

# A GLORIOUS WORK IN THE WORLD

*Welsh Methodism and the International  
Evangelical Revival, 1735 – 1750*



DAVID CERI JONES

STUDIES IN WELSH HISTORY

*Editors*

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WELSH METHODISM AND THE INTERNATIONAL  
EVANGELICAL REVIVAL, 1735–1750

## The WEEKLY HISTORY:

O R,

An Account of the most Remarkable Particulars relating to the present Progress of the Gospel.

London: Printed by J. Lewis in Bartbolomew-Close, near West-Smithfield.  
[Price One Penny.]

Those who are willing to take in this Paper Weekly, may have all the former Numbers; and such Persons are desired to send in their Names and Places of Abode to the Printer above mentioned, in order to be regularly served.

A Letter from Mr. HOWEL HARRIS to Mr. CENNICK.

Brinkworth, Oct. 7. 1741.

Dear Brother Cennick,

OUR dear Lord gives me to love you tenderly.---Thus far am I brought on my Journey.---I lay at my Brother's *Thursday* Night, and met Sir *Richard Ellijon* on the way.---*Friday* I return'd to *London* again, so that I came only to *Maidenhead Friday* Night, and *Saturday* to *Newbury*.---I stay'd there till *Monday* Evening.---I discours'd *Sunday* Morning at 7 in the little Society of Methodists, went to Church and received the Sacrament.---In the Evening I went to Meeting to hear Mr. *Philips* and was ask'd to preach there in his Meeting at six, and so did, and *Monday* Morning in a Baptist Meeting, where I hope the Lord blessed me, to save my Soul from the Blood of all.---I would have preach'd in an Arian Meeting-house, but they (poor Souls) would not let such a Mad-man.---They long for your coming this way much, and I think it will be right for you to make it in your Road to *Wiltshire*.---I had a long discourse with them about having Satan bruise'd under our Feet, but they turn out all the Promises to Death and so lull themselves asleep and say, we must not expect to have Faith in exercise continually.

My dear Brother, what have we to do, but to such as never believ'd to shew them the absolute necessity of Faith, and to such as have it to shew the Necessity in order to bear Fruit, to keep it in continual exercise to look up still to Christ, and while we are continually looking to him, eyeing him! and feeding on him, we shall be chang'd to be more and more like him, and consequently bear more and more Fruit to him, then Sin will die and all Graces grow.---We must always wear our Shield, or we shall soon be wounded by some fiery Dart or other.---I am sure that my Misery and Bondage is, to forget Christ; to lose my watch, look from him aside.---While the Eye of my Soul is kept by his Spirit---fix'd on him; I am not then led away by the Lust of the Eye, the Lust of the Flesh, and the Pride of Life.  
Then

A typical page from John Lewis's evangelical periodical, *The Weekly History*, from October 1741 when he was inundated with letters from many corners of the evangelical world. (By permission of Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/The National Library of Wales.)

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*by*

DAVID CERI JONES

*Published on behalf of the  
History and Law Committee  
of the Board of Celtic Studies*



CARDIFF  
UNIVERSITY OF WALES PRESS  
2004

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**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-7083-1870-3

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*www.wales.ac.uk/press*

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Printed in Great Britain by Dinefwr Press, Llandybie

## EDITORS' FOREWORD

Since the Second World War, Welsh history has attracted considerable scholarly attention and enjoyed a vigorous popularity. Not only have the approaches, both traditional and new, to the study of history in general been successfully applied to Wales's past, but the number of scholars engaged in this enterprise has multiplied during these years. These advances have been especially marked in the University of Wales.

In order to make more widely available the conclusions of recent research, much of it of limited accessibility in post-graduate dissertations and theses, in 1977 the History and Law Committee of the Board of Celtic Studies inaugurated a new series of monographs, *Studies in Welsh History*. It was anticipated that many of the volumes would originate in research conducted in the University of Wales or under the auspices of the Board of Celtic Studies. But the series does not exclude significant contributions made by researchers in other universities and elsewhere. Its primary aim is to serve historical scholarship and to encourage the study of Welsh history. Each volume so far published has fulfilled that aim in ample measure, and it is a pleasure to welcome the most recent addition to the list.

