

THE RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF METHODIST TICKETS, AND
ASSOCIATED PRACTICES OF COLLECTING AND RECOLLECTING, 1741-2017

SARAH LLOYD

University of Hertfordshire

ABSTRACT:

Among all the paper ephemera surviving from eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Britain, the humble Methodist ticket has attracted little attention from scholars and collectors. Issued quarterly to members as a testimonial to religious conduct, many still exist, reflecting the sheer quantity produced by 1850, and the significance of keeping practices, where Methodist habits were distinctive. This article explores first the origin and spread of tickets primarily within British Methodism, but also noting its trans-oceanic contexts. Apparently inconsequential objects, they shaped experience and knowledge, illuminating eighteenth-century religious life, female participation, and plebeian agency. Discussion then turns to patterns of saving and memorialization that from the 1740s preserved Methodists' tickets. Such practices extended the life-cycle of the individual ticket and created the accidents of its survival, giving it new uses as an institutional resource. In recovering the dead, it acquired nostalgic value, but other capacities were lost and forgotten. The ticket's origins, uses, and preservation intersect with major historical and historiographical currents to complicate established narratives of print, urban association, and commerce, and to present alternative understandings of collecting.

Of all the paper ephemera produced in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Britain, high art engravings have long attracted attention from scholars and collectors.¹ In a sub-genre of tickets, theatre and elite entertainments predominate.² But when it comes to survivals from the period, both are matched by the humble Methodist ticket, which from 1741 was issued

School of Humanities, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, AL10 9AB s.v.lloyd@herts.ac.uk

¹ E.g. Andrew White Tuer, *Bartolozzi and his works* (London, 1885).

² Gillian Russell, 'Sarah Sophia Banks's private theatricals: ephemera, sociability and the archiving of fashionable life', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 27 (2015), pp. 535-55.

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quarterly to members as a testimonial to their religious conduct. This persistence is a reflection of the number produced, in the millions by 1850.³ Other types of ticket were also printed in considerable quantities: turnpike tickets, seamen's tickets (a type of pay warrant), and the largest category of all, lottery tickets, but their lower survival rates point to the significance of keeping practices, where Methodist habits were distinctive.

This article explores the origin and spread of tickets primarily within British Methodism, but also noting its trans-oceanic contexts. It highlights the importance of apparently inconsequential objects in shaping experience and knowledge. It traces the processes through which tickets were made, issued, displayed, exchanged, and stored. Ordinary women and men learnt through Methodism the potential for tickets, and paper more generally, to initiate and regulate social relationships. In giving feelings a material form, the ticket embodied aspects of being, self and belonging; it forged connections and identities. Early use illuminates eighteenth-century religious life and plebeian agency. Simultaneously Methodist tickets unsettle an established narrative about the broader society in which they emerged, specifically the development of print and urban association.

Patterns of memory and memorialization are the second focus of this article. From the 1740s, Methodists saved and collected tickets. They gathered them into scrap-books, envelopes, and boxes. Historians of the movement then scrambled for complete sets. That urge to preserve finally deposited many of them in archives where tickets now sit alongside more familiar Methodist documentation, including class lists and circuit plans.⁴ Such practices extended the life-cycle of the individual ticket and created the accidents of its survival, giving it new uses as an institutional resource. In recovering the dead, it acquired nostalgic value, but other capacities were lost and forgotten.

³ Estimate based on Methodist membership figures. The number of tickets surviving in archives and private ownership across the world is unknown and probably unknowable.

⁴ This article discusses a selection of items, mainly from six major archives: University of Manchester, John Rylands Library (JRL); Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History (OCMCH); Museum of Primitive Methodism, Englesea Brook; The New Room, Bristol; The Museum of Methodism & John Wesley's House, London; United Methodist Archives and History Center (UMAHC), Drew University, New Jersey. Sources include: 31 albums of Methodist tickets issued before 1850; a comparable number of sets, kept in envelopes and boxes, or mounted for exhibition; loose and miscellaneous tickets, often uncatalogued.

The Methodist ticket is a potentially rich historical prospect, in the sense that it falls between and straddles categories; it disappears in interesting ways. Modern Methodist historiography suggests how the ticket might be understood in relation to religious practice and movement-building, but has little to say about it explicitly. Its presence in the American colonies and the Caribbean is even more elusive.⁵ Literature on the material culture of popular religion suggests one approach.⁶ Ephemera studies offer a way of defining the form of the ticket, as insubstantial, short-lived, dispensable, and also persistent. They shed light on the jobbing printers who produced it, on the formation of a distinctive category of ephemeral print in the mid eighteenth century, and on its subsequent collection.⁷ We shall see how the Methodist case challenges orthodoxies and classifications, here as elsewhere. Methodist antiquarianism has supplied the most significant body of material, often structured as catalogues and authored in some instances by collectors themselves.⁸ But these men's concerns make a poor match with connoisseurship, aesthetics, and enlightenment knowledge: neither their object (the ticket) nor their purpose (a *religious* history) conforms to an important strand in the literature on collecting. So while the first Methodist tickets emerged in a period that scholars associate with systematic collecting, characteristics of those eighteenth-century practices still define a field that excludes Methodist examples.⁹ As for the habits of those who first saved the paper, they are poorly served by the critical

⁵ E.g. David Hempton, *Methodism: empire of the spirit* (New Haven & London, 2005); Phyllis Mack, *Heart religion in the British enlightenment: gender and emotion in early Methodism* (Cambridge, 2008); Clive Murray Norris, *The financing of John Wesley's Methodism* (Oxford, 2017).

⁶ *Material Religion: the journal of objects, art and belief*

⁷ Maurice Rickards, *The encyclopaedia of ephemera*, ed. Michael Twyman (London, 2000); James Raven, 'Why ephemera were not ephemeral: the effectiveness of innovative print in the eighteenth century', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 45 (2015), pp. 56-73; Gillian Russell, 'The neglected history of the history of printed ephemera', *Melbourne Historical Journal*, 42 (2014), pp. 7-36; Kevin D. Murphy and Sally O'Driscoll, eds., *Studies in ephemera: text and image in eighteenth-century print* (Lewisburg, 2013).

⁸ F.M. Parkinson, 'Class tickets', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society (PWHS)* 1 (1898), pp. 129-137; Joseph G. Wright, 'Class and band tickets: a guide to collectors', *PWHS*, 5 (1905), pp. 33-44, 66, 96; John H. Verney, 'Early Wesleyan class tickets: comments and catalogue', *PWHS*, 31 (1957), pp. 2-9, 15, 34-8, 70-3; Oliver A. Beckerlegge, 'Non-Wesleyan class tickets', *PWHS*, 32 (1959), pp. 34-7, 48-51, 88-90; D.B. Bradshaw, 'Some Irish quarterly tickets', *PWHS*, 21 (1937), pp. 1-3.

⁹ John Brewer, *The pleasures of the imagination: English culture in the eighteenth century* (London, 1997); Adriana Cracium and Simon Schaffer, eds., *The material cultures of Enlightenment arts and sciences* (London, 2016).

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elaboration of ‘collecting’ as a higher-order activity distinct from accumulation.¹⁰ Studies informed by sociological and ethnographic approaches cover some of the ground discussed in this article, but their present-day examples are not always a good fit.¹¹ Psychoanalytic and philosophical approaches emphasize what the set does for the collector, rather than what the collection does to the item contained within it.¹² Actor-network theory gives the ticket ‘life’ and an agency suited to its capacity to flow and shape, but precisely what does that mean in a religious setting, where memory is suffused with providential thinking?¹³ Memory studies have had relatively little to say about the world before 1800.¹⁴ Work on eighteenth-century Britain, where the origins of the Methodist ticket lie, sets an interpretative agenda in relation to material objects, mobility, gender, emotion, and sociability, but again is largely oblivious of it.¹⁵ In short, the Methodist ticket is an invisible presence in major historical and historiographical currents. What happens when it becomes visible?

I

While its history is under-explored, ticket use grew during the early-modern period with a proliferation of specialised kinds mostly printed on paper and card, but also fashioned from other materials, including metal and bone. In timing, innovation and popular exposure, this expansion parallels development of the administrative form.¹⁶ Urban sociability, commerce, and print made an increasing proportion of the eighteenth-century population familiar with tickets, either through handling them -- the pawnbroker’s duplicate or ‘ticket’, for instance –

¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, ‘The system of collecting’ in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The cultures of collecting* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), pp. 22-3.

¹¹ Susan M. Pearce, *On collecting: an investigation into collecting in the European tradition* (London, 1995); Daniel Miller, *The comfort of things* (Cambridge, 2008).

¹² Baudrillard, ‘System of collecting’; Walter Benjamin, ‘Unpacking my library: a talk about book collecting’ in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (New York, 1969), pp. 59-67

¹³ Frank Trentmann, ‘Materiality in the future of history: things, practices and politics’, *Journal of British Studies* 28 (2009), pp. 283–307.

¹⁴ Judith Pollman, *Memory in early modern Europe 1500-1800* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 8, 167

¹⁵ Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, eds., *Everyday objects: medieval and early modern material culture and its meanings* (Farnham, 2010); Ute Frevert, Christian Bailey, Pascal Eitler, et al, *Emotional lexicons: continuity and change in the vocabulary of feeling 1700-2000* (Oxford, 2014); Paul Langford, *A polite and commercial people. England 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1989).

¹⁶ Naomi Tadmor, ‘The settlement of the poor and the rise of the form in England c.1662-1780’, *Past and Present*, 236 (2017), pp. 43-97.

