

# Treasure Trove or Missionary Memorabilia

John Neal

## *Treasure Trove*

I was reclining on a Caribbean beach, arms behind me and fingers running through the sand. I felt something hard; not a pebble or seashell but a flat round object. With a beachcomber's frame of mind I imagined a Spanish 'piece of eight.' However, this object was neither gold nor silver, but black, a coin with a hole in it.



Sea water had eroded the surface and the rim was battered by rocks. Alas! Base metal of little value. Having washed the coin I saw two heads and the words METHO CENTS and wondered if this was connected to an anniversary of the American Methodist Church. I put this coin in my box of souvenirs and forgot about it. Speculation as to who lost this medallion and where, and its significance follows.

## *Missionary Memorabilia*

In 1994, after discussion with Dr Dorothy Graham, the then Connexional Archives Liaison Officer, I polished the object and deciphered METHODIST 1813 ○ NARY 191 and guessed that the heads were those of John and Charles Wesley. From a pencil rubbing, Dr Graham thought the medal was struck for the Centenary of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society [WMMS] in 1913 and guessed that one of the heads was Jabez Bunting. Mrs Joy Fox, Methodist Missionary Society [MMS] Archivist, confirmed that this was a centenary medallion of the Leeds Missionary Meeting and returned a photocopy showing the heads of Thomas Coke and John Wesley, with the globe and quotation on the reverse side.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Image supplied by Martin Bower, December 2011.



In describing 1913 as the Centenary Year of the Missionary Society, the Plymouth Wesleyan Conference observed a 'century of missionary triumph that is closing, and the new age of missionary opportunity and urgency on which we are entering.'<sup>2</sup> However, this centenary was that of 'The Methodist Missionary Society for the Leeds District' organised through Jabez Bunting, Thomas Coke and others.

### ***Branch Missionary Societies***

The Conference stated that the existing and intended District Missionary Societies shall be entitled 'Methodist Missionary Auxiliary Societies.' In Circuits there shall be 'Methodist Missionary Branch Societies', with the formation of *Ladies' Branch Associations*, and *Juvenile Branch Societies*.<sup>3</sup>

Within a few years, and even before the formation of the General Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in 1818, such branches were established in overseas Circuits. For example, in Demerara (later consolidated with Berbice and Essequibo as British Guiana, 1831) a Missionary Society was established in 1817. John Mortier wrote:

We established a Missionary Society for the purpose of augmenting the General Funds in London.<sup>4</sup> On Tuesday a sermon was preached and on Thursday a meeting held. Both were well attended, and 51 persons pledged a monthly subscription. More than £100 sterling was contributed. 'Demerara has caught the flame' that old England kindled.

An elderly white gentleman (A Prussian) who used to speak against us attends in the morning. After the Missionary Sermon £4 sterl. was donated concealing the name of the signature, 'A friend of the Gospel.'

Poor slaves said, 'Sir, we ought of all persons to help our poor fellow creatures, once we had not the Gospel, but the people of England have sent it to us and we ought to help in sending it all over the world.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Minutes of Wesleyan Methodist Conference 1913*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Rupert Davies, A Raymond George, Gordon Rupp, *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 4 vols. (London: Epworth, 1988) 4:356.

<sup>4</sup> Local Circuit expenses were met from collections and pew rents. Missionary monies raised in England were spent in outfitting and passages for missionaries, for the cost of medical and funeral expenses on the field and for meeting the expenses of the annual Conferences.

<sup>5</sup> John Mortier to the Missionary Secretary, May 27 1817, MMS Archives, SOAS. [MMSA]

In St Christopher's (St Kitts) an attempt was made on Friday July 14 1820 to form an ecumenical Missionary Society. 'We sought a union with the Church party and the Moravians. The former met our views, but the latter declined for the present until they wrote home' (to Germany.) In neighbouring Nevis 'A Missionary Society was formed for this island to aid us in an equal degree. The Resolutions essential to the formation of the Society were proposed and seconded by clergymen, missionaries, and private gentlemen... The money raised... was about two hundred pounds.'<sup>6</sup> In Montserrat, the local Missionary Meeting was formed in 1823 with President Herbert in the chair; £25 was contributed together with £300 grams of gold and jewels and a lesser amount of silver.<sup>7</sup>

