



# **BICENTENNIAL HISTORY WESLEY METHODIST CHURCH, CHESTER**

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March 2012



# BICENTENNIAL HISTORY: WESLEY METHODIST CHURCH, CHESTER

*This document brings together material from many sources and contributors, acknowledged on page 151, including the Wesley Scrapbooks assembled by Rosemary Hall and past Church Newsletters and publications. Particular thanks are due to Robin Spencer for his proof reading and editorial advice.*

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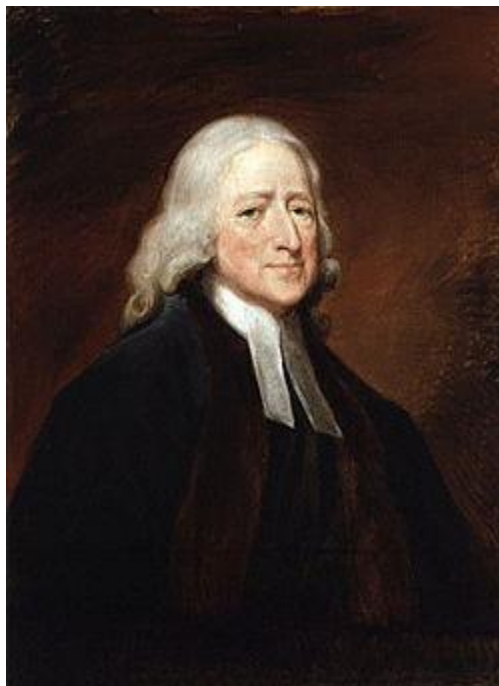




# BICENTENNIAL HISTORY: WESLEY METHODIST CHURCH, CHESTER

## 1. The Beginning of Methodism in Chester

John Wesley (1703 - 1791) was and remained throughout his life an ordained clergyman of the Church of England. He graduated from Christ Church, Oxford in 1724. He was ordained the following year and in 1726 became a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. He and his brother Charles founded the "Holy Club" at Oxford, whose methodical approach to prayer, bible study and good works earned its members the nickname "Methodists". He underwent a spiritual conversion (when he found his heart 'strangely warmed') at a meeting at Aldersgate Street, London in 1738. He preached his first open air sermon to 3,000 people in the brickfields outside Bristol in 1739. He dedicated the rest of his life to travelling and preaching throughout Great Britain and Ireland, riding over 100,000 miles on horseback and preaching 42,000 sermons. The first Methodist (Wesleyan) Conference took place in 1744.



**Fig. 1: John Wesley, by George Romney in 1789**

Methodism was brought to Chester by John Bennet, one of John Wesley's first itinerant preachers (who actually won the hand of Grace Murray while John Wesley was still courting her!). He travelled widely in the North West and was invited to Chester by George Shaw, a tailor living in Boughton. In 1747 John Bennet wrote in a letter to John Wesley concerning his visit to Chester: 'I am assured that the time is come that the Gospel must be preached in that City. The inhabitants received me gladly, and said "We have heard of Wesley and read his books; why could you not have come hither sooner?" ...I heard a religious society was kept in the City, and so I made an enquiry and found them out.'

In 1749, at the annual Conference, John Bennet was appointed to look after the Chester Circuit (which at that time stretched into Lancashire, Derbyshire, Cheshire and North Wales). In 1751 a house in Love Lane, belonging to Richard Jones, was opened for preaching and to provide hospitality for the preachers. Open-air preaching also took place in various parts of the City, including an open space near St John's Church.

In 1752 the growing Society moved to a barn in St. Martin's Ash. The barn (which was a "large and lofty structure" accommodating 200 after a gallery was erected) was on the south side of a square opposite the church of St. Martin's in the Ash. It was in the vicinity of White Friars, Black Friars and Grey Friars. St. Martin's Lodge (1823), the house designed by and for Thomas Harrison in Nicholas Street (next to the HQ Building), is probably close to the site of the barn.

In June 1752 John Wesley made his first visit to Chester. He was to make over 20 further visits, generally in the spring. He recorded in his diary that on Saturday June 20<sup>th</sup> 1752 he preached at 'six, in the accustomed place ....near St. John's Church' and on Sunday June 21<sup>st</sup> he preached in the barn and in the square by St. Martin's Church. This visit is commemorated by a plaque outside Wesley fronting St. John Street (beneath the large windows of the lounge) which reads: "Near this place on June 20<sup>th</sup> 1752 the Rev. John Wesley preached on the occasion of the first of his many visits to this city". On Monday June 22<sup>nd</sup> he walked round the walls, and was intrigued by 'The Rows'. He then had to make an urgent visit to Bristol. He returned to Chester on Friday July 3<sup>rd</sup> to find that there had been a riot and a mob had destroyed the Methodists' barn sanctuary two days earlier. They regrouped at Love Lane and the barn was re-erected by Christmas of that year.

Wesley often visited Chester on his way to Dublin and back (via Parkgate), or into Wales. It seems that there was some disharmony in the Chester Society, but in 1762 he recorded that on 'Monday August 2nd I rode on to Chester. Never was the Society in such a state before. Their jars and contentions were at an end, and I found nothing but peace and love among them'. Although there is no conclusive evidence to support this, it is also highly likely that Charles Wesley visited Chester in 1747.

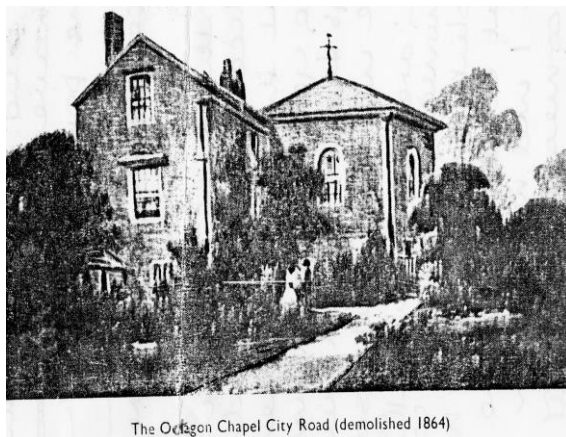
## 2. The Octagon Chapel and Commonhall Street: 1764 - 1812

### 2.1 The Octagon Chapel

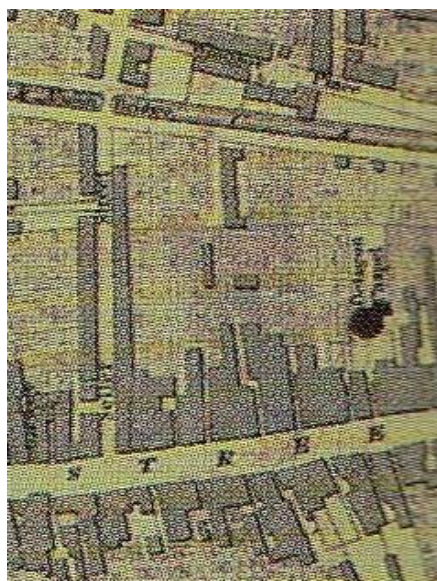
In 1764, the first Methodist Chapel was erected in Chester. A piece of land was purchased at the Boughton end of Foregate Street near to the Bars Gate (which was removed in 1770). The Chapel was built in the form of an octagon, the first of its kind. It opened on Sunday June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1765. It had a diameter of 46 feet, included a gallery and seated 600 with comfort “and perhaps another 200 with pressure”. Wesley strongly favoured this design – in 1770 a Conference regulation read ‘Build all preaching houses, if the ground will admit, in the Octagon form. It is best for the voice....and more commodious...’

The pre-1864 picture below (Fig. 2) appears to show a square-built church exterior. The photographed model (owned by City Road Presbyterian Church) certainly does so, but is thought to be a 1960s interpretation of the picture. However, the contemporary descriptions of the Chapel (for example ‘octagonal roof’ references in Reference 1, page 60) and the 1833 John Wood map of Chester describe an external octagonal shape (even if the map symbol in Fig. 3 is not an accurate octagon!). It may therefore be inferred that the 1864 picture lacks accurate perspective of the octagonal exterior (rather than an internal octagonal layout being within a square exterior).

**Fig. 2: The Octagon Chapel**



Model of the Octagon Chapel owned by City Road Presbyterian Church: this is simply a 1960s era interpretation of the painting



**Fig. 3: Extract from Map of Chester in 1833 by John Wood**

The symbolic representation on the map is certainly not of a square-built exterior for the main part of the Chapel, although it appears perhaps to be more of a heptagon than an octagon. It looks as though the pre-1864 picture (Fig. 2) is viewed from the north-eastern side of the building

Wesley Church has at least one link with the Octagon: the fine blue seated chair in our minister's vestry came from the Octagon vestry, and it is very likely that John Wesley must at some time have sat in this chair!

The Octagon was the centre of Methodist life in Chester from 1765 to 1811. It was demolished in 1864 when City Road was constructed to link the new main railway station to the city. The present City Road Presbyterian Church was erected close to the same site.

## **2.2 Commonhall Street**

In 1776 a room for public services was opened in Commonhall Street (off Bridge Street) for those who found the Octagon Chapel too far away. George Walker, the first Steward of the St. John Street Chapel, (see Appendix 15.11, 'Contact' number 9) wrote of "the engagement of a large room in Commonhall Lane, formerly used as a chapel by the Anabaptists, in which Sunday preaching was had at 2 o'clock to a congregation of about two hundred hearers who completely filled the place. In addition to which service, several of the Classes were set there, and preaching was also had there on Wednesday evenings at seven o'clock" (instead of at the Octagon). At this date Sunday services were held in the Octagon at 8am and 6pm.

But there was some dissension between the Commonhall Street congregation and the Octagon. During John Wesley's life there was no formal separation from the Church of England; the Sacrament was not administered by Methodist preachers, and Methodist services were deliberately not held at the same time as Church of England services. This practice was followed by Conference until 1792, a year after John Wesley's death. It was strictly observed by the Octagon society, but the Commonhall Street congregation was more liberal.

Tensions continued between the two chapels and in 1793 the District Meeting (equivalent to our Synod today) forbade Methodist local preachers to preach in Commonhall Street. In 1793 there was a break away from Conference and the Methodist New Connexion was formed. In 1794 the Commonhall Street congregation separated themselves more decisively from the Octagon, by building their own chapel in Trinity Lane, measuring '12 yards by 19 yards within'. The Trinity Lane Society left the Chester Wesleyan Circuit and joined the New Connexion. In 1835 they erected a large, handsome Chapel in Pepper Street. (The imposing frontage can still be seen in 2012 as the Chateau furniture store façade).

In 1806 the Octagon Chapel formally agreed to administer the Sacrament and to change its hours of worship to 10.30am and 6pm.

### 3. St. John Street Wesleyan Chapel 1811 - 1906

#### 3.1 Church Building

After more than 40 years, the Society at the Octagon Chapel decided to build a bigger church in a more central position. The present site in St. John Street was purchased on 1st February 1811 and the new church opened on Sunday October 4<sup>th</sup> 1812, built at a total cost of £6,865.19s.10d (about £360,000 at 2012 values). The Architect was Thomas Harrison, together with William Cole II of Chester.

The building of the Church was a courageous venture. It was a difficult and uncertain time. Britain was still engaged in a long war with Napoleon which had gone on intermittently since 1793. In 1810 her army was locked in a bitter struggle in the Spanish Peninsula. The economy was suffering, made worse by a series of poor harvests. Prices were rising rapidly and the Government was fearful of revolution. It was particularly suspicious of Methodism with its itinerant ministers.

St. John Street was then very different from its present state. Objectors to the purchase called it a mean street, liable to flooding, narrow, and overlooked by the City walls, which meant that the place would be constantly annoyed by those ill-disposed and attracted by the sounds of worship. The protagonists argued to the contrary that it was central, in the midst of population, and the City walls would provide convenient access. Opposite the site was a timber yard.

The Architect Thomas Harrison (1744-1829) was born in Yorkshire and trained in Rome, made his reputation in Lancaster and practised for much of his life in Chester. His work in Chester included the Shire Hall (won in competition and still in use as Chester Crown Court), the Northgate, the Commercial Rooms in Northgate Street (now the City Club), the Propylaea Gateway at the Castle, St. Martin's Lodge and the Grosvenor Bridge (the longest single span bridge in the world when it was built). In the book *Early Methodism in and around Chester* by F F Bretherton (Reference 1), it is explained that although "the Architect was Mr Thomas Harrison....Mr Harrison only gave the plan, which fact will account for the smallness of the fee recorded in the accounts. The specifications and sections were drawn up by Mr B Gommer, Architect of Ruabon." Chapter 8 of the Bretherton book includes all the detailed costs of the work.

'The Chester Courant' on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1812 gave good coverage to the project: "New Methodist Chapel. This place of public worship, situated in John Street, in this city, is to be opened for public worship on Sunday next (see advertisement). This is a handsome brick building, 22 yards by 17 inside, with a handsome circular front to the east, erected from a model by Mr. Harrison, Architect of our Shire Hall. It contains 99 pews or seats, those below lined with green baize, which contains about 600 sittings, beside the singing gallery and free seats, which contain upwards of 250 more, and when the whole of the aisles etc in the Chapel are well filled it is computed that it will hold near 1400 persons. ...Behind the Chapel a building is erected for a Sunday School, capable of accommodating about 200 scholars, to which and to the back/front of the Chapel a flight of steps descends from the walls; the Corporation laudably granted permission to open a passage from thence". The fine Georgian building next door (now offices at No. 6 St. John Street) served as the manse.



The opening on Sunday October 4<sup>th</sup> 1812 was a great occasion. At 10.30am the worship was led by the Superintendent Rev. John Braithwaite; the preacher was Rev. Sam Bradbury of Liverpool. At 2.30pm Rev. John Gailton of Liverpool took the service and at 6pm Rev. Jabez Bunting of Halifax preached. (Bunting was to become one of the most influential leaders of Wesleyan Methodism, and was four times President of Conference). In his opening remarks at the morning service, Rev. John Braithwaite extolled the building's virtues, adding: "But I hope it will have a superior glory in a more exalted sense. I hope it will have the glory of being the birthplace of many precious souls, and that where one soul was converted in the other Chapel, scores will be converted in this...."

R.E. Waterhouse, a nephew of one of the original Trustees, wrote: "It was thought to be a very beautiful and perfect construction.... Its front to St. John Street is semi-circular and I have heard some of the old men and women speak in awestruck tones of the immense cost of the bricks specially moulded for the erection." The local Methodist historian, Joseph Janion wrote in 1833: "This noble and beautiful house....has a semi-circular front, three entrances, a gallery on three sides, and an orchestra for the singers...."

Robert's Chester Guide (1851) quotes Hemingway: "...a well built structure, with a semi-circular front and two entrances. It is galleried on three sides and behind the pulpit is a large orchestra for the accommodation of singers, where there is also a well tuned organ".

There is an apparent inconsistency between the 1833 description of the Chapel which talks of "3 entrances" and the 1851 description which refers to "2 entrances". The following detail, Fig. 4, from an 1855 aerial view of Chester shows an entrance with steps up to it in the bowed front to St. John Street. By contrast this has been replaced by a window in the photo Fig. 6 below, published in 1903. The extra front entrance is compatible with the pew layout shown in Fig. 8 below.



**Fig. 4: John McGahey's 'View of Chester from a Balloon', 1855** shows Wesley, front right, with entrance steps from St. John Street. (It also shows the 1835 Pepper Street Chapel - top centre).

The 1851 Chester Guide refers to a well-tuned organ. No further information about this original organ has been found so far, apart from the fact that in 1831 the Organ Blower was paid 5/- a quarter for his labours, but the second organ installed by Messrs. Whitely in 1877 at the cost of £188 is shown in the interior photo (see Fig. 7 below) from the 1903 Bretherton book (Reference 1).



**Fig. 5: 1875 Map**

*This excerpt from the 1875 map of Chester also shows the St. John Street Chapel still with entrance steps up from the street in addition to two rear entrances. The St. John Street entrance steps may of course have simply not been updated from earlier map versions.*

*Note the many crowded courts in the vicinity occupied by 'poor' families (hence references to the 'poor fund' and large Sunday Schools).*

*Note also the locations to the north of the Chapel of the Wesleyan Methodist Boys and Girls Day school, and adjoining the Chapel to the south the Infant School, behind the Sunday School buildings.*

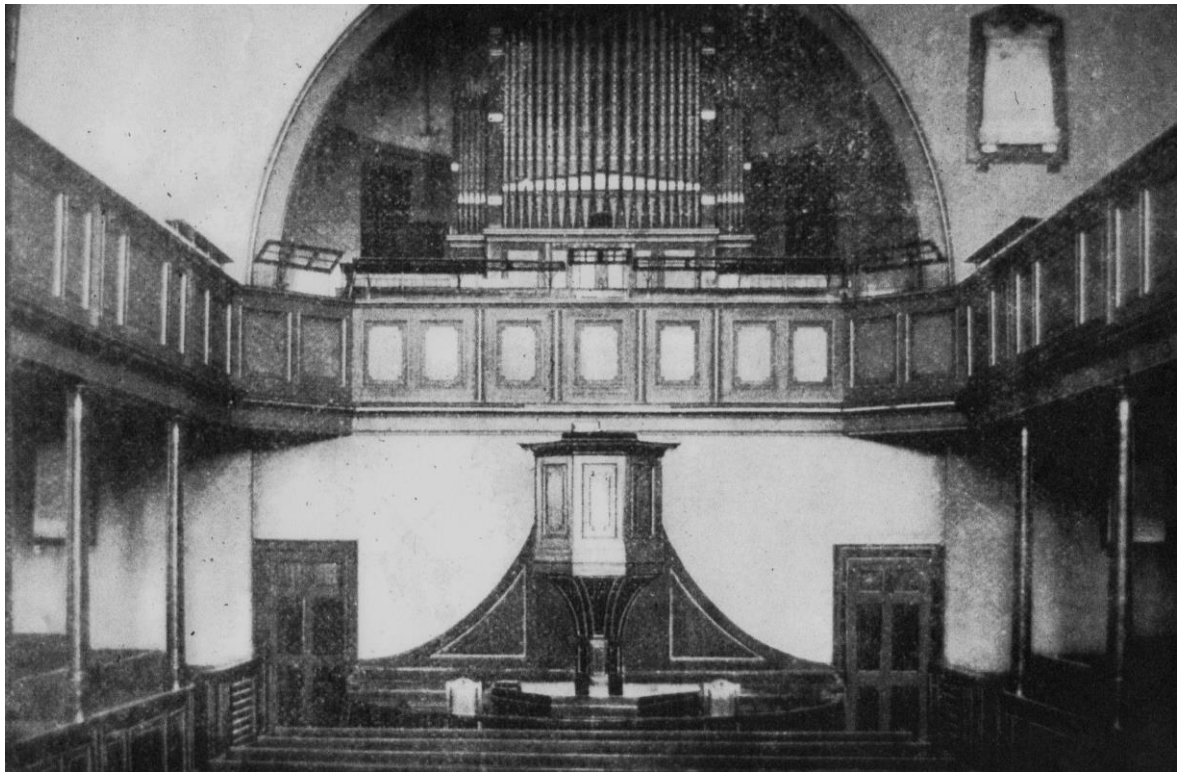
No full plan of the original Chapel has been located to date, but the following two photos from the 1903 Bretherton book (Reference 1), Figs. 6 and 7, together with the original pew seating plan for ground floor and gallery, Fig. 8, give a good indication of the 19<sup>th</sup> century design and layout.



**Fig. 6: Bow Front to St. John Street (1903)**

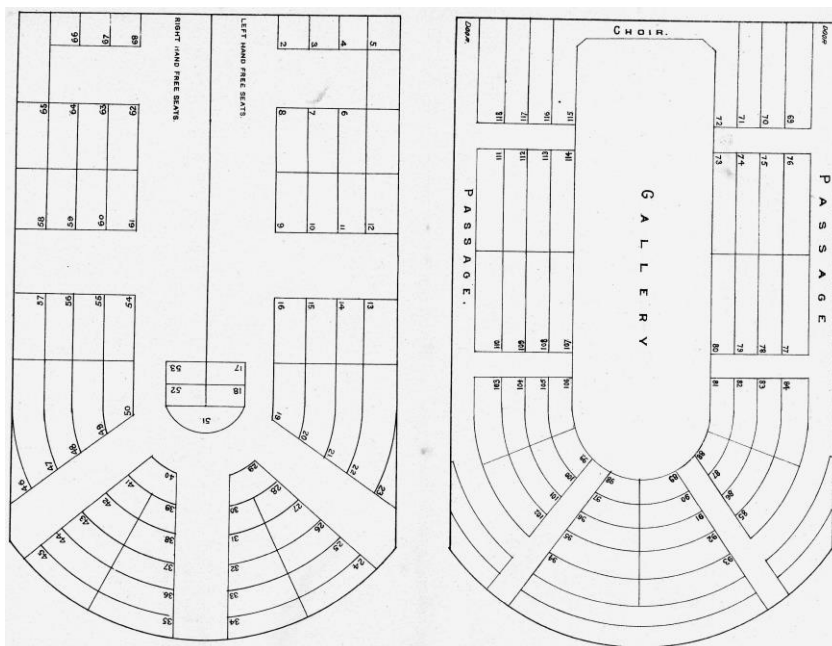
*Note the side alleys to the main entrances on each side (near the City Walls). These lead to the two entrance doors at the back of the church on either side of the pulpit.*





**Fig. 7: Interior view (1903) towards City Walls**

- Notes:*
1. There is a semi-circular apse behind the choir gallery/organ, but the diameter is matched to the arch rather than the full width of the church.
  2. There are two entrance doors on either side of the pulpit from the rear of the church, near the City walls.
  3. The galleries are wider than now, their fronts level with each side of the chancel arch.
  4. Simpler, lower backed seating faces the pulpit in the centre on the ground floor (not shown on the original pew plan, Fig. 8).



**Fig. 8: Original Pews  
Seating Plan -  
Ground Floor (left)  
& Gallery (right)**

*[Cheshire Archives and Local  
Studies reference:  
CALZ ZCR 55/3 103 - 107]*

*Note that the ground floor and gallery level pew seating fill the bow front end of the church facing St. John Street.*



#### a. Society Milestones and Development 1812 - 1906

The first Trustees on the new site and property were appointed on July 30<sup>th</sup> 1811 (*all of Chester unless otherwise listed*):

|                                   |               |   |              |                                 |              |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|---|--------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| George Lowe                       | Goldsmith     | John Jones                              | Linen Draper | Henry Bowers                    | Druggist     |
| George Walker                     | Wine Merchant | Robert Shearing                         | Druggist     | Samuel Williams                 | Linen Draper |
| Thomas Jones                      | Gentleman     | Samuel Beckett                          | Waggoner     | Robert Parry                    | Currier      |
| Joseph Betteley                   | Cordwainer    | Thomas Shone<br><i>Higher Kinnerton</i> | Gentleman    | John Hitchen<br><i>Alpraham</i> | Gentleman    |
| James Sale<br><i>Duddon Heath</i> | Yeoman        | John Reece<br><i>Tarvin</i>             | Miller       |                                 |              |

The Trustees had to borrow £5,070 out of the £6,865 which the new church cost in 1812. In 1848 there was still a debt of £4,000 on the Trust. Not until 1873 – 60 years later – is it recorded that “during the year the Trustees have been able to make arrangements for the extinction of the debt on the premises, on the occasion of the laying of the top-stone of the City Road Chapel”.

The church was originally illuminated by 84 candles: 26 in 6 chandeliers in the gallery, 20 in the gallery front seats, 4 in the pulpit and the rest in 2 large chandeliers.

