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Patriarchy and 'Useful Women' in Wesleyan Methodism, 1810–1851

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A patriarchal culture, reinforced by church discipline, has been ascribed to Wesleyan Methodism in the first half of the nineteenth century. This article returns to the same archives, Hinde Street Church in London, to present a more nuanced view of Methodist discipline. There were women who held influential positions in Methodist chapels, and they resisted ministerial authority with the support of male as well as female members. During this period, the Church was increasingly focused on maintaining a supportive community, with signifiers of status other than gender, such as perceived 'usefulness' in the church community.

Wesleyan Methodism had become the second largest denomination in England by the time of the religious census of 1851.[1] It had grown especially among people who were in the process of moving to skilled employment in London and the expanding industrial towns, and the significant cultural changes in this period have been identified notably by Edward P. Thompson.[2] Anna Clark, in a favourably reviewed and much-cited book,[3] extended Thompson's work on the making of the working class through changes in gender relations in the period 1780 to 1850, and claimed that Methodism 'knit together communities and aided in the formation of radical working-class culture – but it also ensured that this culture would be patriarchal'.[4] Clark argued that

With acknowledgements to Alan Brooks, Dr Sean Brady and the Revd Dr Jane Craske for helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

[1] *Census of religious worship in England and Wales, 1851, abridged from the official report by Horace Mann*, London 1854. Methodological issues in, for example, Clive D. Field, *Periodizing secularization: religious allegiance in Britain, 1880–1945*, Oxford 2019, 35–40.

[2] Edward P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (1963), London 1980: criticisms at pp. 385–440; yearning for communitarian ideals at pp. 51–2.

[3] Anna Clark, *The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British working class*, Berkeley–Los Angeles, CA 1995.

[4] Ibid. 118.

dissenting religion encouraged men to claim 'protective patriarchal authority over their wives and therefore to demand the privileges of domesticity from the wider society'.[5] The patriarchal culture, in her analysis, affected the outcome of Chartist movements in Britain and led to a demand for an extension of the male vote and claims by men for a wage sufficient to support a family.

Clark drew her examples of cultural change from Scottish kirks, along with Baptist and Methodist denominations in England, and particularly from the archives of the meetings of the leaders of Hinde Street Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in the West End of London. The area around the chapel was developing in the first five decades of the nineteenth century, and it included extreme poverty as well as the wealthier occupants, and their servants, of some fine Georgian terraces.[6] Membership of the chapel expanded, reaching a peak in 1845 with 1,184 members,[7] and in 1850 there were over 800 members in a circuit of more than 2,000.[8] Hinde Street Chapel is also significant because renowned ministers were stationed at the church, including at least ten presidents of Conference within the period 1810 to 1850,[9] and the membership included families who dominated Methodism nationally.

This article revisits sources from the chapel's opening in Hinde Street in 1810 to the reform movements and 'agitation' in 1851 and argues, using evidence from those sources, that patriarchy in Methodism was more nuanced and complex than previously suggested. Methodism encouraged domesticity but the discipline of the class meeting and leaders' meeting played a more muted role than previously claimed. Some women successfully challenged the authority of men, and others moved out of their domestic sphere to take an active part in the Church, including leadership roles at a local level.

The first part of the article looks at the links between Wesleyan ideas on domesticity and patriarchy, the second examines moral discipline at Hinde Street and argues that the effects of this on patriarchy were less than has been claimed, the third profiles a woman demanding recognition for views separate from those of her husband, and the fourth examines the status accorded to women through their usefulness in churches, with special reference to Hinde Street.

[5] Ibid. 117.
[6] Alan Brooks, *West End Methodism*, London 2010, 26–31.
[7] Ibid. 61.
[8] City of Westminster Archives Centre, Hinde Street Church (hereinafter cited as M594), M594/27, circuit schedule book, 1844–50.
[9] Brooks, *West End Methodism*, 378–83.

Patriarchy and domesticity

Women's role in the home and workplace changed through the agrarian and industrial revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and middle-class women were increasingly limited to the domestic sphere while business and political activities were regarded as the male sphere.[10] Wesleyan Methodism advocated domesticity but at the same time women were expected to move beyond the domestic sphere into a wider range of activities. These activities provided an alternative, which Linda Wilson identified as a 'third sphere' for women,[11] and it can be argued that within this sphere women exercised a considerable degree of control over their own lives and behaviour.

The meaning of the term 'patriarchy' has been disputed but it is generally interpreted to imply control of people and resources by male leaders, with a hierarchy based on biological difference and kinship position.[12] Anna Clark pointed out that 'For men who found the workshop culture distasteful, the chapel provided an alternative social life and sense of self-esteem.' This meant 'a new ideal of manhood as sober, domestic, honest and successful'.[13] She argued that the domestic ideal included respect for women but embodied patriarchal assumptions: the implications of a patriarchal system included the requirement for men to uphold their authority in the home.

Writing of the Canadian context, Nancy Christie also noted that 'Methodist writers … saw society as a hierarchical structure in which authority descended from God, to the King, to the father as head of the temporal household.'[14] Worship in the home, with fathers reading from the Bible and interpreting the Scriptures to their families, including servants, became the hallmark of middle-class Methodist religious observance.[15] But women sometimes took the lead in family prayers, especially when the husband was absent, and it has been argued that the Methodist

[10] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780–1850*, London 1987, 272–5.

[11] Linda Wilson, *Constrained by zeal: female spirituality amongst Nonconformists, 1825–1875*, Carlisle 2000, 210–11, 225–6.

