

# LISTENING TO MUSIC: PEOPLE, PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES

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## Listening to a singing people: accounts of Methodist hymn-singing

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### Abstract

This chapter uses a series of listening experiences from the long nineteenth century to explore the significant place afforded to hymnody in articulations of Methodist identity. It draws on accounts of individual practice and institutional events from Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist backgrounds. It situates these experiences in the context of evidence available through other sources, such as denominational hymnals, arguing that they allow for a fuller understanding of the relationship between centralised and localised attitudes and practices. Through detailed interrogation of the accounts of hymn-singing, focusing on the practice, repertoire and reactions they record, it highlights their value in placing emphasis on the experiential aspect of hymnody, arguing that this is vital to evaluating the causes of its long-lasting and powerful impression on Methodism.

### Introduction

A special affinity with congregational hymnody is commonly identified as a characteristic of Methodism and Methodists, both institutionally and individually, as well as internally and externally. The Methodist Church of Great Britain's website includes a section explaining 'What is distinctive about Methodism?' that lists ten distinguishing factors, ranging from theological emphases to ecclesiastical structures, among which is one entitled 'Born in song.' The explanation of this states that 'Methodists are well known as enthusiastic singers, in choirs and congregations. Singing is still an important means of learning about, sharing and celebrating our faith.' The phrase 'Born in song' is borrowed from the preface to the *Methodist Hymn Book* (1933) and, thanks to that hymnal's popularity as well as its own poetic quality, it has become embedded in the consciousness of many Methodists.<sup>1</sup> Among many ways in which a more personal attachment to hymnody can be observed is in the long-established custom of many Methodists owning a personal copy of the current hymnal and taking it with them when they attend services.<sup>2</sup> External observers of hymnody's prominence in Methodism include eighteenth-century critics of the movement's evangelical method, novelists such as George Eliot and Harold Frederic, and ecumenical partners.<sup>3</sup>

Hymn texts, particularly those of Charles Wesley, feature prominently in explanations of the significance of hymnody in Methodism. Wesley's hymns were instrumental in the development of the uniquely Methodist concept of authorised hymnody, whereby hymnals and the individual hymns they contain are authorised as being in accordance with, and representative of, Methodist doctrine. The precision that language affords is the obvious reason behind hymn texts being used in this way, and hymns are typically identified by their texts.<sup>4</sup> However, hymns are combinations of words and music in both intention and practice, and are most commonly experienced as such in liturgical contexts. Since the late eighteenth century, each authorised Methodist hymnal has contained hundreds of hymns, with some extending to over 1,000 individual items.<sup>5</sup> These hymnals are important documents in understanding institutional views on hymnody and its relationship to doctrine, while they also offer insights into cultural and aesthetic preferences within the denomination. Significantly, however, these further insights are mediated by the individuals and committees responsible for compiling and editing the hymnals. Furthermore, an authorised hymnal can provide only a broad indication of the repertoire sung in Methodism at a particular point in the denomination's history, but cannot show how its contents were used and received at a local level. To understand fully the significance of hymnody in Methodism, therefore, consideration of a broader range of perspectives and sources beyond authorised hymnals is needed.

This chapter explores six experiences of listening to Methodist hymnody in the long nineteenth century. Taken individually, they each provide a geographically and temporally specific insight into the practice of hymnody in Methodism. Considered in relation to each other, and alongside other evidence such as authorised hymnals, they contribute to a deeper understanding of the diversity of practices and attitudes that characterised Methodist hymnody in this period.

