

MINISTERS

The Rev. W.R.Dent presided at the first quarterly meeting of the new circuit on Sept. 18th 1899. Circuit officers had been appointed previously, among them a secretary for Education and Temperance and the treasurer of the Aged Ministers Fund- a new title as it was formerly known as the Worn Out Ministers Fund. The two circuit ministers then embarked on their task of laying the foundations of the Sutton Park circuit.

At the time ministers were invited to the circuit for one year, the invitation being renewed yearly (if desirable) until the minister departed at the end of the third year. John Wesley had laid down this period in his Deed of Declaration of 1784 and it was not to be altered until 1917 when wartime exigencies required an extension of the period. But in this circuit it was not until 1930 that ministers began to serve more than three years.

Changing ministers was even more expensive then than it is now, as at the time outgoing ministers were entitled to one third of a quarter's extra pay. The first time that this occurred in the circuit the senior circuit steward generously defrayed the extra expense.

Besides conducting worship (dealt with elsewhere) pastoral work has been and still is a major part of a minister's life. From visits made on horseback, carriage or bicycle, but often on foot, the ministers lot has been made much easier by the advent of the motor-cycle or car. Arrangements were made in the 1950's for ministers to have the use of a car if they wished, but as late as 1960 the Superintendent could be seen regularly on his bicycle in Sutton. And even today there is a specified travel allowance for bicycle journeys.

Administrative duties too, occupied much of the minister's time, moreso prior to 1945. Property, that vital part of Methodist life, required constant supervision. Superintendents may act as insurance agents for the circuit's property cover. In recent years restructuring removed some of these duties when lay chairmen and committees undertook property and finance work. Formerly there were always Chapel Stewards and treasurers to rely on, but the minister was expected to

lead in these matters, even to conducting negotiations with contractors and public bodies.

Prior to 1975 the minister was often faced with the task of holding together the often opposing factions of trustees and leaders; or if all was well in that respect it was probably the Youth organisations that caused him a problem. The rise and fall of apparently successful youth clubs over a few years must have been somewhat disheartening; so much depended on the youth leader and the prevailing youth culture. Was it the "thing" to go to this club or that? The minister of the 1960's onwards faced mounting problems with youth work as the secularisation of sundays and ever widening opportunities for sport and leisure sharply reduced the time that young people were prepared to spend on church premises.

But leaving aside the minister's professional life - how have other aspects of the minister changed since 1899? In that year, a minister might wear a black frock coat, with black shirt front and a high white starched collar. In the 1930's he would be wearing a black three piece suit, black shirt and a high clerical collar. More daring ministers and the better-off ones would have a summer suit of dark grey; but whenever he was outside his manse he would be instantly recognisable by his dress. The collar began to be reduced in height in the sixties and a fashionable minister might wear a quite narrow clerical collar. Then, suddenly, it seemed this collar was replaced by an ordinary (but black or grey) shirt collar, but with a white patch where other men wore a tie. The familiar clerical collar has not disappeared of course, but is reserved for more formal occasions.

Then in the 1980's a major change took place in minister's dress; they began to appear at meetings in ordinary lounge suits and then in casual clothes. It is difficult to convey today the mild surprise that members of the congregation experienced when the image of their minister was suddenly altered by his dress.

Pulpit dress has changed, too; a variety of suits and gowns has largely replaced the black gown or suit which for seventy years was the standard wear for worship. Visiting ministers, especially from overseas, brought brilliant shades of reds and yellows to the pulpit; younger and more radical ministers wore any

clothes they fancied to conduct services, sometimes raising eyebrows among the older members of the congregation. The early women ministers dressed soberly in black or grey, wearing the clerical collar or the white patch shirt front, but later colours began to appear, with skirts rising or falling modestly according to prevailing fashion. By the end of the century a ministers dress depended entirely on whether he or she wished to be recognised or not; for hospital visiting, for instance, some obvious sign of his or her profession might be desirable.

And where did the minister live? In the early days, in a house rented by the circuit and furnished usually by church members. This arrangement did not always make for comfortable living and standards varied, ranging from an imposing manse (in this case a gift) at Four Oaks to a semi-detached in Compton Road, Gravelly Hill. But soon the rented houses (Silverbirch Road, Bishops Road, etc.) were replaced by properties purchased by the circuit. One exception was the manse in Anchorage Road, the gift of the owner to the Home Missions Department with the proviso that it could be used with their agreement by the circuit.

In the 1960's however, manses began to be brought in line with the standards of the day with central heating, improved kitchens, and later improved insulation. Up to the 1980's circuit stewards were wholly responsible for the manses and many were called out to a domestic crisis. Today a manse committee is responsible, the stewards paying a formal annual visit to inspect the property and to hear the views of the occupants on any difficulties or proposals they might have.

