

Relations between the Wesley Deaconess Order and the Missionary Society

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Introduction

This paper will look at the Wesley Deaconess special work in Puttur Ceylon and relations between the Wesley Deaconess Order and the Missionary Society. I do not intend to give great details of the actual work done by the Wesley Deaconesses in Ceylon, especially in Puttur, as these can be found in my *Saved to Serve: The Story of the Wesley Deaconess Order 1890-1973*, chapter 4, but will try to explain why the work in Puttur became their 'special' mission project.

Background

The Rev. Thomas Bowman Stephenson, having started the Wesley Deaconess Order in 1890, as early as 1893/4 received a request for a deaconess to serve in South Africa: this could be said to be the start of the Wesley Deaconess Order's work overseas. For the first few years the Order was not under the direct control of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, but by 1894 it was so firmly established that the 1895 Conference agreed to a constitution being drawn up, though Connexional status was not achieved until 1901-2. In his statement to a Special Committee appointed by the 1894 Conference Stephenson reported:

One Wesley Deaconess is already employed in the Mission Field. She is working at Durban, in South Africa. I have received from Ministers at work in India, China, and other parts of the world, enquiries as to when we may be able to assist them by sending Deaconesses to their fields of labour. Undoubtedly, such agencies are urgently needed, and would be highly valued. The work of the Christian Deaconess embraces the care of the children, the sick, the poor, and the lapsed, and there is in the Foreign Mission Field an almost unlimited opportunity for the employment of such women, in Orphanage and other schools. In Zenana work, and the visitation of the people from house to house; in the instruction of the people; and in all sorts of domestic arts, as well as in the assistance which such women could render in religious meetings of all kinds. The bearing of this enterprise therefore upon Foreign Mission work ought not to be overlooked; and I may say in passing, that several of our Deaconesses have expressed a strong wish to be employed in the Foreign Field, and that whilst two of them have already passed the examinations required by the London Obstetrical Society, one of these has done it in order that she may be ready for that work, when the call shall come.¹

¹ MSS Minutes of the Wesley Deaconess Institute 1890-1910 (hereafter WDIMins I) p.4

So, realising the overseas work would grow, the Examination and Appointments committee on 25th March 1896 considered such appointments. It was felt that

in all cases where passage money was paid & outfit provided the term of service ought to be for not less than five years, unless of course a return to this country was rendered necessary by failure of health. If for any other reason than that of failing health a Sister should relinquish her work before the expiration of five years, it was decided that she should be requested to re-fund a proportion of the Passage & outfit money.²

This may seem rather harsh, but we need to remember that at this time the Order was still an almost 'private' venture and while, the Church encouraged it, it was not formally committed to it, so there was little money to cover all expenses.

So to the special project of the Wesley Deaconess Order: the work at Puttur, Ceylon.

Part I - Puttur, Ceylon

When the Rev and Mrs G. J. Trimmer, missionaries in Ceylon from 1877, returned home on furlough in 1896 the people in Puttur and Jaffna asked them to bring back with them 'two ladies to live in Puttar'(sic). The request was simple, but the solution difficult. The Women's Auxiliary could not help, but Miss Ireson offered to go as a voluntary worker. Then, Dr. Stephenson asked Mrs Trimmer to speak at the Foreign Missions session of the Wesley Deaconess Convocation. In her address she appealed for financial support for another worker to go to Ceylon. The appeal was successful and plans were made for the appointment of a Wesley Deaconess.

In October 1896 Stephenson reported that the Finance Committee of the Missionary Society had recommended a grant of £50 towards travelling expenses and a suitable outfit. So as the Women's Missionary Society had agreed to pay the 'necessary expenses of passage and outfit' the Order would promised to raise money for her maintenance for five years. Sister Gertrude Nettleship was designated for the appointment and received special medical training.³ By 1st March 1897 she had successfully passed the Obstetrical Society's examination and was recognised at Convocation before sailing to Ceylon in July.⁴

Having arrived at Colombo on 21st August 1897 en route to Jaffna Sister Gertrude started learning Tamil.⁵ On the first two Sundays she went with Mr. and Mrs. Trimmer and Miss

² WDIMins I p.26

³ WDIMins I pp.33,35

⁴ WDIMins I p.41

⁵ *Flying Leaves* (hereafter *FL*) (Jan.1903) pp.8-10; *Highways and Hedges* (hereafter *HH*) (Jan.1897) p.17; (Feb.1897) p.41; (March 1897) p.64; (June 1897) pp.137-8; (Oct.1897) p.232

Ireson to Puttur, twelve miles away, but she wrote home that because of the distance she was longing for a second sister to come so that they could go to live there. Dr Stephenson had always said he would prefer two deaconesses to go overseas together for mutual support and encouragement. Generous donations meant that by June only £150 was still needed to finance a second deaconess. The Order took Ceylon under 'its wing' and supported the work there financially -by donations, subscriptions, appeals and special events for 'The Ceylon Fund' until 1952.

Plans were finalised in February 1898 and so, with help from the Missionary Society towards the cost of travelling and uniform, Sister Faith Hunter was on her way to join Sister Gertrude in October. By June 1899 both deaconesses were living in a bungalow at Puttur where they had a 'bedroom, bathroom and a tiny study each, with a fair-sized sitting room and dining room in common' which was set in a compound with trees where they hoped to make a garden.⁶ Mr. Trimmer explained why Puttur was chosen for the start of Wesley Deaconess work in Ceylon:

We had spoken of Puttar (sic) as a suitable centre for such work. We had a house there, built for the residence of a Tamil minister, which could, at small expense, be adapted for a Deaconess Home. The village is the head of a circuit. We had four schools, with about 1,000 children learning in them, and there was a population of 10,000 people within easy reach of the Home.⁷

As few of the local people understood any English until the Deaconesses had a good working knowledge of Tamil they had to use a "Bible woman" as interpreter. They used various modes of transport to get outlying areas: bicycles, bullock carts and a bandy, for example. As women their roles differed rather from those of male missionaries because they 'targeted' the women and children in particular and it is these roles we shall explore, chiefly by referring to the extracts of their letters home which were printed in the Order's magazines. These roles consisted of (i) visiting women in their homes and taking meetings and services for them, (ii) using their medical and nursing skills and (iii) educational ventures.