## John Wesley at Warrington, 1781

John Wesley used his journal to record observations on all aspects of his itinerant ministry, including the conduct of Methodist meetings across the country. These descriptions sometimes refer to the singing of hymns and, as with a range of other topics, Wesley uses his observations to emphasise his own viewpoints, such as in his account of a visit to Warrington in 1781:

*The service was at the usual hours. I came just in time to put a stop to a bad custom, which was creeping in here; a few men, who had fine voices, sang a psalm which no one knew, in a tune fit for an opera, wherein three, four, or five persons sang different words at the same time! What an insult upon common sense! What a burlesque upon public worship! No custom can excuse such a mixture of profaneness and absurdity.<sup>6</sup>*

Wesley's attitude is consistent with his other statements on music in worship, and with the publications of hymn tunes for use across the connexion that he oversaw. The basis of his stance is articulated in a statement prohibiting anthems recorded in the minutes of the annual conference of preachers in 1787: 'No anthems be in future allowed in Methodist chapels, because they cannot 'be properly called joint worship.'<sup>7</sup> His concept of 'joint worship' is crucial here in understanding his earlier negative reaction to the singing at Warrington. Heavily influenced by his early contact with Moravian missionaries in America and London, Wesley conceived of hymnody as both doxological and pedagogical. The hymnals he compiled for use in Methodist Society meetings were organised according to the experience of Christian life rather than any liturgical principle. Coupled with his evangelical Arminian theology that emphasised the universal offer of salvation, full and equal participation in hymn-singing was thus a matter of practical and theological significance. These views doubtless lay behind the unison format of *A Collection of Tunes Set to Music and Select Hymns: With Tunes Annexed*.<sup>8</sup>

The real significance of this listening experience, however, lies in Wesley's description of what he actually heard. It reveals a tension between local practice and his own views, which coloured his reaction. This tension existed in terms of both repertoire and performance practice, and Wesley's comment that the practice was 'creeping in here' indicates that this was not an isolated case. Within this local Methodist Society, there was differentiation according to musical familiarity and ability, and an appreciation of part-singing and secular musical styles by at least some of its members.<sup>9</sup> Wesley's observation attests to the challenges of his centrifugal instincts, which extended more broadly than hymnody. Jonathan Rodell gives a sense of the relationship between Wesley and the early Methodist societies, identifying 'chaotic diversity' as a defining characteristic.<sup>10</sup> Wesley's status as an itinerant listener is also important; while he was able to make a timely and decisive intervention on this occasion, his ability to influence practice and repertoire on a broader scale, both geographically and temporally, was limited to publications and edicts issued through the annual conference. This listening experience hints at what had been happening in Warrington prior to this occasion, and what Wesley hoped would happen thereafter, but whether or not he effected a longer-term change is impossible to determine.<sup>11</sup> Rodell's argument that in the 1780s 'Most societies were the products of local initiatives' may have had practical expression through musical repertoire and practices such as Wesley observed in Warrington.<sup>12</sup>

## Listening to rural Primitive Methodism

The Primitive Methodist Connexion, formally constituted in 1810, but tracing its origins to a Camp Meeting at Mow Cop, Cheshire, in 1807 was strongly revivalist in its outlook, and is popularly juxtaposed with nineteenth-century Wesleyan Methodism in its emphasis on outdoor evangelical activity, rejection of formalism in worship and music, and the greater role it gave to the laity in positions of leadership. Henry Woodcock's *Piety Among the Peasantry: Being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds* contains numerous descriptions of the worshipping practices of Primitive Methodist societies, some of which provide insights into their musical practices and preferences. His account of a society meeting in Rudston is particularly detailed, and includes the text of the hymn sung:

*The society was small, poor, excitable, and very demonstrative. ... A self-styled 'Revivalist' – a small pot, soon hot – conducted a protracted meeting. One of his favourite hymns, lustily sung by plough lads and milk maids, was that strange ditty, one verse of which reads; 'Where is now the prophet Elijah,' &c. The words*

*were stupid; the thought commonplace; the tune (!) depressing;  
but, alas! It was sung thus:-*

Where is now the prophet-et – Elijah?  
Where is now the prophet-et – Elijah?  
Where is now the prophet-et – Elijah?  
Safe in the promised land!