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or through indirectly knowing about them – such as the more specialised ‘Tyburn ticket’, a judicial reward that exempted the holder from parish office. While newspapers and coffee houses spread knowledge of and distributed tickets, tickets were not simply a metropolitan or urban phenomenon nor were they always monetized. Women and men, aristocrats, middling sort, and labourers, encountered these objects in a range of convivial and institutional settings, learning the conventions that set them to work. Everyday transactions and micro-politics involving tickets expanded earlier practices that expressed obligations and feelings through things, or used seals, certificates, and papers to underwrite identities. Tickets extended opportunities to give access, possession, information, social capital, and even chance a tangible form. In that shape, abstract qualities as well as material benefits could be exchanged, displayed, circulated or released. Cumulatively over the course of the century, people found ways of using tickets to shape social life, to store information, to organize religious, military and political organizations, to materialize relationships and trust.¹⁷

Looking across the eighteenth-century range, from the elite assembly ticket to the beggar’s or radical’s version, certain patterns emerge. Tickets multiplied in contexts marked by mobility, social fluidity, expansion, and change. They created distinctive ways of relating to and managing other people, and of surviving, whether through legitimate or fraudulent acquisition. Through generations of trial and use, people learnt to associate tickets with relationships of exchange, belonging, and identity, until these habits became instinctive and transparent. At the same time, interactions around tickets could add layers of aesthetic, sensory, and emotional meaning that went beyond monetary or practical value. These responses ensured that some tickets were carefully kept long past their immediate purpose, until all such attributes were spent.¹⁸

Methodists have a special part in this history. They were the first British religious group to deploy tickets as a central feature in their society, an experiment that gave tickets

¹⁷ Sarah Lloyd, ‘Ticketing the British eighteenth century: “A thing ... never heard of before”’, *Journal of Social History*, 46 (2013), pp. 843-71

¹⁸ Lloyd, ‘Ticketing’, p. 861

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new properties, power, and movement. John Wesley recognized tickets' potential in spiritual life, introducing them in 1741 to regulate worshippers in Bristol: 'to those who were sufficiently recommended, tickets were given'.¹⁹ From that date onwards, the ticket asserted order and authority.²⁰ What began in a moment of crisis in the religiously intense atmosphere of early Methodism, was rapidly systematized into a quarterly process of examining and then separating 'the precious from the vile':

To each of those, of whose Seriousness and Good Conversation, I found no Reason to doubt, I gave a Testimony under my own Hand, by writing their Name on a *Ticket* prepared for that Purpose; Every Ticket implying as strong a Recommendation of the Person to whom it was given as if I had wrote at length, 'I believe the Bearer hereof to be one that fears GOD and works Righteousness.'²¹

Methodist preaching was open, but entry into any meeting, including the emotionally charged 'love-feast' (a time of fervent prayer and fellowship), required a ticket.²² It was a disciplinary device, a 'quiet and inoffensive Method' of excluding the 'disorderly walker': 'He has no New Ticket ... and hereby it is immediately known, That he is no longer of this Community.'²³ A means to administer an expanding movement, it was especially valuable in creating certainty and knowledge. For those who physically held a current ticket, it was a guarantee of belonging. It introduced them 'into fellowship with one another, not only in one place, but in every place where any might happen to come'.²⁴ Early Methodists were mobile. The ticket was in motion, leaving a paper trail of geographical range and spiritual reach, opening the comforts of relationship in unfamiliar circumstances, in the American colonies as well as in Britain: 'where-ever they came, [they] were acknowledg'd by their Bretheren,

¹⁹ *The works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler *et al* (27 vols., London, 1984-), XIX, p. 184; 24 Feb 1741.

²⁰ Hempton, *Methodism*, p. 16.

²¹ John Wesley, *A plain account of the people called Methodists* (Bristol, 1749), pp. 14-15.

²² Until 1758, entry was restricted to those with a Band Ticket; after that a current class ticket sufficed: Frank Baker, *Methodism and the love-feast* (London, 1957), pp. 35-6

²³ Wesley, *Plain account*, p. 15; *Works of John Wesley*, XIX, p. 183

²⁴ Jonathan Crowther, *A portraiture of Methodism: or, the history of the Wesleyan Methodists* (London, 1815), p. 42

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and received with all Cheerfulness'.²⁵ Methodism absorbed its members' particular environments and experiences. By the late eighteenth-century Welsh-language tickets created a distinctive bond; in Scotland, Methodists adopted an additional metal token as a 'badge of church membership'.²⁶ The ticket underwrote identity in both a social and a spiritual sense, in individual and collective settings.²⁷ It was a marker of adulthood or independence, not given to young children.²⁸ While the device itself was a novel idea, it drew heavily on biblical formulations in separating god-fearing people from the unworthy²⁹, and Wesley explicitly represented his tickets as direct descendants of the '*Commendatory Letters*' mentioned by St Paul or '*Tesserae*' (tokens, tallies and figuratively, signs and passwords) sanctioned by the Ancients.³⁰

Wesley claimed that showing tickets was 'a thing ... never heard of before'³¹, but exactly where the idea came from is unclear. Tokens had been used since the sixteenth century to monitor and regulate access to communion.³² Those Bristol tickets followed shortly from Wesley's engagement with and then break from the Moravians who not only issued tokens allowing individuals to enter particular religious meetings but also conducted church business by drawing lots, another type of eighteenth-century ticket with ancient antecedents and contemporary resonance.³³ More relevant probably were mainstream tickets of admission, including those produced by numerous eighteenth-century voluntary organisations. These were endorsed with signatures and seals giving admittance to fund-

²⁵ Wesley, *Plain account*, p. 15; *Journals and letters of Francis Asbury* (3 vols., London & Nashville, 1958), I, p. 36; Hempton, *Methodism*, p. 21

²⁶ JRL, MAW MS106; Margaret Batty, *Scotland's Methodists 1750-2000* (Edinburgh, 2010), p. 32.

²⁷ Hempton, *Methodism*, p. 78

²⁸ David Lowes Watson, *The early Methodist class meeting: its origins and significance* (Nashville, 1985), p. 208; JRL, MA/1977/718/3; John Bickers Album (1813); *Methodist Magazine*, 1835, p. 494; Luke Tyerman, *The life and times of the Rev. John Wesley M.A., founder of the Methodists* (3 vols., London, 1870-1), III, p. 116.

²⁹ Jeremiah 15.19; Matthew 25: 31

³⁰ Wesley, *Plain account*, p. 15.

³¹ *Works of John Wesley*, XXI, p. 181

³² Ruth Mason, 'Free from censure: a communion token from the Scots Church London Wall', *Journal of the Antique Metalware Society*, 19 (2011), pp. 50-60.

³³ Wright, 'Class and band Tickets', p. 34. George Lavington noted a connection between Moravians and Methodists in relation to lots: *The enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists compared* (3 vols., London, 1754), I, p. 55. Moravian lots had a Methodist parallel in packs of small cards, each with a biblical quotation, from which members drew cards: The Museum of Methodism, London.

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raising church services, performances, and dinners.³⁴ On a similar principle, Anglican bishops had already used tickets to manage large-scale confirmations, although it was not until the Methodist ticket was well-established, that the practice was systematized and became widespread.³⁵ In the second half of the century, religious denominations introduced pew ‘tickets’ to fund their buildings. These became an important financial measure for Methodists too, although their docket for such payments usually referred to pews, sittings or seats, preserving a special place for their ticket.³⁶ From the outset, therefore, Methodist tickets were attuned to contemporary developments, particularly urban patterns of sociability and association.³⁷ But none of the contemporary parallels quite prepare the historian for the power of Wesley’s particular deployment of the form.

Wesley recognized a potential in the ticket to compress and intensify social processes, especially around membership and order. His account of those first tickets explained that a name written there was equivalent to a recommendation ‘at length’: it underwrote credit and character.³⁸ Wesley invested a piece of paper with symbolic authority and incorporated it into a ritual of gaining entrance to meetings and of quarterly examination. Crucially, possession of a ticket gave religious commitment, enthusiasm, experience, and reassurance a solid form. Unlike the admission or lottery ticket, which had life or currency in relation to a single event³⁹, Methodist tickets represented a pervasive force over daily life, a visible reminder of enduring struggles for spiritual improvement. Once issued, the Methodist ticket exerted its power through a material presence and keeping close to the possessor. Early examples were printed on ‘small, thick *cards* capable of going through the rough wear of a *quarter*’; many were folded by their owners and perhaps tucked into a pocket book or work

³⁴ Lloyd, ‘Ticketing’

³⁵ Francis Atterbury, *Directions for confirmation* ([1716]); Phillip Tovey, *Anglican confirmation 1662-1820* (Farnham, 2014), p. 122

³⁶ Norris, *Financing*, p. 226; JRL, MA1977/717: 1743 (Hackney); 1869 (St Johns Square); 1900 (City Road); John E. Vickers, ‘Notes & Queries 1164’, *PWHS*, 36 (June 1967), p. 64.

³⁷ Hempton, *Methodism*, p. 52.

³⁸ *The nature, design, and general rules of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood, Newcastle upon Tyne, &c.* (London, 1794).

³⁹ Until 1769 lottery tickets were interest-bearing bonds, giving them a fixed-term economic value beyond the draw.

