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Cinderloo: Riot, Repression and Revivalism in the East Shropshire Coalfield 1821-1822

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‘Cinderloo’: Riot, Repression and Revivalism in the East Shropshire Coalfield 1821-1822.

Ian Thomas.

Abstract:

The following study is an attempt to explore the relationship between working-class unrest and Methodist revivalism in the east Shropshire coalfield during the Industrial Revolution. It provides a detailed account of the Cinderhill Riots of 2nd February 1821, based on primary sources; and describes the subsequent cross-denominational Methodist revival which swept the district in its aftermath in 1821-22. An attempt has been made to discuss these events in relation to wider historiographical debates around the issue of the causation of religious revival, prompted by the work of E. P. Thompson. Thompson hypothesised that revivalism often took hold in the teeth of bitter temporal defeats suffered by the working classes. The study will focus on Barrie Trinder's suggestion that the events surrounding the 'Battle of Cinderloo' appear to confirm the 'Thompson thesis.' His hypothesis is investigated in the light of other theories regarding the revival phenomenon. A number of minor qualifications to the thesis are posited. However, in the main, the picture that emerges is inconclusive; and Trinder's insights still appear to be compelling; though it is suggested that further exhaustive research is required on the topic.

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Preface.

Telford New Town is a bewildering place to those who are new to the area, and not much less so to those whose families have resided in the district for generations. It is a 'town' of many contrasts, from run-down housing estates to gleaming corporate headquarters. Older local people have witnessed a period of intense physical and social transformation since the birth of what was originally designated 'Dawley New Town' in the mid-1960s. For some, this has been regarded as a negative experience. The loss of much of the built and natural environment of the past – and, perhaps more importantly, the loss of tightly-knit communities that flowed from this – is often ruefully commented upon. There are, however, clear tangible benefits that have befallen the area as a result of its New Town status. The deep scars of over two centuries of iron-making, and the mining industry that facilitated it, have all but gone; to be replaced by landscaped parks, sprawling shopping centres, and seemingly endless numbers of new roads and traffic roundabouts. In an area once noted for its precipitous pit-mounds and cinder-hills, the only mound not levelled, landscaped, or seen as an eyesore is named the 'Field of Hope', and is crowned by poles bearing the flags of major companies that have relocated to the area which reads like a 'who's who' of global capitalism. They have been attracted to what was considered a thoroughly depressed area economically, bringing with them much needed employment. An element of continuity has accompanied this undoubted period of change. Unlike most parts of the United Kingdom, this self-styled 'birthplace of the Industrial Revolution' still has over forty per cent of its workforce employed in manufacturing industries – though only vestiges of its heavy-industrial heyday remain, largely to cater for the fashion among the wealthy for solid cast-iron cookers,

stoves and guttering. Of course, reliance on manufacturing has its problems: the vicissitudes of the world economy have dealt many harsh blows to people of the district, in ‘new’ industries as well as the more traditional. As well as factory closures and ‘down-sizing’, low levels of unionisation have encouraged the persistence of endemic low pay in the area, with the knock-on effect of high levels of personal debt. All this serves to remind us how tenuous and turbulent life remains for working-class Britons at the dawn of the Third Millennium; and, possibly, how remarkably little *certain aspects* of that experience have changed in the past two hundred years. For, a few minutes walk from the ‘Field of Hope’, is an area of Telford that has been transformed in much the same way as previously mentioned. It was once the site of a massive iron-making concern known as the Old Park Ironworks, at one time the second largest ironworks in Great Britain, surrounded by coal and ironstone mines, cinder-hills and the scattered dwellings of the men and women who worked there. Now, it is home to H. M. Land Registry, carpet superstores and B & Q, a much-praised City Technology College, luxury houses for local entrepreneurs, and the Forge Retail Park, whose name gives the only obvious clue to the area’s industrial past. On this site on Friday 2nd February 1821 a violent clash occurred between a group of around three thousand colliers – who were on strike against a pay cut imposed by an (illegal) combination of local ironmasters – and the Wellington contingent of the Shropshire Yeomanry, called out to support magistrates and their constables; in short, a clash between the most militant and formidable section of the local proletariat and the armed representatives of Shropshire’s ruling elite. That conflict has been remembered in local folklore as the ‘Battle of Cinderloo’, utilising the same brand of popular irony as had been applied to the massacre at ‘Peterloo’ less than two years earlier. Although the number killed at Cinderloo could be counted on

one hand, the event had a profound impact on the locality, and the following study will attempt a detailed description of the events of February 1821. However, while Cinderloo is of interest in itself, the nature of the large religious revival which swept the coalfield in the months and years which followed is potentially of far greater significance for historians and touches on one of the most controversial debates in British social history, and this aspect of the story will demand much of our attention.

Introduction.

The relationship between Methodism and the working classes has long exercised the minds of historians. Ever since Elie Halévy famously suggested that Methodism bore much of the responsibility for preventing continental-style revolution in England during the traumatic century of political and economic transformation between 1750 and 1850, the nature of that relationship has become a matter of considerable historical controversy. One of the more hotly debated aspects of this controversy concerns E. P. Thompson's thesis that some of the numerous outbreaks of intense religious revivalism that peppered this period – particularly during the years between 1790 and 1830 – were manifestations of what he termed the 'chiliasm of despair'.[1] For Thompson, religious revival was, possibly, a clamouring for spiritual salvation, born out of despair at crushing defeats for the temporal aspirations of the lower orders during these years – aspirations which had been expressed through a variety of protest movements, from economic strikes and minor riots, to mass political rallies, petitions and localised insurrections.

The main aim of this project is to test aspects of the 'Thompson thesis' – and other schools of thought on the revival phenomenon – in the light of an empirically based, qualitative study of an example of temporal defeat for a community of colliers and ironworkers that was closely followed by a significant religious revival. The example studied will be the Cinderhill Riots of February 1821, and the subsequent cross-sect Methodist revival in the east-Shropshire coalfield between 1821 and 1822.

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[1] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (1968), Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 427, passim.

Barrie Trinder, the best known historian of the coalfield, was the first to note the parallels between his research findings and Thompson's thesis.[2] Subsequently, in a postscript to *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson acknowledged Trinder's insight, and held up the possibility that these events represented a possible 'exact fit' of his hypothesis and historical fact.[3] In its published manifestations, Trinder's discovery has always formed a relatively minor part of larger works. For the purposes of this project, his observation will provide the central question: is it plausible that the defeat for the workers at what became known locally as the 'Battle of Cinderloo' had a causal relationship with the subsequent Methodist revival?

The First and second chapters of this study will be devoted to the temporal events surrounding the Cinderhill Riots of February 1821. In chapter one this will necessitate a considerable amount of narrative, while in chapter two efforts will be made to put the events in some sort of historical context. For instance, the nature of the dispute and the riot will be discussed, particularly with reference to Thompson's studies of the decline of traditional and customary methods of protest, and of regulating master/worker relationships.[4] It will be investigated whether Shropshire colliers at this time were guilty of 'irrational and wild behaviour'; or of engaging in 'collective bargaining by riot', to use Eric Hobsbawm's phraseology; attempting, through the use of a 'deliberately selected technique of protest', to restore their industry to the perceived paternalistic moral economy of the past; or whether, as a result of their alleged transformation into a component of the English working *class*, they were

[2] B. Trinder, *The Methodist New Connexion in Dawley and Madeley*, (1967), Wolverhampton: Wesley Historical Society, West Midlands Branch, pp. 4-7.
[3] Thompson, op. cit., p. 920.
[4] E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, (1993), New York: New Press, passim.

simply using militant trade union methods to enforce effective industrial action.[5] Also, the links between what was undoubtedly an economic conflict and contemporary politics will be explored, through an examination of the level of political radicalism to be found among the local working class, and their attitudes to the political concerns of the day, such as the Queen Caroline affair and the post-Napoleonic War campaigns for political reform. A number of primary sources have been used to research these chapters. In particular, use has been made of the two local newspapers, The *Salopian Journal* and the *Shrewsbury Chronicle*; and letters from local magistrates to the Home Office, held at the Public Record Office. Clearly, such documents give a rather one-sided view of the events, especially as both newspapers were Tory in outlook. It will thus be necessary to 'read between the lines' of this evidence, or, at least, to treat it with some caution. As was anticipated, evidence of the colliers' political views is very hard to come by; and, unfortunately, reliance on the small amount of circumstantial evidence uncovered by Trinder has had to suffice.

The subsequent chapters deal with the religious revival that took hold in the aftermath of the Cinderhill Riots and the colliers' eventual return to work on reduced wages. The third chapter will, like the first, be composed of a significant amount of narrative, as the facts of the revival are related to the reader. This chapter, too, will be based on a study of primary sources, though most of these have already been cited in secondary works, notably those of Trinder. A number of difficulties exist with respect to the availability and quality of the primary source material regarding this aspect of the project. There appear to be few extant journals or memoirs of the itinerant preachers who descended on the coalfield in the spring of 1821. This compares unfavourably to the relatively large numbers of these that have been so extensively

[5] M. I. Thomis, 'The Aims and Ideology of Violent Protest in Great Britain, 1800-48', in W. J. Mommsen and G. Hirschfeld (eds.), *Social Protest, Violence and Terror in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Europe*, (1982), Basingstoke: Macmillan, p. 20.

used in other studies of similar phenomena. A major gap in this respect is the loss of the volume of Hugh Bourne's journal that deals with the years covering the east-Shropshire revival; although this is partially offset by extracts from the volume which were reproduced in the works of nineteenth century historians and chroniclers of Primitive Methodism, like Kendall, Petty, and Walford. Historians are, thus, in the main, forced to rely on periodicals such as the *Methodist Magazine* and the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* for information on the characters and events of the revival. For the Winfieldite Revivalists of Dawley, we are not even afforded that luxury, since their sect does not appear to have produced a denominational magazine to compare with those of the Primitives, or the New Connexion, into which they were eventually absorbed.[6] What few sources are readily available are somewhat flawed in that they only provide us with the opinions of the religiously committed – and literate – sections of the coalfield community. The great mass of east-Shropshire's working population left little or no written evidence of their views on either religious or temporal matters. We are, then, left to infer much from fragmentary snippets of information. It will thus require a large measure of caution when we proceed to later chapters which will attempt to understand the nature of the revival and its relationship with the tumultuous events that preceded it, as it will be tempting to make rash judgements based on evidence that, while being compellingly suggestive of one conclusion or another, may in fact be wholly untypical.

Thompson's thesis has come under a sustained barrage of criticism from a wide range of historians and social scientists since it emerged during the early 1960s. While it is noteworthy that Trinder has consistently adhered to the view that the Shropshire events support Thompson in each of the three editions of his best known work, *The*

[6] Trinder has shown that an account of the Dawley Revivalists does, however, exist in the *Methodist New Connexion Magazine*, (1838), pp. 42-4.

Industrial Revolution in Shropshire, it will be necessary to examine this wider debate.[7] Thus, the fourth chapter of the project will consist of a brief survey of the relatively large body of secondary literature that exists on the topic. This is necessary to set the context in which the Shropshire events are to be analysed. By an assessment of the different approaches and research methodologies of a range of historians of the topic it is hoped, also, that a variety of avenues for researching the Shropshire events will present themselves. The majority of the literature surveyed will consist of articles in scholarly journals, many of which are case studies of particular examples of Methodist revivalism among working class communities during the period. Whether 'supporters' or 'opponents' of the Thompson thesis, the historians responsible for these studies have, in most cases, taken up his demand for 'closer investigation' of the subject.[8] Thompson regarded his insight purely as a hypothesis. He acknowledged that '…while the relationship between political and religious excitement is obviously intimate, the nature of the relationship remains obscure…'[9] and suggested that, in order to take his hypothesis further, 'we should know more about, not the years of revivalism, but the months; not the counties, but the towns and villages.'[10] The project will seek to follow that advice; and while the survey of secondary sources will form an important component of the study, it is hoped that the specific local investigation will dominate. In this respect, Robert Colls makes a number of important points, some of which have hopefully informed the methodology of this project:

> There are general theories about conversions and revivals which have been tested and speculated upon in other works, but theories referring to, say, the West Riding of

[7] B. Trinder, *The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire*, (First Edition: 1973, Second: 1981, Third: 2000), Chichester: Phillimore.
[8] Thompson, op. cit., p. 427.
[9] Ibid., pp. 427-8.
[10] Ibid., p. 429.

> Yorkshire or the East Coast of the United States, will not necessarily apply here. The specific nature of the historical enterprise denies direct comparison. In order to outline a theory which is faithful to its specific subject I shall consider a spectrum of ideas borrowed from other works but which nevertheless could suggest themselves as relevant to this work. It will be noticed that some ideas are more applicable than others but none of them can stand as a single, sufficient explanation for mass revival and conversion.[11]

With this continually in mind, chapters five and six will attempt to analyse the specifics of the east-Shropshire case study. This will be the point at which theory and fact will hopefully be synthesised in an attempt to come to some understanding of the place of these relatively obscure events in the wider processes of social change in nineteenth century Britain. The views of Thompson, Hobsbawm, Colls, Gilbert, Jaffe and others, will be discussed in the light of the Shropshire events. Chapter five will assess the efficacy of the Thompson/Trinder thesis. Possible flaws in, and qualifications to, their analyses will be explored; though it will be pointed out that both historians have acknowledged that the thesis '…was never offered for universal, instant application'; and that, while it may not apply to all Shropshire revivals, it cannot be simply dismissed when looking at that of 1821-22.[12]

Chapter six will examine alternative explanations for the east Shropshire revival. The impact of, for instance, disease, mining accidents, local culture and tradition, and the proselytising role of the itinerant preachers themselves, will be explored as possible causative factors in the outburst of emotional religious fervour which swept the district in 1821-2.

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[11] Robert Colls, *The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield: Work, Culture and Protest, 1790-1850*, (1987), Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 163.
[12] Thompson, *The Making*… op. cit., p. 921; Trinder, op. cit., p. 169.

The conclusion will build on the discussion in the preceding chapters and will sum up the findings of the project. An attempt will be made to answer the central question regarding the relationship between the Cinderhill Riots and the subsequent burst of revivalism; though it will remain tentative, and suggestive of the need for further, more exhaustive, research.

Chapter 1.

'Cinderloo'.

This chapter will attempt to provide a detailed description of the tumultuous events of February 1821. Firstly, the background to the dispute in the Shropshire iron industry will be assessed. This will be followed by a narrative account of the Cinderhill Riots based on primary sources, and a brief discussion of the possible political dimensions of the dispute.