In 1818 the bill for candles came to £12. 17s. 3d., but a load of coal only cost 11/6d. The caretaker's wages were £4. 1s. 3d. per quarter. In 1819 ‘an old woman’ was paid 3/-d. for weeding and clearing the Chapel yard, and in January 1820 someone was paid 3/-d. for removing the snow from the Chapel roof. The first ever reference to gas is in 1821: £8 14s. 6d. was paid to the ‘Gas Company’.

In the early years the main chief sources of revenue to the Trust were Pew Rents, which in 1827 (a typical year) brought in £207 (about £ 16,000 at 2012 values): the ‘Quarterly Collection’ £15 and the Chapel Anniversary £62. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Pew Rents and the Anniversary were key sources of Trust income.

When it opened in 1812 the new church had 361 members. There were 500 children in the Sunday School. The girls’ Sunday School was held in St. John Street and the boys’ in premises in Back Brook Street.

In 1839 the decision was taken to establish a day school under the control of the Sunday School committee, using the same premises as the Sunday School. The boys’ and girls’ day schools were united in St. John Street when new schools were built in 1842, next to the preacher’s house (as shown on the map, Fig. 4). The building subsequently became the Public Library, demolished in the 1980s, and now the site of Cruise Nightclub. Just over sixty years later, in 1903, the City Education Authority was formed. It was dissatisfied with the standard at that time of the accommodation at the Wesleyan School in St. John Street and so it was closed in 1909, the pupils being transferred to Love Street School.

By 1846 there were 204 children in the morning Sunday School, and 284 in the afternoon Sunday School. There are records of a Sunday School Outing by rail to Beeston in 1846, and another to Ruabon in 1847. The Sunday School teachers, at their meeting on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1847, recorded the

following resolution: "That this meeting calling to mind that the Bridge across the Dee, over which the Teachers and Children passed on their way to Ruabon during the Race Week broke shortly after, by which accident several persons were killed and others seriously injured, desired to express its devout thanks to Almighty God for his merciful protection during their journey". Appendix 19 provides more detail about this major disaster from the early years of development of the railway network, which occurred on Monday May 24<sup>th</sup> 1847 (following Race Week earlier that month).

In 1838 hot water pipes were installed in the Church. In 1851 gas was installed to light the pulpit; this was very successful and soon afterwards gas lighting was extended to the whole Church.

The Chapel was registered for marriages on August 19<sup>th</sup> 1858, and the charge was £3. (The first marriage register has yet to be located. Registers held at Wesley date from 1900: information on baptisms from 1837 and marriages from 1900 is included in section 10).

Over a period of 67 years in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the role of Chapel Steward was held by Henry Bowers, his son and two grandsons (see Centenary Booklet, Appendix 21). A wall plaque in the Church commemorates Henry Bowers, who was Mayor of Chester in 1817 and 1827. The stained glass side window in the Church (Appendix 17.3) commemorates his grandson, Alderman Thomas Bowers.

Further information on the wall plaques and the background to the people commemorated on them is given in Appendix 18. They provide an interesting and important link with the earliest days of Methodism in Chester, including associations with John Wesley himself.

In 1864 the chapel was completely decorated at a cost of £46, with an additional £9 for the rent of the Music Hall for the period when the services were held there during the decoration of the Church.

In 1872-3 a new Wesleyan Methodist Church was built in City Road (in the 1930s this was converted to become Central Hall) because the St John Street Chapel was "too strait to accommodate the worshippers". Prior to that date, in 1856, a new Wesleyan Methodist Church had been built in Saltney and a thriving society was established there. Another extension within the City was made in 1888 by the successful establishment of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Garden Lane.

In 1882 extensive roof repairs were undertaken at a cost of £438 (about £39,000 at 2012 values), but the whole undertaking was covered by a subscription list headed by the Duke of Westminster's gift of £50. A total of £659 was raised by these subscriptions and out of the balance £100 was allocated to City Road and £73 to Garden Lane to reduce their debts. In 1891 new Sunday School and hall buildings were erected.

The St. John Street Wesleyan Chapel Trust was renewed several times during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the appointment of new Trustees.

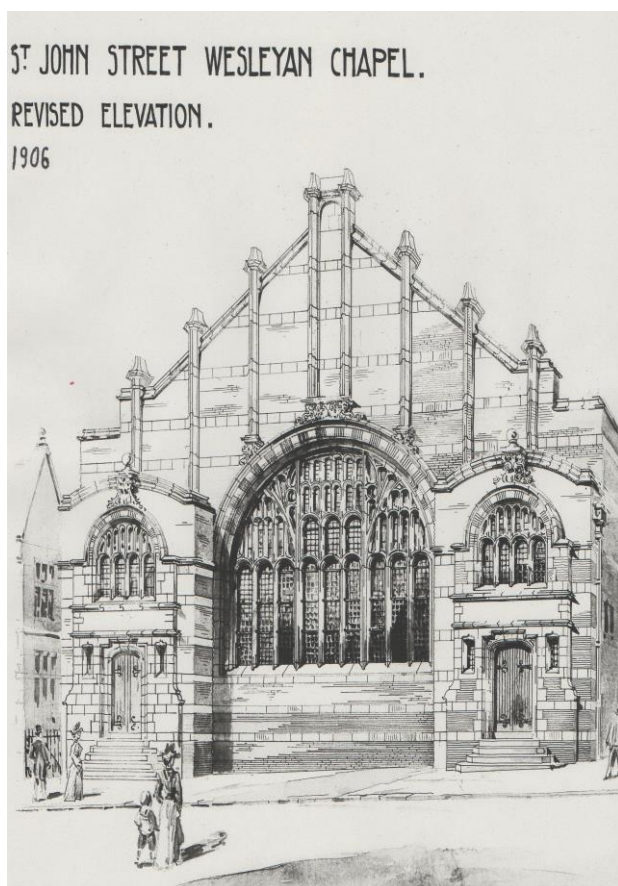
On 28<sup>th</sup> October 1903 the Church was recorded as seating 1,000 and having a total attendance of 357.

#### 4. St. John Street Wesleyan Chapel 1906 - 1926

The 1906 reconstruction was designed by P H and W T Lockwood. The bow front onto St. John Street was replaced by the present building frontage. The seating within the church was modernised and some internal reordering took place. Initial plans for this reconstruction were drawn up in 1905. The Methodist application for permission to alter the Church was dated April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1906, but one wonders whether work had already started, given that the Church reopened less than 6 months later). The reasons for the alterations were said to be: "Inconvenience of access, the entrance being at the back, and want of more light". The reopening services were held on Sundays September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 1906.

John Champness's 2005 book *Thomas Harrison – Georgian Architect of Chester and Lancaster, 1744-1829* records: "The fashionably bowed two-storey front to St. John Street was replaced in 1906 with a typical - and not unattractive - red-brick façade with a large nine-light window filled with perpendicular tracery. At the same time the interior was also significantly changed." The Listed Building description (Appendix 9) includes the assertion: "The 1906 extensions and alterations included reorienting the church". However, it is clear from the photographs and seating plans included in section 3 (Figs. 7 & 8), and those that follow in Figs. 11 to 13 confirm that, while the entrances to the Church were moved from the City Walls end to the St. John Street end of the building, the worship space has always faced west towards the City Walls. The descriptions of the changes in 1906 given in Appendices 10 and 13 implicitly endorse this; they make no reference to any change in direction of worship (which would have been a very substantial reconfiguration).

**Fig. 9: New façade to St. John Street, 1906**



**Fig. 10: Reopening Services, Sept 1906**

ST. JOHN STREET WESLEYAN CHAPEL.

### RE-OPENING SERVICES.

DEAR SIR,

The Trustees have great pleasure in announcing that the Services in connection with the Re-opening of the Chapel after its Restoration will take place on SUNDAYS, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER. 1906

ON THE 23<sup>rd</sup> SEPTEMBER,

The REV. S. GAMBLE-WALKER

will preach at 10-30 a.m. and 6-30 p.m., and conduct a Young Peoples Service at 2-45.

ON THE 30<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER,

The REV. H. C. HOCKEN, of Liverpool,

will preach at 10-30 a.m. and 6-30 p.m.

The Alterations and Restoration have cost about £2,600, and it is hoped that generous support will be accorded at these Services towards raising the large balance still required to meet the cost. The Trustees cordially invite your attendance at the Services, and will greatly appreciate your kind and practical sympathy.

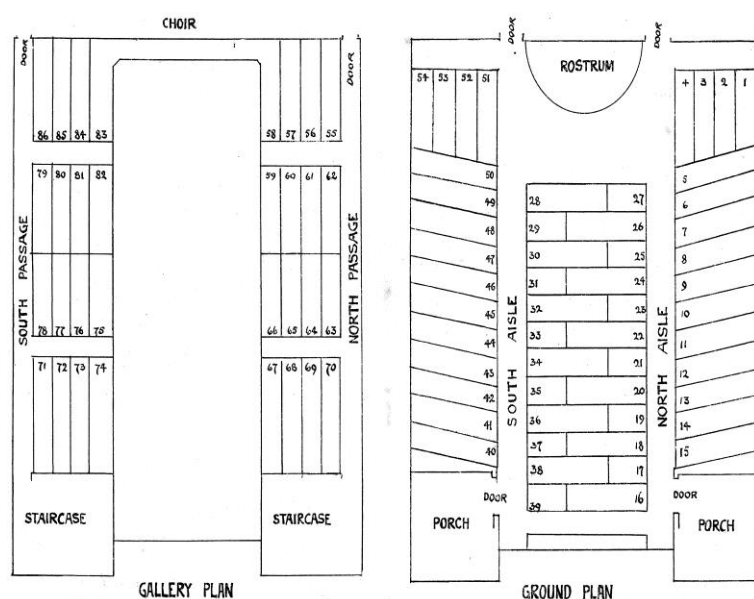
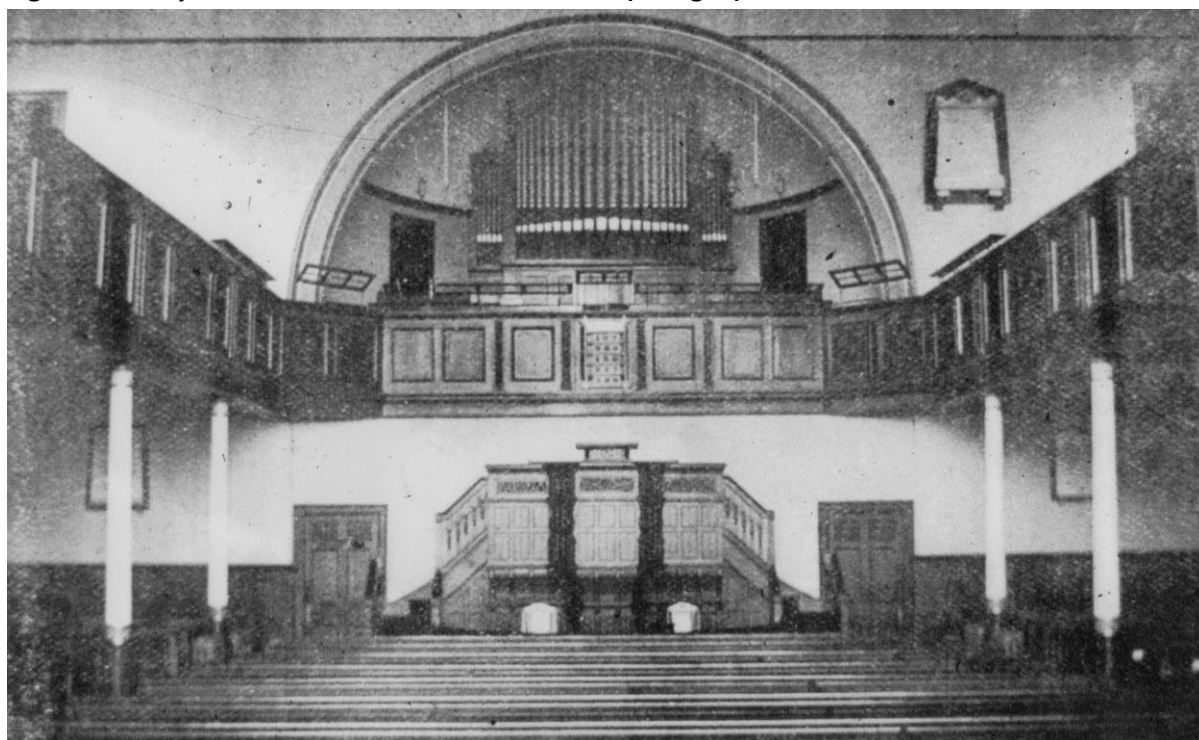
We are, dear sir,

Yours faithfully,

T. WHEATLEY, Superintendent Minister.  
S. P. DAVIES, Treasurer,  
F. MADDOCKS, Chapel Steward.

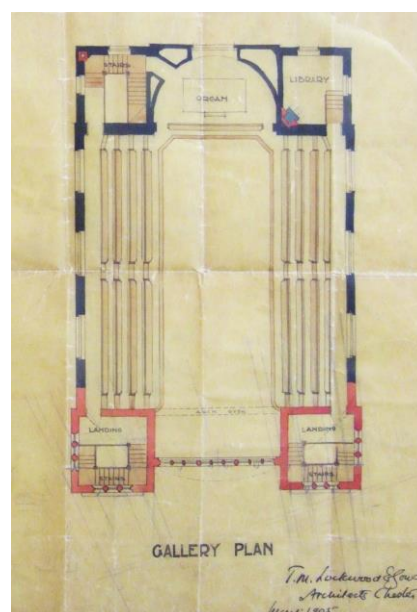
[Ref: CALS ZCR 55/3 103 - 107]

**Fig. 11: Wesley Interior after 1906 Reconstruction (cf. Fig. 7)**



**Fig. 12: New Seating Plan for Gallery and Ground Floor**

[Ref.: CALS ZCR 55/3 103 - 107]



**Fig. 13: Architect's Drawing for Gallery, showing Apse over Organ**

[Ref.: CALS ZCR 55/3 113 - 117]

In Appendix 13, Will Clarke (Chapel Steward for many years in the mid-twentieth century in succession to his father, and proprietor of an ironmongers in Frodsham Street) writing in 1970 recalled: "When I was a young child the front of the Church was brickwork in a semi-circle, and the congregation entered the Church by using two passages which ran towards the City walls and then turned to the Church, one on each side of the Church. One door was near to where the Choir Vestry is now and the other was where the organ is now situated. Then two staircases went up to the galleries from each side. The pulpit was in the centre of the Church, and very high. The Minster's



Vestry was behind the pulpit and between the entrances. I remember particularly the darkness and coldness of the room. This vestry was used for many years after the Church was altered”.

“The first major alteration was the removal of the brick built front of the Church and the building of the present front. My first memory of the Church as it then was, was a sample of the new pews being placed in the school room for the members to approve before the present seating was installed”.

He also recalled: “The Church at this time was attended by a number of large families; all the recreation of the young was centred in the Church and School. Sunday started with morning school at 9.30am, then services at 10.30am, school again at 2.30pm, with an evening service at 6.30pm, followed very often by a prayer meeting”.

A particular feature installed in the 1906 changes was the wood and glass canopy with side access doors covering the central pew at the back of the church, no doubt designed to keep out the draughts from the adjacent entrance doors, and still affectionately known as ‘the greenhouse’. The 1906 entrance doors to the church (which now link to the foyer and the store/north gallery stairs) included leaded glass windows.



**Fig. 14: Centenary Booklet (Appendix 21)**

The Centenary Booklet (see Appendix 21) notes that in 1912 the annual cost of maintenance, lighting, cleaning, heating and care of the premises was £150/yr (about £13,000/yr at 2012 values). Pew rents averaged about £70/yr, Anniversary Services raised £20/yr and the Sunday School contribution was £15/yr. The balance depended on special fund-raising efforts each year.

In 1914 the original cathedral glass window in the St. John Street frontage was replaced with the fine stained glass East Window in memory of William Twiston Davies, JP. His name became prominent in the second half of the nineteenth century. He and the members of his family were generous supporters of the Church and of the Missionary Society. The East Window is a fitting memorial not only to Mr. W. T. Davies, but to the sons and daughters who erected it in memory of their father. Mr. W. T. Davies was the son of Rev. Samuel Davies who entered the Ministry in 1806 at the age of eighteen, and who was one of the pioneers of Welsh Methodism. (When Miss E. Ruth Davies, who was the daughter of Mr. W. T. Davies, died in 1960 a remarkable record of close interest and service extending over one hundred and fifty years in three generations came to an end). The East Window was designed by Gamon and Humphry (see Appendix 17.2).

Will Clarke recalled the impact on the Church of the Great War: "The 1914-1918 war altered the pattern of service to the community very much. The Trustees decided not to black out the Church, but decided to hold the evening service in the schoolroom. Troops stationed in the area used the Church, and the more talented ones organised concerts for the troops and congregation to meet. There were many difficulties in using the building for so many purposes, but I do not remember any of the services suffering through being cramped. The choir managed to lead the singing with the aid of an American Organ, and I do not remember an Advent time without the rendering of the 'Messiah', so strong was the love of music and singing. Once or twice this special service was held in the afternoon in the Church, sometimes in the evening in the schoolroom, but always to a crowded and appreciative congregation".

## 5. St. John Street Methodist Church 1926 - 1970

In 1926, a further set of structural and interior improvements was completed, including the installation of electric lighting. The current chancel was added with its memorial window to commemorate seven members of the church who died in service in the First World War. This memorial window (the 'Warrior Window') was designed by Henry Gustav Hiller (1864 - 1946) (see Appendix 17.1). It was inspired by the famous painting "The Vigil" by the Scottish artist John Pettie RA (1839 – 1893).

Sited in this chancel is the fine three manual and pedal organ built by the respected organ builder James J. Binns of Leeds. Although a three manual console was provided in 1926, it was not until 1948 that second-hand choir organ pipes and mechanisms, operated from the lowest of the three manual keyboards, could be afforded and installed. The organ employs the Binns patent tubular-pneumatic action. Appendix 12 provides more details about the history and specification of the current Wesley organ.

In Appendix 13, Will Clarke recalls one significant change made to the galleries during this reconstruction: "The front seats of the old galleries were removed, supports were taken up to the ceiling and arched over".

The 'Souvenir Programme: Re-opening Services' for the Church and dedication of the new organ and memorial window, July 10<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> 1926 (Appendix 10 and Fig. 16), states in the introduction:

*"For the past one hundred and seventy-five years Methodism has made its contribution in Chester to the coming of the Kingdom of God. Our St. John Street Church has stood since 1811 as a centre of religious life and activity where through the years many leading citizens have been trained for the service of God and their fellows. In 1905/6 structural alterations were made including a new frontage, the putting in of modern seats and the erection of a new rostrum. These changes brought improvements but not complete satisfaction. An attempt has now been made to give unity and beauty to the building – and with success.*

*A Chancel has been added with new Choir seats and Organ, new Pulpit and Communion Table, and a fine Memorial Window, given by Mr S. P. Davies in memory of the St. John Street men who laid down their lives in the Great War. The Electric Light has also been installed in the Church, and two Vestries built.*

*This transformation of the interior of the building gives a pleasing effect and is likely to be viewed with general satisfaction. The total cost of the scheme is about £5,500 (about £250,000 at 2012 values) - most of which has been raised, in fact a debt of only £500 remains, and this, it is hoped, will be removed by a Bazaar next November.*

*Our mission is not yet fulfilled. The outward alterations mark no change in spirit or doctrine. We retain our evangelical character, seek to take our part in world evangelisation, stand for social righteousness and would proclaim ourselves in the words of Wesley, - the friends of all and the enemies of none."*

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Fig. 15\*: Church Front and Entrance in 1926  
 Fig. 17\*: New Chancel [\*Ref.:CALS ZCR 55/2 105 - 113]

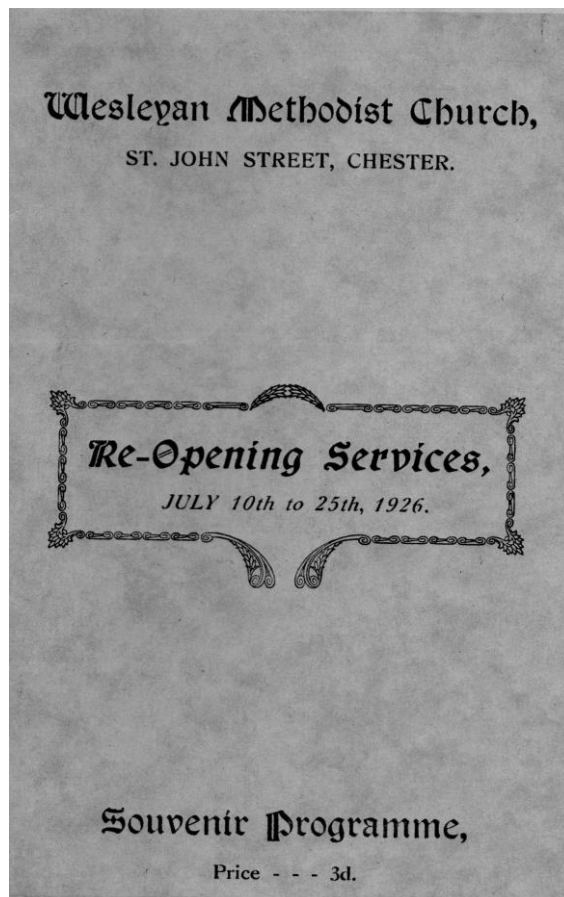


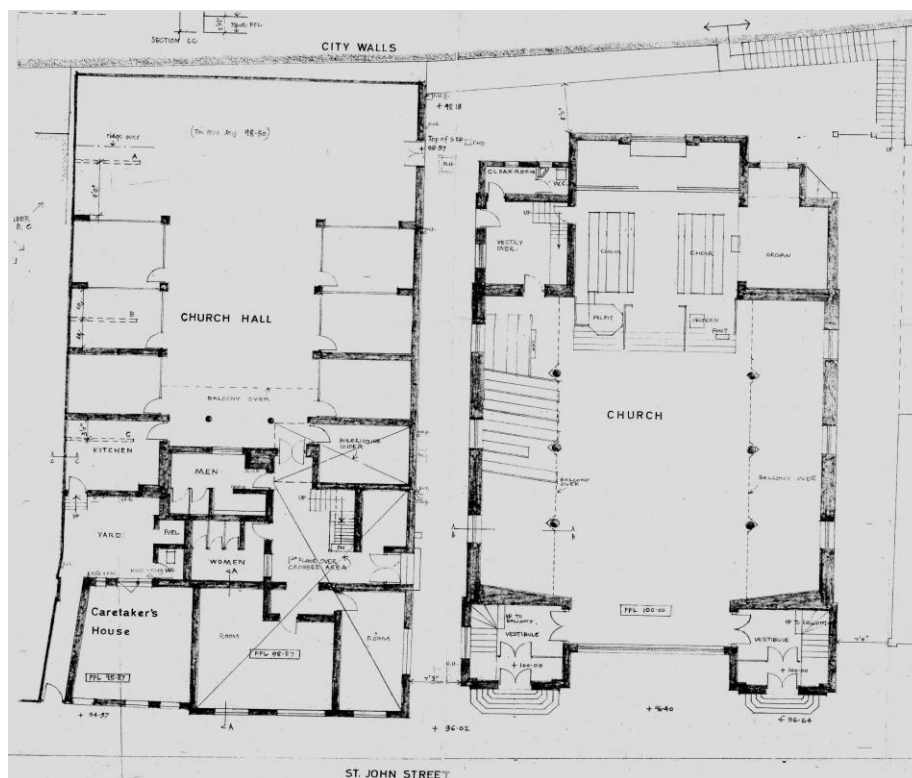
Fig. 16: Souvenir Programme of Services  
 Fig. 18\*: Later View of Chancel from Gallery





The following plan shows layouts of the separate Church and Sunday School Buildings after the 1926 changes.

