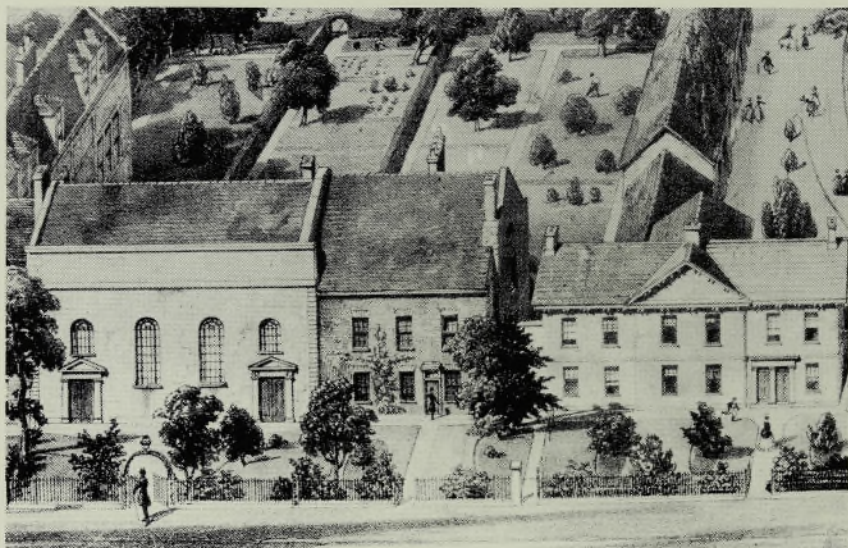


BEDFORDSHIRE
Historical Record Society



VOLUME 68

The Bedford Moravian Church
in the
Eighteenth Century

Edited by
EDWIN WELCH

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THE BEDFORDSHIRE
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THE PUBLICATIONS OF THE BEDFORDSHIRE
HISTORICAL RECORD SOCIETY
VOLUME 68

The Bedford Moravian Church
in the
Eighteenth Century

A Selection of Documents
Edited by Edwin Welch

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THE BEDFORDSHIRE
HISTORICAL RECORD
SOCIETY

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Most of the illustrations are from the collections at the County Record Office. Those who allowed material in their possession to be copied are Mrs D. M. Rogers and Miss Rosemary Rogers (2) and St Luke's Church, Bedford (1) and (4). The copies were made by the County Council Photographic Unit under Mr David Stubbs.

INTRODUCTION

The records of the Bedford Moravian Church, now deposited in the Bedfordshire Record Office (catalogue reference MO), are of very great importance for two reasons. In a denomination which has produced more records of its activities than any other in Britain, Bedford has probably preserved more than any other congregation. It has multiple diaries for the first few years, early diaries for two of the choir houses, and copies of many of the documents (diaries, journals and accounts) which were circulated between the congregations in the eighteenth century. Since a large quantity of Moravian records were destroyed or damaged when their Fetter Lane chapel in London was bombed in World War II, Bedford holds information about the affairs of the British Province which are no longer available elsewhere.

In addition to this, Bedford has the distinction of being the first Moravian settlement established in Britain and the first congregation outside London. Since these were new departures for the Moravian Brethren – a congregation of converts from other Protestant churches and a settlement in a country where such were unknown – it involved decisions and compromises which can be traced in the Bedford records. Bedford provided a pattern for future developments in Britain.

The process of selecting records to be printed in this volume has been difficult. Much has had to be omitted which is of interest and value. It is fortunate that the registers, now in the Public Record Office, and the early lists of members have already been transcribed by the Bedfordshire Record Office, making it unnecessary to print them here. However, there still remain many early records, minutes and congregation diaries in particular, which would merit publication.

The criteria for publication here have been to provide information about the foundation of the congregation in 1745 and the events which led up to it, and to provide specimens of the different types of records which may be found in the eighteenth century archives of the Brethren. Neither has been previously attempted. Earlier historians have reproduced the legend of the smallpox epidemic, often with embellishments of their own and completely ignored the Baptist period of the Bedford society. Despite their great interest both for the congregation and the wider community in which it flourished, no records of a Moravian church have previously been published *in extenso*, and no attempt has been made in recent times to describe the elaborate organisation which produced those records.

The Moravian Church

The Moravian Church, otherwise known as the *Unitas Fratrum* or the Renewed Church of the United Brethren, is one of the smaller Protestant denominations. In origins and development it is distinguished from almost all the dissenting churches.¹ Its origins can be traced back to John Wycliffe and his poor preachers. In 1398 the marriage of Richard II to Anne of Bohemia provided an opportunity for Lollard doctrines to reach Bohemia where they took root. Under the leadership of John Hus there was an attempt to reform the

Church more than a century before Luther was born. In 1415 Hus's condemnation before the Council of Constance and his death at the stake led to the establishment of an independent Church in Bohemia. It was alternately persecuted and tolerated for two centuries. It also fragmented because of doctrinal difficulties. Initial difficulties between the militants who fought Catholic repression and pacifists who refused to resist, moderates and extremists, produced separate groupings of Utraquists (who desired communion in both kinds), Taborists (who rejected transubstantiation), and Chillists (who awaited the Second Coming). Further divisions and further persecutions saw the return of some moderates to the Catholic Church.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century the Bohemian Church (as it was then known) practically disappeared. The Bohemians had invited a Protestant prince, the Elector Palatine, to become their king, but in 1620 he was defeated at the Battle of the White Mountain by the Catholic forces, and the Church was driven underground by persecution. Since the Elector Palatine was James I's son-in-law the Moravians make a second appearance in English history. Collections were made for the benefit of a persecuted episcopal church now mainly in exile in Germany. One of the exiles was the best-known of the early Moravians, Bishop Comenius. Comenius visited England in his other capacity of an educator. Although he tried to keep the Church alive both by his writings and by consecrating a successor, it must have seemed when he died in 1671 that it had disappeared for ever. Nevertheless the apostolic succession and the Church were preserved by an unforeseen occurrence in the next century.

