½		21	3	27	29	26Q	23	24	3	13	32	26	7	13
Meadow Town.....			6	11	32	15	3	7Q	14	16	30	21	23	31	8	24
Brockton LC.....		2½		30	27Q	31	32	12	29	13	14	11	16	30	15	23
Aston			6	30	27Q	31	32	12	29	13	14	1L	16	30	15	23
Wagg Beach LC....10½				27		21		24		28Q		22		4		22
Wattlesborough Heath		2½		MS	16	8	25	30	CM	32	11	10	12	14	22Q	28
			6	MM	16	8	25	31	1L	32	11	10	12	14	22Q	28
School Lecture....	11						7				24			1		
Pennerley.....		2½		22	25Q	32	26	27	7	12	15	3	29	1	23	11
			6	22	25	32	26	21	7	12	15	3	29	1S	24	11
Knowles.....		2½		23	29	24	13	21	27Q	7	26	2	5	32	1	3
School Lecture.....	10							3		CM						
Hope's Gate		2½		29	24	7	23	3Q	2	CM	16	8	15	13	32	21
			6	29	24	7	23	3Q	2	1L	16	8	15	13	32	21
Drewry Lane.....			6		4		11		5Q		18		13		5	
Paddock LC.....			6	21	3	27	29	26	23	24	3Q	13	32	26	1S	13
Stiperstones.....	10½			23	29	24	13	27Q	26	7	26	2	5	32	1	3
Habberley LC.....			6	13	5	CM	17	2	12	25	19	5Q	37	17	20	5
Coyd-Way..LC.....		2½		12	8	30	10	14	CM	8	28Q	22	11	16	10	31
			6	12	8	30	10	14	CM	8	28Q	22	11	16	10	31
Rorrington.....		2½		11	32	15	3	7Q	14	16	30	21	23	31	8	24

REFERENCES.—T. Tickets.—L. Lovefeast.—Q. Quarterly Collection.—P. Publish—L.C. Lead the Class.—R.M. Revival Meeting.—C.F. Fund Collection—C.M. Committee Meeting—A. Chapel Anniversary. M.S. Missionary Sermons.—M.M. Missionary Meeting—S. S. School Sermons..

PREACHERS NAMES AND RESIDENCES.

1 J Langham, Minsterley
2 G Beady, Pontesbury
3 T Gwilliam, Perkin's Beach
4 J Purslow, Minsterley
5 J Evans, Ditto
6 T F Beady, Pontesbury
7 J Davies, Pennerley
8 E Davies, Half-way House
9 S Evans, Pontesbury
10 M Jones, Wattlesboro' H.
11 J Roberts, Brockton
12 T Williams, Pontesbury
13 B Evans, Pontesbury
14 J Davies, Marton Mountain
15 C Rees, Meadow Town
16 S Home, Aston
17 S Bennett, Snailbeach
18 S Woodhouse, Boycote
19 G Russell, Pontesbury
20 W Bennett, Snailbeach
21 R Preece, Perkin's Beach
22 H Bennett, Minsterley
23 R Corfield, Pennerley
24 E Higgins, Ditto
25 J Jones, Pontesford
26 J Williams, Knowles
27 E Evans, Pennerley
28 J Hill, Horse Bridge
29 R Pinches, Bogg

EXHORTERS.

30 G. Griffiths, Wattlesboro H.
31 J. Jones, ditto.
32 J. Price, Welsh Vow.

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REGULATIONS & NOTICES.

Each Preacher must attend his own appointments, or get them supplied by properly authorised persons, and in no case, except very urgent ones, must he trouble either the travelling preachers, or the circuit committee.

No person is allowed to preach in any of our places of worship, who is not authorised to do so by the circuit quarterly meeting, Ministers of other orthodox communities are an exception from the above rule.

The society stewards at each place are affectionately, yet urgently, requested to forward their accounts to the quarterly meeting, not later than three o'clock.

The Primitive Methodist Chapel at Pontesbury, is duly registered for the solemnization of Marriages, pursuant to an act of the 6th and 7th, William IV., cap. 85.

Local preachers, and sabbath schools, may obtain any of the religious London publications through our book room by applying to J. Langham, not later than the 12th of each month.

The Preachers planned at Wagg Bead are requested to preach in the open air, whenever it is practicable, by order of the Quarterly Meeting

CHAPEL ANNIVERSARY SERMONS:—Pontesbury July 13th, Preacher to be made known.

CAMP MEETINGS:—Pontesbury, July 20th, Nos. 9, 26, 25, 20, 22, and 1. Asterley, Aug. 3rd, Nos. 19, 16, 15, 10, and 1. to attend, Wattlesborough Heath, Aug. 10th, Nos. 28, 25, 22, 16, 3, and 1, to attend. Hope's Gate, Aug. 17th, Nos. 26, 21, 15, 12, 3, and 1, to attend. Each of the above meetings to commence at 9½ a.m. and close with a love-feast at 6 in the evening.

REVIVAL MEETINGS:—Aston, Aug. 31st, Nos. 9, 28, and I, to attend. Pontesford, Sep. 14th, Nos. 19, 27, and 22, to attend. Aston Revival Meeting to commence at 10 a.m. and Pontesford at 2.pm. and close with a love feast in the evening.

MISSIONARY SERMONS:— Wattlesborough Heath, July 6th, Sermon at 2½ p.m. by J. Langham, and the public meeting in the Evening at 6, to be addressed by Nos. 28, 10, 8, and 1. Asterley Sep. 7th when a Sermon will be preached at 2½ p. m. by J. Langham, public meeting at 6 in the evening to be addressed by Nos. 25, 22, 9, 4. & 1.

N.B. Collections will be made at the close of each service in aid of the Home and Foreign Missions.

TEA MEETINGS:—Pontesbury, Aug. 11th, Nos. 25, 9, 22, and 1, to attend. Wattlesborough Heath, time to be made known. Hope's Gate, Sep. 16th, Nos. 22, 24, 15, 7, 3, and 1, to attend.

The Quarterly Meeting, at Minsterley, Sep. 1st, to commence at 10.

The Male local preachers compose the circuit committee. J. Langham Book Steward; J. Evans, Circuit Steward.

The Circuit Committee is the Sub-Missionary Committee, J. Evans Secretary and J. Langham, Treasurer.

WEEK NIGHT PLAN.

	JULY.				AUGUST.					SEPTEMBER.				
PLACES.	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29	
Pontesford ..... Monday	7		1s			rm	1t		pm			1		
Knowles ..... Monday	7	1s		1t						1			1	
Brewry Lane .... Monday	7		pm		1t			1			1			
Pontesbury ..... Tuesday	7		nm	1t		12		1		1		1		
Pennerley ..... Tuesday	7	1		1	1t		1		7		1		1	
Paddoc ..... Tuesday	7								1					
Habberley ..... Monday	7					1								
Meadow Town Wednesday	7	1		15	1t		1		1		1			
Perkin's Beach Wednesday	7		pm		1		1t		1			1		
Stiperstones .... Wednesday	7												1	
Snape ..... Wednesday	7			1t										
Minsterley .... Thursday	7		1c		1		1t		1c		1		1c	
Hope's Gate ..... Thursday	7	1				1t				1		1		1
Brockton ..... Thursday	7							1						
Coyd-Way ..... Thursday	7			1										
Asterley ..... Friday	7		1			1t	1t		1			1		
Wattlesboro' Heath Friday	7			1				1t		1			1	
Aston ..... Friday	7	1			1						1			1

HYMN.

"ENDLESS DAY."

Hark! how the gospel trumpet sounds,
Through all the earth its echo bounds;
Proclaiming to a ruined race,
That through the riches of his grace
Sinners may see the Saviour's face,
In endless day.

Hail, Jesus! all victorious Lord,
Be thou by all mankind adored;
For us didst thou the fight maintain,
And over our foes the victory gain,
That we, with thee, might ever reign,
In endless day.

Fight on ye conquering saints fight on,
And when the conquest you have won,
Then palms of victory you shall bear,
And crowns of glory ever wear.
And in his kingdom have a share,
In endless day.

Then in thy presence, heavenly king,
In loftier strains thy praise we'll sing.
We'll sing of thy redeeming love,
When rolling years shall cease to move,
And this shall be our theme above,
In endless day.

G. DRAYTON, PRINTER, SHOPLATCH.

Figure 1. Primitive Methodist Preacher's plan for the Minsterley Circuit, 1856.