[12] Sheila Rowbotham, 'The trouble with patriarchy', and Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor, 'In defence of "patriarchy"', in R. Samuel (ed.), *People's history and socialist theory*, London 1981, 363–73.

[13] Clark, *Struggle for the breeches*, 118.

[14] Nancy Christie, '"Proper government and discipline": family religion and masculine authority in nineteenth century Canada', in J. Arnold and S. Brady (eds), *What is masculinity? Historical dynamics from antiquity to the contemporary world*, Basingstoke 2013, 389–412 at p. 393.

[15] John Tosh, *A man's place: masculinity and the middle-class home in Victorian England*, New Haven–London 1990, 33–9. A similar emphasis in America is shown in A. Gregory Schneider, *The way of the cross leads home: the domestication of American Methodism*, Bloomington–Indianapolis, In 1993, 133–42.

emphasis on religion in the home enhanced the status of women, giving 'a new spiritual dimension' to their role.[16]

There were also sermons that indicated a more nuanced assessment of patriarchy. Adam Clarke, an eminent Wesleyan theologian, associated with Hinde Street as a minister and through family connections,[17] stated that husband and wife 'have equal rights and equal claims; but superior strength gives the man dominion; affection and subjection entitle the woman to love and protection'.[18] This was premised on a biological rather than a socially constructed view of gender roles but the terms 'equal rights and equal claims' and 'dominion' rather than 'domination' suggest a constrained view of patriarchy. Clarke asserted that marriage should be founded on affection: 'the authority of the man over the woman is founded on his love for her', and he should give her 'assistance and support' in directing the minds and forming the manners of the children.[19] Although this view included subjection of the woman, dominion was combined with the concept of a companionate marriage in which women held authority over the household and children. Clarke's view of family life was supported within Methodism; although domesticity was advocated by the Church, class meetings in Wesleyan Methodism did not enforce cultural changes in favour of patriarchy to the extent that has been claimed.

Hinde Street class meetings, leaders' meetings and discipline

Methodist activities in this period included the weekly class meetings for men and women. Tickets to show membership of the church were issued quarterly and were intended to be restricted to those attending class meetings, as illustrated in the statement at the Conference in 1810: 'Tickets have been given to certain persons who have entirely given up Class-meeting … Let our Superintendents take care to put an end to these irregularities.'[20] The class meetings aimed to maintain communities with common values, and the discipline of the class meeting was instrumental in this, but they functioned more broadly to provide spiritual support. In

[16] John Tosh, *Manliness and masculinities in nineteenth century Britain*, Harlow 2005, 161; Wilson, *Constrained by zeal*, 150–2.

[17] Adam Clarke (1760–1832) was President of Conference in 1806, 1814 and 1822, and a minister at Hinde Street Church 1809–11, 1823–4 and 1828–30: Brooks, *West End Methodism*, 45–6; John Telford, *Two West End chapels*, London 1886.

[18] Adam Clarke, 'Husband and wife', in his *Christian theology* (1835), London 2014, 174–8. Anna Clark's use of this reference quotes 'domination' rather than 'dominion': *Struggle for the breeches*, 249.

[19] Clarke, *Christian theology*, 175.

[20] Wesleyan Methodist Church, *Minutes of the Methodist Conference* (1810), answer to question 19: 'Has our discipline been sufficiently enforced?'

the nineteenth century, class leaders and chapel stewards at Hinde Street met in a regular weekly 'leaders' meeting', normally chaired by a minister, which made the main disciplinary and financial decisions at local level. Disciplinary action in Hinde Street included responses to 'bankruptcy and dishonesty', gossiping, drunkenness, and sexual transgressions.[21] To this may be added breaches of sabbath observance. Clark did not distinguish between disciplinary decisions concerned with the stability of the church community and those more closely linked to middle-class values of domesticity and standards of respectability.

Dishonesty was treated seriously and two cases of women committing fraud against the chapel's Poor Fund were considered damaging to the community and led to expulsion.[22] Bankruptcy was treated differently: it was considered an issue for the committee only when accompanied by fraud or allegations that the member had wasted creditors' money.[23] Class leaders were required to have acted prudently in financial matters and to be solvent,[24] but there was an acceptance that bankruptcy could not always be avoided.[25] One example of bankruptcy that did not prejudice membership in the church was that of Frederick Grosjean. In November 1831 he entered bankruptcy proceedings,[26] but his bankruptcy, in a time of recession,[27] did not hold him back from developing a successful business and acquiring offices (trustee, steward, lay-preacher and class leader) in Hinde Street and other chapels in the same circuit, where his wife Elizabeth was also a class leader.

Clark claimed that 'gossip served to control women's behaviour',[28] but also that controls restricting gossiping were patriarchal. She argued that women's attempts to rebuke others could be 'construed as malicious gossip', and, assuming that the members of the leaders' meeting at Hinde Street were all men, stated that 'only men could have moral authority' and 'they seem to have found it necessary to keep a firm rein on the tendency of their women members to "tattle"'.[29] But the leaders at Hinde Street included women, and 'tattling' (gossiping) was regarded as a problem for both genders; talking about others could deter confidences, and men were censured for gossiping. For example, in 1814 Mr Hollins was readmitted as a member after he 'acknowledged his error' in spreading false reports about Mr Calder.[30] In 1817, it was the turn of Mr Clemence (a trustee of the chapel) to be challenged for gossiping.[31] Gossiping