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of devotion.⁴⁰ It differed from other eighteenth-century tickets that released their primary benefits when let go at the door, for example. The Methodist ticket structured time spent and emotions felt. In restricting access to the love-feast, it heightened expectations and promised religious privacy.⁴¹ As instruments of practical supervision and certificates of moral behaviour, tickets constituted the society or 'Connexion' and its subsequent arrangement into bands and classes with separate tickets for each, as well as a transitional 'on trial' version and an occasional 'Note' for entry to the love-feast.⁴² In the process it created a form of human equivalence through which every member, of whatever social status, equaled one ticket. Thomas Taylor, an early Methodist preacher in Cork let no one, not even the class leader or steward, enter a meeting 'without producing his ticket; and the work of the Lord prospered on every side ... I insisted on poor and rich meeting in class, or not to have any privilege of meeting in society'.⁴³ The ticket is therefore the material sign of the new religious phenomenon that was Methodism, capturing distinctive features of the movement and of Wesley himself.⁴⁴

The Bristol tickets of 1741 were almost certainly handwritten slips. None survive. Ornamentation followed swiftly: leafy scrolls, vases, an angel with trumpets, sun, crown, and clouds, all probably taken from printers' decorative stock. A few designs included general exhortations. For the first decade at least, Methodist tickets had no fixed style or size and were locally determined, with different practices of distinguishing the current quarter (such as by colour).⁴⁵ Emblems featured, some attracting hostile comment: 'Popish pictures and devices upon them as of the Virgin Mary, a Crucifix, or Lamb'.⁴⁶ Two characteristics

⁴⁰ JRL, MA1977/720: James Everett's bound volume of tickets, 1742-1839 with manuscript remarks, 'Remarks' for 1746; OCMCH, drawer of class tickets, 1798-9.

⁴¹ Batty, *Scotland's Methodists*, p. 67

⁴² Wright, 'Class and band tickets', pp. 33-44; OCMCH: Kenworthy Class Ticket Album; Baker, *Methodism*, p. 36.

⁴³ Thomas Jackson, *The lives of early Methodist preachers*, 3rd edition (6 vols., London, 1865-6), V, pp. 26-7

⁴⁴ Rupert E. Davies, 'Introduction', *Works of John Wesley*, IX, p. 14; Henry D. Rack, 'Introduction', X, pp. 106-7.

⁴⁵ Wright, 'Class and band tickets'; Verney, 'Class tickets'; JRL, MA1977/720: 'Remarks' for 1745, 1749, 1750, 1753; on decorative ornaments: Raven, 'Why ephemera were not ephemeral', pp. 63-4.

⁴⁶ Hempton, *Methodism*, p. 89; John Scott, *A fine picture of enthusiasm* (London, 1744), pp. 24-5. The 1750 crucifixion scene reproduced the frontispiece of John Wesley's 1735 edition of *The*

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differentiated Methodist tickets from the devotional form of the Catholic holy card: a biblical quotation and an initial letter, which denoted the quarter and ran in regular sequence. These appeared in 1749/50 and 1760 respectively.⁴⁷ From the mid-1760s they were set within a black decorative border and there were no more pictures, although the size and shape of the ticket continued to vary. ‘Watch and Pray’ of 1754 was one of the largest (8.5cm x 7cm **Fig. 1**); a ticket cut from a printed sheet in the 1760s was approximately 3.5cm x 6cm. The new pattern of 1822 (8cm x 6cm) was considerably bigger than its immediate predecessor, hinting perhaps at changing practice and purposes.⁴⁸ Across the Atlantic, Americans shared the design of border and text, but by the early 1800s had re-orientated their tickets, distinguishing the quarters in their own way.⁴⁹

Arranged in chronological order, therefore, surviving tickets record a mode of religious kinship; they chart the institutionalization of Methodism and its global realignments. Wesley’s writing on a ticket – the recipient’s name, a number or a date – transformed an inert, quotidian scrap into an active testimonial. It was also a kind of authorship. But as numbers grew, Wesley could no longer administer the system personally. Assistants now delivered tickets ‘where we cannot do it ourselves’.⁵⁰ Every three months, supporters across the country got the ‘Society Tickets ready’⁵¹, cutting them from large sheets and making annotations. Women participated in at least some circumstances.⁵² Each member was questioned on spiritual progress before the preacher wrote the recipient’s name on a ticket and then presented it ‘in a very solemn manner’.⁵³ Only in the nineteenth century,

Christian's pattern; or, a treatise of the imitation of Christ (London, 1735). For another example: Frank Baker, ‘Notes and Queries 816’, *PWHS*, 23 (1942), pp. 142-3

⁴⁷ Verney, ‘Class tickets’, p.15. Later borders are stock type: William Caslon, *A specimen of printing types* (London, 1785), and bear some resemblance to turnpike tickets: Bradshaw, ‘Irish quarterly tickets’, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Examples from JRL, MA1977/720: dimensions are in height x width.

⁴⁹ UMAHC, Methodist Class Tickets, 2141-4-5:1

⁵⁰ *Works of John Wesley*, X, p. 179

⁵¹ British Library: Add Mss 44935, ‘Diary of Richard Viney, 1744’, 68R

⁵² Dorothy Graham, ‘Female itinerants of early Primitive Methodism, with special reference to those stationed in missionary situations’, <http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk/missionary-history-graham-female-itinerants-2005.pdf> (accessed 1.5.18), p. 4.

⁵³ Joseph Nightingale, *A portraiture of Methodism: being an impartial view of the rise, progress, doctrines, discipline, and manners of the Wesleyan Methodists* (London, 1807), p. 247

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in Britain and America, did issuers regularly sign or initial the ticket.⁵⁴ From the mid-1760s, the British pattern was sent quarterly ‘from London directly’ marking a process of standardization, generating complexity and activity.⁵⁵ By 1807, class and band tickets were printed centrally at the Methodist Conference Office in London and sent ‘to every town and village in the United Kingdoms which contains a Methodist Society’.⁵⁶ An increasingly elaborate system of letters and dates required a bureaucracy of examiners to check for current marks to regulate access and membership. Tickets required a distinctive form of plebeian literacy, an adequate competency in reading both print and script, and specialized skill in interpreting the information they gave, including the large letters.⁵⁷

William Clowes’s 1805 conversion narrative supplies the best contemporary account of Methodist door-keeping and ticket practice. After a rackets youth and several failed attempts at self-reformation, a neighbour invited him to a Methodist preaching. Clowes agreed to go because it was dark, so he would not be seen. But when they heard a love-feast announced at the end of the meeting, his companion offered to go home and leave Clowes with the ticket which he had borrowed from his mother-in-law ‘for the purpose of getting in’:

So, feeling inclined to see this meeting, and my curiosity being thus excited, I took the ticket, and with it directions how to act, in order to gain admission. The person told me, in showing the ticket to the door-keeper, I was to cover the name written upon it with my thumb, and just let him see the alphabetical letter, and thus I should be allowed to pass on into the chapel. Accordingly, we both went up to the chapel door, and my companion, observing that the door-keeper, instead of giving a rapid glance at the presented tickets, took them out of the hands of the individuals, and examined them minutely, said to me. ‘Come, we must go home; I see neither of us can get in.’ But, at the moment, I felt neither any disposition to return, nor to give my friend his ticket back; and, just as I stood in this undecided state, a puff of wind

⁵⁴ JRL, MA1977/718/1: Whitely Collection.

⁵⁵ Verney, ‘Class tickets’, p. 4; *Works of John Wesley*, X, p. 310; Crowther, *Portraiture*, p. 281.

⁵⁶ Nightingale, *Portraiture*, p. 246

⁵⁷ Susan Whyman, *The pen and the people: English letter writers 1660-1800* (Oxford, 2009); Tadmor, ‘Settlement of the poor’, pp. 81-2

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came, and blew the door-keeper's candle out. In a moment, I presented him my ticket; but on taking it into his hand, he called for another light, and just as he was going to read the ticket, another puff came, and away went the light a second time. The man being fluttered and disappointed, hastily pushed back the ticket into my hand, saying, 'Here, here, move on.'⁵⁸

The ticket had material power; it was a vital agent in a divine drama.

Wesley made extensive use of the press, requiring his followers to become adept readers. Printers played a significant role in Bristol evangelical circles mid-century, and the Methodist 'Book Room' was another sign of the movement's confidence and power.⁵⁹ As scholars have noted, Methodist belief worked through text and oral tradition.⁶⁰ Controversy and anti-Methodist sentiments, against which adherents defined and tested themselves, were predominantly expressed in print: in this analysis, public debate shaped Methodist identity to the extent that Methodists' understanding of their own religious emotions, and of the world in which they lived, was a discursive or rhetorical effect.⁶¹ Tickets have not featured in this argument, but as printed items they appear to be implicated. They are associated too with another line of interpretation that develops parallels between early Methodism and theatricality, a point that eighteenth-century critics also relished.⁶² But as long as tickets sit on the margin of historical interest, they pass unnoticed to appear only fleetingly in a scholarship focused elsewhere. Yet even these occasional references suggest that the Methodist ticket was a significant marker, albeit one operating differently to more familiar linguistic forms of religious expression. So a letter from 1785 that confirms the importance of print and literacy in framing Methodist identity, contains within it a curious

⁵⁸ *The journals of William Clowes, a Primitive Methodist preacher* (London, 1844), pp. 18-19; Crowther, *Portraiture*, p. 282

⁵⁹ Jonathan Barry, 'Methodism and the press in Bristol, 1737-1775', *Bulletin* (Bristol: Bristol Branch, Wesley Historical Society, 1992); Norris, *Financing*, p. 181.

⁶⁰ Hempton, *Methodism*, pp. 56, 58-9; Vicki Tolar Burton, *Spiritual literacy in John Wesley's Methodism: reading, writing, and speaking to believe* (Waco, TX, 2008)

⁶¹ Brett C. McInelly, *Textual warfare and the making of Methodism* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 6-7, 63

⁶² McInelly, p. 91; Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in eighteenth-century Britain: enthusiasm, belief, and the borders of the self* (Baltimore, 2012); [William Combe], *The love-feast. A poem* (London, 1778), p. 40

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acknowledgement of the ticket as a transformative force: 'I wished I had not got a ticket for I feared they would read me out of the society – who knew the misery I was in but those who have experienced the arrows of the Almighty'.⁶³

The problem is this. Wesley's introduction of tickets was one aspect of Methodism's deep engagement with eighteenth-century innovation, including print. But the ticket was a distinctive sort of print. In the sense that it displayed words, it was a text. However it does not easily fit into scholarly analyses of Methodist discourse: its scant type does little to explain or convey those religious feelings which found more expansive expression in other literary genres. In addition, the tangible presence of the individual ticket could be significant: it did things, like opening the possessor to be 'read', giving it a form of life that the reproducible book or pamphlet did not. But unlike the solitary, unique personal letter, the ticket emerged from the press with thousands of identical impressions and was then made unique through the addition of a name by hand, a process that sometimes associated an ordinary worshipper with a notable individual.⁶⁴ The Methodist ticket was a hybrid, both print and script, text and object; at times it transcended words and text altogether, as we shall see in the foundation of Primitive Methodism.