*There was abundance of enthusiasm, but it was shapeless;  
without form, and void.<sup>13</sup>*

As with Wesley in Warrington, here too there appears to be a tension between the hymnody popular among the local society and the tastes of the observer. Woodcock was an itinerant minister, mostly stationed in circuits throughout Yorkshire, and was thus likely to have possessed a broader experience of hymnody than the members of the individual societies he visited. Though he made neither intervention nor suggestions for improvement, it is clear that, like Wesley, he considered a more serious style of hymnody appropriate for worship. However, his critical tone masks some aspects of the description; the lusty singing indicates that the participants did not share Woodcock's view, but instead found the whole experience, including the music, enlivening. While Woodcock represented connexional authority to a lesser degree than Wesley, the experience he records again points to the disjunction between centralised ideals concerning the conduct and content of worship and their local expression.

This theme is also apparent in his report of a personal encounter in a domestic setting, along with a deeper insight into the attachment Primitive Methodists had to particular hymns, as suggested by the manner of the singing in Rudston:

*Mrs. Knaggs was a saint of Christly disposition. Though old and suffering when we knew her, she was as blythe as a young milkmaid. We fancy we see her, watching the broth bubbling up in the 'Kiel pot' over the fire, beating up the contents with a wooden ladle to prevent the 'lithing lumping,' and keeping time, by its movements, to a hymn she was singing. :-*

Jesus sits on Zion's Hill,  
He receives poor sinners still;  
Would you serve this blessed King?  
Come enlist, and with me sing;

*I a soldier sure shall be,  
Happy in eternity.*

*When the new hymn book was issued (1853), minus the above hymn, Mrs Knaggs said, with an air of disappointment: 'Where is Jesus now? He used to sit on 'Zion's hill', bless Him, but where is He now? I know where He is. He lives still yonder,' pointing upwards, 'and here, in my heart. Yes, bless Him, they may take Him out of the hymn book, but they can't take Him out of my heart, nor shift Him from His throne on high. Call the men in for dinner, for the pot's a-boiling,' and giving the ladle a sharp turn, she sang, with trembling voice:*

*Christ He sits on Zion's hill,  
He receives poor sinners still.<sup>14</sup>*

Here, Woodcock presents a more impartial account, refraining from any value judgement on the repertoire or performance. The significance of this listening experience is two-fold, and offers possible reasons for Woodcock's impartiality. The hymn sung by Mrs Knaggs was the opening hymn in the *A Collection of Hymns, for Camp Meetings, Revivals, &c: For the Use of the Primitive Methodists*, compiled by one of the movement's founders, Hugh Bourne.<sup>15</sup> This was an influential book in Primitive Methodism, and one which encapsulated the evangelistic zeal of its early years. As such, 'Christ He sits on Zion's hill' would have been familiar to many Primitive Methodists, particularly those who recalled the movement in its infancy, and Woodcock himself would have been aware of its significant heritage. Furthermore, Woodcock's account emphasises the highly personal nature of this episode. It is apparent that this hymn has a profound spiritual significance for Mrs Knaggs, but this type of attachment would have been widely shared by Methodists of all backgrounds, such was the integration of hymnody into the devotional life of the denomination. By recording the account in such detail, Woodcock tacitly acknowledges and affirms the powerful influence hymnody exerted on the lives of many Methodists. Although he does not expand upon the qualities that made Mrs Knaggs 'a saint of Christly disposition', it is clear that he regards her singing as a manifestation of her Christian character, revealing her to be focused on her faith in the midst of her daily tasks.

Mrs Knaggs' distress at the omission of her favourite hymn from *The New and Enlarged Hymn Book For the Use of the Primitive Methodists* provides further indication of the divergence between centralised and localised thought and practice.<sup>16</sup> Evidence of change in Primitive Methodist hymnody is found in Philip Brown's