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## PREFACE

This study is intended to represent a significant reinterpretation of the eighteenth-century Welsh Methodist revival. Despite the extensive historiography relating to Welsh Methodism, modern historical scholarship has yet to illuminate a number of important areas. Both Eryn M. White in her *Praidd Bach y Bugail Mawr: Seiadau Methodistaidd De-Orllewin Cymru* (1995) and Geraint Tudur in his *Howell Harris: From Conversion to Separation, 1735–1750* (2000) have recently opened up new perspectives on the study of Welsh Methodism, but they have both approached the subject from decidedly Welsh points of view. This study adopts a more comparative approach and attempts to assess the role that the Welsh revival played in the wider evangelical enterprise, particularly between 1735 and 1750. In the historiography of the evangelical revival more generally, the current trend is to view the movement as a response to the collective trauma that engulfed the whole international Protestant community and that cut right across national and denominational boundaries. The Welsh revival must therefore be located within the context of this ‘pan-Protestant’ crisis. The focus of this study will be on the way the Welsh Methodists responded to this development and on the methods by which they communicated with their fellow evangelicals. It will trace some of the ways in which the Welsh revival influenced the wider evangelical movement and the manner in which involvement in an international evangelical community fundamentally affected the character and shape of Welsh Methodism.

The preparation of this work has naturally left me indebted to a number of people. I have been privileged to have as my doctoral supervisor and mentor, Dr Eryn M. White. Her unfailing support, encouragement and seemingly inexhaustible reserves of patience have consistently eased the research and

writing of this work. The doctoral thesis on which this book is based was undertaken in the Department of History and Welsh History at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. It was examined by Professor David W. Bebbington, and many of his penetrating comments and suggestions have refined my somewhat woolly thinking at a number of points. Subsequent discussions with him on the nature of early evangelicalism have also opened up a number of further highly productive avenues of enquiry. In addition, Dr Boyd Schlenker, Dr Michael F. Roberts, Dr Geraint Tudur and Professor Geraint H. Jenkins have either read parts of the original thesis or offered invaluable advice and direction at various points during its completion. Parts of the work have been developed and presented at conferences at the Universities of Lampeter, Bangor, Cardiff, Manchester, King's College, London and Northumbria at Newcastle, at the University of Wales, Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth, and at the bi-annual conference of the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF), Christianity and History Forum. Other scholars' responses to the work have been critical in crystallizing a number of points and clarifying ambiguities. Part of Chapter IV has been reworked in my "The Lord did give me a particular honour to make [me] a peacemaker": Howel Harris, John Wesley and Methodist infighting, 1739–1750', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University of Manchester Library* (2004, forthcoming), and similarly part of Chapter VI has been expanded in my "Transcripts of my Heart": Welsh Methodists, popular piety and the international evangelical revival, c.1758–50', in Joan Allen and Richard Allen (eds), *Faith of our Fathers': Six Centuries of Popular Belief in England, Ireland and Wales* (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, 2004, forthcoming).

I am also grateful to the Historical Society of the Presbyterian Church of Wales for granting me access to Howel Harris's diaries and to the staff at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, the Hugh Owen Library of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, the Glasgow University Library and the John Rylands Library, Manchester, for their courteous help and efficiency. I received financial support from a number of sources during the completion of the doctoral thesis. I am indebted to the Glamorgan Further Education Trust Fund, the University of

Wales for receipt of the Thomas Ellis Memorial Award and to the James Pantyfedwen Foundation.

My greatest debts though are of an altogether different nature. To my parents I owe an incalculable debt for introducing me to the same evangelical faith as that practised by Howel Harris and George Whitefield and, secondly, for their constant support in innumerable ways throughout the course of the preparation of this work. My wife, Clare, has had to share the whole of our married life with Harris, Whitefield and various other Methodist interlopers. Without her love, interest, constant support and forbearance this work would have been deficient in so many ways. Finally, Carys Hanna and Celyn Rebekah, who both arrived during the preparation of this work, will now be able to reclaim their father from the eighteenth century, partially at least.

