

# *Yell Methodist Heritage Tour 2013*



*A day of reflection, gentle walks, and worship exploring  
the history & heritage of the Methodist Church in Yell*

# Burravoe – a tale of two chapels

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The story of how Methodism came to Shetland and then took root is well known, and the place it took root in Yell initially was Burravoe. John Nicholson wrote to Conference in Manchester in 1821 appalled at the “low spiritual level of Shetlanders as a whole”. John Raby and Samuel Dunn volunteered to go north as missionaries, were appointed in 1822, and in his first letter to Adam Clarke written 10<sup>th</sup> December 1822 from Mid Yell Raby notes three places where he preaches regularly on the Sabbath (one of which was almost certainly Burravoe and another possibly Cuppaster) and a further four during the week. Clarke wrote in 1823 that he wishes to have a preacher’s house in Yell and then again in June 1824 that he wishes to have a chapel on the island.

The Rev James E Hindson was appointed as Raby’s successor and formed the original Burravoe society and was recorded as preaching there in July 1826 where he gave tracts to upwards of 200 people. He wrote to Dr Clark from Gossabrough to report he has a large room (in Gossabrough) where he preaches and a smaller one where he sleeps. After reporting on his preaching he bemoans the fact that there is:

“..no place to worship God but my room in East Yell and a booth kindly lent us by a person in South Yell...what must be done?”

It would appear that plans to build in Burravoe had already been discussed (presumably by Raby) and it is said that an original charter of 1822 was “not executed, not completed or lost”. This time, Dr Clarke agreed to plans to build a chapel in S Yell in “the coming winter and spring” and a site at the head of the voe was secured by May 1<sup>st</sup> 1826. Plans to build over the winter were derailed by the severe winter and spring of 1826/27 and Hindson reported to Clark in early March 1827 that the severe weather continued unabated. Notwithstanding, by May he had engaged three masons from Mid Yell and joiners from Gutcher and the foundation stone was laid on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1827.

Despite not being completely finished the chapel opened on October 20<sup>th</sup> 1827 and worship took place. Most material for the preacher’s house to be attached to the chapel was on site. As opened the dimensions of the chapel were 18 feet by 30 feet and it was said to seat 200 (!) That same year the Rev Hindson was transferred to the mainland and a Mr McIntosh (who was also present at the opening) replaced him.

Hindson returned to Shetland and visited the new chapel in April 1828 where he reported that while he was there “Marion Scollay, one of the first Methodists in Yell, was taken to a better world, aged upwards of 80 years”.

On June 28<sup>th</sup> 1828 Dr Clarke arrived at Burravoe on board the smack “Henry” from Hull, landing at the head of the voe within a few yards of the chapel “joy in every countenance”. The following Lord’s Day (29<sup>th</sup>) Dr Clarke preached at a crowded chapel with people coming from far and near and then pouring forth to the beach to see Dr Clarke go aboard the Henry.

At 3.30pm on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1828 Clarke weighed anchor and set sail, the boat having been victualled with local milk, eggs, butter, fish and fowls, a “young calf for 1/6d, a lamb for 2/6d, a hen for a groat, a duck for 6d, a cock for 2d, milk a penny a wine bottle, and eggs 2d a dozen.”

December 18<sup>th</sup> 1829 the Rev J Bolan, Burravoe incumbent, wrote to Dr Clarke saying that a public missionary meeting had been held in the chapel on December 2<sup>nd</sup> with Robert Bruce Esq in the chair and he (Bruce) had praised the instructive and moralising influence of Methodism on the local inhabitants, a change from when he first took up residence in 1823 and heard “...the people all round me daily uttering oaths and execrations of the most horrid and appalling nature. This wretchedness and moral degradation were principally attributable to the want of religious instruction, there being no place of worship nearer than Mid Yell.”

Bolan kept Dr Clarke up to date with the progress at the chapel and reported to him in April 1830 that “...whenever the weather is favourable the people come in boats from the island of Samphrey, and from North Delting to Burravoe and return on the same day”.

In another letter to Dr Clarke our indefatigable correspondent the Rev Bolan reports that on October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1830 Holy Communion at Burravoe chapel had more communicants than ever before with the whole of the congregation unable to gain admission for want of space – “...many had come a considerable distance to be present, some had travelled from six to twelve Shetland miles...”