I Visiting women and taking meetings and services for them

Convocation was, and still is, an important feature in the life of the Wesley Deaconess Order – it comprised domestic business meetings, lectures, devotional sessions with the consecration service as the highlight of the week. Deaconesses overseas decided to hold their own Convocations at the same time as the one at home. Gertrude and Faith planned 'a vigorous raid upon the women of as many of our villages as we could, taking a village each day, and having a magic lantern meeting in the evening, where we had been working during the day.'⁸ Mr. Trimmer gave an account of this 'raid', which resulted in three girls going to the Boarding

⁶ WDIMins I pp.53,61,64; *HH* (?)

⁷ *FL* (January 1903) p.9

⁸ *HH* (Oct.1899) pp.237-8

School at Jaffna, where, after about four years, they were baptised: ‘these three children are the “First-fruits” in the way of definite conversion and baptism of the Sisters’ work’ he commented.⁹ He also said that Magic Lantern shows had been a great attraction.

Many open-air lantern services have thus been held and largely attended. With the sheet slung between palmyra trees, and well damped, the picture is clearly visible on both sides of the sheet. One of the Sisters works the lantern on one side of the sheet; the other, with a baby organ and some of the workers, is on the other side. There, in the comparative shadow, the women of the village creep quietly up and are able to enjoy the pictures, the singing, and the preaching, as well as the men who gather on the other side of the sheet.¹⁰

In 1912 Gertrude and her colleague, Easter Hayden, organised a Sale of Work, a big venture for a little village sewing meeting, as it required much thought and planning: they wrote to firms in England asking for samples and Easter contacted *The Nursing Mirror* describing their work in Ceylon and appealing for donations. The response was wonderful. The Sale, held in the boarding school, was such a success that they were able to afford half the cost of ‘new church window shutters’ so at least the church would be dry during the monsoon season:

Nestle’s Milk Co., sent us a large box of..., milks, foods, chocolates etc., carriage paid to Jaffna. Cadbury’s wrote to their Colombo agents giving them instructions to send us a case of chocolates, cocoa, etc. Fry’s sent two large parcels per parcels post; Horlick’s, Allen and Hanbury and several others sent parcels pre-paid to the Mission House, which Mr. Hoyle packed in a box and sent out to us, and several other parcels we received by post. Several firms said they did not usually send goods to bazaars, but would make an exception in this case. I don’t think Sister Gertrude or I had faith enough to expect anything like such a response when we wrote...’¹¹

II Medical/Nursing Work

Often called “doctor Ammah”, the medical skills of the deaconesses were in great demand. Soon after her arrival Faith wrote of ‘looking at tongues, feeling pulses, enquiring into symptoms, advising, prescribing, ordering, with a weight of authority and an air of wisdom no fully fledged M.D. could surpass, all the while making my very scanty stock of tonic go as far as it possibly would, to the great delight of the people...’¹² While in 1900 Gertrude told of sick visits to strict Hindu families who appreciated her medical skills, though she was not allowed to touch the patient or any of the family’s belongings because of pollution. Despite gifts from

⁹ *FL* (Feb.1903) pp.24-7

¹⁰ *Ibid.* pp.24-5

¹¹ *FL* (December 1912) p.176

¹² *HH* (May 1898) p.114-118

home shortage of medicine was a problem as the people often paid in kind rather than currency which meant that supplies could not be bought locally. As a trained nurse and midwife, she found her work helped to overcome prejudice, but she longed for a small separate dispensary as the veranda of their house had virtually become a dispensary. When ill health forced Mrs Trimmer to return to England for six months, Mr. Trimmer, Chairman of the District, promised that if £50 out of the £100 needed to build one could be found he would get work started. The money was quickly raised and work commenced. More money was raised locally by ‘Christian, Hindu and Mohammedan’ friends and the dispensary was opened on 26th October 1901. It had a meeting room, also used as a surgery waiting room, a tiny consulting room, the dispensary, a dressing room and a ward with two beds and met a great need. In the first three months 600 cases were treated and the two-bed ward was seldom empty. In their annual letter to the 1902 Convocation the deaconesses pleaded for the ‘support of a Nurse-Bible woman’ who could live in the dispensary and help with the nursing and dressing and after-care of patients.¹³

Another deaconess was needed, particularly to cover furloughs, and Sister Annie Capper, who had volunteered for service in Ceylon, undertook medical training at the Salvation Army Maternity Hospital, Hackney and sailed in October 1903.¹⁴

Before Easter Hayden went back to Puttur in November 1924, she pleaded for gifts in money or kind for the Dispensary and village work because they were hoping to open some new Infant Welfare Centres. ‘Baby weighing scales, enamel jugs, basins’ and baby toiletries, medicines, first aid items, scraps of material and anything which could be used as prizes in the village schools were needed.¹⁵

In the spring of 1925 Gertrude Nettleship had to go to hospital in Colombo for an appendix operation from which she made an excellent recovery. In 1927 she celebrated over 30 years work with a trip home, but with no intention of ‘retiring’. On her return Easter took her furlough, returning on 27th December.¹⁶ In 1930, after 35 years service in Ceylon, Gladys retired and was granted a pension of £100 a year, part of which was paid from the Retiring Fund and the rest from the contribution made to the Women’s Department for the work in Ceylon.¹⁷