David Ceri Jones  
Aberystwyth  
August 2004

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- Account* John Lewis (ed.), *An Account of the Most Remarkable Particulars of the Present Progress of the Gospel* (London, 1742–3)
- BDE* Timothy Larsen (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (Leicester, 2003)
- BDEB* Donald M. Lewis (ed.), *Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography, 1730–1860*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1995)
- CA* John Lewis (ed.), *The Christian's Amusement Containing Letters Concerning the Progress of the Gospel both at Home and Abroad* (London, 1740–1)
- CCHMC* *Cylchgrawn Cymdeithas Hanes y Methodistiaid Calfniaidd* (Caernarfon, 1916–)
- CH* John Lewis (ed.), *The Christian History or General Account of the Progress of the Gospel in England, Wales, Scotland and America* (London, 1743–7)
- CMA* Calvinist Methodist Archive, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth
- DMBI* John A. Vickers (ed.), *Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (London, 2000)
- DNB* Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (eds), *The Dictionary of National Biography*, 22 vols (London, 1908–9)
- DSCHT* Nigel M. de S. Cameron (ed.), *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1993)
- DWB* J. E. Lloyd and R. T. Jenkins (eds), *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography* (London, 1959)
- ERF* Donald McKim (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Reformed Faith* (Louisville, KY, and Edinburgh, 1992)
- HHD* Howel Harris's Diaries, Calvinistic Methodist Archive, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth
- JWRH* *Journal of Welsh Religious History* (Welshpool, 1993–2000; Bangor, 2001–)
- NLW* National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth
- ODCC* F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford, 1983)

- Trevecka The Trevecka Letters, Calvinistic Methodist Archive, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth
- WH* John Lewis (ed.), *The Weekly History: Or an Account of the Most Remarkable Particulars Relating to the Present Progress of the Gospel* (London, 1741–2)
- WHR* *Welsh History Review* (Cardiff, 1960–)

## INTRODUCTION

In September 1751, Howel Harris (1714–73) set out on another of his extended visits to London, in the hope that he would be able to recapture some of the energy and fire that he felt he had lost. However, the circumstances in which he arrived in the city on this occasion were very different from those to which he had grown accustomed. There was no hero's welcome at George Whitefield's Tabernacle any longer and no crowded and expectant societies waiting to see him and hang upon his every word. A forlorn and dejected Harris, having recently been ostracized so publicly by his English and Welsh Methodist friends, had retreated to his home at Trefeca with only a small rump of supporters, while his old rival, Daniel Rowland (1711–90), had taken over the leadership of the revival in Wales. In his diary, Harris, now suddenly an outsider, tried to bestir himself by reminding himself of the heady days of the mid-1730s and 1740s when he, George Whitefield (1714–70) and John Wesley (1703–91) had stood at the apex of a genuinely international renewal movement that seemed, to them at least, to presage nothing less than the climax of the whole history of redemption. Harris therefore reminded himself of 'ye Universality of this last awakeng among many nations, in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, America, Germany, France, Swedeland &c.'<sup>1</sup> His ability to take such an all-embracing view of the evangelical revival was the result of his fifteen-year career as a revivalist, during which he had placed himself at the hub of a religious revival that was, in John Walsh's memorable phrase, 'an international and pan-Protestant phenomenon'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Library of Wales, Calvinistic Methodist Archive, Howel Harris's Diary (hereafter HHD) 152b: 9 September 1751.

<sup>2</sup> John Walsh, "Methodism" and the origins of English-speaking evangelicalism', in Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington and George A. Rawlyk (eds), *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond 1700–1990* (New York, 1994), p. 20.

The late 1730s and the early 1740s had witnessed exciting and highly charged outbursts of religious enthusiasm in countries as widely dispersed as Wales, England, Scotland, Ireland, many of the American colonies and parts of Germany. Together they gave birth to a revolutionary new religious movement. This 'new' religious force, according to David Bebbington's now widely adopted definition, united a vast array of religious awakenings by its stress on the four themes of conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism.<sup>3</sup> These were all interpreted within the context of a highly emotional and individualistic spirituality that emphasized voluntary commitment rather than religious dogma and confessional conformity,<sup>4</sup> thereby bringing about what Nathan Hatch has called the democratization of Christianity.<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that the evangelical revival was a single homogeneous movement. It could encompass Christians of many different persuasions, from Lutheran Pietists in Saxony, Presbyterians in Scotland, Anglicans and Dissenters, Calvinists and Arminians in England and Wales, and Puritan Congregationalists in New England, who each jealously guarded their distinctive identity. What the revivalists did was transcend these differences by emphasizing a set of core beliefs and elevating revivals of religion to central importance in an attempt to revitalize the flagging fortunes of the Protestant cause throughout much of western Europe and the American colonies.<sup>6</sup>