In October of that same year, the chapel was hired by the Church of Scotland for their use. This relationship lasted until October 1835 by which time the CoS had become disillusioned owing to its “remote situation” and “the difficulty of reaching it with dry feet in winter”.

Dr Clarke went to Glory in August 1832 but to the last was in receipt of correspondence from Shetland. Mr Mainwaring reports from Yell on July 24<sup>th</sup> 1832 of the power of a “destructive gale last week”. In Yell “sad havoc has been made..” “From Gossabrough to Mid Yell only three men have returned, two of these were taken from the keel of Adam Clunis’s boat, who, with William Rendall, was seen to sink to rise no more”. In that fateful storm Yell lost 9 class leaders, 20 members from the circuit, it made more than 20 widows and left 100 fatherless children. The Rev Stephenson in his Report of the State of the Shetland District of 1849/50 was moved to comment that “nearly all the Leaders and active male members perished”. He was still able to record that average attendance at the chapel at the time of his visit was about 100 and the Society numbered 24.

The first Burravoe chapel closed its doors in 1900 – its remote situation, improving transport by road, the unpredictability of transport by small boat into the voe, increasing competition from other churches in the area all were factors in its demise. Add to this the fact that Burravoe itself was starting to turn its back on the sea to face inland made a new chapel closer to the homes of the people inevitable. The last resident minister was the Rev William Langridge who served from 1845-54, the Circuit Superintendent being based from 1845 in Unst. By 1876 the four-room manse was reported to be “very ruinous” and the state of the chapel itself, exposed to all the weathers was giving rise to concern. By the late 1860’s it was reported that there had been “many complaints of gradual dilapidation of property”. The Rev R Webb reported in 1870 that “the roof of our chapel at Burravoe is finished at a cost of £30 – at the next Sabbath I propose to open it. Presumably the roof had needed repair due to storm damage or other causes as he then continues: “I have arranged too for the repair of the Mission House at Burravoe”.

By 1893 a report stated “the remote situation of the chapel and the difficulty of reaching it with dry feet in the winter is a drawback to our work here. The cause is feeble but we have hope, and signs are not wanting of the feeble ranks being replenished with new members. After two years of acceptable service, our lay agent, Mr F Mann, left us to work in connection with the Leeds Mission, his place was filled by Mr Edmundson last November...”

One hundred and twenty years ago Burravoe old chapel was struggling as Burravoe turned its face from the sea to the land. Those folk who used to come by boat and sail or row up to the head of the voe no longer came as newer and closer chapels opened. Even today at the height of summer the way overland to the chapel ruins can be muddy!

The new chapel, opposite St Colman’s Episcopal Church, has a foundation stone let into the boundary wall dated 24<sup>th</sup> July 1900 (coincidentally just two days before the

formal consecration of St Colman's by the Lord Bishop of Aberdeen, Orkney and Shetland). The building itself is a modest two storey rectangular structure with a porch on the front, easily recognisable as the chapel, even though it is now a private dwelling. Early photographs show curtains to the arched windows on the front aspect suggesting that the upper floor at least comprised some kind of living quarters.

By the time Rev Herbert Bent came to Yell to write his December 1947 Report on the North Isles Circuit, Burravoe chapel was struggling. Membership was down to three persons and he found that since 1900 "... the then small membership has declined steadily". He did say that Burravoe was "the best church building in Yell and the newest<sup>1</sup>" yet of the small membership ...only one of the members attends – the other is prevented by ill-health, and the third by family responsibilities". He continues "approximately 8 or 9 local people appreciate the Methodist witness and attend monthly services if possible" but that "most of the population here seem to be attached to the Church of Scotland or Scottish Episcopal church". His conclusion is that:

"The Burravoe chapel is redundant as a Methodist building in my opinion, and has long been costing the circuit more than it can afford".

So it was that the chapel in Burravoe closed just four years later in 1951 ending 124 years of a Methodist presence in South Yell.

Footnote:

<sup>1</sup> Quite what the folk attending the East Yell Chapel would have made of this is uncertain! What the Chapel in the Valley lacked in amenities it surely made up for in numbers, enthusiasm and commitment.

