

† **John Austin Dolan (1945-2015)**, ‘Perfectionism in Crisis: Conflict in John Wesley’s Methodism in the 1760s’, unpublished MA dissertation, Nazarene Theological College/University of Manchester, 1997; and ‘Methodist Lay Sectarianism: The Independent Methodists 1796-1927’, unpublished PhD thesis, Nazarene Theological College/Manchester University, 2004. His doctoral studies inspired Dr Dolan to extend his research period beyond 1927 right up to the early twenty-first century – and this resulted in the publication of a definitive, illustrated, 200-year history of Independent Methodism, *The Independent Methodists: A History* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2005). It is described in the foreword by his external supervisor, Prof. David W. Bebbington, as ‘a thorough, persuasive and illuminating’ account. Dr Dolan, appreciating support he received from his supervisor (Rev. Dr Herbert B. McGonigle, then Principal of Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, and subsequently Director Emeritus of the Manchester Wesley Research Centre), states that: ‘His ready availability and perceptive comments helped to give shape and balance to the final thesis and checked my enthusiasm to include far more than was possible!’

John Dolan was born in 1945 at Newton-le-Willows, Lancashire, his family later moving to Warrington. During the 1950s he was a pupil at Wade Deacon Grammar School for Boys at Widnes (then in Lancashire). In the 1960s he studied at Sheffield [Teachers’ Training] College (in Yorkshire), graduating as a qualified teacher. In the 1970s he was appointed headteacher at Belmont Junior School (near Bolton, Lancashire), a post from which he took early retirement in 1991 in order to take up full-time ministerial duties at Stockton Heath Independent Methodist Church (IMC), Warrington.

From his early childhood he had attended the Sunday School at Friars Green IMC in Warrington. As a teenager he began to realise that the church he attended was part of a local ‘circuit’, within a larger IM ‘connexion’, with a particular history stretching back to 1796, which had arisen from its even earlier Wesleyan Methodist roots. In 1959, aged just fourteen, John Dolan preached his first sermon (to an adult congregation at Friars Green). Within months he had enrolled on the three-year IM Ministers’ Education Course. Soon he was preaching at various churches in the circuit, and had felt called by God in 1962 to join the IMC at Stockton Heath. He successfully completed the Ministers’ course when aged only eighteen, but the certainty of his calling as a minister came to him later, this being formally recognised in a church service held when he was 21. John never married, and apart from his professional work as a school teacher (and his interest in history), his lifetime passion was his ministry in the IMC. Towards the end of his life he was able to look back over a half-century during which he had preached in all but four of the Connexion’s churches, including a few that had by then closed down – 112 altogether. He was Minister

at Stockton Heath Christian Fellowship from 1965-2006 (full-time from 1991), and when he died at Warrington on 30 May 2015, he had been an accredited Minister in the Independent Methodist Connexion for fifty years. That Dr Dolan was respected and widely known beyond Independent Methodism was evidenced on 23 June 2015 when well over 500 people attended a service of celebration and thanksgiving for his life, held at St Elphin's Parish Church, Warrington.

John Dolan's work with the IMC Connexion included: being President of the Connexion (1999); Young Peoples' Secretary (1969-1975); Connexion Archivist (1982-2015); Connexion Publications Editor (full-time from 1991-2009), with titles including: *Introducing the Independent Methodists*; *Christian Foundations* [a teaching course on Christian Discipleship]; *Past & Present 1*, and *Past & Present 2* [a photographic history of the Connexion]; *Together in the Lord* [a book of services]; *Model Church Rules* [new revised edition]; and Editor of the Connexion magazine – originally *The Independent Methodist*, later *The Connexion* (1977-2009).

John Dolan's other publications include: *The Northwood Story: The history of High Legh Independent Methodist Church* (published 1983, which touches on the early life of Robert Moffat, pioneer missionary in South Africa, who was once a worshipper at the chapel); *From Barn to Chapel: The story of Stockton Heath Independent Methodist Church (established 1806)* (published Warrington, 1989); *Peter's People* (published Wigan, 1996) [the story of Friars Green church, the early Independent Methodists in Warrington and their leader Peter Phillips – based on an address given to the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, March 1996 ]; 'The Origins and Early Characteristics of the Independent Methodist Movement', pp. 13-23 in *Wesleyan Perspectives: papers presented to the Wesley Fellowship in 1998*, ed. Paul Taylor (Ilkeston, 1998); 'The Archives of the Independent Methodists', in *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings*, 49 (Feb. 1994), pp. 122-23; 'An Independent Methodist Bicentenary', in *WHS Proceedings*, 50 (Oct 1996), pp. 237-40; 'The Voluntary Ministry of the Independent Methodists', in *WHS Proceedings*, 55 (May 2005), pp. 29-43; *Two Hundred Years of Faith* (published Warrington, 2001) [the two-hundred-year history of Sion IMC, Lymm, Cheshire]; and a revealing autobiographical booklet *The Editor Remembers*, which John Dolan produced in 2009, following his 'retirement' as *The Connexion* Editor due to his increasing ill health.