The self-identity of the first generation of Welsh evangelicals, or Methodists as all of the revival's converts were quickly nicknamed,<sup>7</sup> operated on a number of levels. They were, first and foremost, members of a local society and it was to this small body

<sup>3</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1990s* (London, 1989), pp. 2–17.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Lambert, 'Pedlar in Divinity': *George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals* (Princeton, 1994) and Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (Princeton, 2003), pp. 127–58. For further discussion of the degree to which eighteenth-century evangelicalism was actually innovative see Robert Letham and Donald Macleod, 'Is evangelicalism Christian?', *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 67, 1 (1995), 3–33; Kenneth J. Stewart, 'Did evangelicalism predate the Enlightenment? An examination of the David Bebbington thesis', <http://zondervanchurchsource.com/convention.parallel.htm>; and Garry J. Williams, 'Was evangelicalism created by the Enlightenment?', *Tyndale Bulletin*, 53, 2 (2002), 283–312.

<sup>5</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, 1995), pp. 45–6.

that most felt the strongest allegiance.<sup>8</sup> However, each society member was also part of a national awakening, initially under the direct leadership of either Howel Harris or Daniel Rowland, but quickly organized in a connexional system under the government of a ruling Association. But Harris's comments quoted above indicate a further layer to Welsh Methodist identity. Members were conscious of being part of a renewal movement that was both deeply rooted within the particular traditions of early Welsh Protestantism<sup>9</sup> and part of an international evangelical movement that was simultaneously transnational, transcontinental and transatlantic, aimed at re-energizing the down-at-heel Protestant community. So, for example, the evangelicals who gathered for their monthly update of revival news at George Whitefield's Spa Fields Chapel in London on 8 November 1742 were typical of Methodists everywhere when, in response to news of fresh outbreaks of enthusiasm in Scotland, they sang:

Great things in England, Wales and Scotland wrought,  
And in America to pass are brought,  
Awakened souls warn'd of the wrath to come,  
In numbers flee to Jesus as their home.<sup>10</sup>

The Welsh Methodists would also have been able to sing these lines with great gusto, imbued as they were with a deep sense of their place in the wider international evangelical community. At the height of the revival in the early and mid-1740s, Howel Harris customarily peppered his letters with confident statements outlining the scope of the revival in places that to many a Welsh ear would have sounded both exotic and exciting. To one correspondent in late 1742 he wrote about the 'Progress of ye Gospel in Scotland, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Warwickshire, Wiltshire, Germany, Prussia, New England, Pennsylvania and

<sup>8</sup> See Eryn M. White, 'The people called "Methodists": early Welsh Methodism and the question of identity', *Journal of Welsh Religious History* (hereafter *JWRH*), 1 (2001), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Glanmor Williams, 'Some Protestant views of early British Church history', in Glanmor Williams, *Welsh Reformation Essays* (Cardiff, 1967), pp. 207–19.

<sup>10</sup> 'A call to the sleeping virgins, which was read in the society at the Tabernacle on Monday, 8 November 1742', *The Weekly History or An Account of the Most Remarkable Particulars Relating to the Present Progress of the Gospel* (ed. John Lewis) (hereafter *WH*), 84 (Saturday, 13 November 1742).

many provinces'.<sup>11</sup> Other, more humble, Welsh Methodists similarly recognized the magnitude of the revival and spoke of it as 'the good work that is going on',<sup>12</sup> emphasizing the unity they felt with Methodists everywhere. They echoed Harris's pride in the 'glorious Work . . . in the world'<sup>13</sup> and were committed to remembering 'To tell him [God] to humble and purify all his Lambs, to send his Gospel over the world all the world. Put him in mind of his Promises to [. . .] ye whole world'.<sup>14</sup>

