

## STUDIES IN A DERBYSHIRE PARISH: RELIGION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY HEANOR

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The Industrial village has been fearfully caricatured by Disraeli in his description of Wodgate<sup>1</sup> where idyllic, if insanitary, cottages have been replaced by coarse and grimy shops and the role of the village pastor has been usurped by a burly, blasphemous blacksmith and his virago of a wife. Certainly it is an exaggeration but it does point to some of the difficulties engendered by industrialization and urbanization. The present study is an examination of the fortunes and progress of institutional religion in the Derbyshire town of Heanor during the industrial revolution.

### I

Some of the problems of the Established Church were the outcome of the process of industrialization but others stemmed from the history of the establishment and of society as a whole. For a long time after the Elizabethan Settlement English churchmen and statesmen persisted in the fiction that church and state were one and indivisible. To be an Englishman was necessarily and obviously to be an Anglican, a member of the Church of England as by law established.

The illusion was rudely shattered by the Cromwellian interregnum but following the Restoration of 1660 churchmen, smarting under the indignities they had suffered at the hands of the Puritans, introduced the repressive measures of the Clarendon Code in order to make the fiction of church-state unity a reality. But the day was passed when such legislation had any chance of success. New thought was abroad and many were opposed to a narrowly exclusive state religion. In these circumstances it is not surprising that Toleration Acts were passed which allowed a degree of freedom of worship although Dissenters were still excluded from the universities and from public office. The fiction had been challenged and it was admitted, lacity at least, that not all Englishmen were members of the Church of England. Dissenting worship was permitted providing that meeting places were registered with the bishop or with the justices of the peace.

Freedom *of* worship, however, implied the possibility of freedom *from* worship. Although it was not intended to do so, the relaxation of the obligation to attend the parish church made it possible for many people to avoid public worship altogether. The Archdeacon of Norwich complained bitterly that<sup>2</sup>

. . . a liberty being granted, more lay hold of it to separate from all manner of worship to perfect irreligion than to go to the (meeting houses); and although the Act allows no such liberty, the people will understand it so, and, say what the judges can at the assizes, or the justices of the peace at their sessions, or we at our visitations, no churchwarden or constable will present any for not going to church, though they go nowhere else, but to the alehouse, for this liberty they will have.

Thus, there was to be noted a steady decline in attendance at public worship in the latter part of the eighteenth century and in the early decades of the nineteenth.

This decline was stimulated by the humanist thought of the Enlightenment. As a result of Enlightenment thought some of the clergy of the Established Church tended

towards Deism and easy-going Latitudinarianism. Some were transformed by the enclosure movement into landed proprietors. Both these developments encouraged the parochial clergy to pay little attention to the spiritual needs of their parishioners. A further difficulty arose from the nature of the establishment itself which tended to transform clergy into civil servants. Not only were they ordained to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments but they were appointed as well to the civil office of signing papers — local government, education, poor relief, and sometimes the administration of justice, all came, to some extent, under their guidance and supervision.

Problems arose also from the system of patronage by which parochial appointments were made. With some exceptions every square inch of land in England fell within the boundaries of some parish. Each parish had a patron whose chief prerogative, known as the advowson, was the right of nomination or presentation to the bishop of a suitable person to serve as the parish priest. The patron might be a local landowner, an Oxford or Cambridge college, a cathedral chapter, the Crown, the bishop himself or some other person or group. The advowson was traditionally the prerogative of the landed gentry and was therefore regarded as a mark of social distinction. The owner of an estate or the lord of the manor would expect, as a matter of course, to be able to decide who should minister in its church although once the appointment was made the patron had no actual control over the incumbent. By a series of historical accidents which need not detain us lay rectors, sometimes the patron himself had in some instances become entitled to some of the tithes — at the expense of the incumbent. This diminution of clerical incomes led further to the practice of holding two or more benefices in plurality.

The advowson had also come to be regarded as a piece of real property to be brought or sold for profit. Advertisements for the sale of advowsons appeared frequently in nineteenth-century newspapers. An allusion to this practice occurs in Jane Austen's novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, first published in 1811. One of the characters in the novel, cut off from his inheritance, determined to take holy orders as being the only way of making a living open to him — in itself a striking comment on the conditions of the time. A friend, hearing of his predicament, immediately offered him the living, then conveniently vacant, which he had in his gift. The living was worth £200 a year and was said to be 'capable of improvement'. A neighbour, hearing of the action expressed amazement at such generosity when the advowson could have been sold for £1,400. In such circumstances it is not surprising that the quality of clerical life was low and sometimes ineffective.

## II

It is against his background that we may examine conditions in the ancient parish of Heanor. While one may allow for exaggeration the following comment is probably not without some truth. It was written in the 1860's by the vicar of Ironville, whom we shall meet later in this paper, and concerns his immediate predecessors in the district:<sup>3</sup>

. . . In those days (he wrote) the sparse people of these parts either dispensed with religion altogether, or went, on great occasions, some five miles to the distant parish church, . . . Old Jeremiah, the parson of the said church (probably John Wood, vicar of Pentrich) satisfied his conscience much more easily than most modern divines. He reads the prayers . . . without either unction or emphasis, and with an ill-concealed desire to get to the end as soon as possible; . . . and then mounted his grey pony to trot off as fast as he could to repeat the process. . . there were other churches nearer. But alas! compared with the ministers of these, old Jeremiah was as light to darkness. The incumbent of one of them was a curmudgeon and a drunkard combined (probably Richard Whinfield, vicar of Heanor) . . . The incumbent of the other parish (Alfreton?) was a spendthrift and a drunkard, had to be fetched out of the public-house to duties, and, on more than one occasion, was besieged in the parsonage by bailiffs.