### ***The Impact of Missionary Meetings***

From these early beginnings, Methodist Circuits in the Caribbean and the Americas kept annual Missionary Meetings. In the Dutch island of Sint Eustatius (Statia), Fr. Matthew Bongers, the Catholic parish priest wrote:

“The Methodist Minister we have here this year, ... traveled [US spelling] to St Kitts to attend a missionary meeting ... (where) he allegedly spoke scandalously against the Catholic Church. Two weeks after he returned to Statia, he decided to take a sea bath one afternoon, and drowned! People saw that there were sharks around and his body was completely devoured. The witnesses saw it happen but could not do anything. Everybody considered it as a punishment of God.” The Methodists better be careful: God is watching.<sup>8</sup>

It is tempting to surmise that the 1913 missionary medallion was round the neck of the Rev Joseph F. Southern when he drowned and that it was coughed up by the shark on to Statia's Oranjestad beach. However, he died in 1874.<sup>9</sup>

### ***William Warrener***

William Warrener informed the Leeds Missionary Meeting, '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.'<sup>10</sup> At the Bristol Conference in the following year, John Wesley confirmed Dr Coke's notification that his destination was Antigua, to assist John Baxter. Wesley's *Diary* indicates that with Joshua Keighly and William Hammett he was ordained Deacon on July 28 and Elder on the 29<sup>th</sup>.<sup>11</sup> The ordination certificate is dated August 1 1786.<sup>12</sup> John Simon notes that the ordinations as Deacons were not in Conference hours, as they were done before the Conference convened at 6.00 am.<sup>13</sup>

The American Methodist Episcopal Church ordained the first minister for work amongst African slaves in Antigua at their inaugural Christmas Conference in 1784. Jeremiah Lambert was most

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6 Thomas Hyde, Journal, August 4 1820, cited in David U. Farquhar, *Caribbean Adventures. Extracts from Missionary Journals* (Boston, MS: Mt. Prospect Press, 1999) pp. 32-33.

7 Hyde, August 5 1823, Farquhar, p.86.

8 Gerard van Veen, 'God's Punishment', *Colourful Religion. Fifty Mini-Stories of the Caribbean Church (1701-1998)* (Philipsburg, St Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers, 1999) p. 14.

9 Van Veen dates this occurrence 1872, as does Jacob van Putten, recounting the ministers who served in Statia during his lifetime (unpub. mscr.) The Obituary gives Southern's year of entry as 1868 and his death as November 15 1874.

10 *Methodist Magazine* [MM], Vol. xxxvii (1814) p. 514.

11 *Proceedings*, Wesley Historical Society [PWHS] 9.7 (1914) p. 149 and 33 (1962) pp. 118-119.

12 PWHS, 18 (1932) 112 and 27.6 (1950) 142.

13 John S. Simon, *John Wesley's Diaries*, Wesley Center Online, footnote 23 to entry for July 28 1786.

likely born in the former American Colony. John Baxter, although British, was ordained on June 2 1785. These two were ordained Elder by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury. John Wesley ordained William Warrener as the first British Wesleyan Minister specifically for service to non-European peoples, (Hammett, who was Irish, was destined for Nova Scotia, but stationed by Coke in St Kitts.) These were the first steps taken by the British Wesleyan Conference 'for the establishment of Missions among the Heathens.'<sup>14</sup>

Warrener had travelled in seven Circuits in as many years before he went to Antigua 1786,<sup>15</sup> He spent three years there, followed by one in St Kitts, one back in Antigua, two more in St Kitts and finally four years in Antigua, a total of eleven years. From 1797, Warrener worked for short periods in ten northern Circuits before Selby 1813-14 and was thus twenty two miles from the inaugural Leeds District WMMS. He observed that he was 'the only person in the numerous assembly that has been employed in any of the Missions now so successfully carried on by our body.'<sup>16</sup> In seconding the first resolution at the Leeds Meeting on October 6 1813, Warrener gave historical information about Nathaniel Gilbert, the founder of Wesleyan Methodism overseas, not found in other sources.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Caribbean beaches***

The 1913 centenary medallion was not pirate's treasure trove found on the Virgin Island of St Thomas, even though they have Blackbeard's Castle and Bluebeard's Castle, Treasure Island gift shops and the *Jolly Roger*, a ferry that took me to preach on the neighbouring island of St John. Neither was the beach in Jamaica where an infamous Buccaneer, Sir Henry Morgan, was appointed Lieutenant Governor in March 1675. It is of interest that in connection with their annual missionary meetings, missionaries rode into the mountains of Western Jamaica, peaching and establishing new stations. The beach in question had to be Frigate Bay on the island of St Kitts, east of the roadstead off Basseterre, so often traversed by Warrener.

