**Report on John Rylands Research Institute/Manchester Wesley Research Centre Joint Visiting Fellowship 2016**

I was grateful to be awarded the JRRI/MWRC Joint Visiting Fellowship for 2016. In the autumn of 2016 I had research leave from the University of Stirling and so was able to spend time in Manchester during the latter part of the year as well as during the summer.

My project was designed to investigate Methodist growth in the British Isles during the Victorian era. That entailed studying overall denominational strategies and, as case-studies of growth, two areas where Methodism was strong and where evidence was readily available. The aim was to collect a large body of data from the Methodist Archives kept at the John Rylands Library on these topics. The correspondence of Jabez Bunting and other Wesleyan ministers proved less illuminating than had been hoped because the sources contained little about strategy. Home Mission annual reports, however, were much more informative, supplying sufficient evidence to prepare a paper on ‘The Mid-Victorian Revolution in Wesleyan Methodist Home Mission’, which was delivered at the Nazarene Theological College in November 2016.

Thanks to a member of staff at the John Rylands Library, I discovered five boxes of papers relating to Methodism in the Shetland Isles, an area I had already intended to investigate as a case-study of home mission. The boxes contained the papers of James Loutit, the mainland representative of Shetland Methodism for much of the time between the 1840s and the 1870s. Loutit kept every in-letter, made a copy of every out-letter and despatched them all in 1877 to the Mission House, from which they have come down to Methodist Archives. The string on many of the bundles had never been untied. This collection gave an insight into the real workings of Methodism on the ground such as is unavailable, I believe, for any other part of nineteenth-century Methodism. It therefore constituted treasure trove for the current project and so I spent a large proportion of my time at Manchester examining its contents. The boxes also turned out to contain details of a campaign run by Loutit to alter the relations of landlord and tenant in Shetland that ultimately led to the important Crofters’ Act of 1886. This political effort, hitherto unknown to the secondary literature, was an unexpected find. It is an example of what the rich resources of the Methodist Archives have to offer.

In addition, a visit from Manchester to Leeds at an early stage in the project established that the West Yorkshire Archives contain ample records of Victorian Methodism in that city. I have made several visits to the archives to explore Leeds as a case-study of Methodist home mission alongside the Shetland Isles. On a couple of days when the John Rylands Library was not open, I was able to use the Wesley Research Centre at the Nazarene College, finding useful sources by looking along the shelves. I also enjoyed meeting friends old and new from the college, the university, and elsewhere to discuss matters relating to Methodist history.

The project will continue with research on other areas, but the time spent in Manchester was extremely productive. It is planned to lead to several articles and eventually to a monograph on Victorian Methodist home mission.

David Bebbington

Professor of History

University of Stirling