If Richard Whinfield was something of a curmudgeon, and local tradition seems to confirm the suggestion, then it is possible that circumstances had contributed to making him so. He was presented to the living of Heanor by the Crown in 1821 when it was worth £110 per annum. His predecessor had also been rector of West Hallam, a few miles away and had lived there. Consequently the vicarage at Heanor was a shambles and Whinfield had to spend £700 out of his own pocket to make it habitable. He had also a large family and since he could not afford to send them to school had perforce to educate them himself. The previous incumbent, on resigning the parish of Heanor had retained that of West Hallam with its income of £360 a year. But he was very old and infirm and could not perform the duties. For this purpose he employed Whinfield as assistant curate at £40 per annum. Whinfield was thus receiving £150 a year for shouldering the responsibilities which had brought his predecessor £470 — small wonder that he was something of a curmudgeon!

Moreover, the clergy were not the only ones to suffer. Churches and opportunities for public worship were few and far between. In the 1840's the vicar of Heanor was apparently able to afford an assistant curate who wrote thus to Ecclesiastical Commissioners:<sup>4</sup>

The whole parish of Heanor, Derbyshire . . . embraces an extent of about sixty-six thousand acres — reaching from its extremities a distance of not less than five miles. The population as returned by the last census amounted to upwards of 6,000. For this large number of persons the church accommodation is extremely inadequate; there being one church, not calculated to hold more than 600, in which the sittings are appropriated, *no provision whatever is made for the poor who in a coal and manufacturing district of course, form the bulk of the population.* [Italics added]

The obvious solution was to build more churches but this was not as simple as it might appear. Patrons naturally opposed the division of parishes for which they held the advowson. Nor was this always for purely selfish reasons. Division usually meant a reduction in the value of the living and this could make it more difficult to find a successor when it fell vacant. Incumbents, too, were likely to oppose the division of parishes even though they realised that they were much too large. This, again, was not always due to selfishness and greed as we have seen in the instance of Richard Whinfield.

In the period following the end of the Napoleonic wars there was a realisation on the part of parliament of the need for more churches. Church Building Acts were passed and funds were made available. Encouraged by these provisions the inhabitants of Codnor and Loscoe, hamlets at the western end of the parish of Heanor, embarked upon the buildings of a church at Cross Hill, midway between them. When it was almost completed they made application to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for a grant towards the stipend of an incumbent. They wrote also the Venerable W.A. Shirley, Archdeacon of Derby, asking him to support their application. The archdeacon did as he was asked and wrote to the Commissioners but added:<sup>5</sup>

I very much fear that no co-operation can be expected from the Vicar of Heanor in this case, and I shall be obliged by your giving full instructions to Mr. Starbuck [one of the prominent laymen at Codnor].

As was expected, the Vicar of Heanor protested vigorously. Yet his complaints were not unfounded as he explained:<sup>6</sup>

(1) . . . [the proposed division] would take from my parish of Heanor *one third* of all landed property, and would only embrace . . . one-sixth of the population.

(2) . . . Unfortunately for this Parish my Predecessor was induced to put his hand to a Bill for inclosing the commons and the Vicarage was robbed of 9/10ths of its rights.

(3) The largest and best Pews in the Parish Church of Heanor are the property of persons who will by this Scheme become Parishioners of the District of the New Church . . .

The vicar's protests were unavailing — they could hardly be otherwise since the new church had already been built. The Order in Council establishing the parish of Codnor and Loscoe received Royal Assent on September 3rd, 1844.<sup>7</sup> The vicar of Heanor received some slight compensation and the Reverend Henry Middleton was appointed Perpetual Curate of the new church of St James. Patronage was in the hands of the Bishop of Lichfield.

The new church had seats for four hundred, nearly two thirds of which were free and unappropriated. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners provided an income of £150 per annum for the incumbent who was also entitled to pew rents and surplice fees. Concerning the former, the parishioners were quite realistic and reported that<sup>8</sup>

little or nothing will be raised from pew rents it being arranged that every person within the district subscribing ten pounds towards the building of the church should have sittings for himself and family rent free.

By way of digression it may be noted that not all new parishes were so practical. The new parish of St Peter, Belper, was established in 1824. The church had seats for eighteen hundred and it was anticipated that the pew rents from the six hundred appropriated sittings would contribute significantly to the income of the incumbent. Instead, they brought in only £50 per annum — considerably less than had been expected.

The other new district to be carved partially out of the ancient parish of Heanor was Ironville. Here the problems were greater since the district lay within three parishes and the regulations governing the establishment of new parishes had been made more exacting. Francis Wright, the principal owner of the Butterley Company, an iron and steel concern and the chief landowner concerned, initiated proceedings for the erection of a church at Ironville by writing to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners on January 10th, 1844.<sup>9</sup> In the letter he explained the circumstances which prompted his proposal. Ironville, the industrial colony which he had established, lay midway between the ancient parishes of Alfreton, Pentrich and Heanor, with parts lying in each but without adequate ministrations from any of them. In the early 1840's Wright and his partner had built "two large schools about 40 feet square" and these had been licensed by the bishop for public worship. For the first few years the duties had been performed by the priest in charge of St James', Riddings, a new district carved out of the parish of Alfreton in 1833. Recently, however, the priest's more immediate responsibilities had increased and he could no longer undertake the extra work. The only solution, therefore, seemed to be the establishment of Ironville as a separate parish. He assured the Commissioners that this suggestion had the agreement and concurrence of all concerned.