Recent studies of ephemera emphasise the special characteristics, ubiquity, and influence of cheap print. By looking at numbers produced, the speed with which they circulated, the value attached to them, the uses made, these scholars emphasise an item's 'capacity'.⁶⁵ Originating in John Wesley's disciplinary authority, tickets became an effective administrative device to count, regulate, and tax an expanding membership: 'Give no ticket to any that wear calashes, high-heads or enormous bonnets.' The same applied to those who wore ruffles or consumed smuggled goods, or who failed to attend class meetings.⁶⁶ In 1802,

⁶³ McInelly, *Textual warfare*, pp. 71-72

⁶⁴ Geoff Dickinson, 'Sarah Kirkland, 1793-1880', http://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk/page/sarah_kirkland (accessed 1.5.18)

⁶⁵ Kevin D. Murphy and Sally O'Driscoll, 'Introduction' in *Studies in ephemera*; Lloyd, 'Ticketing', p. 860.

⁶⁶ E.g. *Works of John Wesley*, X, pp. 849, 913; Kevin M. Watson, *Pursing social holiness: the band meeting in Wesley's thought and popular Methodist practice* (Oxford, 2014), p. 46

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the Irish conference withheld tickets from women who preached.⁶⁷ From the 1740s, the annual conference deliberated on ticketing matters. Regularly minuted decisions developed and refined rules around the practice of showing tickets:

‘Q.13 [1752]: Shall we permit any to be present at the public meeting of the bands who have not band-tickets?

A: Certainly not. By that means we should make them cheap, and discourage them who are admitted’

‘Q.14 [1752]: What if one forget his band or society ticket?

A: He may come in once; but not if he forget it two times together’.

Q.30 [1781]: ‘let no stranger be admitted; and let them show their tickets before they come in ... Has it been observed in the Birstall circuit?

A: Hardly at all. Let the preacher, stewards, and leaders see this observed for the time to come.’⁶⁸

So central was the ticket to the movement that as financial arrangements fell into a regular groove, Wesley’s followers used the term ‘ticket money’ to describe the shilling they contributed as a thank-offering every quarter when each new class or ‘Society’ ticket was issued. Although it was not always paid in full, it was a major source of income.⁶⁹ For a critic of Methodism, like the bookseller James Lackington, ‘money seemed to be the principal end of issuing tickets, at least in country places, the members in the community being so well known to each other, that they scarce ever shewed their tickets in order to gain admittance’.⁷⁰ Lackington downplayed the ticket’s capacity, its promise of religious intimacy.⁷¹ However, it projected individual singularity, as expressed in a name, while conveying an intense

⁶⁷ Jennifer Lloyd, *Women and the shaping of British Methodism: persistent preachers, 1807-1907* (Manchester, 2010), p. 50

⁶⁸ *Works of John Wesley*, X, pp. 254, 516-7, 848-9.

⁶⁹ Frank Baker, ‘The people called Methodists. 3. Polity’ in Rupert Davies & Gordon Rupp, eds., *A history of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (4 vols., London, 1965), I, pp. 223-4; Norris, *Financing*, pp. 121, 139, 232.

⁷⁰ James Lackington, *Memoirs of the first forty-five years of the life of James Lackington*, new edition (London, 1794), pp. 121-2; see also Samuel Martin, *A few thoughts and matters of fact concerning Methodism* (Edinburgh, 1766), pp. 4, 10.

⁷¹ A theme he returned to in *The confessions of J. Lackington, late bookseller*, 2nd edition (London, 1804), pp. 193-4

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experience of community. It is a pattern similar to that Bruce Hindmarsh has noted in raw narratives of religious conversion.⁷² An emotional and spiritual force field, which belied the ticket's unassuming appearance, emerges most clearly when tickets played an active role in disputes and in reconciliation following episodes of conflict.⁷³

When Wesley purged the Society and 'many were put away' in October 1743, the ticket was the sign. A woman stripped of her ticket was 'a dead thing out of mind!' to be abandoned by her friends.⁷⁴ The loss of credit and character were palpable. Division between John Wesley and Thomas Maxfield over theology and prophecy in 1763 was acted out before Wesley through the ticket:

Mrs C[oventry], cried out, 'We will not be browbeaten any longer; we will *throw off the mask*.' Accordingly a few days after, she came and, before an hundred persons brought me hers and her husband's tickets and said, 'Sir, we will have no more to do with *you....*'⁷⁵

'More and more persons threw up their tickets every day' as the breach widened.⁷⁶ Far more dramatic than simply walking away, this gesture suggested what Wesley's critics also suspected, that these objects were at least partially understood as 'Assurance and Salvation-Tickets'. Wesley denied this as a 'mixture of Nonsense and Blasphemy', just as he rejected Thomas Church's allegation that the Society was outside the Anglican Church because 'you have delivered and given out Tickets to those, whom you thought proper to continue as Members.'⁷⁷ But for Maxfield's intimates, Wesley's tickets had become worthless and meaningless, something to be discarded along with Wesley himself.

⁷² D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical conversion narrative: spiritual autobiography in early modern England* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 150-3

⁷³ On the latter point: JRL, Early Preachers Collection, DDPr 1/25; Letter from Henry Durbin to Charles Wesley, [March 1785].

⁷⁴ *Works of John Wesley*, XIX, p. 343: 3 Oct 1743; XXIII, p. 293

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, XXI, p. 410.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, IX, p. 482.

⁷⁷ John Wesley, *A letter to the Rev'd Mr Baily of Corke* (Dublin, [1750]), p. 23; *Works of John Wesley*, IX, 192; Thomas Church, *Some further remarks on the Rev. Mr John Wesley's last journal* ([London], 1746), p. 12

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Four decades later, tickets marked the ruptures that created Primitive Methodism. William Clowes and his contemporary Hugh Bourne (converted to Methodism in 1799) were inspired by the American camp meeting model to hold large, outdoor revival gatherings in the Staffordshire Moorlands, but these were uneasy political times, stirred by fears of revolution, war and internal sedition. The national Methodist conference rejected the practice as unsuitable for Britain; local leaders, who had already cautioned Clowes against noisy religion, expelled Bourne in 1808 and Clowes in 1810 through the quarterly meeting and non-renewal of the ticket. Clowes, unlike Mrs. Coventry, recorded the experience: 'I was told that I was no longer with them; that the matter was settled'.⁷⁸ Both men continued their activities, building networks of supporters, and in May 1811 Hugh Bourne 'ordered tickets to be printed for the first time'.⁷⁹ Tickets marked the amalgamation of separate groups into one Connexion, constituted their physical separation from the Wesleyan Methodists who had rejected them, reconfigured their relationships and marked a new 'corporate life'.⁸⁰ A pithy biblical text reinforced the message: 'as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against'.⁸¹ Subsequent historians took that first ticket as the denomination's 'certificate of birth'; when the branches re-united in 1932, the 'last' ticket summed up the occasion.⁸² Tickets are an essential component of the Primitive Methodists' origin story, but it is striking that in a biblically saturated culture in which 'the beginning was the word', they only named themselves in February 1812: the ticket came before the name, before denominational rules, in marking the break.

Bourne issued those first tickets because his followers wanted them, an expectation established through early Methodism. Although many apparently thought that this would be

⁷⁸ John Walford, *Memoirs of the life and labours of the late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, ed. W. Antliff (2 vols., Totton, 1999: 1st published 1856), I, pp. 190-1; John Parrott, *A digest of the history, polity and doctrines of the Primitive Methodists*, 2nd ed. (London, 1864), p.22; *Journals of William Clowes*, pp. 83-5.

⁷⁹ Walford, *Hugh Bourne*, I, p. 332

⁸⁰ H.B. Kendall, *History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (London, 1919), p. 28; John Davison, *The Life of the Venerable William Clowes* (London, 1854), p. 70; Parrott, *Digest*, p. 26

⁸¹ H.B. Kendall, *The origin and history of the Primitive Methodist church* (2 vols., London, [1906]), I, p. 112

⁸² Kendall, *History*, p. 30; B. Aquila Barber, *A Methodist pageant: a souvenir of the Primitive Methodist church* (London, 1932), p. 314.

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a one-off event, the series of Primitive Methodist tickets demonstrates the extent to which religious habits could not now be imagined without them. The question initially arose in response to financial need with subsequent discussion focused on the costs of printing. But economic motives were again only part of the story, because Bourne tied this moment into his broader theology: 'It may seem strange ... that quarterly tickets were not sooner introduced', he noted in his journal, but the explanation was clear. The Connexion had begun 'in the order of divine providence' when godly zeal held it together; but that state did not last. It was the 'wisdom of man' not the 'wisdom of God' that required 'some visible bond' between members. In short, the ticket was an 'inestimable blessing', a bracing antidote to human weakness, timidity and inactivity.⁸³ Issued and renewed by the preacher, the Primitives' ticket served as a financial and supervisory instrument, but it revealed the workings of salvation.⁸⁴

Wesley's intellectual genealogy of the ticket had claimed the authority of the apostles and ancient Romans; his followers brought meanings grounded in their own experience.⁸⁵ For all the power of print and literacy, a Methodist folk tradition asserts that members were buried with their tickets. Whether or not this was the case, it is a story about the reach of paper beyond earthly life, a practice beyond Latin or theology, but imbued with subjectivity and value.⁸⁶ Precautions taken against forgery and impersonation reinforced the ticket's latent power.⁸⁷ Joanna Southcott, the millennial prophet, passed through Methodism in the 1780s before issuing her own 'seals' or protective guarantee of salvation.⁸⁸ She was no stranger either to the symbolic power of paper in her disputes with Anglican clergy: 'Then

⁸³ Walford, *Hugh Bourne*, I, pp. 326-8; *Journals of William Clowes*, p. 95; Hugh Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists. Giving an account of their rise and progress up to the year 1823* (Bemersley, 1823), Preface.