During the early years of the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution in Shropshire was at its zenith. The years of novelty and innovation were mostly to be found in the eighteenth century; while, from around the 1840s, the district entered a long period of decline. Even though the recorded peaks of coal and ironstone production were in 1870 and 1871 respectively, much of this was exported to iron and steel works in other parts of the United Kingdom.[13] The seeds of that decline were already apparent during the Napoleonic Wars, which for many were looked back upon '…with nostalgia as a time of high wages.'[14] Even though the wars generated an economic boom, '[m]any of the Shropshire ironworks were ill-fitted to face competition from the newer works of South Wales and the Black Country.'[15] The end of that conflict in 1815 produced an acute crisis of overproduction, which merged with these underlying weaknesses to create a period of sustained hardship for the local

[13] I. J. Brown, *The Mines of Shropshire*, (1976) Moorland, p. 9.
[14] Trinder, (Third Edition), p. 159.
[15] Trinder, (Second Edition), p. 137. For a summary of the reasons for Shropshire's decline, see Trinder, ibid., pp. 155-156.

working population.[16] Trinder and De Soissons vividly describe the depths of the crisis in 1816-17.[17] While there 'were signs of an improvement of trade towards the end of 1817…prices fell again in 1819.'[18] Arthur Raistrick describes the problems facing the Shropshire ironmasters thus:

> …the ironmasters were finding it difficult to dispose of all their produce at a reasonable price. In 1821 this problem was still under discussion and Mr. Botfield of the Snedshill furnaces, as Chairman of the Shropshire Ironmasters, said: 'They consider the present depressed state of the Iron Trade has been produced by the late increased make which has done serious injury to the trade in general and very little ultimate good to the parties. A reduction in the make is absolutely necessary and ought to take place.' The principal problem for the Shropshire ironmasters was still the strong rivalry of the Welsh dealers in the Bristol market…The great iron works of Merthyr Tydfil, Cyfarthfa, Tredegar and others of the Welsh valleys, were now feeling their strength and increasing production at a great rate…[19]

As well as making statements on the need to limit production to preserve the price of iron, the local ironmasters embarked on a 'project' worthy of those whom William Cobbett characterised as '…cool and cruel and insolent men…'[20] Employing methods that capitalists have continued to use until the present day, the great iron making dynasties of the east Shropshire coalfield endeavoured to make their workers pay for their crisis. They partook in an act of illegal combination and imposed a pay cut of 6d.

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[16] Ibid., p. 137.
[17] Ibid.; M. De Soissons, *Telford: The Making of Shropshire's New Town*, (1991) Shrewsbury: Swan Hill, p. 28.
[18] Trinder, ibid.
[19] A. Raistrick, *Dynasty of Iron Founders: The Darbys and Coalbrookdale*, Second Edition (1989) York: William Sessions, p. 240. The original of Botfield's letter is held by Shropshire Archives (245/104).
[20] W. Cobbett, *Political Register*, 2nd November, 1816, reproduced in Patricia Hollis (ed.), *Class and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century England 1815-1850*, (1973) London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p.9.

a day on the workers in the various concerns who laboured to produce their considerable wealth. This inevitably provoked a militant response from the colliers, who were already disaffected due to operation of the deeply unpopular – and again illegal – Truck System in the coalfield; and who had seen off a similar attempt to cut wages the previous year.[21] On that occasion 'Colonel Cludde of the [Shropshire] Yeomanry persuaded the strikers to accept arbitration by a board of four landowners and a clergyman…[who]…agreed that the men were entitled to their old level of wages and the strike was accordingly called off.'[22] Unfortunately, for the colliers and ironworkers, the strike of 1821 was not to see a repeat of this climb-down.

The story of the Cinderhill Riots has not been told in any great detail by historians other than Trinder. In the works of the Hammonds, Thompson and others it is, quite literally, a footnote of history;[23] while it has only been treated with brevity in Wingfield's and Gladstone's studies of the Shropshire Yeomanry.[24] The only other treatment of the riots is an article entitled 'The Cinderloo Affair' by A. C. B. Mercer, in the *Shropshire Magazine* of January 1966. This piece is inadequate as it does not employ the academic rigours of the discipline of history; and tends to utilise overly dramatic language to romanticise the story in a manner typical of that genre at that time. To emphasise this point, and to show that there is no unfairness in our dismissal of the worthiness of this source, the opening paragraph is reproduced below:

> On a cold grey February morning in the year 1821, the inhabitants of the little mining township of Dawley became aware that something unusual was developing. From the

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[21] For a description of the operation of the Truck System in Shropshire, see Trinder, op. cit., pp. 207-209. For a passionate indictment of it on a national scale, see Hammond, J. L. & B., *The Town Labourer 1760-1832: The New Civilisation*, (1917), 1995 Edition, Stroud: Alan Sutton, pp. 66-71.
[22] Trinder, op. cit., p. 231.
[23] Hammonds, op. cit., p. 68; Thompson, *The Making*…, op. cit., p. 920.
[24] Wingfield, C., *Historical record of the Shropshire yeomanry cavalry 1795-1887*, 1888, pp. 106-110; Gladstone, E. W., *Shropshire Yeomanry*, (1953), Manchester: Whitehorn Press, pp. 20-23.

> narrow lanes and paths around Dawley and Stirchley, small groups of miners came tramping in, many of them being black or unwashed, and mostly in the patched and dirty clothing of their trade. Dour and sullen at first, their behaviour and demeanour changed gradually as the…miners coalesced into a jostling unruly crowd…Sticks and homemade clubs were waved threateningly above the sea of heads. 'Down wi' th' bosses; not a penny off …we've beaten 'em once – we'll do it again; come on lads, lets get t' others out of t' pits.'[25]

In order to move away from this early example of the Mel Gibson school of history, replete with flying pickets with South Yorkshire accents, it is necessary to return to the primary sources cited by the Hammonds and Trinder.

Evidence from letters to the Home Office – from magistrates in the district – highlights the fundamentally economic nature of the dispute, and the fact that it was solidly supported. However, the sense of urgency also seems to suggest an underlying fear of the revolutionary implications of a situation where the district's workmen were acting in open defiance of authority and with seeming impunity. The following letter from Cecil Weld Forester, written on 2nd February also incorrectly implies that the workers were on strike for improved wages rather than resisting a savage wage cut:

> My Lord, I am sorry to be under the necessity of troubling you, but more especially on such an occasion. The Magistrates of Wellington & Much Wenlock have requested me to state that the Colliers in the Neighbourhood of Wellington and Donnington Wood have struck for wages, & during the last two days have risen, & gone about to the different Works, & by force have taken the peaceable Men who would have worked & made them join them so that all the Iron Works in this

[25] A. C. B. Mercer, 'The Cinderloo Affair, *Shropshire Magazine*, January 1966, p. 22.

> Neighbourhood are at a complete stand, & this very populous district may be considered in a most disturbed State ~ I am therefore requested to say that it is their Wish that a Military Force may immediately be stationed in the Neighbourhood to act, in case the Civil Power & Yeomanry may not be found equal to quell the present Disturbances…[26]

The magistrates' fears concerning the efficacy of local law enforcement bodies were misplaced, however. Before the above letter would have reached Lord Sidmouth at the Home Office, the dispute had already reached its bloody climax.

Two days after the announcement that wages were to be reduced, the colliers went on strike. On 1st February, pits that were still working were visited by the strikers, who persuaded the employees to join the action. Following visits to ironworks at Ketley, New Hadley and Wombridge, production was brought to a halt by the plugging of boilers.[27]

On the following day 'it was intended to bring to a halt the ironworks in the southern part of the coalfield.'[28] A force of, initially, 300-400 colliers plugged boilers at Old Park, Dawley Castle, Lightmoor and Horsehay. They also stopped all production at the Stirchley pits.[29] Their intention was to proceed to the ironworks at Coalbrookdale. However, while this was going on news came that the forces of law and order were in hot pursuit:

> About seventy men of Col. Cludde's Yeomanry Cavalry having been assembled, we proceeded in search of the Rioters to the Iron Works at the Horse hay between this place [Wellington] and Coalbrook Dale: upon our arrival there, we found that having

[26] C. Weld Forester to H. O., 2nd February 1821, PRO HO 40/16/9.
[27] Trinder, op. cit., p.232.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

> effected their purpose and completely stopped those works they had proceeded to the works of Messrs. Botfield at the Old Park, to which place we immediately followed them.[30]

The crowd of colliers was, by this time, around 3,000 strong. 'Numbers of women and children had joined them on their route' and they had gathered on and around the precipitous cinderhills that dominated the landscape surrounding the now idle ironworks.[31] According to the evidence of William James, agent at the works, given during the subsequent trial of some of the rioters:

> The hills were of great extent and composed of pieces of iron and iron stone, which had been thrown out from the pit mouths, and might have been accumulating for the last thirty years. There might have been a 100 tons of these pieces, of various sizes, some very large and heavy…The mob had taken possession of the tops of all the surrounding hills, were armed with sticks, and behaving in a riotous manner.[32]

Following the reading of the Riot Act by one of the magistrates, Thomas Eyton, which was met with many jeers and expressions of defiance, a period of one hour was allowed to elapse during which the 'crowd remained very noisy and did not disperse.'[33] From his carriage, Cludde subsequently gave the order for 'the cavalry to advance, to endeavour to disperse them doing as little injury as possible…and at the same time to assist the Peace Officers in taking into Custody any that were armed with bludgeons, or who appeared to be particularly active.'[34] At least two suspected

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[30] W. Cludde, et al, to H. O., 4th February 1821, PRO HO 40/16/15.
[31] *Salopian Journal*, 28th March 1821.
[32] *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 30th March 1821.
[33] Trinder, op. cit., pp. 232-233.
[34] Cludde, et al, loc. cit.

‘ringleaders’ were arrested by the troops and put into the custody of John Bayley, a constable of Malinslee.[35] While the authorities were endeavouring to take these men to Wellington to await trial, the crowd of colliers amassed on the cinder hills adjacent to the road began to throw stones and heavy lumps of slag at the troops. Under the alleged leadership of a collier named Thomas Palin, a successful attempt was made to rescue the prisoners. In the ensuing panic the Yeomanry opened fire on the demonstrators. It was claimed that they were forced into this action by the intensity of the attack upon them, which caused them to fear for their lives, and because the precipitous nature of the cinder hills meant that they could not be ascended on horseback.[36] Whatever the truth of this, the results were fatal. William Bird, an eighteen-year-old collier from Coalpit Bank was killed outright, while Thomas Gittins, otherwise Ingle, also a collier, from Lawley Bank was mortally wounded. At the inquest into the men’s deaths on 6th February, ‘[t]he jury immediately returned verdicts of *Justifiable Homicide*.’[37] A number of colliers and bystanders were wounded, including Thomas Palin, who received an incriminating shot wound to the arm that resulted in his arrest a few days later.[38] Many of the Yeomanry were said to have been badly wounded by the stones and slag showered upon them, but it appears the only serious injury was suffered by one hapless cavalryman, Mr. David Spencer, of Trench Lane, who was ‘dangerously, though accidentally wounded, in consequence of his pistol going off in the holster, which lodged the contents in his knee.’[39]

A number of arrests occurred in the days that followed. Thomas Palin was tried for the capital crime of felonious riot at the March Assizes and executed on the 7th April:

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[35] *Salopian Journal*, loc. cit.
[36] Cludde, et al, loc. cit.
[37] *Salopian Journal*, 7th February 1821.
[38] Trinder, op. cit., p.233.
[39] *Salopian Journal*, loc. cit.

> …in front of the County Gaol, in the presence of a large concourse of spectators. The behaviour of the unhappy man to the last moment was firm and becoming of his situation. Every exertion had been made…to obtain a commutation of his sentence, but without effect, it being considered necessary…that the law should take its course, and we sincerely trust, that the returning good sense and right feelings of our working population in the recently disturbed parts of the county will forever render unnecessary the repetition of so awful an example.[40]

Samuel Hayward was similarly sentenced to death, but was reprieved on 2nd April. Seven other colliers, John Amies, Joseph Eccleshall, John Grainger, Christopher North, John Payne, Robert Wheeler, and John Wilcox were gaoled for nine months each for lesser crime of riot.[41]

In many ways, the treatment of the Shropshire colliers at the hands of the judiciary reminds us of the Hammonds' suggestion that judges:

> …did not think of the working classes as men and women to whom they owed justice, but as a body of rebels dangerous to society…the law is treated as an instrument not of justice but repression. There is consequently no aspect of their lives in which the working classes appear so conspicuously as a helot population…the courts became the recognised instrument of a class supremacy.[42]

The opprobrium of the landed gentry, sat in judgement on the imprisoned rioters, was extended to the whole working population of the coalfield, not just those on trial. This included the women, who had mobilised with the men in defence of their common livelihood. Although the tone of Mr. Barber, the High Constable, in his evidence at

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40 *Salopian Journal*, 11th April 1821.
41 *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 30th March 1821.
42 Hammonds' op. cit., p.63.

the men's trial, and the comments of the presiding judge, is what one might expect, we are provided with some indication of the militancy of the women:

> The High Constable deposed that there were a number of women there whose conduct was more outrageous than that of the men, and his Lordship said, he was sorry to observe that in all Riots of this nature the women were far more violent and their language more abusive than the men. His Lordship after passing a high encomium upon the females, said, he could not but regret to say, that when they were disposed to do wrong, they would go to every length to obtain their purpose.[43]

The dispute that had precipitated the riots came to an end in the days that followed. The 'iron companies in the north of the coalfield, including the Botfields and the Lilleshall Co. compromised with their employees, agreeing to reduce wages by 4d. a day instead of 6d.'[44] The ironmasters of the southern part of the district, however, insisted upon the full reduction:

> Barker informs me that you called upon here on Tuesday to say Mr. Botfield and the other iron masters in that neighbourhood had endeavoured to compromise with their Men at a drop only of four pence a day and that you had met those Gentlemen and said nothing less than sixpence would satisfy you, Mr. Anstice, & the Lightmoor Co. I have just seen Mr. Addenbrooke who thinks with me that after carrying matters so far with every probability of success it is rather strange such compromise should have been offered.

[43] *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, loc. cit.
[44] Trinder, loc. cit.

> Mr. A & Co. request you will accept their thanks for your steadiness and the trouble you have had in this business and to assure you and Mr. Anstice we shall strictly abide by any agreement you may think right to agree to.[45]

In consequence of the callous obduracy of these men, local magistrates feared further disorder and called for the stationing of additional regular troops in the district.[46] It is not clear whether the compromise was eventually adopted by the managers of these concerns or whether their employees were forced to return to work at the full drop. Either way, the dispute has to be seen as a major defeat for the local working class.

The extent of the perceived threat to authority posed by the colliers is reflected in the number of troops that came to the aid of Colonel Cludde, an unprecedented show of strength by the ruling elite when compared to other occasions when the local Yeomanry had been called out to deal with disputes:

> The magistrates thought it right to solicit the immediate assistance of a Troop of Dragoons to be stationed at Shiffnall & I have received a letter from Col. French informing me that a Troop of Carbaniers will be there tomorrow. We also solicited the assistance of Two Troops [of Yeomanry] from Shrewsbury as there are so many posts to be guarded in this neighbourhood, and I trust with the force we now have to be able to prevent any further mischief.[47]

This show of strength appears to have been a great success:

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[45] John Pidcock to Barnard Dickenson, 8th February 1821, Shropshire Archives 245/103.
[46] T. Eyton, et al, to H. O., 10th February 1821 PRO HO 40/16/33.
[47] W. Cludde to H. O., 3rd February 1821, PRO HO 40/16/13.

> On Monday [5th February] the whole [military force] marched through the various works, with the view of protecting such of the colliers as had already resumed their labours; they did not, however, meet with the least molestation to their progress, and we trust that the turbulent part of the population have been deterred by their formidable appearance from the prosecution of their lawless attempts on the property of their employers…[48]

The general impression one gets is of a shocked and defeated local working class, licking its wounds, and fracturing into groups of individuals seeking sustenance in the surrounding countryside.[49] The only contrary evidence comes from the *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, which reproduced an extract of a letter it received claiming that:

> On the morning after the skirmish, the rioters assembled on the same ground, provided with ammunition stolen from the works, with about 150 small arms and three pieces of cannon, the whole drawn up in regular array, having a centre body, and right and left wings, with close and even front. In this position they waited till 12 o'clock, when their patience began to be wearied, and they gradually dispersed. Had the military met them in the morning, without doubt the mischief and loss of human lives on both sides would have been great.[50]

No other sources refer to this astonishing incident. In particular, it receives no mention in the generally candid correspondence with the Home Office. In view of this, and, until further corroborative evidence appears, we must assume that the letter's contents were apocryphal.