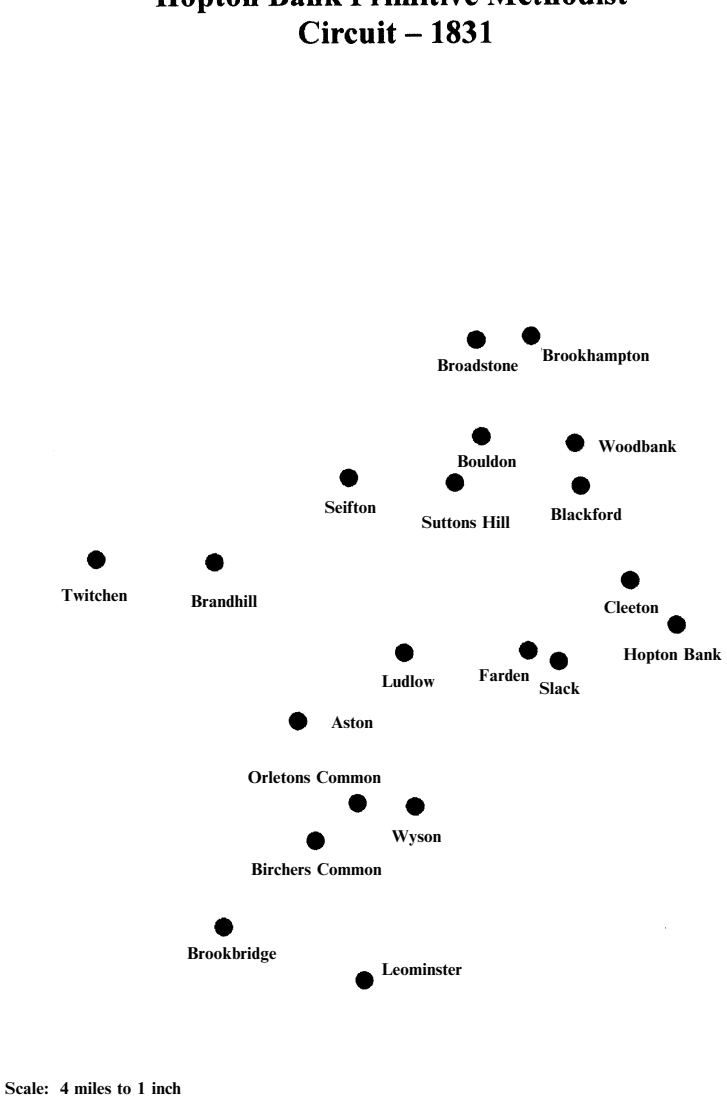


Figure 2.

Despite this degree of conflict, activity in the Much Wenlock branch continued and by 1840, as figure 3 reveals, the societies located in this area had become a distinct and separate part of the Ludlow circuit.[89] While attempts to form Much Wenlock into a circuit in its own right began in 1837, it is clear that the home branch committee had little confidence in such a division, noting 'That the branch cannot be allowed to be made into a circuit as there is not any managing men nor any prospect of it continuing a circuit'.[90]

Although Much Wenlock officials continued to make regular appeals for a division, it was not until 1843 that sanction for this was secured.[91] However, the life of the Much

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Figure 2. Continued.

Wenlock circuit was very short and in April 1847, by direction of the General Committee, it was united with the circuit at Wrockwardine Wood.[92] Clearly, reservations outlined by officials in the home branch were entirely correct, and the brevity of the Much Wenlock circuit's existence demonstrates the caution required when making such decisions.

As expansion continued in the north, the home branch of Ludlow circuit sought extension in the south and west, stationing an itinerant preacher at Leominster in 1836.[93] The total number of societies and preaching places in the home branch of the Ludlow circuit also increased dramatically during this period, growing from a total of

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Figure 3.

thirty in 1835 to 42 in March 1840.[94] However, while the total number of societies continued to grow, figure 3 reveals that there was little change in the size of territory covered by the home branch. The vast majority of new societies formed between 1835 and 1840 were situated in the south around the town of Leominster, and in the west around Leintwardine. For example, we see the establishment of preaching at places such as Bucknell, Luston, and Wigmore. After the division of the Much Wenlock branch in 1843, the level of activity in the south and west of the circuit further intensified. In 1847, societies located to the west of Ludlow were grouped together to form the Leintwardine branch which was 'thrown on its own resources' in 1849, and in 1850 the circuit was

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Figure 3. Continued.

again divided as the Leominster branch was formed.[95] By 1850, the total number of societies in the branches of Ludlow, Leominster and Leintwardine had increased to 61.[96] However despite this, it is again clear that there was little outward expansion of circuit boundaries. The formation of a society at Wharton extended the circuit two miles southwards, while a new society at Birtley advanced boundaries approximately three miles to the south-west of Wigmore, and the establishment of preaching at Little Isle extended the eastern limits of the circuit by just one mile.[97] Although the total number

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of societies listed in the quarterly accounts continued to multiply and change in the years to 1850, circuit officials had begun to look for some level of consolidation in its work. In the period between 1840 and 1850, 25 of the 55 preaching places in the Ludlow circuit were either transferred to the new Much Wenlock circuit or were given up, and a total of 31 new societies were formed. However, thirty (or 55 per cent) of the societies listed in the accounts of 1840 were still present in 1850; moreover, just under half of these had survived from 1831.

It is clear that the geography of Primitive Methodism within Shropshire was established very early in its existence. A significant proportion of the societies listed on Primitive Methodist circuit plans and quarterly accounts at the end of the nineteenth century were actually formed before 1850. Just over sixty per cent, or eleven of the eighteen societies on the Ludlow preachers plan of 1906, had been established before 1856, and seven were actually present in the circuit's quarterly accounts of 1840.[98] Again if we look at the Leintwardine circuit which was formed out of Ludlow in 1864, we see that of the seventeen societies on the plan in 1895, twelve were already in existence by 1850. Six of these societies were present in the Ludlow quarterly accounts of 1836 and two were recorded in the Shrewsbury quarterly accounts as early as 1829.[99] The evidence of the Bishop's Castle, Shrewsbury and Oswestry circuits also reveals a similar pattern. The Bishop's Castle preachers' plan for the period from April to July 1845 shows that there were a total of 33 societies in the circuit at this time. Of these, fourteen were still on the plan in 1874. A further six were also still in existence as part of the Church Stretton circuit which split from Bishop's Castle in 1872.[100] In the Shrewsbury circuit, twenty (or 51 per cent) of the 39 societies present in the quarterly accounts of 1828 were still in existence in the various circuits divided from Shrewsbury in 1900.[101] Similarly, if we look at the Oswestry circuit we see that seventeen of the societies listed in the quarterly accounts of March 1841 were still in existence in the final decade of the century.[102]

By 1840, the Ludlow circuit had already established a core group of societies, which provided a focus for much of the work carried out. Societies such as Hayton's Bent, Hopton Bank, Knowbury Bank, Leintwardine, Leominster, Orleton's Common, Stoke St Milborough, Twitchen and of course the society in the town of Ludlow itself, were all thriving centres of activity. All had healthy memberships and many of them already had chapels. The importance of these societies, particularly those with chapels, was reflected in the number of services they had planned and the attention they received from the itinerant ministers. For example, if we look at the Ludlow circuit plan, which covers the period July to October 1850, we can see that Ludlow and Leominster, the head society of each branch, had the greatest number of Sunday services during the quarter. Both of these had a morning, afternoon and evening service each week in the quarter.[103] Of the 38 Sunday appointments planned over the thirteen week period, 26 (or 68 per cent) of the Ludlow Sunday services, and eighteen (or 47 per cent) of the Leominster services were carried out by one of the itinerant ministers. Similarly, the plan also reveals that the great majority of the special services held during the quarter were planned at these locations. All of the Lovefeasts, Sacraments, Anniversary Sermons, Tea Meetings, and eleven of the fifteen camp meetings, nine of the fourteen missionary meetings, and seven

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of the eleven missionary sermons, were planned at societies which had been in existence since 1840. It is clear therefore that there had been a definite shift in focus; the desire for continued evangelistic outreach being relinquished in favour of the maintenance of existing local institutions. Kendall observed that 'in the forties the denomination was emerging from the valley, winning a recognised position and seeking to minister to the enlarging needs of those whom it had rescued and elevated and gathered into church fellowship'.[104] Moreover, it is evident from the work of Rogers and Vickers that this process of institutional change closely paralleled the experiences of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion several decades earlier.[105]

As well-established centres of activity within the circuit, these societies provided the foundations for the work of the circuit as a whole. However, not only did they play an important role in the spiritual life of the circuit; it also appears that they acted as centres, from which other locations could be missioned. Figure 3 clearly reveals the increasing density of societies within the Ludlow circuit. Of the 31 new societies formed between 1840 and 1850, 23 were situated in the western half of the circuit, and all were within a few miles of societies which had been in existence for over a decade. For example, the society formed at Mocktree was situated within two miles of the societies at Brandhill and Todding, and within one mile of the society at Downton Common.[106] Similarly, the new society at Yatton was located just over a mile from Lucton, and the new society at Richard's Castle was within a mile of Orleton's Common.[107] It is interesting to note that increased activity within the Leintwardine branch during this period brought it into conflict with the boundaries of the Bishop's Castle circuit. In 1847, Ludlow circuit officials requested that Clungunford, a society in the Bishop's Castle circuit, be transferred to its authority. It is perhaps inevitable that the Ludlow circuit should make this request, as Clungunford was actually much closer to the societies in the Leintwardine branch.[108] In 1849 there was further friction between Leintwardine and Bishop's Castle. The minutes of the Bishop's Castle committee meeting declare 'That it be found that the Leintwardine branch have infringed upon this circuit at Burgham'.[109] The matter of the Clungunford society, which was not settled in 1847, was again brought up by the Ludlow circuit in 1851, with the declaration:

> That we make an offer of Primrose Bank to Bishop's Castle circuit on the condition of their giving up to the Leintwardine branch, Clungunford, at the same time informing them if they continue to interfere with our societies we shall lay out the case in the hands of the District Committee.[110]