Events did not run smoothly, however,<sup>10</sup> partly because of the the parishes and individuals involved. In consequence, it was not until 1849 that the scheme was approved. Work was begun and the church, built at a cost of £6,000, was opened in 1852. It contained 540 seats of which 300 were free. The Reverend John Casson was named as the first vicar.

### III

Dissent, because of the flexibility of its structures, found it much easier to respond to changing needs and shifts of population. Preaching stations could be established with a minimum of formality and existing buildings transformed into chapels and places of worship with little difficulty. By the same token, however, they could disappear with

almost equal facility. According to the 1851 Religious Census which will be discussed later there were eleven Dissenting Chapels in the parish of Heanor<sup>11</sup>, three of which have disappeared without trace.

First in the field seem to have been the Quakers, originally known as 'Seekers', 'Children of Light', or 'Friends in the Truth'. It was not until the nineteenth century that they assumed the formal title, 'Society of Friends'. The date of the Quakers in Heanor is unknown but by the middle of the eighteenth century it was evidently a flourishing congregation. The leading lights at that time seem to have been the Tantums and the Howitts. Thomas Howitt farmed a few acres of land at Heanor<sup>12</sup> and became a Quaker when he married Phoebe Tantum who was already a member of the Society. The first Quaker meeting house, now the Particular Baptist Chapel at Loscoe, was probably built in 1722 by Francis Tantum whose initials it bears. In spite of the fact that the building could accommodate four hundred people the Quakers were probably a small, somewhat esoteric group with only a limited appeal. At all events the building was transferred to the Particular Baptists in 1748 and another (smaller?) one acquired in Heanor. The cause was failing and by the middle of the nineteenth century there was but a handful of members.<sup>13</sup>

The Particular Baptists, who seem to have been the first of their sect in Heanor had originally emerged in London, a schism from the General Baptists. Their numbers continued to grow and they extended their activities through the country reaching Heanor, as has been suggested, in the mid-eighteenth century. The General Baptists chapels in Langley Mill and Heanor seem to have been later and were said to have been built, respectively, in 1839 and 1849.<sup>14</sup>

The other congregation representing what is generally known as Old Dissent was that of the Congregational Independents. At the beginning of the nineteenth century they had a flourishing cause not only in Heanor but also in a number of the surrounding market towns.<sup>15</sup> It is rather surprising that in Heanor they have disappeared completely.

Passing reference should also be made to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Mormons. The sect had been founded by Joseph Smith in the USA in 1830 and a mission to the United Kingdom was begun seven years later.<sup>16</sup> Within a few months they were said to have nearly fifteen hundred converts and branches were set up in various parts of the country, including Heanor. For a time they seem to have had a small building used exclusively for public worship and about seventy adherents.

The great evangelistic movement of the eighteenth century was, of course, Wesleyan Methodism, or New Dissent — a protest against a laxity and ineffectiveness of the Church of England and the humanism of the Enlightenment. John Wesley travelled the United Kingdom with extraordinary vigour and energy preaching indoors and out and directing the new society which grew up under his hands.<sup>17</sup> There is no evidence that he ever visited Heanor but he was frequently in Nottingham and Derby and sometimes passed close to the town itself. On 28 March, 1764 he preached at Alfreton at midday while on his way from Derby to Sheffield. 5 July 1786 saw him at Belper, somewhat reluctantly, since 'it obliged me to quit the turnpike road, to hobble over a miserable common'. Nothing is said about the attendance on either occasion so we may presume that the crowds were not large. The day following his visit to Belper saw him at Ilkeston where

though the church is large, it was sufficiently crowded. The Vicar read prayers with great earnestness and propriety. I preached on, 'His ways are ways of pleasantness', and the people seemed all ear. Surely good will be done in this place, though it is strongly opposed both by the Calvinists and Socinians —

a reference to the Congregational Independents.

The influence must have been felt locally and certainly by the beginning of the nineteenth century there were Wesleyan Societies at Codnor and Heanor.

John Wesley had seen the dangers as well as the advantages of the increasing lay participation in the Methodist movement and had kept control largely in his own hands. It is doubtful whether he would have appreciated the working man's need for recognition. With his death in 1791 the restraints were removed and in a few years there were numbers of competing Methodist sects.<sup>18</sup>

By the early nineteenth century the Wesleyan Methodists had acquired an aura of respectability and had thereby lost some of their appeal to the working classes. As Donald Read has written,<sup>19</sup>

By [1819] Wesleyan Methodism had become middle-class in character, as many of its leading adherents prospered in trade. The working classes has tended to draw away from the main Wesleyan Methodist body to form various splinter groups such as the Methodist New Connexion (1797), the Primitive Methodists (1812), and the Bible Christians (1815). These bodies were much more radical in temper than the Wesleyan body, and they were also much more friendly to the radicals in politics . . . the smaller Methodist sects provided many leaders in provincial working class politics throughout the nineteenth century down to the early days of the Labour Party.

The prosperous tradesmen were in a minority in places like Heanor so that we are not surprised to find that the schisms within Methodism were particularly marked and sometimes bitter.