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[48] *Salopian Journal*, 7th February 1821.
[49] *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 9th February 1821.
[50] Ibid.

Thus, while the Cinderhill Riots were a serious incident, there appears to be little direct evidence to suggest that the events of February 1821 represented an explicitly political or revolutionary challenge from the local working class. What we do have is a body of circumstantial and anecdotal evidence collected by Trinder; and the wider national picture of a simmering revolutionary crisis. In John Randall's view, in 1820s Shropshire:

> It was not then so much Whig and Tory as Tory and revolutionist. Society was divided into two complete[ly] hostile camps …Cobbet[t], Hetherington, and…Carlile were the prophets the reformers of that day swore by. It was illegal to buy Cobbett's publications…the first book we ever bought…was one of Cobbet[t]'s…Prohibited publications were brought out of London in coffins and hearses…and a man has been known to be sent from the neighbourhood to Birmingham to secure an early copy of some cherished advocate of popular views.[51]

Trinder shows that other radical publications, like the *Black Dwarf*, were also read in Shropshire; while it appears that Queen Caroline had mass support in Madeley, Shrewsbury, Shifnal and Bridgenorth. The clearest evidence of the existence of a revolutionary mood, however, comes from those most earnestly opposed to radical reform. In a 'series of loyalty meetings held by the gentlemen of the county during January 1821…' speeches bemoaned the state of anarchy in the country, in which the '…Standard of Sedition has been unfurled…' and where '…[i]t will no longer be a struggle for power between Whig and Tory…[but]…a struggle between You who have everything to lose and Wretches who have everything to win.'[52]

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[51] J. Randall, *Broseley and its Surroundings*, (1879) Madeley: *Salopian and West Midland Journal* Office, pp. 230-231, cited by Trinder, op. cit., p. 231.

[52] Reports in the *Salopian Journal*, various dates, quoted by Trinder, ibid., pp. 231-232.

Despite, or because of, this context of a national undercurrent of incipient disorder, there does not appear to have been any blood lust on the part of the authorities. The 'dismay' of the local Tory press at the loss of life – which a cynic might plausibly regard as insincere – was repeated in similar sentiments expressed in magistrates' letters to the Home Office. These, perhaps, *should* be taken at face value, considering that they were not intended for public consumption. This attitude could partially be explained as part of a more 'softly softly' approach of the government and magistracy in the aftermath of the indignation that followed the Peterloo killings, and the callous way the Cheshire Yeomanry's actions had been extolled by the authorities. This is the view held by E. W. Gladstone:

> The cordial thanks of the magistrates and of the inhabitants of Wellington were given to the Yeomanry concerned for the promptitude, temper and firmness shown by them in the riots. The government, however, having caused an outcry by its unguarded approval of the action of the Yeomanry at 'Peterloo', had to be more wary in their wording of its compliments, as is shown by the…letter from Lord Sidmouth…to the Earl of Powis.[53]

The events at Cinderloo did not inspire the likes of Shelley to express their rage and horror in eloquent condemnation of England's tyrannical rulers – 'this ghastly masquerade, all disguised, even to the eyes, like bishops, lawyers, peers, or spies' – in the same way the Manchester events had done.[54] The Cinderhill Riots were a relatively minor *economically driven* affair, incurring little loss of life, and having only minimal impact on national events. This point should not be stretched too far,

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[53] Gladstone, op. cit., p. 22. Sidmouth's letter is reproduced in full in both Wingfield and Gladstone.
[54] P. B. Shelley, 'The Masque of Anarchy', 1819, reproduced in *The Works of P. B. Shelly*, (1994) Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, p. 342.

however. Cinderloo was, albeit on a provincial scale, just as much an example of the brutality and injustice of class relationships in early nineteenth century England as its better-known predecessor. The colliers were poor, disenfranchised and desperate people, pursuing a legitimate grievance against the illegal actions of their employers, and using the only obvious means open to them at that time. Their legitimate protest was met with gunfire, imprisonment and the gallows, not to mention the economic violence of reduced wages and victimisation. One gets no sense of this from the histories written by defenders of the Yeomanry. Both Wingfield and Gladstone insist on referring to the colliers as 'the mob'; while G. Archer Parfitt is under the delusion that '[f]ortunately the "Battle of Cinderloo" in the quelling of the bread riots [sic] in the East Shropshire Coalfield proved to be bloodless.'[55] If one were feeling charitable, it might be suggested that Archer Parfitt was swayed by the trial judge's observation that '[i]t could only be ascribed to good Providence of God that no deaths were occasioned by the Cinders and Stones, hurled by the rioters.'[56] However, the learned gentleman was clearly only referring to those people that *mattered* – the potential victims of 'the mob', rather than the strikers themselves. Such attitudes appear to have left a faint late twentieth-century echo in the work of Maurice De Soissons, the official historian of the now defunct Telford Development Corporation, who employs the doublespeak that was so prevalent during the miners' strike of 1984, to describe the Shropshire Yeomanry as the *peace-keeping* force of the time, bravely facing *attacks* from colliers with stones and bludgeons.[57]

Cinderloo, then, was both a *bloody* and a significant chapter in the history of the east Shropshire coalfield. Clearly, its significance on a national scale was small; and

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[55] G. Archer Parfitt, *The Enduring Tradition: A Brief History of the Shropshire Yeomanry*, (n. d.) Shrewsbury: Shropshire Regimental Museum, p.2.
[56] *Salopian Journal*, 28th March 1821.
[57] De Soissons, loc. cit.

its relationship with the wider movement for radical political reform only appears to be tenuous, based on the available evidence. However, in social history terms, the events of February 1821 appear to symbolise significant changes in class relationships that had been developing in the coalfield during the previous century, and which have implications for wider historical debates. These themes – the changing nature of riots; and the polarisation of class interests – will be addressed in chapter two.

Chapter 2.

Class War?

This chapter will attempt to discuss the *nature* of the Cinderhill Riots. The events of 1821 will be contrasted with examples of food rioting by Shropshire colliers in the previous century. The chapter will then go on to analyse the question of whether the character of class relationships had altered in the coalfield as a result of the industrial revolution. Although it has some implications for the main themes of this study this exploration will, of necessity, remain brief and focus mainly on secondary studies by modern historians.

In Shropshire, as in most of Britain in the century preceding Cinderloo, rioting often consisted of attempts to force local suppliers of foodstuffs to lower their prices to 'customary' levels. As Trinder points out, '…rises in the cost of provisions were the most frequent cause of popular discontent…'[58] Thompson has shown that food riots in the eighteenth century were not simply spasmodic, unthinking responses to 'elementary economic stimuli.' Instead, he posits the notion that while food prices or shortages clearly triggered food riots, the 'riotous' responses of working people were a popular attempt to regulate those inclined to adopt 'illegitimate practices' that offended against what he terms the 'moral economy of the poor.'[59] In the Shropshire context, Trinder supports this view, suggesting that '…the measures taken to secure redress of grievances were not blind acts of violence but customary forms of

[58] Trinder, (Second Edition), p. 227.
[59] E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture*, (1993) New York: New Press, pp. 187-188.

behaviour amounting almost to ritual.'[60] Numerous accounts of food rioting involving Shropshire colliers, particularly the week of rioting in November 1756, are provided in the works of Randall, Raistrick, Trinder, and Thompson.[61] For our purposes, the most important thing to note is that by 1821 the form of rioting in Shropshire had changed considerably. This is confirmed by a number of historians concerned with national developments. For instance, Thompson states that '[e]conomic class-conflict in nineteenth century England found its characteristic expression in the matter of wages; in eighteenth century England the working people were most quickly inflamed to action by rising prices.'[62] Referring to the early years of the nineteenth century, Royle and Walvin reiterate J. Stevenson's view that a 'modernisation of protest' was occurring:

> …popular protest was undergoing a subtle change in the early nineteenth century. The food riots of the immediate post-war period were among the last of their kind. Strikes were replacing collective bargaining by riot…This uneven transition can be attributed to the changing structure of the economy, the emergence of urban industrial centres, and the breaking down of the 'face-to-face' society in which earlier forms of protest had been effective…[63]

Trinder neatly slots these national developments into the east Shropshire framework, and relates them to the concerns of local ironmasters:

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[60] Trinder, loc. cit.

[61] Randall, op. cit., pp. 232-234; Raistrick, op. cit., pp. 77-80; Trinder, ibid., pp. 227-229; Thompson, op. cit., p. 236.

[62] Thompson, ibid., p. 189.

[63] E. Royle and J. Walvin, *English Radicals and Reformers 1760-1848*, (1982) Harvester, p. 109; J. Stevenson, 'Food Riots in England 1792-1818', in R. Quinault and J. Stevenson (eds.), *Popular Protest and Public Order, Six Studies in British History 1790-1920*, (1974) London: Allen and Unwin, p. 67.

> Disturbances in Shropshire in the 18th century were marked by an anxious concern on the part of the ironmasters for the safety of their installations, and appeasement was in consequence the normal entrepreneurial reaction of the threat of riots. After 1800 the characteristics of crises changed. Disturbances were provoked not by high food prices but by threats of reductions in wages. The reaction of the ironmasters was not to provide cheap food but to call for troops. The anger of the rioters was directed not against farmers, millers and bakers but against their employers and their employers' installations.[64]

Clearly Trinder has the Cinderhill events in mind; and they appear to fit the modernisation theory well, Archer Parfitt's risible description of them as 'bread riots' notwithstanding. Can this process of modernisation be extended to the broader question of class structure? Brevity demands that this intriguing topic can only be touched upon, but a number of points may be made.

As in the great northern coalfield, described by Robert Colls, the iron and coal industry of east Shropshire was old, heavily capitalised, and '…its labour had long been by cash nexus.'[65] The local labouring classes appear to fit Marx's description of men and women:

> …who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.[66]

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[64] Trinder, op. cit., p. 227.
[65] Colls, op. cit., p. 165.
[66] K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (1984 Edition) Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 87.

In describing how workers were forced to resort to direct action and sometimes violence to protect their tenuous existence, Marx's description of general trends again reflects the empirical realities of east Shropshire in 1821:

> The growing competition among the bourgeois, and the resulting commercial crises, make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating…their livelihood more and more precarious; the collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes…here and there the contest breaks out into riots.[67]

There is much scope for debate on the class character of colliers and ironworkers during this period. Thompson, in particular, is associated with the view that between the 1790s and 1830s a transformation took place in the labouring and artisan classes, leading to the emergence of a distinctive working *class*, a process that went hand in hand with the increased cohesion of interests among the two elements of the ruling class, the employers and the gentry.[68]

Clearly, Cinderloo can be seen as an example of class conflict. It could be held up too as a local manifestation of the type of class polarisation emphasised by Marx and Thompson. The capitalist employers and the landowning elite, which dominated the magistracy and the Yeomanry, were, in this instance, acting in concert against what they perceived as a common enemy. However, it is too simplistic to regard this as a straightforward coalescing of interests to form a unified pro-capitalist ruling class. Throughout the period of the alleged 'making' of the modern British class system in Shropshire, there were fluctuations and changing alliances, both in the sphere of

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[67] Ibid., p. 89.
[68] Thompson, *The Making*…, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

industrial conflict, as is shown by J. Golby;[69] and in the explicitly political terms of party loyalties during Parliamentary elections, highlighted by J. Nichol.[70] Trinder has also recognised these contradictory manoeuvres, which refuse to be neatly slotted into any teleological framework. While ironmasters in the 1830s and 1840s were belligerently opposed to compromise with their men over industrial issues such as pay and Tommy Shops – at a time when the magistracy privately agitated for compromise and an end to the abuses of the Truck System – they were prepared to unite with their workers in support of a radical candidate in the election of 1832 against the Tory, who was staunchly supported by their erstwhile allies in the industrial arena.[71]

Cinderloo, however, appears as a clear example of a unified response from the gentry and employing class at a time of crisis. Generally, though relationships were at times strained, a subtle process of class crystallisation was taking place in which the working class was emerging as a force in society that required permanently united policing supervision from a pro-capitalist ruling class. Cinderloo was one small component in that non-linear process of class formation.

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[69] J. M. Golby, 'Public Order and Private Unrest: A Study of the 1842 Riots in Shropshire', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, 11, 1967/68, pp. 164-169.
[70] J. Nichol, 'Wynnstay, Willey and Wenlock, 1780-1832, a study in local political history', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*, Vol. 58, Part III, 1967-68, pp. 232-233.
[71] Trinder, op. cit. pp. 234-238.

Chapter 3.

The Lord Makes Bare His Arm.

It is now necessary to turn to the issue of religion, and the relationship between the Cinderhill Riots and the Methodist revival of 1821-22. The following chapter will describe the course of that revival, as a prelude to an analysis of its causation in subsequent chapters.

The history of Methodism in the east Shropshire coalfield extends back well beyond the fervour of 1821-22. John Wesley had been a relatively frequent visitor to the district in the eighteenth century.[72] His journal entry for Saturday 30th July 1774 records a visit to the southern part of the coalfield:

> I went on to Madeley; and in the evening preached under a sycamore tree, in Madeley-Wood, to a large congregation, good part of them colliers, who drank in every word. Surely never were places more alike, than Madeley-Wood, Gateshead-Fell, and Kingswood.[73]

During the course of the nineteenth century, Methodism became, in Barrie Trinder's words, almost the 'established religion in the coalfield' and John and Mary Fletcher's Madeley was regarded by many as the 'Mecca of Methodism.'[74] Revivalism, too, had been a feature of the coalfield before 'Cinderloo'. Unlike Fletcher, who '…was no more a hellfire preacher than John Wesley himself,' Samuel Taylor, appointed to the

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[72] J. E. G. Cartlidge, *The Vale and Gates of Usc-con*, (n. d.), pp. 79-80.
[73] Quoted in Randall, *Broseley and its Surroundings*, op. cit., p. 227.
[74] Trinder, *Industrial Revolution…* (Second Edition), pp. 157-165.

Shrewsbury Wesleyan Circuit in 1798, '…deliberately used emotional techniques to produce conversions in public meetings…[using]…with some effect the tear-raising techniques of later, more sophisticated, practitioners.' The resulting revival saw Wesleyan membership in the circuit, which at that time covered the coalfield, climb from 587 in 1799 to 920 in 1803.[75]

It should come as little surprise that local Wesleyan societies were among the first to be affected by the revival of 1821. Until that year, it appears that they had not encountered any serious competition from other Methodist sects in the coalfield;[76] and the legacy of Taylor meant that revivals had become a common – albeit sporadic and localised – feature of Wesleyan societies in the district.[77] In contrast, the revival that followed Cinderloo '…affected the whole coalfield.'[78]

The Wesleyans saw the membership of their Wellington circuit rise 'from 396 in March 1821 to 705 three years later.' While in Madeley 'there was an increase from 803 to 1,000 within a year of March 1821.'[79] As late as April 1822 it was reported in the Wesleyan *Methodist Magazine* that:

> The Lord is making bare his holy arm and exhibiting the richest of his grace among us…our chapels and preaching houses are crowded to excess and everywhere there is a thirst for the Word of Life…no noise or disorder is connected with this good work, but the power and the presence of God in a peculiar manner rests upon the people in the prayer meetings, the class meetings and under the public ministry, and many that

[75] Ibid., p. 167.
[76] According to Trinder, 'The schism of 1797 [with the Kilhamite New Connexion] had no repercussions in Shropshire' (B. Trinder, *The Methodist New Connexion…*, op. cit., p. 3).
[77] Ibid., p. 167.
[78] Trinder, *Industrial Revolution…* (Third Edition), p. 184.
[79] Trinder, (Second Edition), op. cit., p 168.

