

William Warrener's Contribution to Methodist Missionary History

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William Warrener

Introduction

The context of William Warrener's offer for missionary service is given by looking at the role of John Wesley and Thomas Coke in promoting Christianity in the British Colonies and amongst 'heathen' peoples. Their evangelical concern for the propagation of the Gospel was generated through many personal contacts and correspondents who informed Wesley in detail as to the rise and progress of Methodism in Antigua.

The first part of this paper looks at William Warrener's service as a Wesleyan Preacher in both England and the Methodist District of Antigua in the West Indies. This includes the offer made to John Wesley to go overseas and his consequent ordination. The sources of Warrener's information about the planting of Wesleyan Methodism in the Western world are suggested. This knowledge was gained primarily through John Wesley and Thomas Coke and their many personal conversations.

The second part examines the speech made by Warrener in seconding the Second Resolution at the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) held on October 6 1813. At this inaugural meeting in Leeds he observed, 'I am the only person in this numerous assembly, that has been employed in any of the Missions now so successfully carried on by our body...' From his observation and experience he gave 'plain matters of fact' of 'many providential events' in order to 'correct several little mistakes, into which many writers have fallen.'¹

¹ *Methodist Magazine* 37 (1814) 511 - John Wesley's *Arminian Magazine* [AM] was renamed *Methodist Magazine* [MM] in 1798 and *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* [WMM] in 1822, (London: Conference Office)..

John Baxter took a year's 'furlough', although he was in fact stationed at Newbury 1799-1800. There is the possibility that Baxter regaled his congregations and acquaintances with many missionary anecdotes that were subsequently changed in recycling. In correcting these mistakes, Warrener supplies a number of historical events that are not verified by other primary sources. These incidents are examined as to their veracity by considering the knowledge Warrener gleaned before sailing for the West Indies, from surviving pioneers in Antigua and from oral tradition, added to which was his own personal experience.

John Wesley and the Americas

When Nathaniel Gilbert began Methodism in Antigua in 1759, 1.6 million people were living in thirteen self-governing States of North America. There also the first Methodist witness was by laymen and women, principally the Irish immigrants Barbara Heck and Philip Embury, together with Robert Strawbridge and Captain Thomas Webb of the British army.²

At the 1769 Wesleyan Conference, Q.13 posed 'We have a pressing call from our brethren at New York (who have built a preaching house) to come over and help them. Who is willing to go?' Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor responded.³ John Wesley later sent to America Francis Asbury and Richard Wright in 1771 and George Shadford and Thomas Rankin in 1773. Together with John King and Robert Williams who had entered America as laymen, and the Americans William Watters, Abraham Whitworth and Joseph Yearbry, they held a first Conference of Ministers in Philadelphia from July 4 1773. Wesley's itinerant Preachers were to be stationed:

New York, Thomas Rankin; *Philadelphia*, George Shadford [these two to exchange in four months]; *New Jersey*, John King, William Watters; *Baltimore*, Francis Asbury, Robert Strawbridge, Abraham Whitworth, Joseph Yearbry; *Norfolk*, Richard Wright; *Petersburg*, Robert Williams.

However, the festering hostility of colonial rebellion in the American States leading up to the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and the demand that ministers swore an oath of allegiance and take up arms against Britain, led to Episcopal and Methodist clergy returning to England. These included Boardman and Pilmoor in 1774, Shadford (1776), Rankin (1777) and Rodda (1778). Only Francis Asbury remained in America. After the Declaration of Independence, the Bishop of London had no legal jurisdiction in the United States and refused to ordain and send preachers.

After their first meeting on August 18 1776, Dr Thomas Coke was associated with John Wesley in world affairs. Because of the overwhelming need of Americans for pastoral oversight and the ministrations of the church, on September 10th Wesley declared his conviction that he, as a Presbyterian, had the authority to set apart some persons for the work of the ministry in America by the imposition of hands and prayer.⁴ Two preachers had volunteered to go to America to replace those ministers who had been forced out. John Wesley, Thomas Coke and James Creighton, all Presbyters

2 Thomas Webb would marry Grace Gilbert, the sister of Nathaniel, in 1773.

3 Wesleyan Minutes of Conference, Aug. 3 1769, vol. 1, book 1, ch. iv (digital edition.)

4 Thomas Coke's Ordination Certificate, Rupert Davies, Raymond George, Gordon Rupp, *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* [HMCGB] 4 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1988) 4:199.

of the Church of England, ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey to the ministry of the word and sacraments on September 2 1784. Dr Coke was 'set apart' as Superintendent of the work in the United States with power to induct Francis Asbury into the same office. This led to the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Baltimore in December 1774.

Thomas Coke's Plans for Mission

Towards the end of 1783, Dr Coke and Thomas Parker issued a *Plan of the Society for the Establishment of Missions among the Heathens*.⁵ They proposed the formation of a Missionary Institution principally to raise funds. A first Annual General Meeting was held on Tuesday, January 17 1784, but without John Wesley's support nothing came of it.⁶

This Plan for Missions coincided with Coke's contribution in drawing up the Deed of Declaration, establishing Methodists on a legal footing on February 28 1784. A hundred Preachers constituted a *Yearly Conference of the people called Methodists* to be held in London, Bristol or Leeds.⁷

John Wesley's *Journal* entry for Thursday March 24 1785 reads,

I now was considering how strangely the grain of mustard-seed, planted about fifty years ago, has grown up. It has spread through all Great Britain and Ireland; the Isle of Wight, and the Isle of Man; then to America, from the Leeward Islands, through the whole continent, into Canada and Newfoundland. And the societies, in all these parts, walk by one rule, knowing religion is holy tempers; and striving to worship God, not in form only, but likewise "in spirit and in truth."⁸

At the Methodist Conference on August 1st, Wesley set apart 'three of our well-trying preachers, John Pawson, Thomas Hanby and Joseph Taylor, to mission in Scotland.'

In 1786 Dr Coke printed a twelve page pamphlet proposing a movement for Missions with a prefatory letter by John Wesley dated March 12 1786. In this Wesley gives his blessing to Coke's proposal for what later generations would call 'Home Missions' and 'Foreign Missions.' 'This therefore is the first object, to establish and support an Erse (language) Mission in the highlands and adjacent Islands of Scotland.' The second object was a French language project 'To nurse and carry on work ... in our islands of Jersey and Guernsey.' The U.S.A. Methodist Episcopal Church had begun work in Nova Scotia, Quebec and Newfoundland, so Coke's fourth object was 'To send missionaries to our provinces in America and the island of Newfoundland.' He wrote about the West Indies and the work of John Baxter among the Negro slaves of Antigua and said there was also a call from St Kitts. 'The third object of our institution, - To establish and support missions in our West Indian islands.'

5 John A. Vickers, *Thomas Coke. Apostle of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1969) pp. 133-4.

6 John Pritchard, *Methodists and their Missionary Societies 1760-1900* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate Pub. Co., 2013) p.9, citing Vickers, *Thomas Coke...* 133-4.

7 Leeds Conference of Preachers, August 1784. HMCGB 4:197-8.

8 *The Journal of the Rev John Wesley, A.M.* 4 vols. (London: Conference Office, 1903) 4:286. Nehemiah Curnock, in his abridged edn., (London: Charles Kelly, 1903) p. 394 gives April 24th.

John Wesley's sources for historical information

To assess the authenticity of Warrener's contribution to Methodist Missionary History we look at his sources. His primary source for knowledge of early Wesleyan beginnings in the West Indies was John Wesley, to a certain extent Charles Wesley, and after him Thomas Coke. Before looking at Warrener's own learning experience, it is therefore necessary to examine the ways in which the Wesley brothers learned of Antigua and the work begun by Nathaniel Gilbert in 1759. This was through occasional conversations with Francis Gilbert (c.1753-63, 1764-73, 1775-1779), Nathaniel Gilbert (1757-59), Mary Leadbetter Gilbert (1762-73, 1775-81) and Mary Gilbert, daughter of Nathaniel (e.g. April 11-13 1765 at Francis Gilbert's house in Kendal.) Francis, Nathaniel and Mary Leadbetter Gilbert wrote letters from Antigua to John Wesley, as did John Baxter.