The settlements at Golden Valley and Ironville were, it will be remembered, established in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For three decades they were without a place of worship of any sort. In 1837 a chapel was built at Golden Valley and not surprisingly it was undertaken by the Primitive Methodists who had formed a society there two years previously. The chapel was a small building with accommodation for only 170 persons but it seems usually to have been comfortably filled. Because of the influence of Francis Wright, a zealous Anglican, no chapel was ever built at Ironville. There was a small one in the adjoining hamlet of Jacksdale to which the inhabitants could go if they felt so inclined. For the most part it is probable that they went nowhere but relied upon the parish church for such occasional ministrations as baptisms, marriages and burials.

In the 1840s there was a bitter dispute within Wesleyan Methodism and the animus generated was reflected in the comments made on the religious census returns. Thus, the Wesleyan Methodists at Alfreton commented that 'the decrease of attendance [is] owing to the mischievous efforts of a party of Radicals calling themselves Reformers who have seceded from our Society'. The Wesleyans at Ripley took a loftier approach and commented,

General Congregation is reduced about two thirds of its number since 1849 . . . The Seceders mistaking the noble stand made by the Conference of that year to maintain the purity of the ministry for an arbitrary exercise of power to deprive the members of a perfectly voluntary society of Liberty.

The seceders who described themselves as 'Wesleyan Methodists worshipping apart from the Conference party' were content to let their conduct speak for itself and simply remarked that

our chief difficulty is want of Room. But we are Building a large Room capable of holding from 500 to 600 [the original chapel held less than 600] which we hope to enter upon the 1 June 1851.

Nor were the Wesleyans in the parish of Heanor unaffected. The congregation in

Heanor itself was, apparently, unscathed by the controversy but in Codnor the large Wesleyan Reform chapel was built on the edge of the market place. Both Wesleyans and Primitive Methodist chapels have disappeared.

The years following 1859 saw a religious revival which has sometimes been called 'the Second Great Evangelical Awakening',<sup>20</sup> Starting, apparently, in Hamilton, Ontario, it spread to the USA, to Ireland and to Great Britain. It was essentially a lay and nonconformist movement concentrating on prayer meetings and evangelistic rallies. The movement was not without influence upon the area with which we are concerned. In Little Eaton, prayer meetings were begun in 1859 and in spite of discouragement by the vicar ever-growing numbers crowded into the local chapel. Campaigns were also held at South Normanton with considerable success. At Whitsuntide, 1863, a thousand people were said to have joined in a procession which sang hymns in the streets before the evangelistic service. Similarly, at Codnor, in August, 1863, three hundred persons were converted during the campaign 'making necessary' as it was said, 'the enlargement of the meeting-house from 450 seats to 700'. Somewhat amusingly, the account adds that 'eleven High-Church people were among the converts at Cotmanhay'. There is no evidence of its activities in Heanor itself.

#### IV

The only official religious census ever taken in Great Britain was held on 30 March 1851. The results, as they apply to Heanor, are shown below. Ignoring the vexed question of appropriated pews, it is seen that there were 4,382 sittings for a population of 6,717. This was rather better than the national average.

Far more difficult is the interpretation of the attendance figures. Everyone who has worked with them knows that the returns of the 1851 religious census contain certain inherent problems. The census was voluntary and it was not universally popular. As a result the returns were not always complete or accurate. With respect to Heanor, with the possible exception of those for the parish church, I believe that they are reasonably accurate and reliable. We may first compare the local returns with the national average:<sup>21</sup>

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Total
All rural areas	28.1%	25.5%	17.8%	71.4%
Heanor	28.1%	37.7%	27.3%	93.2%

This would suggest that the community was far more religious, at least in terms of attendance at public worship than many other places in the country. In terms of particular communions the statistics were as follows:

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	TOTAL
Church of England	13.5%	14.1%	4.5%	32.1%
Wesleyan Methodist	6.7%	3.7%	5.5%	15.9%
Primitive Methodist	1.3%	6.1%	5.8%	13.2%
General Baptist		4.1%	2.4%	6.5%
Particular Baptist		3.3%	4.2%	7.5%
Cong Independent	6.1%	5.5%	3.8%	15.5%
Society of Friends	0.2%			0.2%
Latter Day Saints	0.3%	0.8%	1.2%	2.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28.1%</b>	<b>37.8%</b>	<b>27.3%</b>	<b>93.3%</b>

A more serious problem stems from the fact that the census provided no way of determining how many *different* people were present at public worship on that mid-Lent Sunday and in those days there were far more 'twicers' or even 'thricers' than there are today. Horace Mann, who organized the census and compiled the results recognized the difficulty and proposed a practical, if not altogether satisfactory, solution. He suggested that the figures should be adjusted by assuming that half the number present in the afternoon had already been present in the morning and that two-thirds of the evening congregation had also attended an earlier service. Thus, in order to gain an accurate picture of the actual attendance he proposed to count the whole of the morning attendance, half the afternoon congregation and one-third of those present in the evening. This, obviously, gives a more realistic picture of the number of different worshippers who might have been present but, as the critics were quick to point out, it militated against those places of worship which had small morning congregations or none at all. These, in general, were those of the dissenting bodies and the adjustment was thought to give an unfair advantage to the established church. For Heanor the adjusted totals were as follows:

## RELIGIOUS CENSUS 1851 — ADJUSTED TOTALS

	Morning		Afternoon		Evening		Total	
Church of England	812	13.5%	422	7.0%	90	1.5%	1324	22.1%
Wesleyan Methodist	402	6.7%	112	1.9%	109	1.8%	623	10.4%
Primitive Methodist	75	1.2%	183	3.0%	117	1.9%	375	6.2%
General Baptist			123	2.0%	47	0.8%	170	2.8%
Particular Baptist			100	1.7%	83	1.4%	183	3.0%
Cong Independent	368	6.1%	166	2.8%	77	1.3%	611	10.2%
Friends	13	0.2%					13	0.2%
Latter Day Saints	15	0.2%	25	0.4%	23	0.4%	63	1.0%
TOTALS	1685	28.1%	1131	18.9%	546	9.1%	3362	56.1%

## V

Although we know a fair amount about the buildings erected for public worship and the numbers who attended them, we know very little about the kind of people who attended, the social structure of the various congregations. We can only hazard a guess that the very poor were among the 44% who stayed away. It will be convenient to establish the Church of England and the dissenting bodies separately.