However the traditions and worship of the Church had been maintained in secret in Moravia, and at the beginning of the next century, groups began to slip over the border into Protestant Germany to avoid persecution. There they found a supporter at Berthelsdorf, the estate of Count Zinzendorf. He was a Lutheran and had been a pupil of A.H. Francke, a leading German Pietist, and was receptive to the beliefs of the exiles. At first he adopted an Erastian solution, and proposed to incorporate the Moravians in the Lutheran Church, but further conversation with the exiles and the perusal of Comenius's works converted Zinzendorf to Moravianism by 1727. He then proposed that the Moravians should form an 'ecclesiola' (little church or fellowship) within the State Church. The Lutheran Church proved incapable of containing this active new arrival and step by step Zinzendorf was obliged to organise a separate Church, of which he soon became bishop as well as leader. But the concept of the 'ecclesiola' did not die. It was to be used by John Wesley, George Whitefield and other early Methodists to justify their position in the Church of England. For in their eyes 'societies,' formed on the same basis as the late seventeenth century religious societies, were intended simply to supplement the regular worship of the Established Church, and provide for fellowship and spiritual care.

The Moravians under Zinzendorf believed in missionary work amongst the heathen natives. This was a new and unusual concept. Although England already had the New England Company (founded in 1649), the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (founded in 1698) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (founded in 1701) none of them were primarily concerned with the native populations of the colonies. The provision of ministers and literature for the white settlers often took precedence over missionary activities with the Indians. The Brethren, on the other hand, from

the beginning sent missionaries to the West Indies, Greenland, North America and South Africa solely to convert the natives. Since initially they had no funds, they were obliged to beg for passages to those countries and to work alongside their potential converts for food and lodgings. The opposition which they met was considerable. Even the conversion of slaves was often considered undesirable, but working in the fields was held to undermine the respect which the native was expected to feel for the white man. The Danish Government, which had no slaves in Greenland, was unwilling at first to allow a mission to the natives there. However Zinzendorf was a good politician and had sufficient influence at the courts of Europe to overcome this opposition. Soon missionaries were waiting in different European ports until they could obtain a passage to their chosen mission field. The delays were often lengthy and so contact was established with local sympathisers, who could provide support and assistance. Without intending to do so, the Moravians began to make converts amongst the Protestants.

In 1735 the first Moravians arrived in London on their way to General Oglethorpe's new colony of Georgia. While waiting for a ship they established contact with various sympathetic Londoners, of whom James Hutton, a bookseller and son of an Anglican clergyman, is perhaps the best known. At that time they had no intention of converting Anglicans or other Protestants to Moravianism. But it was not until they had embarked for Georgia that they met their most famous convert, John Wesley, on his way to be the incumbent of Savannah parish. This story is too well known to need repeating here, but it was to continue to influence John Wesley even after he had broken with the Moravian Church². Many of the early Methodists eventually joined the Moravian Church and others, such as Howell Harris, the Welsh Methodist, were to remain their friends and imitated their practices. Even John Wesley adopted some of their practices for his own followers.

In the British Isles the Moravians found a situation which they had never anticipated because an evangelical revival was already in progress in parts of England, Wales and Scotland. The Moravian form of worship and doctrines appealed to those who found the Church of England unsympathetic and uncongenial. There was also the added attraction for Anglicans that the *Unitas Fratrum* was an episcopal church and was recognised as such (though somewhat grudgingly) by the British Parliament³. Zinzendorf still believed in the concept of the 'ecclesiola' and at first the establishment of Moravian societies was encouraged. They were intended to supplement the work of Anglican (or occasionally dissenting) churches, and to some extent duplicated the societies already formed in the Anglican Church. The move from society to a Moravian congregation separate from the Established Church was the next stage and in 1745 the Brethren saw no objection to this, although they were already cautious about admitting their converts. The first congregation formed was that in Fetter Lane, London, from the society in which John Wesley had been converted. The second was the society at Bedford. Between 1745 and 1755 another eight congregations were established in Britain but after that time the Moravian Church made every effort to prevent new congregations being formed. Societies such as that at Plymouth Dock (Devonport) were obliged to remain for years dependent on the local parish church for the sacraments⁴. In this way the Moravian Church probably lost its opportunity to become the centre of the evangelical revival in Britain and New England.

The Evangelical Revival

The waves of 'Enthusiasm' which swept across England in the eighteenth century are generally described as the Methodist Revival, but this appears to imply that it was solely the work of John Wesley and led only to what since 1932 has been called the Methodist Church. In Wales the same movement led to the establishment of the Calvinistic Methodist (now Presbyterian) Church of Wales. In New England the revival is known as the Great Awakening and is as much a feature of the Congregational as the Methodist Church. For many years in the eighteenth century the term Methodist was in common use as a term of denigration for any enthusiast from Anglican to Unitarian⁵. Like so many of these terms of abuse it was eventually adopted by the supporters of the movement. In the eighteenth century however Methodism remained a movement rather than a church or congregation⁶.

In its earliest form the Revival was a grassroots movement. In different places, more or less simultaneously, individuals by total surrender to God and admission of personal sinfulness found personal salvation and felt it laid upon them to go out and convert their neighbours. In New England it was Jonathan Edwards; in Wales it was Howell Harris; in the Lowlands, William McCulloch; in Gloucestershire, George Whitefield; and at Oxford, the Wesleys - all are examples of this. Societies were formed and experiences exchanged. The leaders heard of one another's work and began to meet or correspond. The societies also began to establish contact with one another⁷. The existence of printing presses, no longer hampered by the censor, enabled the information about the Revival to be spread cheaply and quickly. Once again the Moravian practice of sending periodical accounts to each congregation provided an example. First in the field was the *Weekly* (later *Christian*) *History* which appeared in different editions in London, Glasgow and Boston (Mass.). The Wesleys and Whitefield also circulated their personal journals, at first in manuscript form and later in print. The exchange of religious experiences assisted this revival in spreading far more rapidly than any previous religious movement.