### ***The Missionary Tradition***

Whoever lost the old centenary medallion was telling me that others had been to St Kitts before me. I was in a great missionary tradition beginning with William Hammett, the first Missionary to be stationed there. The congregations where I had pastoral charge dated back to 1787 and extant chapels were celebrating their 125<sup>th</sup> and 130<sup>th</sup> anniversaries.

The first British and Irish ministers inherited the work of the Revs. John Baxter and Jeremiah Lambert who in turn had built on the work of Nathaniel and Francis Gilbert. Methodist Missions in Antigua became the launching pad for mission to African slaves as migrating Christians dispersed Methodism around the Caribbean Crescent and to Central and South American territories. Although one hundred and four missionaries had been sent by October 1813, The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society added momentum to the pioneering missions in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Mission in reverse began when West Indian Ministers came on the British stations in 1967 and continued with the establishment of the Holland Methodist Circuit of the Leeward Islands District in 1993. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas [MCCA] continues with its fledgeling mission in Guadeloupe. In the 2012 Pastoral

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14 PWHS, 20.7 (1936) 158.

15 Warrener had become a travelling preacher in 1779 and served in Gainsborough, Grimsby, Gainsborough again, Aberdeen, Dundee, Berwick, and Brecon.

16 MM (1814) p. 511.

17 MM (1814) p. 511. A paper 'William Warrener's Contribution to Missionary History' is being prepared for the October 2013 MMS History Project Conference.

Address of the MCCA Conference, the newly inducted Connexional President, the Rev Otto O. Wade, invoked members to 'sail the troubled seas on the Mission of our church come wind, come weather.'<sup>18</sup> The age of European Missionary Societies may have ended, but the Age of Missions continues.

### *Caribbean Adventures*

Deaville Walker wrote about *The Romance of the West Indies* (1933) and David Farquhar entitled extracts from Missionary Journals *Caribbean Adventures*. (1999)<sup>19</sup> However, these book titles are misnomers as the real story of Missions is full of tragedy, persecution and premature deaths.<sup>20</sup>

My thirty year old memory wanted to think that the medal was found at Oranjestad Bay on the island of Dr Coke's beloved Sint Eustatius (Statia).<sup>21</sup> This was the island of my second 'missionary' appointment, rich in world-changing history. The Dutch island was instrumental in the successful American Revolution through Jewish arms traders and the first representative of a Foreign Power to salute the new flag of the United States of America on 16 November 1776.<sup>22</sup> Statia was where Black Harry and the first Methodists suffered the worst persecution since the days of primitive Christianity.

Could the medal have been round the neck of the Rev Joseph F. Southern who drowned whilst sea bathing? Was it coughed out by a whale or a shark? Fr. Matthew Bongers, the Catholic parish priest in Statia, wrote in 1782:

'The Methodist Minister we have here this year, ... traveled to St Kitts to attend a missionary meeting ... (where) he allegedly spoke scandalously against the Catholic Church. Two weeks after he returned to Statia, he decided to take a sea bath one afternoon, and drowned! People saw that there were sharks around and his body was completely devoured. The witnesses saw it happen but could not do anything. Everybody considered it as a punishment of God.' The Methodists better be careful: God is watching.<sup>23</sup>

No, the medallion was not lost on Statia's beach by Southern as he died in 1874.<sup>24</sup> A romantic outlook would like to think it was a beach on Antigua, the birthplace of Methodist missions. But it was 1998 before I visited one of Antigua's 365 beaches. Was this a relic from the wreck of the mail boat Maria when five Missionaries from two Circuits were returning from Synod in St Kitts via Montserrat? Those that drowned were Rev William White with Mrs White and three children; Rev Thomas Truscott and his wife with one child; Rev Daniel Hillier (Mrs Hillier and one child were not on the vessel and returned to England); Rev William Oke (who was unmarried); and Rev Thomas Jones. The sole survivor was Mrs Dorothy Jones who returned to England and later married Thomas C. Hinckson

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18 [www.mccalive.org/documents/485.pdf](http://www.mccalive.org/documents/485.pdf)