⁸⁴ Bourne, *History*, p.40; *Journals of William Clowes*, pp. 351, 355

⁸⁵ Samuel Smith, *Anecdotes, facts and biographical sketches connected with the great revival of the work of God in ... the Primitive Methodist connexion* (Douglas, 1872), pp. 32-3.

⁸⁶ Parkinson, 'Class tickets', p. 135; New Room Bristol, Museum: 'A Ticket to Heaven'; Wesley Historical Society: North Lancashire Branch *Bulletin*, 27 (1998), p. 27

⁸⁷ JRL, 1977/720: 'Remarks' for 1745; Parkinson, 'Class tickets', p. 135; Frank Baker, *Methodism*, p. 37.

⁸⁸ James K. Hopkins, *A woman to deliver her people: Joanna Southcott and English millenarianism in an era of revolution* (Austin TX, 1982), pp. 36-8, 104-7.

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you sent to me to give in my sacrament ticket, to turn me from the altar ... I returned to you every demand you had of me, by returning the sacrament tickets'.⁸⁹

When Mrs Coventry rejected Wesley, she not only returned her own and her husband's tickets; she flung back her daughters' and her servants' tickets too.⁹⁰ It was a moment that caught the gender and household relationships of eighteenth-century Methodism, where women were numerous, active, and visible participants.⁹¹ When pressed, one husband answered that his wife was 'at her own liberty' to attend meetings.⁹² Women held tickets in their own names: the overwhelming majority were written without any preliminary title; upon marriage only their last name changed. Many would have been familiar with other types of ticket, including two that were important in female plebeian circles: the seaman's pay ticket, which was the centre of financial transactions from the mid-seventeenth century, and the pawnbroker's ticket introduced in 1757. But Methodism gave specific, quasi-familial characteristics to the social interactions and flow characteristic of the eighteenth-century ticket.⁹³ These elements were not fixed in 1741, but developed through use. As the appearance of Wesley's early tickets changed, so pictorial, tactile, and textual literacy accumulated; the balance of skills shifted too with the move towards text. Knowledge of what tickets did and their role in a distinctive religious experience was not solely for Wesley and his itinerant preachers to decide; these matters were settled through long and collective participation. Women were therefore significant in shaping a familiar object that here acquired disciplinary functions. If we need a reminder of the complex boundaries between public and private affairs in the early-modern period, Mrs Coventry had an instinctive feel for the possibilities in such interconnections. For women as well as for men,

⁸⁹ Joanna Southcott, *The second book of wonders, more marvellous than the first* (London, 1813), pp. 35–36; referring to the period 1801–4

⁹⁰ *Works of John Wesley*, XXI, p. 403.

⁹¹ Hempton, *Methodism*, 145–6; Brian Curtis Clark and Joanna Cruickshank, 'Converting Mrs Crouch: women, wonders and the formation of English Methodism, 1738–1741', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 65 (2014), pp. 66–83.

⁹² Jackson, *Lives of the early Methodist preachers*, V, p. 27

⁹³ Lloyd, 'Ticketing'.

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these scraps of paper were an intimate possession but also political, in the sense that they concerned power within and beyond the household.⁹⁴

As Methodism spread globally, the ticket circulated in other unequal societies, where it created a paper network that intersected with human relationships and bonds. By 1815 over 40,000 black Methodists in the United States and a further 15,000 in the Caribbean islands carried a ticket.⁹⁵ But what did it do for the enslaved woman or man who was denied legal personhood and property rights; how did slavery modify the mobility and meaning implicit in tickets? The evidence is difficult, with some missionaries stressing disciplinary use and conformist effects: 'I have been obliged to deny tickets to many, on account of their lukewarmness and neglect of the means of grace'.⁹⁶ However patronising the missionaries, their minds suffused with racial thinking, a hint of equivalence lurked in contemporary ticket practice. In 1799, some of these ticket-holding enslaved Methodists on the Virgin Islands joined a revolt. In response, the planters bent ticketing to their will in demanding that 'none in future should be admitted into the society, unless they had previously obtained a ticket from their respective owners, signifying their approbation'.⁹⁷ In early nineteenth-century Antigua, the Hart sisters, who created a specific black Methodist identity, saw the ticket as a marker of both beginning and belonging.⁹⁸ Racial discrimination determined some African Americans to organise separately from white worshippers and issue their own tickets.⁹⁹ In negotiating a relationship, the ticket would always be political, but personal meanings could undercut or sharpen formal rules.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Tolar Burton, *Spiritual literacy*, pp. 151-61.

⁹⁵ William B. Gravely, 'African-American Methodism' in James E. Kirby and William J. Abraham, eds., *Oxford handbook of Methodist studies* (Oxford, 2011), p. 123; J. Gordon Melton, *A will to choose: the origins of African American Methodism* (Lanham & Plymouth, 2007), pp. 91, 213; Moira Ferguson, ed., *The Hart sisters: early African Caribbean writers, evangelicals, and radicals* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1993), p. 139

⁹⁶ Thomas Coke, *A history of the West Indies* (3 vols., Liverpool, 1808-11), II, pp. 284-6.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, III, p. 124

⁹⁸ *Hart sisters*, pp. 62, 92.

⁹⁹ *The doctrines and discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia, 1817), p. 72.

¹⁰⁰ Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled objects: exchange, material culture, and colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), pp. 7, 143

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Meanings change over time. The introduction of the Methodist ticket was a product of religious fervour and eighteenth-century cultural innovations. As Methodism settled, as the tools of association became increasingly familiar, the ticket slipped into accustomed roles. These were not insignificant, since break-away sections asserted independence and faithfulness to Wesley himself by issuing their own tickets (not only the Primitives in 1811, but the New Connexion in 1797; Bible Christians c.1823; New York's Stellwellite group in 1821).¹⁰¹ The Primitives' first tickets were very similar in appearance to the contemporary Wesleyan model: until 1829, when the Primitives added their name to the paper, up-to-date knowledge of the biblical text and initial letters currently in use was required to distinguish between Connexions. Printing continued to play a significant role, as it had in Wesley's day.¹⁰² The Methodist ticket was from its first issue, whether by Wesley or Bourne, a marker of presence and endurance. Later historians and leaders of Methodism foregrounded its administrative value, adapting it to contemporary concerns and priorities. But the dynamics of remembering that made the Methodist ticket an aid to institution-building, had other consequences too. The new Primitive Methodism ticket design of 1829, including the provocative words 'First class formed in March, 1810', exacerbated a dispute between the movement's founders by asserting precedence for one branch linked to Hugh Bourne.¹⁰³ Another effect of history-making was to eliminate some capacities of the ticket altogether: the puff of wind that extinguished the candle in 1805 and brought Clowes to religion was omitted from subsequent accounts, rendering the ticket incidental and mundane.¹⁰⁴

Overall the Methodist ticket increasingly became a 'ticket of membership', a phrase the Wesleyans printed on theirs from 1893.¹⁰⁵ Here it followed a general social trend in

¹⁰¹ Beckerlegge, 'Non-Wesleyan class tickets'; UMAHC, *Methodist Class Tickets: 2141-4-5:4*; see also: Alan Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon's connexion: a sect in action in eighteenth-century England* (Oxford, 2003), p. 127.

¹⁰² Kendall, *Origin and history*, II, p. 1

¹⁰³ John T. Wilkinson, *William Clowes 1780-1851* (London, 1951), Appendix A; John T. Wilkinson, *Hugh Bourne, 1772-1852* (London, 1952), p. 172; Walford, *Hugh Bourne*, I, p. 266; Kendall, *Origin and history*, I, pp. 113-9.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Church, *A history of the Primitive Methodists*, 3rd ed. (London, 1869), pp.60-1; Davison, *Life*, p.13; *Earnest men: sketches of eminent Primitive Methodists, ministers and laymen* (London, 1872), p. 41; Barber, *Methodist pageant*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ Wright, 'Class and band tickets', p. 43.

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which the multiple meanings of early-modern tickets consolidated into a narrower range.¹⁰⁶ As the Methodist network of chapels expanded, church income depended more on seat rents and congregational collections than on the quarterly ticket.¹⁰⁷ By the early nineteenth-century, some had redeployed it as a begging certificate; one late-century commentator complained that relaxation of ticket discipline had gone so far as to diminish spiritual life, although an unfortunate choice of text could still cause a stir.¹⁰⁸ Evidence of the ticket's continuing relevance is not necessarily found in church documents or authoritative pronouncements, however. It lies instead in practices of saving and collecting. The *Encyclopaedia of Ephemera* missed Methodism altogether and declared the ticket 'among the most ephemeral of printed matter rarely preserved deliberately.'¹⁰⁹ But as numerous surviving Methodist tickets demonstrate, that judgement is misleading. Unusually for ephemera, it is also possible to know something about recipients of the Methodist ticket, these 'consumers' of print.