III Education

In September 1899 Sister Faith was unexpectedly asked to go to the Girls’ English High School in Jaffna when Miss Ireson, the Principal, had to leave to nurse her brother. Although she did some teaching much of her work was administrative which gave her many opportunities for

¹³ *HH* (Aug.1900) pp.189-90; (Sept.1900) p.212; *FL* (Ap.1902) p.58; cf. (Feb.1903) pp.24-7

¹⁴ *FL* (July/August 1903) p.115, (Jan.1904) pp.7-8

¹⁵ *The Agenda* (Sept.1924) pp.9-10, (Nov.1924) p.12, (Dec.1924) p.16

¹⁶ *The Agenda* (Xmas 1928) p.4, (April 1929) p.5, (March 1930) p.3

¹⁷ WDI Mins II p.256

contact with the girls there.¹⁸

Back in Puttur, in the autumn of 1900 Faith started a little school in one of the houses in the village of Eevenay and hoped that if it was successful they would be able to build a proper school. She described the first sewing lessons:

It was such fun; their grimy little paws, their bewilderment over the right end of a needle to hold, and their delight with the thimbles, which they thought were jewels or playthings, and could hardly be made to see that they were of any possible use. Some of them were very bright and quick, and will soon learn. Some bright patches of print that I took pleased them greatly, and they were very proud to get a piece to try what they could do. It is such a delight to watch them gradually learning to take in thoughts and ideas so utterly novel, and to see how even already they are developing.¹⁹

Sister Faith's letter of August 1903 not only shows the variety and extent of her work, but also her concern that native 'Bible women' were not being properly trained and that the old idea that 'anyone can do Mission-work' was becoming dominant. She was anxious that a Home or College should be set up 'where *educated young native women* can receive a good and careful training in systematic Bible-study, in practical application of it to the needs they meet, and in nursing sufficient to make them at least not a hindrance in time of need ... When such a trained Tamil woman is available she can hope to accomplish in one year what no European can do in five. From her own life she will be familiar with the details of the lives of the women amongst whom she works.'²⁰ A very forward looking comment!

In 1908, Elizabeth Spence, who went out to cover Annie Capper's furlough soon settled down and was able to cope when Gertrude Nettleship had to go to hospital in December with 'enteric fever'. As we shall see later the Ceylon Mission often faced financial problems and Gertrude's illness intensified them. Gertrude returned to Puttur in May 1910 after her convalescence furlough and Elizabeth had a brief holiday before going to Batticaloa in July to replace Sister Faith who was leaving the Order to marry the Rev. Edgar Thomas Selby, a missionary in North Ceylon District (1907-33). Elizabeth's first letter from Batticaloa on 30th October 1910 showed she was happily settled in her new job and surroundings.²¹

Easter Hayden, a trained nurse and midwife, went to Ceylon in 1910 and found Gertrude much improved in health.²² While Gertrude had been on furlough the 'house' of the Bible-women had been devastated by a monsoon, so one of the first things she did was to consult

¹⁸ *HH* (Feb.1900) p.47

¹⁹ *HH* (October 1900) p.238

²⁰ *FL* (Dec.1903) pp.182-4

²¹ *FL* (Jan.1911) p.5

²² *FL* (Nov.1910) pp.129,130,155; (March 1911) p.37

Mr. Trimmer. She then made an appeal for £150 to build a Biblewomen's Home and Training Institution. Convocation promised £50, the Mission House a grant of £50 with the balance to come from the North Ceylon Fund.²³

When the Rev. J. Milton Brown, the Foreign Missions General Secretary, and his wife visited Puttur in 1911, they were amazed at the impact made by the deaconesses, because when they had been missionaries in the Jaffna District (186683) 'Puttoor (sic) was known as a very difficult and almost fruitless field of labour'. In a letter to the Warden he commented:

You are doing a beautiful bit of work there, for which I devoutly thank God. When I knew the village thirty or forty years ago it was a wilderness, and regarded as the most barren soil of our district; to-day, it looks like a fruitful garden.²⁴

As soon as money for the Tamil Deaconesses Hostel was to hand foundations were excavated and plans made for the stone-laying, but the rains and floods came, so everything had to wait until it all dried out.²⁵ Gertrude Nettleship wrote to the 1912 Convocation, saying as they hoped the Biblewomen's Home would eventually become a Tamil Wesley Deaconess College, substantial foundations had been laid so that a second storey could be added when the money was available.²⁶

The "Tamil Deaconess Hostel" was officially opened on 6th October 1913, but it still needed to be furnished so the deaconesses listed their needs:

First of all we want some money for the simple furnishing..., also some coloured Scripture pictures for the walls, and good maps of Palestine, Asia, Travels of St. Paul.

Then our cupboards are quite bare of toys, slates, pencils, exercise books, etc., for village school prizes for memorising Scripture. Any pieces of print, muslin and cotton stuffs are most valuable. We are most grateful to the Mothers' Meeting which has a yearly 'print collection' for us.

