

The CMVC in Suffolk – the first caravan journey in 1893

By Hilary Marlow

Introduction

This article is based on research conducted in the archives of the Scripture Union which provided photographic evidence of the route taken by the first caravan journey of the Caravan Mission to Village Children (CMVC) from Cambridge to Suffolk. The research also revealed that a booklet published by the CMVC contained a small error in its description of the beginning of this first journey. The booklet was written in 1943 to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the CMVC which had been founded in May 1893. The error was repeated in a book written twenty years later by the Reverend John C Pollock in which provides a comprehensive account of the Children's Special Service Mission (CSSM), the CMVC, and the Scripture Union (SU). The early photographs of the first mission were not available to the Rev Pollock (personal communication from Rev Pollock to Hilary Marlow) and he was therefore unable to check the accuracy of the 1943 booklet. The newly discovered photographic evidence now allows the correct route of the first caravan journey to be described.

The article will trace the route taken by the caravan when it started on its journey in Cambridge on 6th May 1893 under the direction of Samuel Hewlett, one of the founders of the CMVC. It will also attempt to explain the reason for the error in the 1943 Jubilee Publication which states that when the fledgling organisation took delivery of the first caravan in May 1893 in Cambridge 'they set off in the evening, deciding to camp in the first village they came to. This proved to be Melbourn.' This is incorrect, not only because it was not the first village where the caravan actually stopped for the night, but it also implies that the first journey set off southwards from Cambridge. The village of Melbourn lies on the modern A10 some ten miles south of Cambridge. The CMVC booklet nevertheless subsequently records correctly that the caravan was in Suffolk, and refers to Helmingham and Pettaugh. The name of the author of the 1943 publication is not stated but is likely to have been Mr R T Garwood, the General Secretary of the CMVC. Mr Garwood based his account of the early history of the CMVC on handwritten notes prepared by Samuel Hewlett, titled "Mission to Village Children. Rough notes for Mr Garwood". These notes are not dated but were presumably written in 1943 and were therefore written fifty years after the event. By this time Hewlett was in his seventies and his accurate recall of events may have dimmed with the passage of so many years. Indeed, the notes contain a number of dates with blank numerals indicating that Hewlett had a degree of uncertainty when recalling events of 1893. Further research showed that it was in the following year of 1894 that Samuel Hewlett set off from Cambridge in a second caravan travelling southwards through Melbourn where he had an overnight stop. This confirms that Hewlett had confused the routes taken from Cambridge by the caravans in 1893 and 1894.

Discovery of the photographic evidence

The author was researching his family history and, with information supplied by his cousin, had discovered a reference to his grandfather, Alfred James Marlow, in the work of the CMVC. There was a photograph of Alfred Marlow on the steps of a caravan taken in about 1916 and a letter written to his daughter describing problems with erecting a tent while on a caravan mission. Searches on the internet for the CMVC showed that in the nineteen sixties both the

CMVC and the CSSM had come together as the Missions Department of the SU and became known as the SU. Contact was made with the Regional Director of the SU, Emlyn Williams, who kindly looked in the archives of the SU and discovered a number of references to Alfred Marlow in 'Village Notes', the quarterly journal of the CMVC. This revealed that he had served as the CMVC evangelist for Hampshire and was a regular contributor to the journal. It was obvious that a visit to the SU archives in Milton Keynes was necessary to obtain information about my grandfather from the 'Village Notes'. When my wife and I visited the SU we made an unexpected discovery of several old photograph albums, including one which had many photographs of Suffolk villages taken towards the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. The amount of material was so large that it was necessary to arrange a second visit to spend several days in the archive examining all the material. This article now provides a distillation of some of that material which refers to the role that Suffolk played in the first caravan journey of the CMVC. Indeed, had it not been for the intervention of a Pettaugh farmer and mill-owner, James Cutting, to provide medical treatment for Samuel Hewlett, the fledgling CMVC organisation may have been stopped in its tracks, or would certainly have suffered a major setback.

