

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Epworth Review* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_epworth-review-01.php

The People Called Methodists Today: Statistical Insights from the Social Sciences

Clive Field¹

British Methodism has a long tradition of counting its people. Membership figures have been compiled on a continuous basis since 1766, and many other statistics have been added in more recent times, including the community roll from 1969 and church attendance from 1972. However, in general, this quantification has been at the aggregate level. It tells us very little about who the People called Methodists really are, in contrast to the earliest membership registers, which often recorded information about the gender, marital status, occupation and perceived spiritual state of John Wesley's followers.² Thereafter, Methodism's formal engagement with what came to be known as religious sociology was, for a long time and to a large extent, marginal, intermittent and rather superficial. There was no nineteenth-century Methodist equivalent to Abraham Hume, the pioneering and prolific Anglican sociologist and statistician.³ Not until 1961 was a Sociological Sub-Committee of the Church Membership Committee set up to develop Methodism's empirical social sciences base. It was renamed the Methodist Sociological Group in 1968. Under its successive chairs, Bernard Jones and Jeffrey Harris, it developed into a network of ministers, laity and academics with, at its peak, some 65 names on its books. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the Group was associated with a series of small-scale Methodist enquiries, several connected with the dynamics of membership growth and decline.⁴ It also took the lead in convening an Interchurch Research Group which endeavoured, unsuccessfully, to establish an ecumenical programme of research to run in parallel with the 1981 Government census of population.

Subsequently, following the Group's demise, it again proved difficult to persuade Methodists to devote resources to realize the potential of sociology and statistics for understanding and underpinning the Church's outreach and evangelism, beyond the routine (and clearly substantial) effort in compiling the triennial returns, although partnerships with academics did deliver some key surveys, such as of ethnic minorities in 1983⁵ and local preachers in 2000.⁶ Methodism also participated, as a sponsor of Churches Information for Mission, in the Church Life Profile 2001, but,

despite an initial polite consideration of its denominational report by the Methodist Council on 16–17 February 2002, it appears to have made limited pastoral or evangelistic use of its findings.⁷ Even the analysis and interpretation of the triennial returns is now outsourced to the Research and Statistics Department of the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England!

Researchers interested in the demographic attributes of Methodism therefore need to look as much to sources outside the Methodist Church as within it. Unfortunately, the Government is of limited help in this respect since the 2001 census, which asked about religious profession for the first time on mainland Britain,⁸ did not differentiate within self-identifying Christians in England and Wales. The four English censuses of church attendance, undertaken by the organization which is now Christian Research, are of some value in establishing the gender (1979, 1989 and 2005), age (1979, 1989, 1998 and 2005) and ethnic (1998 and 2005) profile of Methodist congregations, but there were many non-responding places of worship and many guesstimated answers.⁹ Academic studies have mostly tended to be too localized or too specialized (as with John Haley's excellent 1997 survey of the Methodist ministry)¹⁰ to tell us much about ordinary Methodists in a national context. With only rare exceptions, public opinion polls, which have investigated religious affiliation since 1943, do not yield explicitly Methodist data, Methodism not usually being one of the coded responses (a more generic Free Church category has typically been used), while the overall sample sizes would in any case be too small to permit reliable disaggregation for any specific denominations apart from Anglicans and Roman Catholics (and the Church of Scotland in the case of Scottish enquiries).

One of the few polling exceptions is the British Social Attitudes Survey, which has been conducted by the independent National Centre for Social Research annually since 1983 (except in 1988 and 1992), on behalf of a changing consortium of Government, academic and third-sector clients and funders.¹¹ A representative sample of adult Britons aged 18 and over has been interviewed each year on a wide variety of topics, with some questions being posed regularly, among them current religious affiliation and, if of any religion, frequency of attendance at a place of worship. In this way, a cumulative dataset of over 75,000 individuals has been built up, and just become available, for the period 1983–2008, including 1,995 self-declaring Methodists.¹² This is a sufficiently large number to enable us to study some of the demographic characteristics of Methodists, while being able to control for survey decade and churchgoing. This article

The People Called Methodists Today

briefly reports, for the first time, on this new source for identifying who the People called Methodists actually are, and highlights two implications of the results for the Methodist Church in Great Britain. An appendix reproduces some of the key statistics.