As we have already seen it is difficult to define a Methodist at this period. At first they had no particular religious dogma and could meet in societies without difficulty, but soon the preaching of the different ministers began to diverge. The Wesleys and their supporters preached Arminianism; Whitefield and his supporters preached Calvinism; the Moravians practised Quietism⁸. As a result the societies were split on doctrinal lines, and while the leaders argued, some of their supporters literally fought. Early Methodism also affected dissenting churches. At Southampton Above Bar Independent (Congregational) church took the initiative; at Plymouth George Street Baptist church was one of its centres; and in parts of south-west Wales some of the Presbyterian meetings. If there was any common element it was a rejection of human wisdom, an insistence on personal sinfulness and an emphasis on personal salvation. Many conversions were instantaneous like that of Saul on the road to Damascus. This is illustrated in the Bedford records by Francis Okely's publication of 'a private heart's epistolary correspondence.'⁹

The causes of the Revival are not easy to identify. In the past Methodist historians have often pointed to the state of the Established Church or even the depressed condition of religion in the country, but the evidence of delinquent

parsons and abandoned churches is not correct in many places. Complaints about lack of sermons often means only that the sermons were unsympathetic to the Methodists, and those about unsuitable pastors that they objected to intruders in their parish¹⁰. Other historians have found the origins of the revival in the societies for the reform of manners, the SPCK and similar bodies, but these should be considered as symptoms rather than the cause. More recently there has been more emphasis on 'political' reasons for the growth of a 'popular' religion. None is completely satisfactory and they ignore the possibility that the revival was a reaction to what its exponents called 'rational' religion, which at this period was beginning to lead to Arianism, Socinianism and eventually Unitarianism in almost all the denominations. Even so Theophilus Lindsey the Unitarian had links with the early Methodists.

The desire of the Methodists to convert others led quite soon to laymen, such as Francis Okely and Howell Harris, exhorting their neighbours. Excluded from their parish churches (or chapels) they preached out of doors or in private houses and barns. Howell Harris exhorted standing on his father's grave in Talgarth churchyard: Francis Okely persuaded his mother to lend her barn in Bedford. This soon resulted in persecution, both by magistrates and the mob, but the Methodists were most unwilling to register as Protestant Dissenters in order to obtain the protection of the Toleration Act. Persecution tended to keep their societies united for protection against mobs headed by the local parson, churchwarden or publican. However like most religious movements which set out to unite everyone, the early Methodists began to split into different groups. Many of the Arminians followed the Wesleys and John began to devise an organisation which would hold them together. The Calvinists had no strong leadership. Most of the leaders were averse to organising because it might lead to separation from the Church of England. Both George Whitefield and Howell Harris used their influence to prevent this, and Harris even hoped to re-unite the Arminians, Calvinists and Moravians in a single group. As a result the Calvinists soon began to disagree amongst themselves. Some joined the Moravians. Of these John Cennick and Benjamin Ingham are perhaps the best known. Others formed Connexions - loose groupings under the name of a particular Methodist. It was not until after John Wesley's death that the Arminian Methodists began to fragment in the same manner.

From the excitement of the times the Moravians were not entirely exempt. In 1740 John Wesley quarrelled with them on doctrinal grounds, and his pamphlet against them was responsible for his breach with George Whitefield. John Cennick joined the Moravians and took with him many of the societies in Wiltshire and Berkshire. Benjamin Ingham similarly handed over his societies in Yorkshire to the Moravians, but later established his own connexion in the North. But, except for John Wesley, the Moravians managed to remain on good terms with most of the Methodists. Howell Harris was fascinated by them and his later 'Family' at Trefeca (near Brecon) was closely modelled on their settlements in Yorkshire and Lancashire. Despite her complaints of poaching members at Bath, Lady Huntingdon even stayed in their houses at Bedford and Gracehill in 1762¹¹. After Francis Okely had left John Wesley to return to the Moravians, Wesley could write that he still loved him¹². The Moravians were an essential part of the eighteenth century revival and this was especially so at Bedford.

The Bedford Revival

At Bedford the evangelical revival preceded the arrival of the Moravians by several years. The two key figures were Jacob Rogers, an Anglican in deacon's orders, and Francis Okely, an Anglican layman. Rogers came from the West Riding of Yorkshire (where he had been at school in Batley with another future Methodist, Benjamin Ingham) and had graduated from Cambridge in 1737. A college friend found him a place as usher at Bedford Grammar School where he arrived in a penniless condition. Although he had known Benjamin Ingham at school he was not influenced by the Revival and still preached 'moral sermons like the other unawakened Clergyman.'¹³ He was also quarrelsome. During the next eighteen months he managed to get himself dismissed first by his headmaster, and then by the vicar of St Paul's whose curate he became for a time. For a short time he was curate of Odell, but left to return to St Paul's and in the end to be dismissed once more. In his private life he was equally unfortunate. He married his Bedford landlady's daughter without the consent of her relations. She, like John Wesley's wife, was completely unsuited to him and created considerable embarrassment by her incessant demands for money¹⁴. In fact until Rogers met Okely and his friends he was the type of clergyman to which the Methodists had a particular objection.

Francis Okely was a Bedford man, the son of a local tradesman who went bankrupt about 1730. As a result he left Bedford, leaving his wife to bring up four sons and a daughter¹⁵. Although Mrs Okely was the granddaughter of an Anglican clergyman and her parents were in a 'Middling Station in Life,' she provided for her family by setting up a milliner's shop. This was so successful that she was able to send Francis to the Charterhouse school and Cambridge University, another son into the Royal Navy as an officer, and a third son to be a lawyer. Still later she made quite large donations to the Moravian cause in Bedford, for which reason she was usually described as Mother Okely. In 1736 when Francis returned from boarding school he 'was fired up to a deep Seriousness and Concern about securing the Salvation of his Soul.' On arrival at St John's College he was one of those who founded the Cambridge equivalent of the Holy Club at Oxford. One of its members was William Delamotte of St Catherine's, brother of Charles Delamotte, the friend of the Wesleys. He brought Benjamin Ingham, a member of the Holy Club at Oxford and John Wesley's companion in Georgia, to Cambridge. Okely took Ingham to Bedford where he was able to renew his acquaintance with Jacob Rogers¹⁶.