II

What can be said of those Methodist tickets that still exist? The inky trace of a Wesley ensured that some circulated through families, between collectors and archives, long after their immediate use had expired.¹¹⁰ More women's tickets survive from eighteenth-century Methodism than men's, roughly on a ratio of two to one, a figure broadly in line with the demography of the movement.¹¹¹ Underlying this pattern are groups of tickets each associated with a single name: over ninety belonging to Margaret Sommerhill of Bristol,

¹⁰⁶ Lloyd, 'Ticketing', pp. 860-1

¹⁰⁷ Norris, *Financing*, p. 232

¹⁰⁸ *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 3rd series, I (1822), pp. 782-3; Parkinson, 'Class tickets', p. 135; W. Hargreaves Cooper, *In Methodist byways* (London, 1904), pp. 110, 112; JRL, MAW MS106, 'A Methodist curiosity'.

¹⁰⁹ Rickards, *Encyclopaedia*, p. 326

¹¹⁰ JRL, MA1977/720, 'Remarks' for 1747

¹¹¹ Approximately 62% of tickets listed by Verney were issued to women, 1750-91: 'Early Wesleyan Class Tickets'; OCMCH: drawer of class tickets, 1792-1821, c.68% are in women's names; OCMCH: Kenworthy Class Ticket Album is more evenly divided. John Kent, 'Wesleyan membership in Bristol 1783', *An Ecclesiastical Miscellany* (Publications of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, Records Section, vol. 11, 1976), p. 107

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including four from 1742, which are the earliest known from Wesley's experiment. She died at a great age during the 1790s, leaving a lifetime of tickets wrapped in her Methodist class paper.¹¹² Clearly, Sommerhill's memory and personal history were bound up with the materiality of her tickets, many of which are now rubbed, faded, and torn.¹¹³ **(Fig. 2)** A succession of tickets located individuals within a stream of time, enabling them to orientate themselves within the movement and within god's providence, to see the shape of their lives, to give meaning to time past.¹¹⁴ It constituted a type of life history, but was also vulnerable to loss and decay.¹¹⁵ In the first instance, therefore, some worshippers put their own tickets on one side at the end of a quarter, perhaps adding them to a small bundle of expired items; it was a habit distinct from (subsequently) collecting them. When tickets outlived their original possessor, it becomes more difficult to establish who kept them and why.

Cultural critics usually distinguish between habits of saving or 'accumulating', which . Collecting is the process of 'gathering together and setting aside selected objects'.¹¹⁶ During the eighteenth-century it can be found in well-established customs of news gathering, and they locate in everyday life, and the practice of collecting, which they associate with system and pattern a popular antiquarianism around the theatre: both fashioned a type of social history and participated in a lengthy shift from oral to scribal memory.¹¹⁷ Collecting expresses desire and subjectivity through creating a series out of singular items; it offers an illusion of return to a particular moment in the sequence.¹¹⁸ In playing with time, in

¹¹² Wright, 'Class and band tickets', pp. 36-7; JRL, MA1977/720, 'Remarks' for 1746 and the original wrapper; the spelling of her name varies, e.g. Someral, Somerell, Somerhill, Sommerhill, Summerhill; Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments* (3 vols., London, 1836), III, p. 2222.

¹¹³ Martin Andrews, 'The importance of ephemera' in Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose, eds., *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 434-50, at p. 436

¹¹⁴ Museum of Methodism, 'Wesleyan Methodist Class Tickets', Book 9: Henry Bowman (first to last tickets, 1826-95), 1996/5229

¹¹⁵ Amy Culley, *British women's life writing, 1760-1840: friendship, community, and collaboration* (Basingstoke, 2014), p. 71

¹¹⁶ Pearce, *On collecting*, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Noah Millstone, 'Designed for collection: early modern news and the production of history', *Media history*, 23 (2017), pp. 177-98; "'Announcing each day the performances": playbills, ephemerality, and romantic period media/theatre History', *Studies in Romanticism*, 54 (2015), pp. 241-268; Daniel Woolf, *The social circulation of the past: English historical culture, 1500-1730* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 164-8

¹¹⁸ Baudrillard, 'System of collecting'; see also: Benjamin, 'Unpacking my library', p. 60

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recuperating the past, it harbours nostalgic associations.¹¹⁹ We have already seen how the Methodist ticket embodied a sense of self: the process of collecting it was to add new layers of subjectivity and memory. Interest began early. The preacher Samuel Tooth (fl 1770-1820) acquired tickets from the 1750s and 1760s, including one in John Wesley's hand.¹²⁰ Each item was tied to a specific quarter in the year, but gestured to a redemptive state beyond death, beyond time.

The concept of 'collecting' is not a neutral one. Defined through the behaviour of a subset of collectors, class and gender assumptions abound: elevating rational system above personal accumulation; prioritizing elements of public display above domestic, 'private' concerns; valuing a separation from, not an integration with, the everyday.¹²¹ Scholarship on eighteenth-century collecting orientates itself around a concept of connoisseurship. Where women are its subject, they are predominantly elite and deeply embedded in fashionable sociability.¹²² But prepositions matter: there are collections *of* popular material and collecting *by* non-elite women and men.¹²³ Methodist tickets are a perspective on collecting by ordinary people out of the substance of their own lives, and as such are unusual: tickets survived because their meaning and power were never exhausted, because they served new purposes across generations. Methodist collecting had its own imperatives: neither a cabinet of curiosities, nor rigorously taxonomic; not fashionable, but probably sociable; not scientific, experimental or philosophical.¹²⁴ It shared with other collecting practices a capacity to fix knowledge about the world; it established relationships and got close to

¹¹⁹ Helmut Illbruck, *Nostalgia: origins and ends of an unenlightened discourse* (Evanston, Ill., 2012); Cooper, *Methodist byways*.

¹²⁰ OCMCH, Kenworthy Album: inside front cover.

¹²¹ Pearce, *On collecting*, pp. 207-8; Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a consumer society* (London, 1995), p. 67

¹²² Beth Fowkes Tobin, 'Virtuoso or naturalist? Mary Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland' in Line Cottagnies, Sandrine Parageau and John. S. Thompson, eds., *Women and curiosity in early modern England and France* (Leiden, 2016), pp. 216-32; Arlene Leis, 'Sarah Sophia Banks: femininity, sociability and the practice of collecting in late Georgian England', Ph.D thesis (York, 2013); Russell, 'Sarah Sophia Banks'; Natalie Rothstein, ed., *A lady of fashion: Barbara Johnson's album of styles and fabrics* (London, 1987).

¹²³ Russell, "Announcing each day the performances", p. 258.

¹²⁴ By comparison, see: Adeline Gargam, 'Between scientific investigation and vanity fair: reflections on the culture of curiosity in Enlightenment France' in *Women and curiosity*, pp. 197-215

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people. It materialised patterns of family and spiritual belonging.¹²⁵ Characteristics of the eighteenth-century Methodist ticket therefore challenge models of collecting as a form of consumption and commodification.¹²⁶ Did the ticket lose its religious and social capacities once collected? Did collecting the ticket change its value? In short, how does a history of collecting intersect with the ticket's shifting meanings, and the personal and professional identities of those who collected it?

Tickets survived because there were places to keep them. Decades after they were first saved, tickets were collected and later glued into blank notebooks, printed pocketbooks¹²⁷, cheap devotional texts, and albums, leaving a distinctive pattern of memorialisation, akin to collective biography. By the early nineteenth century, individual Methodists were anthologising the movement. Their labours continued a long tradition of non-elite record-keeping which registered the passage of time, and events of personal and communal significance.¹²⁸ Over the course of the century such activity resembled another form of popular literacy, a fashion for scrapbooks, which also dealt in pattern and meaning, and were frequently shared by the women and men who crafted them.¹²⁹ It is not always clear who assembled an album, but when its contents reflect a family network, the creator probably had some personal connection with the material. Margaret Hutchison used a handsomely bound edition of Italian poems to create her 'Society Ticket book' in the 1830s.¹³⁰ The first ticket is Robert Hutchison's from December 1804, with Margaret's earliest dated December 1819. Her choice of an engraving of Sarah Wesley, Charles Wesley's widow, to obscure the original frontispiece may have been determined by available materials or

¹²⁵ Culley, *Life writing*, p. 19.

¹²⁶ Belk, *Collecting*, pp. 76-8.

¹²⁷ Ann Higginbotham's copy of *The Methodist pocket book* (London, [1800]), Museum of Methodism, 2006/10685; JRL, MAW MS106.

¹²⁸ Brodie Waddell, 'Writing history from below: chronicling and record keeping in early modern England', *History Workshop Journal*, 85 (2018), pp. 239-264; Pollman, *Memory*.

¹²⁹ Todd S. Gernes, 'Recasting the culture of ephemera' in John Trimbur, ed., *Popular literacy: studies in cultural practices and poetics* (Pittsburgh, 2001).

¹³⁰ JRL, MA1977/718/8. The volume, Carlo Pepoli's *Canzoni anacreontiche* (Londra, 1835), is bound in red with gold tooling; the title suggests a genre of drinking songs. Hutchison may have found the book's fine appearance suited her purpose.

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express a more subjective, matrilineal history. What is striking about many Methodist collections is that they are full of personal and collective, if elusive meaning.

As anthropologists and psychologists observe, people remember (and forget) through things; things evoke thoughts and feelings.¹³¹ Collective identities can be constructed through material remains; possession creates an experience of belonging that shadows the past and hovers around others' lives. By the nineteenth century, tickets bridged generations; they offered a physical link with those who once held or folded them.¹³² In some instances they became a courting record; in most they constructed a genealogy through Methodism: 'two class tickets of my great grandmothers [sic] before her marriage'; 'Mother's sister she died soon after'.¹³³ A sequence of tickets reinforced the early significance of personal story in Methodist expression of spiritual experience.¹³⁴ It resembled collaborative practices of life-writing, through which Methodist women created spiritual friendships and memories, establishing a place for themselves in history.¹³⁵ Tickets migrated with families and collectors, a process of global relocation that extended Methodism's paper network and complicated its geographical foundations.¹³⁶ Tickets were handed on: in 1891 H.M. Booth left their grandfathers' and parents' tickets to a sister or brother.¹³⁷ Archives reveal people who cannot quite throw tickets out, who post them off in the hope of finding a safe repository, of converting a process of saving and collecting into archiving, preserving, and memorializing.¹³⁸ It is as if tickets embodied the dead and their trust in the living: 'My Uncle's loving collection of Class Tickets ... I hope I am doing the right thing'.¹³⁹ By the early twentieth century, there was sufficient interest for an astute publisher to recognise a

¹³¹ Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 155; Sherry Turkle, ed., *Evocative objects: things we think with* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007)

¹³² Bradshaw, 'Irish quarterly tickets', p. 1; Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Empty vessels' in *Everyday objects*, p. 300.