Affiliation

Across the entire quarter-century (1983–2008) 2.7 per cent of Britons described themselves as Methodists (comprising 2.2 per cent of men and 3.1 per cent of women). However, the proportion has steadily fallen by survey date, from 3.8 per cent in the 1980s to 2.8 per cent in the 1990s to 2.1 per cent in the 2000s. The decrease is even more pronounced when expressed in terms of birth cohorts. Among those born between 1890 and 1909, the late Victorian heyday of the Free Churches, 9.0 per cent claimed to be Methodists. The figures then dropped to 5.7 per cent for 1910–29, 3.4 per cent for 1930–49, 1.5 per cent for 1950–69 and 0.9 per cent for those born between 1970 and 1989. Projected forwards, on the assumption of a similar rate of decline, Methodism would command the allegiance of 0.5 per cent of people born in 1990–2009 and 0.3 per cent in 2010–29. On this trend, barring some human or divine intervention, the movement would become extinct by the end of the twenty-first century.

More optimistically, the mean of 2.1 per cent claiming to be Methodists in the 2000s equates to 960,000 adults in the mid-2007 population estimate, 312,000 more than the Church's community roll of 648,000 in that year (which also included children).¹³ Adjusting for children on the roll, the difference is possibly nearer 370,000. In other words, there is an ostensible adult Methodist constituency which is at least half as much again as that recorded in Methodism's own official statistics. Although, from the perspective of Methodist Standing Orders, these hidden adherents may have 'completely severed connection with the local community of the Church' and thereby lie outside its immediate pastoral care, they evidently still regard themselves as Methodists (perhaps to the extent of ultimately having a Methodist funeral).¹⁴ This loyalty may arise from their own former association with Methodism, perhaps through undergoing a rite of passage (baptism or marriage), involvement in Sunday school or a youth club, attendance at public worship or social gatherings, or even being a church member at one stage. But it could equally stem from a more distant ancestral tie, involving no direct contact themselves but an upholding of family tradition. It is significant that, when asked about the presence of Nonconformists in their family tree, 52 per cent of the readers of one

of the popular genealogical magazines reported that they had Methodist ancestors.¹⁵

Of this body of professing Methodists it is certainly true that a majority were not regular churchgoers, even before allowing for the well-known tendency for people questioned in opinion polls to exaggerate their frequency of attendance, effectively usually doubling it.¹⁶ For the period as a whole 41.7 per cent of Methodists claimed to worship once a month or more (compared with 19.3 per cent of all adults), 27.2 per cent went less often (20.7 per cent) and 31.1 per cent never or practically never (60.0 per cent, many of whom had no religion). Despite their somewhat lax religious observance, therefore, professing Methodists were still better attenders than the population in general. They thus accounted for 5.7 per cent of the regular worshippers in the sample, more than double their proportion overall, albeit a smaller denominational 'market share' than in the 2005 English church census.¹⁷ Similarly, at the other end of the spectrum, only 1.4 per cent of people who never or practically never went to church regarded themselves as Methodists. For this reason, it will clearly be important to control for churchgoing when looking at the demographic attributes of Methodists.