The early Welsh Methodists' articulation of this world-view was underpinned by a number of theological presuppositions, shared by evangelicals everywhere. Firstly, they all justified their existence in a similar way. They looked for no explanation beyond the divine origin and inspiration of all their activities. Indeed, so convinced were the pioneer revivalists of God's intimate direction of every facet of their lives and careers that they were often blinded to more worldly forces. For Jonathan Edwards (1703–58) this new outbreak of religious enthusiasm was a 'surprising'<sup>15</sup> work of God. In his writings on the revival he repeatedly made use of terminology that stressed the immediacy of the presence of the Holy Spirit, often using phrases such as the 'pouring out'<sup>16</sup> or the 'effusion'<sup>17</sup> of the Spirit to convey adequately the essence of the revival. George Whitefield continually stressed that it was the 'extraordinary presence of God amongst us'<sup>18</sup> that was the overwhelming reason for the success of his ministry and of the revival more generally. In Pembroke-shire, the exhorter Howell Griffith similarly spoke of the 'pouring

<sup>11</sup> National Library of Wales, Calvinistic Methodist Archive, Trevecka Group, The Trevecka Letters 2803 (hereafter Trevecka): Howel Harris to Herbert Jenkins (22 November 1742).

<sup>12</sup> 'Extract of a letter from a minister in the country to his friend in London (3 February 1742)', *WH*, 46 (Saturday, 20 February 1742).

<sup>13</sup> Trevecka 708, Howel Harris to Marmaduke Gwynne (22 October 1742).

<sup>14</sup> Trevecka 726, Howel Harris to Elizabeth Paul and Hetty Buckler (3 November 1742).

<sup>15</sup> This adjective was used most tellingly in Jonathan Edwards's first work on the revival, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of GOD in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighbouring Towns and Villages of the County of Hampshire, in the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay in New-England* (1736). See Clarence C. Goen (ed.), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, IV: The Great Awakening* (New Haven, 1972), pp. 99–211.

<sup>16</sup> See Goen (ed.), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, IV*, p. 110.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales* (Edinburgh, 1985), p. 71.

<sup>18</sup> See Iain H. Murray (ed.), *George Whitefield's Journals* (London, 1960), p. 251.

out of the Spirit among our Societies'<sup>19</sup> and Howel Davies (1716–70) offered the opinion that 'the presence of God is with us in a wonderful ravishing manner'.<sup>20</sup>

Their strictly spiritual interpretation of the awakenings that they superintended was backed up by a thoroughly providentialist view of history. Their spiritual forebears, the seventeenth-century Puritans, had schooled them to trace the finger of God in every aspect of their daily lives. Since the Church was, in John Calvin's (1509–64) words, 'the great *work-room* of God'<sup>21</sup> the early Methodists were conditioned to pay particular attention to religious history in order to establish a precedent for their activities and thereby secure some measure of divine approbation for their apparent innovations. They therefore mined the history of the Church for examples of communities which shared their enthusiastic outlook on the spiritual life and they constructed a model that enabled them to draw parallels between their own revivals and the earliest apostolic communities, focusing on every similar subsequent outbreak of religious enthusiasm in the 1,700 years between the apostolic era and their own day.<sup>22</sup>

This was an approach to history that was again articulated most persuasively by the chief apologist of the revival, Jonathan Edwards. In a series of sermons on just one brief scriptural passage from Isaiah 51:8, originally preached in 1739 and eventually published posthumously as *A History of the Work of Redemption* (1774),<sup>23</sup> Edwards split the history of the Church,

<sup>19</sup> 'The Copy of a Letter from BRO HOWELL GRIFFITH, to BROTHER CENNIK (3 March 1743)', in *An Account of the Most Remarkable Particulars Relating to the Present Progress of the Gospel* (ed. John Lewis) (hereafter *Account*), III, 1, 31.

<sup>20</sup> Trevecka 837, Howell Davies to John Cennick (no date).

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999), p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> The early editions of the London-based religious magazines were filled with accounts of 'revivals' that had occurred amongst the Waldensian communities throughout various parts of Europe including the French Alps, the Holy Roman Empire and the Albigensian communities in parts of southern France. See *The Christian's Amusement: Containing Letter's Concerning the Progress of the Gospel Both at Home and Abroad, &c. Together with an Account of the Waldenses and Albigenses: People that Never Fell into the Popish Errors, but Retained the Truth of the Gospel from the Time of the Apostles under all the Popish Persecutions Down to the Reformation* (ed. John Lewis) (hereafter *CA*), issues 1, 2, 3 and 6 for examples. For more detail on the Waldenses see F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 1714–15. For the Albigenses see *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> See John F. Wilson (ed.), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, IX: A History of the Work of Redemption* (New Haven, 1989).