[21] Clark, *Struggle for the breeches*, 103–7.
[22] M594/121, leaders' meetings, 16 July 1816; 19 Feb. 1822; 17 Aug. 1830; Brooks, *West End Methodism*, 232–3.
[23] M594/121, 29 Apr. 1817.
[24] Ibid. 14, 21 Mar. 1818.
[25] Ibid. 29 Apr. 1817.
[26] *The London Gazette*, 25 Nov. 1831, 'Notice of bankruptcy', 2473.
[27] Andrew John Boyd Hilton, *A mad, bad and dangerous people*, Oxford 2008, 398–9.
[28] Clark, *Struggle for the breeches*, 52.
[29] Ibid. 103.
[30] M594/121, 27 Dec. 1814.
[31] Ibid. 23 Dec. 1817.

about the moral and religious character of a class member was investigated and traced to a Mr Harrison who was reprimanded.[32] Repeating material derived from a leaders' meetings was strongly reprobated as, for example, in 1838, in the case of leaders who had mentioned their discussions about a member outside the meeting.[33] Concern about gossiping continued in the 1840s, a time when the leaders' meeting was mainly focused on relieving poverty for members and people in the neighbourhood. In 1843 'Brother Padiman' was summoned to attend a meeting to explain statements he had made 'affecting the character of the Leaders of this Society'. He did not provide an explanation and resigned.[34] Controls on gossip clearly applied to both men and women.

Sexual behaviour which offended the norms of the Church, and the reputations of members, included sexual relations and conception outside marriage. In 1816 Mrs Nash was suspended for three months for 'conniving at the sin of her daughter' who was expelled for being pregnant before marrying.[35] In the same year, the leaders were informed that Mr Stimpson was living with a woman of the same class meeting and she was eight months pregnant; they had been married for six weeks, and the Revd Jabez Bunting wished to see them expelled from the society.[36] In 1818 Mr and Mrs Cooper were disciplined because their son's fiancée was pregnant before marriage. Bunting again chaired the meeting and declared that 'unless the leaders' meeting were satisfied that the report was false, they [the Coopers] could not continue in society'. The Coopers attempted to resign but the leaders, faced by Bunting, an extremely forceful minister, did not unite against him and expelled them. The couple unsurprisingly complained that the meeting had treated them 'with injustice', but the judgement was not changed.[37] The glue that bound the community at this time included moral standards and the quest for respectability, and there was respect for pastoral authority.

The demand that parents should take responsibility for their sons' and daughters' sexual behaviour may have led to patriarchal control by fathers concerned about their families' reputations and status in the church. However, the reports of such decisions encompass only a few years from 1816 to 1818, and the severity of the discipline may have been influenced by Jabez Bunting, the minister at Hinde Street at this time. The Coopers' case has an interesting sequel: they applied to return to the chapel in December 1818.[38] By this time Bunting had moved to another circuit and the Coopers, accepted as being 'penitent', were readmitted on trial; there were Coopers serving as class leaders in the

[32] Ibid. 13 July 1819.
[33] Ibid. 23 Jan. 1838.
[34] M594/122, 10, 24, 31 Oct. 1843.
[35] M594/121, 1 Oct. 1816.
[36] Ibid. 27 Aug. 1816.
[37] Ibid. 10 Mar. 1818.
[38] M594/122, 22 Dec. 1818.

1830s. The case also indicates the strength of affiliation, in that people were anxious to remain or return after being reprobated, even when they felt they had suffered injustice.

There were other concerns about sexual behaviour. In a case in 1817 that might be regarded in present-day terminology as sexual harassment, a recently widowed man was 'cautioned against making too free with females at public meetings' and was discontinued as a class leader.[39] In 1819 a member was expelled for 'improper conduct' with a married man,[40] and there were cases of bigamy in 1817 and 1822.[41] Cases relating to sexual behaviour declined after this date but there was one in 1840 which the society would not have been able to ignore. John James, a married man with a large family, was disciplined for adultery with Charlotte Cann who had lived with his family from the age of nine; Cann had a child as a result of this relationship. Cann was not regarded as an innocent victim (her age at the time of the conception of her child is unknown), and she and James were both expelled 'permanently until they have the consent of the leaders'.[42] Although the meeting condemned James and Cann for their sexual activity, the possibility of a return to membership indicated an unwillingness permanently to expel reformed members of the community, even for serious offences against the church's moral teaching. The cases relating to sexual behaviour show an attempt to impose middle-class values regarding marriage on the whole Methodist society, but they also assigned responsibility for sexual misconduct to men equally with women, and promoted the ideal of a peaceful home life.

Methodism treated seriously offences that interfered with domesticity, including domestic violence and alcohol abuse. Drunkenness was reported in cases between 1815 and 1822. In 1815 the meeting decided that two people who had 'frequently been seen in a state of intoxication' would not be allowed to meet in a class any longer.[43] Two years later, Charles Cook was found to be guilty of immorality and his wife of acting 'very inconsistently' in sitting and drinking with him in a public house. In 1822 a member who was accused of being drunk and disorderly was discontinued in his office as a pew-opener and at a later meeting he was expelled.[44] Anna Clark has commented that temperance was 'a practical response to the ravages of alcoholism on the ability of men to be good husbands and good Chartists',[45] and those ravages included family violence.

[39] M594/121, 20 May 1817.
[40] Ibid. 16 June 1819.
[41] Ibid. 23 Dec.1817; 8 Oct. 1822.
[42] Ibid. 28 Apr., 12 May 1840; Brooks, *West End Methodism*, 231.
[43] M594/121, 17 Aug. 1815.
[44] Ibid. 15 July 1815; 7, 20 Oct. 1817; 30 July 1822.
[45] Anna Clark, 'The rhetoric of Chartist domesticity', *Journal of British Studies* xxxi/1 (1992), 62–85 at p. 74.

