



Museum of Methodism and John Wesley's House

# Teacher's Information Pack



## Aim

This document aims to support teachers and school staff before visiting The Museum of Methodism, Wesley' Chapel and Wesley's House. It includes a general introduction to the history of the site, an outline to each of the key visiting areas and general guidance to consider before your visit.

You will have received a booking form and a risk assessment to complete and read, please note that we encourage teachers to visit the site for a free familiarisation visit for their own Risk Assessments. You can also view our virtual tour of Wesley's House here:

<http://www.wesleyschapel.org.uk/vhouse.htm>

## Introduction

The site is a complex of Georgian and Victorian buildings located in a fine Georgian courtyard near the financial district of London. John Wesley's Chapel, his house, his grave and the Museum of Methodism are all on site for visitors to see. Each area of the site offers a different way of looking back in time at the history of Methodism and the work John Wesley as well as being a current thriving Methodist hub with its congregation and worship services every Sunday Wednesday and Thursday.

## What is Methodism?

Methodism is the fourth largest Christian Church in Britain and is a faith derived from the teachings of John Wesley, Charles Wesley and George Whitfield in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Today there is a Methodist church in nearly every country in the world and has a global membership of around 70 million members. Methodism is also known for its rich tradition in music with Charles Wesley himself writing many of the hymns still sung today.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century many Christians believed some people were predestined to hell or heaven, John believed that all people can be saved through faith in Christ. His teachings were also very practical, he was concerned for people's bodies and minds as well as their souls and was very active in helping the poorest of society, setting up schools for the poor, homes for orphans, the treatment of diseases, anti-gambling and anti-slavery.

Methodism today still holds to its global mission and gives special emphasis to actions which bring justice to the poor and disadvantaged, in Britain and world-wide.

The core beliefs of Methodism are known as the "four alls";

1. All need to be saved - the doctrine of original sin
2. All can be saved - Universal Salvation
3. All can know they are saved - Assurance
4. All can be saved completely - Christian perfection

## Who was John Wesley?

John Wesley was born in 1703, his father, Samuel Wesley was a Church of England Parson and his mother was called Susanna. The fifteenth of nineteen children, of whom ten survived to adult life, John Wesley went on to become one of the leaders of the Methodist Movement.

### **An Early Escape**

At the age of 5 John was trapped his old family home in Epworth, Lincolnshire when it caught fire, this proved to be a significant event in his life as his mother believed he had been saved by God for a higher purpose and vowed to take special care of his education.

### **Education**

At the age of seventeen John went on to Oxford to study for a degree, his younger brother Charles eventually followed John to Oxford. There Charles established a group of friends which became known as the "Holy Club". John joined them and later led the group. They read the Bible, prayed regularly, visited the poor and those in prison. Soon they became known as the "Methodists" because they were so methodical.

### **To the New World**

In 1735 John and Charles sailed to the American colony of Georgia. Charles went as a secretary to General Oglethorpe and John as the official minister. The trip was a complete disaster as they were both inexperienced and unable to integrate into the community of settlers. They returned home depressed about their religious states of mind.

### **Conversion**

On his journey to America John met some Moravians (Slavs who came from Southern Germany, Moravia is now part of the Czech Republic) and was impressed with their religious thinking. One of them, Peter Bohler told Wesley to preach until he had faith. Wesley took note and when back in London he attended a meeting with the Moravians in Aldersgate. He describes the evening:

*"In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the aw of sin and death."*

This is known as John Wesley's Conversion experience and his brother Charles had a similar experience only a few days before in the month of May 1738.

### **Open Air Preaching**

Encouraged by George Whitefield, one of his "Holy Club" friends Wesley preached his first open air sermon at Hanam Mount in 1739. It was to be the start of his life's work. He was banned from many of the pulpits of the Anglican Church because he was considered an enthusiast which was disapproved of at the time and this forced him to travel widely, mainly on horseback and to deliver his message wherever he could. It was a message that gave

emphasis to the pastoral care of people's earthly needs as well as the soul. It is estimated that he must have covered more than 250,000 miles over the 50 years of his ministry.

### **A London Base**

In the winter of 1739/40 Wesley decided that he needed a London base. Outside the city of Moorfields there was an old cannon foundry lying empty. John bought the lease for £115 and spent a further £700 converting it for his use. There was a large meeting hall, smaller meeting rooms, a school for the poor children and what was probably the first free dispensary in London in 1746 (dispensaries gave out medical care and advice.) It also had accommodation for him and his mother.