# East Yell – the past, present and future of Yell Methodism

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The Rev James Hindson was reported in 1825 to have “preached in almost every part of Yell” and he would have covered many miles on foot or pony and set himself up in ad hoc rooms or even in the open air. He needed a base from which a society could be formed and grow. The Rev Hindson’s “large room” rented in Gossaburgh (sic) from about 1825 established such a society and by 1826 class meetings had begun with monthly services on a Sunday providing a focus for Methodist worship in East Yell. By 1828 it was reported that:

“In East Yell, the whole body of the inhabitants are in society; parents, children and grandchildren are meeting in one class”

Membership returns for 1834 show 30 in society in Gossabrough alone, so by this stage, with the Burravoe chapel open, Methodism was growing from a lusty infant into an unpredictable, and occasionally tetchy, teenager. Members could worship at Gossabrough or they could make the trek over the hills from Aywick and Otterswick to Burravoe. East Yell schoolroom also held meetings. With the opening of the Mid Yell chapel in 1858 another possibility beckoned but in the days before metalled roads the prospect of the hike to Gardie in the teeth of a winter gale may have put many folk off.

The planning and building of the chapel under the auspices of the Rev William Holbourn in 1891/2 at a site identified as “Otterswick, south of School Board school” is comprehensively documented in Mr Louis Johnson’s admirable “Chapel In The Valley” – now sadly out of print but available in Shetland Library. The foundation stone was laid on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1892 and the chapel opened five short months later on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1892.

## **Landmarks at East Yell chapel**

24<sup>th</sup> January 1893 – First recorded baptism at East Yell, Jesse Mouat of The Stoal, Aywick by Mr Holburn

1905 – hanging oil lamps installed to replace original bracketed ones

1932 – porch added to the front of the original building

November 1944 – Tilley lamps replaced the old oil lamps

1960 – Calor gas lighting replaced oil

1976 – New road down to the chapel (made by Norman Tulloch) replaces old track

1981 – Chapel reopens after extensive repairs and redecoration and the installation of electric lighting

### **Worship patterns over the years**

Extract from a report of 1893 into the condition of the North Isles Circuit:

“We have now four good chapels in the circuit, and all free from debt, three in the Isle of Yell, and one at Unst. East Yell:- our new chapel has been opened during the year, it is neat and comfortable and quite a modern building.”

A North Isles Circuit plan for January to March 1905 shows services at East Yell at 12 noon and 6 pm (though whether both were always conducted is a matter for conjecture) plus a class held on Wednesdays at 7pm either monthly, or occasionally, fortnightly.

For this quarter in 1905, the minister is recorded as the Rev Walter Lee with the Evangelist as Mr William Irvine and six local preachers (Messrs R Sandison, J Henderson, G Anderson, James Clark, J Guthrie and H McLeod). In addition there were two helpers recorded on the plan, Mr James Smith and Mr G William Tulloch.

In addition classes were held monthly at Gossabrough on Tuesdays and at Aywick on Wednesdays, both at 7pm and conducted by Mr William Irvine.

In a North Isles Circuit Report of 1914/15 East Yell (including Gossabrough, Otterswick and Aywick) is shown as having 48 members, 40 scholars, an average congregation of 30 and a contribution to the circuit of £4/16/5d. Not bad for an area whose population was about 200! During the same year a valuation recorded the “Wesleyan Chapel” at East Yell, in extent 4 poles and 25 yards, as having a gross value (buildings and land) of £175.

The plan for January to April 1927 shows a full range of worship with services at East Yell at 12 and 6 every week, the majority of the 12 noon services conducted by Pastor M C S Johnson of Burravoe and the 6pm services by the Rev A L Whittard (the full time Circuit Minister based in Haroldswick) who shares the workload with helper Mr H Hughson of West Sandwick, Preacher Mr G W Tulloch of Aywick, and the Rev G Laurie of Mid Yell. How times have changed – in 1927 the circuit could

call on a team of 7 preachers (though one of these is enigmatically recorded as being "at sea") plus 9 helpers. Given that there were six chapels and preaching places in use, two of which had two services every Sunday, they were still thinly spread, especially in view of the difficulties of travel, At this time there were still two, occasionally three, meetings per month at Gossabrough at 3pm.