The details of this reunion in Bedford are obscure, but the explanation given in several histories is incorrect. These claim that a serious epidemic of smallpox in Bedford caused all the incumbents to leave, so that Rogers was obliged to enlist Ingham and Delamotte to help the stricken town¹⁷. The burial registers of the Bedford parishes show no trace of an exodus of ministers and the epidemic was quite mild. It began south of the river in October 1738. By November it had crossed the bridge to reach St Paul's parish, but it was not until January 1738/9 that the other two parishes were affected. In all 169 people died in Bedford between October 1738 and March 1739. In St Paul's we know how many of these were attributed to small pox — 42 out of 73. There was no week in which 'over sixty people died' as was claimed. One of the Moravian sources written not long after the event states that the initial contact between Ingham and Rogers was in the summer of 1738 before the epidemic, while William

Delamotte's exhorting at Bedford was during the following summer, after the epidemic had ended. In John Wesley's journal for 1753 there is a note written by William Parker, one of the early Moravian converts, stating that 'Mr [Ingham] and W D[elamotte]' went to Bedford in 1739¹⁸. Neither of these near contemporary sources mentions the epidemic.

The true importance of the epidemic in this story is that it was responsible for the death of Rogers' vicar, Francis Hunt. Hunt died at the beginning of the new year, and Rogers was chosen to preach at his funeral on 21 January 1738/9. Influenced by Okely and his friends he chose as a text Isaiah 56, 10 and 11 - 'His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs.' In his sermon he 'sharply reprov'd [the] peculiar vices of the clergy.' It was the last straw for the Anglican ministers of Bedford. Only two days before, he had been put in charge of the parish until a new vicar could be inducted¹⁹. He was now forced to give up his curacy and to become a field preacher, using the windmill at Bedford for his pulpit. This soon became known to the other Methodists. As early as June George Whitefield was reporting it to the Georgia trustees²⁰. When Ingham and Delamotte visited Bedford in 1739 he had probably left Bedford. On 22 May he met George Whitefield at Olney for the first time and with Whitefield's encouragement he went north for the summer, preaching in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and the West Riding²¹. All these areas subsequently saw the establishment of Moravian congregations, and Rogers is credited with the later foundation of the Moravian settlement at Ockbrook between Nottingham and Derby. Okely was probably also absent at this time. He had joined Charles Wesley in London in March, and was still with him in September when at Bristol they joined with John Cennick in prayer for that sinful city²². Meanwhile at Bedford 'Mr Ingham by preaching in the Churches in and about Bedford, and William Delmotte by expounding the holy Scriptures in private Houses made a great Stir and general Awakening both in Town and County, and Societies were gathered together.'²³ While in Bedford they lodged with Mrs Okely.

As we have seen the societies which Ingham and Delamotte founded were not intended to replace the parish church or to be the foundation for a new denomination. They were meetings for mutual edification and were usually held under the supervision of a sympathetic clergyman. One such in Leicestershire, which Rogers may well have visited about this time, heard a sermon of Bishop Ken's read, sang a psalm and recited a prayer - 'the same the[y] use in all the religious Societys in Town hoping by this means to promote the Glory of God.'²⁴ However, as the numbers increased, the societies found it increasingly difficult 'to find a proper Place' to meet. The difficulty was solved at Bedford when Mrs Okely fitted up her barn for the purpose. This was eventually to be the first Moravian church building there²⁵.

By 1740 both Rogers and Okely had ceased to travel and were back in Bedford. There had been a breach with the Methodists on doctrinal grounds. It was in this year that such divisions began to appear in some other societies. In April Charles Wesley thought that the Moravians would break away. By the summer he was worried about the inroads which the Baptists were making. Both Rogers and Okely joined the Baptists, and they probably took most of the Bedford society with them. On October 10th Francis Okely was admitted to membership of the Blunham Baptist church and was immediately chosen as a minister²⁶. Only six days later Mrs Okely's barn was registered in the

archdeaconry court as 'a place of Publick Worship for Protestants Dissenting from the Church of England.'²⁷ Rogers did not join the Blunham church, but the Moravian records show that he too was a Baptist for a time. It must have been at this time that he wrote a 'letter recommendatory' for Ann Dutton's *Discourse concerning the New Birth, a Baptist work*²⁸. Rogers was also able to convert some members of the Nottingham society to this view. When Charles Wesley went to Nottingham two years later a member of the society told him 'Mr Rogers did run well, and preached the truth as you do here; but what a sad end has he made of it! Take care you do not leave the Church, like him.' And in the following year, after preaching at Nottingham Cross, Charles wrote in his journal of 'Mr Rogers's misconduct' which had scattered the flock there²⁹. In 1745 some of the Nottingham society registered a Baptist meeting house, and later still members of the Leicestershire societies, which Rogers had also visited, became Baptists³⁰.

But by this time both Okely and Rogers had ceased to be Baptists and were moving closer to the Moravians with whom they had never ceased to correspond. In November 1741 the Blunham church sent four messengers to remonstrate with Okely and two of the Bedford sisters³¹. The following January they consulted Baptist churches in Hitchin and London about 'Our Brother Okely's Case,' and as a result sent him an admonition in writing. After a further visit from the messengers Okely was summoned to a church meeting at Blunham on 9th April 1742 where he was excommunicated for 'Breach of Church Covenant and for Imbibing and spreading of Errors'³². It is fortunate that we have a more detailed account of the meeting which Okely wrote to James Hutton³³. In it he says he went to Blunham 'to let them know the Reasons of my Absence and Dissatisfaction, so, if I was simple, The Lord might make it a Blessing to them.' He describes the accusations against him in detail — despising the ordinances and daily family prayers, adopting heretical views and consorting with heretics. The Baptists objected to his continued friendship with the Moravians and to his way of preaching. When they asked him if he accepted them as a true Church of Christ, he replied that they could not be so because they were under the Law 'and it is a question whether some of you may not be quite dead and settled upon your Law.' These were Moravian and Methodist sentiments and it is not surprising that the church gave him over to Satan. We do not have any information about when Rogers ceased to be a Baptist but it was probably about the same time.