**Fig. 19: Church and Sunday School Plans, after 1926**



One highlight of the inter-war years was a BBC radio broadcast. Rev. William J Roberts in June 1962 (Appendix 15.7) recalled: "I well remember the service broadcast from our St. John Street Church in October 1935 and the breathless excitement of the preparations. I was preaching in the morning and the service was taped to test the instruments. It was a rare honour in those far off days for a church to be on the air and we came out of the ordeal with great distinction. The Choir, under the baton of Mr. Edward Pritchard, with Mr. Kendrick at the Organ, was at its best and Dr. Stafford's sermon on 'Toiling in Rowing' was afterwards published."

During the Second World War the Trustees again decided not to black out the Church, but rather to black out the school building. This decision made it impossible to use the Church, except on Sunday mornings, all through the winter months. The troops came to St. John Street in considerable numbers and were entertained in several ways. There was a social every Sunday evening after service with singers drawn from the congregation and other churches, as well as some from the forces themselves. Again the choir kept strong, and the rendering of 'The Messiah' on Advent Sunday was a highlight of the choir's year.

One night during a period of the Second World War, when bombing was very heavy, all the windows on both sides of the Church were either damaged or blown out by a blast. Very little other damage was done and the picture windows at the east and west ends of the Church were not damaged. The 'Butt Window' on the north side of the Church was destroyed, but the 'Bowers Window' on the south side was able to be repaired (Appendix 17.3). The broken glass was very carefully collected

from the rubble and replaced. The other four stained glass side windows were replaced by the present cathedral glass leaded lights.

One of the most moving times at the Church during this period was when the school room was filled with people evacuated from London at the time of the flying bombs. The council had used the premises to store blankets and mattresses for use in an emergency and when the school room was used the beds were placed all round the room. About 150 persons were fed and slept in the room and members of the Church were asked to look after them. This included looking after them during the night and because of their unsettled state this was a trying experience for everyone.

In his June 1962 newsletter (Appendix 15.7), Rev William J Roberts gives an interesting and informative perspective on his memories of the church over the period 1935 to 1962. Of 1935 he recalled: "If my memory serves me aright, the Church was not bursting at the seams with fellowship meetings, and yet it was in many ways a fine Church....By comparison with 1935, our Church has made progress. Our present fellowship life is much more vigorous, our normal congregations more consistently good, and the members generally are taking a more responsible share in the leadership of the Church. We cherish what is sometimes called 'the St. John Street tradition' which combines dignity with adaptability.....The Chapel is one hundred and fifty years old, and we show no signs of age except mellowness and charity. St. John Street is a Church that is constantly renewing its youth, and for this we owe a great debt to those many fine individuals and families who have settled among us during the past fifteen years and who have supplied us with so many leaders. The Church is increasing in numbers and influence and is constantly welcoming new friends."

Will Clarke's review of his life and memories of St. John Street Methodist Church, quoted in section 4 above (and included as Appendix 13), covers many aspects of church life over the period to 1970. A fine tradition of music in worship and in special events was sustained throughout. The annual performance of Handel's Messiah in Advent was invariably a highlight of the choir's year.

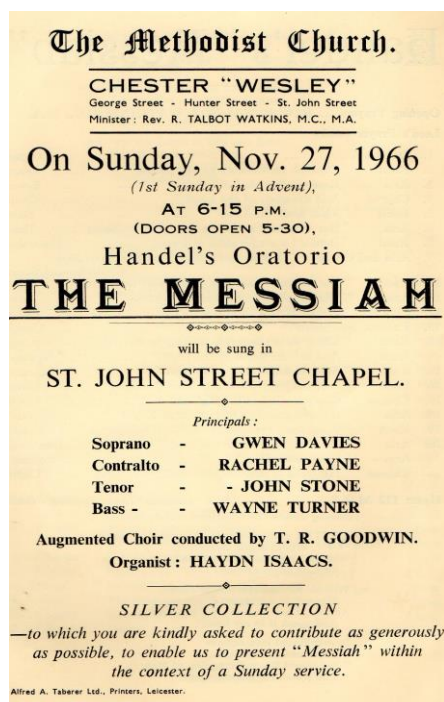


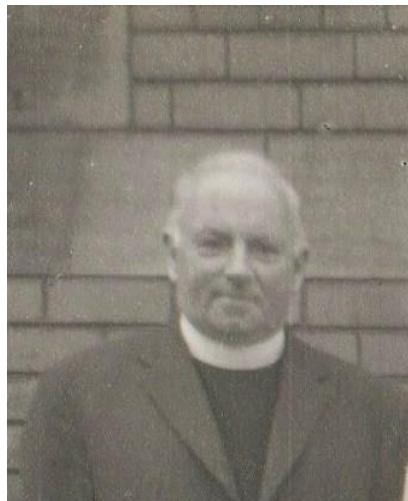
Fig. 20: 1966 'Messiah' Poster



Fig. 21: Frontage/Side Passageway pre-1968

[Ref.:CALS ZCR 55/2 105 - 113]

All the ministers who served at St. John Street Methodist Church between 1926 and 1970 are listed later in this document, in section 10. Rev. William J Roberts was the Superintendent Minister from 1957 to 1962.



**Fig. 22: Rev. William J. Roberts**

He was succeeded by Rev. R Talbot Watkins for the period 1962 to 1969. Rev. R Talbot Watkins had served as padre to the 1st Parachute Battalion in the Second World War and was awarded the Military Cross in the Arnhem campaign, 17<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> September 1944. His citation included the following:

*"...His endless tending of the wounded under fire, and his continued organisation of their evacuation to dressing stations - often only made possible by his untiring personal effort and example - afforded an unparalleled inspiration to all ranks. His demeanour throughout, his unfailing courage and his complete disregard for his own safety guaranteed the morale of the entire force....".*

Under his leadership the unification of the Hunter Street, George Street and St. John Street Methodist Churches took place in the period 1967 to 1970.



**Fig. 23: Rev. R Talbot Watkins**

Rev. Tony Hearle succeeded Rev. R Talbot Watkins in 1969. This was just before the renovated premises of Wesley Methodist Church were reopened in 1970 for the united congregations, who had been worshipping together during the construction works at George Street Methodist Church. He provided strong and sensitive leadership in the early years of the new Wesley.

## 6. Methodist 19<sup>th</sup> Century Branching and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Re-integration

### 6.1 Overview

A historical interlude is necessary in understanding the background to the diverse strands of Methodism, in Chester and elsewhere, which were eventually united. The original body founded as a result of Wesley's work was later known as the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Schisms within the original body and independent revivals led to the formation of a number of separate denominations calling themselves Methodist. The largest of these were the Primitive Methodist Church, deriving from a revival at Mow Cop in Staffordshire, the Bible Christians and the Methodist New Connexion. In 1907, a union of smaller groups with the Methodist New Connexion and Bible Christian Church led to the formation of the United Methodist Church. Then the Wesleyan, Primitive and United streams of British Methodism joined together in 1932 to form the current Methodist Church of Great Britain.

### 6.2 Methodist New Connexion/United Methodists

The Methodist New Connexion, also known as the Kilhamite Methodists, was formed in 1797 by secession from the Wesleyan Methodists. The secession was led by Alexander Kilham, and resulted from a dispute regarding the position and rights of the laity. In 1791, Kilham denounced the Methodist Conference for giving too much power to the ministers of the church, at the expense of the laity. The Plan of Pacification adopted by the Conference in 1795 further entrenched his position, and Kilham was expelled from the Conference in 1797. Kilham formed the New Connexion, based around his church in Sheffield. It thrived, and soon spread across Britain. At its conferences, ministers and laymen were of equal number, the laymen being chosen by the circuits and in some cases by guardian representatives elected for life by conference. Otherwise the doctrines and order of the New Connexion were the same as those of the Wesleyans.

The Pepper Street Chapel was built in 1835 by the society previously worshipping in Trinity Lane to become the Chester Circuit Chapel for the Methodist New Connexion. The Methodist New Connexion merged in 1907 with the Bible Christian Church and the United Methodist Free Churches to form the United Methodist Church. Financial problems caused the closure of the Pepper Street Chapel in 1918. The frontage later became incorporated in the car showroom of Ford dealers Quicks of Chester. The external facade was restored as part of a new Habitat Store in around 1980. It is now part of the Chateau furniture store.

**Fig. 24: Pepper Street Chapel Façade in 2011**





### 6.3 Primitive Methodism

Primitive Methodism was a major movement in Britain from about 1810 until the Methodist Union in 1932. It was seen to originate in an All Day of Prayer held at Mow Cop, Staffordshire on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1807. This led, in 1811, to two groups joining together: the 'Camp Meeting Methodists' and the 'Clowesites', led by Hugh Bourne and William Clowes respectively. Bourne and Clowes were charismatic evangelists. Both had reputations for zeal and were sympathetic to ideas which the Wesleyan Connexion condemned. Their belief most unacceptable to the Wesleyan Connexion was support for the so-called 'Camp Meetings', which were day-long open air meetings involving public praying, preaching and 'Love Feasts' (communal meals).

The death of John Wesley removed a restraining influence on popular Methodism. There was no obvious leader or authority, and power was vested in the Wesleyan Conference. The Wesleyans formally split from the Church of England, which led them to greater organisation and self-definition. The leadership could now withhold the tickets of members, like Bourne and Clowes, who did not behave in the way expected by the Conference.

### 6.4 Primitive Methodism in Chester

Primitive Methodism was brought to Chester in missions by Joshua Reynolds and John Wedgewood in 1819. The first church in Chester was a house-church in the home of Thomas Ellis in Steven Street, licensed in 1821, and later moved to a room in King Street. The first chapel was built in Steam Mill Street in Boughton in 1823, where worship continued for 40 years. The first independent Chester Circuit for Primitive Methodists was formed in 1825, with a total of 36 places of worship in the area.

#### 6.4.1 George Street Chapel

In 1861 some of the workers from Steam Mill Street decided to look for a site in Newtown. The first George Street Chapel was built on the site later occupied by the Temperance Hall, opened in 1863. It was almost immediately filled to capacity. The Primitive Methodist Conference met in Chester in 1866, but the sessions were held at the Music Hall, presumably for want of space. In 1885 a site was purchased across the road from the 'old' George Street Chapel to build a larger church. On Good Friday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1887 the foundation stone was laid by T. Finchett Maddock JP.

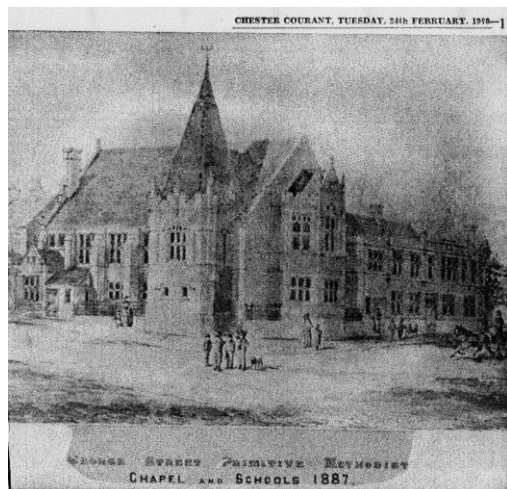


Fig. 25: 1887 Print of George Street Chapel



Fig. 26: Drawing of George Street Chapel



**Fig. 27: Photo of George Street Church**



**Fig. 28: Final George Street Service 15<sup>th</sup> February 1970**

(led by Rev. Ernest Harrop)

The very same year the new George Street Chapel was opened (1888), Synod was held there. The congregation must have felt very proud of their fine new building as they welcomed the delegates. In 1894 the Primitive Methodist Conference again met in Chester, and this time at the new George Street Chapel.

In the 1903 census of church attendance (6.4.4 below) George Street, with 761 attendees, had by far the highest attendance of the Methodist Circuit Chapels in Chester. Another indication of the importance and vitality of George Street is that over the years six ministers who had been stationed at George Street went on to become Presidents of the Primitive Methodist Conference. One of the ministers at George Street during the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was Rev. Wilfrid Callin, whose son Brian became Director of Methodist Homes for the Aged, after whom Callin Court in Chester is named.

George Street continued to be a thriving church through to the 1960s. In 1963, when the new Chester Circuit was formed, the George Street membership was not far short of St. John Street's, with 202 members compared to 246 (section 10.5). Former George Street members contributed much to the united church family that came together in the renewed premises at Wesley in February 1970, after worshipping all together at George Street from July 1968 while the building works were proceeding.

#### **6.4.2 Hunter Street Chapel**

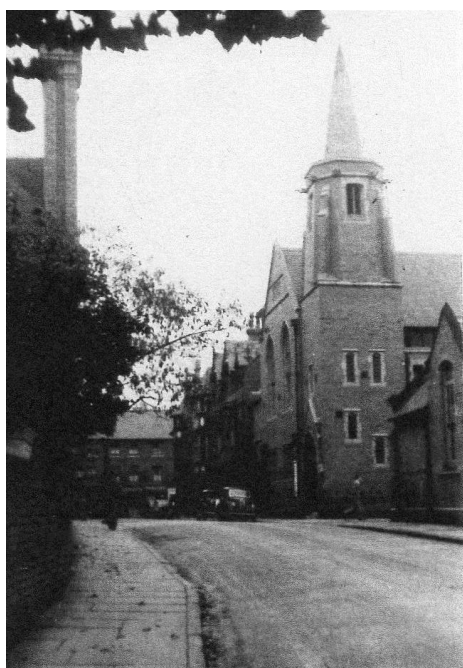
In 1864 a remarkable 'Camp meeting' was held in the Folly Field, Chester. One result was that a new preaching place was rented in Cuppin Street in the same year and used for three years. Then the old Welsh Calvinistic Chapel in Commonhall Street was purchased and that church became head of the second Chester Primitive Methodist Circuit comprising Llay, Rossett, Churton, Aldford, Saltney, Golly and (at one time) Commonwood. On 20<sup>th</sup> April 1898 the stone laying ceremony took place for a replacement church, the 'City Temple' in Hunter Street. This was the only Methodist Church within the City Walls and was officially opened on 1st February 1899.

It took 22 years to clear the debt from building this church. But one of the small chapels for which the City Temple was responsible - Llay - got into serious financial difficulties in 1924. The City

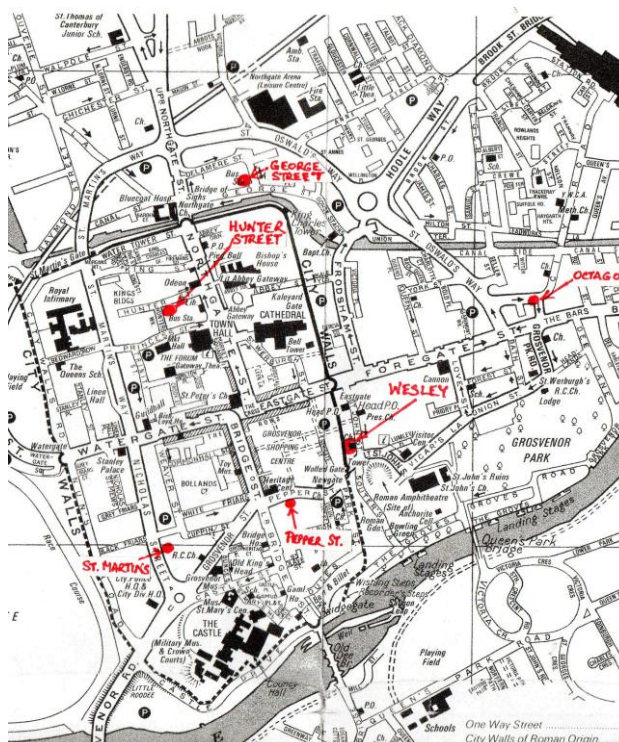


Temple Society mortgaged their church building for £1,000 (around £45,000 in 2012 values), only two years after they had cleared off their own debt! This was, at a time of national recession, when hardly anyone in that congregation was in employment. The debt was not finally cleared until 1946, another 22 years later.

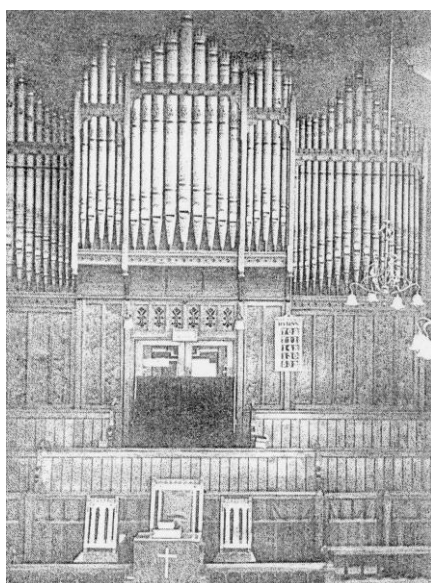
Hunter Street was a family church with a very warm, friendly spirit. The final service at the church was on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1967, just 68 years after its opening. The congregation then united with those of St. John Street and George Street and, after the transition period, settled in the renewed premises at Wesley in February 1970.



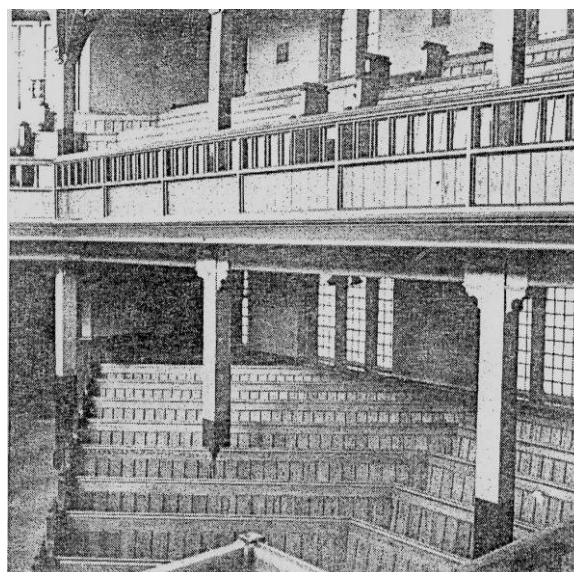
**Fig. 29: Photo of Hunter Street Church**



**Fig. 30: Location of George St. and Hunter St. Churches**



**Fig. 31: Hunter Street Church Interior, showing Conacher Organ**



**Fig. 32: Hunter Street Church Interior from Front**

### **6.4.3 Tarvin Road Chapel**

In 1876, a group of young people from Commonhall Street Chapel held a mission in Boughton. From this a new society was born, which began meeting in a room in Sandy Lane and later built Tarvin Road Chapel. In 1889, the third Primitive Methodist Circuit in Chester was formed with Tarvin Road as its Circuit Chapel.

### **6.4.4 Methodist Circuits and Chapels: 1903**

On 28<sup>th</sup> October 1903 a census was taken in Chester of religious buildings and attendance at worship. There were 5 Circuits based in Chester at that time and the seating capacities and attendance of the Methodist Circuit Chapels were recorded as follows:

| <b>Circuit Chapel</b> | <b>Denomination</b> | <b>Seating</b> | <b>Attendance</b> |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| St. John Street       | Wesleyan            | 1000           | 357               |
| George Street         | Primitive           | 850            | 761               |
| Hunter Street         | Primitive           | 500            | 282               |
| Tarvin Road           | Primitive           | 200            | 170               |
| Pepper Street         | New Connexion       | 1200           | 177               |



## 6.5 Methodist Union 1932 and Chester Circuit Integration in 1959/1963

In 1932 the Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist Churches of Great Britain united. The United Methodist Circuit in Chester disintegrated, but the 4 other Chester Circuits remained in operation. In 1959 the St. John Street and Hunter Street Circuits combined to form the Chester Grosvenor Park Circuit. Then in 1963 the Chester Grosvenor Park, George Street and Tarvin Road Circuits combined to form the Chester Circuit. At that time the new Circuit had 28 Chapels.

**Fig. 33: Circuit Merger Service Booklet, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1959**

**Ministers of the Circuit**  
 Rev. William J. Roberts, B.A., (Superintendent)  
 Rev. George Artingstall  
 Rev. Kenneth Wilson  
 Rev. J. Herbert Barker (Supernumary)  
 Rev. Owen M. Collins (Supernumary)  
 Rev. Peter Woods (Supernumary)  
 Rev. Ronald S. Hamblin  
 (Assistant Chaplain-General, Western Command)

: : :

**Societies of the Circuit**  
 Chester St. John Street  
 Chester Hunter Street  
 Chester Central Hall  
 Chester Garden Lane  
 Chester Hough Green  
 Saltney High Street  
 Bretton  
 Aldford  
 Churton  
 Christleton  
 Rowton  
 Hargrave  
 Milton Green  
 Rossett  
 Golly  
 Llay  
 Barrow  
 Dunham-on-the-Hill

: : :

**Circuit Stewards**  
 Mr. Cyril Shenton  
 Mr. Frederick Hayter


: : :

**Quarterly Meeting Secretary**  
 Mr. J. Henry Reece

**THE METHODIST CHURCH**  
**CHESTER GROSVENOR PARK CIRCUIT**

Celebrations

*to mark the Union of*  
*The Chester St. John's Circuit*  
*and*  
*The Chester Hunter St. Circuit*



Wednesday, 9th September, 1959  
 ST. JOHN STREET CHAPEL, CHESTER

PRINTED BY THE METHODIST CHURCH IN GREAT BRITAIN

**The Methodist Church**

✕

**INAUGURATION**

OF THE

**CHESTER CIRCUIT**

at

*St. John Street Methodist Church*

**WEDNESDAY, 4th SEPT., 1963**

4-00 p.m. DIVINE SERVICE, conducted by  
 The Chairman of the District—  
 Rev. B. ARTHUR SHAW.

5-15 p.m. TEA.

7-15 p.m. **INAUGURAL SERVICE.**  
 The Chairman of the District, Circuit  
 Ministers and Circuit Officers will  
 take part.

*Thanksgiving Offering.*

The Methodist people of Chester and District now  
 become visibly one community for the first time since  
 1796. This gathering is of particular interest to  
 Methodist folk but it is not exclusive...

**... All are most welcome !**

Taplin & Paddock Ltd., Chester.

**Fig. 34:  
Circuit Merger  
Service Booklet,  
4<sup>th</sup> September 1963**

## 7. A United Church - 'Wesley': 1970 - 1986

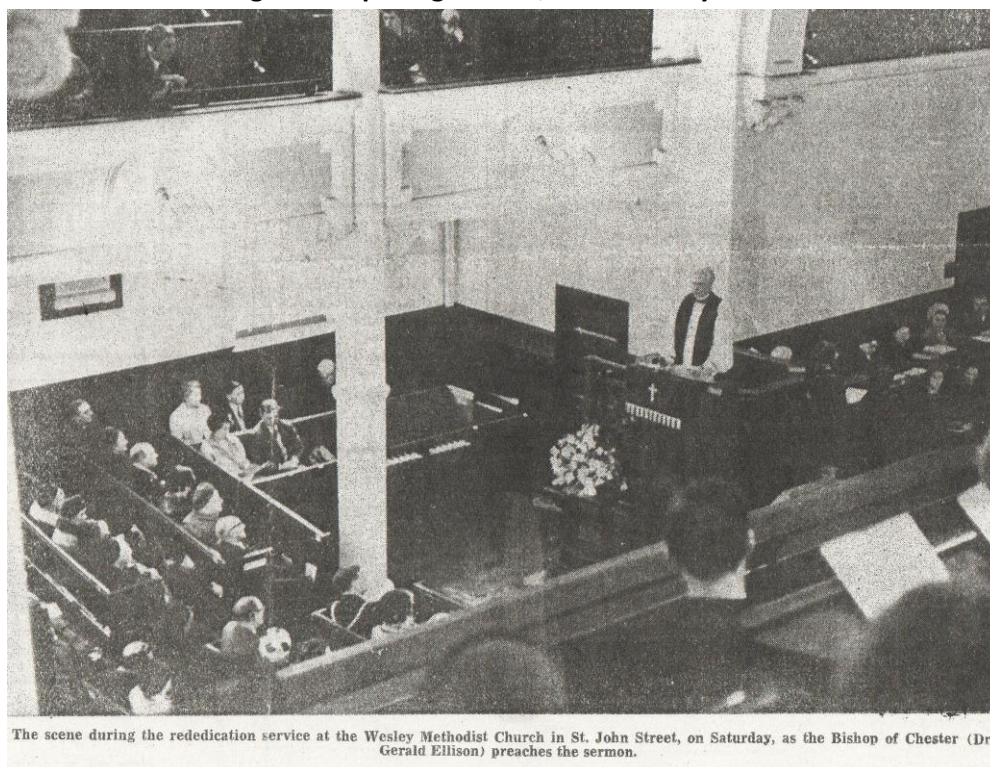
### 7.1 Wesley

In 1965 it was agreed that the Methodist congregations of St. John Street and the two other City centre Churches, George Street and Hunter Street, would merge. The George Street and Hunter Street Societies had, prior to Methodist unification in 1932, been of the Primitive Methodist tradition. A report jointly produced in 1965, stated: "We want to create a new, strong City Church.....to do the work we all know ought to be done.....in the city." After extended consultations it was agreed that this new Society, to be called 'Wesley' would be based in St. John Street.