### **Rev<sup>d</sup> Herbert Bent, Acting Sup<sup>t</sup>: Report on The North Isles Circuit, December 1947**

Membership is reported as being 40

"Most members have a long distance to walk over open country"

"Support from one of the hamlets, Aywick, is good, but from the other, Gossabrough (including Otterswick), generally poor"

"Sometimes the congregation consists of more members of the Church of Scotland than of Methodists"

The Church of Scotland Minister preaches here once a month (though the service is Methodist)

There are 2 leaders and quite a few young people attend (mostly from the Church of Scotland), the young people are reluctant to join membership of any church other than that of their parents

"The sense of privilege and responsibility among members is generally poor, though there are exceptions"

"Financial contributions from this church are below average"

Sunday school is held during the summer months

### **Lerwick, North Roe and North Isles Circuit quarterly meeting, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1963**

An item was reported on:

"In view of the remoteness of this church and consequent difficulties in supervision, the meeting declined to approve the use of the premises by the Evangelical Society"

East Yell chapel continues to provide a focus for Methodist worship in Yell and although numbers are small the spirit is strong and the sense of shared worship with other congregations and communities continues to grow. The Chapel in the Valley is loved and cherished by members, adherents and visitors alike.

# Mid Yell

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The Methodist chapel in Mid Yell stood at the head of the Gardie Road occupying a commanding position looking out over the Mid Yell Voe. James Hindson formed the original society in Mid Yell in 1825 and the first Methodist preaching in the area was by Dr Daniel M'Allum in the Parish Church of Mid Yell and by John Raby who lodged at Reafirth.

The original chapel site was obtained on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1858 and the building erected and that same year. Early photographs show a simple structure with a lean-to on the northward end and a basic porch at the south on a small plot of some 5 poles and 18 yards in extent.

The North Isles Circuit Plan for the January-March quarter, 1905 shows services scheduled at Mid Yell at 12 noon and 6pm with a class on Tuesdays at 7pm. On the same plan a service is shown being held at Vatsetter once a month at 6pm and a class on the Monday of the second week of each month at 7pm run by Mr William Irvine, Evangelist.

Mid Yell, in its early years, had a healthy membership which peaked during the period 1890-1912 at the high 30's to mid 40's but then began a slow but inexorable decline.

In the period 1914-15 the chapel had 24 members and 11 scholars at the Sunday School. Given that Mid Yell was the most populous settlement on the island (a reported population of about 500 in a geographically compact area) one wonders why the decline set in. The average congregation is reported as 14 in 1914-15 and the contribution to the circuit £7/1/3d. Someone must have been alarmed at the decline and from March 1913 a more elaborate system for recording began where membership and adherence was classified according to gains and losses and recorded in each category in a number of sub-categories.

The decline may have been partly for reasons of topography – Gardie Road can seem a steep climb and given the state of the roads at that time it may have daunted some of the less able members of the flock.

The North Isles Circuit Plan for Jan-Apr quarter 1927 has one service a week most weeks throughout the period conducted by the Rev A L Whittard of Haroldswick, Pastor M C S Johnson of Burravoe, Mr G W Tullock of Aywick, Mr H Hughson of W Sandwick and Mr G Hunter of Mid Yell.

In 1931 a manse was bought (it is the house just below the chapel) to house the lay pastor for the circuit and presumably to provide a lodging for travelling ministers.

The Rev Herbert Bent in his pull-no-punches report on the state of the North Isles Circuit in 1947 states that Mid Yell has a membership of 18 and while the number is small the “quality (is) very good”. He does note that “some elderly, unable to attend, some live a distance away” and then ominously that the average attendance is about 6 and that most Sundays one service is held. He reports that there is no youth within the church “though a number of young people reside in the neighbourhood”. Of the Lay Pastor’s manse he says “few members do their utmost to pay for the upkeep”. One would imagine upkeep to be an uphill struggle given its exposed position overlooking the voe.

The manse lasted but 20 years in church ownership and was sold in 1951. The chapel struggled on for another seven years until closure for regular worship in 1958 – it had lasted just into its centenary. What happened next?

The chapel remained in church ownership and at the Lerwick, North Roe and North Isles Circuit quarterly meeting Friday 8<sup>th</sup> December 1961 a letter was read out from Magnus Doull received on 6<sup>th</sup> December enquiring whether he could purchase Mid Yell chapel.

The meeting decided to offer him the chapel *at an annual rental* of £5. He would be responsible for the interior and exterior decoration and repair and have the use of whatever furniture the chapel contains. The church would retain the right to use the chapel as occasion demands. The agreement could be terminated by either party at three months notice. The current insurance value of the redundant chapel was £300 and the meeting agreed to increase this to £1800.