It can safely be said that the Sutton Park manses include some of the best in Methodism. An independent inspection occurs every five years (as with all manses) by a team from the District Manses Committee and the properties are subject to a quinquennial inspection by a qualified surveyor. Rising standards are shown by the case of the Streetly manse, designed and built for the purpose in the late fifties. In the late eighties there was concern about its fitness for a contemporary family, and it was sold in 1997, the minister moving to a larger house in Chester

Road. The cost of providing a manse in the north Birmingham area is well above the average of manses in the connexion. The requirement of four bedrooms (one may be used as a study) together with suitable other rooms is not easily met economically. Nor is the requirement of thirty yards of bookshelves! However, it has been the policy of the circuit to give prime consideration to minister's well-being.

Ministers remain itinerant; a fundamental principle of the church. The periods of serving a circuit have however altered. The five year term is still the norm, but we have had ministers serving up to eleven years. There has been a tendency for ministers to move within the District rather than from a distance. Familiarity with a district has some advantages, but it may be that the true spirit of itinerancy is lost.

The whole process of invitations to ministers has undergone many changes. Attempts to formalise the process by the issue of profiles of circuits and churches on the one hand and the corresponding listing of the histories and aspirations of ministers on the other lasted for some years. But we now seem to be returning to the older system which operated for decades of "networking" and personal recommendations by District Chairmen. The length of time a minister serves depends on his own wishes, perhaps the educational requirements of his children, and of course the relationship he has with his congregation. There have been cases in the circuit of ministers who sadly have not enjoyed the whole-hearted trust of their members, and at times periods of service have been cut short, usually by agreement.

In 1974 the Methodist Church ordained the first woman; it was not until ten years later that a woman minister joined the circuit and became a welcome and popular member of the staff. Since then three others have joined the 108 men who have served the circuit to date. Twenty-one men have served as Superintendents either at Erdington or Sutton, and two of these later became Presidents of Conference.

The presence of supernumary ministers in the circuit (many have enjoyed retirement locally) has been an invaluable asset. As the new churches established themselves in the 1900's and onwards, it was often the case that a retired minister was called

on to serve the new congregation. This sometimes lasted a few years until a manse could be made available for a serving man. In recent years too, the circuit has been glad to have the services of retired ministers to cope with temporary difficulties in manning.

The increasing complexity of church administration led in the 1980's to the employment of part time secretaries to assist ministers. In 1987 a lay pastoral assistant was employed, the first of several in the circuit working mainly among youth but also among the elderly. The title was later altered to lay worker.

In the 70's the advent of ministers from the world church led to the arrival in the circuit of a minister from the Caribbean and one from Australia. Both brought different styles of ministry and their informal approach and sometimes colourful dress were popular with congregations.

In 1994 the circuit welcomed a Minister in Local Appointment. M.L.A's are usually persons who, after study and training in the normal way are accepted for ordination but are not subject to itinerancy or entitled to stipends or pensions as their homes are in the locality. They offer a limited working period weekly. The value of such a minister has been proved; the minister concerned was already well known in the circuit.

The minister's daily round was brightened in the 80's by the advent of the sabbatical. After a certain period of service, a minister could have three months away from church responsibilities with a grant. Many choose the study of theological subjects to extend their understanding, while others choose purely secular pursuits, perhaps to further hobbies or to realise dearly held dreams, for which the appropriate time had never been available. For the minister's church a sabbatical meant three months of change, different preachers and the absence of a familiar face. On returning ministers are not obliged to explain what they have been doing, but some do, bringing a new aspect to the way in which congregations regarded them. A district committee exists to administer sabbaticals and approve proposals for their use. Ministers have for many years had the opportunity for further training on residential courses at specified

periods in the ministry; e.g. after 10 years , 30 years etc. The end of the century brought a new dimension to personal development when the accompanied self appraisal scheme was introduced. This was designed to enable ministers to reflect on their effectiveness, take stock of their gifts and achievements, and to "identify strategies for future action".Whereas in business or the Anglican Church such appraisals are done by hierarchical superiors, in the case of Methodist ministers this was inappropriate. A person is therefore appointed to advise and assist the minister in carrying out his own appraisal, The system is entirely confidential and has no bearing on stationing or disciplinary procedures.

The availability of ministers to fill vacancies in the circuit was not a problem until after 1960. From then on the number of students entering training fluctuated considerably; and the expense involved increased with the reduced allocation of grants by local authorities, and the mounting cost of maintaining large residential colleges. In the Birmingham District the college at Handsworth was closed and Queen's College became an ecumenical training college where students of differing faiths now prepare for ministry, An outstanding feature of the last 30 years has been the increase in the age of candidates. In 1998 the average age at entry was over 40, with most candidates being married with families. This alters the whole pattern of ministry, a man or woman may have only 20 years of service to offer, compared with the norm of 40 years or more in the early years of the century.

The Sutton Park circuit has fortunately been able to call on the services of active supernumerary ministers to avoid any shortages; the situation does , however give rise to concern about the future pattern of ministry.