We do know that, as elsewhere, the churches, and probably the chapels, were used fairly frequently for the 'rites of passage' — baptisms, marriages and funerals. It also appears that although in 1836 the law allowed the solemnization of matrimony in registered dissenting chapels most of the marriages in the parish in the earlier part of the nineteenth century took place in one or other of the churches. During the period 1821-1871 these 'rites of passage' were as follows:



	Baptisms		Marriages		Burials	
	Total	Annual Average	Total	Annual Average	Total	Annual Average
HEANOR Parish Church (1821-71)	3112	61.01	1144	22.43	2467	48.37
CODNOR St James (1844-71)	1117	39.89	448	16.00	1422	50.78
IRONVILLE Christ Church (1852-71)	1165	58.25	199	9.95	902	45.10

There are a few notable exceptions to the annual averages. At Heanor, for example, there were 122 baptisms on 24 May 1825, probably connected with the birthday of Princess Victoria. In 1837, 473 children were baptized between 25 June and 30 June (inclusive). This was almost certainly due to the fact that the vicar promised a bible to any child baptised at the same time as his own. There was also an unusually large number of baptisms (177) in 1860 and this seems to have been due to the exertions of an energetic curate. Similarly, seventy-seven baptisms at Codnor in 1869, well above the annual average, seems to be attributable to the work of enthusiastic curates.

It is much more difficult to determine the number and identity of those attending the Sunday services. Service registers or 'preacher's books' were kept but rarely, if ever, did they record the number of worshippers present — the text and title of the sermon seemed to be much more important. It is possible to glean some information from the records of archdeacons' visitations, where they exist. There is one for Heanor, dated 1 August 1823, from which we learn that divine service with sermon was performed once each Sunday, alternately morning and evening. The Holy Communion was celebrated five times a year with an average of twenty communicants. This may seem surprising in view of later records of confirmations:<sup>22</sup>

	CONFIRMATIONS								
	Heanor			Codnor			Ironville		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1850	8	6	14	4	5	9	10	20	30
1852	1	17	18	6	5	11	5	11	14
1855	4	13	17	4	8	12	5	14	19
1861	27	34	61	4	8	12	16	17	33
1864	8	19	27	5	9	14	2	11	13
1867	8	24	32	2	9	11	12	32	44
1869	7	11	18	9	6	15	11	16	27
1870	2	5	7	11	18	29	10	14	24
1871	5	10	15	9	3	12	3	6	9
1872	2	5	7	8	10	18		11	11
1873							6	14	20
1874	8	22	30				23	8	31
	80	166	246	62	81	143	114	174	288
	Male: 256 Female: 421			GRAND TOTAL: 677					

On the other hand, Robert Lanham, the Scripture Reader and probable author of a survey of 469 miners in 1856<sup>23</sup> claimed that among them he could only find one communicant.

Other evidence of church life in Ironville is to be derived from a curious little book entitled, *Down in Dingshire: or Sketches of Life in the Black Country* by the Reverend W.E. Littlewood who was vicar of Ironville in the 1860s. It was, apparently, originally produced as a series of articles in a local newspaper and in that form elicited a certain amount of criticism from local residents who regarded it as an attack on their village. While it is surprising that the author should choose such an audience the work is perceptive and on the whole sympathetic, analyzing the difficulties which confronted the Church in such circumstances. Although it is a description of conditions in general it has, as would be expected, a particular interest in matters pertaining to religion.

For many years he said<sup>24</sup> there was no church in the village and people wishing to take part in public worship had to make do with the chapel or walk the four or five miles to the nearest parish church. Small wonder then that when churches were built there was no immediate stampede to fill them.

Elsewhere in the booklet Littlewood described his efforts to win the villagers to church. 'Although on Sunday mornings', he wrote, 'we have poor congregations, yet on a Sunday evening, we have very good ones, entirely composed of a well-paid artisan class, and chiefly of men . . . What brings my people to church is careful disposition of those who *show a disposition* to come, the working up of a *congregational feeling*, and *preaching adapted to them*.' He would probably have been the first to admit that some of the credit belonged to his predecessors. In 1851, even in spite of counter-attractions elsewhere, the evening congregation at Ironville was one of the largest in the district.

The effectiveness of Littlewood's parochial work is reflected on his description of his relationship with Thomas Langley (a pseudonym) for whom he had a profound and obvious respect. 'Many a time', he wrote, 'has this humble Christian strengthened his pastor's heart from his own rich experience.' If further proof were required it is to be found in the fact that although candidates for confirmation tended to be predominantly female, of the thirty-four presented from Christ Church, Ironville in 1874, twenty-three were men.