Gender

A feature of Methodist history has been that the membership, in particular, has been disproportionately female, seemingly around two-thirds since the 1960s, both as regards all members and new members.¹⁸ This remains the case among professing Methodists today, 62.5 per cent of whom are women, 8.6 per cent more than for adult Britons. The proportion peaked at 63.8 per cent in the 1990s and then fell to 62.8 per cent in the 2000s, possibly implying the start of differential leakage among women. The ratio was even higher (68.6 per cent) among those who went to church at least monthly, which is in line with the Church Life Profile 2001.¹⁹ It reduced to 63.4 per cent for less frequent worshippers and to 53.6 per cent for non-attenders, suggesting that men are more attracted to a religious affiliation which minimizes their time commitment. Indeed, whereas 45.9 per cent of female Methodists worshipped regularly, this was true of only 35.0 per cent of men; and while 38.5 per cent of men were non-attenders, for women it was 26.6 per cent. The gender balance is significantly affected by social class, as defined by the Registrar General's fivefold scheme, the number of female Methodists ranging from 24.3 per cent among professionals in class I to 83.8 per cent for skilled non-manual workers in class III.

Age

It is an equally well-known fact that support for the longer-established Christian Churches has aged progressively since the Second World War. These British Social Attitudes Survey data corroborate this. In particular, exactly two-fifths of professing Methodists were aged 65 and above, as against 19.0 per cent of all adults. This is partly a reflection of Methodism's disproportionate appeal to women, with their greater life expectancy. The figure climbed steeply from 34.9 per cent in the 1980s to 38.3 per cent in the 1990s to 45.5 per cent in the 2000s and is obviously set to become a majority in the coming decade. It is also marginally higher (42.1 per cent) among regular Methodist churchgoers, which – being the average for a quarter-century – naturally falls short of the 49 per cent recorded in the Church Life Profile 2001²⁰ and the 55.1 per cent in the 2005 English church census²¹ (both of which also indicated near-parity between Methodist worshippers aged 65–74 and 75 or over). At the other end of the spectrum, only 14.0 per cent of all Methodists (and 12.0 per cent of their regular churchgoers) were aged 18–34, less than half the national average, and dropping from 17.1 per cent in the 1980s to 10.5 per cent in the 2000s. Frequent attendance was especially low for the 25–34s (33.3 per cent) and peaked for the 65s and over (43.8 per cent).

Expressed alternatively, the proportion of professing Methodists bore an inverse relationship to age cohorts. Thus, from a high-point of 5.6 per cent of all adult Britons aged 65 and over (and 7.5 per cent in the 1980s), it fell to 3.4 per cent for the 55–64s, 2.3 per cent for the 45–54s, 1.7 per cent for the 35–44s, 1.4 per cent for the 25–34s and 1.0 per cent for the 18–24s (0.7 per cent in the 2000s). In other words, Methodism's ageing is not simply a function of society getting older but simultaneously reflects its relative success at holding on to lifelong affiliates and its comparative failure to attract or retain the younger generations. Some might also say that it is a consequence of the 'clean living' which Methodism has fostered and facilitated, which promotes longevity. Temperance is often cited in this context, although the Methodist practice of total abstinence has probably been exaggerated.²² But, certainly, Methodists do generally appear to enjoy long lives, as can be seen in the family announcements in the *Methodist Recorder*. In 1973 the mean age of death for laity was 77.9 years for men and 83.0 for women;²³ by 2008 it was, respectively, 83.9 and 91.1.²⁴ As, in the natural order of things, these elderly Methodists die off, their shoes will be filled by cohorts over which Methodism has exercised less numerical sway.

Marital status

Throughout this quarter-century 65.0 per cent of professing Methodists were married, amazingly precisely the same proportion as with church members in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²⁵ Then, as now, more Methodists got married than in the wider adult society, where (in 1983–2008) the mean was 58.7 per cent. Today this is probably the result of a combination of the relative effectiveness of the Church's teaching on marriage and the family and the concentration of Methodists in the older age cohorts who have been brought up to regard marriage as the norm for human relationships. Obviously, social attitudes are now changing, and the Methodist constituency has not been entirely unaffected by this process of liberalization. The incidence of marriage among Methodists has fallen, from 67.9 per cent in the 1980s to 65.6 per cent in the 1990s to 62.4 per cent in the 2000s.²⁶ It is also slightly lower (63.9 per cent) among regular churchgoing Methodists than for irregular attenders or non-attenders; this figure accords exactly with the Church Life Profile 2001.²⁷ Moreover, some Methodists now choose to cohabit (2.5 per cent, albeit only a third of the figure for all adults and a lower 1.7 per cent for regular Methodist worshippers). Equally, marital break-up has risen, reflected in our survey in an increase in the number of separated Methodists across the three decades, from 2.3 to 5.2 to 7.2 per cent, with an average of 5.2 per cent or 4.2 per cent for frequent churchgoers.

