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## **SN 5619 - Colchester Primitive Methodist Baptismal Register, 1834-1877**

### **Study Documentation**

Readers with little background on Methodism can find a general introduction to the topic in the following links:

[www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk) [www.methodistanniversaries2007.org.uk/prim.htm](http://www.methodistanniversaries2007.org.uk/prim.htm)

### **Provenance**

Primitive Methodist worshippers met together as congregations, called 'societies', and as 'class meetings'. These gathered initially in someone's living room. Once they outgrew this space they often moved to rented accommodation, a vacant barn, workshop or hall, but the aim of most congregations was to acquire land and construct a permanent chapel. Hostility from the Anglican clergy and congregation, and also often from the nearest Wesleyan Methodist congregation, meant that Primitive Methodist chapels were frequently on the outskirts of a village or the back streets of a town. One chapel might draw its congregation from several different Anglican parishes.

The societies were grouped in 'circuits', usually a market town and its surrounding villages. However, the boundaries of a circuit did not correspond to Poor Law or other nineteenth-century boundaries and at times crossed ancient county boundaries. Large circuits might have one or more 'branches'. The circuit would also organise 'camp meetings' in villages where there was as yet no society in the hope of planting at least a class meeting for prayer and Bible study, which would in time develop into a new society.

The Primitive Methodist Church was a 'connexional' denomination, organised by a central 'conference' to which the circuits sent delegates. This body met annually and controlled both doctrine and the deployment of the stipendiary clergy. These were itinerant and 'stationed' in the circuits for a year at a time. Circuits could invite them to stay longer but could be over-ruled by conference. The stipendiary clergy were assisted by lay people, both men and women, who took a large part in the pastoral, preaching and administrative organisation of the church as class leaders, prayer leaders, 'exhorters', local preachers, secretaries, treasurers and stewards at society, branch and circuit level.

Most of the earlier surviving records were created at circuit level. For example: the circuit, rather than the society, would maintain a baptismal register; the circuit kept records of the deployment of preachers; the individual chapels would maintain their own property but would forward annual schedules to the circuit. Few records of the smaller societies have survived from the nineteenth century and those created by the individual societies in the twentieth century have usually been deposited with the

circuit records. Where the respective books were still in use at the time of Methodist union in 1932 and they were subsequently deposited with the circuit records it may be difficult to distinguish the Primitive from the Wesleyan records.

Because circuit boundaries varied over time and crossed modern administrative boundaries the records of the societies in one county may now be deposited in the Record Office of an adjacent county. A few circuit records have found their way into one of the national repositories of Methodist archives – the John Rylands library at Manchester University <http://rylibweb.man.ac.uk/data1/dg/text/method.html> ; the Wesley Centre, Oxford Brookes University <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/education/wco/msuindex.html> ; or the Museum of Primitive Methodism, Englesea Brook, Cheshire <http://www.engleseabrook-museum.org.uk/> .

### **Baptismal Register**

D/NM 2/2/2 is a baptismal register identical in format to a post-1813 parish baptismal register. The pages are numbered 1 to 100 and headed ‘BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of ..... in the County of ..... in the Year 18...’

The columns are headed ‘When Baptised’, ‘Child’s Christian Name’, ‘Parent’s Names’ subdivided into ‘Christian’ and ‘Surname’, ‘Abode’, ‘Quality, Trade or Profession’ and ‘By whom the Ceremony was performed’. There is no column for date of birth but this has been included with the date of baptism in about 35 per cent of cases. The rows are numbered consecutively and there are 8 rows per page, making a total of 800 printed spaces. However, some rows have been left blank while others have been sub-divided.

The whole document has been transcribed using MS Excel 2003, including entries in the front and back covers.

#### **baptismal\_register.tab**

Field ‘id’: This field was added by AHDS History and represents a unique record identifier

Field ‘number’ is used for the row number in the register, adding the suffix ‘a’ where a row has been subdivided.

Field ‘born’ is used for the whole of the date of birth where given and left blank where it is not given. Where part of the date is missing ‘????’ has been used.

Fields ‘day\_baptism’, ‘month\_baptism’ and ‘year\_baptism’ are used for the day, month and year of baptism respectively. The date has been separated in this way to facilitate analysis. Where part of the date is missing the word ‘blank’ has been inserted.

Field ‘child’ is used for the Child’s Christian Name with ‘blank’ inserted when the name is missing.

Field ‘father’ is used for the Father’s Christian Name with ‘blank’ inserted when the name is missing.

Field ‘mother’ is used for the Mother’s Christian name with ‘blank’ inserted when the name is missing.

Field 'surname' is used for the family Surname with 'blank' inserted when the name is missing.

Field 'abode' is used for the Abode with 'blank' inserted when it is missing.

Field 'occupation' is used for the Occupation with 'blank' inserted when it is missing.

Field 'celebrant' is used for the name of the Celebrant with 'blank' inserted when the name is missing.

Field 'actually\_wrote' is used to record what was actually written in a previous column [the date, surname or abode] when there is reason to believe that it was incorrect [e.g. date of baptism before date of birth, surname spelt differently from siblings, abode spelt phonetically, two entries for the same child].

Field 'page\_headings' is used to indicate the headings of the pages and is given at the first entry on that page. Not all pages have headings.

The entries are not in chronological order. The register begins in 1844 and ends in 1864. It would appear from the comments after page 100 that in 1848 the book was partitioned between the various congregations in the circuit, but once these sections became full the remaining baptisms were entered wherever there was space. In many years more than one minister was officiating at baptisms and they appear to have written up their records retrospectively, not necessarily in the order in which they took place. The actual baptisms date from 1834 to 1877.

### **index\_name\_places.tab**

This table contains a transcription of an index to the names of the places as entered after 1848, these were written on blank page facing page 100 of this baptismal register.

Field 'place' refers to the chapel in which the baptism was celebrated.

Field 'entry' shows the inscription as found in the baptismal register.

Field 'notes' contains explanatory notes regarding some of the data entries in the field 'entry'.