Clark claimed that violence against wives 'was not a major concern of dissenting congregations'.[46] However, it is likely that the reason was a lack of awareness of such violence in their midst. Some in the congregations may have doubted the existence of domestic violence among sober fellow-Methodists as it was commonly associated with drunkenness in both popular melodramas and serious literature of the time.[47] These cultural manifestations would have confirmed common perceptions of the link between alcohol and violence, and the temperance campaigns can be seen (and were often represented) as an attempt to deal with the causes of 'wife-beating' as well as a means of changing plebeian values.

Notwithstanding the presumption against violence, however, there is evidence in the Hinde Street archives of an accusation of 'wife-beating' and it was treated seriously. It was brought against a Mr Jones, in December 1820, following a complaint made by his mother, Mrs Jones senior, that Mr Higton had said that her son beat his wife. This led to an investigation, with Higton accused of making false allegations. However, two female friends of Mrs Jones junior gave evidence that Jones had indeed beaten his wife; he was expelled from membership and no longer allowed to teach in the adult school.[48] Women had spoken out against domestic violence and were, at least on this occasion, treated seriously. Controls over behaviour, such as excess drinking and breaches in sabbath observance, could be construed as supporting domesticity by generating the ideal of the sober husband, and the family at home on Sundays. This domesticity could provide a suitable environment for patriarchal control, but it would not necessarily lead to such control, and women who asserted themselves against domination in the Church could receive support from male and female Methodists.

A case in 1836 provides an example of a woman taking a case to the leaders' meeting herself, in her own name, and not through her husband. The minutes of the meeting show that 'Sister Bevis' had brought charges against Mr Insley (a leading layman). Tantalising as this is, there is no information on the charges, but Insley insisted that they should be brought by Bevis's husband. The meeting passed a resolution rejecting his demand 'by a large majority', showing support for a wife's authority to bring an action in her own name. But there may have been leniency, and a man by the name of Insley continued to be a significant leader for many years afterwards.[49] Certainly, however, women were more assertive than suggested by Clark. In the case of the Coopers, referred

[46] Clark, *Struggle for the breeches*, 104.

[47] J. E. McConnell, 'The character of Methodism in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*', *Methodist History* xlv/4 (2007), 248.

[48] M594/121, 14 Dec. 1820.

[49] Described as 'the oldest leader in the Hinde Street Society' in W. R. Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism*, Oxford 1976, 307; Brooks, *West End Methodism*, 116.

to earlier, it was not Mr Cooper who told the Leaders' meeting that 'the marriage of his son with the pregnant Miss Hornby was a family concern'.[50] It was 'Sister Cooper' who furthermore informed the meeting that 'Mr Cooper and she were satisfied and nobody had any business with it.'[51] A dispute in 1851 (shortly after the period covered by Clark) provides another example of a woman asserting her rights to her own opinion and to the making of her own decisions.

The Hinde Street dispute

The Hinde Street trial of Elizabeth Grosjean shows a woman's independence of view and the support she received from the lay community. It also provides an example of resistance to the patriarchal control of the ministry. It is not known whether Elizabeth took any part in her husband Frederick's tailoring business, but other women in the family were economically active including Frederick's daughter Jessie who took over her father's business and continued it until 1883, six years after his death.[52] In 1850 and 1851 Elizabeth was recovering from the birth and death of a baby in 1850; a second son died in 1851, and the household included nine children, aged between two and eighteen, and two servants. John Tosh has suggested that 'by the 1830s moral motherhood was well into its stride … Wives were increasingly seen as the conscience of the home'.[53] Elizabeth would clearly have led religious observance in the home during the frequent absences of her husband who had advertised in 1841 for a full-time coachman to support his travels (apart from his business interests and involvement in the Wesleyan Reform movement, he was heavily involved in evangelism and the teetotalism campaigns).[54] Elizabeth herself was highly regarded in the church and for ten years from January 1841 she led a large class with, for example, thirty-two members in 1844, thirty-six in 1847, falling to twenty-three in 1851. In January 1851, a remarkable and very lengthy leaders' meeting at Hinde Street was attended by an above-average number: two ministers, five stewards and sixteen class leaders.[55] It considered charges against Frederick Grosjean for his activities in the reform movement which aimed to 'stop the supplies' of funds to the church in order to apply pressure to produce reforms.[56] After his acquittal

[50] Clark, *Struggle for the breeches*, 106.
[51] M594/121, 10 Mar. 1818.
[52] The Regent Street partnership dissolved: *London Gazette*, 1 June 1883, 25238/2887.
[53] John Tosh, 'What should historians do with masculinity? Reflections on nineteenth-century Britain', *History Workshop Journal* xxxviii/1 (1994), 179–202 at p. 195.
[54] *The Times*, 7 July 1841, 7.
[55] M594/122, 7 Jan. 1851.
[56] Brooks, *West End Methodism*, 63–8.

of wrong-doing at midnight, the superintendent minister, Joseph Beaumont, informed the meeting that he had to detain them further to consider a complaint by Mrs Grosjean against the Revd Daniel West.[57]

West had attended the class led by Elizabeth and refused to give her a membership ticket, accusing her of not making the regular payment to the chapel. This was effectively an expulsion and her class then decided, in solidarity with her, not to accept their tickets. West claimed that Elizabeth had said 'I gave nothing last quarter, and I will give nothing this.' She denied that she had said this and stated that: 'Mr West had pre-judged her case, from his knowledge of the family to which she belonged.' This statement, that her husband's view on church reform and the refusal of supplies was not to be treated as the household's view, was made in the presence of male leaders including her husband, and could be interpreted as showing an independence of mind not normally associated with married women of her social class at this time.[58] Alternatively it could be a claim to domesticity from someone who did not expect to enter the public arena of the reformers.[59] Whichever interpretation is valid, her statement shows an expectation that she should be dealt with independently under the rule of law, that she was innocent until proven guilty, and that her case should not be pre-judged. And she had the ability to mount a spirited defence.