For the rest, Methodism is still characterized, as at the outset of the movement, by an abnormally small contingent of single people, 11.2 per cent compared with 18.5 per cent for all adult Britons, and a significant reduction from the 24.6 per cent which obtained for Methodist members in 1759–1823. This is mostly a manifestation of Methodism's weakness among the younger age cohorts where single persons tend to be concentrated. The obverse is also true, with a growing dependency upon the elderly exhibiting itself in more than twice the expected number (16.1 per cent) of widowers and, especially, widows. The figure stood at an even higher 18.7 per cent for those attending church at least monthly, much the same as in the Church Life Profile 2001. The Methodist widowed were the most regular attenders, 48.3 per cent of them going to church monthly or more often, compared with 43.0 per cent of the single, 41.0 per cent of the married, 34.3 per cent of the separated and 28.6 per cent of those who were living together. Similarly, widowed people were twice as likely to espouse Methodism as adults in general, 5.4 per cent against 2.7 per cent, with cohabittees being the least inclined (0.9 per cent).

Ethnicity

In terms of ethnicity, Methodism is less diverse than society overall, with 4.4 per cent non-whites compared with 6.1 per cent in the whole sample, and just 1.9 per cent of all non-whites professing allegiance to Methodism. However, 6.0 per cent of frequent Methodist churchgoers were non-white, a much better ratio than the 3.4 per cent found in the almost 700 congregations covered by the Church Life Profile 2001,²⁸ although much the same as the 6.7 per cent in the 2005 English church census.²⁹ This is a reflection of a more regular attendance by non-white Methodists (57.6 per cent of whom worshipped monthly or more often) than whites (41.1 per cent). The proportion of non-whites among non-attending Methodists was just 2.3 per cent, with only 16.5 per cent of non-white Methodists never, or practically never, coming to church. Regrettably, the number of Methodist non-whites in the British Social Attitudes Survey is too small to permit any meaningful further breakdown of the results.

Education

Perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively, Methodists appear at first sight to be less well educated than the adult population. In respect of terminal education age, an average 50.5 per cent of Methodists had left school at the age of 15 or under, compared with 36.4 per cent of the entire sample. The explanation is probably the skewed age profile of Methodism, its people being concentrated in the older cohorts for whom the school-leaving age was lower and the opportunities for tertiary education extremely limited. The proportion has reduced over time, from 55.3 per cent in the 1980s to 55.0 per cent in the 1990s to 42.1 per cent in the 2000s. A further 20.3 per cent completed their continuous education at 16, 14.2 per cent at 17 or 18, while for 13.4 per cent overall (but 18.7 per cent in the 2000s) it was at 19 or over.

Controlling for church attendance, a somewhat different picture emerges, with regular Methodist churchgoers enjoying the best education of the three worshipping groups. In particular, only 42.7 per cent of them left school at 15 or under (against 62.9 per cent of Methodist non-attenders), and 18.3 per cent enjoyed continuous education to age 19 or beyond (better than the national average), with 7.8 per cent for non-attenders. In fact, 57.1 per cent of those educated to 19 and over worshipped monthly or more often, compared with 35.4 per cent of Methodists who left school at 15 or under. The lesser the education, the greater seems the chance of professing Methodists drifting away from religious observance.