19 F. Deaville Walker, *The Call of the West Indies. The Romance of Methodist Work and Opportunity* (London: Cargate Press, 1933). David U. Farquhar, *Caribbean Adventures. Extracts from Missionary Journals* (Boston, MS, Mt. Prospect Press LLC, 1999) [Journals of John Brownell, Matthew Banks, Thomas K. Hyde and James Hartwell]

20 For example, in Dominica eight of the first ten Methodist Ministers died and the other two broke down in health and had to leave. In the first hundred years, 190 of 307 Moravian missionaries died within a few years of arrival in the Danish Virgin Islands.

21 For details of Dr Coke's visits to Statia in 1787, 1788-9, 1790 & 1792-3 see John A. Vickers, *The Journals of Dr Thomas Coke* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005) pp. 84, 110, 112-3, 138, 178).

22 Commemorative plaque presented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, December 12 1939. J. Hartog, *History of St. Eustatius* (Aruba, NA: De Wit Store N.V., 1976) photo p. 67.

23 van Veen, p. 14.

24 Jacob van Putten recounting the ministers who served in his lifetime gives 1872 as does van Veen. Obituary gives Southern's year of entry 1868 and death November 15 1874.

on 13 July 1832.<sup>25</sup> Neither was this centenary souvenir from the mail-boat Maria as the shipwreck is dated February 28 1826.<sup>26</sup>

### ***The Missionary Tradition***

Romanticism aside, it is more likely that I found this medallion at Frigate Bay on the island of St Kitts in the early 1960s. I like to think that it was on my first Christmas Day in the Caribbean. After the traditional 5.00 am services, the ministerial families gathered at the Superintendent's manse for Christmas dinner. Later in the afternoon my wife and I went to frigate Bay for no other reason than to write back to family and friends in Britain saying we had been sea-bathing on Christmas Day!

Wherever this centenary medallion was discovered, what was it telling me? Others had been there before me. I had entered a great missionary tradition, first at Richmond College and now in the West Indian islands where Wesleyan Methodism began with lay men and women, long before the arrival of Dr Thomas Coke. Of the first four churches on St Kitts where I had pastoral charge, Dieppe Bay had a chapel c.1787-8 (this was removed to Sandy Point in 1794.) A number of wooden chapels were used before the erection of a stone chapel in 1834, still used as a school in the 1960s, but replaced with a hurricane-proof structure in 1922. The Tabernacle stone chapel was built in 1838 and St Paul's 'substantial stone' chapel of 1841 was rebuilt in 1959. In terms of people the Methodist Church in St Kitts was already 179 years old and some chapels could be celebrating anniversaries of between 125 and 130 years.

### ***Bicentennial - 1813-2013***

The Leeds District pioneered Methodist Missionary Societies, the bicentennial of which is being celebrated in October 2013. Principal speakers at the inaugural meeting included the Rev William Warrener and others who recounted personal experience of Methodist beginnings. This included information that is not found in other sources, for example, that Nathaniel Gilbert, the Methodist, first heard John Wesley on Kennington Common.<sup>27</sup> Correspondence received in the West Indies inevitably perished, if not through hurricane winds and floods or earthquakes and volcanoes it was consumed by termites and cockroaches. Through the years, valuable records have also been disposed inadvertently by Ministers. Consequently, some original letters and reports exist only in the *Arminian*, *Wesleyan* or *Methodist Magazines*.

In describing 1913 as the Centenary Year of the Missionary Society, the Plymouth Conference observed a 'century of missionary triumph that is closing, and the new age of missionary opportunity and urgency on which we are entering.'<sup>28</sup> The second century witnessed the zenith of missionary enterprise before the emergence of autonomous churches and eventually the eclipse of British missionary work.

The cradle of Methodist Missions in Antigua became the launch pad of mission to African slaves as

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25 The Mate of the 'Maria' and another sailor, who were trying to rescue Maria's (life) boat drifted back of Nevis, were picked up by a French vessel and taken to St Bartholomew's.

26 John Hannah, *The Story of the Wreck of the 'Maria' Mail Boat with a memoir of Mrs Hinckson the only survivor*. (London: Charles H. Kelly, c.1859). Notes taken from Mrs Jones narrative *The loss of Five Wesleyan Missionaries in the 'Maria' Mail Boat off the island of Antigua, in the West Indies, February 28 1826*. Sloops were one-masted sail boats used for local mail and inter-island trade. Line drawings in Hannah's book show a two masted vessel on pp. 52 & 77.