> have been very vile and ignorant as the wild ass's colt have been strangely drawn to hear words whereby they may be saved.[80]

The growth in Wesleyan membership after 1821 necessitated the stationing of a second minister in the Wellington circuit in 1823.[81] That year also saw the formation of a separate society at Arleston; and the construction of a chapel at Ketley Bank.[82] Preaching places at Old Park and Mannerly Lane are mentioned in the Wellington circuit plan for the first time.[83] And in 1824 St John's chapel was opened at Trench, reflecting growth in that society's membership from 8 in 1821 to 71 in 1824.[84] In the newly renamed Madeley circuit (formerly Broseley), 1822 saw new meetings '…in a cordwainer's house in Madeley Lane and a moulder's house at Madeley Green…'[85] It is interesting to note, that one account of Wesleyan Methodism, which focuses on the Coalbookdale society, suggests that '[f]rom this time [1821] to 1828, we did not experience any particular revival, so as greatly to multiply our Religious Associates.'[86] This was exceptional, however. Coalbrookdale, '[a]lone among the churches in the Broseley Wesleyan Circuit…showed a sharp decline in membership between 1817 and 1824, from 161 to 113.'[87] As will be seen below, rather than indicating that the revival passed Coalbrookdale by, it appears reasonably clear that another branch of Methodism was profiting from it at the Wesleyan society's expense.

This development stemmed from the fact that the revival of 1821-22 saw the emergence, for the first time in Shropshire, of Methodist sects that had left or been

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[80] *Methodist Magazine* (1822), quoted in Trinder, ibid.
[81] J. H. Lenton, *Methodism in Wellington 1765-1982*, (1982) Wellington, privately published, p. 5.
[82] Ibid.; Cartlidge, op. cit., p. 81.
[83] *Victoria County History, Shropshire*, Vol. XI (Telford), p. 275 (hereafter *VCH* XI)
[84] Ibid., p. 332.
[85] *VCH* XI, op. cit., p. 70.
[86] B. B., MS History of Wesleyan Methodism in Coalbrookdale to 1836, Shropshire Archives 2280/16/186.
[87] Trinder, *The Methodist New Connexion…*, op. cit., p. 5.

expelled from the Wesleyan parent body. The Revivalists, followers of Robert Winfield, first appeared in Dawley in 1821 and attempted, successfully, over the next few years, to evangelise the southern half of the coalfield. Adherents to the Primitive Methodist Connexion arrived in Oakengates in April of the same year and concentrated their efforts in the northern portion of the district. It appears that there may have been some sort of 'tacit agreement' between the two groups to remain within these boundaries which lasted until 1839.[88] The remainder of this chapter will attempt to summarise the facts surrounding the emergence of these two sects locally. Lack of space – as well as the need to remain focused on the Shropshire events of 1821-22 – dictates that the national origins of these sects cannot be covered, and readers are advised to seek such information in the general connexional histories and syntheses contained in the bibliography, in the case of the Primitives; and the articles by Trinder and Short for the Revivalists.[89]

Once again, we are indebted to the work of Barrie Trinder for bringing to light the Shropshire history of the Winfieldite sect. Originating in the east Midlands, the Revivalists sent out '…a number of missionaries…to evangelise other parts of the country.'[90] It appears that one of those who arrived in Dawley in 1821 may have been Winfield himself. Short suggests that this is evidenced by the fact that '…Winfield…had Shropshire friends who were reputed to have given him Fletcher of Madeley's silver shoe buckles.'[91] He was alleged to have visited twenty counties and 250 different towns and villages, making a visit to Dawley in 1821 quite plausible.[92]

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[88] Ibid., p. 7.
[89] Ibid., pp. 4-7; Colin C. Short, 'Robert Winfield and the Revivalists', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Vol. 53, No.3, (2001), pp. 93-102.
[90] Trinder, ibid., p. 5.
[91] Short, op. cit., p. 100.
[92] Ibid., p. 97.

The Revivalists appear to have had much in common with the Primitive Methodists from whom they seceded in 1819. According to John Petty:

> [Winfield] and his followers were called 'Revivalists.' They sang the same hymns and tunes as the Primitive Methodists, preached the same doctrines, and greatly resembled them in their mode of worship. Several zealous preachers were raised up among them; they visited divers counties in a short period, and met with considerable success in the conversion of sinners.[93]

Hulbert, too, mentions their '…extraordinary zeal…' and the fact that they encouraged '…field and female preaching.'[94] Among the more popular of the Revivalist preachers active in Dawley was a Mrs. Ford.[95]

It appears that soon after their arrival, the Revivalists '…attracted the attention of Benjamin Tranter, son of one of John Fletcher's companions, and agent in charge of the mining operations of the Coalbrookdale Company.'[96] Tranter was a Wesleyan, but believed that the Revivalists would 'prove a blessing to the neighbourhood.' Consequently, he offered them the use of his barn as a preaching place, for which he was 'reprimanded by the Wesleyan authorities.' Tranter then left the Wesleyan Connexion and '…identified himself fully with the Revivalists.'[97] In Trinder's view, this explains the fall in the membership of the Wesleyan society in Coalbrookdale, with Tranter possibly taking other members into the Revivalist camp.[98] There do not appear to be any membership figures to highlight the growth of the Shropshire

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[93] John Petty, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion,* (1864 edition), P. 84, quoted in Short, op. cit., p. 96.
[94] Charles Hulbert, *The Religions of Britain – or a view of its various Christian Denominations*, (1826), p. 288, quoted in Short, ibid., p. 96.
[95] Trinder, loc. cit.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.

Winfieldites, though expansion is evident from the fact that they opened a large chapel at Brand Lee, Dawley in 1822. Revivalist societies 'were formed in a number of nearby hamlets', including one in a room Hodgebower, Madeley Wood, begun in by two missionaries in 1823, which led eventually to the building of the Zion Chapel in 1827 or 1828.[99]

The main beneficiaries of the revival that followed 'Cinderloo' in the northern portion of the coalfield were the Primitive Methodists. While the Primitive revival was slightly slower to take hold after the Cinderhill riot than its Revivalist and Wesleyan counterparts, it was to be the most spectacular of the three. Until 1821 experience of 'Primitive Methodism' in east Shropshire had been limited to a camp meeting 'on the Wrekin – the famous mountain of Shropshire' on the 'first Sabbath of May 1808.'[100] This event took place a matter of weeks before Hugh Bourne and his followers – known as 'Ranters' or 'Camp Meeting Methodists' – were expelled from the Wesleyan Connexion and became fully fledged secessionists.[101] Fusion with the supporters of William Clowes took place in 1811; and the epithet 'Primitive Methodist' was only formally adopted in February 1812.[102] In April 1808 Bourne, had 'heard of the wakes [held annually on the Wrekin] while passing through Shropshire.' The next month he 'brought to the Wrekin a group of his followers from the Potteries, who organised a camp meeting in opposition to the normal festivities.'[103] J. Ashworth, writing in 1888, also describes how 'Mr. Bourne and his friends…held an open-air

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[99] *VCH* XI, loc. cit.
[100] H. B. Kendall, *History of The Primitive Methodist Connexion*, (1889) London, Joseph Toulson, accessed at: http://www.rewlach.org.uk/books/Kendall/Kendall.rtf on 14th April 2004; J. Ashworth, *The Life of the Venerable Hugh Bourne*, (1888), accessed at: http://www.rewlach.org.uk/books/HughBourne/HBfull.rtf on 14th April2004; Esther J. Lenton, 'Primitive Methodist Camp Meetings in Shropshire', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Vol. 52, February 1999, p. 1. The Wrekin is a large hill near to Wellington, the main market town in the district.
[101] E. J. Lenton, ibid.
[102] http://35.1911encyclopedia.org/P/PR/PRIMITIVE_METHODIST_CHURCH_THE.htm accessed on 14th April 2004.
[103] Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*…, (1981), op. cit., p. 222.

service on a mountain in Shropshire, called the Wrekin, near Wellington.' The meeting was convened 'for the purpose of counteracting the ungodly revellings on that spot at that period of the year.'[104] The wake was notorious among local moralists for its violence and debauchery.[105] According to H. B. Kendall, the 'principle was to meet vice and the devil on their own ground…' and, consequently, the Methodists '…very often pitched their camp in the very midst of Vanity Fair.'[106] In Ashworth's view, the Wrekin meeting 'proved very successful,' while Kendall, writing in 1889, counted it among those camp meetings that 'have become historical, and tradition yet talks of them in the localities where they were held.'[107] On such occasions the 'lonely heath or secluded mountain became animate with living throngs, and vocal with stirring hymns.'[108] Despite the enthusiastic descriptions of later Methodist historians, and the 'vast number…[who]…experienced…"awakening"', however, the Wrekin camp meeting does not appear to have generated any notable growth in membership figures.[109]

By contrast, the Primitive revival of 1821-22 appears to have been far more impressive. According to J. E. G. Cartlidge, '…itinerant missioners first reached Oakengates in the Autumn of 1821.'[110] In this assertion he appears to have been mistaken. Trinder dates their arrival in April 1821, the month of Thomas Palin's execution.[111] The two missionaries from Tunstall in the Potteries, William Sanders and Thomas Sugden, began to 'reap an abundant harvest among the men employed in mines and ironworks around Wrockwardine Wood, Oakengates and Coalpit Bank'; in

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[104] Ashworth, loc. cit.
[105] Trinder, op. cit., pp.217-8.
[106] Kendall, loc. cit. Among the 'wicked' attractions at the Wrekin wake were 'Ale booths, gingerbread standings, gaming tables, swing-boats, merry-go-rounds and three-sticks-a-penny stalls…' (Trinder, Ibid., p. 220).
[107] Kendall, Ibid.; Ashworth, op. cit.
[108] Kendall, ibid.
[109] E. J. Lenton, loc. cit.; Trinder, op. cit., p. 167.
[110] Cartlidge, op. cit., p.77.
[111] Trinder, *Methodist New Connexion*…, op. cit., p. 4.

other words, among men and women likely to have been intimately connected with the tumultuous events of only a few months before.[112]

As Petty later recounted, the small town of Oakengates was initially the focus of the itinerant preachers:

> It was visited by the Primitive Methodist missionaries connected with the Tunstall circuit, about the year 1821.The spot occupied for a preaching place was an open space near the centre of the village, called 'the bull ring,' where thousands of guilty and depraved beings rioted in the brutal sport of bull-baiting, as have done many since that period. In this oft-frequented place, where vice of every kind had been committed without a blush, the missionaries of the cross unfurled the blood-stained banner, and pointed sinners to the Lamb of God! Their plain and powerful addresses were accompanied with the mighty energy of the Holy Spirit, and many hardened sinners were awakened to a sense of their lost condition; and some of the ringleaders in wickedness being arrested by the Prince of Peace, became champions in his cause.[113]

The height of the revivalist fervour came in the Spring and early Summer months of 1822.[114] Trinder recounts the experiences of a Primitive Methodist preacher at an 'emotional' meeting at Coalpit Bank on 29th April 1822:

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[112] J. Petty, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, (1860 edition), p. 111, quoted in Trinder, ibid. see also M. R. Prior, Religion and Society in East Shropshire: A Study of Wrockwardine Wood 1820-1870, unpublished MA thesis, (1987) Wolverhampton Polytechnic, p. 26.

[113] J. Petty, 'The Entrance of Primitive Methodism into Oaken Gates', Article IX, *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, (1846), p. 419.

[114] Trinder, loc. cit.

> It was a shaking time. The people were crying for mercy on every hand and a great many were enabled to rejoice in a sin pardoning God. O Lord still ride on and be glorified in the salvation of sinners.[115]

On the 19th May Hugh Bourne returned to east Shropshire to conduct a memorable camp meeting at Coalpit Bank. The volume of Bourne's journal covering this event has been lost. Fortunately, however, Petty included the following extract from it in his history of Primitive Methodism. The account vividly describes both the magnitude and the intensity of the revival:

> …there was a vast concourse of people, and the scene was grand and majestic…The Lord made bare His arm; souls were in distress in several of the companies and several were brought into liberty. In the afternoon thousands were present and two preaching stands were occupied. The last time the praying companies were out was a very powerful one; and at the first stand there still remained about a thousand persons who had not room to go out. A praying service was held for these and after some time a general cry for mercy was heard among them, but how many got liberty could not be fully ascertained.[116]

Cartlidge quotes the Primitive Methodist preacher James Bonsor as saying 'I preached last Sunday at Oakengates to near 2000 people, and on Wednesday night, for the first time, at Old Park.'[117] Bonsor reported to Tunstall in May 1822 that he was

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[115] *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, (1823), p. 70, quoted in Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*…, op. cit., p. 168.

[116] Petty, *History…*, pp.112-113, quoted in Trinder, *Methodist New Connexion*…, loc. cit.; and Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*…, loc. cit.

[117] Cartlidge, loc. cit. The name of this preacher is recorded differently in different authorities. Cartlidge and Werner use 'Bonsor'; J. H. Lenton, 'Bonsar'; Trinder, 'Bonser'.

working from 9am to 10pm each day, and that he had opened as many places as could be supplied, but 'they are wanting us at fresh places.'[118]

The extent of the Primitive revival is reflected in membership figures published in the minutes of the Connexion, the newly formed Oakengates circuit claiming 775 members by 1823.[119] Petty described the society's evolution thus:

> A society was formed, and the work of God prospered there and in the neighbourhood. The mining district of Shropshire was soon formed into a branch of Tunstall circuit, and shortly afterwards became a distinct circuit, of which Oaken Gates was the head.[120]

Preachers emanating from the Oakengates circuit, along with those originating from Burland and Darlaston, eventually went on to evangelise most of Shropshire, and set up missions in Wiltshire, South Wales, and Belfast.[121] Within the coalfield, 'by 1822 there were five Primitive Methodist classes in the district north of Watling Street, mostly in the Oakengates and Wrockwardine Wood area…'[122] A chapel was opened at Wrockwardine Wood in 1823. Plans to build one in Oakengates had been obstructed by Rev. C. R. Cameron, the incumbent of Wombridge:

> A chapel being wanted, a building site was sought; but the influence of the parish clergyman was successfully exercised against us. However, at Wrockwardine Wood,

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[118] *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, (1822), pp. 187-188, quoted in Trinder, *Methodist New Connexion*…, loc. cit.
[119] *Primitive Methodist Minutes*, (1823), 2, 6. Quoted in Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*…, loc. cit., and the *Victoria County History, Shropshire*, Vol. II, p. 14 (hereafter *VCH* II).
[120] Petty, 'The Entrance…', loc. cit.
[121] *VCH* II, op. cit., pp.14-16; Cartlidge, op. cit., p. 78.
[122] J. H. Lenton, op. cit., p. 33.