Both Okely and Rogers were clearly moving closer to the Moravians and once again most of the Bedford society followed them. Of five early 'Methodists' in Bedford at least four were Moravian when they died³⁴. Only three years later the society became a Moravian congregation. Rogers remained with the congregation until 1751, although he was often sent to preach elsewhere. Howell Harris heard him preaching at the Fetter Lane chapel on 30th August 1751, but in March of 1752 he went to Pennsylvania. By then his wife was dead and he left their children in the care of the English Moravians. From Bethlehem in Pennsylvania he went to the Moravian settlements in North Carolina where he married Ann Molly Parsons, a daughter of the Surveyor General. She died in 1759 and Rogers returned to England three years later. There, in Bedford he married Mary Cherry, the widow of Brother Brampton³⁵. In England he became the minister of the Bath congregation with a commission to preach in the surrounding country, and

there he renewed his acquaintance with Howell Harris³⁶. From Bath he went to Leominster to replace the minister who was ill, and finally to London where he died in February 1779³⁷.

While Rogers' life began with storms and became peaceful after he had become a Moravian, Okely's experience was the reverse. After the Bedford society became a congregation he was sent to Bristol, where he met another convert, John Cennick. From there he went to Dukinfield to preach in Cheshire and South Lancashire. It was to Okely at Dukinfield that John Cennick addressed his last letter in May 1755. While visiting Manchester Okely met John Byrom, a Methodist sympathiser, who introduced him to the works of the German mystics. This appears to have unsettled him and in March 1757 he wrote to the Brethren in Yorkshire saying that he was convinced his call was to serve elsewhere. After a visit to Fulneck³⁸ he and his wife went to London where it was agreed amicably that he should leave the Moravians. He returned to Bedford without his wife to wait until God should settle his future course for him³⁹. By July 1757 the Bedford Moravians recorded their concern about 'Ockley's visiting our People with an ill Intention,' but soon decided that he presented no threat to the congregation. Okely's behaviour seems to have been unknown to many of the Moravians. In October 1757 the Bristol minister, L.T. Nyberg, noted 'a disagreeable visit' from two Wesleyan preachers, Roquet and Peronett, who apparently told him that Okely had left the Brethren, to which he replied that Okely had recently had a son baptised by the Brethren⁴⁰. However in the following September when Okely accidentally met Nyberg and the Rev. Walter Chapman, a local Anglican minister, Nyberg 'told him in plain Terms how our people here pitted and prayed and wept for him'. Chapman on the other hand accused him of Apostacy⁴¹.

By the following March he had set out for Manchester again where he was to visit the Methodist societies as a companion to John Wesley. He accompanied Wesley on a visit to Ireland but because he refused to preach against the Moravians Wesley denounced him as a coward. Okely merely said he 'found it would be impossible for me to join with him in the manner that would give satisfaction both to him and me.' By October 1758 he had been reunited with his wife at Bedford, but was no longer treated as a minister by the Moravians⁴². Okely next attempted to become an Anglican clergyman. Surprisingly Walter Chapman was now willing to take him as his curate at Bath, but his Moravian orders did not satisfy the bishop⁴³. Next Lord Dartmouth, a Methodist sympathiser, promised to make him curate of Olney if he was in holy orders. However his application to the bishop of Lincoln, followed by an appeal to the archbishop of Canterbury, was unsuccessful. The sole result of his efforts was that his name was added to the list of those 'not to be permitted to serve Cures within the Diocese of Lincoln' because he was 'not in Orders.' John Newton became the curate of Olney instead with results which no one could have anticipated at that time⁴⁴.

Okely remained at Bedford where he was 'employed principally in teaching Latin and Greek to some young gentlemen belonging to the Brethren.' In 1765 he opened 'a Sort of Boarding School' to which some of the Brethren sent their children. Eventually he was accepted back into the Moravian Church, and was sent to Northampton to minister to the small Moravian society there. He spent the rest of his life there making and circulating translations of the German mystics. He died on 9th May 1794 and was buried at the Bedford Moravian burial ground on the 15th⁴⁵.

The Bedford Congregation

In the course of the eighteenth century the Moravian Brethren developed an elaborate hierarchy and a well defined organisation. It was made up of societies, town congregations and settlements. Societies were groups of people who were not Brethren and retained their membership of other churches, often Anglican. They were led by a Moravian minister or labourer, listened to his preaching, but had to resort to their own church for communion, baptisms and burials⁴⁶. A town congregation, on the other hand, contained only members of the Moravian church and their ministers christened, buried and administered communion. Although town congregations, and also settlements, developed out of societies the latter did not then disappear. The society continued in a lesser role providing shelter for all those seeking to become Brethren, which could sometimes take several years to achieve since it was decided by the lot. Settlements were congregations in which all or most of the members lived as a community. Separate houses were provided for spinsters, bachelors and married couples, usually in an area surrounding the chapel. Although there was no community of goods, and everyone (even ministers) was expected to work at a trade, new ventures received the support of the congregation and each was expected to contribute towards the support of the house and congregation. Settlements were held to be the ideal Moravian congregations because they separated themselves from the world, and in the eighteenth century members were encouraged to move into them⁴⁷.

Each settlement and congregation was ruled by an elaborate series of committees on which there were elected as well as nominated members, women as well as men. There was an elders' conference of ministers, labourers and any visiting ministers⁴⁸. The elders' conference was responsible for the 'spiritual affairs' of the congregation although it did not control the ministers' activities. The congregation council consisted of the members of the elders' conference together with members chosen by the congregation. This controlled secular activities and in particular the financial arrangements. At first *ad hoc* committees were appointed to undertake specific tasks or solve particular problems, but later a standing congregation committee was appointed each year to work under the council. The committee was responsible for building maintenance, the conduct of members and distribution of the poor's fund⁴⁹.

Each of the three provinces into which the Church was divided - Germany, Britain and America - was governed by a Provincial Synod. The synod included all the bishops and ministers in the Province and deputies elected by each congregation. In between meetings of the synod the Provincial Elders' Conference made decisions about such matters as the location of ministers and the holding of visitations. However only the Provincial Synod could nominate new bishops. Although the Moravian Church maintained the apostolic succession of bishops, its bishops, unlike those of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, had only spiritual and no administrative functions. Most bishops were also ministers to a particular congregation⁵⁰. The supreme authority with the Brethren was the General Synod and the Unity Elders' Conference. In 1741 the post of Chief Elder was abolished and the decision made to regard God as the presiding elder. This resulted in the frequent use of drawing lots to discover His will - a practice which continued until the end of the nineteenth century⁵¹.