Not surprisingly, no reply had been received from Magnus Doull by the meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> March 1962. The redundant chapel remained with the church, until the Lerwick, North Roe and North Isles Circuit quarterly meeting of 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1966 was able to report that the “sale of Mid Yell chapel is proceeding”

Today the chapel, minus the lean to extension on the rear but with the porch extant, is used a store by the owner of the manse. He can remember the fixtures and fittings being taken out some time after the sale and when he bought it it was just an empty building. It is still recognisable as a chapel building though not used as such for some 55 years.

# The Seafield Mission Hall

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On the opposite side of Mid Yell Voe to Mid Yell itself lies the small community of North-a-Voe, spread out along and down a steepish hill which rises up from the voe itself where the road meets the sea at Seafield. There is still a small pier and many ruined buildings speaking of busier times at the fishing. In the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century the folk of North-a-Voe could worship at Mid Yell, necessitating a boat journey across the voe or a more arduous trek over land around the head of the voe and then down into Mid Yell. The alternative was to attend the United Free Church at Sellafirth, a distance of six miles as the crow flies without any of the ups and downs the terrain entailed. These journeys were difficult for older people and those with young bairns who desired regular worship throughout the year.

In 1858 the Seafield Estate was bought by John Budge and a few years later he, and his family, moved into Seafield House on the shore (still extant but unlive in). His wife, Sinclair Craigie Henderson, whom he married in 1858, had been brought in a Methodist household on Papa Stour and later in Whalsay and at her instigation he gave part of an adjoining barn to be made into a meeting house to serve North a Voe and district. Although we do not know exactly when the building was gifted it was probably around 1868.

The creation of the Seafield Mission Hall was a real community effort with each family in the district giving 2/6d towards the cost of materials and fittings. The menfolk gave freely of their time, and stone to enlarge the building was dug out from the banks at the foot of Kirkabister Croft and transported by hand to the site.

The Mission Hall was wood panelled and later had a wooden floor with wooden seating. Originally lit by oil lamps it was later modified to be gas lit (the fittings and some of the piping could still be seen in 2012). The Bible has survived the depredations of weather and has recently been rescued as has a small part of the later American organ.

A provision for the use of the building was that it was to be non-denominational, available to any that wished to worship there. To this end a four-week rota was worked out whereby the first Sunday each month was allocated to the United Free Ministry, the second to the Church of Scotland, the third to the Methodists and the

fourth to whosoever wished to use it. The Salvation Army often used this fourth Sunday.

The Mission Hall had a Sunday School and a fine male voice choir, still spoken of by many of the older North-a-Voe folk. Although the Mission Hall has been out of use for many years (since the 1960's) and is now used as a store by a local crofter who used to live next door in an adjoining house, it can still be seen and its original purpose is discernible.

In old photographs the hall is the next but one building from Seafield House travelling towards North-a-Voe (in other words to the right hand side of the photograph). It appears in old photographs as a grey building with two tall windows – the frames are now long gone but the window openings still remain.

# Cullivoe – a mystery chapel in North Yell

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Little is actually known of the origins of the chapel in Cullivoe in North Yell and there are many gaps in the history of the building. The usually comprehensive Harold Bowes in his magisterial thesis on the origins and history of Shetland Methodism does not mention it, and for good reason.

We can be fairly certain that it started life as an independent chapel (the date panel above the door reads 1855) and then later became, unofficially, and by default, a Methodist preaching place simply because the majority of its adherents were Methodists. The OS map of the area for 1878 clearly marks the chapel as “Independent Chapel”. The nearest preaching places with Methodist meetings at this time were Sellafirth and Dalsetter in North Yell (John Raby and James Hindson preached in both these places) but both were a rextor away in bad weather.

The old name for the site on which the chapel sat is Gamblagord and later the building came to be known as the Wesleyan Chapel (even though we believe it was never officially part of the circuit). Laurence Tulloch says that it is a sizeable and sturdy building with thick stone walls. It seems to have had a short life as a chapel. Cullivoe has a well-established Church of Scotland church so maybe that was one factor in its demise as a chapel. The burn nearby is known as the Chapel Burn and alongside it is Chapel Well. Another factor in its demise may have been the loss of George Moar and his brothers who were stalwarts of the chapel in a boating accident.