Social class

The social class basis of Methodism has long been debated,³⁰ with the movement gaining an increasing middle-class reputation. The British Social Attitudes Survey³¹ looks to suggest that this perception is not entirely justified, since the social profile of Methodism does not initially appear seriously out of alignment with the national one. At the two extremes, there was even a modest underrepresentation of professionals in Methodism and an overrepresentation of the unskilled. However, the bedrock of Methodism was to be found in Registrar General classes II and III, intermediate and skilled non-manual employees and skilled manual workers. Collectively, these accounted for 72.5 per cent of Methodists, 73.9 per cent of the men and 71.6 per cent of the women, much the same proportion as in early twentieth-century marriage registers.³²

At this combined II-III level, there was no appreciable fluctuation across the three decades, but there were signs of growing affluence, notably a reduction in skilled manual workers from 21.5 per cent in the 1980s to 14.9 per cent in the 2000s, with a corresponding rise in the intermediate non-manual category from 23.9 to 30.6 per cent. This effect was accentuated for regular Methodist churchgoers, among whom class II reached its high of 33.3 per cent and class III (manual) a low of 13.8 per cent. For non-attenders the picture was reversed, with the fewest non-manual workers (47.7 per cent against the Methodist average of 58.1 per cent) and the most manual employees (52.2 per cent versus 41.9 per cent). Overall, non-manual Methodists were far more prone to go to church monthly or more often than the manuals, peaking at 48.7 per cent for class II but sinking to 26.7 per cent for class V. The lower the social status, the greater is the likelihood that Methodism will lose the adherent to the worshipping community. Once again, therefore, the introduction of churchgoing as a variable begins to question the representative nature of Methodism.

Housing tenure

Occupation is naturally closely linked with income and wealth, one proxy for which in the British Social Attitudes Survey is housing tenure. New research has identified significant links between Methodism and the building society movement and posited that, because of their disproportionate concentration in classes II and III, Methodists would have been particularly attracted to home ownership.³³ These new data confirm this hypothesis, with the proportion of Methodists owning or buying their home on a mortgage rising from 74.9 per cent in the 1980s to 77.8 per cent in the

The People Called Methodists Today

2000s, the Methodist mean of 76.0 per cent being almost five points above the national average. Renting a property from the council by Methodists virtually halved over the same period. Churchgoing again made a difference, Methodist home ownership falling from 79.3 per cent among regular churchgoers to 71.0 per cent for non-attenders, with a parallel doubling in local authority renting from 10.7 to 21.0 per cent. Whereas 43.4 per cent of the Methodist home owners worshipped monthly or more often, this was the case for just 29.9 per cent who lived in council accommodation. It is thus, relatively, the more economically deprived whom Methodism is least successful in retaining.

Conclusion

What do these data from the British Social Attitudes Survey for 1983–2008 tell us about the People called Methodists today? Two principal conclusions emerge. First, the demography of Methodism is skewed. Methodists are not representative of the adult population. In particular, they are disproportionately female, old, married or widowed, white and home owners. These imbalances are even more accentuated among regular Methodist churchgoers, with whom further biases become apparent, towards the better educated and higher social classes. On the whole, the position is worsening over time. In particular, as the birth and age cohort analyses reveal, Methodism's increasing dependence upon the elderly and its relative inability to attract and retain the young constitute a very great risk to the persistence of the Church. Indeed, the current demography of Methodism contains within it the seeds of the movement's eventual destruction by the end of this century. It will, literally, just die out.

Secondly, the Survey has uncovered a large constituency of people who continue to regard themselves as Methodists, through their own lapsed or a family connection, but who are invisible to the Church, in the sense of being outwith its official statistics, non-attenders at its worship and otherwise beyond its pastoral ministrations (except at the point of death, when some of them may have a Methodist funeral). Our calculation is that they number 370,000. Disproportionately, with the possible exception of the young, they include several of the groups Methodism needs to reach out to if it is to restore its demographic gravity, and especially men, the lower social classes, the lesser educated and council tenants.