In 1966 and 1967 the frequency of united services was increased and a number of unified meetings became based at George Street (Young Wives, Women's Fellowship, 'Group 66' and all youth work on Sundays for children over the age of 11). The new youth club, 'Group 66', was formed in September 1966 and it continued to be a strong feature of the united church in the renewed Wesley premises. The last service held at Hunter Street before its closure was on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1967. St. John Street closed for Sunday worship in July 1968 to allow the construction of the new Church House, in place of the old Sunday School buildings. The architect was Neale Evans of Design Group Partnership, a member of Hamilton Street church at the time, and for many years now a member of Wesley. During the construction period (July 1968 to February 1970), the combined congregations of the three churches worshipped at George Street. The last service at George Street was held on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1970. After completion of the mergers, the Hunter Street and George Street sites were sold and the buildings demolished. Their original locations are shown on Fig. 30.

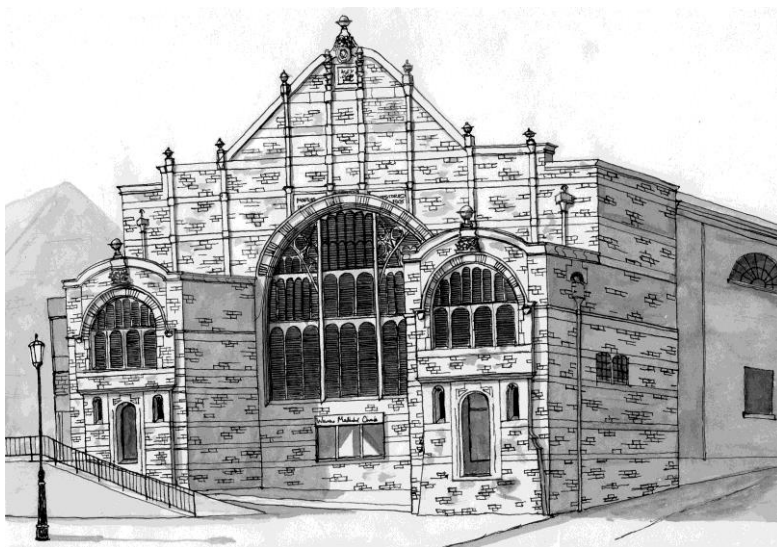
Rev. Tony Hearle succeeded Rev. Talbot Watkins as Superintendent Minister at Wesley in September 1969. On Saturday February 21<sup>st</sup> 1970 the redeveloped premises were opened and re-dedicated by the Bishop of Chester, the Rt. Rev. Gerald Ellison.

**Fig 35: Reopening Service, 21<sup>st</sup> February 1970**

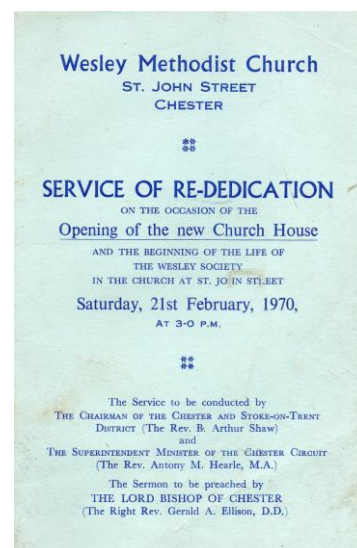


The Church entrance from St. John Street was altered as part of these changes, and became a single

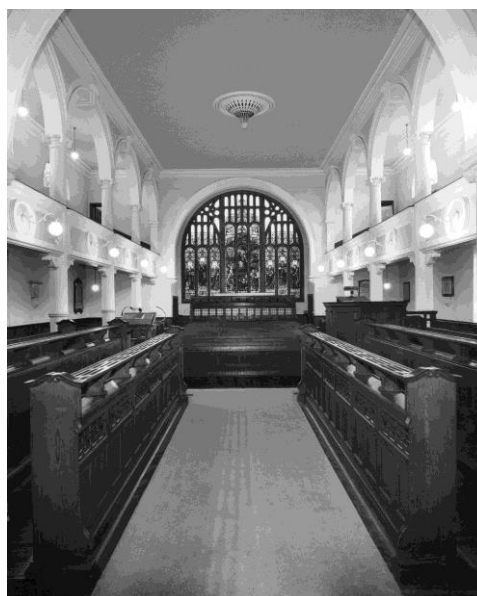
straight entrance ramp up to a new foyer joining the Church to the new Church House.



**Fig. 36: Wesley Frontage in 1970**



**Fig. 37: Reopening Service**



**Figs. 38, 39, 40, 41 : 1987 Photos of Wesley's Interior and Exterior**





In 1969, just before the reopening, the first Stewardship Campaign was held for the combined Society. Stewardship Reviews or special Renewal Campaigns took place annually thereafter in the period to 1986.

In recent decades Wesley, as a gathered City church, has seen a regular flow of people joining and leaving as a result, for example, of births, marriages, deaths and job and location moves. There are nonetheless quite a few current congregational members worshipping at Wesley who attended Hunter Street, George Street or St. John Street churches prior to their merger in the late 1960s.

**Hunter Street:** Colin Barwick, Peggie and Stan Johnson, Peter Johnson and Annette Roberts. (Stan Johnson first played the organ for services at Hunter Street sixty years ago, in 1952).

**George Street:** Eric and Margaret Batteson, Celia Burley, Molly Choppen, Rayna Dornford-May, Rosemary Hall, Pat Manson, Cyril Morris, Bob and Jean Swettenham, Myra Venables and Peter Venables.

**St. John Street:** Joyce Burley, Stewart Burley, Pam Cawley, Eileen Gledhill, Andy Pooley, Audrey Spencer, Julia and Robin Spencer.

## **7.2 Diary of Key Events 1970 to 1986**

- **1970:** Reopening Service of the United Church at Wesley on 21<sup>st</sup> February.
  - Jennifer Kennerley started Friday morning Shoppers' Crèche.
  - BBC Radio Sunday Morning Service broadcast live from Wesley on 6<sup>th</sup> September (LP record made).
- **1971:** New Wesley Newsletter 'Contact' first issued.
  - Worship Committee set up in December.
- **1972:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Review of Stewardship held before Easter.
  - Children's Music and Arts Festival held in April.
  - Stewardship Review in September by director of First Campaign, Charles Cherry.
  - Civic Service attended by Mayor, Sheriff and Councillors on 10<sup>th</sup> December.
- **1973:** Club 73 for the handicapped formed.
  - The Leaders' Meeting recommended that lay people be asked to assist in administering Holy Communion.
- **1974:** Stewardship Review in February.
  - Wesley Choir performed the Passiontide Music from the 'Messiah' at Easter.
  - Active 'Twenty Plus' group meeting on Sunday evenings.
- **1975:** Young people's weekend at Bala in February attended by 8 youngsters from Wesley.
  - Mrs Merrill retired as Wesley Caretaker after 30 years' service living at No.8 St John Street. Mrs Burgess became the new caretaker.

- **1976:** Group 66 went to the London MAYC weekend.
  - Brian Heald became Wesley Organist (Sept.) after the untimely death of Haydn Isaacs.
  - First Church Family Weekend in Plas-y-Coed, Colwyn Bay.
  - Social Committee set up to provide a programme of social events.
- **1977:** May Spring Fair weekend to enhance fellowship. Fair opened by Earl Grosvenor.
  - Organ cleaned and overhauled (£1500) after 50 years' service.
  - Rev. Alan Horner succeeded Rev. Tony Hearle as Superintendent Minister.
  - 'Music at Wesley' programme of organ recitals and a choral concert to mark completion of organ overhaul and to raise funds.
- **1978:** Breakfast Communion began.
  - Group 66 went to the London MAYC weekend.
  - BBC TV 'Songs of Praise' broadcast from St. John's, with Wesley taking part.
  - Radio Merseyside 'United in Song' broadcast from Wesley on July 7<sup>th</sup>.
  - Major Stewardship Campaign led by Harry Jones: meal for 218 at Overleigh Middle School.
- **1979:** First Talkback Service and first afternoon service for the house-bound.
  - 'District Together' weekend for 3,000 in Prestatyn.
  - Margaret Horner took over as choir leader from Mike Gledhill.
- **1980:** Church family weekend at Bodlondeb, Llandudno at end of February.
  - 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Church House reopening: Family Service and birthday cake.
  - Stewardship Renewal with Harry Jones and meal at Overleigh Middle School.
  - Group 66 went to the London MAYC weekend.
  - 'Together in Praise' District event at Chester Football Ground on June 7<sup>th</sup>.
  - Junior Church celebrated '200 years of Sunday Schools'.
  - Induction of Rev. J Stuart Rhodes as District Chairman took place at Wesley in September.
  - Cassette recording of Wesley organ and vocal solos produced by Brian and Claire Heald.
- **1981:** First church family weekend at Willersley Castle at end February.
  - Stainer's Crucifixion performed by the choir at Easter.
  - Group 66 went to the London MAYC weekend.
  - Summer Saturday opening of Wesley Coffee Bar commenced.
  - First experiments in family communion services.
- **1982:** Willersley Castle 'Away Together' weekend at end of April.
  - Stewardship Review meal at Overleigh Middle School in March.
  - Group 66 went to the London MAYC weekend.
  - Church ramble and tea at Brown Knowle in May.
  - 'The Barn' in Drs Vincent and Barbara Tonge's garden in Littleton became a recreation area for deprived children.
  - Rev. Alan Washbrook became Superintendent Minister in succession to Rev. Alan Horner.
  - Claire Heald took over as choir leader from Margaret Horner.



**Fig. 42: Rev. Alan Washbrook**

- District 'Together Day' at Chester football ground in June.
- Mr & Mrs Pitman took over as caretakers from Mrs Burgess.
- **1983:** United service at Wesley on January 1<sup>st</sup>- the first to include St. Werburgh's RC church.
  - Church Family Stewardship Meal ('7 Whole Days') at Overleigh School in March.
  - Group 66 went to the London MAYC weekend.
  - Willersley Castle family away weekend at the end of April.
  - Wesley Preaching Group formed by Frank Skitt.
  - Celebration for 10 years of Club 73 for the handicapped.
  - '20+ Group' re-formed.
  - MHA at Callin Court opened on 8th October.
  - Wesley Sunday evening services moved to the Upper Room.
  - Ecumenical visit to Chester from the Catholic Church of Albi, France.
  - Wesley morning service numbers counted at 214 on Nov. 27<sup>th</sup> (161 adults, 53 children).
- **1984:** Bishop of Chester preached at a United Service at Wesley on January 24<sup>th</sup>.
  - New Methodist Hymn Book 'Hymns & Psalms' introduced by Rev. John Davis at a 'Festival of Praise' service on February 8th.
  - Church Family Meal at Wesley in March, with celebration and discussion.
  - Richard Grocott went to Japan for 2 years as an assistant missionary.
  - Wesley volunteers went to 'Mission England' at Anfield football ground to assist and lead nurture groups.
  - 'Healing Services' began in collaboration with Christ Church, Newtown.
- **1985:** 9.30am monthly communion services began.
  - Church Family Meal ('Follow Me') in March, with celebration and discussion.
  - Wesley manse moved from Ferney, Queen's Park to New Ferney, Westminster Park.
  - Willersley Castle family away weekend ('One Family') at end of April.
  - Group 66 went to the London MAYC weekend.
  - Intercessions Book introduced.
  - 'Sunday Half Hour' recorded by BBC at Wesley on October 14<sup>th</sup> for broadcast on Radio 2 and World Service.
  - First Wesley 'Open Day' on 30<sup>th</sup> November.
  - First candlelit carol service held.
- **1986:** Stewardship meal at Wesley in March for 116.
  - Richard Grocott candidated for the Methodist Ministry from Wesley.
  - Chester City Centre Churches ecumenical visit to churches of Albi/Mazamet, France.
  - Preparatory autumn thinking about Wesley's future role and development of the premises.
  - Church roof structural problems starkly revealed when a piece of the ceiling fell into the Worship Area in late October.
  - The Church was closed and Sunday worship moved to the Hall.
  - Group 66 disbanded.

## **7.2 Methodist Church Act 1976**

On the wider Methodist stage, the Methodist Church Act 1976 replaced the Methodist Church Union Act 1929 which took effect in 1932. One of the main changes introduced by the 1976 Act was to transfer the management of Methodist property (which ultimately belongs to the Conference) from local Trustees to local Church Councils. Previously, the Trustees, who were appointed for life and could not be ousted unless they resigned, were responsible for the property and the contents, including hymn books and the like as well as lettings and allocation of rooms, while the Leaders' Meeting looked after the life of the Methodist "society" i.e. the worship and various church activities (Sunday School, Choir, Fellowships, outreach etc). In those days church stewards were called society stewards; communion stewards were called poor stewards and property stewards, appointed by the Trustees, were called chapel stewards. They were responsible for the "chapel", the building, while the society stewards were responsible for the "society" or as we would say today the "church". (Throughout the history of the St. John Street Chapel from 1811 onwards the Trust had been renewed every twenty years or so, with new Trustees appointed. In the latter years the Trust had been renewed in 1923, 1938 and 1954).

In Methodism generally the split of roles between Trustees and Leaders sometimes led to division, especially when Trustees, appointed for life, moved away and when age distanced them from younger families and the young people in the church. Some Trustees were very resistant to change. All this changed when the 1976 Act made Church Council members the Management Trustees, while the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes ('TMCP') became the Custodian Trustees for all Methodist property.

The 1976 Act also enabled Conference to amend the doctrinal clauses in the 1929 Act, subject to stringent safeguards, whereas they had previously been unalterable without Parliamentary approval. This meant that in matters of doctrine the church was free from state interference after 1976.

## 8. Church Roof Failure and A New Vision for Wesley: 1986 - 2009

### 8.1 1986 - 1993 Development Project and Commencement of the 'Open Door'

In late 1986 it became clear that major and costly roof repairs were urgently needed; the main beam of the Church roof had moved six inches and a piece of the ceiling fell into the Worship Area. Agonising decisions had to be made - to stay in the City Centre or move to a new site? After considerable heart-searching and prayerful debate it was finally decided to stay and to seek to serve the city's residents, workers, shoppers and tourists more effectively. Funds were raised and a phased project was carried out under which the whole premises underwent repair and redevelopment. In the first phase the Church roof was rebuilt.



**Fig. 43: New Roof Structure being Installed**

At the same time the opportunity was taken to fit a new exit from the church to the courtyard. The choir stalls were removed from the chancel, so that the open space created could be used in flexible forms of worship, and for concerts and other events. Sunday morning worship continued in the Hall for two years (and evening worship in the Upper Room) until all this work had been completed. On 11<sup>th</sup> December 1988 the first service was held back in the Church.

In 1989 a full-time warden, Kevin Coverley, was appointed to oversee Wesley's new 'Open Door' policy for the redeveloped premises. From this time the premises were open six days a week to the public, offering a space for relaxation and refreshment in the City Centre. With no further need for a full time caretaker, the caretaker's house at No.8 became available to be modernised for external letting to produce income to help support the Open Door work.

Once further funds had been raised and grants obtained, the building development project was progressed further. In the second phase various church centre repairs, flat roof renewal works and boiler replacement were carried out. Then in the final phase a new entrance lobby was created with a new window into the Church and a less steep curved entrance ramp was installed to improve disabled access to the whole of the premises. Toilet facilities were improved, with one for the disabled and one upstairs. Kitchen facilities were improved and various other lighting, screening and re-furnishing works were carried out.

The total project cost in 1993 was £330,000 (*equivalent to £550,000 in 2012*), of which a total of £78,000 was received in external, Methodist and Rank grants.



Completion of the overall renewal project was celebrated with a 'Come and Join the Celebration' weekend, 26<sup>th</sup> September to 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1993.

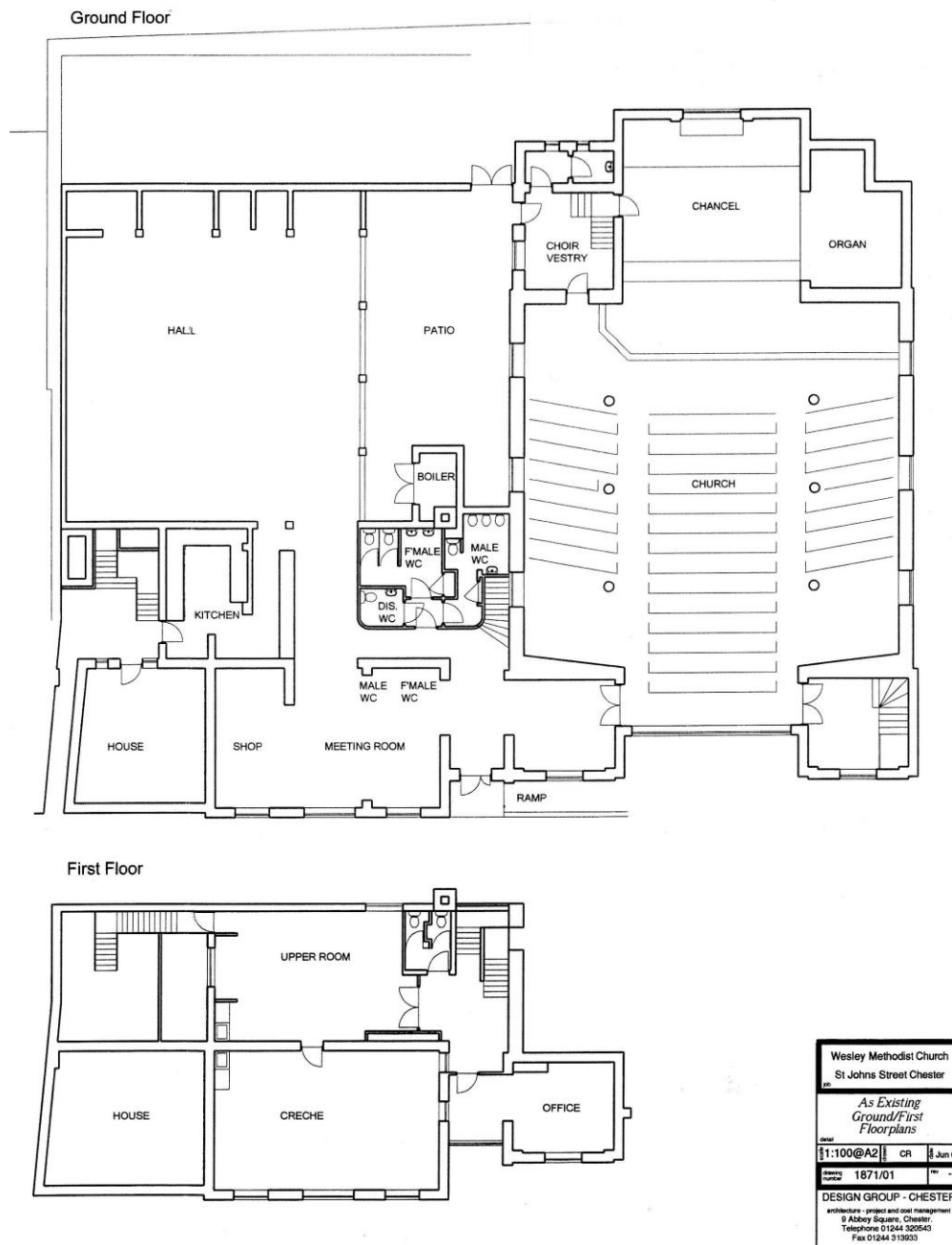
## 8.2 Diary of Key Events 1987 to 1993

- **1987:** - Willersley Castle family away weekend at the beginning of May.
  - Visions Group recommendations agreed for 'Open Door' policy and revised pastoral system.
  - Recreation Group formed to organise social and musical activities for the Church Family.
  - Anne Brown candidated for the Methodist Ministry from Wesley.
  - From September, Wesley open daily from 10am to 1 pm manned by volunteers, with prayer space in Upper Room.
  - Shopper's Crèche extended to Thursdays as well as Fridays.
  - Major Stewardship Campaign 'Come as Living Stones' led by Haydn Veitch in September.
  - Church Family meal at The King's School, with the Riding Lights Theatre Company.
  - 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary service led by Rev. J Stuart Rhodes.
- **1988:** Margaret Trickett and Claire Heald became fully accredited Local Preachers.
  - Easter Day dawn communion on top of Moel Famau led by Re. Frank Earle. (This new tradition continued most years until 2001).
  - Church Day Out to climb Snowdon in May.
  - Church Day Out to Acton Scott Farm Museum and Stokesay Castle in June.
  - 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of John Wesley's conversion - celebration service in Chester Cathedral led by District Chairman, Rev. J Stuart Rhodes on 26<sup>th</sup> May.
  - First Wesley Summer Barbecue (annual tradition until 2010).
  - Church repair project completed, including cleaning of St John Street stained glass window.
  - Worship moved back from the Hall to the Church on 11<sup>th</sup> December, at the new worship time of 10.30 am (hitherto 10.45 am), with coffee served afterwards to retain fellowship enjoyed in Hall.
  - A Yamaha grand piano was donated to Wesley in December to enable a wider variety of regular 'Music at Wesley' events to be held using the more versatile and open chancel area.
- **1989:** Service to celebrate church reopening held on January 28<sup>th</sup>.
  - Youth club work now focused on B.G. Club (8-11)/Green Lights (11-14)/Something Different.
  - Civic Service at Wesley in February for Harold Tomlins, Chairman of Cheshire County Council.
  - Kevin Coverley became Warden at Wesley to spearhead the 'Open Door' policy.
  - XP2 Music and Drama Workshop at Wesley in May.
  - Albi/Mazamet ecumenical visit to Chester in May.
  - Church Family Camping Weekend at Lake Bala in May.
  - Church Day Out at Chatsworth House in June.
  - The Wesley choir disbanded for regular worship and hereafter was gathered for special events only, such as the annual candlelit carol service.
  - Open Weekend in July (including exhibitions, music and youth events etc).
  - Church Council approved the Phase 2/3 Renewal on Aug. 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - Rev. Geoffrey Thorpe became Superintendent Minister at Wesley



**Fig. 44: Rev. Geoffrey Thorpe**

- in succession to Rev. Alan Washbrook.
- Annual candlelit carol service tradition re-established (at Advent this year), as in 1985.
  - 'Messiah for All' at Wesley led by Chester St. Cecilia Singers in December.
- **1990:** Caring and Sharing Weekend in March, with visiting Lay Witness team.
    - First series of four 'Music at Wesley' lunchtime recitals at Wesley in April/May (annually hereafter).
    - Church Family Camping Weekend at Lake Bala in May.
    - Anniversary weekend in October with Rev. Tony Holden of Home Missions.
    - New 'loop' system fitted in church for the hard of hearing.
  - **1991:** First of continuing series of annual concerts by St. John's Festival Orchestra at Wesley at the end of January.
    - Stewardship Review in February/March.
    - Church Family Camping Weekend at Lake Bala in May.
    - Senior Citizen's outing to Heswall (an annual event hereafter).
    - Rev. Alan Horner (then Chairman of Scottish District) led Anniversary Service in October.
    - Three 4pm evening services took place as an experiment in the autumn.
    - Brooks Bar New Testament Church of God, Manchester came to morning service: their pastor preached and a gospel choir of 30 sang.
  - **1992:** Summer Celebration Service at The Groves led by the Inner City Churches.
    - Church Day Out in June to Ironbridge and Blists Hill Open Air Museum.
    - Christian Listening ministry set up in mornings as part of the 'Open Door'.
    - Christmas Fair held in aid of the Wesley Development Fund on December 19<sup>th</sup> - the first for many years.
  - **1993:** Wesley youth group went to the MAYC London Weekend.
    - Church Family Camping Weekend at Caernarfon in May (wet!).
    - Church Day Out in July to Llandudno and Conway.
    - 'Prayers for Help and Healing' commenced in June on Thursdays at lunchtime.
    - Margaret Trickett candidated for the Methodist Ministry from Wesley.
    - Completion of the overall renewal project celebrated with a 'Come and Join the Celebration' weekend, 26<sup>th</sup> September to 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1993 - Music & Drama Workshop included.
    - Stewardship Review in October.
    - Visit by Rev. Frank Topping on November 12<sup>th</sup>.