¹³³ OCMCH: Kenworthy Album; JRL, MA/1977/718/3: Bickers Album (1810); JRL, MA1981/12, John Wesley Class Ticket Album: p. 2 (tickets for Peter Worsley and Joanna Clarkson)

¹³⁴ Tolar Burton, *Spiritual literacy*, p. 25

¹³⁵ Mack, *Heart religion*, pp. 135, 150-1; Culley, *Life Writing*, pp. 23-4

¹³⁶ E.g. Bridwell Library, Special Collections, Southern Methodist University: <http://digitalcollections.smu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/jwl/id/159> (accessed 17.12.18)

¹³⁷ JRL, MAW MS 106: uncatalogued (empty) envelope. Gender unknown.

¹³⁸ Museum of Methodism, 'Tickets of Robert & Betty Peters', 1999/7281/1-2

¹³⁹ OCMCH, Kenworthy Album, loose letter dated 17 August 1970.

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commercial opportunity, a variant on the cigarette card collection. George Thompson of Paternoster Row marketed a decorated *John Wesley Class Ticket Album* with John Wesley's signature in the title and his motto, 'The World is my Parish', incorporated into the coloured page designs. Intended to display four tickets of the current shape, owners stuck in older ones, which were smaller or irregularly sized, putting albums and tickets to their own purposes.¹⁴⁰ **(Fig. 3)** In the twenty-first-century tickets can still stand for people: 'We were sorry to hear about the death of Miss Edith Hargreaves ... The above Photocopy of class tickets formed part of a collection handed down from her father. We print them as a token reminder of Edith and her devotion to Methodism and its traditions'.¹⁴¹

An urge to collect beyond immediate personal association accelerated in the second half of the nineteenth century. Where it is possible to identify them, men predominated as comprehensive, systematic collectors; some were professionally committed to the movement which gave them privileged access to materials. They aimed for whole sets, but in valuing the earliest tickets, produced large collections not necessarily representative of the genre as a whole.¹⁴² As for the difference in collecting styles, we need make no judgement on their relative value.¹⁴³ James Everett (expelled from the Wesleyan Connexion in 1849 and subsequent founder of the United Methodist Free Church) was the acknowledged authority. He acquired Margaret Sommerhill's from the preacher and scholar Adam Clarke (c.1760-1832), who had first secured 'the whole of the good old woman's tickets'. Everett sold his extensive two-volume collection to Luke Tyerman, biographer of John Wesley, and Tyerman's son presented it to the Methodist conference for safe custody in 1894.¹⁴⁴ Everett had to make do with a sketch of Ottiwell Higginbotham's 1752 ticket, however, as Higginbotham's daughter, who asserted that familial collecting tradition, refused to part with

¹⁴⁰ JRL, MA 1981/12: *John Wesley class ticket album*; others are deposited at the Primitive Methodist Museum, Englesea Brook; Museum of Methodism, London.

¹⁴¹ North Lancashire Branch *Bulletin*, 32 (2000), p. 26.

¹⁴² Adrian Seville, 'Building a representative collection of printed ephemera', *The Ephemeraist*, 167 (2014), pp. 2-11

¹⁴³ Pearce, *On collecting*, p. 208

¹⁴⁴ JRL, 1977/720: handwritten note inside cover of volume 1, 'Remarks' for 1746; Tyerman, *John Wesley*, I, pp. 354-55.

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it.¹⁴⁵ He arranged his tickets chronologically, adding handwritten 'Remarks' and 'Events' to create a history of Methodism. The year he chose to divide the volumes – 1839, the centenary of Methodism – demonstrated a conscious attempt to chart the movement. But Everett had another purpose in mind too: he recommended reading entries regularly through the year to preserve 'a lively recollection of the History, and dealings of God with the body'.¹⁴⁶ For men as well as for women, therefore, tickets conveyed a type of family chronicle. Collectors also provided illustrations for works of Methodist history. In the tradition of scrap-booking, a number of early twentieth-century albums hold facsimile tickets, including those of Margaret Sommerhill, cut from published plates and pasted into the sequence to give an impression of origin and completeness.¹⁴⁷ James Edward Kenworthy of York carefully distinguished his photographic copies from 'real' items.¹⁴⁸ These acts of reproduction, so very different from the initial purpose of the ticket in guaranteeing a worshipper's identity, again change the ticket's meaning and purpose. In a period of standardized tickets, this practice placed value on what was unique or particular about the earliest examples, but it did so through means that multiplied and replicated those very qualities, so that Sommerhill's ticket was no longer unique but existed in many places at once.

In some instances, an immediate link to original items was lost but they found a new place within institutional memory. In 1937, the East Anglian District received some old Wesleyan class tickets belonging to the Hinchcliffe family of Denby Dale. Tickets dating back to 1827 had been stuck into a lined exercise book with an assortment of loose items added, such as a card of 'old class tickets lent by Miss E Greaves of Tadcaster'. 'It is of course of no value to me' wrote W. Heap to the Central Office, but the reply assured him that it would be of use to the Methodist Museum and Heap duly sent the items to London.¹⁴⁹ On the death of

¹⁴⁵ JRL, 1977/720: 'Remarks' for 1752 & 1753.

¹⁴⁶ JRL, 1977/720: [p. 1]

¹⁴⁷ Gernes, 'Recasting the Culture of Ephemera', p. 116; John Stephens, *Chronicles of Wesleyan Methodism* (2 vols., London, 1827), II: frontispiece; JRL, MA/1977/720: 'Remarks' for 1748; MA/1977/719/4; George Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism*, 2nd ed revised (3 vols., London, 1859-62), I, plate facing p. 322

¹⁴⁸ OCMCH: Kenworthy Album, loose papers: 'Wesleyan class and band ticket list'

¹⁴⁹ Subsequently transferred to Manchester: JRL, MA1977/718/5

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Richard Broad, a Congleton dentist, in 1899, the Museum received his brown notebook on loan. While the names written on some of the tickets suggest that the collection originated in Broad's own family, the cover simply recorded 'Old Methodist Class Tickets. Valuable.'¹⁵⁰ From the very beginning, ideas about use and value ensured the survival of an individual ticket. Harking back to the original Methodist Connexion, tickets expressed personal and group identities, all bound up in an elusive trace of memory. But to the extent that these imperatives were shaped by broader cultural currents, they were mutable signs.

Among family memorialists and historians of the movement, acquisitive enthusiasts left their trace in albums stripped of tickets.¹⁵¹ Kenworthy signed off his ambition to have one or more examples a year from 1750 to 1949 as follows: 'on my 79th Birthday ... this Collection was completed'. J.H. Verney borrowed it in the hope of locating some of the 35 tickets missing from his updated catalogue of tickets. After Kenworthy died in 1954, Verney described their relationship as of 'friendly rivals' who both advertised for new additions.¹⁵² Collecting can generate psychological satisfaction and a sense of community¹⁵³ but even then, the choice of Methodist subject lends a distinctive character, with access to co-religionists, family, and friends giving an advantage in the dedicated pursuit of rare examples. While it is possible to distinguish Margaret Sommerhill's quarterly habits from Verney's meticulous cataloguing, and perhaps read into the difference a broader shift from household religion to institutional church, this is an over-simplified conclusion. Similarly, gender distinctions do not fully account for practices that crafted either a family story or a formal chronicle from old tickets. Collecting is bound up with the construction and fixing of memory. As a response to human transience, it expressed a need to give life meaning, individually and collectively.¹⁵⁴ By the nineteenth century, the ticket was a church record, but its fragile link with past

¹⁵⁰ JRL, MA1977/719/1.

¹⁵¹ For a stripped album: JRL, MA/1977/719/4. Verney removed tickets from a number of albums, including Everett's, JRL, MA/1977/719/5: letter inside front cover.

¹⁵² OCMCH: Kenworthy Album, inside front cover and loose letters. Joseph G. Wright's ticket collection was acquired by Frank Baker and is now held in the Rubenstein Library, Duke University.

¹⁵³ Pearce, *On collecting*; Leis, 'Sarah Sophia Banks'.

¹⁵⁴ David Rieff, *In praise of forgetting: historical memory and its ironies* (New Haven & London, 2016), p. 9.

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generations also made it into a profoundly nostalgic object in suggesting a recovery of what had irrevocably gone. The object itself was material ‘proof of unbroken association with the people of God’.¹⁵⁵ For one York chronicler, writing of people ‘long since pass’d away’, only a ticket ‘in my Poss[ess]ion’ connected the name of Cooper with Methodism.¹⁵⁶

III

When James Lackington recorded his youthful adventures in Methodism, he still remembered, over twenty-five years later, the Biblical quotations printed on his tickets.¹⁵⁷ He claimed a prodigious memory, but the feat alerts us to a broader mnemonic practice which, in Lackington’s case, runs counter to his own avowal of the item’s unimportance. Or perhaps even now he had his tickets to hand? Memories in tangible and intangible form cluster around single items and collections. Tickets carried more than words. They reached back into the past and recalled those now forgotten; they held on a thread what might seem to be of little moment.