Contributions of drugs or appliances, old linen or cotton sheets are always welcome, and we badly need Quinine. We use *pounds* in a year!²⁷

From 1915 there is little information as *Flying Leaves* ceased because of the shortage of paper during the War and there are very few references in the Minutes, presumably because of the difficulties of communication. In January 1922, the new magazine *The Agenda* came into being, but it contained fewer actual reports of deaconess work and also appeared rather intermittently. The first communication, in February 1922, from Puttur was from 'Emily', the

²³ WDIMins I pp.5,24; *FL* (Mar. 1911) pp.37-8, (June 1911) p.85, (Dec.1911) p.168, (Feb.1912) p.20

²⁴ *FL* (May 1911) p.78

²⁵ *FL* (March 1912) pp.37-8, (April 1912) p.55, (Sept. 1912) pp.125-6, (Oct. 1912) p.141, (Dec. 1912) p.173

²⁶ *FL* (April 1912) p.53, (June 1912) pp.88-9

²⁷ *FL* (July/Aug.1913) pp.99-100, (Sept.1913) p.132, (Dec.1913) p.174

first Tamil Deaconess student trained at the Puttur Training Home. Replying to letters from the Ilkley students she described her work and further training since leaving the Home. She had returned to Vembadi Girls' High School to teach Domestic Science and Nursing, but also took some needlework, 'Dictation and Recitation' and Scripture classes, plus a Junior Class meeting and Bible class meetings for Christian and Hindu girls and was in charge of the School Dispensary. Emily added that a fellow student from the Training Home who had gone to Colombo for a six month course at 'the Lying-in-Home' had obtained the Government certificate in midwifery.²⁸ This letter pays tribute to the success of the deaconesses' work in Puttur and the far-sightedness which set up the Training Home so that local girls could be trained to help their own people. Emily's comment emphasises this valuable work:

Before leaving Puttur, I had given to me a badge on which is the Training Home motto, "Others". My earnest wish is that I may live for the good of "Others."²⁹

In 1922 the Women's Local Committee of the North Ceylon District wrote to the Warden, Dr. Maltby expressing appreciation of the deaconesses's work in Puttur and the support given by the Order and pleading for a third deaconess, especially to cover furloughs. They reported that there were six girls training at the Tamil Training Home, where the curriculum included 'Bible Study, Hygiene, Home Nursing, Domestic Science and Infant and Maternal Welfare' as well as practical work.³⁰ This plea did not go unheeded as 'a generous friend' made it possible so Evelyn Lowe, a fully trained, experienced nurse, sailed on 4th October 1923 and Sister Easter was able to have her furlough. The Order continued to support the two deaconesses at Puttur as its special missionary contribution.

While Gertrude Nettleship was on furlough in 1922 Sister Easter was assisted by Mrs Ester J. James, a Tamil worker and trained teacher. Mrs James wrote a very revealing letter telling how, in spite of family opposition she had gone to Puttur and now felt it was where God wanted her to be. She described the Training Home – 'a real home' – the course of study undertaken and also the practical work, both in the Dispensary and the villages.³¹ Gertrude and Easter sent a heartening progress report telling how the students had prepared and given a 'Lyrical Lantern Service' on the "Pilgrim's Progress" to both Christian and Hindu audiences in the villages. They were amused, when the service was over, to hear the men on the other side of the sheet discussing it, especially when one man said "The Brahmins read to us in April, but why don't they teach us that life is a battle between good and evil and how to meet it – and *women* can tell us!"

Given the high entry standards set by the Order, some idea of the value of the work done, is shown when, in 1936, a student from Puttur, Kate Chelliah, went to Ilkley for a year so

²⁸ *The Agenda* (Feb.1922) pp.7-8

²⁹ *The Agenda* (February 1922) p.7

³⁰ *The Agenda* (May 1922) p.13

³¹ *The Agenda* (Oct.1922) p.7; (Dec.1922) pp.10-12

that she could do deaconess work on her return.³² In June 1938 Puttur held its own Convocation of Deaconesses and Social Service Workers and sent a greeting, signed by everyone, including Kate Chelliah, to the British Convocation, which was delighted to learn that Kate had been ‘dedicated’ at Convocation. Miss M. Dore, after a term spent at the College, sailed on 19th May 1939 to join Easter at Puttur. Presumably she was a lay missionary, possibly a teacher. Easter Hayden had been the only deaconess at Puttur since 1938, being listed as doing ‘Medical, Training, and Evang. Work’, so another pair of hands must have been very welcome.³³ In 1939 Sister Easter had problems when the old building at Puttur was demolished to make way for a new one as she needed to spend a great deal of time supervising the builders, in addition to doing her usual work.

In July 1932, Sister Gladys Stevenson, called at Ceylon on her journey home from China. Arriving in Colombo, she went to the ‘oldest Methodist Church’ in Asia and was delighted to meet a qualified Tamil deaconess, who had been trained at Puttur. She went onto Puttur, to visit Easter Hayden who took her to a village where the deaconess students were holding Child Welfare Clinics. Easter told her that in the early days the work had been very hard, but ‘the villages had now become Christian’ and indeed many of the children had been brought into the world by the Sisters. Later they visited the English and Tamil High Schools and the Women’s Missionary Society in Jaffna and attended a meeting of the Tamil Ladies Auxiliary who wanted to hear about China. Gladys also saw the Dispensary and Training Home, meeting the staff and students to tell them of her work in China. She commented:

What splendid work those deaconesses are doing -they are breaking down age-long barriers of prejudice, blazing trails for an emancipated Christian womanhood, and showing to their own countrymen that God has a work for His daughters to do with honour and success. These Tamil deaconesses are now sometimes asked to preach at a general service, an entirely new departure, one that even the Pastors have been slow to allow but quick to appreciate. Puttur looks to the Deaconess Order in a very special way to uphold them in prayer. Do not let us fail them, or cease to remember that this work is peculiarly the bit of missionary service begun and maintained by our sisterhood.