And , finally, until the advent of the National Health Service in 1948, the circuit meeting would annually pass a resolution of sincere thanks to the doctors in the circuit who gave their professional services free to the ministers and their families.

Ministers who have served in the
Sutton Park Circuit.

The Reverends	W.R.Dent	1899-1902	Supt.
	G.J.Ayre	1899-1900	
	R.S.Armsby	1900-1903	
	W.H.Booth	1902-1905	Supt.
	J.A.Clapperton	1903-1906	
	A.O.Sanderson	1905-1908	
	C.J.Horne	1906-1909	Supt.
	W.Humphrey	1908-1911	
	C.L.Dunham	1909-1912	Supt.
	J.D.Hall	1909-1912	
	R.Bond	1911-1918	
	R.Haslam	1912-1915	Supt.
	R.Harris	1912-1915	
	H.H.Burdess	1915-1920	
	R.F.Cowl	1915-1921	Supt.
	W.A.Moore	1918-1921	
	P.Grubb	1920-1923	
	F.Cox	1921-1924	Supt.
	W.L.Doughty	1922-1925	
	J.S.Wilkinson	1924-1927	Supt.
	A.B.Bateman	1923-1926	
	F.W.Townsend	1925-1932	
	P.W.Brough	1925-1927	
	W.E.Selby	1916-1929	
	J.R.Irving	1927-1929	Supt.
	A.Goldthorpe	1927-1930	
	R.S.Armsby	1929-1932	Supt.
	W.Jones	1929-1930	
	J.Harper	1930-1934	
	R.Cox	1930-1937	
	— W.Partridge	1932-1936	Supt.
	A.B.Darby	1932-1937	
A.G.A.Lees	1933-1935		
W.Slater	1933-1937		
A.W.Barr	1934-1937		
H.S.Hillman	1935-1937		
P.Shaw	1935-1939		
A.H.Smith	1936-1941	Supt.	
H.M.Jones	1937-1941		
F.C.Gill	1937-1944		
T.Richardson	1937-1940		
F.Roberts	1938-1942		

E.Rogers	1939-1947	
✓ A.J.Trebilco	1941-1947	Supt.
H.Walker	1942-1948	
J.T.Gray	1942-1949	
H.J.Morris	1942-1948	
✓ W.C.Russell	1947-1953	Supt.
J.V.Wilson	1947-1951	
J.H.Humphries	1948-1954	
F.Mellor	1948-1953	
A.R.Burch	1949-1953	
E.W.Blennerhassett	1951-1956	
✓ J.T.Jones	1953-1959	Supt.
R.H.Smith	1953-1956	
J.G.Scott	1953-1958	
W.Strawson	1954-1955	
C.Booker	1955-1959	
J.Morgan	1956-1962	
J.D.Cope	1956-1961	
G.B.Salmon	1958-1964	
B.H.Howell	1958-1962	
✓ T.Russell	1959-1964	Supt.
G.A.Cornforth	1959-1966	
N.Taylor	1961-1967	
C.Hardy	1962-1969	
S.Johnson	1962-1967	
✓ D.R.Lee	1964-1968	Supt.
S.Davis	1964-1976	
K.J.Richardson	1966-1972	
J.Simmonds	1967-1971	
K.Street	1967-1972	
D.Hewitt	1967-1974	
✓ G.Wade	1968-1975	Supt
K.Bloxham	1969-1973	
S.Beard	1972-1979	
K.Webster	1972-1982	
D.Bannister	1973-1979	
J.N.Pickering	1974-1980	
✓ H.T.Bone	1975-1982	Supt.
A.McNab	1975-1984	
L.Churms	1979-1988	
B.F.Coates	1979-1986	
B.J.Galliers	1980-1982	
D.Boyle	1982-1992	Supt.
K.Beck	1982-1989	
D.Geveza	1982-1984	

Mrs C. Dybdahl	1984-1993	Supt 92-93
J. Pernu	1984-1988	
C. Barron	1985-1990	
D. Bosworth	1986-1993	
I. Jackson	1988-1992	
Mrs C. R. Jackson	1988-1991	
K. Finch	1988-1989	
W. Hopkins	1989-1990	
A. Washbrook	1989-1993	
B. Dodd	1990-1995	
J. Jennings	1990-1992	
B. Mifflin	1991-1995	
G. Holmes	1992-1997	
W. Pearce	1992-1997	
B. Powell	1992	
Mrs M. Hart	1993-1998	
D. Sampson	1993	Supt
Mrs L. Atkin	1994	
Mrs J. Sweet	1995-1998	
D. Hunter	1995	
E. Heyes	1996-1998	
D. Easton	1997	
R. Lunt	1997	

Many Supernumerary ministers have also served the circuit from time to time. The Rev. R. Smith was a member of the circuit staff while serving as Industrial Chaplain in the Birmingham District.

E. Webster, M. Shanahan, M. Houtby, H. Marshall, A. Fyall, S. Charman, R. Mason and C. Silvertown have served as Lay Workers.