**Fig. 45: Wesley Church Centre Layout after Renewal in 1993**

### 8.3 Diary of Key Events 1994 to 2009

- 1994:** 'Worship 2000' group formed to revitalise faith and develop ways of worship.
- 'Forward Group' formed to lead development of community outreach.
  - Stewardship Review.
  - In May a Wesley party of 19 visited Italy - including meeting Rev. Richard Grocott in Rome.
  - Jean Moore and Mike Halliday were given 'Notes to Preach'.
  - Project and fund-raising started for a '75 year service' for the Wesley organ.
  - The Sunday Trading Act 1994 came into force on 28th August.
  - Church Family Weekend at Abbot Hall, Grange-over-Sands at the end of September.



**Fig. 46: Church Family Weekend at Abbot Hall, Grange-over-Sands, September 1994**

- **1995:** Linda Pamphilon joined Wesley as Coffee Bar Co-ordinator and Margaret Tudor as Office Secretary.
  - Rev. Geoffrey Thorpe granted a 3 month sabbatical January to March.
  - New 'falls' for the pulpit, lectern and communion table designed and commissioned.
  - Wesley Prayer Chain set up in February.
  - Rev. Frank Topping presented his One-Man Play 'An impossible God' in April.
  - Claire Heald candidated for the Methodist Ministry from Wesley.
  - Forward Group report issued in June after a widespread consultation process. The following **Mission Statement** was then developed for Wesley: ***"Christian Caring and Gospel Sharing at the centre of Chester, offering Sanctuary through its Spirituality, Hospitality and Community"***.
  - Stewardship Review with Haydn Veitch in October ('Forward in Faith' and 'Job Sharing'), with meal for 185 at The King's School and drama inspiration from Andrew Harrison.
  - Christian Question Time on 'Evangelism Today'.
  - Service of Thanksgiving held in November for 'NCH Action for Children', with Rev. Kathleen Richardson.
- **1996:** Christian Question Time in January, chaired by Robin Spencer with H.H. Judge Gareth Edwards QC, David Cracknell, Gaynor Pollard and Steve Timms MP.
  - Wesley 'Safari Supper' in April.
  - 'All for Jesus' service in April to welcome President of Conference, Rev. Brian Hoare.
  - Wesley party of 35 went to Easter People at Blackpool in April.
  - Church picnic at Brown Knowle in May.
  - Rev. Richard Griffiths ordained on June 3<sup>rd</sup>.
  - Music in Worship group formed to lead worship songs.
  - Large service at Wesley in September for the induction of Glenda Clarke as Connexional Network President.



- Jean Moore accredited as a Local Preacher in November.
- New committee structure set up following 'A Vision for Wesley' report: a smaller Church Council of 30, a Leaders Group and Church Life, Mission and Administration groups.
- **1997:** Christian Question Time in January, chaired by Robin Spencer with Rev. Dr Leslie Griffiths, Rev. Graham Cook, Gyles Brandreth MP and Christine Russell.
  - Alpha Course successfully run at Wesley in the first quarter and attended by 36. Away weekend at Rhos-on-Sea.
  - Wesley party went to Easter People in Bournemouth.
  - Visit of the President of Conference, Rev. Nigel Collinson.
  - Rev. Martyn J Skinner became Minister at Wesley and Tarvin Road Churches in succession to Rev. Geoffrey Thorpe. (Superintendent's role moved to Rev. Graham Evans at Caldley Valley Neighbourhood Church).
  - Church Life Committee produced its report on 'A House Group System for Wesley'.
- **1998:** Christian Question Time in March, chaired by Robin Spencer with The Right Rev. Dr Peter Forster (Bishop of Chester), The Venerable George Austin (Archdeacon of York), Gabrielle Cox and Christine Russell MP.
  - Wesley party went to Easter People in Blackpool.
  - 'Help and Healing Service' on Thursdays re-launched at the earlier time of 11.30am.
  - Andrew Harrison performed 'For Whom the Bird Sings' in July.
  - Wesley Church designated a Grade 2 Listed Building in July.
  - Nigel Mountford joined Wesley as Lay Worker in September.
- **1999:** Nigel Mountford, Andrew Herbert and others set up The Gathering, an alternate worship event for teenagers, every 6 weeks or so - initially around the Circuit, then settled at Wesley.
  - Ethiopian evening held in May.
  - Rev. Claire Heald inducted as a Circuit Minister at Garden Lane, with responsibilities at Wesley and Garden lane, on August 29<sup>th</sup>.
  - David Greenwood candidated for the Methodist Ministry from Wesley.
  - Christian Question Time at Wesley in October, chaired by Robin Spencer with Lord Wade of Chorlton, Terry Wynn MEP, Andrew Stunnell MP and Rev. Peter Sharrocks.
- **2000:** Funeral service for 'our missionary', Edna Marriott, who worked in South India for 30 yrs.
  - Chester City Centre Churches Covenant signed on 23<sup>rd</sup> January (ten churches).
  - Evening services ceased at Wesley in March (replaced by Circuit evening services at Saltney and Caldley Valley).
  - The Wesley Binns organ was cleaned and restored by David Wells Organ Builders Ltd. over the period May to August, at a cost of £23,000.
  - Coach from Wesley to 'Catch the Dream' District Pentecost Celebration for the Millenium at Tatton Park.
  - Morning services in early autumn led by the past and current Chairmen of District, Rev. Stuart Rhodes and Rev. Brian Powley.



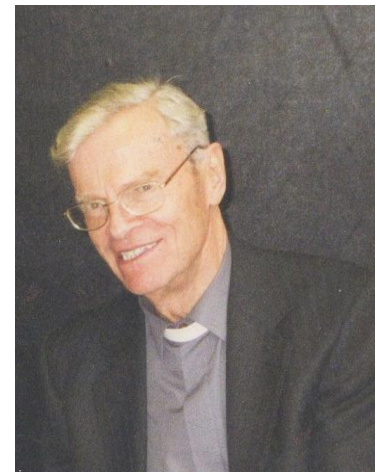
**Fig. 47: Rev. Martyn Skinner**

-Rev. Alan Horner led Anniversary Service in October: celebration of restored organ.

- **2001:** Wesley party went to Easter People in Llandudno.
  - Easter Day dawn communion on top of Moel Famau led by Rev. Martyn Skinner (last occasion).
  - Rev. Claire Heald's ordination service in Lowestoft on June 24<sup>th</sup>, with Rev. Alan Horner and Chester Methodist Circuit supporters.
  - Dr Daleep Mukerji, Director of Christian Aid, preached at Wesley on July 5<sup>th</sup>.
  - Exchange in July/August between Rev. Martyn Skinner and family and Rev. Michael Williams and family from Nashville, Tennessee.
  - Pam Welsh took over from Margaret Tudor as Wesley Administrator.
  - Rev. Tony Hearle led 190<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Service in October.
  - The Fair Trade Shop moved from St. Peter's to make its home in Wesley.
- **2002:** Celebration service on June 23<sup>rd</sup> of the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of John Wesley's first visit to Chester on June 20<sup>th</sup> 1752.
  - Circuit Service on June 30<sup>th</sup> for the Recognition and Commissioning of Jonathan Bushman and Barbara Greenwood as Local Preachers.
  - Young people from Wesley and the Circuit attended the MAYC weekend in Birmingham in July.
  - Christian Question Time at Wesley in October, chaired by Robin Spencer with Sue Proctor, Rev. Lorraine Dickson, Rev. John Taylor and Lord Harrison of Chester.
  - Nigel Mountford appointed as Lay Youth Worker.
- **2003:** Rev. Martyn Skinner took his 3 month sabbatical February to April, including 1 month in Ethiopia with friends who had been at Chester College and Wesley, and time at Chalaki Church.
  - Easter People at Llandudno
  - John Wesley Tercentenary Celebration Service in Chester Cathedral on June 15<sup>th</sup>, preacher Rev. Tim Macquiban.
  - Rev. John Walker, District Chair, led Anniversary Service in October.
  - A wide-ranging worship consultation questionnaire issued to the congregation and children and the results analysed and reported in December 2003 Contact magazine.
  - Anglican Methodist Covenant signed on November 1<sup>st</sup>. In Chester, Wesley and the Cathedral opened conversations, and agreed increased pulpit exchanges from January.
  - Monthly Methodist communion started to be held mid-week in the Cathedral.
  - Andrew Harrison performed sketches 'The End of the World ...and Other Embarrassing Moments' in November.
- **2004:** Helen Wilson candidated for the Methodist Ministry from Wesley.
  - Circuit Service of recognition of Andrew Herbert as a Local Preacher on May 30<sup>th</sup>.



**Fig. 48: Rev. Alan Horner**



**Fig. 49: Rev. Tony Hearle**

- Rev. David Greenwood ordained as a Methodist Minister.
- Rev. Gordon Etheridge became Superintendent Minister at Wesley in September.
- Allie Hancock became paid Crèche co-ordinator in the autumn (for the ongoing twice weekly sessions, on Thursdays and Fridays).
- Warden Kevin Coverley left for a new role after 15 years at Wesley.

- **2005:** 'Tuesdays' fellowship initiative commenced at Wesley in March - meal, conversation and structured time, 6 - 9pm.
  - 'Jesus Christ Superstar' performed at Wesley in April.
  - Wesley party of 21 went to Easter People in Southport.
  - Helen Wilson accredited as a Local Preacher in July.
  - Funds were raised to purchase a new Schimmel Grand Piano for the Church (part-exchanged for the previous Yamaha) for use in 'Music at Wesley' events, lettings and worship.
  - District Service in Chester Cathedral with preacher John Bell, Vice President of Conference.
  - 'Windsails' installation by Wendy Rudd set up in chancel for two weeks in mid November.



**Fig. 50: Rev. Gordon Etheridge**



**Fig. 51: Windsails Installation**

- **2006:** 'Jesus Laughing and Loving' Art Exhibition at Wesley in March.
  - Slovakian Choir from Bratislava led worship in June- attending the International Church Music Festival at Chester Cathedral.
  - Football World Cup matches shown on a 'big screen' in the Wesley Hall in June.
  - Andrew Herbert appointed as Wesley's Mission Development Officer in August.
  - Rev. Sidney Ramsey (supernumerary Methodist Minister) and Mrs Dorothy Ramsey moved to Chester and joined Wesley.
- **2007:** 9.30 am Sunday morning informal services in Hall commenced monthly: 'First Up'.
  - 'Nets' installation by Wendy Rudd set up in the chancel from February to April.
  - Wesley's website went live in April.
  - Wesley joined a Circuit coach to Burslem for a 'Celebration of Praise' on May 26<sup>th</sup>.
  - Andrew Harrison presented 'The Walk' (about William Wilberforce) on June 24<sup>th</sup> at a Circuit Service at Caldys Valley.
  - 'A Thousand Tongues'- Celebration of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Charles Wesley's birth in July: part of the Chester Summer Music Festival, led by Paul Ledington Wright/Coventry Singers.



- Two supernumerary Methodist Ministers and their wives joined Wesley: Rev. George Evans and Mrs Julia Evans, Rev. Ralph Fennell and Mrs Janet Fennell.
- Allie Hancock increased the number of Wesley Crèche mornings from 2 to 3 each week.
- Rev. Martyn Skinner returned to Wesley to lead Church Anniversary service in October.
- **2008:** The 'Renewal 2010' project team was appointed by Church Council in February to improve the hospitality and facilities of the Church Centre and improve access for the disabled.
  - Special service in March devised by Rev. Ralph Fennell to celebrate Charles Wesley (1707 - 1788): his life, hymns and legacy.
  - 'Music at Wesley' (operating at Wesley since 1988) became formally affiliated to 'Making Music' as a concert promoting society, as part of the parent charity, Wesley Methodist Church.
  - Wesley's youth rock band 'The Identity' established.
  - Family Day at Walton Hall Gardens, Warrington
  - Rev. Helen Stubbs (née Wilson) ordained in Scarborough in July.
  - Farewell Service for District Chair Rev. John Walker in Chester Cathedral in July.
  - Rev. Gordon Etheridge resigned and Rev. Claire Heald became Acting Superintendent Minister based at Wesley for 1 year in September.
  - Ruth Blakebrough-Miller appointed as Wesley's new Administrator, and Linda Turner as Circuit Administrator based at Wesley.
  - 'Renewal 2010' fund raising programme started in earnest.



**Fig. 52: Wesley Frontage in 2008**



**Fig. 53: Wesley Interior in 2008**



**Fig 54: Wesley Interior in 2008**



- **2009:** Junior Church revitalised in January, with new name 'SPLAT!' chosen by it later in the year (from "Sharing - Praying - Learning - Acting - Thinking").
- Spring Fair held in March to raise funds for 'Renewal 2010'.
- 'Dwelling Space' installation in chancel in April/May and 'Bald Statements' in June/July.
- First 'Chester's Got Talent' event held at Wesley in partnership with Connexions (Youth Service in Cheshire).
- Wesley Coffee Bar set up as a separate company and also Wesley Development Limited as a project vehicle.
- 'Renewal 2010' Phase 1 construction project commenced on July 20<sup>th</sup> (£480,000).
- Wesley's Coffee Bar and Fair Trade Shop relocated to the Welsh Presbyterian Church in St. John Street while construction works in progress at Wesley's Church Centre.
- Rev. Neil Stacey became Superintendent Minister at Wesley.
- Wesley Worship Area reopened on September 13<sup>th</sup> for Sunday morning worship, while Church Centre remained closed for construction works.
- Wesley Lounge/Coffee Bar/Fair Trade Shop reopened on October 5<sup>th</sup> while construction continued in Hall/Atrium.
- Fund raising meal and 'Handbag of Harmonies' concert at Caldys Valley Church in October.
- Brian and Claire Heald cut a 'Renewal 2010' fund raising CD: 'Organ Classics at Wesley' (including contralto solos).
- 'Renewal 2010' Construction works completed (except for 'snagging') in mid December. The whole premises were used for a Christmas Concert by the Vale Royal Singers on Friday December 18<sup>th</sup> and for the Christmas Services.
- Church Council decided that in future Wesley would be presented as 'The Wesley Church Centre'.



**Fig. 55 : Olivia Griffiths and Rev. Claire Heald:  
'Renewal 2010' Fundraising Lunch**



**Fig. 56: Console of Wesley's Organ,  
Built by James J. Binns of Leeds in 1926**



**Fig. 57: New Wesley Logo**

## 9. Wesley 'Renewal 2010'

### 9.1 Renewal 2010 Project

In 2008 - 2009, in order to develop the next stage of Wesley's outreach and church life, the 'Renewal 2010' project was devised and implemented. This project was designed and developed between March 2008 and June 2009 and was implemented between July and December 2009. It modernised the Wesley Church Centre and its support facilities. This included improving the Coffee Bar, which lies at the hub of Wesley's Open Door, by redesigning the kitchen and servery; making the hall more welcoming and hospitable; and building a covered atrium in place of the previous courtyard. New access doors were installed into the worship area at the left hand side at the rear, to make the Church more visible and welcoming to visitors. Accessibility improvements were made in the worship area and a lift was installed to the first floor rooms. New toilet facilities were provided.

Brian Heald, Sue Ramsey, Derek Fry and Andrew Herbert made up the Wesley project team; Rodney Brown was fund-raising chairman and Andrew Ramsey was project treasurer. The Architect was Peter Farrell of Design group – Chester. The project was constructed by Nobles Construction Ltd. The total project cost was £480,000. By November 2011 all of this had been raised (except for £5,000 pledged for 2012), with Wesley members and fundraising events contributing £271,000, legacies £14,000, Circuit/District/Connexional Funds £154,000 and external Charitable Trusts £41,000.

**Fig. 58: Modernised Coffee Bar and Servery**

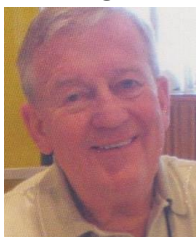


**Fig. 59: New Atrium Room Joining Church to Hall**



**Fig. 60:  
Redecorated and  
Modernised Hall**

**Fig. 61: Rodney Brown,  
Fund-raising Chairman**





**Fig. 62: New Entrance from Foyer to  
Worship Area**

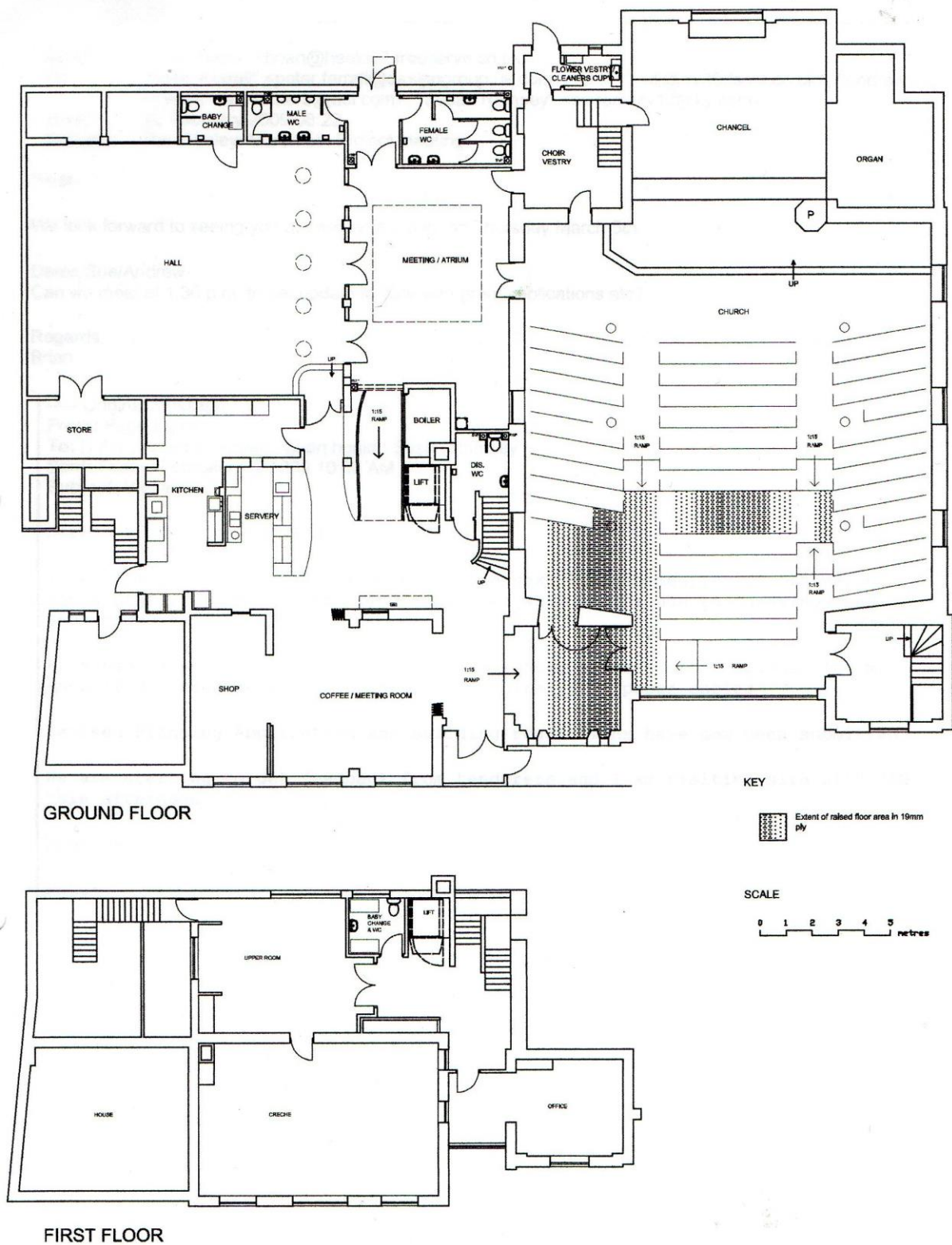


**Fig. 63: New Entrance from Atrium to  
Worship Area**



**Fig. 64: Plan of Wesley Church Centre Changes - 'Renewal 2010' Project**

*(subjected to a few minor detail changes during construction)*







**Figs. 65 - 70:  
Reopening Ceremony  
Photographs, Jan 16<sup>th</sup> 2010.**



**Top: Mike Kennerley, Andrew and Sue Ramsey, Nigel Mountford; Cyril Morris, Rev. Brian Holroyd. Middle: Derek Fry, Brian Heald, Sue Ramsey, Andrew Herbert, Rev. Neil Stacey, The Lord and Lady Mayoress of Chester, Town Crier David Mitchell. Bottom: Peggie and Stan Johnson, Myra Venables and Dorothy Carty; David Mitchell, Jan McCarthy.**



**Figs. 71 - 80: More Reopening Ceremony Photographs, Jan 16<sup>th</sup> 2010.**



**Above: Ian Evans, Heather Pearson, David Clarke**



**Below: George Moore**



**Above: Rev. Ralph Fennell**



**Above: Andrew Ramsey, John Griffiths**



**Above: Caroline and Jonathan Bushman, John Hales, Rev. Claire Heald, Catherine Evans, Audrey Spencer**



**Below: Dorothy and Rev. Sid Ramsey with Town Crier**



**Above: Julia and Robin Spencer, Robin Witter and His Honour Judge Elgan Edwards DL (trustees of the Earl of Chester's Fund)**



**Above: Rev. George Evans, Rev. Martin Hardy, Rev. Paul and Bronwen Braisdell**



**Above: Janet Fennell, Catherine Evans, Vicki Evans**

**WESLEY'S FAIR TRADE SHOP**

**Fig. 81: Fair Trade Shop after 'Renewal 2010' Improvements**



**Fig. 82: Jennifer Kennerley and Marilyn Holroyd**



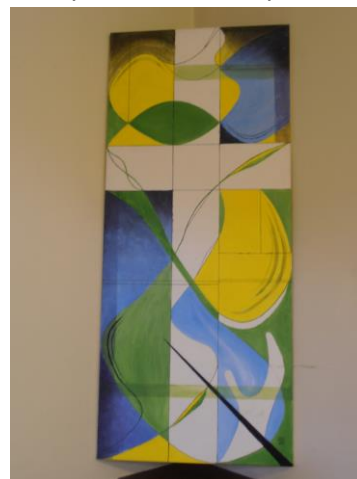
## 9.2 Wesley 2010 - 2012

### 9.2.1 Mission Statement

Wesley's current Mission Statement is "**A place to be, to belong and to believe**". In our life together as a church community here, and in partnership with other City Centre churches and agencies, our aim is always to find new ways of fulfilling this calling.