> about a mile distant, land was given to us by Mr. Amphlett, and a spacious chapel was soon erected. A large congregation attended, and a flourishing society arose…[123]

In Oakengates, 'Our friends…were confined to dwelling houses, and the society's progress was impeded.'[124] A similar situation appears to have confronted the Primitives in Wellington, though whether this was a result of opposition from the clergy of the established church is not clear. According to Lenton, the first Wellington 'Primitive Methodist meeting was held at 229 Watling Street. In 1822, Edward Williams' house in Tan Bank was licensed and in 1823 a school-room in Elizabeth Lewis' house there.'[125] It appears a chapel was not built at Tan Bank until around 1826.[126] In Donnington Wood – later the scene of a notable camp meeting in 1839, attended by some 4,000 people – Primitive meetings were registered in two houses in 1821 and 1822.[127]

On Friday 6th April 1821, the *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, as well as reporting the reprieve of Samuel Hayward and the impending execution of Thomas Palin, confidently asserted that 'The iron trade is reviving in this county, Staffordshire, and South Wales, bar iron has advanced…'[128] Recovery was not instantaneous, but '…prosperity returned to the iron industry in the 1820s…[and]…the heat of the [religious] revival diminished' accordingly.[129] There is some evidence of revivalist fervour lasting into 1824, however. John Ride, a preacher in the Oakengates circuit recounted some of his experiences in the *Primitive Methodist Magazine*:

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[123] Petty, loc. cit; Cartlidge, loc. cit.; *VCH* XI, p. 301. Lenton (ibid) gives the date as 1822.
[124] Petty, loc. cit.
[125] J. H. Lenton, loc. cit.
[126] Ibid.
[127] PRO RG 31/7 Salop Nos. 382, 381, cited in *VCH* XI, op. cit., p. 173.
[128] *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, Friday 6th April 1821.
[129] Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*…, op. cit., p. 169.

> Sunday 15th [February], met class at six o'clock in the morning. The Lord was present. At nine met a class at Ketley, renewed tickets, and spoke at half-past ten to a very large congregation. Many in tears, I related how the Lord was reviving his work in Shrewsbury Circuit. The hearts of the people were gladdened. Led a lovefeast at Oaken Gates; it was a powerful time. If ever I felt given up to the Lord and his work, it was that time. The people spoke with liberty and great freedom. I attended preaching at Wrockwardine Wood chapel. After preaching we held a prayer meeting. Many souls were seeking the Lord and some professed to find him…
>
> Tuesday, February 17, I visited the people at Coal Pit Bank, and prayed with many families. My soul was wonderfully blest in the work. Preached at the chapel at night to a very large congregation. We had a mighty out-pouring of the Spirit; and while I was preaching the power of God came down. And while I was speaking concerning the effect of faith, one of my brethren told me afterward, that he felt the sanctifying power run through his soul. I concluded preaching and we had a prayer meeting. Sinners were crying out for mercy all over the chapel; the pious labourers engaged in prayer with mourners. And at one certain time there were as many as five praying companies engaged. How many there were that were liberated I cannot assert; but many professed to find the Lord. Many went away mourning, wanting to find him whom their soul desired to love. The Lord is reviving his work in this branch of Oaken Gates Circuit. Praise the Lord for ever. Amen.[130]

Ride’s optimism can be seen, with hindsight, to have been a little misplaced. As Trinder points out, the Oakengates ‘Primitive Methodist circuit disappeared from the Connexion’s official records between 1825 and 1828, when its membership was 304, less than half of that in 1824. It fell away still further in the next few years.’[131]

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[130] *Primitive Methodist Magazine* (June 1824), pp. 134–135.
[131] Trinder, loc. cit.

The decline was by no means terminal. The coalfield was to experience the fervour and excitement of revivalism on numerous occasions as the nineteenth century progressed.[132] By the time of the Ecclesiastical Census of 1851, the 'three Methodist denominations taken together [Wesleyan, Primitive, and New Connexion] were the best supported of the churches in the district, having rather more than half of the total attendances…between them [they] claimed 3,516 members.'[133] These developments lie largely outside the scope of this study, though they will be alluded to in the following chapter, which will attempt to assess the nature of the revival of 1821-22.

There has clearly been a surfeit of narrative thus far. This has been a necessary evil. Evidence of the revival is scattered in numerous publications; and for the purposes of this study it has been necessary to collect these snippets together to get some idea of the extent of the revival that occurred after 'Cinderloo'. An area for concern that emerges from this chapter is the fact that the vast majority of sources cited show great sympathy for the Methodist position. There is some danger that the contemporary itinerants, and their late nineteenth century counterparts, being rather less than impartial observers or chroniclers, may have been given over to hyperbole. Certainly, there is an element of sectarian jargon that permeates many of the accounts, and they appear remarkably similar in both style and content to those from other parts of the country that experienced revival contemporaneously. An example, cited by Colls, from the great northern coalfield is striking in its similarity to Shropshire accounts:

> The Lord soon began to work powerfully so that both men and women were in distress until the Lord spoke peace to their souls. I cannot say how many professed to

[132] Ibid., pp. 169-173; E. J. Lenton, op. cit., passim.
[133] Ibid., p. 166.

> get into liberty, but the meeting continued until the next morning. Many were seized so as to be in apparent fits: but the Lord soon set them free.[134]

Indeed, Colls could just as well have been referring to east Shropshire as Northumberland and Durham when he states that:

> …physical emanation invited physical metaphors…preaching tours in the coalfield witnessed 'quickening', 'shaking', 'mighty', 'melting', 'powerful', times; converts 'fell before God' while the 'devil was roaring', the people crying out', and the 'Lord made bare his arm' as 'many wept and shook like leaves before the wind'.[135]

This seems to be particularly the case with regard to Primitive Methodist reports. Ride, for instance, almost appears to be paraphrasing Bourne's journal when describing his own preaching experiences. Combined with his subsequent assessment of the immediate prospects for the Connexion in 1824 – which was clearly wide of the mark when posited next to the empirical evidence of Primitive Methodist decline in the mid-1820s – Ride's comments raise the suspicion that zeal could all too easily translate into obligatory, over-optimistic rhetoric. None of this is to suggest that Methodist preachers were unreliable witnesses. The similarities could, of course, be taken simply as evidence of the universality of the revival experience on a national, and international, scale. Caution should inform our attempts to understand the magnitude of the revival and the sociological make up of the participants. It must be emphasised that the numbers who joined the three Methodist sects during the revival represented a relatively small minority of the working population of the coalfield.

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[134] Colls, op. cit., p. 150.
[135] Ibid., p. 167.

Many, it appears, were not easily persuaded by the revivalist fervour. Benjamin Tranter indicated that in Dawley the Revivalists were plagued by the 'insults and interruptions of the ignorant and profane;'[136] while Petty mentions that 'wickedness' continued to occur in the bull ring at Oakengates long after the Primitives had 'unfurled the blood-stained banner.'[137] Indeed, we cannot be certain that colliers and ironworkers made up the majority of the few thousand Methodist society members in the district. Tranter was a leading representative of the Coalbrookdale Company management, who would have taken his place alongside the employing class in times of crisis; and other leading lay people appear to have been petit-bourgeois, such as the tailor William Heaford.[138] The likelihood, however, is that the societies were generally made up of the poor. In settlements like Dawley and Wrockwardine Wood during the nineteenth century proletarians massively outnumbered their middle-class counterparts.[139] Also, it is generally accepted by historians that Methodist membership figures represent only the organised tip of an iceberg of popular support. As David Hempton has suggested:

> …Methodist membership figures are conventionally multiplied by three to find the number of adherents, but even this figure may turn out to be a low estimate…Methodism was particularly strong among artisan occupational groups from whom most was feared in times of political excitement and public disorder. Thus Alan Gilbert concludes that 'the historian ought perhaps to think of something

[136] Trinder, *Methodist New Connexion*…, op. cit., p. 5.
[137] Petty, 'The Entrance…', loc. cit.
[138] Trinder, loc. cit.
[139] Prior, op. cit., p. 25.

> approaching 20 per cent of the most politicised section of the adult "lower orders" being associated with chapel communities' of one sort or another.[140]

While it is thus plausible to suggest that at least some of the converts to Methodism in 1821-22 had played some sort of role in the strike, Trinder rightly points out that '…it is impossible at present to trace links between particular individuals involved in the riots and the revivals.'[141]

It appears, then, that while caution should always be scrupulously employed in such situations, and while there is clearly scope for further research, the evidence that has been accumulated thus far from contemporary accounts seems to confirm Trinder's contention that a widespread and intense period of religious revivalism among the east Shropshire working class followed *directly* upon the colliers' defeat in February 1821. Did that calamitous defeat, however, sow the 'fields so ripe for harvest' that James Bonsor and his colleagues were apparently able to reap so successfully?[142] An attempt to analyse possible answers to that question will be made in the following chapters.

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[140] D. Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850*, (1984) London: Hutchinson, p. 12.
[141] Trinder, loc. cit.
[142] J. H. Lenton, loc. cit.

Chapter 4.

Historians and Revivalism

Before going on to analyse the Shropshire revival of 1821-22 and its relevance for the debates around the Thompson thesis, it is necessary to look, very briefly, at the way historians have approached the thorny question of religious revivalism and its relationship with the working classes. This will hopefully provide a broader context for the discussion of local events which follows in subsequent chapters.

The historiography of revivalism is vast; and in a study of this nature it is only possible to scratch the surface. Priority will be given to those studies that explicitly focus upon the relationship between working class insurgency and Methodist revival. Thus, detailed studies of the revival phenomenon which do not focus on this relationship, such as John Kent's *Holding the Fort*, do not receive the attention that they perhaps deserve.[143] Instead, attention will centre on a number of journal articles which have attempted to support or refute the Thompson thesis by engaging in local studies of Methodist revivalism.

Any discussion of the social role of revivalism usually begins with Halévy's hypothesis that Methodism played an important part in preventing revolution in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[144] The Hammonds supported this

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[143] J. Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism*, (1978) London: Epworth. It is noteworthy that on the one occasion that Kent does look at Thompson, he is quite sympathetic: 'The hysteria of the war years worked both ways, inflaming the minds of both governors and governed with dreams of conspiracy; religion offered some people alternative kinds of ecstasy, which, as has already been suggested, could move surprisingly close to politics in troubled times.' Thompson '…rightly emphasises the turbulent underside of English society in these years…revivalism gave form to one reaction to conditions of social tragedy' (p. 46).

[144] Itzkin quotes Halévy thus: ' it is generally agreed that the influence of Methodism contributed a great deal, during the last several years of the eighteenth century, to preventing the French Revolution

view, and went one step further, seeing evangelism as serving'…the ruling classes as an instrument of suppression and reaction, and the working classes as a counsel of resignation and submission.'[145] This view was criticised by a number of historians, most notably Eric Hobsbawm, who attempted to refute Halévy by suggesting that 'Methodism advanced when Radicalism advanced.'[146] Thompson then famously posited his notion of the 'chiliasm of despair', claiming that '…religious revivalism took over just at the point where "political" or temporal aspirations met with defeat.'[147] An avalanche of criticism of the Thompson thesis has appeared, including contributions from Gilbert, Hempton, Kent, and Ward.[148] The journal literature has tended to be more even handed in its approach to the thesis. A number of local studies have uncovered evidence to support at least some of Thompson's assumptions. John Baxter's study of revivalism in Yorkshire in the 1790s has produced a mass of statistical and biographical evidence which undermines the keen criticisms of Currie and Hartwell, levelled against the oscillation theory, and which '…bears out Thompson's speculation.'[149] P. Stigant, in an investigation into the relationship with Wesleyanism and radicalism in Northern England, also lends support to Thompson by pointing to a drop in support for the denomination at times when the political temperature was rising; though he provides little convincing evidence of a growth of

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from having an English counterpart.' (E. S. Itzkin, 'The Halevy Thesis – A Working Hypothesis? English Revivalism: Antidote for Revolution and Radicalism 1789-1815', *Church History*, 44, 1975, p. 49.

[145] G. Himmelfarb, *Victorian Minds*, (1975) Gloucester Massachusetts: Harper Torchbooks, p. 293.

[146] E. J. Hobsbawm, 'Methodism and the Threat of Revolution in Britain', *History Today*, Vol. 7, No. 2, February 1957, p. 124.

[147] Thompson, *The Making…*, op. cit., p. 389.

[148] A. D. Gilbert, 'Methodism, Dissent and Political Stability in Early Industrial England', *Journal of Religious History*, 10, 1978-9, pp. 381-399; Hempton, op. cit., pp. 74-77; J. Kent, *The Unacceptable Face: the Modern Church in the Eyes of the Historian*, (1987), London: SCM Press, pp. 114-116; W. R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850*, (1972) London: Batsford, passim.

[149] John Baxter, 'The Great Yorkshire Revival 1792-6: A Study of Mass Revival among the Methodists', in M. hill (ed.), *A Sociological Yearbook of religion in Britain*, Vol. 7, (1974) London: SCM Press, pp.61-62.

Methodism as a result of defeat.[150] Many of Stigant's arguments regarding the antipathy to reform of Northern Wesleyans are repeated in Michael R. Watts' second volume on the history of religious dissent. Watts goes on to approvingly quote George Herod's suggestion that in the village of Countesthorpe, after the Pentridge disaster, and following a visit from a Primitive Methodist preacher, 'all the leading men belonging to the Levellers in that village were convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of a judgement to come.' Apparently, 'two of the ringleaders became local preachers, and the barn in which the ammunition was stored became the Ranters' place of worship.'[151] Other recent examinations of revivalism have tended to query the main thrust of the Thompson thesis. David Luker's examination of Cornish revivalism stresses the spiritual, regional, and generally internal dynamics of revivalism in that county. Where he senses external impulsions toward revivalism these are not usually the result of political defeat but of a variety of contradictory events from cholera epidemics to victory in the Napoleonic wars.[152] At least, unlike most of Thompson's critics, Luker has the good grace to point out that Thompson had already acknowledged all these factors as possible faults with his theory. John Rule, again focusing on Cornwall, suggests that there is a 'growing sense that…revivalism was essentially the manifestation of a community dynamic to which radical politics were largely irrelevant.'[153] He sees Cornish revivalism as '…an internally driven phenomenon which although it could be sparked by any number of occurrences, was an expected and recurrent feature deriving from imperatives within the local religious

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[150] P. Stigant, 'Wesleyan Methodism and Working-Class Radicalism in the North, 1792-1821', *Northern History* 6, 1971, p. 105.
[151] M. R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, Vol. 2, (1995) Oxford: Clarendon, p. 389.
[152] D. Luker, 'Revivalism in Theory and Practice: The Case of Cornish Methodism', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 37, No. 4, October 1986, pp. 603-617.
[153] J. Rule, 'Explaining Revivalism: The Case of Cornish Methodism', Southern History, 20, 1998, p. 169.

community itself.'[154] Two studies of the Durham and Northumberland coalfield provide a number of points of comparison with the events in Shropshire. J. A. Jaffe appears to be part of that over-large club of historians who seem blind to Thompson's qualifications. This said, Jaffe offers some important detailed insights into the problems of applying the oscillation theory in the coalfield and into the role of cholera epidemics.[155] Colls is a little less dismissive of Thompson, and provides a rich locally focused analysis of the dynamics of revivalism in the coalfield that appear to have a number of implications for the east Shropshire case study.[156] With these studies in mind, it is necessary to attempt to analyse the revival that has been described in chapter three.

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[154] Ibid., p. 178.
[155] J. A. Jaffe, ''The "Chiliasm of Despair" Reconsidered: Revivalism and Working-Class Agitation in County Durham', *Journal of British Studies*, 28, January 1989, pp. 23-42.
[156] Colls., op. cit., pp. 162-176.

Chapter 5.

The Spiritual Legacy of Defeat?