Origins of the CMVC

It is important to place the formation of the CMVC in the context of the religious life in 19th century Britain. In this period there were two spiritual driving forces, evangelism and revivalism. Evangelism and revivalism are terms which describe two different but intertwined religious movements. Evangelism is the spreading the New Testament Gospel of salvation through faith, not by sacrifice or good works. Central to this is the acknowledgement and confession of sin and that, through His grace God, will forgive the repentant sinner. Revivalism is the reawakening and reinvigoration of spiritual awareness through evangelism. Revival movements usually followed a period of spiritual decline and religious observance, accompanied by a decline in moral standards. Thus, it was in 18th century England that a great revival began with John Wesley at the forefront (Hylson-Smith, 1989). Wesley realised that although members of the upper, wealthy class might attend church the broad mass of society did not. Church services were formal while the doctrinal preaching and abstract content of sermons were not appreciated by the general population. Wesley therefore adopted the missionary strategy of reaching out and taking his message to people by preaching in public places. The Gospel was preached in simple language and tuneful hymns with memorable words penned to reinforce the message. Services were lively and the Gospel presented with fervour and enthusiasm. In 1858 there was a religious revival in America and this was followed a year later in 1859 by the start of a second revival in Britain which proved to be greater than that of the preceding century (Orr, 1949). Large revival meetings took place in Ulster, Scotland, Wales and England attracting large crowds. Suffolk was profoundly affected by the revival and large crowds attended the meetings. In Lowestoft, whose population at the time was 9000, 3000 people attended a meeting in February 1861 at the railway goods depot as no building in the town was large enough to accommodate those who came to hear the preachers. Another meeting was held the following morning in the Town Hall which was crammed so full that people overflowed into the street (Orr, 1949). A report in the Ipswich Journal, Saturday 9th March 1861 described continuing interest in the Lowestoft revival meetings: 'With increasing interest and happy effects these meetings are being held every alternate evening in the week. On Wednesday and Friday of last week they were continued in the 'Continental Goods Depot' and on each occasion there were no less than 1500 to 1600 persons present. This week the meetings are being held in various

Meeting-houses. On Monday it was the Baptist Meeting-house which was crowded, numbers being unable to get in, and there might be seen stout-hearted men, some of whom for 20 years had not attended a place of worship, weeping like children. The effect it produced is marvellous'. Revival meetings were held in other towns, such as Stowmarket, with a report in the Ipswich Journal, Saturday 30th April 1861 of a revival meeting in the Stowmarket Corn Exchange which was filled to capacity with hundreds, some people being unable to gain access. The report mentions that the preacher spoke for about three hours. Many of those who attended revival meetings, including schoolchildren, professed their conversion to the Christian faith and it was estimated that about one million converts were gained to the non-conformist and Anglican churches. One consequence of this great revival was the establishment of organisations to take the Gospel message to children. A prominent exponent of preaching the Gospel to young children was a young American, Edward Payson Hammond, who had travelled to Britain enthused with the 1858 revival which he had experienced in his home country. Another feature of the second evangelical revival was the establishment of a large number of religious missionary organisations, both in Britain and overseas, such as The Evangelisation Society which has relevance to the 1893 caravan journey. This society was formed in 1864 and its activities are a measure of the great revival of the 19th century. The 1889 Annual Report of the society recorded that it conducted meetings in 1086 places in England, including 32 in Suffolk, one of these being in Pettaugh which led to the conversion of James Cutting (see later).

In 1867 a London man, Josiah Spiers, who lived in the London borough of Islington, attended a revival service for young children. The service was conducted by Payson Hammond who had become known for his ability to preach the Gospel in a manner understood by young children. After attending the meeting, Spiers had no doubt that children could become converted to the Christian life. He spoke to a neighbour who offered the front room of his large house in Islington for the holding of a Sunday evening service for children. The first meeting was held in June 1867 with fifteen children. Spiers told the children stories of Jesus and taught them hymns. The popularity of his services increased and so did the number of children which had increased to fifty by November, requiring a larger meeting room. At this point a committee was formed to hire a room at a local school and to choose a suitable name for the movement. The name chosen 'Children's Special Service Mission' (CSSM) was an appropriate description of the new venture. During the summer of the following year, Spiers was enjoying his summer holiday in Llandudno, walking along the sandy beach. He came across a group of children playing in the sand and making patterns with bits of seaweed and pebbles. The thought occurred to him that these could be used to make texts from the bible. He used a spade to trace out the words 'God is love' in the sand and invited the children to fill in the words with the pebbles they had been collecting. He then told them one of the stories of Jesus in the style which he had used successfully in his Children's Special Service in London. The service was so enthusiastically received that it was repeated daily with attendances of several hundred children. Over the following years, the movement spread with summer seaside services being held in other resorts, including the Suffolk seaside towns of Southwold, Lowestoft and Felixstowe.

In 1890 two of the CSSM missionaries, Samuel Hewlett and George Goodwin, took a fortnight's rest after conducting a summer seaside mission at Great Yarmouth. Goodman and Hewlett were both clerks to London solicitors and used their annual summer holiday in Norfolk helping with the CSSM seaside services. They spent their rest time in the nearby resort of Mundesley and during this time, Hewlett and Goodman had the opportunity of telling the Gospel message to a maid in the house where they were staying. She was greatly impressed with this and said that her parents and friends

who lived in the nearby village of Knapton would be blessed if they could preach in the village. Their meeting was arranged on the small triangle of grass in the village where the local lanes intersected and was attended by a large gathering on a Saturday afternoon. This idea of travelling to rural villages and preaching the Gospel to children had been planted in Hewlett's mind when he had read the diary of two Cambridge undergraduates who had hired a gypsy caravan and toured the countryside to preach in villages. It would appear that most revival meetings had been held in the larger towns and cities for the obvious reason that the preaching would reach more people in the concentrated population areas. This meant that large swathes of the countryside with scattered and poorly accessible rural villages remained ignorant of the revival preaching. The pioneers who used caravans to travel into the countryside and preach the message of salvation were using the example of John Wesley who proclaimed that if the people were not going to church, he would take the church to them.

