**Christopher Evans’s Reflections His Summer 2017 John Rylands Research Institute-Manchester Wesley Research Centre Joint Visiting Fellowship**

My research centered on transatlantic Methodism in the late nineteenth century, focusing on the rise of the Deaconess Movement. I was especially interested in studying the role of British Methodist “sisterhoods” formed in the 1880s, culminating with the establishment of the Wesley Deaconess Institute in the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1890. During the six weeks of my fellowship, I examined how these women contributed to what I consider to be a vital, yet overlooked, component for understanding the development of Methodism’s social witness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The John Rylands Library has an extensive collection of materials related to Wesleyan Deaconesses, including personal papers, correspondences, and several diaries/journals kept by different women. Additionally, the examination of important periodicals, such as the *Methodist Times* and *Flying Leaves* (the early twentieth-century journal of the Wesleyan Methodist Deaconess Movement), provided an invaluable look into the lives of these women and their work.

Part of what I discovered in my research was the extent that these late nineteenth century Methodist women were influenced by the international women’s temperance movement. While striving to get people to sign “the pledge” (a vow that individuals would abstain from buying and consuming alcohol), Methodist women in cities like Manchester, Cardiff, Birmingham, and London saw alcohol abuse connected with larger problems of late nineteenth-century urbanization.

The highlight of my research occurred when Rylands archivist, Gareth Lloyd uncovered a diary kept by a Wesleyan Methodist Deaconess, Jeanie Banks. The diary, covering the years from 1888 to 1893, provides a vivid depiction of her work at the Wesleyan Methodist East End London Mission. In detail, Banks discusses her weekly routines of teaching children, leading open air revivals, and most especially, the door-to-door visitation that represented the backbone of Deaconess work. Banks, and other Deaconess women, took to heart John Wesley’s belief that ministry could not be accomplished by proxy. That is, one needed to be exposed to the living conditions of those who struggled with poverty.

What I took away from reading Banks’s journal, as well as reading the narratives of other Deaconess women, is that understanding the development of late nineteenth century Methodism moves beyond formal theologies. These women were anchored in a passionate commitment to lead their communities to Christian conversion. Yet their beliefs were often forged out of the multiple roles that they took on as teachers, preachers, social workers, and community activists. As they shared their understanding of Christianity, they also strove to provide urban poor a sense of personal agency and self-worth.

My research will not only contribute to a transatlantic understanding of the Deaconess Movement, but also show how late nineteenth-century Methodist women were able to create the space within male-dominated church structures to engage in visionary forms of ministry. My time in Manchester will contribute to several articles that explore the history and work of the Deaconess movement, as well as to a book project on the International Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, and its charismatic Methodist leader, Frances E. Willard.

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