Largely forgotten today, the ticket sits obliquely to all historiographies.¹⁵⁸ So what did it do? It was instrumental in Methodism’s development: from John Wesley’s first disciplining of the Bristol followers and establishment of the ‘class’, to conversion experiences and episodes of conflict and division. Its psychological and corporate power was such that in 1807, the ticket and quarterly visitations accompanying its distribution, were described ‘as among the wisest and most politic institutions in the Methodist economy’.¹⁵⁹ Tickets raised revenue but their full capacities cannot be contained within a financial frame of reference. Tickets denied access in a moment, even to John Wesley.¹⁶⁰ They showed Margaret Sommerhill the enduring promise of god in the world. In a profound way the ticket

¹⁵⁵ Parkinson, ‘Class tickets’, p. 135.

¹⁵⁶ University of York, Borthwick Institute for Archives: MRC/1/1/22: ‘Historical account of Methodism around York’.

¹⁵⁷ Lackington, *Memoirs*, p. 122: the quotations he recalls place the tickets in the early 1760s.

¹⁵⁸ Today’s Methodists are often unaware of the ticket’s origins and early designs: personal communications.

¹⁵⁹ Nightingale, *Portraiture*, p. 250.

¹⁶⁰ Baker, *Methodism*, p. 35

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was the Connexion: it formed a Methodist; it created and expressed a new community. Generic attributes of the eighteenth-century ticket were crucial. Its ability to circulate, to give access, and to manifest transactions and relationships accommodated the lives of Wesley's early followers, who were often mobile, marginal, and seeking refuge from economic uncertainty.¹⁶¹ It was this potential that Wesley seized and amplified. Through the ticket, individual souls shared an identity attuned to theological, spiritual, and social moods. It was a distinctly Methodist experiment, albeit one with broader implications. From the outset, the system facilitated patterns of female religiosity, with tickets issued to women in their own names, and women, their friends and relations collecting them as a distinctive *aide memoire*. Tickets played a quotidian role in Methodist life and in the administrative elaboration of the church; a silent presence in many accounts, they enabled the pleasures of the love-feast and the confidences of the Band meeting.¹⁶² Tickets were a medium of expression and self-improvement, and instruments of salvation, subjectivity, and self. They could embody people. Far from incidental, therefore, tickets actively shaped Methodism and in the process they exposed new populations to the power of circulating paper, setting expectations of what it might do.

Methodist tickets are historically significant in a second sense too. They reveal aspects of the movement, including female presence and participation beyond preaching and missionary activity. They map Methodism's global dimensions, raising specific questions about the experience of enslaved Methodists, for whom ticket-holding was conditioned by captivity. The scale of Wesley's innovation emerges through understanding the larger contexts in which tickets proliferated in eighteenth-century Britain and attempts to create certainty around knowledge, identity, possession, and belonging. At a micro level, tickets passed through multiple hands, some of which left a mark in ink, stain or crease. Methodist uses point to the sensibilities and activities of ordinary people, to household relationships

¹⁶¹ David Hempton, *The religion of the people: Methodism and popular religion c.1750-1900* (London, 1996), pp. 7-8, 21.

¹⁶² John Foster, *The life and experience of John Foster* (Gainsb[orough], 1824), p. 15; JRL, BRD/1/2: personal papers of Samuel Bardsley, p. 60.

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and to improvised and at times idiosyncratic forms of history-making and (auto)biography. As material remnants they illuminate religious practice and the role of memory in belief. Visual elements, print, and script on the paper's surface, manifested immediate bonds between worshipper, god, and community, and later conveyed denominational history.¹⁶³ Institutional contexts came to overlay otherworldly associations, although traces of the latter persisted. Were tickets slipped into coffins, asserting a faith in eternity in the face of loss and oblivion?

To appreciate the ticket's role in Methodism, whether as an active force or as a marker of trends, requires us to notice how contemporaries referred to, used, and understood it. Acts of collecting which create ephemera and preserve what was once dispensable, do more. They are a third dimension, exposing characteristics of the objects themselves. Folded paper suggests how Methodists held, used and saved their tickets; variant borders and irregular edges open production and preparation to view. Annotations on tickets and in albums reveal the workings of memory, but in the first instance survival required a place as well as a desire to keep things. Uneven patterns of survival and memorialisation reflect material inequalities; tickets held by black and indigenous Methodists are rarely found in the archive, although unused blanks are there.¹⁶⁴ Possession, habits of saving and collecting, elements of routine and ritual, indicate how people ordered their worlds. As an object initially held close to the person, the Methodist ticket subsequently became spatially distant and separate, whether it was discarded or put somewhere safe. Over time, surviving tickets assumed new meanings and shed others. Valid for only three months, a succession of tickets constituted a distinct temporal rhythm that was the pulse of religious life. Collecting put them into a new, potentially open-ended timeframe. Nostalgia was one outcome of that later phase, an interaction of human and object that strained or longed to recapture the lifespan that was lost. The ticket sometimes reminded people of a fundamental,

¹⁶³ Wesley College Archive, Bristol: copy of first Chinese ticket (1857).

¹⁶⁴ United Methodist Archives: personal communication; Emory University, Pitts Theology Library, Methodist Quarterly Tickets Collection, Box 1, 1: 'African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1861'; JRL, MA1977/717: tickets in Maori and Xhosa, 1839, 1859

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unbridgeable temporal gulf. Collecting is therefore integral to the Methodist story from 1741. While denominational and personal memories were significant for collectors, the objects in their collections had their own timescales, mingling spiritual and human life courses. Tickets intervened in history as a tactile form of genealogy, a way of belonging across time and generations; they become a vehicle for re-telling the past in terms institutional and personal, domestic and global, material, and sentimental.

Once visible beyond Methodism itself, Wesley's ticket suggests a fourth set of conclusions. It joins the range of cheap printing that extended far beyond books and prestige engravings.¹⁶⁵ Situated within broader narratives of social and economic change, of eighteenth-century urban growth and sociability, the Methodist ticket highlights reputation and identity. By underwriting religious standing, it created character and credit. As a pragmatic mechanism for moral endorsement, it responded to the needs of Wesley's early followers.¹⁶⁶ Plebeian literacy, which this object encouraged, here took some specialised forms. Access to and possession of paper and print were not necessarily commercially acquisitive decisions. Methodist tickets constituted a form of spiritual publicity stretching beyond town, coffee house, and debating arena. As others have already argued, eighteenth-century innovation was not necessarily secular, individualist, 'modern' or liberal.¹⁶⁷ After all, this ticket could serve a providential end; it was an expression of communal life.

A model of collecting based on connoisseurship tends to obscure original uses and misdirect attention away from those collecting practices which preserved religious meanings. Early collectors were distinctly ordinary; they emphasised the diachronic and serial, if only by virtue of saving tickets from successive quarters. Over time, tickets had multiple 'owners' or custodians, driving us to look beyond a framework of consumerism.¹⁶⁸ Across centuries, women and men participated in acts of remembering and forgetting, developing ideas about

¹⁶⁵ James Raven, *Bookscape: geographies of printing and publishing in London before 1800* (London, 2014), pp. 100-3.

¹⁶⁶ Margot C. Finn, *The character of credit: personal debt in English culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 320.

¹⁶⁷ Hindmarsh, *Evangelical conversion narrative*, p. 344.

¹⁶⁸ Belk, *Collecting*, p. 65

uniqueness and replication. Contrary to the standard definition of printed ephemera, the ticket was neither transitory, nor minor; it was not simply a document.¹⁶⁹ If ‘ephemera’, literally, is a category situated in the day/everyday, the Methodist ticket is both within calendrical, mundane time and outside it altogether.¹⁷⁰

The questions that drove this study came from different fields, but no single method or theoretical insight wholly sufficed in reaching these conclusions. They require us to take the ticket seriously in its own right, as an object that people touched, held, studied, and also lost, forgot, and destroyed. For this reason, its capacity or agency matters; put another way, we need to focus on what was possible only because the ticket had a material existence and presence. The ticket, not a narrative about historical change or modernity, is centre stage. But as the literature on collecting indirectly reminds us when it focuses on present-day examples, or deploys psychological and psychoanalytic insight, tickets occurred within historically specific and mutable settings. Twenty-first-century comparisons are not always helpful. So in probing the ticket’s capacities, temporal contexts are significant.

The ticket has been hidden in plain sight, both as an idea about how to do things and as a historical phenomenon. This article aims to restore it to Methodism and to the eighteenth century, and in the process to add new knowledge and perspective about the object itself and what it did. If there were no Methodist tickets, we would lose a form of plebeian literacy and organisational life; we would miss changing religious experiences and their incremental absorption, first into denominational expectations and then into nostalgia; we would forego the challenges which complicate models of a bourgeois public sphere and a commercially acquisitive culture. This approach is one that searches for human existence in small things not major upheavals, and over long periods of time.¹⁷¹ Patterns of cause and effect, so integral to the discipline of history, are often difficult to identify on this scale. But as the Methodist ticket demonstrates, apparent trifles can be powerful agents themselves.

¹⁶⁹ Maurice Rickards, *Collecting printed ephemera* (Oxford, 1988), p. 13

¹⁷⁰ Andrews, ‘The importance of ephemera’, p. 434; Russell, ‘Neglected history’, p. 32.

¹⁷¹ James Deetz, *In small things forgotten: the archaeology of early American life* (New York, 1977)

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FIGURES:

Figure 1: OCMCH: Kenworthy Class Ticket Album *From the collections of the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, U.K. Used with permission.*

Figure 2: Four tickets belonging to Margaret Sommerhill, 1742; a fifth has clearly been removed at a later date (JRL, MA1977/720: James Everett Album) *Reproduced and published with the permission of the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes and The John Rylands Library, University of Manchester.*

Figure 3: Page from the *John Wesley Class Ticket Album* (JRL, MA 1981/12) *Reproduced and published with the permission of the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes and The John Rylands Library, University of Manchester.*