(a) Francis Gilbert

Francis was the younger brother of Nathaniel, born on the Gilbert estate in Antigua in 1725.⁹ After profligate escapades, Francis fled to Jamaica and then went on to London where he became acquainted with the Wesleys. Under their preaching he became a Methodist c.1753 and one of Wesley's Preachers in 1758, serving first in Bristol in 1759. He had a house in Wandsworth, London, during the time of Nathaniel's visit 1757-59.¹⁰ Mindful of the need for the Gospel in his home island, he corresponded with Charles Wesley about obtaining Anglican ordination.¹¹

Francis conducted an evangelistic campaign in Antigua 1763-64 during which he reported back to John Wesley.¹² Because Mary Leadbetter had returned to England in 1762, Francis took the five Gilbert girls with him when he went back in May 1764. Mary continued their education and served as a companion/housekeeper to Francis. That year he resumed work as an itinerant preacher. This close acquaintance with Wesley continued as in 1764 he was designated 'Secretary of the Preacher's Fund.' After Francis located in Chester, a centre of Methodist activity, he married Mary Leadbetter. They continued to be guardians to Nathaniel and Elizabeth's five daughters. In 1773 Francis and Mary returned to Antigua where they saw revival and built up the Methodist work.¹³ Wesley continued to hear about the Antiguan Methodist work through further correspondence from Francis.¹⁴ After this two-year spell, Francis returned to England and was located at Madeley, another centre of Methodist influence. Francis's failing health led to his death on July 1 1779 at the age of 54.

(b) Nathaniel Gilbert

In the second place, we see John Wesley's acquaintance and correspondence with Nathaniel Gilbert. This began with the Gilbert family's visit to England 1757 to 1759, expressly to meet and hear Wesley. Three meetings in Wandsworth are noted, on one occasion two of Gilbert's domestic slaves

9 do John H. Lenton, compiler and editor, *John Wesley's Preachers, 1740-1791*, alphabetical listing.

10 Phyllis Plummer, *Methodism in Wandsworth* (unpub.)

11 John Wesley to Francis Gilbert, London, February 1759. Robert Glen, Wesley Historical Society [WHS] *Proceedings*, 53 (Oct. 2002) 223. Francis Gilbert to Charles Wesley, Bristol, March 15 1760, John Rylands University Library, Manchester, [MARC] CW 2/54. Frank Baker, 'Francis Gilbert and Methodist Ordination.' WHS *Proceedings* 27 (1949-50) 146-8, where Baker gives March 5th. Copied by Charles Wesley to his wife, Bristol, April 11, 1760.

12 Francis Gilbert to John Wesley, May 16 1763, AM (1782) 5:159; June 18 1763, AM 5:384-6.

13 Robert Glen, *An Early Methodist Revival in the West Indies: Insights from a Neglected letter of 1774* (in preparation.)

14 Francis Gilbert to John Wesley, August 25 1773, AM 9 (1786) 567-8.

were baptised.¹⁵ John also baptised Elizabeth Gilbert, born in 1758. Correspondence included letters from Nathaniel to Wesley between 1759 and 1765, as well as to brother Francis in 1760 and 1765.¹⁶ In telling of the progress of Methodism, the editor of the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine entitled the first letter 'An account of the dawn of a Gospel Day'.

(c) John Walsh and Mary Walsh Leadbetter Gilbert

John Walsh was corresponding with John Wesley by the end of 1755. That year, his sister Mary, married a Mr Leadbetter. After losing her second child, she was influenced by Charles Wesley's preaching and became a Methodist. About the time when her husband died, Mary wrote to John Wesley on June 1st 1758, after which she joined the Gilbert household as Governess. When she agreed to accompany the Gilberts to Antigua, Mary's niece Henrietta described her as 'a female missionary' because her primary vocation was to instruct poor Africans.¹⁷

In a letter to her brother John Walsh, Mary gave details of her first voyage and arrival in Antigua and told of Nathaniel Gilbert's witness and preaching.¹⁸ Extracts of this letter were copied to John Wesley. Further letters from Antigua to her brother were published in *Spiritual Letters*.¹⁹ These include letters to John Wesley from Antigua dated June 21 1760, May 3 1761, Nov. 17 1761; letters from Chester dated Nov. 15 1765 and Oct. 30 1765. Mary also corresponded with both John and Charles Wesley on her return to England in 1762.²⁰ *Spiritual Letters* also included two letters written in London to Francis Gilbert in Antigua, May 17 1762 and Aug. 24 1763. One of Mary's letters, written during her second visit to Antigua, was copied on October 29th to Mary Bosanquet, one of the pious women closely associated with the Methodist revival.²¹ Many of these letters were published in the *Arminian Magazine*, later the *Methodist Magazine*.²² John Walsh continued to correspond with the Wesleys, for example, in 1762 he wrote a long letter to Charles giving copious details of his spiritual life.²³

Mary educated the daughters Nathaniel and Elizabeth over a period of fourteen years, first as tutor, then housekeeper to Francis Gilbert and as his wife from 1767. In all she spent more than fifteen years in Antigua. Mary Leadbetter Gilbert was also able to keep John Wesley fully informed of the development of Methodism in Antigua when she met John Wesley on various occasions through her relationship with the Gilberts.

15 Curnock, *Wesley's Journal*, vol.4, pp. 277, 280, 299.

16 Nathaniel Gilbert to John Wesley, Sep. 18 1764, AM (1782) 5:605-7; July 22 1765, AM (1783) 6:329-31. Nathaniel Gilbert to Francis Gilbert, May 10 1760, AM 3 (1780), 387-9 and May 10 1765.

17 Henrietta F. Gilbert, *Memoirs of the late Mrs Mary Gilbert, with some account of Mr. Francis Gilbert, (her husband) Second son of the Honourable Nathaniel Gilbert, of Antigua... in a letter to Rev Mr Benson* (London: Cordeux, 1817) p. 7.

18 Mary Leadbetter to John Walsh, April 30 1759, AM 3 (1780) 330-2.

19 Editor, *Spiritual Letters: By Several Eminent Christians* (Chester: pr. Read and Huntley, 1767/8) Most of the 'Spiritual Letters' are signed 'M.L.' Although the publication date is 1767, some letters written in 1768 are included. These are signed 'M.G.', presumably because Mary Leadbetter had married Francis Gilbert in November 1767.

20 Henrietta Gilbert, *Memoirs*, p. 9.

21 Mary Gilbert to John Walsh, Antigua, Aug. 6 1774, extract to Mary Bosanquet Oct. 29 1774, MARC, MAM, Fl.7/8/4. Gareth Lloyd brought this letter to the attention of Robert Glen, *The Fletcher-Tooth Collection*, 7 vols. (Manchester, 1997-2004.)

22 Mary Leadbetter Gilbert to John Wesley, May 4 1766, Jan. 14 1779, Nov 20 1783, AM (1791) 443,449; Feb. 7 1784, AM (1791) 449. There is a further letter in the *Methodist Magazine* after John Wesley's death dated Jan. 14 1804.