*Companion to the Primitive Methodist Hymn Book*: 'Within the last twenty years Psalmody has undergone a great change. Fugue tunes, and those which repeat much, and many others formerly popular, are now seldom heard in many congregations, having been supplanted by chaster selections.'<sup>17</sup> However, Woodcock's concluding summary of Primitive Methodist hymnody on the Yorkshire Wolds suggests that such changes had not been uniformly adopted: 'Familiarity breeds contempt and, perhaps, one of the weaknesses of Wolds Primitive Methodism is the sameness of its singing. For 60 years they have sung the same spirit-stirring hymns to the same tunes, which by frequent use have become so doleful, that if David played in the same tones we do not wonder that Saul threw his javelin at him.'<sup>18</sup> Significantly, a souvenir booklet produced for a national celebration of Primitive Methodism's centenary in 1907, discussed below, contained a small selection of 'Hymns and tunes of ye olden time,' the first of which was 'Christ now sits on Zion's hill.'<sup>19</sup> Taken in isolation, its inclusion may be regarded as merely nostalgic, but Woodcock's account, both in terms of the individual case of Mrs Knaggs and the more general observation of unchanging musical habits, suggests that while some Primitive Methodists had embraced change, its older hymns, such as this, remained part of the collective memory of the denomination.

## Sir Frederick Bridge and the *Methodist Hymn Book* (1904)

The appointment of Frederick Bridge, organist of Westminster Abbey, as musical editor of the *Methodist Hymn Book* (1904), a joint publication of the Wesleyan Methodists and the Methodist New Connexion, was a significant coup for a denomination that, at least institutionally, sought to portray its hymnody as reflective of current sophisticated musical taste. The hymnal's preface describes how the selection of tunes drew heavily on the work of 'the great composers of the last generation, and of others happily still with us, whose names are household words in Christian homes, and whose tunes have done so much to elevate popular taste in Church music.'<sup>20</sup> Bridge's influence in soliciting new tunes from many musical luminaries is apparent, and the committee records its 'deep sense of obligation' to him.<sup>21</sup> They also note that 'he has entered with sympathy into the spirit of Methodist hymnology and worship', a claim which is backed up by Bridge's own accounts of his work in his autobiography and in an address to the Methodist Conference in 1904.<sup>22</sup> In both, he describes an unusual listening experience, involving his cook, a Wesleyan Methodist named Mrs Rider:

*I concluded [the conference address] by speaking of the help afforded by my cook, who was a Wesleyan, and to whom I often appealed to ascertain from her special knowledge if a particular tune was popular. 'Oh, yes,' she once said, in reply to one of my queries, in the hearing of a member of the Committee, 'we sing that in our chapel very often,' and she piped a few bars of it up the lift, at the bottom of which she was standing. This brought down the house, and my cook was presented by the Committee with a special copy in recognition of her valuable services to the book and to me.<sup>23</sup>*

Although the hymn is unspecified, this account provides a number of interesting insights, not least that this was hardly a unique occurrence for Bridge. The description of the event in his conference address makes clear that the tunes concerned were unfamiliar to Bridge, indicating that they were unlikely to have been from the standard Anglican repertoire. His concern to establish their popularity points to the preservation and frequent use of some tunes that were distinctive to Methodism. Bridge's desire to draw on his cook's knowledge and the committee's recognition of her contribution also indicate that there was a desire to make the tune selection representative of current practice, rather than simply imposing a selection based on abstract criteria. The relationship between singer and hearer in this listening experience is crucial. Bridge, the epitome of the professional church musician, listens to and learns from a domestic employee. That he does so, and allows the experience to influence the contents of the hymnal, emphasises the experiential significance of hymnody. Mrs Rider's familiarity with these tunes, gained through experience rather than as a result of musical education, is the determining factor with regard to their inclusion.

This episode, and the emphasis it places on the experience of Methodist hymnody, also provides informative context for decisions taken by the compilers of the 1904 hymnal and its 1933 successor. As well as listing eminent composers of new tunes and highlighting sources of hymn tunes such as the 'great composers' mentioned above, the compilers of the 1904 hymnal also notes that 'Owing to the revived interest in what are commonly known as "Old Methodist Tunes," the Committee has felt justified in placing in an Appendix a select number of those melodies most widely known and used. For these it must assume entire responsibility, though in connexion with them Sir Frederick Bridge has offered valuable suggestions.'<sup>24</sup>