This finding underlines the relevance to ecclesiastical leaders of sociological and theological studies of church-leaving,³⁴ and of numerical research into the potential for church-returning.³⁵ It also demonstrates the timeliness of Methodism's connexion-wide involvement from 2009 in the

The People Called Methodists Today

Back to Church Sunday initiative, inaugurated in the Anglican Diocese of Manchester in 2004. The challenge (and opportunity) for Methodist evangelism and social witness is certainly how to translate some of this latent and inert sympathy for Methodism into a more active association with the Church, notwithstanding the fact that all tangible ties with this 'lost' community of Methodist souls appear to have been broken. The social scientific market research we have reported on here will not of itself provide the practical and tactical solutions to this challenge, but it will permit the Church to have a more empirically-grounded and quantified understanding of what mission and branding problems it needs to solve.

Appendix

**Table 1: Profile of Professed British Methodists by Survey Decade
(percentages down)**

	1983– 1989	1990– 1999	2000– 2008	All Methodists	<i>All Britons</i>
GENDER					
Male	39.6	36.2	37.2	37.5	<i>46.1</i>
Female	60.4	63.8	62.8	62.5	<i>53.9</i>
AGE					
18–24	5.5	4.6	3.5	4.4	<i>11.4</i>
25–34	11.6	10.6	7.0	9.6	<i>18.4</i>
35–44	13.9	12.6	11.7	12.6	<i>19.4</i>
45–54	16.5	16.6	11.5	14.7	<i>17.3</i>
55–64	17.6	17.3	20.8	18.7	<i>14.6</i>
65+	34.9	38.3	45.5	40.0	<i>19.0</i>
MARITAL STATUS					
Married	67.9	65.6	62.4	65.0	<i>58.7</i>
Cohabiting	1.1	3.6	2.2	2.5	<i>7.4</i>
Separated	2.3	5.2	7.2	5.2	<i>7.5</i>
Widowed	16.3	14.8	17.3	16.1	<i>7.9</i>
Single	12.4	10.8	10.9	11.2	<i>18.5</i>
TERMINAL EDUCATION					
AGE					
15 or under	55.3	55.0	42.1	50.5	<i>36.4</i>
16	16.9	20.1	22.9	20.3	<i>27.0</i>
17	8.9	7.1	7.1	7.5	<i>8.2</i>
18	5.5	7.2	7.0	6.7	<i>8.7</i>
19 or over	12.1	9.2	18.7	13.4	<i>16.8</i>
Other	1.3	1.3	2.2	1.7	<i>2.8</i>
REGISTRAR GENERAL					
SOCIAL CLASS					
I Professional non-manual	3.0	3.7	4.7	3.9	<i>4.7</i>
II Intermediate non-manual	23.9	28.3	30.6	28.0	<i>26.8</i>
III Skilled non-manual	27.5	25.1	26.4	26.2	<i>24.7</i>
III Skilled manual	21.5	19.3	14.9	18.3	<i>21.3</i>
IV Semi-skilled manual	17.2	16.8	16.1	16.6	<i>16.8</i>
V Unskilled manual	6.9	6.8	7.2	7.0	<i>5.8</i>
HOUSING TENURE					
Owner occupiers/mortgage	74.9	75.0	77.8	76.0	<i>71.3</i>
Renting (local authority)	20.2	14.7	11.1	14.9	<i>15.7</i>
Renting (other)	4.9	10.2	11.1	9.1	<i>13.0</i>

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey, 1983–2008

Table 2: Profile of Professed British Methodists by Churchgoing (percentages down)