23 John Walsh to Charles Wesley, Aug. 11 1762, MARC, Early Methodist Volume, p.134.

Dr Coke recalled that Mary told of her prayers and those of Baxter 'that some faithful labourers might be sent to minister to them... But though application had been made to Mr Wesley, the difficulties and obstacles were too powerful to be overcome, the wishes and abilities not corresponding to the ardour of the soul.'²⁴

(d) Mary Gilbert

The first child of Nathaniel and Elizabeth Gilbert, young Mary was born on February 28 1751. In the house of Francis and Mary in England she received letters from her parents giving the latest news. On Sunday May 4 1765 she wrote, 'My poor PAPA is in a bad state of health.' On Monday June 16 she had received a 'letter from dear MAMMA telling me of papa's health.' She was therefore able to update John Wesley on Antigua affairs when he visited the Gilbert home that year. Her Journal was corrected by John Wesley who prefaced it before publication.²⁵

Mary began her Journal on January 1 1765. On Saturday 5th she 'wrote letters to my dear friends in Antigua.' She then quoted the 5th verse of a New Year Hymn:

O that each in the day of his coming may say:

I have fought my way through, I have finished the work thou didst give me to do.

On her birthday on February 28th, she quoted the 3rd verse of the hymn, using the first person singular:

My life is a dream, My time as a stream glides swiftly away,

And the fugitive moment refuses to stay.

Mary shows that the first Antigua Methodists were well versed in the hymns of Wesley and Watts. These included one of Charles Wesley's renowned hymns, 'Wresting Jacob.'²⁶ Mary was not to know that she would die prematurely three years later on Friday January 21 1768.

(e) John Baxter

A fourth source for information acquired by John Wesley was John Baxter, who had been in the Methodist Society for twelve years and a Class Leader at Chatham dockyard. He commenced preaching on December 23 1771, and although located at the naval dockyard in Chatham, he was a supply preacher in the London District. Baxter must have learned from Wesley about the need for preachers in Antigua, so as a shipwright, he accepted a position at the Government dockyard in Antigua. He landed at English Harbour on April 2 1778. Dr Coke wrote, 'On his arrival in Antigua, being constrained by the love of God he openly preached the Gospel.'²⁷ This open air preaching in the town of St John's was under a tree to a 'mixed crowd of white, black and yellow'.²⁸

24 Thomas Coke, *History of the West Indies*, 3 vols. (London: printed for the author, 1811) Reprinted (Miami, FL: Mnemosyne Pub/ Co., 1969) 2:433.

25 Mary (L) Gilbert, *An Extract from Miss Mary Gilbert's Journal*, entry for March 16 1766. (Chester: pr. J. Harvey, 1768) Methodist Missionary Society Archives [MMSA] Special Collections Reading Room, School of Oriental and African Studies [SOAS] London: MMSL AM CR140; 4th edn. annotated, (London: pr. J. Paramour, 1787) MMSL AM CR80.

26 Mary Gilbert, *Journal*, Friday June 21 1765. John Wesley's *Collection of Hymns* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1877) still retained 13 of the original 14 verses, divided into two hymns, Numbered 140 & 141.

27 Coke, *History of West Indies*, 2:248.

28 William Warrener, Leeds, October 6 1813.

Having discovered a few disciples of Jesus in St John's, twenty days after his arrival Baxter wrote to Wesley reporting on his early ventures.²⁹ Thereafter, there were regular communications detailing the progress of Wesleyan Methodism in Antigua.³⁰ Wesley learned of his marriage, the use of his wife's house for worship and meetings and the need for preachers.

Writing in 1783 about the building of a chapel, Baxter said, 'as soon as this work is completed, and we can maintain a preacher; or if you think it is expedient, I will come to Conference next year...'. This implies that he was thinking of being officially set apart as one of Wesley's Travelling Preachers for work in Antigua.³¹ However, following discussions between Wesley and Coke, it was agreed that Baxter should go to Baltimore for the inaugural Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church where he and Jeremiah Lambert were elected as Elders and stationed in Antigua. Unable to be present on Christmas Day in 1784, Baxter was ordained by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury on June 1 and 2 of the following year.³² Baxter returned to Antigua as an Elder and Coke sailed the same day for England. A few months later in 1785, Coke reported to Wesley the ordinations that had taken place in America and the latest news from Antigua. The following year, Jeremiah Lambert was forced to return to the U.S.A. because of his precarious health. This had left a thousand church members without adequate pastoral oversight and unlimited missionary opportunities. This knowledge persuaded Wesley and Coke to appoint Warrener to Antigua in 1786.

News was frequently carried from the West Indian islands by naval vessels, packets and merchant ships laden with sugar, tobacco and cotton. However, the above selection of sources only indicates some of the documented instances of the exchange of information.

1. William Warrener - Wesley's Travelling Preacher

Born at Strensall in the North Riding of Yorkshire in January 1750, William Warrener was accepted as a travelling preacher by John Wesley in 1779 and stationed in Gainsborough.³³ This was followed by a year each in Grimsby, Gainsborough again, Aberdeen, Dundee, Berwick and Brecon. Coke's 1784 proposal outlined the character of missionaries saying, 'that the spirit of a missionary must be of the most zealous, most devoted, and self-denying kind; nor is anything more required to constitute a missionary for the heathen nations, than good sense, integrity, great piety, and amazing zeal.' William Warrener was amongst those recognised as 'Men, possessing all these qualifications in a high degree, (that) we have among us...' Warrener had demonstrated in six Circuits the qualities looked for in Missionaries, added to which was the willingness to submit entirely to God's guidance mediated through John Wesley and Thomas Coke.

29 John Baxter to John Wesley, April 16 1778, AM 2 (1788) 485.

30 John Baxter to John Wesley, April 22 1778, June 10 1779, AM 12 (1779); June 10 1782, MMSA Box 439, AM 13 (1790) 439-40.

31 Coke, *History of West Indies*, 2:431, 433. John Baxter to John Wesley, Antigua, June 10 1782. MMSA Box 39, AM 13 (1790) 439-40.

32 Missing from the English editions of Coke's *Journal*, this was printed in the Philadelphia edition of the *Arminian Magazine*, vol. i, 1789.

33 Lenton, *John Wesley's Preachers*, alphabetical listing. Albert Mosley, Database of Wesleyan/Methodist Missionaries, 11893/12,860, accessed 16/04/2013.

Warrener's call to overseas mission and ordination

In addition to the general conversations between key players in the missionary drama, Warrener attended the annual Methodist Conferences including the 1784 Conference of Preachers in Leeds and again in 1785 when there was an appeal for more ministers for North America. He recounted,

I told Mr. Wesley, in the year 1785, that I was at his, and the Lord's disposal to go to America or wherever I might be wanted. At the Conference held in Bristol the following year (1786), I was appointed to go to Antigua, as an assistant to Mr. Baxter. I was informed of the place of my destination by Dr. Coke: on which I went directly to Mr. Wesley, and said, 'Sir, is it your desire that I should go to Antigua?' His answer was, "It is." On which I replied, 'I have nothing more to say: I go in the name of the Lord.'³⁴

Warrener was ordained by John Wesley at the Bristol Conference that convened on July 25 1786. Wesley's ordinations were not normally in Conference hours, so at 4.00 am on July 28 Warrener, along with Joshua Keighly and William Hammett were ordained as Deacons, and on the following day, July 29 1786 as Elders.³⁵

Warrener's Ordination Certificate reads as follows:

To all to whom these presents shall come, John Wesley, M.A., late fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, sendeth Greeting.

WHEREAS it hath been represented to me that many of the people called Methodists under my care in America, stand in need at present of proper persons to administer the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper among them; I therefore do hereby make known unto all men that I did on the twenty-ninth day of July last solemnly set apart for the office of an Elder in the Church of God by the imposition of my hands and prayer (being assisted herein by other ordained Ministers) and with a single eye to the glory of God, William Warrener whom I judge to be a proper person to administer the Sacrament of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And I do recommend him as such to all whom it may concern.) In testimony whereof I have hereunto put my hand and Seal the first day of August in the year of our Lord 1786, eighty six. JOHN WESLEY.³⁶

It is noted that Warrener's ordination was because of the need of the people called Methodists in America and that Antigua is not specifically mentioned. In the first years, work in the West Indies was considered part of the American mission and Methodist Episcopal Conference took the initiative in ordaining and appointing Ministers for Antigua.

