

**Where did Mary Ann Werrey, female Bible Christian minister,  
come from ?  
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One of the outstanding features of the Bible Christian branch of Methodism was their willingness to employ female ministers. Prominent in the early days of the movement, there was one female still employed when the BCs joined with the Methodist New Connexion and the United Methodist Free Churches in 1907 to form the United Methodist Church (Lillie Edwards at Hastings).

Yet many of the female Bible Christian ministers are shadowy figures. Biographical details are hard to recover as they rarely merited an obituary, especially in their travelling name, and they are hard to identify under their married names if they married.

One of the more colourful characters among the female ministers – and there were many – was Mary Ann Werrey. Dr.Oliver Beckerlegge<sup>1</sup> records her stations as follows:

1820	St.Keverne	1 year
1821	Truro	1
1822	? [No station given]	
	[She is named in the list of Itinerant Females in the 1822 <i>Minutes of Conference</i> . She in fact went to the Isles of Scilly <sup>2</sup>	]
1823	Jersey Mission	1
1824	Northumberland Mission	1
	disappears	

I first became interested in Mary Ann when I wrote my study of the (later) Bible Christian Mission in County Durham.<sup>3</sup> I was indebted to a paper by Dr.A.W.G.Court<sup>4</sup> who recovered from the Edinburgh newspapers the account of her attempt to preach in the city. A structural failure in the balcony of the hall in which Mary Ann was due to preach led to the abandonment of the attempt – and with that Mary Ann disappears from sight.<sup>5</sup> In 1901 the Bible Christian historian F.W.Bourne<sup>6</sup> believed she had died in Northumberland in 1824-5, but no obituary was ever published.

Consequently nothing is known of her roots. When Rev.Lewis Court wrote for the 1915 Bible Christian centenary the poem 'A Song of a Century'<sup>7</sup> he said ...

Her birth, her lineage – these are all unknown,  
And how she passed into the land of light.  
She came, they say not whence; her spirit's flight  
We know not: ...

What can we now uncover ? The surname Werrey is unusual. It does not appear in the current Cornwall and Isles of Scilly telephone directory. Werry (no second 'e') has five entries, four in the St.Austell area and one at Quethiok east of Liskeard.<sup>8</sup> Over the years I had come to much the same conclusion as Lewis Court. However my search recently reopened. Working on the Bible Christians in south east Cornwall<sup>9</sup> and exploring the St.Neot / Liskeard Bible Christian Circuit Baptism Register 1820-1837<sup>10</sup> I came across five Werrey entries, one the maiden name of the child's mother, in the period 1834-7. These entries form Table 1. It is clear from Mother's Parents' names that the Register reveals three Werrey families.



**Table 1 Werrey (-ey) entries in the St.Neot / Liskeard BC Baptism Register**

Nº	Date	Day	Born	Surname	Christian name	Father	... of ...	Occupation	Mother	Mother's parents	Baptism parish	Place	By ...
218	5/10/1834	Su	24/8/1834	Werrey	William	Peter	Landreath	Yeoman	Eliza	Stephens, Thomas & Jane	Boconnick	Trecangate Chapel	Roberts, James
254	30/5/1836	M	29/5/1836	Werrey	Maria	Thomas	Lanssallos	Farmer	Jane	Mutton, Thomas & Patience	aforesaid	Crumplehorne	Roberts, James
266	26/9/1836	M	5/9/1836	Werrey	Jane	Peter	Lanreath	Farmer	Eliza	Stevens, Thomas & Jane	aforesaid	Ebenezer Chapel	Barnden, J
274	3/1/1837	Tu	6/12/1836	Common	Mary Ann	Joseph	St.Neot	Tinner	Susannah	Werrey, William & Elizabeth	aforesaid	St.Lukes Chapel	Barnden, James
281	26/2/1837	Su	7/2/1837	Werrey	Mary Ann	James	St.Neot	Labourer	Jane	Lukes, Mary	aforesaid	Trenant Chapel	Barnden, James

**Notes:**

The entry 'Day' is not in the Register: I have calculated it and added it to my database.