	Monthly or more	Less often	Never/practically never
GENDER			
Male	31.4	36.6	46.4
Female	68.6	63.4	53.6
AGE			
18–24	4.4	6.7	2.4
25–34	7.6	14.4	7.8
35–44	13.3	13.7	11.0
45–54	13.6	16.5	14.7
55–64	19.0	17.4	19.3
65+	42.1	31.3	44.8
MARITAL STATUS			
Married	63.9	65.9	66.0
Cohabiting	1.7	2.6	3.4
Separated	4.2	6.3	5.3
Widowed	18.7	12.7	15.7
Single	11.6	12.5	9.6
TERMINAL EDUCATION AGE			
15 or under	42.7	47.7	62.9
16	21.3	21.8	17.6
17	8.0	8.7	6.1
18	8.1	6.7	5.0
19 or over	18.3	12.2	7.8
Other	1.6	3.0	0.5
REGISTRAR GENERAL SOCIAL CLASS			
I Professional non-manual	4.4	5.4	2.0
II Intermediate non-manual	33.3	25.7	23.2
III Skilled non-manual	27.3	28.9	22.5
III Skilled manual	13.8	16.7	25.3
IV Semi-skilled manual	16.6	15.9	17.2
V Skilled manual	4.6	7.5	9.7
HOUSING TENURE			
Owner occupiers/mortgage	79.3	76.8	71.0
Renting (local authority)	10.7	14.1	21.0
Renting (other)	10.1	9.1	7.9

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey, 1983–2008

The People Called Methodists Today

NOTES

- 1 Clive Field is Honorary Research Fellow, Department of Modern History, University of Birmingham - formerly Director of Scholarship and Collections, The British Library.
- 2 Clive Field, 'The Social Composition of English Methodism to 1830: A Membership Analysis', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 76:1 (Spring 1994), pp. 153–78.
- 3 Although Edwin Tindall, *The Wesleyan Methodist Atlas of England and Wales* (London: Bemrose, [1874]) might be noted as an honourable exception.
- 4 Cf. Bernard Jones, *Family Count: A Study-Pamphlet about Methodism Today* (London: Methodist Church Home Mission Department, 1970) and Clive Field, 'Joining and Leaving British Methodism since the 1960s', in Leslie Francis and Yaacov Katz (eds.), *Joining and Leaving Religion: Research Perspectives* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2000), pp. 57–85.
- 5 Heather Walton with Robin Ward and Mark Johnson, *A Tree God Planted: Black People in British Methodism* (London: Ethnic Minorities in Methodism Working Group, 1985).
- 6 *Methodist Conference, Wolverhampton, 2002: Agenda* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2002), vol. 2, pp. 414–30; *Over to You, 2002: Reports from Conference, 2002* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2002), pp. 57–73; John Sawkins and Margaret Batty, 'Methodist Local Preachers in Great Britain: A Millennial Profile', *Epworth Review* 29:3 (July 2002), pp. 48–55.
- 7 Phillip Escott and Alison Gelder, *Church Life Profile, 2001: Denominational Results for the Methodist Church* (New Malden: Churches Information for Mission, 2002), also available online at http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/methodist_denominational_report.pdf. Cf. *Methodist Recorder*, 8, 15, 22 and 29 January 2004.
- 8 A decennial census of religious profession in Ireland has been taken by Government from 1861 and is continued in Northern Ireland.
- 9 *Prospects for the Eighties: From a Census of the Churches in 1979, Undertaken by the Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism* (London: Bible Society, 1980–83, 2 vol.); Peter Brierley, 'Christian' England: *What the 1989 English Church Census Reveals* (London: MARC Europe, 1991); Peter Brierley, *Prospects for the Nineties: Trends and Tables from the 1989 English Church Census* (London: MARC Europe, 1991); Peter Brierley, *The Tide is Running Out: What the English Church Attendance Survey Reveals* (London: Christian Research, 2000); Peter Brierley (ed.), *Religious Trends, No. 3, 2002/2003* (London: Christian Research, 2001); Peter Brierley, *Pulling Out of the Nosedive: A Contemporary Picture of Churchgoing – What the 2005 English Church Census Reveals* (London: Christian Research, 2006); Peter Brierley (ed.), *Religious Trends, No. 6, 2006/2007: Analyses from the 2005 English Church Census* (London: Christian Research, 2006).
- 10 John Haley and Leslie Francis, *British Methodism: What Circuit Ministers Really Think* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2006).
- 11 For more information, see <http://www.britsocat.com>.
- 12 I am extremely grateful to Professor David Voas (Institute for Social Change, University of Manchester), who has assembled this dataset of the religious variables from the British Social Attitudes Survey, and run the analyses which underpin this article.
- 13 *Methodist Conference, Scarborough, 2008: Agenda* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2008), vol. 2, p. 580.
- 14 This is the inference of the triennial statistics. On the assumption that the death rate