Easter Hayden wrote a short pamphlet in 1933 with an appreciation of Gertrude Nettleship “our Periammah” and her work. It ended with an appeal:

All these developments bring responsibility, and the call for funds, staff and equipment and...*Retrenchment* is the cry of the day! Should we halt? Should we say we have reached the limit? For thirty-five years Sister Gertrude has laboured and established this work. For thirty-five years the members of the Wesley Deaconess Order and their friends have loyally supported her labours with love, prayer and gifts. We appeal to all Old friends and New friends to help the women

³² *The Agenda* (Oct.1936)

³³ *The Agenda* (Dec.1938) pp.8-9,14 (June 1939) p.6 cf. Stations of the Deaconesses 1938-9

of this land to meet the new opportunities and challenge to service that open to-day.³⁴

Elizabeth Baker gave a first hand account of the work at Puttur to the 1937 Convocation and Christine Cox, on behalf of the ex-United Methodist sisters, expressed their willingness to help with the Ceylon Fund.³⁵

During World War II contact was rather spasmodic, but in August 1942 it was learned that Elizabeth Baker, now at Batticaloa, was safe and well. Easter Hayden managed to get home at the end of March 1944 and retired. After her return no more appointments at Puttur are listed. Other deaconesses, who worked in Ceylon were at other stations, and, presumably, worked under the auspices of the Women's Auxiliary. Glory N. Swamisthos sent a letter, signed by all the deaconesses, from 1944 Jaffna Convocation, which had been attended by the Chairman of the District and representatives from the Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and Congregational churches.³⁶

Miss C. Hamilton wrote about the deaconess work and training in Ceylon in *The Agenda* of January 1946 emphasising that the work had three aspects – the evangelistic work in the villages, the medical work in the Dispensary and the Training Centre with three year courses for students wishing to become deaconesses and other shorter courses. She noted that there were 20 deaconesses altogether working in the Tamil speaking areas of North and East Ceylon and in the Colombo City Mission. Other denominations had taken advantage of the training offered.³⁷

Here we leave the specifically funded Wesley Deaconess Order work in Puttur. Obviously the Training Home, which started so humbly and with such faith had now grown to be of inestimable value in training Tamil women to work among their own people. The relationship with the Methodist Missionary Society and the Women's Auxiliary had changed and many Wesley Deaconesses were now working under their auspices. In 1951 Convocation sent £350 to the Mission House for Puttur, leaving the Ceylon Fund with a balance of £230. After discussion in Convocation and consultation the Mission House it was decided, after reference to the Ceylon Synod, that the Order's support should be transferred to the West Indies to help the new and growing Deaconess Order there. This was the end of an era as for 55 years the Order had supported the work in Puttur. The 1953 Convocation agreed it would now be more appropriate to change the fund's name to the Overseas Deaconess Fund.³⁸

Fifty-five years ago, in response to an appeal in Convocation, the Wesley Deaconess Order undertook to send two of its number to Puttur in North Ceylon

³⁴ *The Agenda* (Oct.1933) p.4

³⁵ RConv. II (1937) p.17

³⁶ *The Agenda* (Aug.1942) p.6, (July 1944) pp.11-12, (Christmas 1944) pp.7-8

³⁷ *The Agenda* (Jan.1946) pp.9-10

³⁸ RConv. II (1951) p.129, (1952) p.139, (1953) p.148; *WDMag.*(July 1953) p.11

and to raise the funds for their support. The medical and evangelistic work centred in Puttur, and particularly the training of Tamil women as Deaconesses, has during all those years been the special responsibility of the Order. But “the old order changeth”: the work in Ceylon is well established; on the other hand there is a newer and growing work in the West Indies and, largely through the vision and labour of our own Sisters, a small West Indian Order has come into being. So while the link with Puttur remains, and that work in Ceylon will ever have its place in the hearts and prayers of members of the Order, the financial support is to be transferred to the developing Deaconess work in the West Indies.³⁹

Part II - Organization and relation with the MMS

At their meeting on 12th September 1901 the Wesley Deaconess Committee formally decided ‘to accept responsibility for the support of the Wesley Deaconesses now labouring in Ceylon.’⁴⁰ On 5th December 1902 a report on the Ceylon work was presented to the Executive Committee which resolved that as both deaconesses ‘were allowed to come to come home on furlough in the next two years’ a third one should be sent out ‘to act as supply for the Sisters successively on furlough.’ By now, we note that Gertrude had done well over the five year term originally stipulated: 1897-1903 and Faith her five years. Evidently the Foreign Missionary Society was well pleased with the work being done by the deaconesses as they made a grant of £70 towards travelling expenses. However, there was a financial crisis when the Children’s Home withdrew its support because it wanted to support a worker of its own. Fortunately, Mr Thomas Firth offered to provide £35 towards the next year’s expenses, with the Order challenged to find the rest.⁴¹ The students at Ilkley held a Summer Sale and Concert and this continued for many years.⁴²

In February 1903 the Executive Committee learned that the Ceylon Mission Account had paid all claims up to the end of that financial year, but there was likely to be a deficit in the next two years. Financial commitments were: One deaconess in Ceylon, expected home in April 1903; one training in England; and another in Ceylon expected home in spring 1904. Mr Trimmer suggested and it was approved that:

1. That Deaconesses returning home shall be paid their full salary at the rate they receive when on the field, until they reach England. That from the date of landing in England Deaconesses on furlough shall be reckoned on the funds of the Institute.
2. That in the case of Sisters going out they shall be paid in England up to the date of their landing in Colombo from which date they shall be chargeable to the funds for the support of Sisters abroad & paid at that rate.
3. With regard to the months in which Sister Faith (or any other Sister) shall be living alone, an extra allowance at the rate of £15.0.0. a year be made to meet the

³⁹ *Wesley Deaconess Magazine* (July 1953) p.11

⁴⁰ WDIMins I p.98

⁴¹ WDIMins I pp.130-31

⁴² *FL* (March 1903) pp.36-41; (April 1903) p.54

extra cost of such living alone.