In response, Bishop's Castle declined to 'comply with the proposition made by the Ludlow circuit'.[111] However, the Ludlow circuit eventually got its way, and in 1855 Clungunford was included along with the other societies in the Leintwardine branch quarterly accounts.[112]

While a gradual decline of outward expansion can be witnessed in the Ludlow circuit from 1840, in other circuits this process began later. Although we are unable to chart the geographical development of the Bishop's Castle circuit before 1845, the evidence of its preachers' plans reveals that the circuit continued to expand up to 1851. In the quarter from April to July 1845, there were 33 societies in the Bishop's Castle circuit, of which

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twelve were located in the branch at Church Stretton. Extending west across Offa's Dyke and into the Clun Forest, and north-west across the hills of the Long Mynd and the Caer Caradoc, the Bishop's Castle circuit spanned approximately fourteen miles from north to south and sixteen miles from east to west, and covered 144 square miles.[113] By 1851, the number of societies had grown to 49, 31 in the home branch and eighteen in the Church Stretton branch. Of the 49 societies on plan in the quarter from January to April 1851, twenty (or 41 per cent) were 'new' societies.[114] Although we cannot be sure that these were completely fresh places that had not been previously missioned, it is impossible to deny that this was a large turnover in the number and location of societies, clearly revealing the continued missionary activity within the circuit. However, while the north-south dimensions of the circuit remained unchanged, considerable expansion occurred both in the west, as the home branch extended over the national border into Wales, establishing societies at Cefnycoed, Llandyssil and Montgomery, and also in the east as the Church Stretton branch formed societies at Day House, East Wall and Hughley. In 1851, the entire circuit spanned 23 miles from east to west, and covered 198 square miles.

Although Bishop's Castle continued to grow after 1845, plans reveal that by 1860 the phase of outward-expansion had passed. Between 1851 and 1860, there was not only a slight reduction in the number of societies, but also in the area covered by the circuit; by 1860 the number of societies had decreased to 46, and the area spanned to 176 square miles.[115] While this was not a major decline, it is apparent that the Bishop's Castle circuit had passed its peak. However, this picture of overall decline masks a maintenance of growth in the Church Stretton branch: during this period, the number of societies in the branch increased from eighteen to twenty. Moreover, there continued to be a considerable turnover in the location of the Church Stretton societies; seven of the societies on plan in 1860 were new from 1851. In contrast, the home branch underwent a period of considerable contraction, the total number of societies declining from 31 to 26. However, generally there was very little change in the location of its preaching places, 88 per cent of those on plan surviving from 1851. It is clear from the minutes of the Bishop's Castle circuit committee meeting that the home branch had begun to look for consolidation:

> That all places where there is no society . . . be informed that if there cannot be a society formed at those places we must withdraw our labours from them and attend to those places where there is a society after this quarter.[116]

Although it took longer for Bishop's Castle to evolve into a 'mature' circuit, with a core group of viable societies, the pattern of development was the same as in the Ludlow circuit a decade earlier.

As Primitive Methodism increasingly focussed upon its 'well-established societies', and the age of speculative expansion passed, circuit officials 'took fewer risks, venturing less and failing less'.[117] Although missioning continued and new societies were formed after 1850, Obelkevich has argued that such activity was increasingly 'overshadowed by the rise of revivalism'. He comments that 'if it was God who initiated conversions in the

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first period, now it was self-consciously the preachers. They were confident that revival could break out simply by virtue of their own will-power and prayer-power'.[118] This point is supported by the evidence of the Ludlow committee meeting minutes: 'That our members be requested to meet at 7 O'clock on Sunday mornings where convenient to pray for a revival of God's work. If not convenient for them to meet, to pray at their respective homes'.[119] While the drive to recruit new converts was still very much alive after 1850, missionary activity increasingly took the form of carefully planned revival and protracted meetings. The minutes note 'That a revival meeting be planned for every place in the circuit on some one Sunday on the next plan'.[120] At the revival meeting, which was held on the Sabbath, various travelling or local preachers were engaged to give a short address to the gathered congregation.

Following the same format, the protracted meeting was held over a series of consecutive nights, and usually lasted for a week or more.[121] The purpose of such meetings was not only to create new converts, but also to revive the zeal of existing members. In 1854, Brother J. Guy related information to the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* about the protracted meeting carried out in the Canterbury Mission. From this we can gain a clear insight into the nature of the week-long gatherings. The meeting began on Monday, 'two souls were saved' on Tuesday, on Wednesday another good meeting was held, by Thursday 'the conflict with the powers of hell' had become very great, and on Friday evening, just as 'the meeting was about to be closed, 6 souls began to cry for mercy, all of whom found peace.' On the morning of the Sabbath, Brother Hawes and others processed through the neighbourhood of the chapel, securing a large number of attendants for the afternoon meeting, and in the evening a love-feast was held and '12 more professed to find salvation through faith in Jesus.' Brother Guy proclaimed the success of the week, noting that many new souls were converted and many backsliders restored.[122]

Plans of the various Shropshire circuits indicate that the protracted meeting was predominantly a feature of the winter. As Church has noted, 'having been almost regularly confined to their chapels during the winter months' Primitive Methodists were eager to get out into the open air once more, and as the better weather returned the Camp Meeting was reinstated.[123] While it is evident that Primitive Methodism increasingly saw revival as something that could be 'consciously planned and carried out by the acts of men', Obelkevich has observed how the enthusiasm and fervour exhibited during the early years of the movement could also become a feature of the protracted meeting.[124] In 1857, J. Prosser informed the connexional magazine of the successes of the missionary services held in the Oswestry circuit. He noted that the meeting held at Bethel 'was large, and the influence mighty; indeed at one time, the weeping of sinners and the shouts of joy from believers were so powerful, that the speakers could not proceed'.[125]

If we look at the plans of the Prees Green and Bishop's Castle circuits, the changes in missionary tactics are clearly visible in the organisation of the quarterly preaching engagements and the various special services. In the quarter from January to April 1829, weeknight appointments in the Prees Green circuit were divided into six different rounds. This ensured that all of the places listed had weeknight preaching at least once

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every three weeks. In two of these rounds, one specific day was set aside for 'Mission'. For example, in the week beginning Monday 26th January, the first travelling preacher J. Hallam, was planned at Market Drayton on the Monday, Ercall Heath on the Tuesday, Marchamley on the Wednesday, Weston on the Thursday and was set free for missionary work on the Friday.[126] By setting aside specific days, the planning committee helped to give missionary work an emphasis, and encouraged the travelling preachers to maintain their endeavours. However as Ambler has argued, this 'tight planning' of missionary activity limited its scope, particularly when single days given over to missionary work had fixed appointments on either side.[127] For example, although J. Hallam was set free for missionary work on Monday 2nd February, he was planned at Wem on both the Sunday, and on the Tuesday evening. This would have severely restricted his movements on the Monday, and may well have limited the overall impact of his missionary work. Also planned during this quarter was a single missionary meeting at Welch End on Thursday 24th February, and six preachers were due to address the congregation. It can be argued that missionary meetings were the precursor to the later revival and protracted meetings, as they were very similar in nature. In the early period of Primitive Methodist history, the missionary meeting was used as an arena in which to celebrate the glorious victories already achieved and to encourage the work further. Song, prayer and 'stirring speeches' in which the deputation told of the work of the circuit's missions, were followed by tea and the opening of the missionary box.[128] However, as the nineteenth century progressed and the Primitive Methodist Connexion matured, it appears that the character of these meetings changed, increasing emphasis being placed upon the collections made. When in 1857, J. Prosser celebrated the successes of the missionary services in the Oswestry circuit, it was the level of collections that was praised first.[129]

In the quarter from April to July 1831, weeknight appointments continued to be given over to missionary work in the Prees Green circuit; moreover, two Sunday appointments were also allocated for this work.[130] However, by the quarter of January to April 1844, no specific days were set aside for this task. While the earlier plans did not include any revival or protracted meetings, it is clear that these were now being employed as a replacement for the open 'Mission' days, a total of twelve missionary meetings and ten revival meetings being planned during the thirteen-week period. In the home branch, these meetings were held throughout the quarter, and were planned together at the same location. For example on 4th March, a missionary meeting at Brown Moss followed an afternoon revival meeting. By contrast, in the Market Drayton branch, revival meetings were all held on 21st January, and all missionary meetings were planned for the month of March.[131] Although the Prees Green circuit continued to expand from 1831, as the Oswestry branch became a circuit in its own right and Market Drayton became a branch, by 1844 it appears that there was a well established group of societies, and that the drive to advance circuit boundaries had dwindled. However, while the desire for outward expansion of circuit boundaries may not have been as keen as it had been during the earliest years of the movement, it is important to note that success itself ultimately had a negative impact upon missionary work. As the total number of societies within a circuit increased, the maintenance of existing societies and the increasing

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demands of administration ensured that the travelling preachers inevitably had less time available for missionary endeavours.[132]