### 9.2.2 Diary of Key Events 2010 - 2012

- **2010:** Formal 'Renewal 2010' Reopening Ceremony and celebration day, on 16<sup>th</sup> January.
  - Neale Evans gave his painting of a new banner for the prayer corner at Wesley.
  - Thanksgiving service at Wesley on March 11<sup>th</sup> for the life of Rev. Frank Earle, sector minister in the Chester Circuit, attended by 200.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Spring Fair held in March to raise funds for 'Renewal 2010'.
  - Weekly 'Bread Making' sessions commenced at Easter.
  - First of a new form of approximately quarterly worship - 'Big Church' - in May.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> 'Chester's Got Talent' event held at Wesley in partnership with Connexions.
  - Wesley Methodist Church registered as an independent charity no. 1138016 on 10<sup>th</sup> September.
  - Lesley Twigg took over as paid Crèche coordinator in September 2010.
  - Andrew Harrison presented his 'Darwin's Tree' one man show in October.
  - The Wesley youth rock band 'The Identity' cut their CD 'Fight for your Life' (issued in January).
- **2011:** President of Conference, Rev. Alison Tomlin led a morning service in January.
  - Commencement in January of twice monthly use of the premises as a Child Contact Centre on Saturday mornings.
  - Two congregational/SPLAT! Consultation services held in March to review thinking on current and future forms of worship.
  - Regular giving appeal to members and a 3<sup>rd</sup> Spring Fair held in March to address (successfully) a serious potential annual deficit.
  - Chester City Centre Churches Covenant renewed on 15<sup>th</sup> May (ten churches).
  - Tuesday morning Toddlers Group established as a Wesley activity.
  - Christine Dutton, Methodist Minister in training, commenced a student placement at Wesley.
  - Launch of Wesley's Bicentenary year at the Church Anniversary weekend in October:
    - Bicentenary concert given by Brian Heald (organ) and Jeremy Heald (piano).*
    - Morning service led by District Chair, Rev. Peter Barber.*
    - Church family lunch arranged by Olivia Griffiths.*
  - Decision taken for Chester and Delamere Forest Circuits to merge in September 2012 under the superintendency of Rev. Neil Stacey.



**Fig. 83: Prayer Corner Painting  
by Neale Evans**



- Bicentenary event in October: '200+ Family Quiz' evening.
  - 'A House is not a Home' event in October as a collaboration between Wesley/SPLAT!, Chester Aid to the Homeless and Chester Voluntary Action.
  - Bicentenary concert given on Armistice Day (November 11<sup>th</sup>) by the Vale Royal Singers and Queen's Young Voices (performing John Rutter's Requiem and Andrew Carter's Benedicite).
  - Indian meal and presentations in the Hall/Atrium in November in support of the Dalit cause.
  - Bicentenary Christmas concert given by the Chester St. Cecilia Singers.
- **2012:** SMILE week held in January.
  - Bicentenary concert by St John's Festival Orchestra on February 5<sup>th</sup>, featuring Schumann's Piano Concerto.



**MUSIC at WESLEY**

**St. JOHN'S FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA**

**SUNDAY FEBRUARY 5<sup>th</sup> 2012**  
 7.30 p.m.  
 WESLEY CHURCH CENTRE  
 ST. JOHN STREET, CHESTER

**Conductor : Alan Lees**  
**Leader : Edward Davies**  
**Piano : Brian Heald**

**Programme**

Overture 'Fingal's Cave' : Mendelssohn  
 Piano Concerto in A minor : Schumann  
 Symphony No. 82 in C 'The Bear' : Haydn

TICKETS: £9 (Concessions £7)  
 FROM WESLEY OFFICE (01244 323037) OR AT THE DOOR  
 Proceeds in aid of Wesley Church Centre Funds

**Fig. 84 and 85: Bicentenary Concert on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2012**

- Regional event to mark the launch of 'Methodist Women in Britain' held at Wesley on Saturday afternoon February 18<sup>th</sup>, attended by 300.
- 'The Mix' District Youth Event, featuring 'The Identity', held at Wesley on Sunday February 26<sup>th</sup>.



**Fig. 87: 'The Identity' Performing at Wesley**

**Fig. 86: 'The Identity'**

- from the left Mike Evans (bass guitar), Jonny Mountford (lead guitar), Matt Hawkeswood (lead vocals and rhythm guitar), Stephen Haynes (drums), Rob Haynes (keyboard & synthesiser).



- A new bread oven acquired for the weekly Bread Making sessions, funded by external grants.
- Bicentenary Spring Fair held on March 24<sup>th</sup>.



## 10. Overview of Ministers, Organists, Membership, Registers & Circuit Structure over the Years

### 10.1 Wesley Ministers over the Years

| Lead Minister  | Second Minister        | Dates       |
|--|------------------------|-------------|
| <i>All Ministers appointed in the Chester ('Wesleyan') Circuit 1765 – 1911 are included in the St. John Street Chapel Centenary Booklet, Appendix 21</i> |                        |             |
| Rev. E Wright Adcock   |                        | 1908 – 1911 |
| Rev. John Davies   |                        | 1911 – 1914 |
| Rev. W Collett   |                        | 1914 – 1917 |
| Rev. F H Harry   |                        | 1917 – 1925 |
| Rev. A Leathley Heap   |                        | 1924 – 1929 |
| Rev. G E Woodford  |                        | 1929 – 1932 |
| Rev. J T Wardle Stafford (+District Chair)   | Rev. J L Warner        | 1932 – 1933 |
| Rev. J T Wardle Stafford (+District Chair)   | Rev. S Frith           | 1933 – 1935 |
| Rev. J T Wardle Stafford (+District Chair)   | Rev. William J Roberts | 1935 – 1936 |
| Rev. W Jessop Winter   |                        | 1936 – 1939 |
| Rev. Robert Robertson  |                        | 1939 – 1948 |
| Rev. Sydney G Granville  |                        | 1948 – 1957 |
| Rev. William J Roberts   |                        | 1957 – 1962 |
| Rev. R Talbot Watkins  |                        | 1962 – 1969 |
| Rev. Antony M Hearle   |                        | 1969 – 1977 |
| Rev. Alan P Horner   |                        | 1977 – 1982 |
| Rev. Alan J Washbrook  |                        | 1982 – 1989 |
| Rev. Geoffrey R Thorpe   |                        | 1989 – 1997 |
| Rev. Martyn Skinner  | Rev. Claire M Heald*   | 1997 – 2004 |
| Rev. Gordon Etheridge  | Rev. Claire M Heald*   | 2004 – 2008 |
| Rev. Claire M Heald  |                        | 2008 – 2009 |
| Rev. J Neil Stacey   | Rev. Claire M Heald*   | 2009 -      |

\*25% role at Wesley

### 10.2 Wesley Organists over the Years

|                        |             |
|------------------------|-------------|
| H. W. Kendrick         | 1919 - 1943 |
| Alfred A. Taberer FRCO | 1943 - 1955 |
| Haydn Isaacs           | 1955 - 1976 |
| Brian C. Heald         | 1976 -      |

### 10.3 St. John Street/Wesley Membership Numbers over the Years

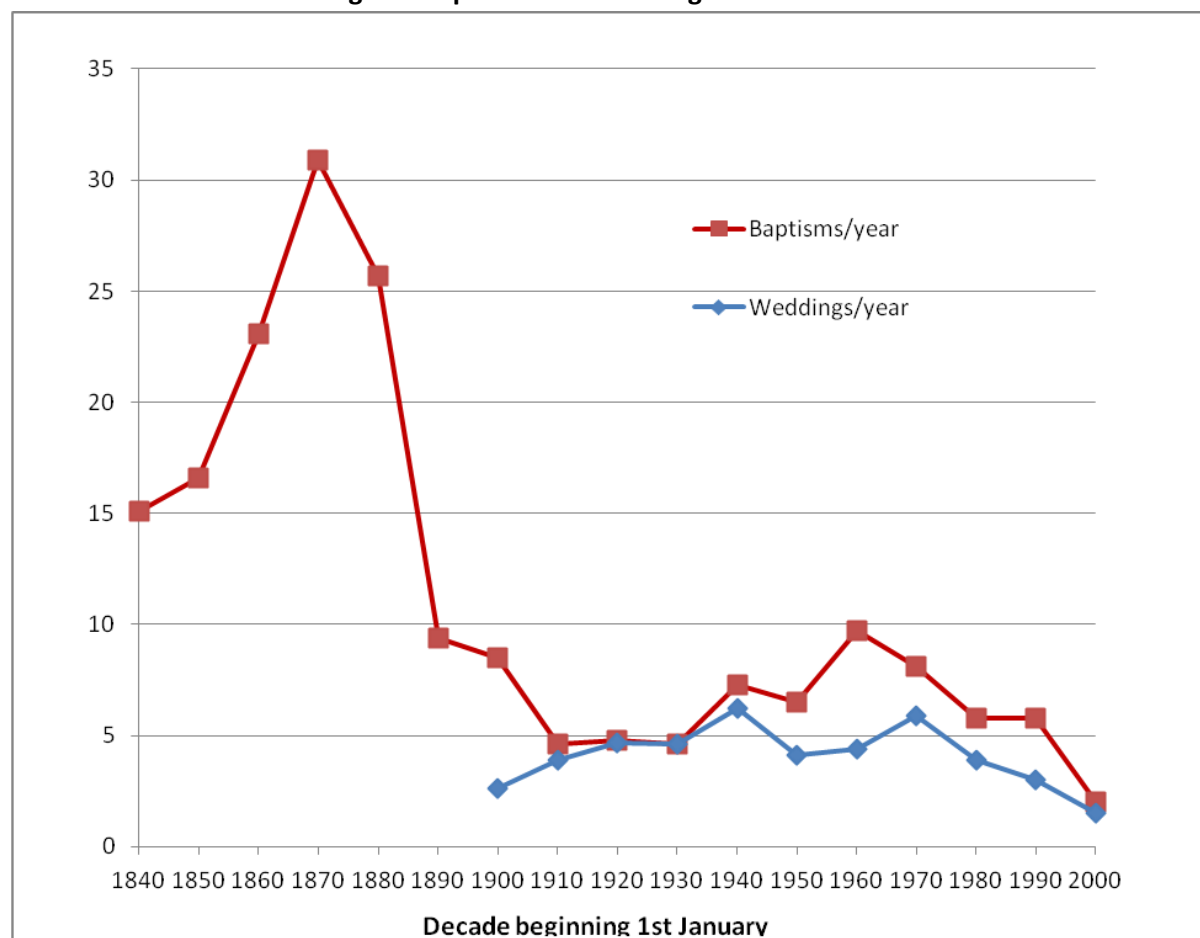
These figures are of enrolled membership.

| Year | Members | Comments   |
|------|---------|--|
| 1822 | 468     | Bretherton Book (Ref.1), page 274: source for figures to the year 1900                                       |
| 1860 | 458     |  |
| 1880 | 278     | City Road Chapel, opened in 1872 ('church plant'): 160 members in 1880                                       |
| 1900 | 195     |  |
| 1910 | 175     | Numbers from this date are from archived Circuit Plans   |
| 1932 | 193     |  |
| 1959 | 218     |  |
| 1963 | 246     |  |
| 1970 | 349     | United church membership (with Hunter St. and George St.)  |
| 1992 | 275     |  |
| 2012 | 158     | N.B. Community roll is about twice this number<br>(and Church Centre weekday community is much larger still) |

### 10.4 Marriages and Baptisms at St. John Street Chapel/Wesley over the Years

Wesley holds Baptism Registers dating from 1837 and Marriage Registers dating from 1900. The following chart shows the average number of marriages and baptisms for each decade. Appendix 16 tabulates the statistics in more detail.

**Fig. 88: Baptisms and Weddings over the Years**



## 10.5 Circuit Structures over the Years

Numbers of members shown. Black = ex Wesleyan; green = ex United; red = ex Primitive

| 1910                                 | 1951                                | 1959   | 1963                                | 1970                   | 2011                        |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>St. John St. Wesleyan Circuit</b> | <b>Chester St. John St. Circuit</b> | <b>Chester Grosvenor Park Circuit (formed '59)</b> | <b>Chester Circuit (formed '63)</b> | <b>Chester Circuit</b> | <b>Chester Circuit</b>      |
| <b>12 churches</b>                   | <b>11 churches</b>                  | <b>18 churches</b>                                 | <b>28 churches</b>                  | <b>24 churches</b>     | <b>10 churches</b>          |
| St John Street (1812) 175            | St John Street 221                  | St John Street 218                                 | St John Street 246                  | Wesley 349 (united)    | Wesley 164                  |
| Saltney (1856) 46                    | Hough Green 49                      | Hough Green 56                                     | Saltney (new) 126 (united)          | Saltney 164            | Saltney/Bretton 119         |
| Rowton (1865) 15                     | Rowton 37                           | Rowton 39  | Rowton 49                           | Rowton 47              | Rowton 32                   |
| City Road (1872) 167                 | Central Hall 158                    | Central Hall 155                                   | Central Hall 147                    | Central Hall 173       | Caldy Valley 101 (inc. URC) |
| Garden Lane (1888) 63                | Garden Lane 48                      | Garden Lane 57                                     | Garden Lane 73                      | Garden Lane 62         | Garden Lane 14              |
| Christleton (1888) 35                | Christleton 47                      | Christleton 45                                     | Christleton 53                      | Christleton 37         | Christleton 30              |
| Hargrave 11                          | Hargrave 13                         | Hargrave 11  | Hargrave 11                         | Hargrave 11            |                             |
| Milton Green 26                      | Milton Green 24                     | Milton Green 19                                    | Milton Green 16                     |                        |                             |
| Barrow 26                            | Barrow 24                           | Barrow 23  | Barrow 22                           | Barrow 19              |                             |
| Dunham-on-the-Hill 13                | Dunham-on-the-Hill 25               | Dunham-on-the-Hill 18                              | Dunham-on-the-Hill 16               | Dunham-on-the-Hill 13  |                             |
| Belgrave 7                           | Bretton 32                          | Bretton 33   | Bretton 42                          | Bretton 41             |                             |
| Stanney 5                            |                                     | Hunter Street 84                                   | Hunter Street 79                    |                        |                             |
|                                      |                                     | Saltney High St (old) 68                           | Hamilton Street 204                 | Hamilton Street 214    | Hamilton Street 86          |
|                                      |                                     | Aldford 10   | Aldford 6                           | Aldford 7              |                             |
|                                      |                                     | Churton 6  | Churton 10                          | Churton 9              |                             |
|                                      |                                     | Rossett 8  | Rossett 14                          | Rossett 9              |                             |
|                                      |                                     | Golly 8  | Golly 10                            |                        |                             |
|                                      |                                     | Llay 45  | Llay 52                             | Llay 50                |                             |
|                                      |                                     |  | George Street 202                   |                        |                             |
|                                      |                                     |  | Tarvin Road 73                      | Tarvin Road 62         |                             |
|                                      |                                     |  | Saughall 47                         | Saughall 54            | Saughall 25                 |
|                                      |                                     |  | Guilden Sutton 42                   | Guilden Sutton 27      |                             |
|                                      |                                     |  | Elton 31                            | Elton 27               |                             |
|                                      |                                     |  | Piper's Ash 29                      | Piper's Ash 31         |                             |
|                                      |                                     |  | Huxley 25                           | Huxley 16              | Huxley 11                   |
|                                      |                                     |  | Mickle Trafford 20                  | Mickle Trafford 18     | Mickle Trafford 17          |
|                                      |                                     |  | Manley 11                           | Manley 7               |                             |
|                                      |                                     |  | Stapleford 8                        | Stapleford 4           |                             |

## **11. Wesley Church Centre Going Forward in 2012**

This section describes the Wesley Church Centre in its 200th Anniversary year from the personal perspective of the author. Some of the features of Wesley life in March 2012 are as follows.

### **Sundays**

- Wesley is a gathered church with members spread throughout the city and suburbs of Chester and beyond.
- The normal Sunday morning service at 10.30am is attended by around 70 people.
- The crèche and junior church (SPLAT!), which meets at the same time and joins the main service towards the end, have grown well in recent years. Children and teachers/helpers bring total numbers on Sunday mornings to around 90.
- Once a month there is an early morning Communion service at 9.15am. Communion as part of the main Sunday morning service is also monthly.
- The Wesley congregation is a warm and friendly fellowship (confirmed by visitors) and is also mutually supportive.
- Compared to the past the pattern of morning worship attendance has changed greatly, due to off-peak holidays, leisure patterns, Sunday trading, competing Sunday commitments for adults and children etc. The congregation attending one week may be very different from that attending the next week and the total worshipping congregation numbers around 200. Wesley membership is now 158.
- Morning service music is usually provided by the fine organ (and piano) and Wesley has strong traditions of music and singing in worship. There is an annual service of Morning Prayer (now very rare in Methodism).
- Once a month, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday, there is a 9.30am 'First Up' service in the Hall, particularly geared at young families, but with some crossover to/from the main morning service. Average attendance is about 30. It is followed by a family breakfast.
- A 'Big Church' service is held every one to two months on a Sunday morning to provide a choice of traditional and other experiences for the whole church family (including a sermon, bible study, practical activities, music etc), in between collective worship at the beginning and end.
- Wesley has good links with 9 other City Centre Churches which signed up to a renewed Covenant in 2011. In particular there are periodic pulpit exchanges with Cathedral clergy.
- There is a successful Wesley based youth rock band, 'The Identity', which has cut a CD and is in demand for concert 'gigs' at Wesley and other churches, locally and throughout the country.
- A Wesley choir of 20 or so is mustered every Christmas for a much valued candlelit carols service.
- Wesley's worshippers have diverse hopes and expectations about worship and this is a priority topic for further discussion and development in 2012.

### **Weekdays**

- The Wesley Church Centre is a vibrant place from 10am to 4 pm Monday to Saturday. It is valued as a place where conversation is always possible and where friendships can be made. We offer listening and prayer to those in need or distress, and sometimes practical help too. We



hope to offer a place where people can participate in new activities which enrich their lives, including the development of their spirituality.

- The Mission Development Officer, Andrew Herbert, leads development of Wesley's community outreach.
- The Coffee Bar is at the heart of Wesley's 'Open Door'. It is run as a separate company within Wesley. It covers its fair share of overheads, but its purpose is to be a hub of good value hospitality, not to generate income for Wesley.
- A big part of the life of Wesley in the week is the Coffee Bar team which includes over 20 volunteers supervised by the paid staff, led by Linda Pamphilon. The team therefore includes people of all ages and abilities working, learning and supporting each other in a shared enterprise.
- The Fair Trade Shop next to the Coffee Bar is run by Chester Fair Trading and also plays an important part in Wesley's community outreach and offering to visitors. Wesley is committed to using fair trade goods wherever possible.
- The Circuit Youth Worker, Nigel Mountford, is based at Wesley. He also carries out minor maintenance services on a part-time basis.
- Many groups rent rooms in the premises for a wide variety of purposes in day time and evenings.
- The Wesley administrator, Ruth Blakebrough-Miller, oversees the Church Centre office four mornings a week, providing efficient administrative services, including lettings management. On Wednesday mornings the Circuit Administrator, Linda Turner, is based in the office.
- The Wesley Crèche, which started in the early 1970s, is Wesley's longest standing form of community outreach. It is now led by Lesley Twigg and is thriving 3 mornings a week (Monday, Thursday and Friday). In addition, on Tuesday mornings there is a separate Toddler Group.
- Wesley members are often present to welcome visitors to the Church Centre.
- There are a number of faith-based regular meetings and services at Wesley during the week e.g.
  - Monday Evening and Tuesday Afternoon Fellowships.
  - Tuesday morning prayers in the prayer corner.
  - Thursday mid-day services.
  - Time Out on Wednesday afternoons for informal prayer and friendship.
- Two Prayer Chains are active within Wesley.
- There are regular links with Chester Cathedral, with active and supernumerary ministers from Wesley fulfilling day chaplaincy roles and leading Methodist communion services monthly on Tuesdays in the Cathedral. Regular meetings are held with the clergy of other City Centre churches within the Covenant.
- Bread Making on Wednesday mornings has become firmly established as a time of fellowship for a large group of people, with opportunities for a short time of meditation in the worship area towards the end of the sessions.
- There are two active Housegroups, both in Queen's Park.
- Wesley has a well run system for pastoral visiting via a network of leaders and visitors.
- 'Music at Wesley' runs a successful programme of about 12 concerts a year (lunchtime recitals and evening events). This contributes significantly and directly to Wesley's income (and also indirectly to Coffee Bar income when lunchtime recitals are held).
- Because of the gathered nature of its members, their age profile/family circumstances and the City Centre location in 'club land', with no parking, it is not easy to get good attendance of Wesley people at evening meetings or events at the church.

- Wesley collaborates closely with Chester Aid to the Homeless and Chester Voluntary Action on arts-based volunteering exhibitions/events at Wesley. We are committed to staging three of these per year.
- Krafty Kids is a significant piece of work, too. There are seven of these events per year in the school holidays, run by a community artist and resulting in large-scale art that is then displayed in the building. We have embarked on a special project for the Bicentenary Year 2011-12 to create a mural in the hall entitled 'Life Journey'. Consisting of seven separate painted panels, the finished piece will be 8.5m wide and 2.4m high.
- As part of our Bicentennial Celebrations, Wesley will be staging an exhibition, called *In the Image*, of pieces from the Methodist Art Collection in September to October 2012. The wide-ranging programme will include school tours, workshops and talks.
- The minister's vestry is currently being refurbished so that it will in future also serve as the Circuit Superintendent's office on weekdays.

## Resources

- Membership numbers are gently declining, but a much larger number of people are committed to supporting Wesley.
- Sunday worship is still well attended and this includes a particularly encouraging number of young people and families.
- The proportion of retired people and the average age of the membership and congregation have increased in recent years.
- Wesley's congregation includes many talented and experienced people, but finding volunteers to fill vacancies in church responsibilities when they arise is becoming more difficult.
- Ministerial responsibilities will change when the Chester and Delamere Forest Circuits merge in September 2012. Rev. Neil Stacey will be Superintendent of the enlarged Circuit, with the new Circuit Superintendent Minister's office based at Wesley, and will no longer have responsibility for Saughall Methodist Church. Rev. Claire Heald will continue to provide an approximately 25% role at Wesley in addition to her responsibilities for Rowton and Christleton Methodist Churches.
- Following a generous response to appeals for increased regular giving in 2011, income will exceed expenditure in 2011/12. Income from lettings, rental, concerts and fund raising events supplements congregational giving (which makes up 65% of the total).
- The response to the 'Renewal 2010' fund-raising appeal shows that when there is agreement on what needs to be done, Wesley people are very generous in donating funds to development projects.
- Over the next 5 to 10 years fund-raising will be required for major maintenance works (e.g. flat roofs, redecoration and boiler replacement), in addition to any further project to re-order the worship area. External grants towards funding such works are increasingly hard to obtain.

## Overview

The Wesley Church Centre has a fine modernised set of premises in Chester City Centre, together with capable and committed leaders and voluntary lay resources. It has a clear mission of community outreach via the 'Open Door', based on the Coffee Bar which is open six days a week. The spacious centre is increasingly popular with shoppers, residents and visitors, particularly those with young children.