Providential voyage to Antigua

Dr Coke, together with Warrener, William Hammett and John Clarke, sailed on a brig bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia, on September 24th. On the first Sunday, Warrener preached in Portsmouth

34 MM (1814) p.514. See Edgar W. Thompson, *Nathaniel Gilbert. Lawyer and Evangelist* (London: Epworth Press, 1960) pp 28-9.

35 John Wesley, *Standard Journal*, vol. vii, pp. 192-3. *WHS Proceedings*, 9.7 (1914) 149, and 33 (June 1962) 118-9.

36 Warrener's ordination certificate as an Elder is held at the New Room, Bristol. Copy in *WHS Proceedings* 18 (March 1932) 112. Thompson, *Nathaniel Gilbert*, p.29. Thompson gives 29th as ordination as Deacon and the following day as Elder, p.28. Wesley's Journal reads: Friday July 28 1786, 'Pr., ordained, J.K., W. War, W. Ha.'

and en route led prayers whilst Coke preached.³⁷ The missionaries' epic and providential journey that brought them to Antigua is not detailed here. The newly arrived missionaries and John Baxter (Lambert had returned to America) held the first ever Infant Conference of Methodist preachers in the West Indies on January 5 1787.³⁸

Glimpses of Warrener's work in the Leeward Islands.

In his *History of Antigua*, Brian Dyde writes of William Warrener, 'the first missionary ever appointed by the Methodist Church to minister to non-Christian black people in 1786.' Historians tend to overlook the contributions of Lambert and Baxter, ordained by the Methodist Episcopal Church (USA.)

John Baxter had found a handful of Methodists keeping fellowship, about thirty members in the town of St John's, when he arrived in Antigua in 1778. Although he was fully employed as a shipwright at Nelson's dockyard and later a cabin-keeper in charge of stores, this Local Preacher had built up the church membership to 600 in his first year. Before the arrival of Warrener, three preaching places had been established: English Harbour, Parham, and St John's where a chapel had been opened on November 8 1783. At the time of Warrener's arrival, there were a thousand in Methodist Society Classes in Antigua, almost entirely Negro slaves.³⁹ This was the result of Baxter's work with the assistance of Mary Gilbert (widow of Francis) from 1781 and the Irish family from the beginning of 1784. Warrener's initial appointment was to assist John Baxter who continued as the Superintendent Minister in Antigua until he died in 1806 (apart from 1787-91 when he was in the St Vincent Carib Mission.) As a result, Warrener entered an established and organised Methodist work.

(a) Membership growth, mission in St Eustatius and advice to missionaries

Warrener told the Leeds Meeting that in 'the first year of my being in Antigua, we had as many members added to Mr Baxter's flock, as made the whole number account to two thousand, six hundred souls.' The truth of this statement is acknowledged by Coke.⁴⁰

The particular usefulness of Mr Warrener, since he had been established in this island (Antigua), it would be ungrateful to overlook. Mr Baxter, it is true, had, under God, been the father of this blessed work, and in a certain sense may be said to have sown the seed which Mr Warrener had been called to reap; but since the arrival of the latter, he had added not less than a thousand to the Society; who, so far as it was capable of judging, were worthy members.⁴¹

Subject to the itinerant system, Warrener spent his first three years as appointed in Antigua, and then spent one year in St Kitts followed by a year in Antigua, returning to St Kitts for a further two years and finally four years in Antigua completed eleven years of missionary service. He shared in outreach ministry to the island of St Eustatius (Statia), where there were fifty Negroes in connection with the Methodist Church. Warrener applied to James Stephen, Esq., a member of the House of

37 John A, Vickers, ed., *The Journals of Dr. Thomas Coke* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005) pp. 67, 78.

38 Vickers, *Coke's Journals*, p.76.

39 Minutes of MEC Conference, 1786.

40 Vickers, *Coke's Journals*, p.108.

41 Coke, *History of West Indies*, 2:441.

Commons for a letter requesting permission to preach the Gospel to slaves. Although Stephens replied that this would be a waste of time, Warrener said that 'Mr. T. Owens and I.. ventured to St Eustatius' where the Governor threatened them with imprisonment in the fort if they preached. On this occasion the two ministers baptised twelve persons before returning to St Kitts.⁴² The ministers in St Kitts continued to give pastoral oversight to the Statia Methodists until 1811, including when they visited St Kitts for the Watch Night Service or at Christmas and Easter.

Alexander Kilham entered the ministry in 1785 and three years later enquired about offering himself as a missionary to the West Indies. He wrote to Warrener for information and received a reply dated June 1788. The first answer concerned health; Warrener said that the climate was suitable for those with a consumptive condition. Second, he assured Kilham that language was not a problem in Antigua. Third, he said that slaves were not wild and savage but mild, naturally warm and passionate amongst themselves. Last, Warrener told Kilham to bring all his books and gave him advice as to clothing.⁴³ Kilham did not go the West Indies but was expelled in 1796 when he founded the *Methodist New Connexion*.

During Warrener's second term in St Kitts, Coke visited in January 1793 and held a 'Little Conference' in Antigua that began on the ninth. Preachers from the Leeward and Windward Islands attended. Stations for ministers were made with Warrener going back to Antigua to assist Baxter. Antigua returned 36 White members, 105 Coloured People and 2,279 Blacks, claiming 2,420 of the 6,570 West Indian members.⁴⁴

(b) Proposal for Anglican missionary teachers

Bishop Beilby Porteus was the Bishop of London who was responsible for Anglican work in British Colonies and a supporter of the Anti-Slavery movement. In 1794, he changed the name of the *Christian Faith Society* to *Society for the Conversion and Religious Education of the Negro Slaves in the British West-India Islands* (Conversion Society).⁴⁵ This proposed the recruitment of missionary teachers for the Anglican Dioceses of Jamaica, Barbados, Leeward Islands and Mauritius. Porteus wrote to the Rev Samuel Dent, long-time Rector of St Georges in Grenada and Acting Governor 1801-2, who in turn sought the opinions of Methodist missionaries. The Revs Richard Pattison, Jonathan Harper, William Warrener, Thomas Owens and Jonathan King replied to Dent. These men were seasoned missionaries and had been in the West Indies from three years (Pattison and King), to six years (Owens) and seven years (Harper). Warrener, writing from Antigua, had served for eight years. These letters were bound together as a single volume.⁴⁶

Samuel Dent forwarded the replies to the Bishop of London on January 10 1795, Pattison's letter covering twelve pages (on two-sides of pp. 203-8.) The Methodist brethren had strong reservations about the proposal. Their concerns were threefold. First, about the recruitment and qualifications of candidates; second, the relationship with Governors, Legislative Bodies and Proprietors and

42 MM 37 (1814) 516.

43 WHS *Proceedings* 21:2 (June 1937) 32-6 cited from Henry Smith, *Life of Alexander Kilham*, pp. 196-7.

44 The terms 'Black' and 'Coloured' are used as in historical records.

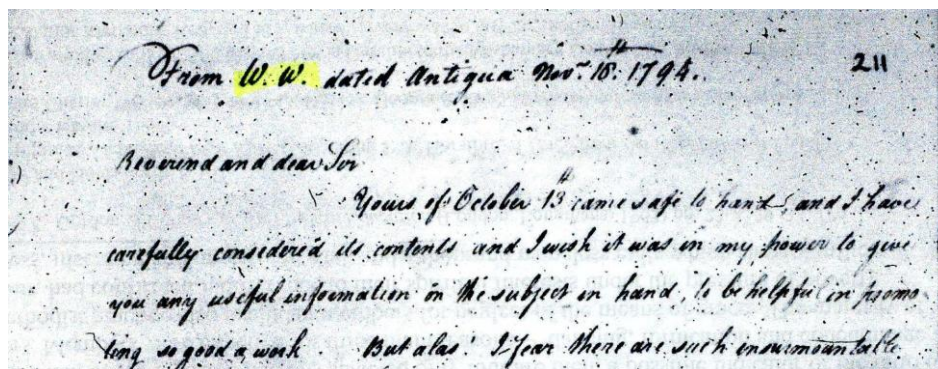
45 The 'Conversion Society' had a further change of name in 1836 to *Society for Advancing Christian Faith in the British West-India Islands*.