The placement of these tunes outside the main body of the hymnal and the categorical absolution of Bridge from any responsibility for them indicates that there was some resistance, presumably aesthetic, to these tunes. This is supported by Bridge's



comment that ‘Of course there were many old Methodist tunes that were dear to the Wesleyans, and which, although not of a very high class, had of necessity to be included.’<sup>25</sup> Though it is not clear that these were the same tunes about which Bridge consulted his cook, his lack of familiarity in both cases suggests that there may have been some overlap. Interest in these tunes is also evident in publications commemorating the centenary of John Wesley’s death (1891). In his preface to *The Centenary Tune Book*, Alfred Rogerson, a Wesleyan choirmaster from Wainfleet, observes that ‘The Centenary Celebration of Wesley’s death has revived these old tunes, and the present time may be considered opportune for introducing a well-selected and carefully-harmonized edition of these time-worn favourites, any of which were in danger of sinking into undeserved oblivion.’<sup>26</sup>

Bridge’s distaste for these tunes and the committee’s ambivalent attitude suggests a somewhat uneasy relationship between the editorial and denominational hierarchy responsible for the hymnal and the Methodist societies it sought to serve. This presents a different perspective on Bridge’s interaction with his cook, creating an implicit link between her status and her musical taste. However, many of the new tunes introduced in the 1904 hymnal, and fifteen of the 21 tunes by Bridge himself, did not survive to the 1933 hymnal. Instead, many of the tunes included in the Appendix to the 1904 hymnal became the principal tunes set to familiar texts by Charles Wesley and others, as compilers acknowledged their currency with Methodist congregations. In terms of Bridge’s experience of listening to his cook singing hymns, it indicates that the real significance lies in hearing a representative voice of actual Methodist practice. Though the hymns that she advised on are unknown, the account points to the central place of the practice and experience of hymnody in understanding how particular hymns have gained significance within Methodism.

## Celebrating the 1904 hymnal

The Methodist Conference of 1904 included an act of worship marking the publication of the new hymnal, at which Bridge presented his address. An anonymous newspaper-style report, perhaps produced for the official record of the Conference, and now preserved in the Methodist Archives, provides great detail on the service held to celebrate the publication. The writer describes the musical forces that took part, which included a choir of over 350 voices drawn from local chapel choirs, under the direction of a renowned organist from one Sheffield chapel and accompanied by another. Although the report notes that no solos were included, it nonetheless lists by name a dozen ‘singers of high repute in the city’ who were among the choir.<sup>27</sup> The content of the service is then described in detail, beginning with the first hymn:

*The Rev. Charles H. Kelly rose and announced the hymn,*

*'O for a thousand tongues to sing.'*

*In this hymn, as in several others specially marked for the purpose, the congregation was requested to join. The benefit of special training was in an instant felt by all present in the vigour with which the first verse was sung. Verse 3 of this hymn was almost dramatic in its rendering, the second line, 'That bids our sorrows cease,' being sung softly, and then, in the fourth line of the same, the words, "Tis life and health and peace,' coming out with fine crescendo effect.<sup>28</sup>*

This extract indicates that full congregational participation was restricted to a selection of the hymns sung. Although the report is not entirely clear how each hymn was performed, several are described as including the congregation, while some items, such as the chanted settings of the Beatitudes and the Te Deum, are described as being sung by the choir alone. Some other hymns are reported as receiving appreciative hearings, which indicates that they were sung by choir alone too. Among these was Bridge's own hymn tune 'Gordon', set to the traditional Easter text 'The foe behind, the deep before,' and clearly composed with choral singing in mind. In the 'Musician's note' printed after the main report, the author notes that 'the verdict of approval was unmistakable,' and that the setting would become a 'great treasure to the Methodist congregations in the immediate future.'<sup>29</sup>

The extent and detail of this listening experience is atypical of most accounts of Methodist worship, as is the event that it describes. Nonetheless, the scale and status of the occasion indicate its importance as an expression of the significance Methodism attached to its hymnody and the launch of its new hymnal. While the identity of the writer and the exact purpose of the account are unknown, it is a document for public consumption written by someone who is well acquainted with and sympathetic to both the nature of the particular occasion and Methodism at large. As such, the listening experience is described in a way that seeks to communicate the grand scale and aura of the event to readers who were not present. Its significance lies, then, not in the degree to which it is representative of local Methodist practice Sunday by Sunday, but in what it reveals about how the Wesleyan Methodists wished to represent themselves at a denominational level, and how the local Methodists who were able to be involved responded to this.