The worshipping congregation is not growing in overall numbers, but it is a strong fellowship and there has been very encouraging recent growth in young families and children attending 'SPLAT!' and 'First Up' services.

Church income is currently covering expenditure. 'Balancing the books' in future will depend on the ability of the body of the Wesley members/congregation (who contribute nearly two thirds of the total income of the Church Centre) to increase regular contributions in line with operating costs.

It is worth noting that the issue of balancing church finances has been a recurring theme throughout Wesley's history. For example the minister's newsletter in September 1959 (Appendix 15.3) looked back at the Leaders' Meeting minute book in the archives. This noted that at a meeting at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: "a prolonged discussion took place on the question of how best to increase the income of the Society". In the same year: "a long discussion followed on the question of making the Sunday evening service more inspiring and popular". So the theme of developing forms of worship more relevant to the culture of the times also has a long history!

Although the future will present many challenges, in our 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year there is much to be thankful for in Wesley's situation and much to look forward to with confidence. We continue to strive, in faith, to fulfil the vision for the new Wesley identified by the three uniting churches nearly 50 years ago in 1963 ( 7.1 above): "We want to create a new , strong city church to do the work we all know ought to be done in the city." Our current Mission Statement is "**A place to be, to belong and to believe**". As a church community and in partnership with other City Centre churches and agencies our aim is to continue to find new ways of fulfilling this calling in the years ahead.

Brian Heald

March 2012



**Fig. 89: Wesley Staff Meeting in Upper Room, March 2012 (from left: Ruth Blakebrough-Miller, Linda Pamphilon, Rev. Neil Stacey, Andrew Herbert, Nigel Mountford, Rev. Claire Heald, David Jacques (Treasurer))**





# APPENDICES

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## **APPENDIX 1: CURRENT WESLEY HISTORY LEAFLET (updated Sept 2011)**

### **The Beginning**

Methodism was first brought to Chester in 1749 by travelling preachers. There is a plaque on the wall outside Wesley which says "Near this spot on June 20th 1752 the Rev. John Wesley preached on the occasion of the first of his many visits to this city."

The first Methodist church in Chester was the Octagon Chapel, built near City Road in 1764. John Wesley often preached there. There is a fine chair in our church vestry which came from the Octagon Chapel when it was demolished and which he almost certainly used on his visits.

### **St. John St. Chapel**

After more than 40 years it was decided to build a bigger church in a more central position. The present site was purchased on 1st February 1811 and the new church opened on October 4th 1812 at a total cost of £6865.19s.10d. R.E. Waterhouse, a nephew of one of its original trustees, wrote: "It was thought to be a very beautiful and perfect construction.... Its front to St. John Street is semi-circular and I have heard some of the old men and women speak in awestruck tones of the immense cost of the bricks specially moulded for the erection."

The local Methodist historian, Joseph Jamion wrote in 1833: "This noble and beautiful house....has a semi-circular front, three entrances, a gallery on three sides, and an orchestra for the singers..."

The fine Georgian building next door served as a manse, and beyond that a day school was built in 1839 (but this has since been demolished). When it opened the new church had 361 members and there were 500 children in the Sunday School. The church was illuminated by 84 candles until 1851 when gas was installed.

In 1905 the bow front onto St. John Street was replaced by the present frontage. The seating within the church was modernised and some internal reordering took place. The large window in the St. John Street frontage was erected in 1914 in memory of William Twiston Davies, JP.

In 1926, a further set of structural and interior improvements was completed, including installation of electric lighting. The current chancel was added with its memorial window to commemorate members of the church who died in service in the First World War. Sited in this chancel is the fine three manual and pedal organ built by the respected organ builder James J. Binns of Leeds. Although a three manual console was provided in 1926, it was not until 1948 that second-hand choir organ pipes and mechanisms could be afforded and were installed. The organ employs the Binns patent tubular-pneumatic action and this was faithfully restored by David Wells Organ Builders Ltd. during a major clean and renovation in 2000.

### **A United Church**

In 1965 it was agreed that the congregations of St. John Street Church and two other City Centre (ex-Primitive Methodist) Churches, George St. and Hunter St., would merge. A report jointly produced in 1965, stated: "We want to create a new, strong City Church..... to do the work we all know ought to be done ..... in the city." This new Methodist Society, to be called 'Wesley', was based in the St. John

Street building, and the other two buildings sold and demolished. The old Sunday School building was replaced with new Church Centre buildings. In February 1970 the newly developed premises were opened and re-dedicated by the then Bishop of Chester, the Rt. Rev. Gerald Ellison.

### **A New Vision for Wesley.**

In 1986 it became clear that major and costly roof repairs were urgently needed; the main beam of the Church had moved six inches. Agonising decisions had to be made—to stay in the City Centre or move to a new site? It was finally decided to stay and to seek to serve the city's workers, shoppers and tourists more effectively. The whole premises underwent repair and redevelopment over a period of three years. This included the removal of the choir stalls from the chancel; the open space this created is used in worship, and for concerts and other events. A new entrance with a ramp was created.

In 1989 a full-time warden was appointed to oversee Wesley's 'Open Door' policy—i.e. the premises were opened six days a week to the public, offering a space for relaxation and refreshment in the City Centre.

Wesley was designated a Grade 2 Listed Building in the 1990s.

In 2002 the Fair Trade shop made its home in Wesley.

In 2009/2010, in order to develop the next stage of Wesley's outreach and church life, the 'Renewal 2010' project was implemented. This project modernised the Wesley Church Centre and its support facilities. It included improving the Coffee Bar which lies at the hub of Wesley's Open Door by redesigning the kitchen and servery, making the hall more welcoming and hospitable, and building a covered atrium in place of the previous courtyard. New access doors were installed into the worship area to make it more visible and welcoming to visitors. Accessibility improvements were made in the worship area and a lift was installed to the first floor rooms.



## APPENDIX 2: BRIEF SUMMARY OF JOHN WESLEY'S LIFE

- 1703: Born June 17<sup>th</sup>.
- 1709: Rescued from fire in Epworth Rectory.
- 1714: Attended Charterhouse School, London.
- 1720: Entered Christ Church College, Oxford.
- 1725: Ordained as an Anglican Deacon.
- 1727: Became curate at Wroote.
- 1729: Returned to Oxford and became leader of the Holy Club.
- 1733: Published first of many books 'A Collection of Forms of Prayer'.
- 1735-1737: Went as pastor to settlement in Georgia, America.
- 1738: John's conversion on 24<sup>th</sup> May at a meeting in Aldersgate Street.
- 1738: Visit to Moravian community in Herrnhut, Saxony.
- 1739: Preached first open air sermon to 3,000 people in the brickfields outside Bristol.
- 1740: Methodists made their HQ The Foundery, Moorfields, London.
- 1741: Began his travelling and preaching ministry.
- 1744: First Methodist Conference.
- 1747: First visit to Ireland.
- 1750: Married Mary Vazeille and visited Scotland for the first time.
- 1752: First of many visits to Chester.
- 1768: Methodist Chapel opened in New York.
- 1784: Ordained Dr Coke for work in America. This led to split with Church of England.
- 1790: Final tour of Great Britain.
- 1791: Died aged 87 on 2<sup>nd</sup> March at his house in City Road, London.
- In his ministry he rode by horseback over 100,000 miles and preached 42,000 sermons.

### **APPENDIX 3: WESLEY 'CONTACT' MAGAZINE ARTICLE RE LAND OWNERSHIP (John & Cicely Potts ca. 1988)**

The first recorded sale of the land and messuages (dwelling house with out-buildings) on the site of our Wesley chapel was on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1620. This was a counterpart of a bargain, sale and feoffment (the mode of conveying a free-hold estate), from Roger Barton of Knolton in the county of Flint - gent - to Thomas Williams of Chester - sadler. The sale comprised "messuage and tenement of the west side of St. John's Lane in Chester, now or late in the tenure of John Moyle, draper, with two gardens and one orchard, part of which was and is the Town ditch, under the wall of the City." The consideration was £160.

Later, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1637, Thomas Williams sold the messuages and burgage (ancient tenure rights) and orchard, garden, stabling and outhouses to Robert Harvie, an alderman, who in 1652 added two dwellings in the tenure of William Meacock, a pewterer.

The houses and land changed owners several times, and one interesting situation was on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1741, when they were held as an indenture of a fine made in the Portmote Court of Chester. (This was a court where land transactions were registered. By 1295 the court was held before the sheriffs of the city. After 1300 the mayor became associated with the Court, which dealt with pleas of real estate, trespass and debt. It met on a Monday, two or three times a month, and only ceased at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.) The indenture was between John Cooke – plaintiff – and George Griffiths and Margaret his wife as deforcients. At this time the Property consisted of "2 messuages, 1 brewhouse -garden and half an acre of land in St. John's Lane".

Over the years the land was mortgaged for the repayment of debts and had associations with other properties in Chester e.g. " 5 messuages in Handbridge in the tenure of the wardens and overseers of the poor in the parish of St. Mary's on the Hill, used as a poor house for that parish, and a field called "Paradise" (now the site of several bungalows for old people in Handbridge). The whole to secure payment of £200 with interest."

By 1768 the owner was a Col. Thomas Newcomen of Dove Hill, Co. Tipperary, but there seemed to be problems because on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1768 there is a declaration by the Minister and Churchwardens of Garrick, Co. Tipperary, stating that they had been unable to find a baptismal entry for Thomas Newcomen, but that they believed him to have been born on or about 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1745.

It is interesting to note that on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1807 there is a receipt for the redemption of an annual rent of 1 shilling from the owners' daughter, one Ester Smith.

To explain how the Methodists bought the site it is necessary to delve into our history. Wesley Methodist chapel (Old Connexion) started in about the year 1750 when the first preacher was a Mr John Bennett, who commenced his labours in Huntington Hall – the residence of Mr George Cotton – later the preaching was removed to the house of Mr Richard Jones in Love Lane, where a society was formed. At this time preachers stayed for one year, and as the society grew it moved to a capacious barn in Martins Ash, situated on the south side of St. Martin's Church, where the Rev. John Wesley visited them on his annual excursion.

In 1765 the society had sufficient credit to obtain £250 upon bond with which they erected the Octagon Chapel, near the Bars in Foregate Street, where they remained until the move to St. John Street.

Now to the building of Wesley Methodist Chapel (Old Connexion) in St. John Street. The site and buildings were purchased 1811 – 1814 from Thomas Jackson. On 27<sup>th</sup> July 1811 a “Bond was made between John Harrison (builder), John Bradford (tanner), Bruen Stapleford (farmer), George Lowe (goldsmith), and Henry Bowers (druggist) concerning the completion of the carpentry work in the penal sum of £2000.”

On 29<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> July 1811, we get the first Trustees “George Lowe (goldsmith), John Jones (linendraper), Henry Bowers (druggist), George Walker (wine-merchant), Robert Shearing (druggist), Robert Parry (currier), Thomas Shone (gent), Joseph Bettley (cordwainer), John Hitchen (gent), John Reece (miller) and James Sale (yeoman). They were required to “to hold the property in trust, to demolish the same, and erect a chapel to be used as a meeting place for the worship of Almighty God, by the Religious Society called Methodists, in the connection of the late Rev. John Wesley”.

The consideration of the old property was £1300 [*about £78,000 at 2012 values*].

The first description of the Chapel states that “It is a large, well built handsome structure, with a semi-circular front, and three entrances, two of which are at the West end, near the city walls, from which a flight of steps descends into the chapel yard. The other entrance, which is the principal one, is from St. John Street. It is galleried on three sides – behind the pulpit is a large orchestra for the accommodation of a body of singers”

On October 24<sup>th</sup> 1814 “Authorisation by the vestry for a preacher to officiate in the Circuit, whilst the Superintendent Minister was away collecting money for the new Church.”

*John & Cicely Potts*

*(written during the 1986-1989 repair and redevelopment of Wesley)*

#### **APPENDIX 4: WESLEY, CHESTER'S SCRAP BOOK 1 (Compiled by Wesley member, Rosemary Hall)**

*There is a wealth of interesting information about Wesley from its origins to the present day and also the Societies of Hunter Street and George Street that combined to form the current Wesley Methodist Church in 1970, in the series of six Scrap Books created by Rosemary Hall and held in the Wesley office. The following information is taken from her script in Scrap Book No. 1*

##### **Introduction: Methodism Comes to Chester**

Methodism was brought to Chester by John Bennett, one of John Wesley's first itinerant preachers (who actually won the hand of Grace Murray while John Wesley was still courting her!). He travelled widely in the North West, and was invited to Chester by George Shaw, a tailor living in Boughton.

In 1747, John Bennett wrote in a letter to John Wesley concerning his visit to Chester 'I am assured that the time is come that the Gospel must be preached in that City. The inhabitants received me gladly, and said "We have heard of Wesley and read his books; why could you not have come hither sooner?" ...I heard a religious society was kept in the City, and so I made an enquiry and found them out..'.

In 1749, at the Annual Wesleyan Conference, John Bennett was appointed to look after the Chester Circuit (which at that time stretched into Lancashire, Derbyshire, Cheshire and North Wales).

In 1751, a house in Love Lane, belonging to Richard Jones was opened for preaching and to provide hospitality for the preachers, and open air preaching was carried out in various parts of the City, including an open place near St John's Church.

In 1752 the growing Society moved to a barn in St. Martin's Ash, which held up to 200. (This would have been not far from Callin Court).

Later that year, John Wesley made his first visit to Chester. (Many more - over 20 - were to be made, generally in the Spring). He recorded in his diary that on Saturday June 20<sup>th</sup> he preached at 'six, in the accustomed place near St. John's Church' and on the Sunday in the Square by St. Martin's Church. On the Monday he walked round the walls, and was obviously intrigued by 'The Rows; that is, covered galleries which run through the main streets on each side from East to West and from North to South; by which means one may walk both clean and dry, in any weather, from one end of the City to the other'.

Wesley often visited Chester on his way to Dublin and back (via Parkgate), or into Wales. It seems that there was some disharmony in the Chester Society, for in 1762 he recorded that on 'Monday August 2<sup>nd</sup> I rode on to Chester. Never was the Society in such a state before. Their jars and contentions were at an end, and I found nothing but peace and love among them'.

##### **The Octagon Chapel**

In 1764, the first Methodist Chapel was erected in Chester. A piece of land was purchased on the Boughton side, where City Road approached Foregate. The Chapel was built in the form of an



octagon, the first of its kind. It had a diameter of 46 feet, seated with 600 with gallery “and perhaps another 200 with pressure”, according to “Early Methodism in and around Chester” by F F Bretherton. Perhaps the inspiration came from the octagon-shaped Water Tower on the Walls (which was taken down in 1782). Certainly Wesley strongly favoured this design – in 1770 a Conference regulation read “Build all preaching houses, if the ground will admit, in the Octagon form. It is best for the voice....and more commodious...”.

The new Octagon Chapel could seat 600. It opened on Sunday June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1765. The opening service was at 5pm and the preacher was John Hampson – his text was 2 Corinthians 6: 41. John Wesley was delighted with the Octagon, and preached there several times.

Wesley Church has at least one link with the Octagon; the fine blue seated chair in our minister’s vestry came from the Octagon vestry, and Norman Craine (former Wesley member and organist) used to express certainty therefore that John Wesley must at some time have sat in it himself!

The Octagon was the centre of Methodist life in Chester from 1765 to 1811. It was then sold to the trustees of Rev. Philip Oliver, an evangelist and his successors. In 1852 it was transferred to the Presbyterian Church of Wales; it was pulled down in 1864 and the present City Road Presbyterian Church was erected almost on the same site.

### **Commonhall Street**

In 1776, a Room for public services was opened in Commonhall Street (off Bridge Street) for those who found the Octagon Chapel too far away. But there was some dissension between the congregation and the Octagon.

During John Wesley’s life there was no formal separation from the Church of England; the Sacrament was not administered by Methodist preachers, and Methodist services were not held at the same time as Church of England services. This practice was followed by Conference until a year after John Wesley’s death. It was strictly observed by the Octagon society, but the Commonhall Street congregation was more liberal. (In 1794 the latter separated themselves more decisively by building their own chapel in Trinity Lane).

Tensions continued between the two chapels and in 1793 the District meeting (equivalent to our Synod today) forbade Methodist local preachers to preach in Commonhall Street. In 1793 there was a break away from Conference and the New Connexion was formed. In the same year the Trinity Lane Society left the Chester Circuit and in 1835 they erected a large, handsome Chapel in Pepper Street. The imposing frontage can still be seen as the Chateau furniture store (previously Habitat) façade.

Tensions continued until 1806 when the Octagon Chapel formally agreed to administer the Sacrament and to change its hours of worship to 10.30am and 6pm.

## **Henry Bowers**

One very interesting character of the Octagon years was Henry Bowers. He was a well known and important figure in the City, but with no real interest in Christianity. However, he began to be drawn to the evangelical preaching of the Methodists and to attend the Octagon, albeit somewhat secretly. One day he met up by chance with a deeply committed Christian family, and was converted in their home on July 16<sup>th</sup> 1810, other members of his family following soon after. He became a class leader, then a preacher – drawing crowds for it was something of a novelty to see an Alderman (as he then was) in a Methodist pulpit! He twice became Mayor of Chester (1817 and 1827). Those opposed to his election said they would support him if he gave up preaching. He told them that it was a greater honour to be a preacher than to be a Mayor. Henry's son John became an ordained minister and a well known preacher, and ultimately President of the Wesleyan Conference. Members of the Bowers family were pillars of St. John Street Chapel until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. There is a memorial to Henry Bowers in Wesley.

## **Sunday School and Day School Work**

It was the Methodists who started the first Sunday School work in Chester for poor and neglected children. This was at the Octagon Chapel in 1782; the Superintendents were Thomas Bennett and George Lowe and 700 children attended.

There were also Branch Schools in Handbridge (1782), in Back Brook Street (1822) and Bridge Street (1828).

In 1805 a grand concert was arranged at the Octagon Chapel to raise money for the Sunday School, a silver collection being taken. But subsequently many felt uneasy that something 'worldly' had been done which was out of line with Methodist discipline.

In 1839 a Day School was established linked to the Sunday School, to provide secular education. From 1845 these schools (for boys, and for girls) met in fine new premises in St. John Street. This building became the City Library and was demolished in the 1980s.

By 1846 there were 204 children in the morning Sunday School, and 284 in the afternoon school.

There are records of a Sunday School Outing by rail to Beeston in 1846, and to Ruabon in 1847. The Sunday School teachers, meeting in July 1847, recorded their 'devout thanks to Almighty God for his merciful protection during their journey' – for just after the train, bearing teachers and children on their way to Ruabon, had passed over the bridge over the River Dee, the bridge had broken and several people had been killed or injured!

In 1848, the outing was to Rhyl (at a cost of £2 per day per railway carriage).

In 1855 the older boys wanted to start a brass band – but that was too revolutionary an idea for the Teachers to cope with!

In 1863, a set of flags was purchased by the Sunday School, to celebrate the wedding of the Prince of Wales. The children processed round the City and each was given an orange and a few biscuits.

### **St. John Street Chapel 1811 Onwards**

Early in the nineteenth century, it was decided that a new Church building was needed, and in 1811 a site was bought in St. John Street at a cost of £6,865-19s-10d.

The Methodist New Chapel was opened on October 4<sup>th</sup> 1812; it consisted of the Chapel itself, the Manse (the fine Georgian building next door to Wesley at No. 6 St. John Street, now offices) and a Sabbath School. The Architect was Thomas Harrison, also Architect of the Grosvenor Bridge. The building of the Church was a courageous venture for it was a difficult and uncertain time for the country, involved in the Napoleonic war. And in addition to all this – they couldn't sell the Octagon for some time. What faith!

The new Chapel was described (in 1833) as: "This noble and beautiful house....has a semi-circular front, three entrances, a gallery on three sides, and an orchestra for the singers....". There were 361 members and 500 children in the Sunday School.

Another writer, commenting on the front, noted: "I have heard some old men and women speak in awestruck tones of the immense cost of the bricks specially moulded for the erection".

The opening was a great occasion. At 10.30am the worship was led by the Superintendent Rev. John Braithwaite; the preacher was Rev., Sam Bradbury of Liverpool. At 2.30pm Rev. John Gailton of Liverpool took the service and at 6pm Rev. Jabez Bunting of Halifax preached.

In his opening remarks at the morning service, Rev. John Braithwaite extolled the building's virtues, but added: "But I hope it will have a superior glory in a more exalted sense. I hope it will have the glory of being the birthplace of many precious souls, and that where one soul was converted in the other Chapel, scores will be converted in this....".

### **St. John Street Chapel in the Nineteenth Century**

In 1826 a Watchnight Service was held: records note that 5 people spoke and 3 prayed – for a total of 180 minutes!

During the 1830s there was an orchestra to provide music for worship. *(The word 'orchestra' could just mean the space for provision of music in the gallery apse above the pulpit as noted in the 1833 quotation above. There was an organ at this time, because someone was being paid as an organ blower).*

In 1835 there is a reference to Vaults being available for burials 'at the back of the Church against the Walls'. In 1838 hot water pipes were installed in the Church.

In 1848 the ladies held a bazaar which raised £135.

Until 1851 the Church was lit by candles- 84 altogether: 26 in 6 chandeliers in the gallery, 20 in the gallery front seats, 4 in the pulpit and the rest in 2 large chandeliers. In 1851 gas was installed to light the pulpit; this was very successful. Soon after gas lighting was extended to the whole Church.

## APPENDIX 5: EXTRACT FROM 'REMINISCENCES OF CHESTER METHODISM'

### Kenneth Bounds, 1975: (Reference 2)

*The full document is held in the Chester City Library Reference section and most of it is held in Wesley scrap Book No. 1. The following excerpt from page 8 is most relevant to Wesley.*

"After a generation of divine service in the Octagon Chapel, steps were taken to build a new Chapel in a more central position, and a site was procured in St. John Street, adjacent to the City walls. The opening was on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1812, with some distinguished guests.

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| 10.30 a.m. | Rev. John Braithwaite, superintendent. |
|            | Rev. Samuel Bradburn                   |
| 2.30 p.m.  | Rev. John Gaulter                      |
| 6.00 p.m.  | Rev. James Bunting                     |

The architect was Mr Thos. Harrison, who also erected the County School and the Grosvenor Bridge. The cost was £6,685 10s. 10d. "The Chester Courant", 28<sup>th</sup> September 1812 gave good coverage to the project:

"New Methodist Chapel. This place of public worship, situated in John Street, in this city, is to be opened for public worship on Sunday next (see advertisement). This is a handsome brick building, 22 yards by 17 inside, with a handsome circular front to the east, erected from a model by Mr. Harrison, architect of our Shire Hall. It contains 99 pews or seats, those below lined with green baize, which contains about 600 sittings, beside the singing gallery and free seats, which contain upwards of 250 more, and when the whole of the aisles etc in the Chapel are well filled it is computed that it will hold near 1400 persons. The whole of the building is neatly finished, both inside and outside, and Messrs. Harrison does credit to the undertakers, Mr W Boden for the latter, and Messrs. Harrison and G Boden for the carpenter's work. Behind the Chapel a building is erected for a Sunday School, capable of accommodating about 200 scholars, to which and to the back/front of the Chapel, a flight of steps descends from the walls; the Corporation laudably granted permission to open a passage from thence."

This was a very large venture to be taken by the trustees, and it took a period of sixty years before the debts were finally cleared.

In the year 1905 [*error: 1906*] this Chapel was reconstructed; the entrance was changed from the back to the St. John Street side, and the 'bow' front was removed. New seats were installed."