### **The Movement Grows**

Wesley's preaching flourished and Wesley travelled more and more between his three bases in London, Bristol and Newcastle. Gradually he set up societies to which all his converts could go for spiritual support. Wesley's organisation of his followers was really the key to his success. Methodist chapels were built and Wesley recruited preachers to help in his work.

### **To City Road**

After almost 40 years the lease was running out on the Foundery which was also falling back into ruin. Wesley decided to build a new Chapel which was funded by all the smaller groups from all over the country within the Methodist organisation. The Chapel opened on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1778. The following year he built and moved into a house on the corner of the site and spent the last eleven years of his life there before dying there at the age of 87.

## Site Areas

### The Museum of Methodism

The newly refurbished museum is located in the crypt of the Chapel and holds one of the world's largest collections of Wesleyan ceramics and some of the finest Methodist paintings. Visitors can step back in time and stand in Wesley's original pulpit from The Foundery Chapel.



The "Warmed Heart" tells the story of John Wesley's conversion. His Field Bible is one of the objects on display in a contemplative space.

"Mr Wesley's New Chapel" traces the history of Wesley's Chapel using a series of maps of Finsbury and Islington, the earliest of which dates to 1746.

"Connecting the Connexion" illustrates John's Wesley's visionary organisational system of Methodist societies, classes and bands. Exhibits include a range of membership tickets and a print of Francis Asbury, whose enthronement as a bishop in the United States sealed Methodism's separation from the Church of England.

Huw Edwards, the BBC presenter, narrates our new seven-minute audio-visual presentation and the latest technology, including tablet computers, provides interactive access to major archival documents, such as John Wesley's sermons and Charles Wesley's hymns.

### Wesley's Chapel

Wesley's Chapel was built in 1778 by John Wesley. The Chapel was his London base and replaced his previous London Chapel, The Foundery, which stood about 200 yards away. It was designed by the architect George Dance the Younger, who was then the surveyor to the City of London. It is a fine example of Georgian architecture and a Grade I listed building. It was the first Methodist Church to be built specifically for the celebration of Holy Communion as well as for preaching services.



In 1891 the Chapel was transformed to commemorate the centenary of Wesley's death. Marble pillars were donated from Methodist Churches around the world to replace the original pillars made from wooden ships' masts donated by George III. New pews were also added and the stained glass was installed around this period.

In 1972 the Chapel was found to be structurally unsafe and had to be closed. Between 1972 and 1978 nearly £1 million was raised to save the Chapel from demolition and restore it to its former glory. On 1st November 1978, exactly 200 years after Wesley opened the Chapel, the

restored building was re-opened in the presence of HM Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh.

In 1989 Wesley's Chapel and the Leysian Mission joined together and the Leysian Centre which houses our administration centre was opened in 1992. Today the Chapel is a thriving place serving a congregation of hundreds, the local community as well as the thousands of pilgrims and visitors that come each year to see the 'Mother Church of World Methodism.'

The site also houses one of the few surviving examples of a Gentleman's Convenience, built by the renowned sanitary engineer Thomas Crapper in 1891, and restored in 1972.

## Wesley's House

Step back into Eighteenth Century London with a visit to one of London's finest surviving examples of a small Georgian house. Built by Wesley in 1779, he lived here the last twelve winters of his life, in the summer months he would visit and preach to his Methodist societies round the country. The house also provided a home for the preachers of the Chapel, their families and servants. Discover the day to day running of a small Georgian town house



The house contains many of John Wesley's belongings and furniture, including his electrical machine and his study chair. His small Prayer Room is considered by Methodists all over the world to be the Power House of Methodism.

Wesley died in his home on the 2 March 1791, aged 87.