At the time that the Bedford settlement was being established the organisation of the Brethren's Church had not been finally decided, which sometimes makes it difficult to establish the early procedures in detail. However Bedford was obviously an experiment and the decisions made there were to influence the congregations established later. For example all future churches in incorporated boroughs were to be town congregations. The Brethren found it difficult to have a settlement in Bedford because the corporation still restricted most of the trades to their own freemen, while the congregation wished to bring in tradesmen from other parts of the country. Therefore, after 1745, settlements were founded in the country and preferably away from villages – Fulneck in the West Riding, Ockbrook in Derbyshire, Fairfield near Manchester and Gracehill in Northern Ireland. Similarly at Bedford there were at first a number of committees instead of one congregation committee.

Despite the large quantity of records for 1745, only part of which is printed here, the formation of a separate congregation at Bedford is not clearly documented. Before 1745 certain members of the Bedford society had been admitted to the London congregation. They were probably selected for their importance both to the society and the Moravian church, but it is difficult to be certain because all admissions were subject to the vagaries of the lot⁵². By the beginning of 1745 it was being found inconvenient to send new members to London for admission, particularly since they could not receive communion from a Moravian minister in Bedford. As a result members were first admitted to the London congregation without going there, and then a new congregation was established for them. Although the process seems somewhat haphazard it is probable that it was carefully thought out over a period of years⁵³. German ministers had been sent to preach to the society for several years, while Rogers and Okely had been sent to London and Germany to see congregations and settlements at work. In addition ministers were sent from London to oversee the early meetings of the new Bedford congregation.

The new congregation (like the society) was organised in choirs – married couples, widows, widowers, single brethren, single sisters, great boys, great girls, little girls and little boys. Since Bedford was a settlement, each of the adult groups had a house and the children often lived with the single sisters or brethren. But not every member lived in a choir house. Some in Bedford continued to live as families, while the members who lived in the villages were unable to do so, though they often asked to move to Bedford for this purpose. When all the members of a choir met together it was known as a class or band⁵⁴. Where members lived and worked together that was called an oecumeny, but this could also be used of non-members. There were certain religious services which could be held by society or choir as well as congregation. These included the love feast or *agape*, foot-washing or *pedilavium*, and the quarter hour. All, like the practice of kissing one another, had good scriptural precedents, but the *agape*, an occasion to drink tea and share religious experiences, eventually became a great burden⁵⁵.

All these meetings and services, together with the exchange of information between congregations, has produced the great wealth of Moravian church records. In some ways the Moravians resembled the Quakers. Both in this early period admitted women as well as men to serve on committees⁵⁶. Both debated matters at great length in order to reach a consensus in the congregation. Both

preferred to settle disputes by arbitration rather than in the law courts. In addition to this each society, congregation and mission circulated copies of its diaries and reports to each other. The procedure was usually to send copies which were re-copied (having first been translated if necessary) and sent to other congregations. Bedford choirs received copies of diaries from other choirs in other congregations. The Bedford congregation also received 'accounts' of missionary work in various parts of the world - Greenland, the West Indies and Labrador at this time. They also received from London the 'word' for each day or *loosung* which figures largely in these early diaries. The scripture text and appropriate verses often served as a text for a sermon or quarter hour. Jacob Rogers noted when they were particularly apposite. Many of these records have been preserved at Bedford.

The congregation diaries are unique to the Brethren. Each minister was expected to keep a diary and record not only events in the congregation, but also events in the community - riots, rebellions, fires and unemployment all find their place in the better-kept diaries. They provide a chronological account of local events not usually available elsewhere. At Bedford three of the four diaries compiled in 1745 have survived. Jacob Rogers' diary runs from July 1743 to February 1746 with occasional gaps: John Wade's diary is complete from January to October 1745: only David Hackenwelder's diary is missing, but it has been summarised in the abstract for 1745 which was read at the watch night. This last was almost certainly the version circulated to other congregations, and from it we can see how much was lost - some comments were omitted because they might cause offence, some (like Rogers' comments on his wife) because they were too personal. But even the bowdlerised version gives a fascinating picture of an early Moravian settlement. The choir diaries are usually a less interesting record of trivial events and routine matters, but Bedford is most fortunate that early diaries have survived for both the single brethren and the single sisters⁵⁷.

Life in a Moravian Settlement

The early Moravians were strongly influenced by quietism or stillness. They rejected human reason and required all their converts to acknowledge their sinfulness. They believed that it was necessary to wait upon God until all this was made clear. They rejected instant conversion of the type that John Wesley experienced in the Fetter Lane society and this was the principal cause of their breach with him. As can be seen from the Bedford records conversion and admission to the ranks of the Brethren could be a very long process. It was necessary for the candidate to reach a proper frame of mind and to be approved by the lot - permission to attend the communion service as a spectator might be delayed for several months, and admission to it even longer. Stillness is essential to understand some of the early records - reason is wrong and 'sinnerlike', sinfulness is part of human nature and this must be recognised before it can be removed.

Quietism also reinforced the use of the lot for many important decisions. The lot was so designed as to produce three answers - yes, no or blank. It could delay the admission of new members, or it might accept a wife and reject her husband. The Parker family and others clearly thought that the lot should take more account of seniority than it did. To avoid the worst difficulties various

expedients were adopted. Husband and wife were put to the lot jointly for membership, or a proposal might be divided into several questions beginning with 'Is the time ripe for . . .?'. It can be seen that where the decision is clear, for example expulsion for misconduct, the lot was not used. The lot was for decisions which were difficult to make.