The most striking feature is the official prominence given to choral singing by a choir that was discrete from the rest of the congregation. This stands in marked contrast to John Wesley's attitude when he observed the segregated group of singers at Warrington. By 1904, choral singing has become an accepted, even celebrated, part of the musical identity of Methodism that the event sought to present. Together with the description of musical sources in the hymnal's preface, it demonstrates the cultivation of a repertoire of sacred music that the conference authorities deemed to be in good taste for the purposes it was meant to serve. Wesley's account of local choral singing, however, paints a picture of the enthusiastic adoption of secular styles with scant regard for their religious suitability. The attitude of the Wesleyan leadership in 1904 may be regarded as a continuation and expansion of what Kevin Watson describes as their early nineteenth-century counterparts' concern for 'the preservation of a respectable image' in the wake of Primitive Methodism's emergence.<sup>30</sup>

The details of the make-up of the massed choir also makes clear that the local enthusiasm for choral singing that Wesley observed in Warrington was still present in individual Methodist chapels at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, the writer also describes how extensive rehearsals had been held in preparation for the event, and how the choirmaster had ensured that each chorister's hymnal was marked up with detailed performance instructions, which presumably allowed for the dynamic nuance and drama observed in the performance of the first hymn. Such meticulous preparation over a lengthy time period was probably atypical of the working practices of the individual chapel choirs from which the singers were drawn. The selection of repertoire would have taken place far in advance, and the prestigious occasion would have demanded a degree of preparation that could not realistically have been achieved or maintained on a weekly basis with a much smaller group of singers. The resulting emotive qualities of the musical performance described indicate that this event was able to create a listening experience of heightened intensity.

## The centenary of Primitive Methodism

Methodism's strong historical consciousness has often found expression in special acts of worship to celebrate or commemorate various anniversaries, whether at local level to mark the opening of a chapel, or at connexional level to mark an event significant in the life of the denomination. The Primitive Methodist Connexion's official celebrations of the centenary of the camp meeting at Mow Cop that led to its foundation included a public meeting at the Victoria Hall, Hanley, which was attended

by some 3,000 people. In his description of the celebrations, William Patterson cites a report that commented in detail on the musical forces present and their effect:

*A great united choir filled the orchestra stalls; 'but in point of fact,' remarked a journal in surprise, 'the entire gathering was one gigantic choir. Not a single one in the multitude but could sing, and did sing. The hymns chosen needed no restraint on the part of the singers, no delicate tone painting; they were the old, full-bodied psalms of praises, resonant and triumphant. So this magnificent gathering threw restraint to the winds, and the deep swell of the great organ led them in such paeans of praise as it refreshed one to hear.<sup>31</sup>*

Compared with the description of the Wesleyans' celebration of their new hymnal three years earlier, there are some points of similarity and difference. A massed choir is again present, indicating that choral singing was also a regular part of Primitive Methodist worship at the local chapel level. However, despite their defined musical role being emphasised by their physical separation from the rest of the gathering, the musical qualities that impressed the writer do not appear to have been the result of the rehearsal of fine details. Instead, the robust singing of the whole congregation made the strongest impression. The resulting listening experience is nonetheless similar, in that the musical effect is wrought by the sheer scale of the event and stands apart from what might be more typically experienced in a local chapel. However, the noteworthy full and enthusiastic participation, and the use of familiar, well-established repertoire, points to a connection between the singing witnessed here and broader practices and attitudes among the denomination's membership. The familiarity of the hymns would have been crucial in encouraging such participation, and the congregation's enthusiastic participation a tacit signal of the approval of the selection. Whether this was based on their current, localised experience of Primitive Methodism, or nostalgia for the hymns of the past, is uncertain, although the selection of 'Hymns and tunes of ye olden time' in the souvenir programme, mentioned above, suggests that the latter may have played some part.