It is clear that many circuits were well established by the early 1840s and therefore did not have the demand, or time, for general missionary work. However, the practice of setting aside specific days for missioning endured where need continued. If we look at the Bishop's Castle preachers' plan of April to July 1845, we can see that although the home branch had no missionary activity planned during the quarter, the Church Stretton branch had one Sunday evening and two week nights set aside for mission work each fortnight.[133] This would suggest that the Church Stretton branch was less well developed than the Bishop's Castle half of the circuit, and therefore required more time for general missionary work. Ambler has observed a similar pattern in the Lincoln circuit plan of 1821, noting that the travelling preachers in the 'South Part of the plan were more strongly tied to missionary work than those on the Lincoln or East Part'. While he argues that this 'could reflect the needs of the area as perceived by the compiler of the plan', he also points out that this may simply 'reflect the amount of time available to the full-time preachers after fulfilling their weeknight obligations'.[134]

As we have seen, planned missionary days in the Church Stretton branch did indeed have the desired effect, the total number of societies increasing between 1845 and 1851. However by 1851, the protracted and revival meeting had become the only form of missionary activity within both branches of the Bishop's Castle circuit. During the quarter from January to April, protracted meetings were held in both branches of the circuit. In the home branch protracted meetings, which began at Bishop's Castle and concluded at the society in Asterton, were planned for a total of fifteen days. In the Church Stretton branch, the protracted meetings lasted for one week and were planned at five different locations. In total, fourteen revival meetings and six missionary meetings were planned throughout the entire circuit during the period from January to April.[135] While the Church Stretton branch enjoyed continued expansion to 1860, the decline witnessed in the home branch would suggest that these changes in missionary 'tactics' did indeed have a negative effect upon the work of a circuit.

While the outward expansion of Primitive Methodist circuits faltered and the nature of missionary work changed during the second half of the nineteenth century, many circuits continued to undergo considerable transformation in both the number and location of their societies. Taking the evidence of circuit quarterly accounts on a five year basis, it is possible to obtain a clear insight into the changing number of new societies formed. If we look at the evidence of the Ludlow quarterly accounts, we can see that there continued to be considerable alteration in the societies listed throughout the second half of the century. While many of these did not stand the test of time, some did become important societies where chapels were eventually built. In the period between 1855 and 1860, eight new places were added to the list of societies in the Ludlow quarterly accounts. However, while Cleeton, Cleobury, Little Leinthall and Seifton had been the focus of previous Primitive Methodist attention, Coxheadford, Factory, Hopes Cross and Peaton Strand were new preaching places that had not appeared in the circuit's quarterly accounts before. The five years between 1860 and 1865 saw the

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establishment of a further eight new societies at Angel Bank, Ashford, Bitterley, Hints, Little Isle, Middleton, Oreton, and Pipe Aston. Again, all of these were fresh locations previously unmissioned by the Ludlow circuit. Although it is evident that missionary activity was still very much a part of the work of the Ludlow circuit in the period between 1860 and 1865, quarterly accounts reveal that this was carried out within a much narrower field. With the exception of Oreton, all of the new societies created during this period were located within eight miles of the town of Ludlow. New preaching places continued to appear in the Ludlow quarterly accounts from 1865, and by 1870 a further five societies had been established. Again, with the exception of Cleestanton, these were fresh locations that had not been the focus of previous missionary endeavours. While efforts to form new societies continued, it is clear that the success of the Ludlow circuit in this area began to diminish later in the nineteenth century; between 1870 and 1875, only three new societies were established. Although the Ludlow quarterly accounts are made confusing by the appearance and disappearance of the Bromyard Mission in the decade between 1875 and 1885, the decline of missionary results after 1870 remains unequivocal.[136]

If we look at the evidence of the Oswestry circuit, we can again see that missionary activity ensured that new societies continued to be formed well into the second half of the nineteenth century. Although six societies were removed from the Oswestry circuit accounts between 1855 and 1860, a total of five new places were added. By 1865, a further six new societies had been created as the total number of places in the accounts rose from 42 to 48. Again, despite a reduction in the total number of preaching places in the circuit between 1865 and 1870, four more societies were added to the accounts during this period. From 1870 however, the quarterly accounts reveal a permanent decline in the establishment of new societies. If we compare the March quarterly accounts for the years 1870 and 1875, we can see that only three new societies were formed during the five year period. Between 1875 and 1895, this number declined further, and the accounts reveal that in the five years after 1890 no new societies were established.[137] Although decline began after 1870 in circuits such as Ludlow and Oswestry, in others the process started much earlier. Of the twenty societies on plan in the Church Stretton branch in the quarter April to July 1860, six had been established in the period from 1855.[138] However, between 1860 and 1865 only two new societies were formed, and between 1865 and 1870 just one. While Church Stretton experienced spells of greater activity, four new societies being formed in the five year period from 1880, the decline of real missionary activity ensured that the circuit remained fairly static throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.[139] Again we can see a similar pattern in both the Minsterley and Shrewsbury circuits. Neither of these circuits managed to establish more than two new societies in any five-year period after 1865, and both were entirely static after 1885.[140]

While the formation of new societies certainly played an important role, perhaps the most important factor affecting the developing geography of a circuit was the extent of sub-division it experienced. Each of the Shropshire Primitive Methodist circuits underwent some form of division during the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, the Wrockwardine Wood circuit underwent three separate divisions, as the

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Dawley Green, Oakengates and Wellington, and Stafford circuits were formed. The Prees Green circuit also became fragmented as Market Drayton became a circuit in 1869, and Wem in 1878. Oswestry is one particular circuit, which underwent considerable geographical change as a result of sub-division in the later stages of the century. In the period from 1875, the Oswestry circuit experienced a total of three separate divisions as its Rhosymedre, Llanymynech and Ellesmere branches became circuits in their own right.[141] In 1875 the Oswestry circuit had control of 31 chapels and fourteen other preaching places. It spanned approximately seventeen miles from north to south, and thirteen miles from east to west. However, by 1895, there were just seven chapels and two preaching places in the Oswestry circuit, which now spanned approximately seven miles from north to south and eight miles from east to west.[142]

In 1836, the Annual Meeting ruled that each new circuit should be able to support two travelling preachers.[143] However, in the period after 1850, this emphasis declined, as increasing numbers of new circuits formed with just a single itinerant minister. What factors acted as a catalyst for division, and what led to the growing numbers of single-minister stations? Clearly, the maintenance of a single minister inevitably placed much smaller financial burdens upon a new circuit. In 1871, the Knighton branch of the Presteigne circuit became a circuit in its own right. In its annual return of 1869, the Knighton branch admitted that they were unable to support two itinerants, but made an 'appeal for some privileges', commenting that 'other branches have been made into circuits with but one travelling preacher'.[144] Other Shropshire branches such as Church Stretton, Llanymynech and Minsterley were also made into circuits, despite the fact that they were unable to support more than one travelling preacher. Division also had other financial implications, as new circuits took full control of their own monetary affairs. Moreover, it is evident that division itself was viewed as a way in which to increase quarterly revenues. In 1869, Knighton officials proposed that division would encourage the various societies and friends to be 'more free and liberal in their contributions being naturally prompted to this by a feeling of independence and increased responsibility'.[145]

Appeals made in 1884 for the division of Clun from Bishop's Castle reveal that the issue of distance was also a matter for consideration when the subject of division was being discussed. Bishop's Castle circuit officials suggested that 'the geographical position of the circuit' was 'such as to occupy time and labour which might be better spent.' Moreover, they noted that the residency of the second itinerant in Clun, located to one side of the circuit, made it more difficult for him to work the station as a whole. The annual return of 1884 also reveals that the creation of 'smaller' circuits not only helped to limit the distances itinerant preachers were required to travel, but also enabled them to concentrate their efforts in the most needy locations. For example, as there was great competition from both the Church, and the Wesleyans, whose minister spent 'most of his time in Clun itself', Bishop's Castle officials pointed out the importance of sustaining a strong Primitive Methodist presence in Clun.[146] New circuits also attempted to consolidate their geographical positions through the exchange of preaching places. In 1866, the Ludlow circuit committee meeting minuted: 'That we accede to the request of the Branch for the transference to them of Hayton's Bent, Sutton's Hill, Stoke and Blackford, societies and chapels and membership given to them'.[147]

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Similarly in 1858, Oswestry handed over control of Lower Wych to the Whitchurch circuit: 'Our Chapel at Lower Wych with society of nine members has been given to Whitchurch circuit, it being more convenient for them to supply the said place with preachers than us'.[148]

The need to reduce financial pressure, and consolidate efforts within smaller, more manageable circuits, led to many divisions of Shropshire Primitive Methodist circuits during the second half of the nineteenth century. However, in certain instances, we see how some circuits had little choice in the procedure as division was ultimately thrust upon them. In 1850, the Shrewsbury circuit made a request for the restationing of Brother Pugh, noting that he had saved them from a 'virtual split', and that his continued presence would enable 'the good understanding he has restored' to be 'perfectly consolidated'.[149] While feuding parties could often be reconciled, in other instances such problems were not so easily remedied. The separation of Oakengates and Wellington from Wrockwardine Wood in 1864 was the result of a dispute over the four societies of Nabb, New Hadley, Snedshill and St. George's, and the division that followed created particularly bitter relations between the two circuits.[150] For example, Oakengates and Wellington put preachers from Wrockwardine Wood on its own plan, giving them quarterly appointments on days when they were already planned, in the Wrockwardine Wood circuit.[151] In 1865, the Wrockwardine Wood annual return noted that the:

> unhappy strife between the two circuits has damaged us numerically and spiritually. We have done all we can to put down this unhappy contention but at present it seems in vain...we have offered to amalgamate the station and call it the Wrockwardine Wood and Oakengates Circuit – yet still they resist.[152]

However, the acrimony continued. Oakengates and Wellington circuit listed the four societies in question upon its plan, and planned its preachers to meet with those of Wrockwardine Wood. The minutes of the Wrockwardine Wood committee reveal that this carried on for a period of six months, and noted that 'on one occasion Mr Casewell preached a sermon at Mr Prosser's back'.[153] In 1866, the Wrockwardine Wood circuit pointed out that

> Snedshill is ours by the Minute of the December Quarterly Meeting at the time of division, and it has been confirmed by all connexional courts since, even by the last conference – but the Oakengates and Wellington circuit authorities are above all law . . . By their own acknowledgement they have taken from us 23 members at Snedshill, and of course they have taken the monies from those ever since . . .[154]

Clearly, the society of Snedshill was almost split in two; 23 wanted to join with Oakengates and Wellington, while the other 27 members wished to remain within the Wrockwardine Wood circuit. There was also considerable dispute about the precise boundary line between the two circuits. While Wrockwardine Wood upheld that the boundary was 'parallel from Wood Barracks up into Snedshill as far as Four Lane Furnace and down right into the midst of St. George's', Oakengates disputed this, and suggested that the voting to establish this line had been illegal.[155]

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Although neither side wanted to give in, it is clear that both wished to be sure of their geographical and financial positions, and to settle the dispute. In 1866, the General Committee recommended that 'New Hadley and all the houses below the canal' be given up to Oakengates, and that 'Wrockwardine Wood does not hold services nearer to Oakengates than it does now.' Moreover, it suggested that the Oakengates and Wellington circuit withdraw its services from the society at Wood Barracks.[156] Although the recommendation did not mention the other societies in question, we discover from the Wrockwardine Wood quarterly accounts that Snedshill, St. George's and the Nabb remained under its jurisdiction until the end of the century.[157]

Let us now examine the effect of division upon the geography of the Ludlow and Bishop's Castle circuits during the second half of the nineteenth century. In the period between 1850 and 1906, the area originally covered by the home branch of the Ludlow circuit experienced three divisions.[158] In 1854, the branches of Leominster and Weobley were joined and became a new circuit in 1855.[159] In 1864, a second permanent division of the Ludlow circuit occurred as Leintwardine branch was made into a circuit in its own right.[160] The evidence of quarterly meeting minutes reveal that Leintwardine officials had been pushing for a division for several years. The first mention of this subject was made in 1861, when there was an 'application to the General Committee to become a circuit'.[161] In 1863, the issue of division arose again and another request to make Leintwardine a circuit was made; once more this was denied. Minutes reveal that the stumbling block in this matter was Leintwardine's lack of travelling preachers; as we have seen branches were required to have two itinerant ministers before a division could be allowed to go ahead, and in 1863 Leintwardine had just one travelling preacher.[162] Demands were made by branch officials that they be given 'the liberty to call out another travelling preacher', and in 1864 the minutes recorded the plea 'That we use every proper means to have this branch made into a circuit with one or two preachers and we request the Home branch to use all their influence for that purpose'.[163]

Figure 4 shows the location of preaching places listed in the Ludlow circuit quarterly accounts of March 1860. With the removal of its branches, the Ludlow circuit was significantly reduced. In 1860, the Ludlow circuit spanned approximately sixteen miles from Netchwood in the north to Bircher's Common in the south, and thirteen miles from Little Leinthall in the west to Cleobury Mortimer in the east. The circuit had 31 societies, and covered a total of 137 square miles.[164]

While attempts were being made in the early 1860s to create a permanent division in the western half of the Ludlow circuit, moves towards a second division in the north were also underway. In 1862, circuit officials ruled: 'That the upper places of the circuit as presented on the draft plan be made into a branch'.[165] The Primrose Bank branch of the Ludlow circuit remained in existence for over a decade, before this too was permanently divided from the home branch in 1875.[166] Figure 4 reveals the size of the Ludlow circuit after the separation of Peaton Strand. By March 1875, the total number of societies in the Ludlow circuit had fallen to 24, and the area it covered to 125 square miles.[167] The results of the Ludlow circuit's continued missionary endeavours are also made clear, as new societies appeared at Angelbank, Ashford, Cleobury Mortimer, Hill Houses, Middleton and Sandpits. However, it is evident that division

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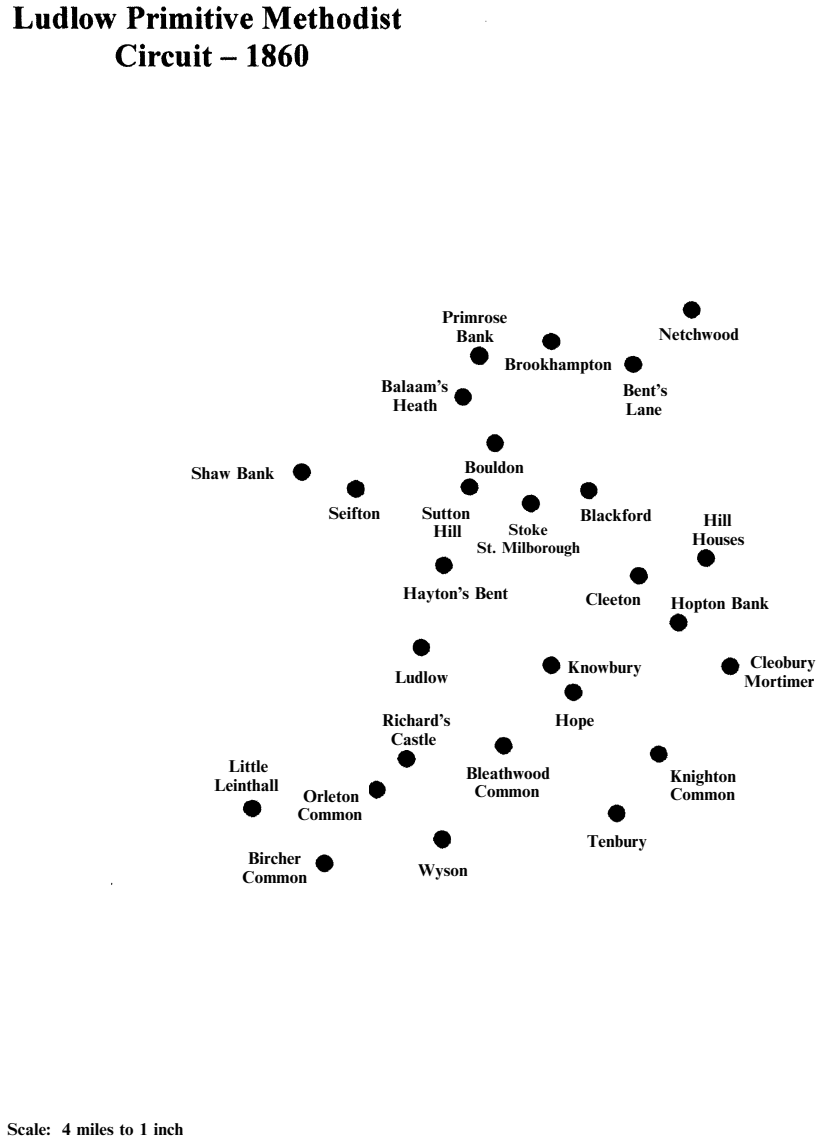


Figure 4.

acted to limit the opportunity for outward expansion. Bounded by the circuits of Leintwardine in the west, Peaton Strand in the north, and Leominster and Weobley in the south, the only available avenue for expansion left open to Ludlow was in the east. As we can see, with the exception of Hatfield, all of the new preaching places were either a relatively short distance of the town or to the east. Although Ludlow experienced no further divisions after the separation of Peaton Strand in 1875, as figure 5 shows, the contraction of the circuit continued. By 1890, the number of societies in the circuit had fallen to 21 and with the transfer of the society at Hatfield to the Bromyard circuit, and

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Figure 4. Continued.

the removal of the society at Onibury, the total area spanned by the Ludlow circuit declined to approximately 84 square miles.[168] By 1906, the total area of the circuit had declined further. The preachers' plan which covers the quarter October to December shows that the Ludlow circuit had control of just eighteen societies and spanned a mere 59 square miles.[169]

Bishop's Castle circuit also underwent two phases of sub-division during the second half of the nineteenth century. The first of these came in 1872 when the Church Stretton branch became a circuit in its own right; the second in 1884 when Clun was also formed

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Figure 5.

into a new circuit. As we have already seen, in 1860, the Bishop's Castle circuit spanned approximately thirteen miles from east to west, and 21 miles from north to south, covering a total area of 176 square miles.[170] However, by 1874, we can see that the Bishop's Castle circuit had been reduced to 86 square miles.[171] The main reason for this contraction was the separation of Church Stretton in 1872; however, the home branch also 'lost' the societies of Cefnycoed, Montgomery and Pentre Highland, which were located between three and five miles to the west of Old Church Stoke. These losses acted further to reduce the overall area covered by the circuit of Bishop's Castle.