Another aspect of these early records was the emphasis on the Lamb of God and his blood. While the present symbol of the Brethren's Church is still a lamb, the preoccupation with blood is not, since it is somewhat distasteful to modern eyes. The verses on the cover of the Labourers' Conference minutes of 1747 provides a specimen of this preoccupation:

'Dearest Sidehole! dearest Sidehole! dearest Sidehole!
Thou art mine, Charming Sidehole! sweetest Sidehole!
Lovliest Sidehole, dear Sideshrine, where our
Congregations and all Blood relations dwell to all Eternity.
We pray thee: Bedfords Flock in thee shall be'⁵⁸

This, and a great emphasis on celebrating Easter, made the Moravians very unpopular with many of the unconverted. Taken together with the appearance of German ministers with a poor command of the English language this made them suspect as Jacobites in 1745 and to the circulation of various calumnies about them.

To counteract these accusations and to assert their right as an episcopal church Count Zinzendorf obtained an Act of Parliament which conferred certain privileges on the Brethren in 1748. Its preamble describes it as an Act to encourage settlement of the Moravians in the colonies and permitted them to affirm rather than swear and not to be obliged to bear arms⁵⁹. Neither of these requirements seems to have caused problems in Britain at least, but it gave an appearance of approval to the denomination. Soon afterwards it was faced with various accusations of misbehaviour from such unusual allies as John Wesley and Bishop Lavington of Exeter. At the same time there was a financial crisis which led to various economies being introduced. Neither of these two problems makes more than a fleeting appearance in the Bedford records⁶⁰.

The Nineteenth Century and After

The later history of the Bedford congregation has still to be written. There is a small pamphlet written to celebrate the bicentenary of the congregation in 1945, but no one has used the extensive later records for a complete account⁶¹. A detailed history would describe how the settlement was slowly replaced by a town congregation in the nineteenth century and the educational activity which led to the setting up of a girls' school. Although the present congregation is now very small and has combined with the downtown congregations of Presbyterians and Congregationalists the cause continues to flourish in Bedford at the daughter church in Queen's Park. Although the chapel was rebuilt in 1865 the other eighteenth century buildings of the settlement are still to be seen on one of the busiest Bedford streets as a permanent reminder of an important part of the town's history.

- 1 For the history of the Moravian Church see Hutton; W.G. Addison, *The Renewed Church of the United Brethren* (London, 1932); J.T. & K.G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church* (Bethlehem, Penn., 1967).
- 2 For the story of their meeting see Townsend, Workman & Eayrs, *A New History of Methodism* (London, 1909), p 191 and *Proc. Wesley Hist. Soc.*, vol 46, pp 125-153.
- 3 *Acta Fratrum Unitatis in Anglia MDCCXLIX* (London, 1749).
- 4 Devonport was finally permitted to form a town congregation in 1803 after many years as a society.
- 5 *Proc. Wesley Hist. Soc.*, vol 34, pp 172-175.
- 6 See K.H. Voigt, *Pietismus, Methodismus, Gemeinschaftsbewegung* (Bremen, 1979).
- 7 Southern Methodist Univ., Bridwell Library, Huntingdon letter 53.
- 8 Briefly Arminians believe that all men can be saved, while Calvinists that only those will be saved whom God has predestined to salvation. Quietism emphasised the necessity of waiting upon the Lord's will.
- 9 F. Okely, *Dawnings of the Ever-lasting Gospel-Light* (Northampton, 1775).
- 10 See 'The Rise of the Bible Christians' by J.H.B. Andrews in *Devons. Assoc. Trans.*, vol 96, pp 147-185.
- 11 BRO, MO 342. Bristol Univ. Lib., Bristol Moravian diary 1, p 341.
- 12 *Remains of John Byrom* (Chetham Soc., vol 44, 1857), p 629.
- 13 BRO, MO 621.
- 14 This account is taken from Okely's letter to Hutton of 19 May 1742 - MCH, A 13 - printed below.
- 15 BRO, QSR 1734, 37a, 48.
- 16 See 'Cambridge Methodists' by John Walsh in P. Brooks (ed), *Christian Spirituality* (London, 1975), p 254.
- 17 A.J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf: The Ecumenical Pioneer* (Philadelphia, 1962), p 128 and Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
- 18 BRO, MO 606. John Wesley's *Journal* for 8 Oct. 1753.
- 19 BRO, MO 621. 'Cambridge Methodists' *op. cit.*, pp 252-258. BRO, ABC 15, f 292.
- 20 *Egmont Diary*, vol 3 (Hist. MSS. Comm., 1923), p 69.
- 21 *George Whitefield's Journal* (London, 1960), p 273. *Letters of George Whitefield* (Edinburgh, 1976), p 92. LRO, 14D32/8/6, 20, 66.
- 22 *Journal of Charles Wesley* (London, 1909), p 227. T. Jackson (ed), *Charles Wesley's Journal* (London, n.d.), vol 1, pp 168 & 175.
- 23 BRO, MO 606.
- 24 LRO, 14D32/24 - Letter of Lady Huntingdon, n.d.
- 25 BRO, MO 606.
- 26 *The Old Meeting Baptist Church*, (BRO, 1976), p 7. H.G. Tibbutt, *The Old Meeting Blunham* (Blunham, 1951), p 7.
- 27 BRO, MO 42.
- 28 BRO, MO 4. *Baptist Hist. Soc.*, vol 7, p 142.
- 29 Jackson, *op. cit.*, vol 1, pp 309 & 337.
- 30 R.C. Swift, *Lively People* (Nottingham, 1982), p. 3. J.R. Godfrey, *Memorials of Barton and Melbourne General Baptist Churches* (Leicester, 1891), p 13. F. Baker (ed), *Works of John Wesley*, vol 26 (Oxford, 1982), p. 23.
- 31 These were Sr Hannah Green, who later joined the Moravian church, and Sr Prior who may have become a Methodist.
- 32 *The Old Meeting Baptist Church*, *op. cit.*, pp 10 & 11.
- 33 MCH, A 13 - Okely to Hutton, 14 Apr. 1742.
- 34 J.M. Anderson, *Early Methodism in Bedford* (Bedford, 1953), p 7.
- 35 A. Reinecke (ed), *Register of Members of the Moravian Church* (Nazareth, Penn., 1873), p 315. BRO, MO 4. Fulneck archives, no 351. T. Beynon (ed), *Howell Harris's Visits to London* (Aberystwyth, 1960), p. 24.
- 36 NLW, Harris's diary 240, 25 Jan. 1763. T. Beynon (ed), *Howell Harris: Reformer and Soldier* (Caernarvon, 1958), p 162. Bristol Moravian diary, vol 1, pp 422-429.
- 37 R.T. Jenkins, *The Moravian Brethren in North Wales* (London, 1938), p 110n. G.M. Roberts (ed), *Selected Trevecka Letters 1747-94* (Caernarvon, 1962), p 158.
- 38 Fulneck was the principal Moravian settlement in Yorkshire.
- 39 BRO, MO 491. V.W. Couillard, *The Theology of John Cennick* (Nazareth, Penn., 1957), p 94. Byrom, *op. cit.*, pp 642-649. Okely already knew the works of William Law, but was now introduced to those of Boehme, Engelbrecht and Hiel (McGill Univ. Lib., MS. 131).
- 40 Bristol Moravian diary, vol 1, p 106.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p 148.