Frederick Grosjean supported his wife by questioning West's evidence. Tosh argued that 'until women were admitted to the political process, to speak for one's family in the public arena conferred weight which was denied to the single man'. But Grosjean was supporting his wife in her independent stand.[60] His attitude may have been exceptional at the time, but he was supported by other members: 'several brethren said they would believe her before Mr West, as they had long known and respected her for piety and usefulness'.[61] The credibility of a laywoman in this example was set above that of an ordained minister. After some discussion, three female members of Elizabeth's class were called, still waiting at quarter to one in the morning, as witnesses in her favour. In the conversation that followed, various leaders intervened with questions and comments in her support but the minister persisted in his refusal to give her a ticket. There were procedural arguments in the course of the meeting about the order in which evidence and arguments should be heard, whether the superintendent minister should be asked to hand out the ticket as his junior had refused, and whether witnesses should be called.

[57] Ibid. 67–8.

[58] *Wesleyan Times*, 3 Mar. 1851. This was a reformers' publication giving a detailed (though not unbiased) report.

[59] Davidoff and Hall noted the belief among 'serious Christians' that women should be subordinate to men socially: *Family fortunes*, 114.

[60] Tosh, *A man's place*, 3.

[61] 'The Wesleyan Inquisition', *Wesleyan Times*, 31 Mar. 1851.

The discourse emphasised 'fairness', a concept invoked by both sides in the dispute. West declared it unfair to call witnesses as he had not been given advance notice. A layman stated that 'the meeting wanted nothing but what was fair to all parties'. The discussions showed an antagonism in which the laypeople undermined the authority of the minister. When West complained that he had no confidence in the witnesses who might give evidence, a layman reminded West that 'if the members of this class were such wicked people, he ought … to have brought them before the Leaders' meeting to answer for their falsehoods. Why had he not done so?' The meeting demanded respect for female members, and the minister was out-manoeuvred by Elizabeth's female supporters and the lay-brethren providing mutual support.

The arguments in the meeting illustrate strong feelings that would lead to further conflict later. When a leader, obviously getting tired at the lateness of the evening, offered to pay the shilling if the minister would give Mrs Grosjean her ticket, her husband observed, 'if [one shilling] a quarter constituted membership, we are free for more than 200 years to come, as former contributions would more than cover that space of time'. The meeting broke up eventually with leaders at the meeting stating that 'they would never pay another farthing until Mrs Grosjean's ticket was restored'. The withholding of a membership ticket was a serious affront that had the effect of casting a person out of the church, and the lay community united in her defence. This incident was part of a wider controversy as ministers claimed pastoral responsibility, including the authority to admit or expel members, an authority also claimed by the leaders' meetings.[62] Reports of disciplinary actions diminished gradually during the second quarter of the century. Classes were expected to provide mutual support in the members' spiritual lives but the class meeting was already evolving in the mid-nineteenth century, with a declining emphasis on confession and discipline.[63]

The leaders in this example supported Elizabeth in opposition to a minister and supported her right to act separately from her husband, Frederick. The incident also demonstrates resistance to the authority of an ordained minister. Daniel West's biography portrays a man who held strict Methodist views and 'was always more inclined to conserve than to loosen and liberalise – as that term is understood by some – the

[62] David Bebbington, 'Secession and revival: Louth Free Methodist Church in the 1850s', *Wesley and Methodist Studies* vii/1 (2015), 54–77.

[63] Kevin M. Watson, *Pursuing social holiness*, Oxford 2014; Charles Edward White, 'The decline of the class meeting', *Methodist History* xxxviii/4 (July 2000), 258–67; Henry D. Rack, 'The decline of the class-meeting and the problem of church membership in nineteenth century Wesleyanism', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* xxxix/1 (1973), 12–21.

peculiarities of Methodism'.[64] He was in his mid-thirties and had experienced difficulties with a leaders' meeting in Hull by the time he came into confrontation with the leaders at Hinde Street. His age may have affected his status with the Hinde Street leaders, many of whom were older, and he found himself in conflict with his superintendent minister who was more conciliatory and adopted greater laxity in the distribution of class tickets.[65] After his unhappy period in Hinde Street, West moved to a peaceful circuit in Hackney, east London, where he was able to report that he was engaged in 'a scheme of usefulness', and later to Birmingham where he was in a 'sphere of usefulness'.[66] Throughout his itinerancy as a minister, he stressed the value of 'usefulness'. In one of the letters quoted in his biography he recorded his admiration for the 'life and usefulness' of a woman who visited prisoners.[67] Elizabeth Grosjean had also been valued for 'piety and usefulness', attributes that could be applied to women as well as men, and laymen as well as ministers.