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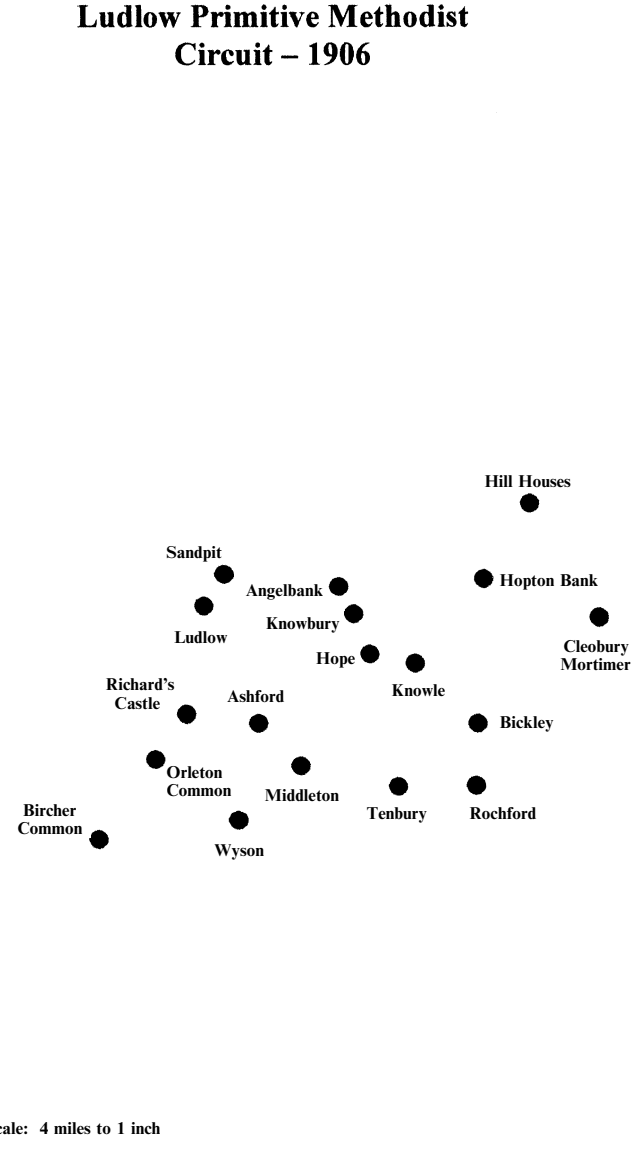


Figure 5. Continued.

While new preaching places were formed in the period between 1860 and 1874, these were all located within the well-established confines of the circuit. After the division of Clun in 1884, the Bishop's Castle circuit was again further reduced. In 1894, the Bishop's Castle circuit had a total of fourteen societies and spanned just 52 square miles.[172]

Figure 6 depicts the circuits of Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton and Clun in the final decade of the nineteenth century.[173] It not only demonstrates the way in which the Bishop's Castle circuit became fragmented, but also makes clear the compact nature of Primitive Methodist circuits at this time. One of the most interesting points which is

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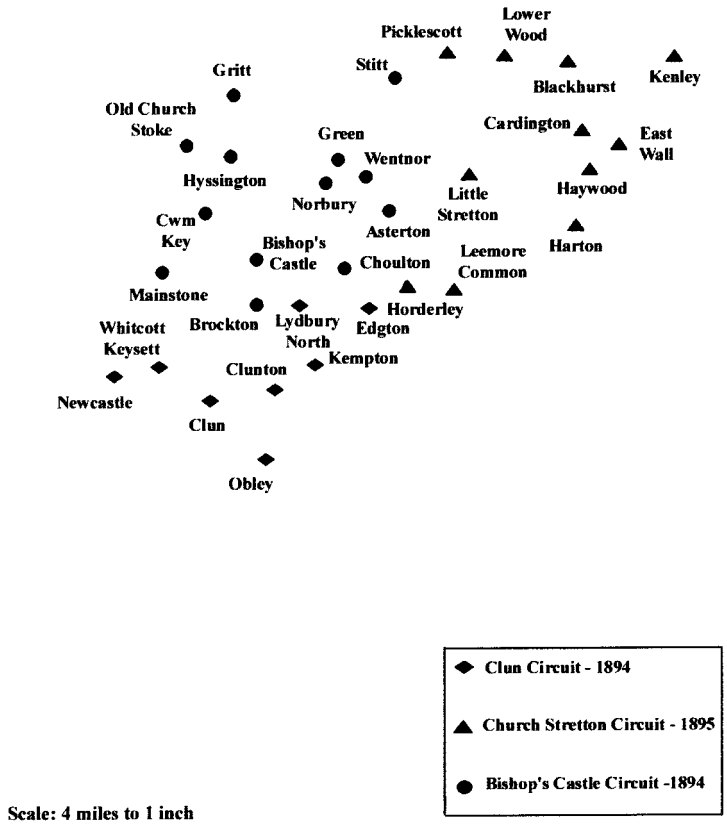


Figure 6.

revealed by the evidence of the Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton and Clun circuits between 1894 and 1895, is the extent to which the chapel now dominated. In 1860, only thirty per cent of the societies and preaching places listed on the Bishop's Castle preachers' plan had a chapel.[174] However, 65 per cent of the societies shown on figure 6 were locations with Primitive Methodist chapels. In 1894, Bishop's Castle had ten chapels, and only four societies which met in rented or other types of accommodation. Similarly, Clun had seven chapels, and just two other preaching places. In many cases circuits had to give up societies because they were simply no longer able to sustain a membership in these locations. In 1882, the Church Stretton circuit abandoned its society at Underhill Hall, noting that the 'inhabitants refuse to have services any longer'.[175] Similarly, the Ludlow circuit was forced to give up its society at Burford, noting 'That at the request of Burford, the services planned there be discontinued owing to the non-attendance of a congregation'.[176]

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Some societies were discontinued because of a lack of staff. In 1884, Bishop's Castle noted the loss of Moat's Hill, explaining that the expulsion of two local preachers, 'for protracted insubordination', meant that they were no longer able to supply this society with the necessary staff.[177] Other societies had to be given up when the house in which they met was lost. Wentnor, a society in the Bishop's Castle circuit, had been in existence for over a decade. However, when a dispute erupted between various parties at the meeting-house, it became impossible to continue worship in this location.[178] In 1889, the Church Stretton circuit lamented the loss of Leebotwood, explaining that they were 'compelled' to give it up 'on account of the conduct of those who lived in the house'.[179] Similarly, the Shrewsbury circuit lost a society when 'the person whose house we preached in died, and there was no other opening'.[180]

This trend was not unique to the southern regions of Shropshire. Throughout the county and indeed the country, scores of Primitive Methodist societies were given up as circuits became consolidated around their chapels.[181] In 1881, the Ludlow circuit had a total of fourteen chapels, and fifteen societies which met in houses or other rented accommodation. However, while the number of chapels changed little, there was a dramatic reduction in the number of societies without a permanent place of worship during the final decades of the century; by 1890 the Ludlow circuit had fifteen chapels, and just six other preaching places.[182] By the time of the 1906 circuit plan, these other places had been further reduced; only the societies at Richard's Castle, Bircher's Common and Hill Houses did not meet in a chapel.[183] Similarly, other circuits such as Minsterley, Shrewsbury and Wrockwardine Wood all went through a similar process, as the number of chapels increased and the preaching places declined. By the turn of the century, the Minsterley circuit had thirteen chapels and two other preaching places, Shrewsbury had eight chapels and just one other preaching place, and the Wrockwardine Wood circuit had thirteen chapels and six other preaching places.[184] Cooper has highlighted the same trend in the Saffron Waldon circuit in Essex. In 1855–6, the Saffron Walden itinerants were planned around a total of 32 societies; however, only eight of these had chapels. By 1878, the number of chapels had risen to nine, while the number of societies held in meeting houses or rented accommodation had fallen to seven. In 1896, there were ten chapels and just one other preaching place in the circuit.[185]

On a national scale, chapel-building within the Primitive Methodist Connexion peaked in the years between 1863 and 1872; chapels finally outnumbering rented rooms in 1868.[186] Obelkevich has argued that as outward expansion declined, the chapel became the focus of Primitive Methodist endeavours. Providing status and security, a chapel was the aspiration of many societies.[187] As the experience of the Melverley society in the Oswestry circuit reveals, even those which could not be deemed particularly successful strove to build a chapel: 'This is a small and thinly populated parish, and our society is rather weak, but having no certainty of a place wherein to worship, land was obtained . . . whereon to build a chapel'.[188] It is clear from the evidence of several Shropshire circuits that there was considerable demand from members to worship in chapels. As the 1881 annual return of the Leintwardine circuit shows, societies that did not have their own chapel by the end of the nineteenth century often chose to amalgamate with those that did: 'The Park Lane society request to worship at the Craven Arms chapel, it being one mile away'.[189] In 1885,

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the Shrewsbury circuit was forced to discontinue the society at Rock Terrace as it was located too near to the Belle Vue chapel.[190] Similarly, the Wrockwardine Wood circuit gave up societies at New Hadley and Bunter's Row, both of which were deemed as being situated too close to other chapels.[191]

Conclusion

So what general trends in the geographical development of circuits can be ascertained from the experience of Primitive Methodism in the English-Welsh borderland during the nineteenth century? During the first half of the century, Primitive Methodist circuits often covered huge expanses of territory, and were made up of scores of preaching places, as travelling preachers and missionaries attempted to form societies in many different locations. However, as a core of viable societies was established and these were given permanency as a result of chapel building, the nature of missionary activity changed and the work of the circuit became increasingly inward looking. The decline in outward expansion which began before 1850 was exacerbated during the second half of the nineteenth century, as sub-division created a plethora of new Primitive Methodist circuits throughout Shropshire and the English-Welsh borderland. This trend divided circuits into smaller, more manageable geographical areas, which could often be manned by a single itinerant minister. Finally, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, Primitive Methodist circuits underwent a phase of contraction, as preaching places were given up and the work became focussed on the chapel.