Back in London, Hewlett spent the next year gathering support for his new venture. In May 1892 he travelled to Baldock in Hertfordshire where he purchased a baker's cart and pony. The cart was painted with the text 'Jesus called a little child unto Him' in gold lettering and set off, holding their first mission in the nearby village of Barkway. The mission was enthusiastically received and Hewlett then spent summer months travelling across Surrey and Sussex where he was joined from time to time by George Goodman and others. Hewlett realised that the baker's cart did not meet their requirements and that a proper caravan would be needed with accommodation and catering facilities to avoid being dependent on finding sleeping quarters in the villages. On returning to London in the autumn, Hewlett formed a committee with George Goodman and others to gather support for their plans. The work of the committee was successful and within a few months sufficient funds had been raised to purchase a caravan.

Route of the first caravan journey of the CMVC.

The first caravan was ordered from a Christian coach-builder, a Mr John Alsop, who traded as a wheelwright at 83 East Road in Cambridge. Hewlett, Goodwin and Ernest Geary, accompanied by Jock the terrier, took possession on Saturday 6th May 1893. The caravan was made to the traditional gypsy design and was painted maroon with religious texts inscribed on all the panels. The route taken by the caravan on its maiden trip can be retraced using a photograph diary of the first few weeks of the journey. Hewlett and his companions must have set off in the morning in an easterly direction proceeding along East Road and then the Newmarket Road (now the A1130) before turning into the road (now the B1102) to Swaffham Bulbeck where they stopped for a lunch break. This is recorded as 'the first halt for lunch' in a photograph with the place name and date recorded alongside the photograph. Having refreshed themselves and the horse, they journeyed onwards to nearby Burwell where a photograph records the 'first camping ground'. Burwell therefore is therefore rightly assigned the honour of being the village where Hewlett and Goodwin conducted their first mission and the caravan had its first overnight stop. From Burwell the caravan moved further eastwards to Newmarket where it stayed for two days. From here it moved north-eastwards into Norfolk to Worlingworth and Thetford, before turning eastwards to Bressingham. By this time, Goodwin and Geary had returned to London and Hewlett continued the journey with two other workers, Arthur Lyons and Will Perkins. From Bressingham the caravan turned south into Suffolk visiting Brockford Street and Mendlesham before heading to Helmingham to take up an invitation to conduct a mission in the village.

En route from Mendlesham to Helmingham they were passing through the village of Pettaugh and stopped near the windmill. It was the usual custom of the missionaries to sit on the platform of the caravan and draw attention to the mission they were engaged upon by singing hymns and playing on instruments. The CMVC Jubilee booklet records that, 'Samuel Hewlett made a joyful noise singing a hymn, accompanied by Will Perkins blowing his cornet as loud as he could and Arthur Lyons playing on the portable organ'. The music was sufficiently loud to attract the attention of the workers in the mill, including James Cutting, a local farmer who was owner of the windmill. The sight of the caravan with its religious texts painted on the sides must have impressed James Cutting greatly. He had undergone a profound religious experience five years earlier during a visiting tent mission by the Evangelisation Society to Pettaugh in June 1888 and this had inspired James to adopt an evangelical religious belief. In 1889 he was the driving force behind the building of a Mission Room in Pettaugh, a small timber-framed building clad with corrugated iron, which became the focus of evangelical religious activity in Pettaugh.