Usefulness conferred status that was not subject to patriarchal controls. David Bebbington identified the Methodist attribute, shared with other Evangelicals, of 'activism'. This involved a 'busyness that extended to social action', with women involved in a wide range of activities within the church.[68]

Usefulness

Methodism placed emphasis on 'usefulness', which, for women, was not limited to the supportive role within marriage. John Wesley, in a note about his former housekeeper Sara Perrin, stated 'I do not know, that her marriage increased either her usefulness, or her knowledge and love of God.'[69] Women (and men) in the emerging middle class found in Methodism an alternative to both the private sphere of the home and the public sphere of politics and business. They were active in class leadership roles, Sunday school teaching and philanthropic work, along with fundraising for the church and for missions and involved in supporting the cohesion of the society through community activities.

For many people in a church of one thousand members, the weekly class meeting would have been the main locus of affiliation and class leaders

[64] Thomas West, *The life and journals of the Rev. Daniel West, Wesleyan minister and deputation to the Wesleyan mission stations of the Gold Coast*, London 1857, 27.
[65] Ibid. 98–112. [66] Ibid. 114, 119. [67] Ibid. 34–6, 112–14, 119.
[68] David Bebbington, 'Methodist spirituality, 1800–1950', <http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk/missionary-history-bebbington-spirituality-2004.pdf>, accessed 17 Mar. 2019, p. 4.
[69] Phyllis Mack, *Heart religion in the British Enlightenment*, Cambridge 2008, 247.

were the most significant contact. In 1850, for example, Hinde Street was part of the Sixth London Circuit in which 2,000 members were served by only four ministers and, although this was higher than average, David A. Gowland, in his study of Methodism in three Lancashire towns, also noted high ratios of members to ministers in 1830 and observed that some members regarded their class leaders, rather than their ministers, as their 'faithful pastors'.[70] The ties between members in the class were significant, and John Tosh quotes the example of Joshua Pritchard who signed his letters home to his wife Mary 'by sending his love "to all the class", knowing the message would be passed on'.[71] John Wesley had encouraged Methodists to meet weekly in order to develop their faith. The original groups, 'the bands', had been confessional in nature but in the nineteenth century classes were concerned with matters other than discipline.

Originally classes were intended to be for seven to twelve people but some Hinde Street classes comprised thirty or more members.[72] Apart from attending weekly leaders' meetings and regular class meetings, being a class leader involved convening meetings, visiting, 'inquiring into the spiritual lives of each member and offering spiritual guidance and direction as needed', providing care and support, collecting dues and reporting the need for financial assistance to the leaders' meetings.[73] Literacy and belief in Methodist doctrine were essential for class leadership, as illustrated at Hinde Street by a man who was considered for class leadership in June 1816 but was rejected when it was found that he could not write,[74] and a man who was removed as a class leader (but not as a member) because he 'held doctrines contrary to Methodism' and 'refused to promise to lend no books that defend the Doctrines in Question'.[75]

Clark suggested that class leadership may have provided some men with a 'wider patriarchal role'.[76] But there were numerous women who led classes at Hinde Street. For example, there was one female class leader in 1806; one in 1827; five out of thirty-three classes were led by women in 1838; and, in 1848, twelve classes out of forty were led by women.[77] There were women who were invited to be class leaders but refused, although sadly their reasons are not given.[78] Hinde Street was probably

[70] D. A. Gowland, *Methodist secessions: the origins of free Methodism in three Lancashire towns*, Manchester 1979, 166.
[71] Tosh, *Manliness and masculinities*, 151.
[72] Brooks, *West End Methodism*, 226.
[73] Watson, *Pursuing social holiness*, 3.
[74] Telford, *Two West-End chapels*, 229. In 1850 the proportion of men in England and Wales able to sign their name on registration of their marriage was approximately 70%; the proportion of women able to do so was 55%: Roger Schofield, 'Dimensions of illiteracy, 1750–1850', *Explorations of Economic History* x/4 (1973), 437–54 at p. 443.
[75] M594/121, 15 May 1827.
[76] Clark, *Struggle for the breeches*, 94.
[77] Alan Brooks provides similar figures for different years: *West End Methodism*, 226.
[78] M594/121, 20 Jan. 1821.

not atypical. David Bebbington identified five women among the twelve 'loyal Wesleyan class leaders' involved in the secession in Louth in 1852, and two others who left the Wesleyans to join the Free Methodist Church.[79] Women led classes that included men,[80] and Tosh gave the example from Yorkshire of Sarah Sugden who held a position of 'leadership for at least two years, over a sizeable class which included several men, most notably her elder brother'.[81]

John Telford, writing in 1886, stated that 'the ladies of West End Methodism have been and are some of its noblest workers', referring to the example of Mrs Butterworth, a class leader who died in 1820.[82] The opportunity to spend time on church affairs may have been related to income and social class. Mrs Butterworth (sister of Adam Clarke) was the wife of Joseph Butterworth, a publisher and Member of Parliament who was active in Hinde Street and on Methodist Connexional committees.[83] But even affluent women could find that domestic life precluded other activities. Mary Corderoy, the wife of a manager of a large London building business, resigned after a short period as a class leader in a Methodist chapel because, 'viewing the office as one of awful responsibility, she was but too quickly overwhelmed'. She educated her sons to serve in the church and taught her daughters 'Never to hinder your husbands' in such work. The account of Mary Corderoy's support for the church was provided by a minister and may reflect his view rather than hers,[84] but wives of ministers and church leaders were in an intermediate position as they commonly played a supportive role, including providing hospitality,[85] as well as leading classes and taking an active part in the church.[86]

Giving and bequeathing money to religious causes was a significant part of church membership and there is evidence of recognition of the independence of married women, against the mainstream thinking at that time: for example, in 1849 and 1850 the names of wives, including two Corderoys,[87] appear among the donors to Methodist causes with donations equal to those of their husbands,[88] long before the financial independence

[79] Bebbington, 'Secession and revival', 70.