27 *The Methodist Magazine for the Year 1814*, vol. XXXVII [11<sup>th</sup> of New Series] (London: Conference Office) pp. 12-20, 92-100, 436-9, 507-519.

28 *Minutes of Wesleyan Methodist Conference 1913*, pp. 10-11.

migrating Christians dispersed Methodism around the Caribbean Crescent and to Central and South American territories. The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society added momentum to the pioneering mission in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Mission in reverse began when West Indian Ministers came on the British stations in 1967 and continued with the establishment of the Holland Methodist Circuit in 1993. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas continues with its fledgeling mission in Guadeloupe.

Following a celebration of the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Methodist work in Antigua in 2010, Delegates of the MCCA Districts to the Caribbean Mission & Evangelism Seminar declared that they had a Missionary Mandate to go to all nations to make disciples.<sup>29</sup> In the 2012 Pastoral Address of the MCCA Conference to the Congregations, the newly inducted Connexional President, Rev Otto O. Wade, invoked members to 'sail the troubled seas on the Mission of our church come wind, come weather.'<sup>30</sup> The Age of Missionary Societies has ended, but the Age of Missions continues.

### ***1960 Missionary Bicentennial***

The first volume of the MMS History Project is entitled *Methodists and their Missionary Societies 1760-1900*.<sup>31</sup> It is acknowledged that the period should start in 1759 when Nathaniel Gilbert first preached and gathered a group of Methodists. Nevertheless, 1760 has been cemented into oral tradition and historical publications. In this connection a brooch was issued with the



dates 1760-1960 superimposed on a Bible and circled with 'West Indies'.

The 1960 event was celebrated, especially in the West Indies, with special services and pageants. The birthplace of Methodist Missions was in Antigua, so it is asked if the broken and tarnished medallion was found on one of the island's beaches, a relic from the wreck of the mail-boat Maria in which five Missionaries, two wives and four children were lost; the wife of one Missionary being the only survivor. The missionary party was returning from the Annual District Meeting held in St Kitts sailing via Montserrat when it was wrecked on February 28 1826, but this was only thirteen and a half years after the Leeds meeting.

### ***1986 Bicentennial***

The Methodist Church Overseas Division produced a commemorative item to celebrate 200 years of Methodist World Mission dating from a dawn meeting in Antigua on Christmas Day in 1786. Dr Coke arrived providentially with three missionaries. One of these was William Warrener who had been appointed to Antigua by the 1786 Wesleyan Conference, to assist the Rev John Baxter. Baxter had been ordained Elder by Bishops Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury

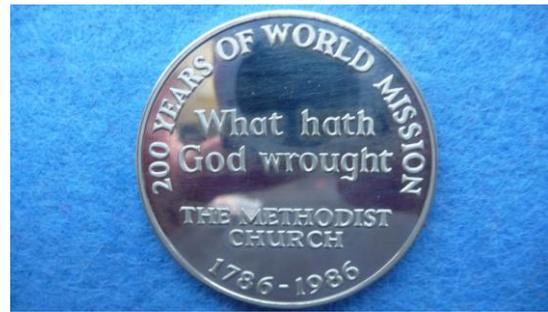
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29 'Revisioning for Mission in the Caribbean: that the world may know Jesus Christ' (Ocho Rios, Jamaica, 2011). [www.mccalive.org/documents/447.pdf](http://www.mccalive.org/documents/447.pdf).

30 [www.mccalive.org/documents/485.pdf](http://www.mccalive.org/documents/485.pdf)

31 John Pritchard, *Methodists and their Missionary Societies 1760-1900* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2013).

at a Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church on Thursday, June 2 1785.<sup>32</sup>



The big event in England was the weekend celebration at Trentham Gardens in Stoke-on-Trent, June 20-22 1986. Some 15,000 people assembled for the celebration service that included the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The Rev Dr Philip A. Potter had left his carefully prepared notes at his lodging and added his sermon. This message, as the weekend itself, and the commemorative medallion, provided memorabilia that is treasured by those who were challenged to launch out in missionary service.

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32 John Vickers, *The Journals of Dr Thomas Coke* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005) p.65, note 191.