It is unfortunate that there is no testimony from the parishioners themselves. Miners and framwork knitters rarely committed their thoughts to paper. No doubt they talked among themselves but no record remains. In examining the influence of the Established Church some assumptions can be made. Probably most of those who reached adulthood before c1830 had been baptised. If they had moved, as many of them had, even a few miles from their parental homes it is not so likely that their children were baptised or that they themselves continued habits of church attendance. If they were baptised it is unlikely that they were subsequently confirmed and even less likely that they ever became communicants. There was, evidently, a vast amount of ignorance, apathy and indifference regarding matters of religion. It does not seem to have been overt hostility although there was, perhaps, the feeling that church-going was appropriately left to one's 'betters'. This would help to explain the fact that those who were attracted to the Church from the working classes were those better-paid artisans who possessed a greater degree of independence. Then, as now, there were those who went to church regularly or not at all and those who went when the spirit or the occasion moved them but the proportion of regular and occasional worshipper seems to have been higher.

Part of the responsibility for the prevailing conditions must rest with the clergy. Where they mixed freely and unostentatiously with their working class parishioners there was a degree of success and congregational feeling as Littlewood called it. Some attempt to remedy clerical inadequacies was made by the employment of Scripture

Readers. These were men, usually of humble origin, employed to seek out the lapsed or uncommitted and to read the scriptures to them. One such already mentioned was Robert A. Lanham who appeared at Eastwood, Nottinghamshire in 1856. He became particularly interested in the employees of the Butterley Company and about two years later moved to Loscoe to work among them. There he seems to have remained until some time in 1861 when he was succeeded by another Scripture Reader, Frederick Chapman, who was reported by the 1861 census to be living in Ironville.

The status and influence of these men remains something of a mystery. Usually such agents worked under the direction of a parish priest and their wages were provided or subsidized by a district or diocesan Scripture Readers' Association. But there seems to have been no such association in the area under discussion and their connection with the clergy seems to have been minimal or even non-existent.

There was little opportunity for the working man to participate in or to influence the life and policy of the established church. Even when meetings of Scripture Readers' Associations were held the Readers themselves were never present. It was otherwise in the dissenting bodies and particularly in Primitive Methodism. There the working man could take his place as a class leader or local preacher. He, with others, could decide upon the location and establishment of new preaching places, the building of new chapels and, to some extent, the policy of the denomination. Therein the chapel met the working man's need for status and responsibility particularly when industrialisation was taking them from him. Peter Laslett's comment<sup>25</sup> may be remembered that in pre-industrial society 'the head of the poorest family was at least the head of something'. When wives and children were earning as much or more than the husband this was no longer true but in the chapel he could still be, locally at least, a person of consequence. Census returns for the period show that many foremen and supervisors were local preachers or 'exhorters' and could, no doubt, exercise considerable influence in their respective spheres. Local report has it that such references as the 'Bailey Brook Baptists' and 'Langley Prims' (Primitive Methodists) were not uncommon. Such men could have considerable influence on the working conditions. If the butty or the overlooker was rough, careless and worldly, swearing, abuse and immorality would be rife. If he was a man of character, a churchman or a chapel-goer, there would be an absence of such evils and a certain rough kindness. One such man was John Smith,<sup>26</sup> a local preacher who was responsible for the building of several chapels. He was also the agent or manager at Butterley Park. All went well when there was no industrial unrest but when circumstances ranged men against the company the unfortunate preacher-manager could be caught in the midst. No doubt at such times relationships in the chapel could be tense especially when one considers the following quotations:<sup>27</sup>

A most devoted and enthusiastic chapel-goer, and one of the most happy men in the village [Codnor], was Joseph Grainger who lived in Mill Lane. . . . He was a collier until the miners' strike for the nine hours' day, and as one of the deputies of the men he lost his job. After that he became a house-to-house canvasser for the sale of tea. He was an exhilarating example of a happy, converted, truly religious, bible-reading man.

A.R. Griffin in his doctoral thesis, 'The Development of Industrial Relations in the Nottinghamshire Coalfield',<sup>28</sup> lays great emphasis upon the influence of Methodism in this area. It was, he says, a humanising influence, 'softening the crude outlines of the mining world.' By its educational and devotional activities it opened up new vistas of life and provided new opportunities for men and women alike. For the men, particularly, it fostered literary, oratorical, musical and organisational skills which furnished the leadership in later trade union activity and indeed in membership of local municipal councils. He concedes that the puritanism engendered might sometime be

lacking in charity and comments that 'it was no uncommon thing for a girl to be turned out of such a home because she was "in trouble"'.<sup>28</sup> I am inclined to think that this is an exaggeration of both the positive and negative aspects of Methodism. It minimises the influence of other religious bodies if the witness of the 1851 religious census is to be believed. It is also, perhaps, less than fair to the relatives of the 'fallen women'. Immorality, while not condoned, seems to have been accepted, perhaps after a family row, and illegitimate children received into the families upon which they had a claim. They were also presented, more or less openly, for baptism — at least in the Established Church. While the Influence of Methodism in the nineteenth century is certainly not to be minimised it is important to realise that there was, throughout the earlier part of the century, a moderate evangelical awakening which was not confined to Methodism.

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- 3 W.E. Littlewood, *Down in Dingshire: or Sketches of Life in the Black Country*, Ripley, nd., Reprinted 1933
- 4 Church Commissioners, File 1748. See Appendix I
- 5 Church Commissioners, 2590/43, File 174B
- 6 Church Commissioners, 3556/44, File 174B
- 7 *London Gazette*, 1 October 1844
- 8 'Form of Enquiry . . . for constituting a new District, . . . 30 November 1843.' Church Commissioners, File 174B
- 9 Church Commissioners, File F3499
- 10 See appendix II
- 11 They were as follows:

The Name is that of the official signing the return.