The temporal setback suffered by the colliers and ironworkers in February 1821, and the spiritual stirring which followed in its wake, were both highly significant events in the lives of the populace of the coalfield. The heightened excitement caused by the strike and the fatal riot; the fear brought on by the military occupation of their towns and settlements; and the demoralisation and bitterness produced by reduced wages, victimisation, imprisonment, and judicial murder in all likelihood had a profound effect on the psyche of the local working class. So too, for a significant minority, did the subsequent religious revival. As Colls has stated, revivals were '…big days, contingent and extraordinary.'[157]

How were these two notable events linked? Did the temporal defeat at Cinderhill stimulate the revivalist fervour? Or, were there other less spectacular causal factors? The following two chapters will attempt to explore some of the possible answers to these questions. The views of modern historians of the revival phenomenon discussed in chapter four will be tested in the light of the local events delineated in chapters one to three. This chapter will explore the issues surrounding Trinder's interpretation of the events of 1821-22, while chapter six will assess alternative explanations.

For the local working class the defeat in February 1821 was a tragic event. People respond to tragedy in a number of ways: among them anger, resignation, despair. In John Kent's opinion, the kind of religious revivalism practiced by Americans like

[157] Colls, op. cit., p. 164.

Lorenzo Dow, which was a major influence upon the evolution and character of charismatic revivalist sects like the Primitive Methodists and the Winfieldites, '…gave form to one reaction to conditions of social tragedy.'[158]

Barrie Trinder's justification for his suggestion that the east Shropshire revival of 1821-22 was the one of the colliers' reactions to the social tragedy of the Cinderloo defeat is compelling:

> While it is not possible to identify individuals converted in the revival with people who took part in the Cinderhill riots, the connection between the revival and the traumatic political and social defeat of the colliers in February 1821 seems a close one. In an area where a return to work at reduced wages was overlooked by Dragoons, it was not surprising that Methodist missionaries should find a trembling and fearful population. Colliers and ironworkers who had experienced five or six years of unparalleled economic depression, and whose attempts to prevent wages being reduced were met with gunfire from a Yeomanry force comprised of the local ruling class, might well have asked what they might do to be saved.[159]

Trinder explicitly associates the east Shropshire revival with the Thompson thesis:

> …events in Shropshire in this period do add some strength to Mr. Edward Thompson's suggestion that the surges of Methodist strength between 1790 and 1830 represented expressions of working class despair at the failures of political agitation.[160]

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[158] Kent, loc. cit.
[159] Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*…(Second Edition), op. cit., pp. 168-169.
[160] Trinder, *Methodist New Connexion*…, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

Few other historians of Shropshire have been as bold in this assertion. Most seem to content themselves with merely reporting that a religious revival occurred after the riots and leave it at that. De Soissons goes one step further, giving revisionism a whole new meaning by implicitly putting the revivalist cart before the horse of industrial discontent.[161] If that is not his intention, then he is at least guilty of not pointing out the potential link between the two events.

While compelling, the Thompson/Trinder thesis is, in many ways, as problematical as its counterparts. While it is possible in very general terms to agree with Sydney Dimond's assertion that the emergence of a 'new social order' – as a result of the industrial revolution – created a 'new spiritual need' which was met by the revivalists, it is far more difficult to prove this in concrete terms, especially when focusing on the peculiarities of local events.[162] The most obvious problem is that none of the evidence collected by historians *explicitly* points to a concrete causal link between the riots and the revival. The main preoccupations of the Methodist preachers in the district were the evil pastimes of the workers: their drinking, brawling, debauchery, and cruelty to animals. None of them appear to make any mention of the events that preceded their arrival in the coalfield. We still have no clear evidence that any of the rioters were converted during the revival. Trinder's insights remain, therefore, at the level of a speculative hypothesis, though one that is impeccably logical. The problems with the thesis that do exist tend to *qualify rather than refute* the notion that temporal despair led to a search for spiritual salvation. For instance, while it appears that the defeat of Cinderloo was indeed a serious blow to the morale of the local working class, it is not altogether clear that it was primarily a *political* defeat, as had been the defeat of the Pentridge Rising in 1817, which Trinder holds up as a comparable event:

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[161] M. De Soissons, op. cit., p. 28.

[162] S. G. Dimond, *The Psychology of the Methodist Revival: An Empirical and Descriptive Study*, (1926) London: Oxford University Press, p. 37.

> Like the great Nottinghamshire revival of 1817-18 which followed the abortive Pentridge Rising, the Shropshire revival of 1821-22 was kindled by a political defeat for the working class.[163]

As has been suggested in earlier chapters the concerns of the Shropshire colliers in 1821 were overwhelmingly *economic*. While Trinder successfully highlights the wider political crisis of the period, and its impact on Shropshire, his attempts to establish links between radical reformers and the county's workers – especially those outside the labour aristocracies of Coalbrookdale and Coalport – remain tenuous.

The rioters of February 1821 appear to have been ill-prepared for the repression they faced from the local Yeomanry force; and the dispute ended so quickly after the riots as to suggest that little in the manner of revolutionary sentiment animated their actions. This was, it should be stressed, a confrontation between around 3,000 colliers and only around 60-70 Yeomanry and a handful of constables. If the colliers had been determined revolutionaries, then the authorities' possession of firearms could have been overcome relatively easily.

This lack of revolutionary motivation seems confirmed by the fact that the local magistrates did not express any explicit concerns about political extremism in their correspondence with the Home Office; and in the fact that the local Tory press made little or no mention of political motives, which was in sharp contrast to their later reporting of the colliers' strike and riots of 1842 which were largely blamed – with little supporting evidence – on Chartist agitators.[164] Of course, economic struggle cannot be entirely divorced from politics. The two do not operate in separate spheres;

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[163] Trinder, (Second Edition), p. 169.
[164] Golby, op. cit., p. 161.

and something as simple as questioning 'management's right to manage', or, more specifically, their right to impose wage-cuts, is immediately implicit of a challenge to the established order of things, especially during periods of wider political instability. Thus, while the point is worth making, the qualification that Cinderloo, and the subsequent pay cut, was primarily an economic rather than a political defeat for the colliers does little to detract from the logic that links these events with the revival. Hobsbawm has further suggested that the newly converted workers might have expected economic good fortune to magically return, with their faith '…affect[ing] the prosperity and policy of their factory or mine.'[165] Crucially, tying in with the Thompson thesis, he goes on to state that '…economic conditions…[became] a matter of fate, rather than for struggle.'[166] Resignation to providence rather than collective action was the pathway offered by Methodism – Wesleyan and Ranting – in much the same way as it had been the only road offered by the old church.

Another possible qualification to the thesis that could be posited is the notion that Shropshire workers may have embraced Methodism, at least in its Primitive and Revivalist incarnations, as an act of *rejection* of the established church, and its close association with the class of men who had so brutally crushed their temporal aspirations. While Rev. John Eyton, vicar of Wellington from 1804 to 1823 had a reputation as a friend and supporter of Wesleyan Methodism, his brother Thomas was the magistrate who read the Riot Act to the colliers amassed on the cinder hills of Old Park, and gave evidence against them at the subsequent trial. Rev. Charles Cameron, who opposed the building of the Primitives' chapel in Oakengates, appears to be one of Coll's '…people in high places who wanted the poor to keep their mouths shut and

[165] E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, (1963) Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.133.
[166] Ibid.

their heads bowed.'[167] He had already expressed his patrician concerns about the Wesleyans in 1812; no doubt the later 'antics' of the Ranters would have made him apoplectic:

> I urge Methodists to take heed who they admit as members of their society, and still more who they suffer to teach, or speak, or in any way take the lead among them. But while persons, not only whose past character but whose present profession of religion is evidently doubtful, are admitted into their society, while inexperienced men, women and almost children…are suffered to pray or exhort, or in any way to stand forth as teachers, such woeful departures from their profession, as must disgrace the society to which they belong, tend to its confusion and destruction, and cause the truth of God to be blasphemed in the world.[168]

In response to such attitudes, the colliers' and ironworkers' adherence to Methodism might be seen as a working-class 'declaration of independence' from the religion of their class enemies, possibly motivated by a desire for 'a sort of etherealised revenge' against them come Judgement Day; in which the temporal wrongs of Cinderloo would be righted in the spiritual world.[169] As Hobsbawm and Rudé suggest, the growth of nonconformity '…is a clear indication of some group which wishes to assert its independence of squire or parson, for few more overt gestures of independence could be conceived than the public refusal to attend the official church.'[170] Gilbert later

[167] Colls, op. cit., p. 171.
[168] C. R. Cameron, *Considerations suggested by the Murder of William Bailey*, (1812), pp. 19-20, quoted in Trinder, (Second Edition), p.164.
[169] Hobsbawm, op. cit., p. 133.
[170] E. Hobsbawm and G. Rudé, *Captain Swing*, (1969) London: Lawrence and Wishart, p. 187.

repeated the Marxists' insight that '…an assertion of "independence" was a manifest and intrinsic aspect of chapelgoing.'[171]

Of course, such actions may have been prompted by positive as well as negative factors. This is the theme explored by Gilbert, Obelkevich and others, who provide a more sophisticated view of the attractions of Methodism for the working class than the traditional positive interpretation associated with Wearmouth.[172] Many of these modern historians posit their theses in terms of a critique of Marxists like Thompson and Hobsbawm, whilst neglecting to mention the fact that both historians were well aware of the democratic aspects of Methodism, especially in its Ranter variety. For Hobsbawm, Primitive Methodism was:

> …democratic: congregations participated in worship to a much greater extent than elsewhere, by choral singing, speaking with voices and 'testifying', by lay preaching (including that of women), and in the proliferating chapel committees and offices. Chapel democracy fused with chapel community, for one of the great things about the sect was that it provided a working-class community both with its own cohesion and scale of values in which the poor could outdo the rich – poverty became a symptom of grace, austerity of virtue, moral rigour contrasted with the laxity of the reprobate, and a new spiritual status system replaced that of the secular world – and with the community institutions that were otherwise almost totally lacking.[173]

Thompson, too, was well aware of the plebeian nature of the revivalist sects:

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[171] Gilbert, op. cit., p. 390.

[172] Obelkevich, paints a picture of '…a religious movement which encouraged self-realisation and cultural enrichment rather than negation and spiritual impoverishment.' Revivals in this view gave the converted '…more pleasure than pain; more pardon than guilt, more liberation than repression.' However, as John Walsh points out, '…it must be remembered that Thompson deals mainly with an earlier and harsher period [than Obelkevich] and with Methodism in an industrial context.' (John Walsh, 'Review of James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society, South Lindsey 1825-1875*, (1976) Oxford: Clarendon Press', *History Workshop Journal*, No. 5, Spring 1978, p. 207).

[173] Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, op. cit., p. 132.

> To read the biography of Bunting beside that of Hugh Bourne…is to pass between two different worlds…Bourne and Clowes were *of* the working people…the Primitives still lived in the world of hardship and persecution of Wesleyanism's origin. We can hardly discuss the two churches in the same terms. The preaching of the Primitives was as hard as the lives of their congregations…this was not preached *at*, but *by*, the poor…these sects contributed far more directly to the later history of trade unionism and political Radicalism than the orthodox Connexion.[174]

Viewed in this context, the revivalists of 1821 had much to offer beyond spiritual solace for the despairing of the coalfield. It is plausible that the local population felt a certain amount of affinity and solidarity with the new denominations. Not only were the men and women who represented the Primitives and the Revivalists not tainted by too close an association with the landed elite or the employers, but some of them had been subjected to persecution by the same authorities that had crushed the colliers and ironworkers. The most notable example is James Bonsor, who, along with Thomas Brownsword, was imprisoned and fined on a number of occasions while attempting to evangelise the Black Country in 1820. In Werner's view, such '[h]arassment simply worked to popularise the Primitive Methodist cause…confrontations with authority "turned out to the furtherance of the gospel and the enlargement of the circuit."'[175] It seems reasonable to suggest that Bonsor's reputation as a man of principle, prepared to stand up to the persecution of magistrates and judges, preceded him when he entered the east Shropshire coalfield in 1821; and that it possibly created a common bond between him and his proletarian listeners.

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[174] Thompson, The Making…, op. cit., p. 436.

[175] Julia Stewart Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History*, (1984) Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, p. 119.

On whole, the chronology of events appears to weigh in Trinder's favour. While we are, at present, not in a position to give a week by week account of the revival's course, or name the individuals involved, Trinder has taken us beyond Thompson's 'years' and 'counties' of revivalism. It seems clear that the revival took place after the workers' defeat of 1821, and that this was the most significant 'sombre or dramatic event' in the coalfield at that time.[176] Although, in many ways, Trinder's insight remains one based upon 'general and individualistic impressions,' and lacks the kind of detailed statistical weight contained in other studies, such as Baxter's, it remains the most compelling and thorough attempt to understand revivalism in a Shropshire context.[177] While the thesis cannot, at present, be proven with hard positive evidence in its favour, it may be possible to reinforce – or undermine – it through an examination of alternative theories and insights into the revival phenomenon including some of those discussed in chapter four. This will be attempted in the following chapter.

[176] Thompson, The Making…, op. cit., p. 919.
[177] Hempton, op. cit., p. 75.

Chapter 6.

Alternatives?

Historians have, over the past forty years, posited a number of alternative hypotheses to that of Thompson to explain the growth of Methodism in the early nineteenth century, and the role of revivalism in that growth. Some of those alternatives will now be examined with reference to the east Shropshire revival of 1821-22.

The different possibilities can roughly be divided into two categories: endogenous and exogenous factors. Endogenous factors, by definition, refer to the suggestion that revivals were generated from *within* the pre-existing (therefore Wesleyan) Methodist societies in the locality; while among the exogenous factors are the expansion of the new revivalist sects; in particular, the skill of newly arrived itinerant preachers at whipping up spiritual frenzy; the possible stimulation of revival as the result of some traumatic natural or man-made disaster, such as disease or mining accident; and, of course, the already discussed Thompson thesis, citing the demoralising effects of political or, more accurately, economic defeat.

Another factor that must be taken into consideration is the wider social and political nature of Methodism. While it is clearly beyond the scope of this study to analyse this intractable question in the depth it deserves, an attempt will be made to ascertain whether the different Methodist dominations exerted a conservative or a liberating influence on the workers of the coalfield.

There appears little evidence to suggest that the revival of 1821-22 was the result of some sort of internal revivalist dynamic emanating from within existing Methodist societies in the coalfield. There had been a tradition of 'home grown' revivals in the previous decade, a pattern which reappeared in the 1830s and 1840s, with congregations exploding into revivals '[l]ike barrels of gunpowder on a burning ship…' and sending sparks into their immediate neighbours' societies.[178] Thompson also accepted that revivals '…may be periodic[ally] self-induced…following an internal generational pattern, as successive cohorts of the young are brought to an emotional commitment to the church of their parents.'[179] None of these notions of endogenous causation appear convincing in this case, however, and it is necessary to turn our attention back to external factors.

One ostensibly exogenous explanation of the revival phenomenon must be dealt with briefly. That is the view, still firmly held by the many members of thriving evangelical movements around the world today, that revivalism is a genuine manifestation of 'divine intervention'. Little can be said of this view in a study that claims to be empirically based. It is not one that is shared by the current writer. However, like all belief systems that rely on faith rather than fact to sustain them, it cannot be categorically refuted. Instead, it is necessary to turn to other, more mundane and earthly, explanations that can at least be analysed in some concrete manner; although, as with the notion of spiritual causation, it is highly unlikely that even those revival theories that focus on material and human agency can be *emphatically* endorsed or dismissed.