Once closed (around 1912) the chapel was converted into a public hall which it remained for many years – the lean-to on the side of the original chapel (which gives it its odd lop-sided appearance) which may have been a vestry or meeting room became cloakroom and toilets (said to be the first public building in rural Shetland to have an inside flusher).

The new public hall in Cullivoe opened in the mid 1980’s and made the old building redundant – the Cullivoe Up Helly Aa committee purchased it and it became the galley shed it remains to this day. Part of the lean-to had become an artists’ studio.

Much research needs to be done to fill in the gaps from 1855 to 1912.

# Yell Ministers 1840-1900

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1840-42	Uriah Butters
1843-44	John Donks
1844-46	James Kendall
1847-50	William Parsonson
1850-51	William Fern
1852-65	no record
1866-69	Richard Webb
1870-74	no record
1875-76	Peter Roberts
1876-78	William H Farnell
1878-81	Richard Evans
1879-82	William W Grigg (Zetland District Mission)
1883-84	no record
1884-87	George B Glover
1885-87	Peter Williams-Jeffries (Zetland District Mission)
1887-89	no record
1890-93	William E Holburn
1893-96	Benjamin Stanley
1896-99	Ernest Ogden

# Evolution of the circuit 1822-1953

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1822 – Shetland Isles (sic) Circuit formed, later becoming Shetland Isles District with Revd John Lewis as Chairman with 5 preachers by 1825

1823-24 Yell circuit formed and then merged into Northmavine and North Isles Circuit

1825-45 Yell Unst and Fetlar Circuit formed from Northmavine and North Isles Circuit with Revd James C Hindson as resident minister

1832 – the death of Adam Clarke – at the time of his death there were 4 circuits, 14 chapels, 3 manses and 1413 members in the Zetland district, one of which was the YU & F circuit

1833- 45 Successive chairmen of the district were the Rev<sup>d</sup>s Richard Allen, James Cotton, George Clarke, William Wears, William Webb, John Imson and Joseph Watson

1846 – Renamed North Isles Circuit with Norwick, then Haroldswick seen as Head of Circuit

1847 – 61 Successive chairmen of the district were the Rev<sup>d</sup>s James Kendall, Thomas Hesk, James Firtley and John Duncan

1861 - At this time there were 5 circuits, 20 chapels, 1 chapel in progress, 4 manses and one still being built. It was reported “these erections are free of debt, the number of members is 1537 with several hundred day and Sunday school children”. It was also reported that one side effect of this healthy growth has been the “stimulation of the Church of Scotland, Free Church and others to greater effort”. The satisfactory condition of the chapels and other property is due to “the able and indefatigable care of the Rev James Loutit”.

1862 – circuit brought into Edinburgh and Aberdeen District

1869 – Zetland Islands District separated and placed under supervision of Home Missionary Committee (North Isles circuit membership fluctuates between 110 and 175).

1869 – visit of Revd Alexander McCauley with a view to “consolidating and strengthening the work of God in the islands”

The North Isles Circuit remained until 1953 when it ceased to exist as a separate entity and became part of the Lerwick, North Roe and North Isles Circuit.

# Extracts from “A Report of the State of the Shetland District 1849-1859” by the Rev J Stephenson (from the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine for 1851)

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In addition to occupying the chapels, our brethren preach in many private houses. In the Lerwick Circuit there are forty preaching-places. In the Walls Circuit there are eighteen ; in Northmavin, fifteen; and in the North Isles, twenty-six. It will thus be seen that, scattered over these islands, there are ninety-nine places where "Christ crucified " is preached, more or less frequently, to hundreds of the inhabitants of these northern parts of the British empire. The people are, indeed, generally poor; but many of them have been made rich in faith, and heirs of the inheritance that shall not fade away. They are often called to encounter storms, in which many perish ; but, in reference to not a few of these, we sorrow not as men without hope, knowing that they have died in the Lord, and exchanged a scene of tempest, strife, and suffering, for one of safety, rest, and joy. There are thirteen Societies in the Lerwick Circuit; eleven in Walls ; eight in Northmavin; and seven in North Isles; making a total of thirty-nine Societies.

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With the exception of the town of Lerwick, the members of Society are in general so poor, that it is impossible for them to do much for the support of the ministry. On comparison, however, with another church, (which might be considered as in more favourable circumstances,) it appears that our people stand creditably in this respect. Something has been lost for want of system, regularity, and uniformity, in carrying out our rules.