46 Christian Faith Society (Library, Lambeth Palace, London) F.3 Letters and Papers (1642-1796) microfilm reel 9, folios 201-213. Copies provided by courtesy of Joan Duffy, Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library.

Managers of sugar estates; third, the matter of accountability and discipline.

In summary the letters said 'The true missionary must also have an experiential knowledge of the deep things of God' and there must be room for the religious liberty of missionaries who were British subjects. Warrener questioned if these teachers would be under the direction of the parochial clergy. He also asked about 'sending them first to those Islands where neither the Moravians nor we have any Missionaries.' Warrener also recalled the ecumenical dimension and the spirit of love that already existed in Antigua, as on the last Easter Sunday afternoon, the Methodist chapel in St John's had been crowded within and without. Two of the Church Clergy and one of the Moravian Ministers had been present on the platform.

Warrener's letter (pp. 211-12) shows a standard of writing in a style almost identical with those of the other missionaries. It should be noted that correspondence would be attended to after an exhausting day's labour and written in candlelight.



(c) Lifestyle of the Missionary

In asking whether the proposed Anglican missionaries should imitate the Methodist ones, Pattison describes the lifestyle of the latter in Antigua. In their commodious chapels that could contain five hundred persons, a room was provided that contained a bed, or at worst a bench with the saddle bags as a pillow, a table, a stool, and a candlestick, 'all that is necessary for his real, not the imaginary wants.' There was a plain diet with 'a Plantain and a bit of Salt Fish, and a little Coffee for Breakfast, and some little matter for his Dinner and Supper.'

One further reference to Warrener's Caribbean ministry: Coke received a letter from Warrener dated Antigua, April 2 (1796) telling of revivals in the island. 'Our chapel could not contain more than one fourth part of the people that assembled... We have again revived the children's meetings... for the offspring of both French and English parents...'

2. Warrener's third stage of ministry in Britain

William Warrener left the West Indies in May 1797. He carried with him letters from John Baxter.

John Baxter, Antigua, May 10 1797. To the President of the Leeds Conference: 'Brother Warrener, who is the bearer of this letter, will give you and the Conference an excellent

account of the work of God in Antigua.'

Baxter wrote about the debts of the Society that they hoped to pay off and the ability to maintain three Preachers. There was a further letter of Baxter to Alexander Mather who had been ordained by Wesley for work in England, probably as 'Superintendent' alongside Coke.⁴⁷

Status of returned missionaries

William Warrener was amongst those who had been ordained for work overseas and who subsequently returned to the British work. This created an anomaly as ministers in Britain and Ireland had not been ordained. The 1793 Wesleyan Conference decided that the distinction between 'ordained' and 'unordained' ministers be dropped. It was not until 1836 that the Conference regularised procedures, with the following note:

N.B. The Conference agrees that returned Missionaries, who have travelled with acceptance four years and upwards, having been already, on their appointment to the foreign work, solemnly set apart for the office of ministry by the imposition of hands, shall not be re-ordained with the approved Candidates for the home work, who may be received into full connexion;- but that there shall be a formal *recognition* of them, by the President and Secretary for the time being, acting on behalf of the Conference, in a *separate* public service appointed for that purpose; when they shall be examined with respect to their continued attachment to the doctrines and discipline to which they are already solemnly pledged, and shall also be expected to give an account, if time will permit, of their present Christian experience, and of their labours in the foreign department of our work.

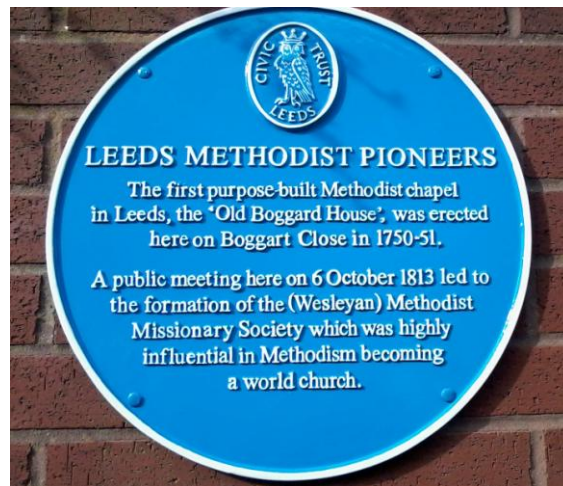
Upon Warrener's return to England he was stationed in Scarborough (1797-8) and Bridlington (1799-1800). After marrying Jane Wood in 1800 he went to Sunderland (1801-2) Alnwick (1803) Stockton (1804) Darlington (1805) Malton (1806-7) Easingwold (1808-9) Ripon (1810-11) Barnard Castle (1812) Selby (1813-14) Doncaster (1815-16) and Ashby-de-la-Zouch (1817). He became a Supernumerary in Manchester in 1818 and then moved to Leeds in 1822 and died on November 27 1825 aged 74.

3. William Warrener and the establishment of Methodist Missionary Societies

The motivation for forming Missionary Societies was to raise funds for the existing overseas work. In a preliminary service to the Leeds meeting, Richard Watson preached, saying 'Religion is the most efficient instrument of civilisation and there was need for sending the blessed Gospel to the heathen with utmost zeal. Duty demands it – We owe a debt of love to every man. Sympathy demands it; interest demands it... as does our hatred of sin and pity to souls. Lastly, gratitude to God for past mercies demands it.'⁴⁸

47 John Baxter to James Mather, Antigua, February 19 1798. HMCGB 2:152, note 27; 2:287, note 31.

48 MM 37 (1814) 436-9.



At the public meeting held on October 6 1813 in the Old Boggard House, 1,200 people assembled, the women observing from the gallery. Twenty-six ministers of the Leeds District were present. Warrener, stationed in nearby Selby, was among the 36 men speaking to nineteen Resolutions, and the only person present to have served in the overseas missions. In 1813, he also attended the first Missionary Meetings in Halifax (Nov. 10), Hull (Nov. 24), Sheffield (Nov. 26), and in 1814 Beverley (Jan. 13), Bridlington (Jan. 18), Wakefield (Feb. 7) and York (Mar. 24). Warrener made significant contributions in his speeches, and presumably in personal conversations, as he gave some account of the rise and spread of Methodism in the West Indies.

In these first meetings that preceded the formation of the General Wesleyan Missionary Society by five years, Warrener was described as 'an old soldier of Selby' and 'an aged missionary.' He was the pioneer of many missionaries, of whom George Morley said, 'We know their motives... We have no doubt that the love of Christ constrained them to expose themselves to the piercing cold of Newfoundland, or the burning sun of the torrid zone' (West Indies.)⁴⁹

The grounds of Warrener's historical knowledge

It was noted that before sailing Warrener learned of the need for a missionary in Antigua from John Wesley and Thomas Coke. Upon arrival in Antigua, he must have spent many hours in conversation with John Baxter and the unnamed Mrs Baxter who reminisced on their 'adventures' in the preceding years. But principally, a key witness was Mary Leadbetter Gilbert who was now living in St John's. Mary was with the Gilbert family when Francis introduced them to John Wesley in London. She was also a participant and eye-witness Methodism's beginning in Antigua.