One possible exogenous cause of the east Shropshire revival, which potentially highlights a weakness in the Thompson thesis, is the notion that it was primarily

[178] Trinder, (Second Edition), op. cit., p. 170.
[179] Thompson, loc. cit.

triggered by the activities of newly arrived Ranter and Revivalist missionaries, along with the reinvigorated attitude of Wesleyans who, '…following the guidelines on pastoral work laid down at Liverpool, engaged in much the same activities as the Primitive Methodists and for much the same class of people.'[180] Robert Colls has criticised the view that mass conversions simply resulted from the activities of zealous itinerants impacting on the feeble minds of an uneducated and credulous populace. He takes issue with Southey's assertion that:

> A powerful doctrine preached with passionate sincerity, with fervid zeal, and with vehement eloquence, produced a powerful effect on weak minds, ardent feelings, and disordered fancies.[181]

Against this, Colls argues that while '…preachers could be a force for explanation, and what they had to say did at times clearly appeal…[revivals]…could burst upon…[them]…in an unexpected way, and, although as experienced revivalists they sought to exploit them when they began, it was usually from one step behind.[182]

This appears to be true of east Shropshire, too. Lenton has indicated that the religious revival was already underway when Sanders, Sugden and Bonsor entered the coalfield.[183] This suggests that rather than precipitating the revivalist fervour, the missionaries arrived to develop it and give it organisational form. This, circumstantially at least, seems evident from the fact that most of the written reports of preachers like Bonsor and Bourne mentioned in the previous chapter refer to events which occurred twelve months after the revival began; although, admittedly, it could

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[180] Werner, op. cit., p. 120.
[181] R. Southey, *The Life of Wesley and the Rise and Progress of Methodism*, (1820) London, Vol. I, p. 246, Quoted in Colls, op. cit., p. 163.
[182] Ibid., p. 164.
[183] J. H. Lenton, op. cit., p. 33. See also *VCH* II, op. cit., p. 14.

just as plausibly be suggested that it had taken twelve months for the efforts of the itinerants to bear fruit among a notoriously insular population. This is not the general impression one gets, however, from tone of the itinerants' writings.

A potential flaw in the notion that the Shropshire events began independently of the efforts of the missionaries is the possibility that the expansion of Primitive Methodism into the east Shropshire coalfield was merely a result of the logical extension of Ranter activity into a district in relatively close geographical proximity to the Black Country, where the Connexion was experiencing notable growth contemporaneously. As Julia Werner has pointed out, during 'the early spring of…[1819]…Sampson Turner…launched a missionary drive into the populous Black Country.'[184] This revival generated conversions that led to the setting up of the Darlaston Primitive Methodist circuit, which grew from nothing to 1,551 members between 1819 and 1823. Growth was also experienced by the Wesleyan Connexion, which saw the membership of its five Black Country circuits grow from 4,184 to 5,910 during the same period.[185] There are clearly parallels between the Shropshire and Black Country revivals, not least its cross-denominational character. What is not so clear, however, is the actual process of causation.

As the Hammonds have shown, the dispute in the east Shropshire iron industry that culminated in 'Cinderloo' was just one component of a much larger struggle against the iniquities of the truck system and the vicissitudes of the free market that centred on the Black Country in the early 1820s.[186] The whole region was suffering from the same symptoms of 'hardships caused by stagnation of trade along with rioting sparked by attempts to lower wages in the collieries…'[187] Interestingly, Black Country

[184] Werner, op. cit., p. 118.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Hammonds, *The Town Labourer*…, loc. cit.
[187] Werner, loc. cit.

Wesleyans saw these conditions as conducive to a *decline* in Methodist fortunes, citing 'bad trade [and] infidel reformers' as the cause. In reality, as Werner states, 'the times were propitious for conversions to Methodism.'[188] Is it possible that the spread of Ranterism into the Black Country, rather than undermining the Thompson thesis with a picture of the gradual, linear, geographical spread of Methodism, actually lends circumstantial evidence in support of it? The issue of timing here is crucial. The Wesleyans' letters bemoaning the prospects for Methodism and alluding to the influence of political reformers were all written *before* the defeat of the workers in 1821.[189] Were workers at this point 'oscillating' towards temporal solutions, whether political or economic, only to be thrown into the arms of the Primitive missionaries, and the already established Wesleyans, in the wake of defeat and repression? Clearly, this speculative hypothesis requires further investigation. However, it suggests that the growth of Methodism in the West Midlands was not simply the result of the '…streaming …[of]…the inspired words of the preachers into the simple mind of the crowd.'[190] Combined with Lenton's previously mentioned suggestion that the Primitive itinerants arrived in Oakengates in response to a *pre-existing* revival in the coalfield – and Colls' more general critique of the notion – this evidence tends to point away from explanations of the east Shropshire revival based solely on the idea of Methodist pro-activity.

In her brief description of Primitive Methodism in the Black Country, Werner suggests that both 'Wesleyans and Primitives benefited from the fact that the Church of England had failed to provide adequately for the vastly increased population in the

[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid., (endnote no. 3), p. 213.
[190] Colls, op. cit., p. 163.

region.'[191] Once again, developments in east Shropshire ran closely parallel. In Trinder's estimation:

> The pattern of settlement in the coalfield created substantial difficulties for a church based on the territorial parish. Mining and iron-making villages grew up with no regard for established ecclesiastical boundaries and remote from parish churches…The obstacles to the creation of parishes or even to the construction of new chapels-of-ease within existing parishes were formidable in the eighteenth century.[192]

However, this did not simply create a vacuum to be filled by the revivalist sects as R. Currie appears to suggest.[193] People did not, it appears, become Ranters simply because they were in the locality while the established church was not, though, of course, that obviously produced a state of affairs advantageous to Methodist growth.[194] As has already been stressed in chapter five, other factors may have turned Shropshire workers against the Church of England as much as its lack of coverage.

It is important not to underestimate or play down the importance of the revivalist itinerants and their locally based Wesleyan counterparts in encouraging, sustaining and giving permanent organisational form to the upsurge in religious enthusiasm in 1821-22. While they did not, it seems, generate the spark that ignited the revivalist frenzy, they certainly added fuel to the fire. The zeal of the Winfieldite preachers has already been referred to; as has that of Primitives, like James Bonsor, who was repeatedly imprisoned and fined for his commitment to the missionary cause. Personal

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[191] Werner, op. cit., p. 119.
[192] Trinder, op. cit
[193] R. Currie, 'A Micro-Theory of Methodist Growth', *Proceedings of the Wesleyan Historical Society*, 36, 1967, p. 69.
[194] H. McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth Century Britain*, (1984) Basingstoke: Macmillan, p. 22.

sacrifice and evangelical zeal are also apparent in the reports of John Ride, who, on hearing of the death of his youngest child, redoubled his efforts on behalf of the Lord:

> Monday, February 16, 1824. This day I received a letter from home, informing me that my youngest child was dead. It rather pained my mind at first; but I was enabled to say, 'The will of the Lord be done.' This evening, visited a sick person at Oaken Gates; she was a backslider, and had been for many years. When I first went in, she appeared in a careless state. I began to exhort her to get ready for heaven, and faith began to increase in my soul. She was soon made sensible of the hardness of her heart and a need of salvation. We all engaged in prayer, and the power of the Lord came down, and before we left the house, the Lord set her soul at perfect liberty. Praise God for ever. I visited her again the next day, and she longed to be dissolved and be with Christ. This night I spoke at Coal Pit Bank; it was a precious time to my soul and the people seemed much blessed.[195]

The issue of the nearness of death has been put forward as a possible generating input to the 'powerful psychic swell' of religious revival, particularly in coalfield settings.[196] This, too, is an area of controversy. Colls' critique of the view that itinerant preachers precipitated revivals is extended to '…the more recent idea which claims that the sweeping emotional doctrines of the preachers somehow "fitted" the brutal existence of the Poor, an existence which had to find an answer for a life of paradox and injustice.'[197] On this issue, Colls' dismissive tone is less convincing. Hobsbawm long ago suggested that:

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[195] *Primitive Methodist Magazine* (June 1824), pp. 135. For a discussion of Methodist attitudes to death bed conversions, see a. Gregory Schneider, 'The Ritual of Happy Dying among Early American Methodists', *Church History*, 56, 1987, pp. 348-363.
[196] Colls, op. cit., p. 148.
[197] Ibid., p. 164.

> …life was, for the working class, miserable, poor, nasty, brutish, short and above all insecure, and the religions they chose for themselves mirrored their situation. Their worship was above all fervent…Visions of splendour, of judgement and of hellfire for the evil men filled those who needed support to bear the burden of their suffering, and the emotional orgies of hellfire preaching, revivals and similar occasions brought diversion into their lives.[198]

In the case of east Shropshire, Trinder also treats the idea with more sympathy. Thus, he states that revivals were:

> …phenomena which appear to have owed as much to their origins in vernacular culture and the local environment as to denominational sources. It was probably because the Methodist churches tolerated and sometimes encouraged revivalism that they fulfilled so effectively the emotional needs of those accustomed to working in danger and under the threat of death.[199]

These dangers were very real indeed; both in the iron-making process proper and the extractive industries that provided its raw materials. John Fletcher vividly described the perils of working in Shropshire mines in his *Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense* of 1772:

> They take their leave of the light and the sun, and suspended by a rope are let down many fathoms perpendicularly towards the centre of the globe…the murderer's cell is a palace in comparison of the black spot to which they repair…In these low and dreary vaults, all the elements seem combined against them. Destructive damps, and

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[198] E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, op. cit., p. 131.
[199] Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, (Third Edition), op. cit., p. 183.

> clouds of noxious dust infect the air they breathe. Sometimes water incessantly distils on their naked bodies; or bursting upon them in streams, drowns them and deluges their work. At other times pieces of detached rocks crush them to death; or the earth, breaking in upon them, buries them alive. And frequently sulphurous vapours, kindled in an instant by the light of their candles, form subterraneous thunder and lightning. What a dreadful phenomenon! How impetuous is the blast! How fierce the rolling flames! How violent and fatal the explosion![200]

Such incidents were a relatively common feature of the coalfield. Trinder has shown that between '1801 and 1819 the Quarter Sessions records list 355 deaths from mining accidents in east Shropshire, an average of 18.7 per year, which represents a considerable increase in the accident rate over earl[ier] periods, even allowing for inconsistent recording before 1800.'[201] Could it be that a major mining disaster in the district was a factor in pushing colliers and their families into the arms of the revivalists? Certainly, multiple deaths in such accidents were 'occasions for vast demonstrations of public grief,' as when one, and possibly two, thousand mourners attended the funeral of three young men killed in an explosion at Blists Hill in 1804.[202] Trinder states that the 'nearness of death might well explain the particular form of emotional revivalism found in the churches of the district;'[203] and he goes on to cite the example of a localised revival at the Nabb, near St. George's in 1835 which was probably precipitated by the accidental death of a Wesleyan collier.[204] By contrast, however, 'the whole coalfield was swept with religious hysteria from the

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[200] Quoted in B. Trinder, *John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley during the Industrial Revolution*, (n.d.) Ironbridge: Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, p. 6.
[201] Trinder, *Industrial Revolution*, (Second Edition), op. cit., p. 211.
[202] Ibid., p. 212.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid., p. 170.

spring of 1821 to the summer of 1822.'[205] There do not appear to have been any major mining explosions in the years immediately preceding that revival. Indeed, there were *never* any pit disasters in east Shropshire on the scale of those in the Northern coalfield that occasionally led to 'sudden responses to the prophesy.'[206]

Similarly, disease has been posited as a factor in stimulating spiritual fervour, with cholera, in particular, seen as underwriting 'the preachers' words with a capricious, fetid, death.'[207] Colls, Jaffe and Walker all point to outbreaks of cholera as having a role in colliers' and other workers' readiness to embrace revivalism.[208] Such an argument, it seems, cannot be sustained in the east Shropshire context, however. While the working poor of the coalfield quite possibly experienced 'high normal instances of death by disease…' in common with their northern counterparts, '…most observers [of the Shropshire coalfield] found that living conditions in the area as a whole were favourable compared with those of large towns.'[209] Cholera does not appear to have been a major problem in the county before the epidemic of 1832; though smallpox, scrofula, typhus and scarletina appear to have been relatively common in the coalfield before the middle of the nineteenth century.[210]

While there appears to be no conclusive proof that mining disasters or epidemic disease were major factors in provoking the revival of 1821-22, the generally precarious existence of the east Shropshire working classes and their tenuous grip on life were surely conducive to an acute awareness of one's own mortality and the closeness of the grave. For the colliers and ironworkers of Dawley and Wrockwardine

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[205] Ibid., pp. 170-171.
[206] Colls, op. cit., p. 166.
[207] Ibid., p. 152.
[208] Ibid., pp. 152-154, p. 166; Jaffe, op. cit., pp. 32.34; R. B. Walker, 'The Growth of Wesleyan Methodism in Victorian England and Wales', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 24, No. 3, July 1973, pp.270-271.
[209] Colls, ibid., p. 166; Trinder, op. cit., p. 196.
[210] Trinder, ibid.

Wood the question of one's place in the after-life would have been far more pressing and immediate than can be easily imagined by those of us enjoying relatively long and comfortable lives. This endemic perception of closeness to death and danger was surely heightened in the minds of workers and their families in the aftermath of the strike of 1821. With William Bird and Thomas Gittins brutally cut down by Yeomanry bullets, and Thomas Palin swinging from a gibbet outside Shrewsbury Gaol, as a frightful example to all of the perils of trying to improve their lives by collective action, it should not be surprising that the local population should turn in *despair* to the comforting idea that their suffering might be relieved in the next world:

> …sweetly sleep[ing] in Jesus having laid their bodies down 'in sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection unto eternal life…'[211]

Another aspect of Methodism that possibly 'fitted' with the psyche of the coalfield community is an alleged fatalistic, possibly millenarian strand that was easily absorbed into a culture of superstition and folklore. In this respect, Professor Kent has questioned Thompson's use of the word 'chiliasm', suggesting that such a view was '…wide of the mark…when one of the distinguishing features of the Wesleyan tradition…was the absence of that obsession with eschatology and Adventism so typical of Pietism in general and fringe Protestantism in particular.'[212] Evidence from east Shropshire, however, appears to contradict Kent's view, possibly lending weight to that of Thompson. John Fletcher, the vicar of Madeley, who had been Wesley's choice for successor as leader of his connexion, shared the founder's Arminianism in controversies with Calvinists; and he '…did not encourage meetings of excessive size,

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[211] B. B., loc. cit.

[212] Kent, *Unacceptable Face*…op. cit., p. 115.

length or sentimentality, and was not a revivalist in this sense.'[213] However, he was not totally averse to preaching to huge crowds in the open air, nor to seeing portentous signs in natural phenomena, as when he delivered a sermon on the site of the Buildwas landslip that caused the river Severn to alter its course in 1773.[214] Fletcher's wife – and successor as spiritual leader of Madeley's Wesleyans – Mary, commented on the unfortunate death of a young woman pit bank worker in 1805 by saying that '[t]his and some other things of the same kind which have lately occurred, seem to have brought eternity very near.'[215] As Trinder states, periods of '…political stress brought to the surface particularly vivid fears among the Methodists.'[216] He goes on to tell of an incident later in the century when a Methodist correspondent of Mary Tooth '…claimed to have found in John Wesley's "Notes upon the New Testament" prophesies that the year 1832 was fixed upon as the time that the Beast would ascend out of the bottomless pit and that the year 36 would be the time of the final overthrow.'[217] In Julia Werner's opinion:

> [t]he rhetoric of Methodist revivalism was often freighted with apocalyptic imagery, and the movement gained impact from the millenarian climate of the day. Although revivalism and millenarianism sometimes overlapped, the two were not synonymous. They flourished concurrently in response to the dislocations of the period, and the

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[213] Trinder, op. cit., p. 177.