## Hymnody's undisputed yet contested centrality

Though small in number, the range of listening experiences considered here, spanning more than a century, encompassing private devotion and mass gatherings, and drawn from different strands of Methodism, all affirm the important place hymn-singing has

occupied in Methodist practice and thought throughout the denomination's history. Those recounting listening to an individual singer seem not to find their subject's readiness to express themselves in song unusual, while the organisation and effect of the connexional celebrations afforded music and musicians a prominent place, which was matched by the detailed attention given to the singing in the reports of these occasions. All of the writers simply accept unquestioningly that hymn-singing was a fundamental part of the experience of being Methodist, whether individually or institutionally. To some extent, therefore, these experiences merely affirm the centrality of hymnody that the regular production of large-scale authorised hymnals by each branch of Methodism demonstrated at an institutional level. However, they also enable a more complex understanding of the significance of hymnody for Methodists by providing insights into actual practices and preferences, which can be brought into dialogue with the printed records enshrined in authorised hymnals, sometimes revealing points of congruence, but at other times divergence.

Choral singing emerges as a popular practice among the Methodist people at both ends of the historical spectrum covered by these accounts, and also across Wesleyan and Primitive Methodism. However, the relationship between its popularity at local level and its institutional acceptance shifted significantly over this period, from Wesley's resistance to the practice he observed in Warrington to the prominent position given to massed choirs at connexional celebrations. The shifting terms of this relationship point to the vitality of hymnody in Methodism; practices, repertoires and attitudes changed as they were influenced by internal and external factors, while a tension can frequently be observed between localised and centralised ideas.

This vitality and tension are particularly apparent in relation to the selection of repertoire, and demand that the significance of a new hymnal be considered carefully. The very decision to create a new authorised hymnal indicates an institutional desire to update the church's repertoire and, once it has been published, commercial necessities as well as belief in its intrinsic worth both play a part in the advocacy of the hymnal by figures in positions of authority. On the other side of the relationship, the tendency of chapel-goers like Mrs Knaggs to draw on older repertoire indicates the importance of the experience of hymnody; new repertoire would typically require time and repeated exposure in order to gain acceptance, let alone to have spiritual significance attached to it. However, institutional and individual attitudes are linked, as the exposure to hymnody brought about by the institutional priority afforded to it has been a contributory factor in the affection for particular hymns expressed by individuals, while their enthusiastic participation in congregational and choral singing has helped to maintain hymnody's prominence as a characteristic trait of Methodism.

# Conclusion

Listening experiences emerge as important sources in understanding the significance of hymnody to those whose stories are recounted through them. In terms of the prominent place hymnody has in perceptions of Methodism, they provide insights into the role of personal experience and practice in creating and perpetuating such perceptions. However, there are some limitations and qualifications that need to be considered when evaluating such experiences. The best preserved and most readily accessible accounts tend to come from literate persons in positions of authority, such as lay and ordained preachers, whose views and recollections may not correspond to those of the congregations to whom they preached. Sometimes, however, as in Woodcock's account of Mrs Knaggs, these provide a voice for those whose experience might otherwise have remained inaccessible, owing variously to levels and traditions of literacy among some of the social groups with which Methodism has historically been associated. Furthermore, irrespective of the context of the experience, it is common for precise details concerning the words and tunes sung to be left out of accounts. As shown above, while some conclusions about repertoire and practice can be extrapolated from such accounts, they need to be placed alongside other forms of evidence to gain the fullest possible insight. However, in the context of such an approach that draws on multiple types of source, listening experiences can contribute to an enhanced overall understanding through the marrying of objective historical record with the valuable insights of human interpretation and reaction. In the case of Methodism, they show the importance of practical and experiential dimensions in contributing to the prominent place accorded to hymnody in individual and institutional articulations of Methodist identity.

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 **LISTENING AND SPIRITUALITY**

**# CHURCH MUSIC, HYMNODY, METHODIST, RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE, SPIRITUALITY, WESLEY**

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