## Graveyard

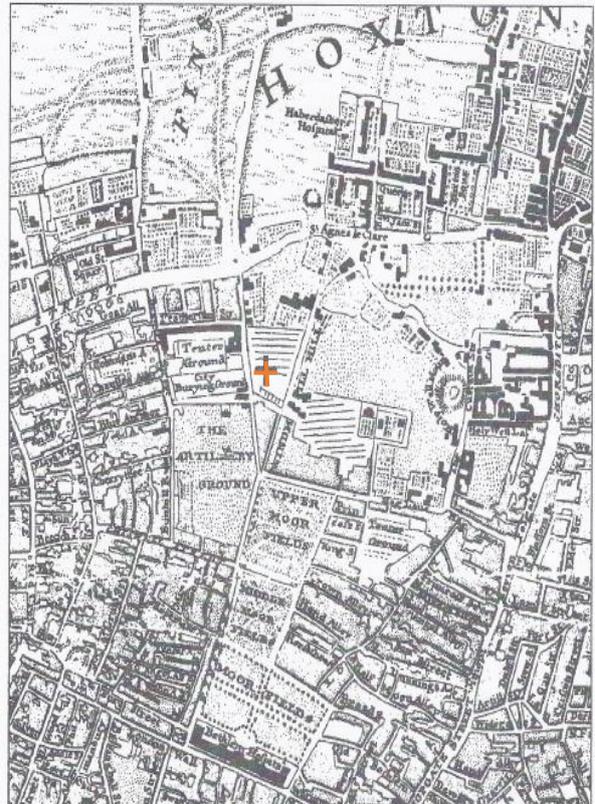
The Graveyard behind the museum is where you will find Wesley's tomb as well as many other graves relating to the Chapel and early Methodism.



# The Site of Wesley's Chapel



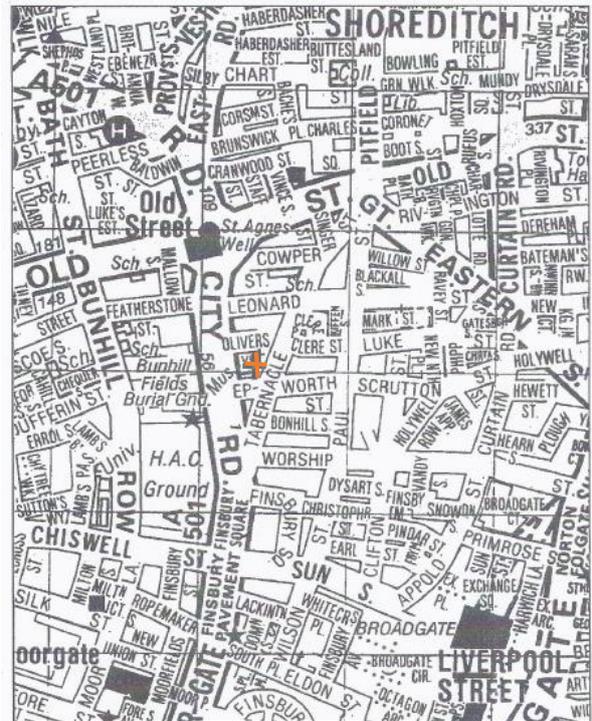
1689



1745



1872



1995

## The Site

- 1 Street**  
The graphics on the street provide public awareness and start the on-site experience.
- 2 Main Gate**  
Maintain current use of main gate through to the courtyard and vestibule to enter the site as this will preserve the impact of key heritage views (eg Wesley's statue and the main façade of the Chapel) and to convey the key message of entering a living, vibrant, and working place.
- 3 Courtyard**  
Creating a more sympathetic landscape scheme to improve its feel and functionality (eg for small external gatherings, evening functions etc.), while retaining the essential use as a place to park cars.
- 4 Chapel Doorway**  
The 'front door' could be made more welcoming by keeping the wooden doors open and inserting a new glass door behind, to offer visitors a glimpse of the Chapel beyond and create a sense of openness. This could be delivered at a later time.
- 5 Vestibule**  
Sensitively begin the interpretation and orientation in the Vestibule, building on the current use of graphics and volunteer guides. The aim is to physically orientate people to the site at this point.
- 6 Chapel**  
Continue the use of the Chapel as a key interpretive space within the Complex, beginning tours here with a guide's talk. This could be expanded to include an advertised set time activity in addition to the current use. Additional opportunities for interpretation would be to expand on the existing interpretation with the use of non-intrusive media.
- 7 Museum**  
Lift and stairs to the Exhibition. Detailed recommendations are made throughout this brief.

- 8 Tomb**  
Ensure that all visitors to the site visit the tomb – users are guided there through clear interpretation within the exhibition and signage on site. Explore the possibility of exiting the Museum via the backdoor to the garden.
- 9 Foundry Chapel**  
Integral part of the site's offer, and an excellent opportunity for education groups.
- 10 Toilets**  
A visit to these heritage toilets is a key part of the experience.
- 11 Wesley's House**  
We recommend the development of the House's storyline in tandem with the exhibition. The principle entrance for visiting the house (on a guided tour) should be the front door. Currently during the peak summer months (May–August) the front door is opened and has proved successful in encouraging visitors.