Spellings are as in the Register.

Entry #274 - mother Susannah, née Werrey - is included for completeness.

**Table 2 Werry (-y) entries in the St.Neot / Liskeard BC Baptisms Register**

Nº	Date	Day	Born	Surname	Christian name	Father	... of ...	Occupation	Mother	Mother's parents	Baptism parish	Place	By ...
19	22/9/1822	Su	17/8/1822	Werry	Thomas	Walter	Landreath	Yeoman	Jane	Mutton, Thomas & Patience	/	/	Lyle, William
42	14/11/1824	Su	28/10/1824	Werry	Jane	Thomas	Lansallos	Yeoman	Jane	Mutton, Thomas & Patience	aforesaid	Crumplehorn	Courtice, William
69	20/12/1826	W	24/11/1826	Werry	James	Thomas	Lansallos	Yeoman	Jane	Mutton, Thomas & Patience	aforesaid	Crumplehorn	Arthur, James
109	5/4/1829	Su	22/3/1829	Werry	John	Thomas	Lansallos	Yeoman	Jane	Mutton, Thomas & Patience	aforesaid	Trenewend	Harris, William
152	29/3/1831	Tu	25/11/1830	Werry	Thomas	Peter	Landreath	Labourer	Eliza	Stephens, Thomas & Jane	Boconnoc	Trecangate Chapel	Skinner, William
157	14/8/1831	Su	24/7/1831	Werry	Elizabeth	Thomas	Lansallos	Yeoman	Jane	Mutton, Thomas & Patience	aforesaid	Crumplehorne	Daniel, William H
184	4/11/1832	Su	23/8/1832	Werry	Anna Maria	Peter	Lanreath	Husband-man	Eliza	Stephens, Thomas & Jane	aforesaid	Trecongate Chapel	Ching, James
203	28/11/1833	Th	15/11/1833	Werry	William	Thomas	Lansallos	Farmer	Jane	Mutton, Thomas & Patience	aforesaid	Pengaze	Ching, James

Notes:

The entry 'Day' is not in the Register: I have calculated it and added it to my database.

In entry 19 the child's and father's names have probably become transposed; see the Mother and her parents in the next three entries.

In addition there are several earlier entries (1822-34) in the name of Werry: these form Table 2. Again Mother's Parents' names reveal that all these are for two of the Werrey families. The Christian name combination Mary Ann does appear in the Werrey list.

Edwards (1976)<sup>11</sup> in his index to the Cornish Nonconformist Baptism Registers deposited at the Public Record Office in 1837 lists eleven children under the name Werry (including variant spellings). All are found in the St. Neot Bible Christian Register. I have found thirteen entries, including the Werrey Mother's Parents (#284). Number 19 is not in Edwards.

The two predominant families are Thomas Werrey of Lanreath (1822; presuming the transposition of the entries in #19) and then Lansallos (baptisms 1822-36), and Peter Werrey of Lanreath (baptisms 1831-36). The third family (James; baptism 1837) lived in St. Neot parish. One construction from that might be that the Werreys came from Lanreath parish and that Thomas and James moved south and north respectively.

So are any of these the family of Mary Ann Werrey the female minister? We have several Werreys appearing in a very confined location in south east Cornwall – and Edwards (1976) lists no others from the preserved nonconformist Registers.

I then turned to the Cornish Family History Society databases at the Library in Truro. Here I found in the baptisms database 48 entries for Werrey in the 260-year period 1610-1869 – the name is indeed rare.<sup>12</sup> Mary Ann Werrey the Bible Christian minister would appear in a Baptism Register around 1800 – the females were often very young women. And to be sure, there is one such entry in 1795 – the only Mary Ann Werrey in the database. She is the daughter of William Werrey and Mary, baptised in St. Austell Parish Church on 31 May 1795. A previous William was baptised in 1754, at St. Martin by Looe.