4. Provision is being made to provide a suitable Tamil worker to reside at Puttur & assist Sister Faith until the arrival of a second Sister. The salary of this woman should be met out of the Deaconess Fund until Sister Annie Capper arrives. Then her services will either be discontinued or met from local funds.⁴³

As it was hoped that Annie Capper would be able to stay on altogether, Sister Gertrude left for home on 9th March 1903, arriving in early April.⁴⁴

Bidding farewell to Gertrude as she prepared to go back to Puttur the 1904 Convocation was reminded that the Wesley Deaconess work there was now wholly supported by the Order. By the end of the year, when Faith was on furlough, there was concern that there might not be enough money to send her back and maintain three deaconesses in Ceylon. It was decided to approach the Missionary Committee to tell them that Annie Capper was available for appointment either at Puttur or elsewhere in the District where Tamil was spoken, as she knew the language, had two years experience and was a trained nurse. Another suggestion was that the Missionary Society might now employ all three Wesley Deaconess at Puttur under similar arrangements as those made for West Africa. At first it seemed the Wesleyan Missionary Society was either unable or unwilling to help, but Stephenson contacted Mrs Wiseman and eventually the Women's Auxiliary accepted Faith Hunter for work in Batticaloa⁴⁵ if the Order could find half the cost. Sister Dora Stephenson undertook to be personally responsible for raising £35 per annum. So Faith went to Batticaloa and was granted 'beyond her keep' £50 to cover travelling expenses, pocket money and her return outfit while she was on furlough. Stephenson reported:

For the first time, a **Wesley Deaconess** is going to foreign work **in connection with "Women's Auxiliary"** to the Wesleyan Missionary Society. Sister Faith Hunter ... is to go to Batticaloa to fill an important vacancy there. But her support will be provided by the Women's Auxiliary, and she will act under the direction of the Auxiliary's Committee. She will none the less continue to be a Wesley Deaconess. This is as it should be. The support of the Sisters at Puttur, by contributions given or collected by the Wesley Deaconess Order is altogether an exceptional thing. It is not the business of the Institute to support workers but to train them. As the Circuits or Missions at home support the workers with which we have supplied them, so the Missionary Society or the Women's Auxiliary will maintain the Deaconesses whom we place at their disposal...⁴⁶

As time went on arrangements between the Wesley Deaconess Order and the Women's Auxiliary were formalised with the Executive Committee, December 1910, insisting that 'where Wesley Deaconesses are employed by the Women's Auxiliary Society' the terms should be the same as they were for any other 'agents', with the deaconesses being paid directly and only £5

⁴³ WDIMins I pp.134-35

⁴⁴ *FL* July/August 1903, p.115,(Jan.1904) pp.7-8

⁴⁵ WDIMins I pp.223-24, 231-32, 234, 242

⁴⁶ *FL* (Oct. 1905) p.325; (Dec.1905) pp.358-9; (Jan.1907) p.13

being paid into the Superannuation Fund. Bearing in mind that Puttur was the special concern of the Order the same meeting spelled out financial arrangements for them, which shows its care and concern:

That the payment for Deaconesses at Puttur shall be £75 each per annum, payable quarterly, in advance.

That if satisfactory arrangements can be made, the money shall be forwarded direct to the Deaconess.

That in addition to this, a grant of £10 shall be made every second year for holiday expenses,

That in cases where a Deaconess is alone at her post, her allowance shall be at the rate of £90 a year.

That claims for medical attention shall be considered as they arise.

That at the end of five years' service, a furlough allowance of £12.10.0 a quarter shall be paid for one year, provided the Deaconesses is returning to her work.

If a Deaconess is not returning to the work, no furlough shall be paid except by a special decision of the Committee in each case as it arises.

In the case of a Deaconess on furlough who is returning to her work, a grant of £4 worth of uniform shall be paid at the beginning of the furlough, and £10 renewal of outfit at the end.⁴⁷

Here we shall leave Faith Hunter, as she was now working under the auspices of the Women's Auxiliary at Batticaloa.

Regulations for uniform to be worn overseas were laid down in June 1907:

11. For Countries with Tropical and sub-Tropical climates.

A. Full Dress. The navy blue Uniform with cuffs, collars bow, and bonnet, as worn at home, only the dress to be made of thin cashmere.

B. For afternoon wear, Sundays, and visiting. White drill skirts, with plain white muslin blouses, navy belts and bows. Plain straw shade hat, trimmed simply with white washing silk, or a helmet.

C. Working dresses may be worn. Blue-grey gingham skirts, with zephyr blouses to match, with blue belt and white bow.⁴⁸

Very sensible and practical!

As noted earlier, in 1908 Gertrude Nettleship's illness exacerbated the financial problems of the Ceylon Mission. The cost of Annie Capper's furlough, the passage and tropical outfit of Elizabeth Spence, who was sent out to cover her absence, plus Gertrude's illness had cost an extra £250, so an appeal was made to the Mission House and special money raising efforts undertaken. The Warden emphasised, yet again, that the function of the Order was to train

⁴⁷ WDIMins I pp.371,372

⁴⁸ WDIMins I p.299

deaconesses not to support mission workers.⁴⁹ Annie Capper married the Rev. William C. Bird, a missionary in the North Ceylon District (1906-23), in autumn 1909 and left the Order, but kept in touch with the deaconesses in Ceylon. In the autumn of 1911 her husband conducted special mission services in the Jaffna District and wrote to the Warden:

During a week's mission at Puttoor (sic) we had the splendid co-operation of the Sisters there.... Each night the Sisters brought from fifty to eighty Hindu women to the big meeting, and squatted down on the floor with them at one end, in a building otherwise full of men. Such a thing would have been considered incredible only a few years ago. The villages around Atchelu (Puttoor circuit) are tremendously influenced by Christianity, and I can truthfully say, mainly through the agency of the Sisters.⁵⁰

In 1910 arrangements were made with the Mission House about the employment of Wesley Deaconesses overseas. With regard to Ceylon it was agreed

That so long as the Wesley Deaconesses continue to support two of their number as agents of the Wesleyan Missionary Society in Putoor (sic), or (whenever the Society may desire a change), at any place the Missionary Committee may select, the cost of their outfit and passage shall be borne by the Missionary Committee, it being understood that when the Deaconesses have to support a worker on furlough, they do not undertake also to supply her place on the field. These arrangements to take effect from March 1st 1910, and to be re-considered at the end of two years.⁵¹