Having attracted the attention of James Cutting and the mill workers, Hewlett explained that they were on their way to Helmingham to conduct a mission at the invitation of the rector and would then move on to Framdsen for a few days. As they got ready to cover the two miles to Helmingham, Hewlett invited James to visit their mission in Helmingham which was to be held in the open air opposite the parish church. That evening James cycled over to Helmingham and joined the throng of villagers who had come to the mission to hear Samuel Hewlett preach. Hewlett was an accomplished and enthusiastic preacher. He was animated and spoke in a way that could be understood by his audience. The lively choruses, led by Hewlett in his loud voice and accompanied by Will Perkins and Arthur Lyons, had memorable words and tunes. James Cutting invited Hewlett to return to Pettaugh after his mission in Framdsen and conduct mission services for the benefit of the Pettaugh villagers. Hewlett readily accepted the invitation. After a few days in Helmingham the caravan moved to Framdsen, only a mile down the road, where they set up their tent in a field near the church. During the mission in Framdsen, Samuel Hewlett recorded in his notes that he began to feel unwell with a headache, sore throat and fever. It seemed likely that he had contracted the Russian influenza virus which was affecting many people in England. Hewlett and his helpers packed up the tent and they set off in the caravan for Pettaugh to take up the invitation extended by James Cutting. By the time that they reached Pettaugh, Hewlett was feeling so unwell that he wished he could get to the hospital in Ipswich. Fortunately, James Cutting had come to the caravan to welcome Hewlett and saw that he needed medical attention. Taking charge of the situation, James took the caravan back his home at Abbot's Hall farm in Pettaugh where he was the tenant farmer. He summoned the doctor from Debenham who duly arrived, examined the patient and prescribed medicine. With Samuel Hewlett now confined to bed on the orders of the doctor, James Cutting took charge of the caravan for the next few weeks. The caravan visited surrounding villages, including Debenham and to Cretingham, to conduct missions under the direction of James Cutting. The period of rest and the medicine achieved the desired effect for Hewlett and after spending some weeks recuperating at the farm, Hewlett was ready to resume his work. He was now joined by another missionary, Marcus Falloon, who conducted tent services with Hewlett on Birches Meadow in Pettaugh. During the days that Hewlett spent recuperating at Abbot's Hall, he and James Cutting discussed the missionary work of the CMVC. They agreed that the caravan would remain in Suffolk so that the evangelistic work in the Suffolk villages could be continued. James Cutting became deeply committed to the work of the CMVC which continued for the rest of his life. It was the start of a friendship between Hewlett and Cutting which Hewlett recorded with great affection in his notes written in 1943, referring to James Cutting as 'Brother Cutting'.

James Cutting also continued his work with the CSSM, organising and leading seaside meetings in Felixstowe from about 1896 into the 1930s.

Expansion of the CMVC

In 1894 a second caravan was built in Cambridge and it was in this caravan that Hewlett began his journey southwards in May 1894 through Melbourn into Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. James Cutting continued the work of the CMVC in Suffolk with the first caravan, conducting missions in Melton, Wickham Market, Marlesford, Snape, Peasenhall, and Middleton, before returning to Pettaugh. James Cutting ordered a second caravan for Suffolk in 1905 which was built by an Ipswich firm. The work of the CMVC whose headquarters were in London expanded rapidly. Caravans were built for the CMVC at the rate of nearly one every year so that by 1915 there were caravans working in Bedford, Devon, Dorset, Essex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Norfolk, Northumberland, Suffolk, Surrey, Sussex and Wiltshire. Within another decade, there were also caravans in Cheshire, Cornwall, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Wiltshire and Yorkshire. The Lincolnshire evangelist, William Knights, was an Ipswich man who joined the CMVC staff in 1907 and was still on the staff in 1943. In 1943 when the CMVC celebrated its Golden Jubilee, there were caravans in 28 counties of England, and by this time the horse-drawn caravans were being replaced by more modern trailer caravans pulled by motorcars. George Goodwin did not live to enjoy the 50th anniversary celebrations as he died in the autumn of 1942. James Cutting died on the last day of 1946 at Abbot's Hall in Pettaugh. Samuel Hewlett lived into his nineties and died in 1957 just over sixty years following his life-threatening bout of influenza in Pettaugh.

References.

CMVC: 1893-1943 Jubilee Booklet; CMVC, London, 1943
Evangelisation Society Annual Report, 1889
Hylson-Smith, K: Evangelicals in the Church of England; T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1989
Ipswich Journal: March 9, 1861; April 30 1861
Orr, JE: The second evangelical awakening in Britain; Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London 1949
Pollock, JC: The Good Seed; Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1959

Acknowledgements.

The Regional Director of the Scripture Union, Mr Emlyn Williams, generously provided unrestricted access to the Scripture Union archives and gave permission for CMVC journals and photograph albums to be copied. The photographs which accompany this article are also reproduced by the kind permission of the Scripture Union. Much of the searching through the archive and copying of records was done by my wife, Margaret, whose knowledge of archive and library procedures was invaluable. The secretary of The Evangelisation Society (TES) kindly found articles in the TES archive provided copies of these. Staff members of the Suffolk Record Office in Ipswich have been helpful in providing information. Mary Harrison started my research into the history of my grandfather, Alfred Marlow, who was the CMVC caravan evangelist for Hampshire from 1916 until 1935. My interest in the history of Pettaugh owes much to the work that has been done by the Pettaugh History Society (<http://www.pettaugh-history.org.uk>), particularly, in collaboration with Richard Clark.