- 42 BRO, MO 23 & 342. Byrom *op. cit.*, pp 646 & 647. J. Telford (ed), *Letters of John Wesley* (London, 1931), vol. 4, pp 33-36.
- 43 Bristol Moravian diary, vol 1, p 443.
- 44 MCH, A 13 - Okely to Hutton. LRO, 1D41/19/5, clergy list for 1789.
- 45 Methodist Archives, PLP 80 14 1. Public Record Office RG4/306.
- 46 After Hardwicke's Marriage Act was passed in 1755 the Moravians, and most of the dissenters, had to be married in an Anglican church. This continued until 1837.
- 47 A splendidly preserved group of settlement buildings can be seen at Ockbrook near Derby.
- 48 Ministers were ordained: labourers (men and women) were chosen for some spiritual function, but not ordained.
- 49 *Church Book*, pp 94-101.
- 50 *Church Book*, pp 51-63. Several Bedford ministers were also bishops.
- 51 *Church Book*, p 105.
- 52 The records of the London congregation were bombed at the Fetter Lane chapel in World War II and there appears to be little surviving on this point.
- 53 The records of the Devonport congregation at MCH are equally uninformative about its formation.
- 54 This was probably where John Wesley found the inspiration for his organisation of his societies.
- 55 See F. Baker, *Methodism and the Love-Feast* (London, 1957).
- 56 By the 19th cent. this had changed and married women in particular were almost completely excluded from decision making (*Church Book*, pp 98 & 214).
- 57 The latter were only discovered at the church when this book was being compiled.
- 58 BRO, MO 1, p 377.
- 59 *Acta Fratrum Unitatis in Anglia MDCCXLIX* (London, 1749).
- 60 Hutton, pp 351-361. At Bristol the Moravians were puzzled when they read about the accusations.
- 61 *St Peter's Moravian Church, Bedford, 1745-1945* (Bedford, 1945).
- 62 BRO, MO 1 & 2.
- 63 Rogers' writing in his diaries is only slightly better than that other Methodist diarist, Howell Harris.
- 64 A. Capelli, *Dizionario di Abbreviature* (Milan, 1949), pp 409-411.

EDITORIAL METHOD

The early congregation diaries were originally in small single gatherings, but in 1933 they were bound up in two volumes with explanatory notes⁶². Although this has prevented any further losses the bindings are so tight that transcribing is difficult. In addition Rogers' diaries are written in a small cramped hand which requires considerable practice to read accurately⁶³. While John Wade's diary is somewhat easier to read, his spelling creates its own difficulties. The text of the diaries and other records printed here are as close to the originals as possible. Most abbreviations have been expanded where possible, but the original capitalisation and spelling have been retained. Where the spelling or capitalisation was doubtful modern practice has been followed. Punctuation has only been changed or added where it was necessary to explain the sense. My transcripts have been greatly improved by the General Editor checking them against the original with great care.

There are certain conventions in these early records which require mention here. The lot was rarely mentioned in any record, but is indicated by the appearance of an asterisk followed by its decision. These have been reproduced exactly. On the other hand the symbols used to indicate the days of the week have been omitted since they were invariably followed by the date. These symbols were based on the medieval Latin names of the days of the week, and were in common use in Europe from the 14th century onwards, but not in Britain⁶⁴. They were

☉	Dies solis	Sun	Sunday
☾	Dies lunae	Moon	Monday
♂	Dies martis	Mars	Tuesday
☿	Dies mercurii	Mercury	Wednesday
♃	Dies jovis	Jove	Thursday
♀	Dies veneris	Venus	Friday
♄	Dies saturnis	Saturn	Saturday

Their introduction can be attributed to the German Moravians, and after 1770 they were no longer used.

A further difficulty in transcription has been caused by the German umlaut. Its use in the records is very spasmodic and the German ministers normally substituted the additional 'e' (Moelter for Mölter, Boehler for Böhler). The English Moravians tended to ignore it completely and wrote Molter or Boler. David Hackenwelder causes the most problems appearing as Heck:, Hack:, or Haeck:. These have been expanded into Hackenwelder or Heckenwelder according to the writer's most frequent usage.

A few letters from other archives have been included in this selection since they cast extra light on the Bedford congregation. They are drawn from the records at Moravian Church House, the Fulneck archives, the Trevecka letters at the National Library of Wales, the Hastings correspondence in the Leicestershire Record Office, and the Moravian Archives at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

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- 1) the Bedford Moravian Church
- 2) the Methodist Archives, John Rylands University Library of Manchester
- 3) Moravian Church House
- 4) the Presbyterian Church of Wales
- 5) the Fulneck archives
- 6) the Leicestershire Record Office

ABBREVIATIONS

BRO	Bedfordshire Record Office
<i>Church Book</i>	<i>The Church Book of the Brethren's Unity</i> (London, 1892)
Hutton	J.E. Hutton, <i>A History of the Moravian Church</i> (London, 1909)
LRO	Leicestershire Record Office
MCH	Moravian Church House Library
MO	Catalogue references to the Moravian records in BRO
NLW	National Library of Wales
<i>Register</i>	W.C. Reichel, <i>A Register of Members of the Moravian Church</i> (Nazareth, Penn., 1873).