[80] Lloyd, *Women and British Methodism*, 29–31.

[81] John Tosh, 'Keighley to St-Denis: separation and intimacy in Victorian bourgeois marriage', *History Workshop Journal* xl (1995), 193–206 at p. 201.

[82] Telford, *Two West End Chapels*, 211.

[83] Brooks, *West End Methodism*, 57–62.

[84] Mary Corderoy's life (1791–1847), *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* lxxiii (1850), 1017–23.

[85] Wilson, *Constrained by zeal*, 144–6, 152–4.

[86] Davidoff and Hall, *Family fortunes*, 123–6. Examples of ministers' wives in Hinde Street include M594/121, leaders' meeting minutes, 21 Oct. 1851, Mrs Barton as class leader; M594/27, circuit schedule book, Mrs Young as class leader.

[87] The men of the Corderoy family were successful surveyors and active as senior laypeople in more than one Wesleyan London circuit during this period, as well as serving on connexional committees.

[88] M594/27, circuit schedule book, 1844–50.

of married women was recognised in law.[89] Three women and three men loaned large sums to pay for the building of the Hinde Street chapel in 1810 (including one woman who loaned £1,000 and gave £50).[90] Nehemiah Curnock, writing in 1910, described the financial difficulties of the nineteenth century and the organisation by women of 'tea-meetings' to enable ministers and stewards to talk to the community about the chapel's finance and to encourage people to contribute in order to reduce the debt.[91]

Hinde Street Church was active in supporting the community through providing care for members and support for the local population in the surrounding area. Women were collectively involved in fundraising; for example a deputation from the 'Female Charity' requested 'the usual sermons in aid of that charity' in 1830,[92] but further archival information on this charity is not available. Demand for poor relief increased in the 1840s and the leaders' meeting agreed on numerous donations to 'the poor', especially in the 1840s. A large number of gifts were distributed at Christmas, for example an award of 5*s.* to each of ninety-nine people in December 1843, and the same amount to each of 106 people in December 1844.[93] In the 1880s there is a reference to 'the mothers' meeting', and this may have existed earlier in the century.[94] The annual meetings of the Methodist Missionary Society included services at Hinde Street with sermons preached for the 'usual annual collections'. It is very likely that women were involved in this fundraising which recurred during the 1820s and 1830s.[95] They are also likely to have been involved in bazaars to raise money for missions and other causes which were commonly held in the nineteenth century, as well as making goods for sale and fundraising activities which 'gave them practical experience and self-confidence'.[96]

Fundraising, mutual aid and philanthropy became ways of holding the community together and assisting people in the wider community, as well as giving a sense of purpose to women, providing them with responsibilities outside the home.[97] Some positions of responsibility were held by women of very limited means: Mrs Ade and Mrs Bayley, for example, were employed as door-keepers, responsible for cleaning the chapel and

[89] The Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882.
[90] Nehemiah Curnock, *Hinde Street Chapel, 1810–1910*, London 1910, 26.
[91] Ibid. 40–1.
[92] M594/121, 12 Aug. 1830.
[93] M594/122, 19 Dec. 1843; 17 Dec. 1844.
[94] Curnock, *Hinde Street*, 105.
[95] *Morning Chronicle*, 22 Apr. 1822; *Morning Post*, 28 Apr; 1823; *Methodist Magazine* xliii (June 1820), 465.
[96] F. K. Prochaska, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century England*, Oxford 1980, 71.
[97] Susan Mumm, 'Women and philanthropic cultures', in S. Morgan and J. DeVries (eds), *Women, gender and religious cultures in Britain, 1800–1940*, London 2010, 54–71.

opening the pews, and from 1822 Mrs Bayley was in sole charge. When she retired after twenty-six years as 'chapel keeper' she was awarded 4*s.* a week from the Poor Fund because she was old and infirm with no means of support.[98] Most roles however were unpaid and, while the roles in the church may also have given women confidence to resist domination on grounds of gender in their homes, these unpaid activities may have contributed to patriarchy by occupying women when they could have been seeking financial independence.

Some activities that were intended to be philanthropic provide evidence of concerns about respectability in the wider society. The plight of a woman unable to support a family and the hurt pride of a man who could not do so are illustrated by two cases supported by the leaders' meeting. A woman in the church was attempting to support her father and mother through her needlework but this was inadequate, and so the chapel granted them '5 shillings per week'.[99] In the following October, a member who had been given '20 shillings' from the Poor Fund, 'which had been advanced him as a free gift, but which he always had considered only as a loan', found his circumstances improved and returned the money.[100] Mr Clemence, granted regular assistance in 1837 at the age of seventy-three, voluntarily relinquished it when he was fit enough to work.[101] Respectability brought with it a pressure to be independent, and a feeling of humiliation among those who could not remain independent.[102] But the church also enabled members to prove their independence by repaying financial assistance when their circumstances improved. The model of the male breadwinner and the implications of this for masculine pride and status were significant elements in the patriarchal views of this period.[103]

As in the case of philanthropy, the Sunday schools provided opportunities for men and women to engage voluntarily in useful work, but they may also have served to promote middle-class values of respectability and domesticity. Women volunteered as teachers and attended the Sunday school teachers' meeting. A minute in 1852 listed men from leading families as chairperson and secretary along with twelve male and ten female unnamed teachers.[104] There were no Sunday school superintendents in Hinde Street until 1845. Instead, there were visitors, secretaries, male lecturers and female lecturers (described as 'lecturesses').[105] In the early nineteenth century, the Sunday schools taught reading and writing; boys

[98] M594/116, Hinde Street trustees' meeting, 6 July 1810; M594/121, leaders' meeting, 5 Aug. 1835; Telford, *Two West End chapels*, 128.