[214] J. Fletcher, *A Dreadful Phenomenon Described and Improved: being a particular account of the sudden stoppage of the river Severn, and of the terrible desolation that happened…on Thursday morning, May the 27th, 1773: and the substance of a sermon preached the next day, on the ruins, to a vast concourse of spectators*, (1786) London: J. Paramore. According to Trinder, Fletcher used '…the incident to draw his listeners' attention to the ways in which they conducted their lives and to the need to be prepared for death, which might come as speedily and unexpectedly as the landslip' (B. Trinder, *John Fletcher…*, op. cit., p. 12).

[215] Extract from the diary of Mary Fletcher, 23rd February 1805, from *Hannah Moore, The Life of Mary Fletcher*, (1817) (Cited in B. Trinder, *Shropshire Pit Girls Study Pack*, (n. d.) Coalbrookdale: Ironbridge Institute Library).

[216] Trinder, Industrial Revolution…(Second edition), p. 165.

[217] M. Grigson to Mary Tooth, 30th May 1832, quoted in Trinder, ibid.

adherents of both yearned for divine salvation from the snares and hazards of earthly existence.[218]

Admittedly, Werner is referring specifically to the 1790s though her comments appear apposite for our period too, as does her highlighting of the 'apocalyptic echoes in Bourne's *Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs* published in 1809.'[219]

The sad episode of the bereavement suffered by John Ride referred to above, and his zealous response to that personal tragedy, brings to light an aspect of Methodism which might plausibly be cited as evidence that it was fundamentally an oppressive religion, torturing poor working people during the few remaining hours of their miserable lives. Along with their relentless campaigning against excessive drinking, blood sports, and far less obnoxious pastimes practiced at wakes and fairs, and, of course, the 'sins of the flesh', the continuous exhortations against dying sinners and backsliders lend weight to Thompson's portrayal of Methodism, even in its ostensibly less conservative Primitive guise, as a reactionary phenomenon. While there is plenty of condemnation of the 'evil' activities of the lower orders, there is little sense of the same tone expressed in respect of the poverty and inequality that produced such an allegedly degenerate lifestyle. In many ways the Methodists appear, from a twenty-first century vantage point, to be heaping insult upon injury. If this were entirely so, however, why were so many black grimy faces streaked white with religiously inspired tears in the east Shropshire coalfield during 1821-22? Why did thousands gather on cinder hills and pit banks to listen to Methodist preachers, who offered nothing material in return for their attention? The answer is clearly complex and difficult to fathom. For Thompson, allegedly, Methodism was indeed a conservative

[218] Werner, op. cit. pp. 30-31.
[219] Ibid., p. 31.

movement, whose influence was intended, Halévy style, to bind the working class to their masters and betters, thus deflecting their energies away from radical, revolutionary solutions to their problems. Critics of the Halévy thesis, including Thompson's fellow Marxist, Eric Hobsbawm, have suggested that, in fact, Methodism grew *in tandem* with working class consciousness and self-organisation. Each fed into the other. This is emphasised by Rule and others who suggest that Methodist influence upon the working class was far from detrimental: 'As class leaders as well as local preachers, persons of humble birth had the opportunity to play a responsible role in their communities. Confidence gained and abilities thus discovered, for example in organizing or in public speaking, could be harnessed for wider purposes.'[220] Further, it is implicit in Gilbert's work that the colliers, ironworkers, immigrant mill-hands, and landless farm labourers who flocked to their societies across the Midlands and the North in the early nineteenth century exerted reciprocal levels of influence upon the sects they joined, which could potentially undercut the conservatism of connexional leaderships:

> …where their commitment is more than perfunctory the members of any voluntary association inevitably exercise a powerful influence on the character of the associational culture…If sufficiently determined…a minister generally could impose his will on a local society in a direct confrontation; in absentia, however, he could virtually be ignored. The…ministers were itinerants: while they came and went the chapel communities persisted.[221]

[220] J. Rule, *Albion's. People: English Society, 1714-1815,* (1992), London: Longman, p. 153. Quoted in Dean G. Blevins, 'Practicing the New Creation: Wesley.s Eschatalogical Community Formed by the Means of Grace', pp. 7-8, accessed at http://www.oxford-institute.org/pdfs/WorkingGroup2/Pap2Blevins72802.pdf on 4th May 2004.

[221] Gilbert, op. cit., pp. 384-385.

In Colls' words, 'any revival theory which starts from the idea of Methodism's effect on the Poor is unbalanced because it underestimates the Poor's effect on Methodism…'[222] In the east Shropshire context, a contradictory picture emerges.

The attractions of Methodism as a semi-democratic movement that allowed scope for working people to develop and to assert their independence has already been discussed as a qualifying factor for the Thompson/Trinder thesis. However, there is plenty of evidence in the history of early Shropshire Methodism stressing its inherent social and political conservatism. Trinder has shown that despite his clear reputation for compassion and selfless acts of charity, John Fletcher was '…by nature a patrician and readily took his place at times of crisis with ironmasters and magistrates.'[223] Mary Tooth is characterised as obtaining consolation '…from accounts of the discomfiture of the wicked, like a description of the death of Tom Paine carefully preserved among…[her]…papers.'[224] Just like the Primitive and Revivalist preachers who entered Oakengates and Dawley in 1821, Fletcher focused his ire on the outward *symptoms* of the malady that plagued the coalfield rather than the underlying ailment of class inequality. Fletcher 'saw as his mission the combating of the busy-ness and sin which he regarded as particular features of industrial society; bad language, drunkenness, misuse of time, Sabbath-breaking, self-indulgent recreation, lack of respect for humanity and the flouting of lawful authority.'[225]

Intimately related to this is the theme of resignation to the pain and injustice of the temporal world which runs through Methodism in all its manifestations. This point is made in a letter of Mary Fletcher's from 1807 that was approvingly reprinted in the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* of June 1824:

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[222] Colls, op. cit., pp. 164-165.
[223]Trinder, *Industrial Revolution…*, (Third Edition), p.182.
[224] Trinder, *Industrial Revolution…*, (Second Edition), p.165.
[225] Trinder, (Third Edition), p. 176.

> The one thing our Lord aims at in all our many trials is, to bring us perfectly to lose our wills in his: therefore if you strive by acts of resignation, to lie as clay before the potter, your soul shall grow as the Lily, and cast out its roots as Lebanon. It is true your bodily sufferings may keep you sometimes from feeling that degree of joy which some may feel who have less faith and love: but you must observe, our part is to believe, and God's part is to give the joy of believing, when, and as, he sees good. Do not measure your state of *grace* by your degree of *joy*, but by a power to hang on the word of the Lord, with a continual cry in your heart, Thy will be done.[226]

Resignation and surrender appear as the enduring messages that Methodism, in all its permutations, passed into the psyche of the working classes of early nineteenth century England. All in all, this tends to lend weight to Thompson's interpretation of Methodism's social role, and appears to sit relatively easily with his notion of the 'chiliasm of despair'.[227] Even if one accepts the important insights into the positive role played by Primitive Methodism in generating 'self-discipline and…resistance to deference…from which the next generation of …radicals and trade unionists would arise…' this 'eventuation' should not be used to disregard the essentially passive other-worldliness of Methodism.[228]

This brief look at alternative hypotheses shows the problematic nature of searching for one hold-all theory of Methodist revivalism. None of the theories can stand alone in contradiction of the Thompson/Trinder thesis that holds responsible the temporal defeat at Cinderloo. However, by the same token, Trinder, more than anyone, has

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[226] M. Fletcher, 'Letter to Mrs. Collet, of St. Erme, Cornwall, 18th March 1807', *Primitive Methodist Magazine* (June 1824), p. 136.

[227] Perhaps the phrase 'surrender to providence' would be more appropriate as it removes the association with millenarianism that Kent, Currie and Hartwell find so misplaced in studies of Methodism (Kent, loc. cit.; R. Currie and R. M. Hartwell, 'The Making of the English Working Class?', *Economic History Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1966, p. 640).

[228] Thompson, op. cit., pp.921-922.

shown the wider factors influencing the religious allegiances and predisposition to revivalism of the working classes in the district. This theme of complexity and contradiction will now be explored in an attempt to draw some conclusions from the present study.

Conclusion.

We have seen that a multitude of sometimes contradictory, sometimes complementary, factors may have induced thousands of working people in east Shropshire to turn to Methodism in 1821-22. None of the hypotheses explored above can stand alone as an explanation for the revival. Each has its merits and each possesses some flaw. Every individual might possibly have had a different motivation for his or her actions. This is rarely the case in reality, however. Even in our atomised modern day society, very few individuals are completely isolated. All human beings are subjected to the opinions and prejudices of their fellows, as well as what they see with their eyes and feel in their belly. Workers in east Shropshire in the period under discussion lived as a *community*; and, as such, developments such as religious revivals must be seen as emanating from a community response to certain stimuli.

In weighing up the varying assessments of the stimuli to which they were subjected in the period immediately before the revival of 1821-22, it has to be acknowledged that a coalescing of various factors contributed to the fervour of the alleged spiritual rebirth in the district. It seems that primacy, however, should be given to Trinder's contention that '[i]t would be absurd to pretend that every revival in nineteenth century Shropshire represented an expression of working-class despair at the failures of political agitation, but equally absurd to maintain that in 1821-22 political disappointment and the great tide of popular emotion represented by the revival were not closely linked.'[229] The community of colliers and ironworkers that are the subject of this study were, arguably, going through a period of transition in which the horizontal structure of society was both simplifying and solidifying. The revival of

[229] Trinder, ibid.

1821-22 was a working-class response to economic defeat and persecution. For some it may have been an act of defiance, for others an act of despair; most likely, it was a mixture of both. It has to be seen in the context of a relatively isolated, largely uneducated community, with little tradition of politically inspired labour organisation. When faced with the trauma of defeat, the psychic energies unleashed – rage, anger, and confusion – were channelled into the emotional exuberance of spiritual revivalism by the undoubtedly well meaning activists of the Ranting sects. Whether this represented the 'chiliasm of despair', the operation of the Halévy thesis, or Gilbert's 'safety valve', is not clear, though it seems plausible that the Cinderhill riots and the revival were intimately connected in some way in the minds of local people.

One of the most striking conclusions that can be reached from this brief exploration of revivalism and the working class in Shropshire is the thoroughly problematic nature of taking a simplistic or teleological approach to the study of history. No causative factor, or theory of revivalism, has been put forward in the previous chapters that can claim to be above criticism. Instead, the empirical evidence that remains of the events surrounding the Cinderhill Riots and the subsequent revival present historians with that familiar messy picture of complexity and contradiction. This can be extended to the wider question of the general relationship between Methodism and the working class in England in the nineteenth century. One of the most pervasive features of that relationship is the thorough *ambiguity* of Methodism's social role, a fact recognised by many of the historians who have attempted to understand the subject:

> …words such as 'paradoxical,' 'ambiguous,' 'contradictory,' and two-sided' abound in the literature of British working-class Methodism. Perhaps in no other field are

> otherwise confident men and women so willing to yield before a seemingly intractable problem.[230]

This feature has intensified rather than abated the more historians analyse Methodism in the localities. As Hempton points out, '...[a]n increase in knowledge has inevitably led to an increase in complexity;' and he goes on to quote Raphael Samuel approvingly, stating that '[t]here was after all not one Methodism, but "many Methodisms in many places at many times."'[231]

Hopefully, the contradictory social and political character of Methodism in Shropshire has been highlighted in the previous chapters. One of the ironies of the historiography of revivalism is that those most often accused of taking a teleological approach – Marxists, like Thompson and Hobsbawm – are, it seems, the most trenchant in emphasising the problematical nature of research into these obscure events and the possibly unfathomable motivations of the working poor of the early nineteenth century. Hopefully, this too has been emphasised by this study. If not, a few more words from Thompson might reinforce the point. Taking issue with Himmelfarb's conspiracy theorising regarding a possible Marxist 'united front' between Thompson and Hobsbawm intended to mute the terms of their disagreements over the nature of Methodism, he suggests that:

> There may, however, be a more simple reason than ideological conspiracy for our caution: we are both aware that the evidence is inconclusive. Revivalism is not a phenomenon which admits of a single hold-all explanation. Given the initial propensity to instability, it may be set in motion by any sombre or dramatic event – a

[230] Jaffe, op. cit., p. 25.
[231] Hempton, op. cit., p. 11.

> Lisbon earthquake, plague, famine, national crisis, war, a local pit disaster, or (in a village) the sudden death of an individual. It may be induced by missionary evangelism from outside, or, within a church, there may be periodic self-induced revivals…we are dealing with relationships – and psychic disturbances – so obscure that we may never be able to move beyond hypotheses…My thesis was never offered for universal, instant application.[232]

Admittedly, Thompson was stung into making these careful and qualifying comments about the tentative nature of his hypotheses regarding Methodism by the sharpness of the response to his notion of the 'chiliasm of despair'; and the work of Gilbert and many others have tended to highlight the fact that he may have bent the stick a little too far in his portrayal of the negative side of Methodism. None of this, however, takes away from the fact that in the Shropshire context, there is as much to be said for the Thompson thesis as there is to be said against it. Trinder, too, is careful to qualify his hypothesis, and his conclusions are not easy to refute. He acknowledges the wider cultural, societal and denominational factors which provided fertile ground for the tumultuous revival of 1821-22. For instance, comparing the attractions of plebeian blood-sports and fervent revivalism to the workers of the coalfield, he suggests that they were:

> …in a sense not mutually exclusive but complementary. They were both aspects of an essentially violent popular culture, in which men and children were accustomed to seeing sudden and painful deaths in the pits, in which riots were often the only means of industrial bargaining. When children no longer went into the pits before the age of 10, when the double shifts at blast furnaces were discontinued, when mining

[232] Thompson, The making, op. cit., pp. 919-921.

> accidents became less frequent, so violent recreation and violent religion declined together.'[233]

Trinder thus contextualises 'violent' revivalism, like that of 1821-22, in much the same way as Thompson, who sees his thesis as being mainly useful during a volatile 'middle period' between the 'years of Wesley's own pastorate…and the sober years of ascending respectability and social status…'[234] Trinder's and Thompson's views are also suggestive of a wider application of this distinct periodisation. Wesley's life coincided with a time when paternalism and deference still held sway through much of the country, while the period of Methodism's rise to respectability roughly coincides with rises in living standards and the development of a primarily economistic trade union movement, and the associated 'age of improvement'. Ranterism was a feature of the *intervening* years, when millennial fears and temporal uncertainties prevailed; years when Hobsbawm's 'dual revolution' was at its fullest intensity. Cinderloo was one tiny facet of these turbulent decades. Yet, embodied in these obscure Shropshire riots, and the revival that appears to have been their offspring, were all the irrational and explosive – as well as complex and contradictory – characteristics of the period. While we will never know with certainty what motivated individual colliers and their families from Madeley, Dawley, Oakengates and Wrockwardine Wood, to open their arms, homes, and hearts to Primitive and Revivalist missionaries, we can be reasonably sure that their reasons were unlikely to have been mundane, and that the memory of Cinderloo was fresh enough in their memories to have had at least some influence.

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[233] Trinder, op. cit., p. 171.
[234] Thompson, op. cit., pp. 919-920.

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