Society of Friends (Quakers), Heanor

Separate building, erected 1834, capacity c300

Francis T. Howitt

Particular Baptist, Loscoe

Separate building, erected 'before 1810', capacity 400

Thomas Hicking, Deacon

General Baptist, Heanor

Separate building, erected 1849, capacity 235

Thomas Cresswell, Local Preacher

General Baptist, Langley Mill

Separate building, erected October 1839, capacity 150

William Stanhope, Deacon

Mount Zion Chapel (Congregational Independent) Heanor

Separate building, erected 1821, capacity 480

Henry Brentnall, Deacon

Wesleyan Chapel, Codnor

Separate building, erected 1827, capacity, 285

John Peake, Trustee

Wesleyan Chapel, Heanor,

Separate Building, erected 1839, capacity 532

John Horridge, Chapel Steward

Golden Valley Primitive Methodist Chapel

Separate Building, erected 1834, capacity 170

John Smith, Superintendent

- Hope Primitive Methodist Chapel, Heanor  
 Separate Building, erected 1849, capacity (unspecified)  
 George Birley, Society Steward
- Mill Hay Primitive Methodist Chapel  
 Separate building, erected 1836, capacity 110  
 Joseph Watson, Trustee
- Latter Day Saints  
 Separate building, (not date) capacity, 70  
 Samuel Gamble, Secretary
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 25 Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, London (1971), 54  
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 27 Joseph Millott Severn, *My Village, Owd Codnor, Derbyshire*, Published by the author,  
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## APPENDIX I

Letter from Francis Wright to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners

Lenton Hall  
 near Nottingham,  
 10 Jan. 1844

My Lords,

I beg to represent to your Lordships the accompanying case, the particulars of which I will endeavour to lay before you as concisely as possible.

The Parish of Alfreton in the County of Derby had a population at the last census in 1841 of 7,577.

The living of Alfreton is a Vicarage in the Gift of Wm. Palmer Morewood Esqr. The present incumbent the Revd. John Pepper. The value about £160 a year arising from lands and fees and there is a Parsonage House.

By an order in council dated the 6th of May 1835 a district was taken from the Parish containing a population of 4,557 at the last census, under the designation of the Riddings district, . . . About the same time a church was erected at Riddings & was consecrated but without any endowment. A Parsonage house has however been very recently purchased partly by subscription & partly by a grant from Queen Anne's

Bounty, of which grant there is a small surplus which yields £4. 10. 4 a year from pew rents [sic]. This, with a voluntary donation from Mr. Morewood of £10 a year and an uncertain sum of about £30 a year from pew rents is the whole provision upon which the Minister has to depend, with the exception of a grant of £90, annually made by the Church Pastoral Aid Society, to prevent the Church from being closed, the continuance of which is very uncertain. The Hamlet of Ironville including a number of Houses adjoining called Thorntree, or Fletchers Houses, Newlands row, and a few others detached . . . contains a population of 1,018 and is in the Riddings district but in consequence of its distance from the Church few of its inhabitants attend. In this Hamlet of Ironville which is entirely the property of myself and partner in the adjoining Ironworks (excepting the few abovenamed adjoining houses) we erected about a couple of years ago, two large schools each 40 feet square with a Masters house, these have been licenced by the Bishop and are thrown together every Sunday for divine Worship, the service being performed by the incumbent of Riddings the Revd. W. Howard. He has however so very much on his hands in his extensive district that he is unable to perform more than one service on the Lord's day and can give scarcely any time to the pastoral superintendence of the People.

Immediately adjoining this Hamlet is the Extra Parochial district of Codnor Park with a population of 655 over whom there is no pastoral care whatever, with no place of worship except the schoolrooms which many of them attend, to this, I would add, detached from their Parish, a few scattered houses in Codnor Township having a population of 88.

Adjoining also & distant near a mile and [a] half from their parish Church are the hamlets of Jacksdale & Westwood in the Parish of Selston in the County of Nottingham having a population of 133.

Adjoining also both the Riddings & Codnor Park districts, is my own Estate of Butterley Park, which is a detached portion of the Parish of Pentrich in the County of Derby containing a population of 114 who are at least two miles from their Parish Church, His Grace the Duke of Deveshshire being the Patron & the Revd. John Wood, Rural Dean, the incumbent, whose signatures being attached to this application attest their concurrence therein, & I believe that it has their entire satisfaction.

I humbly beg to represent to your Lordships the destitute case of a considerable portion of this large population numbering 2,008 souls, and I earnestly entreat your Lordships to constitute as a separate district for Ecclesiastical purposes those portions of the Riddings district above described & called respectively — Ironville, Newlands row with a few houses adjoining, Thorntree Row & houses, together with the Extra Parochial district of Codnor Park, the detached portion of the Parish of Pentrich called Butterley Park, the Hamlet of Stoneyford in Codnor Township, & the Hamlets of Jacksdale & Westwood in the parish of Selston, . . . The District to be called the District of Ironville containing as before set forth a population of 2,008 nearly two thirds of whom are employed in our Ironworks which are carried on at Codnor Park & Butterley.