The database does show some concentration of the Werrey name around Looe (1716-1757; 11 consequent baptisms), but no entries in Lanreath or in Lansallos. There is also some concentration of Werreys in the St. Austell area (1792-1819; 7 baptisms). There are other places however where the name appears, notably one family at Germoe in west Cornwall in the late seventeenth century and three families in Cardinham in 1811-12. If the identification of William is correct, there is a Looe-area – St. Austell connection.

However, for reasons outlined in note 11, I am suspicious of the completeness of the data provided in the CFHS database. It undoubtedly incorporates what has been found, but that there is data missing seems highly likely.

If the surname is unusual what about the Christian names? We do have records for two children in the Werrey line who were baptised Mary Ann in January and February, 1837. The CFHS database suggests no others (but does not include #281 in Table 1). Yet eleven other non-Werrey Mary Anns appear in the St. Neot Register as children, and five others as Mother's Name; the combination cannot be said to be rare, or unique to one family. Yet we do have a Mary Ann Werrey (#281) and a Mary Ann whose grandmother was a Werrey. Is this pure coincidence?

However these baptisms are in January and February 1837: is that too long after Mary Ann's presumed death in 1824-5 to attribute a link? But what if Mary Ann didn't die then, and after the failure in Edinburgh did manage to return to the obscurity of this area? Might she even have lived on with her family and unnoticed by the contemporary recorders of the Bible Christian story until she died around the end of 1836, whereupon her name was

used for two other girls in the Werrey line ? All sorts of speculations might be attempted; facts are not so easily ascertained.

I offer a tentative conclusion.

It seems possible that Mary Ann Werrey the Bible Christian minister was baptised in St.Austell parish on 31 May 1795. Her father may well have come from the area just east of Looe. She may have had family who subsequently lived in the Lanreath area.

There is a remote possibility that it might be in error to presume her death in 1824-5, and that her true death was nearer 1836.

If all these speculations cohere she would have been 41 when she died.

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<sup>1</sup> Beckerlegge, O.A. (1968), *United Methodist Ministers and their Circuits* London: Epworth.

<sup>2</sup> Deacon, L (1951), *So I went my way* London: Epworth p54.

<sup>3</sup> Short, C.C. (1995), *Durham Colliers and West Country Methodists* Kidderminster:Short. Copies are available in the Cornwall Studies Library, Redruth.

<sup>4</sup> Court, A.W.G. (1964), 'Mary Ann Werrey in the North' *Wesley Historical Society North East Branch Bulletin* July 1964.

<sup>5</sup> See Short (1995) for the newspaper report, and also for the story of a further incursion into Scotland by the Bible Christians almost fifty years later.

<sup>6</sup> Bourne, F.W. (1905) *The Bible Christians: their origin and history* London:Bible Christian Book Room, p145. This installment of Bourne's work was actually published in 1901.

<sup>7</sup> Methodist Archives and Research Centre, John Rylands University Library of Manchester MAW Ms 92.51, Ms 93.4.

<sup>8</sup> I have presumed that the similar Wherry/-ey is a different name on the basis that it seems to have a different etymology. Wheal after all derives from huel. I would be interested to know if anyone thinks that is a wrong conclusion.

<sup>9</sup> Short C.C. (2010) 'Notes on the Bible Christians in the south east of Cornwall' *The Journal of the Cornish Methodist Historical Association* Vol.11 N<sup>o</sup>2 (2010) pp74-79.

<sup>10</sup> Townsend, S & Townsend, S (2000) *Nonconformist Registers for Cornwall held at the Public Record Office*, Shelkay:Townsend.

<sup>11</sup> Edwards L.W.L. (1976), *Index to Cornish Nonconformist Registers Deposited at the Public Record Office* London:Edwards (private; limited edition).

<sup>12</sup> Only one of the baptisms was quoted from the St.Neot BC Register however, and that for St.Neot in 1836 – which does not correspond to the St.Neot entry in Table 1. There are other omissions in the CFHS data from what I was finding in the St.Neot BC Register, and some questions about Werry entries (301 of them). For these reasons I have to regard the CFHS database as incomplete.