Later that year in order to clarify the arrangements the Executive Committee resolved, 1) that any Deaconess who left before her term of duty was over should refund part of her passage money to those who had paid it originally, but insisted that it had no responsibility for this 'as it gains no financial advantage from the employment of Deaconesses abroad' and the missionary deaconesses should be told of this decision. 2) that where Deaconesses were employed by the Women's Auxiliary Society the terms should be the same as for any others thus employed, with the Deaconesses being paid directly and only £5 a year being sent to the Order for the Superannuation Fund. 3) about Puttur the Committee agreed the following financial arrangements:

That the payment for Deaconesses at Puttur shall be £75 each per annum, payable quarterly, in advance. That if satisfactory arrangements can be made, the money shall be forwarded direct to the Deaconess. That in addition to this, a grant of £10 shall be made every second year for holiday expenses. That in cases where a Deaconess is alone at her post, her allowances shall be at the rate of £90 a year. That claims for medical attention shall be considered as they arise. That at the end of five years' service, a furlough allowance of £12.10.0 a quarter shall be paid for

⁴⁹ *FL* (Feb.1909) p.19, (April 1909) p.53

⁵⁰ *FL* (Feb.1910) p.26, (Dec.1911) p.174

⁵¹ *WDIMins* I p.361-62

one year, provided the Deaconess is returning to her work. If a Deaconess is not returning to the work, no furlough shall be paid except by special decision of the Committee in each case as it arise. In the case of a Deaconess on furlough who is returning to her work a grant of £4 worth of uniform shall be paid at the beginning of the furlough, and £10 or outfit at the end.

Faith Hunter must have been regarded as a special case because she received £10 from the Women's Auxiliary, and the Order paid her furlough allowance from the Ceylon Fund, as she was returning to Ceylon but as a missionary's wife, not a deaconess.⁵²

The records note in several years money raising for the Ceylon Fund was so successful that not only were the Deaconesses able to support their colleagues in Puttur, also but give contributions to the Centenary Fund (1912, 1913) and in 1915-16 give £100 to the Missionary Society to help send another deaconess nurse to China.

Reports during World War I highlight the dangers of wartime travel: chased by submarines, one taken as prisoner of war for a short time on the liner Appam, while a former deaconess and her husband died when their ship was torpedoed in the Irish Sea. When, in 1917, the Government prohibited Lady Missionaries from sailing to or from their appointments the Warden, in correspondence with the relevant Chairmen of the Districts and the Deaconesses concerned, suggested that holidays should be taken locally 'for the conservation of their health.' This prohibition meant that Gertrude Nettleship was alone in Puttur, while Easter, on furlough, was unable to return.⁵³

In September 1924 Miss Polkinhorne of the Women's Auxiliary went to live at Ilkley 'to affiliate the work of the Deaconess Order with the Women's Auxiliary.' Perhaps it was as a result of her work that in December the General Committee was told that the present position at Puttur, is that 'The Women's Auxiliary has now taken over the administration of the work there, the Wesley Deaconess Order agreeing to be responsible for the allowances of two workers at £140 a year for the present and £280 altogether - also for £15 per year to be sent by the W. Deaconess Order to each Sister direct as long as the present workers remain there.'⁵⁴ Apart from recording appointments, sailings and arrivals of deaconesses working under the auspices of the Women's Auxiliary there is very little else in the Wesley Deaconess Order records about their work in Ceylon. Each year the students held a Missionary Anniversary to raise money for the Ceylon Fund to support their deaconesses at Puttur.

In December an anomaly came to light in the arrangements with the Women's Auxiliary when it was pointed out that a candidate, Miss Ella Twinem, who had already been accepted by the Women's Auxiliary for overseas service, would risk losing her more generous annuity from it if she joined the Order. Evidently Miss Twinem felt a call to the Order very strongly, or trusted

⁵² WDIMins I pp.371-72,375

⁵³ WDIMins II pp.78-79, 109, report inserted between pp.130-31

⁵⁴ WDIMins II p.212

that things would be sorted out, because in 1928 she was listed in the Appointments as being in the North Ceylon District engaged in ‘language study’ and thereafter served, according to the Wesley Deaconess Appointments lists, in that District until 1938/9, though a note was appended to the Committee Meeting Minutes that she and two others who were serving abroad had never been consecrated and were still regarded as Probationers. In 1935 one had married and resigned, one was removed from the probationer list and further enquiries about Ella were to be made at the Mission House. As her name disappeared from the Deaconess roll of members, if she continued as a missionary in later years it was probably under the auspices of the Mission House.⁵⁵ Maltby had considerable correspondence with the Women’s Department of the WMMS about the contributions paid on behalf of Deaconesses engaged by the Women’s Department towards their Annuitant and Retiring Funds. As a result they agreed to contribute £10 per head for each Deaconess and in addition to give the Order £125 per year towards their training, but more permanent arrangements were made in December 1931:

1. Deaconesses appointed from January 1st 1930

The Women’s Department shall include in the Women’s Department Pension Fund all Deaconesses appointed by it to the Field from January 1st 1930.

If a Deaconess appointed on or after January 1st 1930, retires from the Field before the completion of 25 years’ service, the Deaconess Order shall accept responsibility for her from September 1st following her retirement.

In such a case the Women’s Department shall transfer all payments made on her behalf from the Women’s Department Pension Fund into the Annuitant Fund of the Wesley Deaconess Order.