But the District must ever be treated as a Mission, and must derive by far the larger portion of its support from the Contingent Fund. The whole case merits the kindest and most generous treatment that our circumstances allow.

It is stated with regret that the return of numbers from this District is not so large now as it was twenty years ago. In 1830 there were returned 1,330; whilst this year there is a return of only 1,223. After twenty years of labour, we might have hoped that the results would be different. It is but fair, however, to take a view of the circumstances that have contributed to produce this state of things. For some time itinerancy, if not entirely given up, was very much limited. This course appears to have seriously injured the work of God, and prevented its extension. In a country like Shetland, where the population is very much scattered, and where many villages or hamlets are from two to five miles distant from any place of worship, it is especially important that our system should be kept in full and efficient operation.

And to the want of this, it would seem, the present state of our numbers is in part to be traced.

There is now, moreover, nearly double the agency, provided by other bodies for the religious instruction of this population, than there was twenty years ago. The Free Church has seven Ministers, who are zealously occupying important positions in the several places where they reside. The Independents and Baptists have more agents than they had. And the Scotch Church has been reinforced, and is doing more than formerly. It will be perceived, therefore, that the circumstances of our brethren are greatly altered. The question, then, may be asked, Is it needful to continue a supply of Wesleyan Ministers? The Visitor answers in the affirmative, without hesitation. It is not his wish to say anything that might have the appearance of disrespect or unkindness toward any of the Christian bodies in Shetland; but, from all that he has seen and heard, (and he has made extensive inquiries,) he is of opinion that the time will never arrive when the earnest, experimental, plain, and powerful preaching of the Wesleyan Ministers can be dispensed with in these islands. Hundreds have been instructed and benefitted by this particular instrumentality; and it has operated beneficially upon other bodies. The labours of the Wesleyan body in these islands, and their results, it is believed, are looked upon generally with approval and good-will by all ranks; and Methodism occupies a prominent and respectable position. The Societies, however have suffered much, by emigrations and deaths, but especially by the loss at sea of many of the Leaders and more active members. The places of these individuals cannot be readily supplied. Many years must elapse before the oak arrives at maturity; and some time must pass away before the young can acquire the influence of their elders, arising from weight of character and standing in the church. It is matter of thankfulness, nevertheless that there are some young men who are walking in the steps of their pious fathers, and who, it is hoped, may be their successors in the church.

There is a considerable amount of sincere piety, and of decided attachment to our Connexion, among the members of the Wesleyan Societies in Shetland. The last year has been, financially, one of great difficulty. The crops failed to such an extent, that only four months' food, on the average, was secured for the country. Multitudes have had to endure great privation; and, had it not been for the extraordinary means adopted, hundreds must have died of starvation

# The Rev Herbert Bent reports on the North Isles (1947)

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The Rev Herbert Bent was commissioned to research and write a report in 1947 on the North Isles Circuit which makes fascinating reading today. The problems he encountered in 1947 have not gone away! Following are a few extracts taken verbatim:

“The most faithful members consist mainly of middle-aged or elderly people, and as members are lost by death their places are not being taken by an entrance of younger people” (plus ca change...)

“It appears that much damage has been done to the spiritual life of the churches by the acceptance of persons into membership who never realised the privileges and responsibilities of membership in the Methodist Church...”

“Almost without exception, all members make a small quarterly subscription. The average per member is around 1/1d, though individual subscriptions vary from 2d to 2/6d”

“The circuit is costing the Home Mission Department a very considerable amount... the question of whether or not to withdraw the Lay Pastor from Yell has been discussed during the last three years...”

*The Rev<sup>d</sup> Bent was much exercised by the problems of ministerial transport logistics in the North Isles and comes up with the following suggestion:*

“A good reliable motor-cycle on each island (I suggest a simple two stroke about 2 ½ hp). He [the Minister or Lay Pastor] could reach all three islands on most Sundays”

*But there is a fly in the ointment:*

“A special hire of the ferry boat would be required each Sunday, and would cost about 12/6d”

*He also had very clear ideas as to the sort of person he would like to see in the job:*

“Such a task as outlined above is a man-sized job, the work of an ordained man. Additional to other essential qualifications, he would need to be robust, and have a

working knowledge of engines.”

*He then returns to a favourite hobbyhorse:*

“There is evidence that the Church of Scotland are anxious to gain a monopoly in the North Isles...”