Members of the Gilbert family were still living in Antigua. These included Nathaniel's daughter Euphemia who married Dr Thomas Lynch c.1776 at the age of 32. John Gilbert was a nephew who grew up in St Vincent and returned to Antigua in 1777. He worked at English Harbour where, during Warrener's final term in Antigua, he became a Class Leader in 1794 and a Local Preacher in 1797. He married Anne Hart in 1798. John's sister, Henrietta, became a companion to Mary

49 George Morley speaking to the Third Motion, Leeds, Oct. 6, MM 37 (1814) 511.

Leadbetter Gilbert in 1785 and would later write memoirs of her.⁵⁰

Another source of information was Barry Conyers Hart, a mulatto yeoman. He had procured land for Baxter's chapel on December 9 1782 and extended credit to the Methodist Church at 5 per cent interest. Although the new chapel was opened on November 8 1783, he conveyed the property to Methodist Trustees on April 17 1785 and received the final payment on April 26 1786, just eight months before Warrener's arrival.⁵¹ Hart's mother-in-law, Frances who was a freed slave, had been converted by the ministry of Francis Gilbert.⁵²

Two daughters grew up in Barry Hart's Methodist family. Anne was well versed in Charles Wesley's hymns, although she did not become a member until Warrener's successor, the Rev Bartholomew McDonald, was living in the Harts' house between December 24 1797 and December 4 1798. That year she married John Gilbert, Nathaniel's nephew. Well informed about Methodist beginnings, she later wrote from Antigua in 1804 'to Preachers now in Europe' and it can be assumed that Warrener was one of the recipients.⁵³ Barry's daughter Elizabeth, having 'collected all the information', wrote about 'The rise and progress of Methodism.'⁵⁴ This letter was also forwarded to England.

Other veterans of the cause were still alive during Warrener's ministry in Antigua, including Mary Alley and Sophia Campbell, the two women who kept Methodists together until Baxter arrived. Campbell served as Treasurer of the chapel building fund. A tailor by trade, John Cory was a mulatto slave who had been twelve years a Class Leader and Exhorter. Christopher Nibbs, a mulatto slave on an estate, was a Class Leader for six years and successful evangelist.⁵⁵ John Quash Gilbert was a pious black slave who had become a Methodist early in the 1770s.⁵⁶ The above persons and others retold personal experiences as well as oral traditions.

In England, Warrener related many interesting anecdotes respecting both Negroes and Planters, not only listing the prevailing 'sins' of the slaves but also testifying to the work of John Baxter for the success of the West-India Mission. He delighted audiences and congregations with stories of simple and affective examples of 'the blessings which the Gospel brings home to the bosom and heart of even the poor slaves.'

His stories included one about Nathaniel Gilbert that dates around 1760.

... soon after Mr Gilbert began to preach, one Judy Athol went to hear him, 'because,' as she expressed herself, 'odder negers go. De word reach my heart.' She instantly parted with all her jewels, bracelets, fine muslins, and lace, and never desired them again.⁵⁷ She entertained

50 Henrietta Gilbert, *Memoirs of Mrs Mary Gilbert*.

51 Property Deed, Antigua Methodist Church.

52 Elizabeth Hart Thwaites to Richard Pattison, St John's, May 5 1804. MMSA, WIC, fiche 1:31.

53 Anne Gilbert to Preachers in Europe, June 1 1804. MMSA, WIC 1803-17, fiche 1:37.

54 Elizabeth Hart (Thwaites) to Richard Pattison, St John's, May 5 1804, MMSA, WIC, Fiche 1:31.

55 Coke, *History of West Indies*, 2:445-6. John Baxter to Thomas Coke, Antigua, May 24 1794, MM 23 (1800) 265.

56 Coke, *History of West Indies*, 2:446. John Baxter to James Benjamin, June 12 1804. MM 27 (1804) 574-5.

57 Using gender inclusive language, John Wesley's 'principles and practices of our sect', No.15 in 'The Character of a Methodist', (first published, 1742) wrote "He cannot 'lay up treasures on earth'. ... He cannot 'adorn himself', on any pretence, with gold or costly apparel.'" *John Wesley's Works*, R.E. Davies, ed., Bicentennial edn. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989) vol. 9, p. 40. Cited from HMCGB, 4:54.

the preachers many years at her house, and truly adorned her Christian profession. Such was the confidence reposed in her, on account of her exemplary character, that Mrs. A. upon whose estate she lived, requested her to become her housekeeper. But Judy declined the offer, alleging as a reason that she could not then entertain her preachers, nor attend so constantly the means of grace.⁵⁸

When she was dying, Warrener asked her 'Now you are dying, how is it with you now?' She replied, 'O. Massa! My Massa Jesus always been good since I knew him; but now I dying, it all glory, glory.' In such triumph died Judy Athol, concluded Warrener.

Warrener included another anecdote at the Hull Missionary Meeting on November 24 1813.

On the estate of a Mr. G. near St John's, some pious negroes resided, who repaired to the means of grace, whenever they could go without detection. Mr G. being about to sail to England, his manager was heard to say before his departure, 'Mr. G. is going to England; I will then soon put an end to all this praying by the negroes.' ... Mr. G... saw some ripe pease wasting; on which he said to his watchman, ... 'Why do you not gather these pease?' 'O, massa', said he, 'they no my pease.' ... 'O, massa, we negers, who go to prayer, no teef.'

Mr G. ... called his boy, and said, 'Go, tell Mr ___, the manager, to address a note in my name to Mr Baxter, and to inform him that he is welcome to preach on my estate at any time.' ... The good hand of God being with us, we erected a chapel on that very estate, worth 400*l*. currency.⁵⁹

Of the other missionaries ordained by Wesley and Coke, John Clarke 'ran well' but 'something hindered him' and he was dropped from the stations. He continued to reside in St Vincent and was restored to Society membership in 1806. William Hammett had successful pioneer ministry in St Kitts (1787), Tortola with Santa Cruz (1788) and Jamaica (1789). After Coke took him to Charleston, SC, following a physical breakdown, he initiated the first Methodism schism in American Methodism – 'The Primitive Methodist Church.'

There were only about three of the pioneer missionaries still living in 1813. Of these, two other veterans with missionary experience shared their stories. At the Halifax meeting on November 10 1813, Matthew Lumb spoke to the First Resolution, telling how he had been imprisoned in St Vincent for preaching to the Negroes. John Brownell, who served eleven years in the West Indies, spoke to the General MMS Meeting for the Leeds District on Feb 7 1814.

4. Warrener's contribution to Missionary History

William Warrener's speech is found in 'A REPORT of the principal SPEECHES, delivered on the 6th day of October, 1813, at the Formation of the Methodist Missionary Society for the Leeds District.' Two copies of the third printed edition by James Nicholls are held in the Methodist Archives and

⁵⁸ William Warrener, Leeds Missionary Meeting, MM 37 (1814) 516-17.

⁵⁹ Warrener, Hull Missionary Meeting, November 24 1813, MM 37 (1814) 235, 517. This chapel is not identified as one of the later places of worship. In all probability, it was used for worship for a short period and then for other purposes. 400*l* equals £400 in Colonial currency.

Research Centre at The John Rylands Library in Manchester, and one copy at the Yorkshire Wesley Historical Society Branch Archives in Huddersfield, but not in the Methodist Missionary Archives at SOAS. A Review of the speeches was printed in the *Methodist Magazine* in 1814.⁶⁰

The First Resolution 'was seconded by Mr W. Warrener, the whole of whose speech, on account of its containing several historical facts not generally known, we shall lay before our readers'.⁶¹ Several of his stories are examined to verify their truth.

Nathaniel Gilbert heard John Wesley on Kennington Common

According to William Warrener, 'Nathaniel first heard John Wesley on Kennington Common, when the word came with power, and was made the savour of life to him'.⁶² We do not have a specific date for this occasion, but John Wesley had been preaching for many years in the open air at Kennington and Moorfields. For example, on Sunday June 17 1739 Wesley journalised; 'I preached, at seven in Upper Moorfields, to (I believe) six or seven thousand people. At five I preached on Kennington Common, to about fifteen thousand people.'⁶³ On Sunday September 9, 'I declared to about ten thousand, in Moorfields, what they must do to be saved. My mother went with us, about five, to Kennington, where were supposed to be twenty thousand people.'⁶⁴ Some attribute crowds of 50,000 to hear Wesley.⁶⁵ The question is raised if the crowds were overestimated; however various sources attest such large crowds. Kennington was South London's 'Speaker's Corner' where George Whitfield also preached to crowds of no less than 30,000.⁶⁶ The most likely source for this information was Mary Leadbetter who worked with the Gilberts in London and who had returned to Antigua five years before Warrener's arrival. It can be concluded that Warrener's information is plausible.