Notes

1. M. R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 2, (Oxford, 1995), p. 133.
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7. T. Rowley, *The Shropshire Landscape* (London, 1972), p. 22.
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10. Sylvester, *Rural Landscape*, pp. 341–3.
11. Rowley, *The Shropshire Landscape*, pp. 24–5; Baugh, *A History of Shropshire*, pp. 13–14; Sylvester, *Rural Landscape*, pp. 328–9.
12. Rowley, *The Shropshire Landscape*, p. 21; Sylvester, *The Rural Landscape*, p. 145.
13. Kendall, *Origin and History*, 1, 160.

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14. Rev. G. Middleton, *Son of Thunder, or a Life Sketch of Charles Bayliss, commonly called Ironsides*, (2nd ed., London, 1874), p. 10 (his italics).
15. Watts, *The Dissenters* 2, 144; J. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825–75* (Oxford, 1976), p. 249.
16. G. Herod, *Historical and Biographical Sketches, Forming a Compendium of the Primitive Methodist Connexion. Up to the Year 1823*. (2nd ed., London, 1857), p. 12.
17. Middleton, *Son of Thunder*, p. 16.
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20. Rev. C. Tonks, *Victory in the Villages: The History of the Brinkworth Circuit* (Aberdare, 1907), pp. 42–4.
21. Tonks, *Victory*, pp. 42–4.
22. J. Simpson, *Memoir of the Life, Labours, Character and Death of Samuel Atterby, Primitive Methodist Minister* (London, 1849), p. 32.
23. *The Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury*, 7th June 1839 quoted in R. W. Ambler, *Churches, Chapels and the Parish Communities of Lincolnshire, 1660–1900* (Lincoln, 2000), p. 156.
24. J. Macpherson, *The Life and Labours of the Reverend John Petty* (London, 1870), p. 40.
25. D. M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton, 1985), pp. 134–5; Ambler, *Churches*, p. 139.
26. Kendall, *Origin and History*, 2, 278.
27. Rev. W. Garner, *The Life of Mr John Garner, Senior, One of the Early Ministers of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, and Original Deed Poll Member of the Conference* (London, 1856), pp. 32–3.
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29. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 249. It is interesting to note that it was not only preachers who were the focus of abuse. In *The Gospel Among the Masses*, Robert Key presents the story of an old woman who was attacked and put into the stocks for many hours simply for standing by the preacher (see p. 37).
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36. Shropshire Records and Research (SRR): NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Report, 1840.
37. SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1840–50, 18th March 1844.
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40. SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Report, 1842.
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49. SRR: NM2775/8: Prees Green Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1841–64; NM2138/49: Church Stretton Branch Quarterly Accounts, 1847–56.
50. SRR: NM2612/21-22: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1836–44 and 1844–56.
51. SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1844–59, 1st November 1845.
52. SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828–44, 7th August 1841.
53. SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828–44, 13th November 1834.
54. SRR: NM2612/21–22: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1836–44 and 1844–56.
55. SRR: NM2775/8: Prees Green Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1841–64.
56. SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Report, 1840.
57. SRR: NM2775/8: Prees Green Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1841–64.
58. SRR: NM2612/21–22: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1836–44 and 1844–56.
59. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 250.
60. SRR: NM2775/8: Prees Green Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1841–64.
61. SRR: NM4219/3/1&3: Oswestry Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1840–46 and 1863–75.
62. SRR: NM2123/435–437: Shrewsbury Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1835–48, 1848–71 and 1868–91.
63. SRR: NM2123/433–434: Shrewsbury Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1828–34; NM2138/49: Church Stretton Branch Quarterly Accounts, 1847–56.
64. PMM, 1842, 257.
65. SRR: NM3544/1/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers and Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1850–55, 13th September 1852.
66. Hereford Record Office (HRO): K76/12: Leintwardine Circuit – Circuit Minute Book, 1864–87.
67. PMM, 1832, 226–7.
68. PMM, 1842, 144.
69. PMM, 1842, 144.
70. Hatcher, 'Origin and Expansion', p. 161.
71. PMM, 1851, 626.
72. PMM, 1842, 144–5.
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74. S. Hatcher, *God is building a house: From Mr Smith's kitchen to Vision 2000* (9th Chapel Aid Lecture: Englesea Brook, 1999), p. 12; R. W. Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society, South Lincolnshire, 1817–1875* (Hull, 1989), p. 59.
75. A. D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740–1914* (London, 1976), p. 160.
76. R. Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (1968), p. 45.
77. J. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825–75* (Oxford, 1976), p. 222; Ambler, *Churches, Chapels and the Parish Communities*, pp. 226–7.
78. Kendall, *Origin and History*, vol. 2, p. 282; Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 198, 253–8.
79. B. Trinder, *A History of Shropshire* (Chichester, 1983), p. 83.
80. SRR: NM2941/2/2: Hopton Bank Circuit – Quarter Day Meeting Minutes, 1828–40, 27th December 1830.

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81. PMAMM, Consolidated Minutes – 1836, pp. 22–3.
82. B. Greaves, 'Methodism in Yorkshire, 1740–1851', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Liverpool University, 1968, p. 283.
83. SRR: NM2941/2/3: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Roll Book, 1831–45. It is important to note that figures given for the area of a circuit are only approximate, as it is often impossible to be certain of their precise boundaries. However, this does not detract from their value, and they provide a clear picture of the expansion and contraction experienced by individual circuits during the nineteenth century.
84. SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828–44, 15th May 1833 – 16th April 1835.
85. Certain problems can arise when attempting to devise these 'circuit-maps'. Names of societies were often abbreviated in quarterly accounts and on the plan, for example, the use of Aston, instead of Aston on Clun. This inevitably makes it difficult to be sure that one has the correct location, particularly when a name is common within an area. Similarly, society names were also misspelt. Another problem is that Primitive Methodist societies were sometimes in remote areas, making it difficult to be certain of exact positions, especially if a place-name is not given on Ordnance Survey maps. However, such uncertainties only arise in a small number of cases, and do not undermine the value of these maps to show the precise geography of an individual circuit.
86. SRR: NM2941/2/3: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Roll Book, 1831–45.
87. PMAMM, Various Regulations – 1831, p. 3.
88. SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828–44, 5th October 1839.
89. SRR: NM2941/2/3: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Roll Book, 1831–45. Although initially chosen as the head of the circuit because of its convenient location, in 1836 the name of the Hopton Bank circuit was changed to Ludlow, as this town five miles to the west of Hopton Bank, became the focus of circuit life.
90. SRR: NM2612/2/2: Hopton Bank Circuit – Preachers and Quarter Day Meeting Minutes, 1828–40, 20th March 1837.
91. SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers and Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1840–50, 20th March 1843.
92. SRR, NM1861/162: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Letter from General Committee re. Minister of Much Wenlock.
93. SRR: NM2941/2/1: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1828–44, 9th September 1836.
94. SRR: NM2941/2/3: Hopton Bank Circuit – Circuit Roll Book, 1831–1845, March 1840.
95. SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers and Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1840–50, 14th June 1847 and 18th June 1849. NM3544/1/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers and Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1850–55, 16th September 1850.
96. NM32/12/1/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preacher's Plan, July–October 1850.
97. While outward development of the Ludlow, Leominster and Leintwardine branches was relatively limited between 1840 and 1850, the total area of the entire circuit actually underwent massive expansion. In 1849, a series of branches and missions were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Ludlow circuit. In April, Ludlow received the Weobley branch of the Cwm circuit, in May it received the mission located at Bromyard, and in October, the Worcester branch of the Brinkworth circuit was also transferred to the Ludlow circuit. (SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers and Quarterly Meeting Minutes, 1840–50, 14th April 1849, 19th May 1849 and 13th October 1849). In the space of a single year the area covered by the entire circuit expanded from approximately 67 square miles, to 123 miles. While we must note the vast size of the entire circuit at this point, the acquisition of Bromyard, Weobley and Worcester had little direct impact upon the geographical expansion of the Ludlow, Leominster and Leintwardine branches.