[99] M594/122, 23 Jan. 1844.

[100] Ibid. 28 Oct. 1845.

[101] M594/121, May–Dec. 1837.

[102] Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851–75*, St Albans 1973, 281–2.

[103] Sonya O. Rose, *Limited livelihoods: gender and class in nineteenth-century England*, London 1992.

[104] M594/141, Sunday school minutes, 19 Jan. 1852.

[105] Curnock, *Hinde Street*, 51–2.

and girls were taught separately, with women teachers involved from the earliest days of the school, and children could progress to become teachers. In March 1817, for example, 356 boys and 402 girls were members of the school.[106]

The work of the Sunday schools was philanthropic as well as evangelistic. Children were provided with various treats and children from very poor backgrounds were included. The *Methodist Magazine* described twenty chimney-sweep boys in the school in 1818.[107] The same article reported on a woman who was delighted that her daughter had used her Hinde Street Sunday school education to reprove her father for bad language and drinking, and 'from that time he became a sober, industrious man'.[108] Clearly Methodist teaching in this example led to a more domesticated existence, with the children arriving at Sunday schools in clean clothes and the husband spending time at home instead of in the public house.

Although women were involved in a wide range of activities, including teaching, there was a gendered hierarchy. The trustees at Hinde Street were all male,[109] and the status of men was reinforced by the symbolic significance of male leadership of worship and committees. Although women were regarded as equal to men in spirituality, their opportunities to preach had been limited in 1803 by the Wesleyan Conference. They were allowed to preach only to women and, even then, there were restrictions.[110] Although women could not serve as ordained ministers in the Wesleyan Church, the attitude to women in such roles is unclear. When Caroline E. Raskin of the Society of Friends wanted to visit their members, the leaders' meeting declined her offer of services which they deemed to be 'inexpedient'.[111] In other Methodist churches, however, there were women who spoke at special events, such as Sunday school anniversaries, and some who preached in defiance of the Conference proscription.[112]

[106] Brooks, *West End Methodism*, 229–59; Curnock, *Hinde Street*, 49–55.

[107] Henry Basden, 'The great utility and importance of Sunday schools', *Methodist Magazine* xli (Aug. 1818), 616–19 at p. 617; Telford, *Two West-End chapels*, 262.

[108] Basden, 'The great utility', 617.

[109] Curnock, *Hinde Street*, 31.

[110] Wesleyan Methodist Church, *Minutes of the Methodist Conference*, 1803, answer to question 20A; George Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism*, second edn, London 1857–61, ii. 388–9; Deborah M. Valenze, *Prophetic sons and daughters: female preaching and popular religion in industrial England*, Princeton 2017, 92; Gareth Lloyd, 'Repression and resistance: Wesleyan female public ministry in the generation after 1791', in N. Virgoe (ed.), *Angels and impudent women*, Loughborough 2007, 114–31.

[111] M594/121, 28 Jan. 1840.

[112] Jennifer M. Lloyd, *Women and the shaping of British Methodism: persistent preachers, 1807–1907*, Manchester 2009, 49–51, 134; Gail Malmgreen, 'Domestic discords: women and the family in east Cheshire Methodism', in J. Obelkevich, L. Roper and S. Raphael (eds), *Disciplines of faith: Studies in religion, politics, and patriarchy*, New York 1987.

They acted with support from ministers, family members and their own networks.[113]

The relationship between Methodist discipline and the development of patriarchy in the nineteenth century was not straightforward. Women's activities in Methodism may have drawn women's efforts away from Chartism, and unpaid female work allowed men to claim justification for the family wage, but women's activities were not confined to the home.[114]

Women taught in Sunday schools, led classes, made financial contributions to the church and looked after the church buildings. They visited the sick, raised funds for the poor and were responsible for the religious education of their children and servants. Some of these areas of philanthropic and educational work may have contributed to the pressures on the plebeian class to conform to a more domesticated lifestyle, but the discipline of the class meeting was much less connected with the enforcement of patriarchal ideology, and less effective in controlling female behaviour, than has previously been claimed. There were numerous examples at Hinde Street of women who resisted patriarchal authority at local level: they demonstrated financial independence, claimed the right to speak on their own behalf and not through their husbands, and women displayed confidence in resisting the authority of male clergy.

The ability of the church to impose discipline on members was limited and contested: the chapels were concerned with retaining members and fostering community, and the patriarchal authority of the leadership was constrained by the need for the genders to work together. By mid-century, although the authority and symbolic significance of the male ministry, local preachers, stewards and chairmen of committees should not be under-estimated, there were important signifiers of status other than gender or conformity at the local level, such as perceived 'usefulness' in the chapel society.

[113] John H. Lenton, 'Support groups for Methodist women preachers, 1803–1851', in G. Hammond and P. S. Forsaith (eds), *Religion, gender, and industry*, Cambridge 2011, 137–55.

[114] John Pritchard, *Methodists and their missionary societies, 1760–1900*, London 2013, 243–54; Emily J. Manktelow, *Missionary families: race, gender and generation on the spiritual frontier*, Manchester 2013; Janet Kelly, 'Presenting a ministry of wives', in Virgoe, *Angels and impudent women*, 7–30.