2. Deaconesses appointed prior to January 1st 1930

The Women’s Department may grant all Wesley Deaconesses, appointed by the Missionary Society prior to January 1st 1930 who have served for 25 years and who have attained the age of 55, a sum not exceeding £30 per annum, in addition to the Pension granted by the Wesley Deaconess Order, which it is assumed will not be less than £70 per annum.⁵⁶

In time circumstances changed and Sister Hettie Addy, having told the 1930 Convocation that £150 was still needed to support the two deaconesses in Puttur, suggested that perhaps the time had come to reconsider Order’s responsibility to the Women’s Department for the support of two Deaconesses in Ceylon.⁵⁷

Easter Hayden wrote a short pamphlet in 1933 with an appreciation of Gertrude Nettleship “our Periammah” and her work. It ended with an appeal:

All these developments bring responsibility, and the call for funds, staff and

⁵⁵ WDOMins III pp.16,27, WDO Roll of Members; WDO Appointments Lists

⁵⁶ WDIMins II pp.241,249,266

⁵⁷ *The Agenda* (June 1930) pp.8,10

equipment and... *Retrenchment* -is the cry of the day! Should we halt? Should we say we have reached the limit? For thirty-five years Sister Gertrude has laboured and established this work. For thirty-five years the members of the Wesley Deaconess Order and their friends have loyally supported her labours with love, prayer and gifts. We appeal to all Old friends and New friends to help the women of this land to meet the new opportunities and challenge to service that open to-day.⁵⁸

Elizabeth Baker gave a first hand account of the work at Puttur to the 1937 Convocation and Christine Cox, on behalf of the ex-United Methodist sisters, expressed their willingness to help with the Ceylon Fund.⁵⁹

During World War II contact was rather spasmodic, but in August 1942 it was learned that Elizabeth Baker, now at Batticaloa, was safe and well. Easter Hayden managed to get home at the end of March 1944 and retired. After her return no more appointments at Puttur are listed. Other deaconesses, who worked in Ceylon were at other stations, and, presumably, worked under the auspices of the Women's Auxiliary. Glory N. Swamisthos sent a letter, signed by all the deaconesses, from 1944 Jaffna Convocation, which had been attended by the Chairman of the District and representatives from the Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and Congregational churches.⁶⁰

Extra

On 16th March 1934 a Sub-Committee had to consider the matter of two candidates who had been sent to Ilkley by the Mission House and also a missionary on furlough from Ceylon who all wished to join the Order. It was agreed to recommend their acceptance on condition that, as they had offered for the Order from the missionary route and not vice versa, they should not 'be treated as coming under the arrangement made with the Missionary Society in December 1929'. If for any reason they returned home any employment should be a matter of consultation between the Order and the Mission House, but the ultimate decision would rest with the Order.⁶¹ There were representatives of the Mission House on the Wesley Deaconess Committee which facilitated consultations. The Mission House had paid £150 less 2.5% a year for Deaconesses working for it, but by 1937 the training given had been so appreciated that more missionary candidates were being sent and so the Mission House agreed to pay an additional £20 for each of their candidates.

In 1940 there were negotiations with the Mission House about annuities for deaconess missionaries and it was decided that Women's Department of the Missionary Society would 'take over responsibility for the pension of the seventeen Deaconesses who are still on the Deaconess Pension fund, upon the payment from the Wesley Deaconess Retiring Fund of the

⁵⁸ *The Agenda* (Oct.1933) p.4

⁵⁹ RConv. II (1937) p.17

⁶⁰ *The Agenda* (Aug.1942) p.6, (July 1944) pp.11-12, (Christmas 1944) pp.7-8

⁶¹ WDOMins IIIpp.15-16,17

sum of £4,3000, which represents about £200 more than the contributions paid by Women's Work on behalf of these Deaconesses, with 3.5% compound interest. Under the Women's Work Pension fund regulations a missionary is due to receive a pension of £100 after 25 years' service when she has attained the age of 55, or alternatively a pension of £60 after 20 years' service at the age of 50.' Maltby said he felt the settlement to be fair and even generous.⁶²

From 1958 right up to 1972, there were from time to time, negotiations with the MMS and the WDO about pensions, but maybe that is for another time!

In 1942 the Rev W. Machin, Chairman of the Lucknow and Benares District asked about the possibility of ordaining probationer deaconesses abroad. Perhaps having in mind the previous incident of Ella Twinem it was decided to consult the Women's Work Department, and it was agreed that Mary Johnson should be ordained in India. However, this did not happen before she was due home on furlough, but as she did not arrive in time for the ordination service on May 7th 1943 at Reading she was eventually ordained at 1943 Sheffield Convocation.⁶³

Another instance of the close relationship between the Order and the Missionary Society came in 1942 when Grace Woolcott, a missionary in India for 14 years before her health failed and who had since been working in the Post Office, wished to enter the Order. She spent a term at the College, followed by six months in circuit. After a satisfactory health report she was accepted and discussions were held with the Mission House regarding financial arrangements for the Retiring Fund. It was agreed that Women's Work would 'pay in one sum £9 for each year of the sixteen years between Sister Grace's twenty-eighth birthday and her entry into the Deaconess Order plus 3 5% compound interest.' If she had to retire before she was 60 there would be a review. On 15th October 1943 Sister Grace was ordained at an 'emergency Ordination Service' in the College Chapel, as, having been appointed to Johannesburg, she was likely to have to sail at short notice. She worked at the Central Hall there until 1949 when she returned India. Payments made to the Deaconess Retiring Fund by the Missionary Society were returned plus the contributions, and accrued interest, she had made to it since 1943. Her pension was now the responsibility of the MMS. Grace retired from Nilgris in the Mysore District in of the Church of South India in 1962.

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⁶² WDOMins III pp. 98, 100,105, 108,114 (N.B. Minutes of the finance committee meetings from Oct.1939 are filed at back, but pages are numbered as if they were in date order of combined Minutes)

⁶³ WDOMins III pp.142,143,163,167,199