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98. SRR: NM2612/21–22: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1836–44 and 1844–56. The Ludlow Preachers Plan of 1906 has been obtained from the collection held at Englesea Brook Primitive Methodist Chapel and Museum.
99. HRO: K76/6: Leintwardine Circuit – Circuit plan, 1895. SRR: NM2612/21-22: Ludlow Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1836–44. NM2123/433: Shrewsbury Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1828–30.
100. SRR: NM2138/54: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Annual Report, 1845; NM3675/4: Preachers Plan, 1874.
101. SRR: NM2123/438 Shrewsbury Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1891–1912. NM2138/200: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1900. NM4111/3/3: Minsterley Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1881–1901. NM3219/4: Church Stretton Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1880–1900. NM2045/10/65: Hadnall Circuit – Quarterly Accounts, 1878–1900.
102. SRR: NM4219/3/1&4: Oswestry Circuit Quarterly Accounts, 1840–6 and 1876–96.
103. SRR: NM3212/12/1/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers Plan, July–October 1850.
104. H. B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, 1 (London, c.1905), 160.
105. A. Rogers, 'When City Speaks for County: the emergence of the town as a focus for religious activity in the nineteenth century.', in D. Baker (ed.) *The Church in the Town and Countryside*, Studies in Church History 16, (Oxford, 1979), 336–42; J. A. Vickers, 'Methodism and Society in central Southern England, 1740–1851', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Southampton, 1986, pp. 156, 159–60.
106. Brandhill was listed in the circuit roll book of 1831, Todding in the circuit roll book of 1835, and Downton Common in the quarterly accounts of March 1836.
107. The society at Orleton Common appears in the circuit roll book of 1831, and Lucton in the quarterly accounts of 1836.
108. While Clungunford was located just one mile away from the society at Bedstone, it was approximately four miles away from Clunton in the Bishop's Castle circuit.
109. SRR: NM2138/2/1: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1847–51, 12th March 1849.
110. SRR: NM3544/1/1: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers and Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1850–5, 15th December 1851.
111. SRR: NM2138/44: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1851–7, 20th December 1851.
112. HRO: K76/18: Leintwardine Branch – Quarter Day Accounts, March 1855.
113. SRR: NM2133/1: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, April–July 1845.
114. SRR: NM2133/2: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, January–April 1851.
115. SRR: NM2138/69: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, April–July 1860.
116. SRR: NM2138/43: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1847–51, June 1853.
117. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 250.
118. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 251.
119. SRR: NM2941/3/1: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1840–50, Quarter Day December 1846. In June 1851, the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* published an article (pp. 360–63) suggesting that a revival of religion could be secured by 'frequent conversations on revivals', 'diligent attention to the means of grace', and 'earnest prayer'.
120. SRR: NM3544/1/3: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes, 1860–66, 9th September 1861. R. W. Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society, South Lincolnshire, 1817–1875* (Hull, 1989), pp. 73–4.
121. T. Church, *Popular Sketches of Primitive Methodism: Being a Link in the Chain of British Ecclesiastical History* (London, 1850), p. 134.
122. PMM, 1854, p. 235.
123. Church, *Popular Sketches*, p. 120.

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124. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 226.
125. PMM, 1857, p. 106.
126. The Prees Green Preachers Plan of 1829 has been obtained from the collection held at Englesea Brook Primitive Methodist Chapel and Museum.
127. R. Ambler, 'Preachers and the plan – patterns of activity in early Primitive Methodism', in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, XLVI, (May 1987), 31.
128. H. Woodcock, *Piety Among the Peasantry: Being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds* (London, 1889), pp. 235–44.
129. PMM, 1857, p. 106.
130. SRR: NM5909/1: Prees Green Circuit – Preachers Plan, April–July 1831.
131. The Prees Green Preachers Plan of 1844 has been obtained from the private collection of Mr T. Edwards.
132. Ambler, 'Preachers and the plan', p. 31 and Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, pp. 149–50.
133. SRR: NM2333/1: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, April–July 1845.
134. Ambler, 'Preachers and the plan', p. 31.
135. SRR: NM2333/2: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, January–April 1851.
136. SRR: NM2612/22–24: Ludlow Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1844–56, 1856–75 and 1875–94.
137. SRR: NM4219/3/2–4: Oswestry Circuit – Quarter day Accounts 1850–63, 1863–75 and 1876–96.
138. SRR: NM2138/64: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, April–July 1855 and NM2138/69: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers Plan, April–July 1860.
139. SRR: NM3219/3–4: Church Stretton Branch/Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1860–80 and 1880–1900.
140. SRR: NM2123/436–438: Shrewsbury Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1848–71, 1868–91 and 1891–1912. NM4111/3/2–3: Minsterley Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1859–81 and 1881–1901.
141. SRR: NM4219/4/14 and 27-35: Oswestry Circuit – Annual Returns 1876–78 and 1895.
142. SRR: NM4219/3/3–4: Oswestry Circuit – Quarter day Accounts 1863–75 and 1876–96.
143. PMAMM, Consolidated Minutes – 1836, p. 22.
144. Powys County Archives (PCA): R/NC/4/KP/D/8–43: Knighton Branch – Annual Return, 1869.
145. PCA:R/NC/4/KP/D/8–43: Knighton Branch – Annual Return, 1869.
146. SRR: NM2138/97: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Annual Return, 1884.
147. SRR: NM3544/1/4: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1866–79, 3rd December 1866.
148. SRR: NM4219/4/2–36: Oswestry Circuit – Annual Return, 1858.
149. SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Return 1850.
150. SRR: NM3038/1/1–3: Oakengates and Wellington Circuit – Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1865–93, 6th March 1865.
151. SRR: NM3511/7: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1845–68, 16th January 1865.
152. NM1861/15: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Annual Return 1865.
153. SRR: NM3511/7: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1845–68, 7th July 1866.
154. NM1861/16: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Annual Return 1866.
155. SRR: NM3511/7: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1845–68, 7th July 1866; SRR: NM3038/1/1-3: Oakengates and Wellington Circuit – Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1865–93, 6th March 1865.
156. SRR: NM3511/7: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1845–68, 7th July 1866.
157. SRR: NM3511/16: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1875–96.

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158. The Worcester branch was transferred to the Kidderminster circuit in 1855, and the Bromyard mission was given up to the General Missionary Committee in 1861. However, these divisions had no impact upon the geographical development of the Ludlow, Leominster and Leintwardine branches.
159. HRO: J92/26: Leominster Branch – Quarterly Branch Meeting Minutes 1848–52, 6th March 1854. SRR: NM3544/1/2: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1855–60, 10th September 1855.
160. SRR: NM3544/1/3: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1860–66, 7th March 1864.
161. HRO: K76/10: Leintwardine Circuit Minute Book 1849–65, 4th September 1861.
162. HRO: K76/10: Leintwardine Circuit Minute Book 1849–65, 8th May 1863.
163. HRO: K76/10: Leintwardine Circuit Minute Book 1849–65, 2nd March 1864.
164. SRR: NM2612/23: Ludlow Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1856–75, March 1860.
165. SRR: NM3544/1/3: Ludlow Circuit – Circuit Committee Meeting Minutes 1860–66, 8th December 1862.
166. On becoming a circuit the Primrose Bank branch was renamed Peaton Strand.
167. SRR: NM2612/23: Ludlow Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1856–75, March 1875.
168. SRR: NM2612/24: Ludlow Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1875–94, March 1890; HRO: W66/22: Bromyard Circuit – Annual Return 1883.
169. The Ludlow Preachers' Plan of 1906 has been obtained from the collection held at Englesea Brook Primitive Methodist Chapel and Museum.
170. SRR: NM2138/69: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers' Plan, April–July 1860.
171. SRR: NM3675/4: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers' Plan, January–April 1874.
172. SRR: NM2138/111: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Annual Return 1894.
173. SRR: NM2138/111: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Annual Return 1894, NM2333/39: Clun Circuit – Preachers' Plan, April–July 1894; NM3219/4: Church Stretton Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts, March 1895.
174. SRR: NM2138/69: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Preachers' Plan, April–July 1860, NM 2138/155-6: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1874–5; NM3219/6: Church Stretton Circuit – Chapel Schedule, 1873. In 1860, there were 14 chapels and 32 other preaching places in the Bishop's Castle circuit.
175. SRR: NM3219/6: Church Stretton – Annual Return, 1882.
176. SRR: NM3544/1/5: Ludlow Circuit – Preachers and Quarterly Meeting Minutes 1890–99, 2nd June 1892.
177. SRR: NM2138/97: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Annual Return, 1884.
178. SRR: NM2138/73: Bishop's Castle Circuit – Annual Return, 1864.
179. SRR: NM 3219/6: Church Stretton Circuit – Annual Return, 1889.
180. SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Return, 1884.
181. Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, pp. 160–1.
182. SRR: NM2612/24: Ludlow Circuit – Quarter Day Accounts 1875–94, March 1890.
183. Ludlow Preachers' Plan – 1906.
184. SRR: NM4111/4/1–2; Minsterley Circuit – Annual Returns, 1852–68 and 1872–99; SRR: NM2123/379–90: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Returns, 1840–90 and 1890–1900; NM1861/11–101: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Annual Returns, 1861–1904.
185. J. Cooper, '"A Fine Field for Usefulness": Primitive Methodism in the Saffron Walden Circuit, 1838–1900', in *Family and Community History* (2002).
186. Kendall, *Origin and History*, 2, 456.
187. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 251.
188. PMM, 1866, 690.
189. HRO: K76/34: Leintwardine Circuit – Annual Return, 1881.
190. SRR: NM2123/379: Shrewsbury Circuit – Annual Return, 1885.
191. SRR: NM1861/20: Wrockwardine Wood Circuit – Annual Return, 1870.

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