- on the community roll was the same as in the membership, the likely breakdown of the 83,000 funerals conducted in Methodist churches in 2005–07 was: 23,000 of members, 36,000 of other adherents on the community roll and 24,000 of persons not on the community roll. *Methodist Conference, Scarborough, 2008: Agenda*, vol. 2, pp. 580, 590.
- 15 *Your Family Tree* 73 (February 2009), p. 8.
 - 16 This also appears to be the case here, since the Church's figures show an average adult all week attendance of 215,000 in 2007; *Methodist Conference, Scarborough, 2008: Agenda*, vol. 2, p. 580.
 - 17 Brierley (ed.), *Religious Trends, No. 6*, p. 5.6.
 - 18 Clive Field, 'Adam and Eve: Gender in the English Free Church Constituency', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44 (1993), pp. 68–71, 'The Social Composition of English Methodism', pp. 155–9, 170–5, 'Joining and Leaving British Methodism', p. 69 and 'Zion's People: Who were the English Nonconformists?' (forthcoming).
 - 19 Escott and Gelder, *Church Life Profile, 2001*, p. 3. Cf., for the 2005 English church census, Brierley, *Pulling out of the Nosedive*, p. 135.
 - 20 Escott and Gelder, *Church Life Profile, 2001*, p. 3.
 - 21 Brierley (ed.), *Religious Trends, No. 6*, p. 5.6.
 - 22 Clive Field, "'The Devil in Solution": How Temperate were the Methodists?', *Epworth Review* 27:3 (July 2000), pp. 78–93.
 - 23 *Methodist Recorder*, 30 August 1973.
 - 24 Analysis by the present author of the family announcements in all 2008 issues of the *Methodist Recorder*.
 - 25 Field, 'The Social Composition of English Methodism', pp. 158–62, 175.
 - 26 Expressed as a percentage of either the community roll or membership, the number of weddings or blessings in Methodist churches is also falling. See, for instance, *Methodist Conference, Scarborough, 2008: Agenda*, vol. 2, pp. 580, 590.
 - 27 Escott and Gelder, *Church Life Profile, 2001*, p. 4.
 - 28 Escott and Gelder, *Church Life Profile, 2001*, p. 5.
 - 29 Brierley, *Pulling out of the Nosedive*, p. 94.
 - 30 For a synthesis of the evidence, see Clive Field, 'The Social Structure of English Methodism: Eighteenth-Twentieth Centuries', *British Journal of Sociology* 28 (1977), pp. 199–225 and 'The Social Composition of English Methodism', pp. 162–8, 176–8.
 - 31 It should be noted that the British Social Attitudes Survey classifies respondents according to their own occupation, current or most recent, and not by that of the 'head of household'.
 - 32 Field, 'The Social Structure of English Methodism', pp. 206, 210–11.
 - 33 For a preview, see Clive Field, 'Safe as Houses: Methodism and the Building Society Movement in England and Wales', *Wesley Historical Society West Midlands Branch Bulletin* 9:3 (Spring 2009), pp. 59–63. A much longer version of this essay will appear in Peter Forsaith and Martin Wellings (eds.), *Methodism and History*, a festschrift for John Vickers.
 - 34 Leslie Francis and Philip Richter, *Gone for Good? Church-Leaving and Returning in the Twenty-First Century* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007).
 - 35 Jacinta Ashworth and Ian Farthing, *Churchgoing in the UK: A Research Report from Tearfund on Church Attendance in the UK* (Teddington: Tearfund, 2007).