Jeremiah Lambert was the first Methodist Missionary in Antigua

In the *Methodist Archivist* there was spirited debate between Edgar Thompson, George Lawrence and Donald Ching about who was the first Methodist minister to serve in the West Indies.⁶⁷ Thompson wrote in 1961, 'John Baxter was certainly not the first Methodist Minister in the Caribbean (under the British Conference) that honour belongs to William Warrener.... When Dr Coke arrived in Antigua in 1786 as a Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church he ordained Baxter as a Deacon and Elder (Presbyter).'⁶⁸ This assumption was made in ignorance, because Baxter had gone to a Baltimore Conference and was ordained on behalf of the MEC by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury. Coke wrote that on Thursday, June 2nd 1785, 'we ordained five Elders, bros. Boyer,

60 MM 37 (1814) 507-519.

61 MM 37 (1814) 511. Warrener's speech is on pages 511-519.

62 MM 37 (1814) 511.

63 Curnock, *Wesley's Journals*, p. 77.

64 Curnock, *Wesley's Journals*, p. 81.

65 Thomas Jackson, *The Centenary of Wesleyan Methodism, 1839: A Brief Sketch*. 22nd thousand edn., (London: John Mason, 1839) p. 94. Wesley Center Online, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/johnwesley/johnwesleythemethodist/chapter-ix-societyandclass> Stefan Szczelkun, 1997, 2005, <http://www.kenningtonpark.html>

66 vauxhallcivicsociety@org.uk.stima.kskenning.org.tabouthistory citing Diary for Sunday 5 May 1739.

67 *The Methodist Archivist*, The Wesley Historical Society in the Western Area, vol. 1, No. 8, Sep. 21 1961; No. 9, Jan. 12 1962; vol. 2, 17th issue, May 26 1962. See WHS *Proceedings*, 33 (Sep.-Dec. 1961) 76.

68 Edgar W. Thompson to Editor of *Archivist*, London, April 18 1961, *Archivist*, 8 (1961) 3.

Tunnell, Pigman, Baxter and Foster. The day before we ordained them as Deacons...⁶⁹ In 1965, 'John Vickers supplied incontrovertible evidence that John Baxter was the first preacher to be stationed (as a minister) in the Caribbean under the British Conference.'⁷⁰

However, this conclusion overlooks the fact that Jeremiah Lambert was ordained and appointed to work alongside Baxter in Antigua by the Inaugural Conference of the MEC in 1784. Both the MEC and British Minutes for 1765 recorded this stationing. American histories do not mention Lambert's overseas ministry, except that a 1964 publication noted 'It is not known whether or not he went to Antigua.'⁷¹ A footnote was added to Dr Coke's *History of the West Indies* stating 'John Lambert... died before setting out for that destination... probably it was under this malady (consumption) that he was designated for Antigua, with the hope of restoration to health.'⁷² This first Methodist missionary to the West Indies was written out of British histories by stating that he died before going to Antigua, for example Findlay and Holdsworth (1921-4), HMCGB (1988) and Vickers (1969).⁷³

This categorical error overlooked that Coke had written early in 1785, 'I have taken a ship for Brother Lambert an Elder.' Writing about John Baxter on March 13 1786, Coke also stated, 'But we have only that single minister in those islands, Mr *Lambert*, whom we sent from the States, being obliged to return on account of his ill state of health.'⁷⁴ In a 1760 Caribbean bicentennial publication, Donald Ching recognised that Lambert went to his appointment but developed consumption and had to return to America.⁷⁵ However, as far as mainline histories are concerned, the newly published *Methodists and their Missionary Societies* is the first publication to acknowledge the ministry of Jeremiah Lambert in Antigua.⁷⁶

There is further support for Lambert being in Antigua early in 1785, including the time that Baxter was visiting Baltimore for his ordination during May and June. Anne Gilbert recorded that a Mr Lambert, a Methodist Preacher from America, 'supplied in Mr Baxter's place' during his absence from Antigua.⁷⁷ Her sister, Elizabeth Hart, wrote that she also heard his preaching before he returned to America.⁷⁸ Incidental evidence is seen in the purchase of red port 'for the uses of the society' on April 9 1785.⁷⁹ Baxter was on his way to Baltimore for ordination and Lambert was

69 Vickers, *Journals of Thomas Coke*, p.65, n 191, referring to the American edition of Coke's Journals (1784-85) p. 398; printed in the Philadelphia edn. of the *Arminian Magazine* vol. i, 1789. WHS *Proceedings*, 35 (June 1865) 43.

70 *Archivist*, vol. 2, 17th issue, Dec. 1965, p. 5, citing WHS *Proceedings*, 35 (1965) 43.

71 Emory Stevens Bucke, *The History of American Methodism*, 3 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964) 1:361.

72 Coke, *History of West Indies*, 2:36, fn 3.

73 G.G. Findlay & W.W. Holdsworth, *History of the Wesleyan Missionary Society*, 5 vols. (London: Methodist Church Office, 1921-4) 2:36, fn. 3; HMCGB, 3:4; Vickers, *Thomas Coke...* p. 99.

74 Thomas Coke, *An Address to the Pious and Benevolent, proposing an annual subscription for the support of the missionaries in the Highlands and the adjacent islands of Scotland, the Isles of Jersey, Guernsey and Newfoundland, the West Indies, and the Province of Nova Scotia and Quebec*. London, March 13 1786. Cited from HMCGB 4:209-10.

75 Donald Ching, ed., *For Ever Beginning. Two Hundred Years of Methodism in the Western Area* (Kingston, Jamaica: Literature Dept., Methodist Church, Jamaica, 1960) p. 16.

76 Pritchard, *Methodists and Missionary Societies*, fn 6, p. 15.

77 Anne Gilbert, Antigua, June 1 1804, recounting her 'Rise and progress of Methodism.' MMSA, West Indian Correspondence (WIC) fiche box 1:37; WM, 1804.

78 Elizabeth Hart, Antigua, May 5 1804, MMSA, WIC, fiche box 1:31.

79 St John's Chapel Building Account, *Archivist* 1 (1957). A photocopy of p.1 in Ching, *Forever Beginning*, pp. 40-1.

ordained 'To administer Baptism and the Lord's Supper.'⁸⁰

Warrener added his testimony to that of others that Jeremiah Lambert was the first ordained Methodist Minister to serve in Antigua, indeed in the West Indies, even if his ministry was short.⁸¹ Speaking of John Baxter, Warrener said at Leeds, 'It was not long before he required another labourer in the vineyard. Mr Jeremiah Lambert was then sent to him from America, whither he was soon obliged to return, on account of his being consumptive.'⁸²

The first Methodist 'chapel' in the West Indies

Warrener told the Leeds meeting how Nathaniel Gilbert 'relinquished his situation as Speaker of the House of Assembly' just before July 29 1769,⁸³ 'and immediately fitted up a large room, above the place where his plantation stores were kept. He placed a pulpit in it, and seats for the negroes.'⁸⁴ The 'chapel' could accommodate 200 people, on benches rather than pews. Deaville Walker wrote that this Upper Room 'was in regular use so late as 1841' and that the foundation walls were traceable beside the windmill in 1933. 'A small stone building nearby is said to be a school he erected for the children of his plantations.'⁸⁵ Without corroborating evidence from primary sources, doubt has been cast on the existence of the 1769 store room chapel.