Since writing the above I have learnt that the 15 houses in Codnor Township were included in an application to your Lordships for a district for Codnor & Loscoe, which I understand could not be granted on account of there not being a population of 2,000. I have included them merely because they are within our boundary of Codnor Park and detached very far from their own Parish. Should there be an objection to this or to any other point in this my application, I could wish that the Archdeacon of the district might be referred to (Archdeacon Shirley) as he is thoroughly acquainted with the whole, & he has kindly promised his assistance wherever it can be of service in rendering to your Lordships any information you may require. I have notified this my

application to the Patron of Alfreton and to the incumbent of Riddings who have signified their concurrence to a district being formed, but who cannot sign this application because they object to a small portion of it. I shall also inform the Patron & Incumbent of Selston.

I am my Lords,  
your Lordships humble servant  
F. Wright

John Wood Vicar of Pentrich

Devonshire  
Patron

## APPENDIX II

### Christ Church, Ironville

Many of the nineteenth century churches were built under the provisions of Sir Robert Peel's additional churches acts [M.H. Port, *Six Hundred New Churches*, London [1961] These acts were intended to facilitate the building of churches where they were most needed. While they made a significant contribution in that direction they also added to the restrictions which could impede the would-be church builder.

So great had been the rush for new churches that those charged with the administration of the public funds available had found it necessary to introduce criteria to make sure that churches were placed where the need was greatest. Among these was a condition which required public grants to be matched with private donations and another which limited new churches to the most densely populated areas. It was therefore determined that

No district can be constituted under this Act containing within its limits any consecrated church or chapel in use for purpose of divine worship . . . and the Commissioners have determined not to entertain, for the present, any application for a district with a population of less than 2,000; unless the whole amount of the endowment required by the Act can be provided independently of any grant from their funds.

[Information contained in a letter from Mr D.N. Goodwin, of the Church Commissioners to the writer, 19 November 1971]

In order to gain any assistance, therefore, Wright had to produce evidence that there were in the proposed district at least 2,000 people living at more than a reasonable distance from a parish church. At this point his difficulties began and there were objections to his proposed arrangement. Following the submission of the application to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners objections had been received from William Palmer Morewood, patron of the living of Alfreton and from James Oakes, a neighbouring colliery owner and iron founder. Specifically, they objected to the

inclusion of Newlands Row and the whole of the upper side of Pinxton Canal whose boundary I propose to follow including a strip of land one hundred yards wide running along its upper bank until it reached the old Nottingham lane . . .

[Letter from Wright to Archdeacon Shirley, 25 Nov 1844]

The area was outside the Butterley Company's immediate sphere of interest but had been included for reasons which seemed valid to Francis Wright. It was close to the Ironville schools. It contained a good solid house belonging to the company which he thought would serve admirably as a parsonage house. Moreover, the extra population was needed to make up the required minimum.

One suspects that Oakes' objection was prompted largely by jealousy since under the

proposed arrangement some of his own employees would be served by a church provided by his business rival. Objections came too from Sir Wollaston Dixie, 'a considerable landowner in the parish of Selston . . . and Lay Impropiator there.' There were also objections from the rural dean, the Reverend John Wood, vicar of Pentrich, concerning the inclusion of fifty inhabitants of Codnor Township 'without which the proposed district of Codnor and Loscoe could not make up their 2,000'. Wright met this last objection by conceding 'the whole of Aldercar in Codnor Park, containing above 100 persons, with which Mr Wood was more than satisfied'. This concession made it essential that Ironville should be allowed the extra area in the Riddings district. Wright said that he would see Oakes as soon as possible and felt sure that they would be able to reach an agreement. His hopes were evidently not realised since the district of Ironville as it was eventually constituted did not include either the area north of the Pinxton canal or that in the county of Nottingham.

There the matter rested for the time largely because of Wright's preoccupations with other commitments. Writing to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners on 26 March 1844, he spoke of the schools at Ironville which had cost him about two thousand pounds and continued,

I am engaged at the present time in the entire rebuilding of a Parish Church at Osmaston next Ashbourne at an expense of more than £4,000.

These, with a large undertaking which is not entirely completed in my own Parish of Lenton (that of a new Parish Church, Schools & Parsonage which have cost me considerably above £5,000) prevent my undertaking the building of a Church at Ironville for the present, but I would state that it is my earnest desire to do so, so soon as I am able, & whenever the present chapel or schoolrooms are found inadequate for the wants of the inhabitants.

The state of my finances & the great depression in the iron trade for the last 3 or 4 years will not allow me to expect to accomplish it at present . . .

[Church Commissioners, File 3499]

A further three years were to elapse before he felt able to embark upon the Ironville project but on 19 October 1847, he wrote again to the Commissioners outlinging an

. . . offer from me, 1st to supply a Church for the district capable of holding at least 500 persons, 2nd to give a most eligible house for the Parsonage built of stone and convenient for the district — 3rd to secure a sum of £50 a year for the Minister for ever — this I am ready to engage in provided I can have the patronage in myself and I cannot but hope that their Lordships would meet me with at least £100 per annum.

[Church Commissioners, File 3499]

The additional hundred pounds was required to bring the income of the living up to the prescribed minimum. Wright was a Low Churchman and anxious that the incumbent should always be of like convictions. The condition regarding the patronage created some hesitation on the part of the commissioners but on June 13th, 1849, Wright's offer was accepted. The Commissioner agreed to provide the additional sum required while leaving the patronage in the hands of Francis Wright.

Work was begun and the church, built at a cost of £6,000 was opened in 1852. It contained about 540 seats of which 300 were free. New National Schools were erected about the same time by the Butterley Company with the aid of a small parliamentary grant.