Nathaniel Gilbert V, the grandson of the Methodist, became an Anglican priest like his father, returning to Antigua after completing his education. He was Rector at St Mary's for three years and was opposed to the Methodism of his ancestors, even encouraging the Moravians. His attitude changed for the better when he returned to Antigua in May or June 1822 after a three-year absence. He built his own chapel for the convenience of his slaves.⁸⁶ Oliver noted that in 1825, Nathaniel V officiated in St Peter's parish on his own estate and that Gilbert's chapel had 350 sittings.⁸⁷ There were no indications where this chapel was located. At the request of Nathaniel V, Benjamin Luckcock was sent out by the *Conversion Society* to oversee the instruction of his slaves at Gilberts (see above re Anglican teachers).⁸⁸

Robert Glen discovered a letter in the *Conversion Society* archives: 'Nathaniel Gilbert to Thomas

80 MEC Constitution V, Q.2, A.2 (2), Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. 12th ed., 1860, 4 vols. (New York: T. Mason & G. Lane, 1839, 1840). http://ccel.org/b/bangs/history_mec/HMEC06.HTM vol.1, book 3, ch.3.

81 John C. Neal, 'The Methodist Episcopal Church and Early Wesleyan Mission in the Caribbean.' *Methodist History* vol. L., No. 1 (October 2011) 16-27.

82 MM 37 (1814) 514.

83 'July 29 1769, Thomas Warner was chosen as Speaker vice Nathaniel Gilbert resigned.' Vere Langford Oliver, *History of the island of Antigua, one of the Leeward Caribbees in the West Indies, from the first settlement in 1635 to the present time* [1894] 3 vols., (London: Mitchell & Hughes, 1896) 1:cxx.

84 William Warrener, MM 37 (1814) 512.

85 F. Deaville Walker, *The Call of the West Indies. The Romance of Methodist Work and Opportunity in the West Indies and adjacent regions* (London: Cargate Press, MMS, 1933) footnote to p. 33.

86 David U. Farquhar, *Caribbean Adventures. Extracts from Missionary Journals* (Boston, MS: Mt. Prospect Press, 1999) p. 230, fn 70.

87 Oliver, *History Antigua...* 3:380.

88 Farquhar, *Caribbean Adventures*, p. 231, fn 84. CFS Letter Book, 1822-32, Gilbert to Thomas Porteus, Antigua, 14 Oct. 1822.

Porteus, Gilberts, Antigua, 14 Oct. 1822.⁸⁹ In this letter, Gilbert states that 'the chapel was formerly a store room, that it is seventy feet long, and that it can hold five or six hundred persons.' The letter continued: 'About fifty years ago it was used as a place of worship by my grandfather; and it may not be uninteresting to you to be informed, that this is the first known room ever set apart in this island, or probably in the West Indies for the religious instruction of the Negroes.'⁹⁰ Whereas Nathaniel III's chapel accommodated 200 persons above the stores, the renovation by Nathaniel V must have used both upper and lower floors. The accuracy of Warrener's historical contribution about the first West Indian chapel is therefore verified.

Walker noted that 1841 was the year when the use of this chapel was discontinued; this was during Nathaniel V's lifetime. His assumption is most likely correct, although he mistakenly presumed that the upper floor of the 1769 'chapel' was in continued use for church purposes until that date. This first chapel fell into disuse after the death of Gilbert III because his son The Rev Gilbert IV was an absentee proprietor, working in English parishes and Sierra Leone. Before 1803, the Methodist Church had erected a purpose-built chapel near the estate, this was called Zion Hill and later renamed 'Gilbert Memorial'. The school referred to by Walker is more likely to have been erected by Nathaniel V and used by Luckock for the instruction of the Negro slaves.

Other details

Warrener related how 'Nathaniel was in a little time taken to his reward. Francis then became the stated Preacher on the island.' Although never appointed by Wesley to Antigua, Francis continued his brother's preaching ministry at that time. Referring to the 'house of our two coloured friends' that was used after the final departure of Francis for England, Warrener said that 'such had been the frequency that they had nearly worn out a good pine floor and had actually trodden it to holes.' Presumably this old house still stood during Warrener's time in Antigua.

Obituary

As one of Wesley's travelling preachers, William Warrener worked in twenty two Circuits. In Britain, fifteen of these terms were for one year and five for two years. In his eleven years in the Leeward Islands, he alternated between two islands for eleven years, his longest stay being four years. He was one of the most widely travelled preachers whose Circuits ranged from Wales and Scotland to Northern England, as far south as Lincolnshire and Leicestershire, and the West Indian islands of Antigua and St Kitts.

William Warrener was one of those missionary worthies who 'never stood still'. In the ceaseless round of the itinerant ministry, he would have sung Charles Wesley's hymn written in 1750:

*Come , let us anew Our journey pursue,
Roll round with the year, And never stand still till the Master appear.*⁹¹

89 *Society for the Conversion and the Religious Instruction and Education of the Negro Slaves in the British West Indies*, 1794. Papers, D.1, Minutes (1794-1832) pp. 253-4 (entry for Dec. 3 1822) Library, Lambeth Palace.

90 *Conversion Society*, F.1, Letterbook (1822-32) p. 15.

91 Charles Wesley, *Hymns for the New Year*, 1750. *Voices in Praise, A Hymnal for the Caribbean and the Americas* (St John's, Antigua: The Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas, 2013) No. 496.

This New Year hymn described the shortness of life and conveyed the sense of the swiftness of time and the urgency of the second coming of Christ. Wesley's Travelling Preachers in the West Indies were aware that the life expectancy of a healthy slave was not much more than twelve years, their own often much less. As one of these itinerants, Warrener was essentially an evangelist, leaving the pastoral care of members to Class Leaders, without whom the Methodist work would have dissipated in the same way as that of Whitefield.

Warrener was one of the indefatigable veterans blessed with amazing stamina and one of few who survived eleven years in the 'torrid zone', the majority of missionaries dying within a few years of entering the mission field. He superannuated in 1818, the year that the General Wesleyan Missionary Society was formed. William Warrener spent his last two or three years in Leeds and died on November 27 1825 in his 75th year and in the 44th year of his ministry. The conclusion of his official obituary reads:

During Mr Warrener's last violent but short affliction, his Lord, in whom he had long confided, and who had been his help in former troubles, enabled him to rejoice greatly, and also to triumph over death. His character was marked by regularity, punctuality, and fidelity; and whether considered as a relative, a friend, or a colleague, he was eminently ingenuous and affectionate.⁹²

Warrener could sing with a clear conscience:

I have fought my way through, I have finished the work thou didst give me to do!

Conclusion

As one of the pioneering missionaries, William Warrener's contribution to Methodist Missions has been seen first in his significant missionary service in the development of Wesleyan Methodism in the West Indies. Building on the work of Francis and Nathaniel Gilbert and other lay folk, and that of Jeremiah Lambert and John Baxter, Warrener saw phenomenal growth in the church in Antigua and St Kitts. The first Wesleyan Missionary ordained by John Wesley specifically for work amongst African slaves, Warrener concluded his Leeds speech with the words: 'I think that there has not been a more prosperous Mission in any age or country than this of the West Indies.'

William Warrener's contribution to Methodist Missionary History lay in his presence and the speeches made at the inaugural meetings of the District Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Societies. In these, as well as in personal conversations, he challenged others to offer for missionary service and to support 'foreign' missions. This experience and knowledge was dispersed nationwide and preserved by publication the *Methodist Magazine*. In this way he made significant preparation for the establishment of the General Wesleyan Missionary Society in 1818.

The evidence presented in this paper demonstrates that Warrener's interesting speech at Leeds was in accordance with his stated object: 'In doing this, my statements will correct several little mistakes, into which many writers have fallen.'

© J C Neal, 6 October 2013

⁹² The full obituary in the 1826 *Minutes* has not been consulted. This extract is from William Moister, *Missionary Worthies; being brief memorial sketches of ministers sent forth by the Wesleyan Missionary Society who have died in the work from the beginning* (London: T. Woolmer, 1885) p. 262.