## APPENDIX 6: TYPED EXTRACT FROM JOURNAL OF MARY LOWE, NEE CAWLEY (1761-1819)

*Wesley's Scrap Book 1 contains a typed six page history of the Lowe family, a typed ten page Memoir of Mary Lowe (1761-1819) provided by Janet Lowe in 1993 and also a short four page account by Mary Lowe's of the life of her mother, Mrs Elizabeth Cawley (1731-1805).*

Mary was wife of George Lowe, Silversmith of Chester and Assay Master up to his death in 1841. (He was presumably one of the original Wesley Trustees – cf. Appendix 3).

“Sunday, Oct 4<sup>th</sup> 1811 (*Error: should be 1812. Oct 4<sup>th</sup> 1811 was in fact a Friday*). Our new chapel in John Street was opened. Mr. Braithwaite gave out the first hymn and prayed. He then made some remarks about the new edifice, which was erected for the Worship of God. He said that when Solomon's Temple was rebuilt, the Jews wept, because the former house so far exceeded the latter. He then said that if we wept it would be with tears of joy to see what great things the Lord had done for us, in the latter House so far exceeded the former. Mr Bradburn then preached from the 48<sup>th</sup> Psalm, the last two verses. He gave us a short history of the rise and progress of Methodism, in a very plain and intelligent manner. In the afternoon Mr Gaulter preached from the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Philippians, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> verses. In the evening Mr Jabez Bunting preached from Zechariah 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter verse 7. It was a most excellent sermon and the Chapel was crowded with serious and attentive hearers. The collections made on that day amounted to one hundred and fifty seven pounds [*about £8,000 at 2012 values*] and a few shillings. We had several Christian friends for a distance at our house. After supper we spent the time in singing and prayer, and the Lord was powerfully present with us.”



## **APPENDIX 7: HISTORY OF METHODISM (ref. Wikipedia, 18/9/11)**

### **Overview**

The original body founded as a result of Wesley's work was later known as the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Schisms within the original (Wesleyan) Methodist church, and independent revivals, led to the formation of a number of separate denominations calling themselves Methodist. The largest of these were the Primitive Methodist church, deriving from a revival at Mow Cop in Staffordshire, the Bible Christians and the Methodist New Connexion. The original church became known as the Wesleyan Methodist Church to distinguish it from these bodies. In 1907, a union of smaller groups with the Methodist New Connexion and Bible Christian Church brought about the British "United Methodist Church". Then the three major streams of British Methodism united in 1932 to form the current Methodist Church of Great Britain. The Wesleyan Reform Union and the Independent Methodist Connexion still remain separate. The Primitive Methodist Church had branches in the USA which still continue.

### **Methodist New Connexion / United Methodists**

The Methodist New Connexion was a Protestant nonconformist church, also known as the Kilhamite Methodists. It was formed in 1797 by secession from the Wesleyan Methodists, and merged in 1907 with the Bible Christian Church and the United Methodist Free Churches to form the United Methodist Church.

The secession was led by Alexander Kilham, and resulted from a dispute regarding the position and rights of the laity. In 1791, Kilham denounced the Methodist conference for giving too much power to the ministers of the church, at the expense of the laity. The Plan of Pacification adopted by the conference in 1795 further entrenched his position, and Kilham was expelled from the conference in 1797.

Kilham formed the New Connexion, based around his church in Sheffield. It thrived, and soon spread across Britain. At its conferences, ministers and laymen were of equal number, the laymen being chosen by the circuits and in some cases by guardian representatives elected for life by conference. Otherwise the doctrines and order of the Connexion were the same as those of the Wesleyans, although some Wesleyans accused Kilham of revolutionary sympathies and links with Tom Paine.

At the time of the union in 1907, the Methodist New Connexion had some 250 ministers and 45,000 members.

### **Primitive Methodism**

Primitive Methodism was a major movement in English Methodism from about 1810 until the Methodist Union in 1932. The Primitive Methodist Church still exists in the United States. It was seen to originate in an All Day of Prayer (often misnamed a "Camp Meeting" held at Mow Cop, Staffordshire on 31st May 1807. This led, in 1811, to two groups joining together, the 'Camp Meeting Methodists' and the 'Clowesites', led by Hugh Bourne and William Clowes respectively.

The movement was spawned from the personal followings of these men. Bourne and Clowes were charismatic evangelists. Both had reputations for zeal and were sympathetic to ideas the Wesleyan Connexion condemned. Their belief most unacceptable to the Wesleyan Connexion was support for so-called "Camp Meetings." These were day-long, open air meetings involving public praying, preaching and Love Feasts.

Clowes was a first generation Methodist convert—at the age of 25 he renounced his desire to be the finest dancer in England. The movement was also influenced by the backgrounds of the two men, Clowes had worked as a potter, while Bourne had been a wheelwright. Both of them had been expelled from the Wesleyan Connexion—Bourne in 1808 and Clowes in 1810. The reason given for Clowes' expulsion was that he behaved "contrary to the Methodist discipline," therefore he could not be a "preacher or leader amongst them unless [he] promised not to attend [camp] meetings anymore."

It seems likely that this was not its only concern regarding the pair. Bourne's association with the American evangelist Lorenzo Dow would have put him in a dim light with Wesleyan leaders. The Wesleyan leadership's hostility to Dow is demonstrated by a threat Dow received from prominent Wesleyan (and twice president of the Conference in 1797 and 1805) Thomas Coke, on his arrival in London around 1799. Coke threatened to "write to Lord Castlereagh to inform him who and what you are, [and] that we disown you,... then you'll be arrested and committed to prison."

The Wesleyan Connexion was also concerned about Bourne's and Clowes' association with the "Magic Methodists" or "Forest Methodists" led by James Crawfoot, the "old man of Delamere Forest". He was significant to both Bourne and Clowes and was for a time their spiritual mentor. He held prayer meetings where people had visions and fell into trances. Crawfoot, according to Owen Davies, had developed a reputation for possessing supernatural powers. Indeed Henry Wedgwood, writing later in the century, recalled that many locals at the time were terrified of the magical powers of an innkeeper called Zechariah Baddeley, but that they considered Baddeley's powers nothing next to Crawfoot's prayers and preaching.

The enthusiasm associated with revivalism was seen as disreputable by the early 19th century establishment. In 1799, the Bishop of Lincoln claimed that the "ranter" element of Methodism was so dangerous that the government must ban itinerancy. Men like Bourne and Clowes were not educated and their preaching and mass conversion was threatening. The Wesleyan Methodists, such as Coke, wanted to distance themselves from such populism. The death of John Wesley removed a restraining influence on popular Methodism: there was no obvious leader or authority, and power was invested in the Wesleyan Conference. The Wesleyans formally split from the Church of England, which led them to greater organisation and self-definition, and the leadership could now withhold the tickets of members, like Bourne and Clowes, who did not behave in the way expected by the Conference. The result was less toleration for internal dissent, and a weakening of the movement's leadership.

The Camp Meeting Methodists looked back to the early days of the Methodist movement and considered that field preaching was acceptable. Despite their exclusion from the Connexion, Clowes and Bourne and the assistants who appeared to help them became involved in a task which *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* saw as a work of primary evangelisation. The same book also regards the Primitive Methodist denomination as an independent growth rather than as an offshoot of mainstream Methodism.

## **APPENDIX 8: NOTE FROM CYRIL MORRIS (WESLEY MEMBER) ABOUT THOMAS HARRISON, ARCHITECT (4/9/06)**

Brief Entry in Pevsner's "Buildings of England- Cheshire":

"Methodist Church, St. John Street. Although re-fronted in 1906, the body of the church is of 1811 and is, according to [Mr Howell], by Harrison. There are side galleries and a four-bay Ionic arcade, though the detailing must be 1906 rather than 1811."

The recent book (2005) by John Champness "Thomas Harrison – Georgian Architect of Chester and Lancaster 1744 - 1829" gives a much more detailed and well researched account of all his buildings. Harrison's first church commission was at Whittingham in Shropshire, now much altered; his second was the re-facing of the sandstone of St. Peter's at The Cross in Chester.

"His third church – the Methodist Church in Chester – suffered much the same fate as the first. Its three-bay shell was built in dark brown bricks to Harrison's designs in 1811 – a rain water hopper in the south west corner bears that date – but the specification for the internal works, including a gallery, was provided by the main contractor William Cole. The fashionably bowed two-storey front to St John's Street was replaced in 1906 with a typical – and not unattractive – red-brick façade with a large nine-light window filled with Perpendicular tracery. At the same time the interior was also significantly changed."

Thomas Harrison (1744 - 1829) was born in Yorkshire and trained in Rome, made his reputation in Lancaster and practised for much of his life in Chester. His work in Chester included the Shire Hall (won in competition), the Northgate, the Commercial Rooms in Northgate Street (now the City Club), the Propylaea Gateway at the Castle, St. Martin's Lodge and the Grosvenor Bridge.

There is an interesting account of the 'erection of St. John Street Chapel 1810 onwards' in *Early Methodism in and around Chester* by F F Bretherton (Reference 1), which reads: "the Architect.. was Mr Thomas Harrison....Mr Harrison only gave the plan, which fact will account for the smallness of the fee recorded in the accounts. The specifications and sections were drawn up by Mr B Gommer, Architect of Ruabon". The chapter includes all the detailed costs of the work.

Robert's Chester Guide (1851) quotes Hemingway:

"a well built structure, with a semi-circular front and two entrances. It is galleried on three sides and behind the pulpit is a large orchestra for the accommodation of singers, where there is also a well tuned organ".

### **St Martin's Ash**

The barn (which was a "large and lofty structure" accommodating 200 after a gallery was erected) was on the south side of a square opposite the church of St. Martin's in the Ash. It was in the vicinity of White, Black and Grey Friars. St. Martin's Lodge (1823), the house designed by Thomas Harrison in Nicholas Street (next to the new HQ Building), is probably close to the site of the Barn. After Harrison's death it became the rectory for the combined parishes of St. Bridget and St. Martin - St. Bridget's Church was close to where the Magistrates Courts are now.

## APPENDIX 9: LISTED BUILDING RECORD

### Name: WESLEYAN METHODIST CHURCH

List Entry Number: 1375924

Location: WESLEYAN METHODIST CHURCH, ST JOHN STREET

District: Cheshire West and Chester

District Type: Unitary Authority

Grade: II

Date first listed: 23-Jul-1998

#### Details:

CHESTER CITY (EM)

SJ4066 ST JOHN STREET

1932-1/6/248 (West side)

Wesleyan Methodist Church

II

Church. 1811. By Thomas Harrison and William Cole II of Chester. Extended, externally drastically, 1906 by PH and WT Lockwood. Earlier part built of brown brick, the later part in Ruabon red brick; grey slate roofs.

PLAN/EXTERIOR: the face to St John Street, 1906, is symmetrical in indeterminate style with projecting 2-storey corner pavilions, formerly with entrances, now display windows, in front of the gabled main front with large 9-light round-arched window with quasi-panel tracery. A plaque above the window is inscribed erected 1811: restored 1906. Stepped and rounded gable with cartouche and finial. The right side of the original chapel has 3 tall leaded windows with cambered gauged-brick heads to the aisle and 3 semicircular windows with radial-bar glazing to the gallery. The left side is similar, but with lower part of front bay concealed by the extension. The rear, now the liturgical east end, was reordered in 1906; a rainwater pipe and head at corner of nave is dated 1811 on a butterfly bracket.

INTERIOR: Ionic arcades and side galleries in the unaltered parts and a round classical arch to the chancel.

HISTORICAL NOTE: originally the chapel was correctly oriented, entered from the west, facing the City Walls, and with an apsidal east end to St John Street. Thomas Harrison prepared only a plan, fee 20 pounds. This was an insufficient basis for builders' estimates. William Cole II, whose son was to be Harrison's pupil, completed the working drawings and prepared specifications, fee 85 pounds. Cole evidently also acted as a contractor for masonry, carpentry and joinery, approximately half the cost of the building. The 1906 extensions and alterations included reorienting the church#. The apse was demolished, the new entrance front to St John Street built and the chancel added, or reordered from the previous porch, to replace the original entrance.

The later C20 wing left of the St John Street front is not included in this item.

(Simpson F: Notes on Chester Churches and Chapels: 1920-1930).

Listing NGR: SJ 40759 66231

Source: *English Heritage*

*# No. It is clear from the photographs and seating plans included in Part 1 sections 3 and 4 that, while the entrances to the Church were moved from the City Walls end to the St. John Street end of the building, the worship space has always faced west towards the City Walls. The descriptions of the changes in 1906 given in Appendices 10 and 13 implicitly endorse this, in that they make no reference to any change in direction of worship (which would of course have been a very substantial reconfiguration).*

## **APPENDIX 10: REOPENING SERVICES SOUVENIR PROGRAMME, JULY 10<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> 1926**

*This is the text of the introduction from the Order of Services and Souvenir of the Re-opening of the Church and Dedication of the New Organ and Memorial Window: Wesleyan Methodist Church, St. John Street Chester.*

“For the past one hundred and seventy-five years Methodism has made its contribution in Chester to the coming of the Kingdom of God. Our St. John Street Church has stood since 1811 as a centre of religious life and activity where through the years many leading citizens have been trained for the service of God and their fellows. In 1905 structural alterations were made including a new frontage, the putting in of modern seats and the erection of a new rostrum. These changes brought improvements but not complete satisfaction. An attempt has now been made to give unity and beauty to the building – and with success.

A Chancel has been added with new Choir seats and Organ, new Pulpit and Communion Table, and a fine Memorial Window, given by Mr S. P. Davies in memory of the St. John Street men who laid down their lives in the Great War. The Electric Light has also been installed in the Church, and two Vestries built.

This transformation of the interior of the building gives a pleasing effect and is likely to be viewed with general satisfaction. The total cost of the scheme is about £5,500 – most of which has been raised, in fact a debt of only £500 remains, and this, it is hoped, will be removed by a Bazaar next November.

Our mission is not yet fulfilled. The outward alterations mark no change in spirit or doctrine. We retain our evangelical character, seek to take our part in world evangelisation, stand for social righteousness and would proclaim ourselves in the words of Wesley, - the friends of all and the enemies of none.”



## APPENDIX 11: LETTER FROM ALFRED TABERER- “THE PEPPER STREET METHODIST CHAPEL”

*This letter was written to Cyril Morris’s department in Chester City Council at the Town Hall in August 1984, when the then new Habitat Store (closed down in Sept 2011) had been opened in Pepper Street. When the new Habitat Store was being planned it seemed unlikely that the old chapel pillared façade would be exposed, as Habitat said it would cost too much and Chester City Council wouldn’t give a conservation grant because Habitat’s balance sheet didn’t justify the Council or the Government giving financial assistance. It only happened as a result of Cyril Morris contacting Jennifer Jenkins (who was Chairman of the Historic Buildings Council and wife of the leading politician Roy Jenkins), who promptly rang her friend Sir Terrance Conran of Habitat, who then authorised the additional expenditure!*

The re-emergence of the façade of the old chapel in Pepper Street after remaining hidden for sixty years recalls an almost forgotten chapter in the history of Methodism in Chester. It was not Welsh Methodist, however, as referred to on page 14 of the Chester Chronicle dated 27<sup>th</sup> July 1984. Its designation at the time of its closure in 1918 was United Methodist, but this had only been so since 1907. When opened in 1835 it was a chapel belonging to the Methodist New Connexion. The following notes may be of interest.

In 1764 the Methodist Society (followers of John Wesley) in Chester, after meeting for 12 years in a converted barn in St. Martin’s Ash, erected their first large chapel (the Octagon chapel) on land which is now part of City Road, near the present City Road English Presbyterian chapel. From here they moved in 1811-1812 to what is now Wesley Chapel in St. John Street, but not before, in 1776, an additional preaching-room had been established in Commonhall Street, largely for the benefit of a section of the membership who found the Octagon too remote from where they lived. Here service was held at two o’clock on Sunday afternoons, so as not to conflict with morning and evening services at the Octagon; and at both places the times of service were such as would not prevent those who wished from attending service in the parish churches – for such was the policy of official Methodism at the time. Dissatisfaction with this arrangement began to be felt through Methodism towards the end of the eighteenth century, especially after John Wesley’s death in 1791, and the Commonhall Street room became the meeting-place of Methodists who wanted to discontinue any deference to the established Church, by holding services at hours most convenient to themselves and by receiving the sacraments at the hands of their own preachers, which official Methodism did not then allow. In 1794 this group was strong enough to open a chapel of their own in Trinity lane (now Trinity Street), where ultimately they were disowned by the parent body at much the same time (1797) that there was a large secession from official Methodism and the formation of a separate denomination called the Methodist New Connexion, which the Trinity Lane Methodists joined. (Methodists still loyal to the old plan were from thenceforth known as Wesleyan Methodists).

It was the Trinity Lane Methodists who erected the imposing Pepper Street chapel in 1835, which throughout the rest of the nineteenth century was the home of one of the most prosperous free church congregations in the city. Many names well known in business and municipal life appeared on its membership roll. In 1907 the Methodist New Connexion, the Bible Christians and the United Methodist Free Churches (a combination of several small Methodist groups who had joined together in 1857) amalgamated to form the United Methodist Church, and the Pepper Street designation thereupon changed to “United Methodist”.

From the early years of the twentieth century, and especially during the First World War, the Pepper Street membership declined, and by 1918 came the reluctant decision to close as a Methodist chapel. For some years, however, under the management of the principal trustee, the late Mr S

Edwin Davis, an attempt was made to keep the building in use as a public hall, and in the General Election Campaign of 1924 I remember attending, along with my parents, a public meeting held there in support of the Liberal candidate, Mr W Craven Llewelyn. Half-way through the candidate's address the lights went out – as a result, it was said, of the mains switch being turned off by miscreants from one of the other parties! Dog shows were also held within its walls.

Ultimately the property was sold, and the proceeds of the sale were invested with the Methodist Conference Property Department in Manchester – and nearly fifty years later the accrued funds were used to finance in part considerable structural alterations at Wesley Methodist Church in St. John Street.

Referring back to the Octagon, this chapel when vacated by the Wesleyan Methodists in 1812 was then occupied by Presbyterians who later became part of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, but had to be demolished in 1864 to make way for the construction of City Road as the main route from Foregate Street to the General Station. The Presbyterians then rebuilt in City Road on a site very near to where the Octagon had stood, and in 1918, when their chapel needed considerable renovation, bought some of the pews from Pepper Street, and these are still in use at City Road today.

Commonhall Street has over the years been the meeting-place of a number of religious societies. When the "Trinity Lane" Methodists vacated their preaching-room there they were followed, though not immediately, by a group who had previously belonged to the precursors of the City Road Presbyterians, and who by 1841 had become known as Congregationalists, moving in 1875 to their much more commodious chapel in Upper Northgate Street, which still stands, but is used by another religious group. Another chapel was erected in Commonhall Street in 1820, used first by the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists (Presbyterians) before their move to the present Welsh Presbyterian Church in St. John Street, and from 1867 to 1899 by Primitive Methodists who then built the Hunter Street chapel (closed in 1969 along with George Street Methodist in 1970, and the members transferred to Wesley Chapel, St John Street).

It is sometimes suggested that the Trinity Lane membership was augmented by seceders from Mathew Henry's Chapel (in Trinity Lane from 1699) who objected to the rise of Unitarianism in the second half of the eighteenth century; but the principal secession from Mathew Henry's was of course represented by Queen Street Congregational Church from 1777 until the 1960s, when the move was made to Vicar's Cross and the chapel built which is now known as Vicar's Cross United Reformed.

Pepper Street chapel did not survive to see the ultimate re-unification of practically the whole of Methodism in Great Britain, which took place on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1932.

Alfred A Taberer  
F.R.C.O.

## APPENDIX 12: THE WESLEY ORGAN- LETTER FROM ALFRED TABERER F.R.C.O., AND SPECIFICATION

### A12.1: LETTER FROM ALFRED TABERER F.R.C.O. TO DON SWEETING, 31/10/93- "THE HISTORY OF THE WESLEY JAMES J. BINNS ORGAN"

"I hadn't forgotten your request that I should set down what I know of the history of the Binns organ in St. John Street chapel: sorry I've not had a chance to do so until now.

Actually I doubt there is much I can tell you that will not be apparent to Hill, Norman & Beard. When the organ was installed in July 1926, there was a shortage of funds, preventing its being put in as a complete three- manual instrument, and consequently the Choir Organ department was left "prepared for", i.e. the manual keyboard itself was there, and the relevant stop-knobs were in position on the right-hand stop-jamb, but the pipes relating thereto were missing. The "Swell to Choir" coupling mechanism was operative, however, so that the organist could appear to be playing on the Choir Organ whilst the sound itself came from whatever stops had been drawn on the Swell organ! This was bound to look a trifle ostentatious, but made the console more comfortable for the player, and I myself did this habitually. There was one change from the advertising specification – the Choir Dulciana was put into the Great Organ in place of the Clarabella, and the Clarabella stop-knob was put into the Choir. This was in order to provide a sufficiently quiet accompaniment for the solo stops on the Swell.

In 1926 the expressed hope was that the organ could be completed in "three of four years", but this had not been accomplished when the Second World War broke out in 1939, and other considerations then had to take precedence. After the War there was a demand for work for export overseas to be given priority – with the object of helping the national economic situation; so that it was not until 1948 that St. John Street had a Binns organ that was three-manual in fact as well as in appearance. The Dulciana and Clarabella stops were of course changed back to their original positions.

The organ as installed in 1926 cost £2000 approx., and it was said that to have installed the Choir Organ then would have cost a further £400 approx. (In these days such an extra sum would have appeared trifling!) It was naturally expected that in post-War conditions this cost would have risen – but to our astonishment the price charged was exactly the same as that quoted in 1926 – and one benefit of delay in completion was the fact that by 1948 work such as this no longer attracted Purchase Tax. It should also be mentioned that by this time there was a change in management, and the original firm of James J. Binns had become Binns, Fitton & Haley. This company too was eventually bought up by Rushworth & Dreaper.

The contract for maintenance and tuning of the organ was not given, however, to either Binns or Rushworths, but to the Chester organ-building firm of Henry Poyser, who in fact had charge also of the Hill organ in Chester Cathedral - and also sang in the Nave Choir! The Cathedral organist at that time was Mr J. T. Hughes – a well-known Cestrian widely known as 'Tommy Hughes' – and it was said that the specification of the St. John Street organ had been drawn up 'in consultation with Mr J. T. Hughes, organist of Chester Cathedral', but the probability is that this simply meant that Mr J.T. Hughes had suggested Binns as the organ builder whom St. John Street should entrust with the contract for their new organ, for, as Hill, Norman & Beard are no doubt well aware, most of the

Binns organs are built to a standard design, the only variation being dictated by the amount that their client could afford to spend. It was Mr Hughes who played for the opening service on Saturday afternoon, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1926, and gave a recital in the evening, concluding with an arrangement of the well-known tone-poem Finlandia by Sibelius, 'without which', as one music critic facetiously remarked, 'no organ recital would seem to be complete!' When Mr Poyser retired from business, his connection was taken over by Charles Whiteley & Co. of Crane Bank, Chester, who had built the previous Cathedral organ in 1872 and whose work was widely known as esteemed throughout the district.

As many Wesley members will know, their chapel has seen many changes both inside and out since it was built in 1811-1812, and the most radical of all was undoubtedly the one completed in 1926 with the installation of the new organ, chancel and choir-stalls and side pulpit, replacing the old rostrum and organ-and-choir gallery which faced the congregation. (May I say in passing that I personally felt sad when the choir-stalls disappeared a few years ago, for until then, when I was able occasionally to play the organ for a service, I could (during the sermon) sit and picture to myself the many friends of long before who occupied those stalls, remembering where each had sat - including one, the late Mr George J. Lloyd, who, going to chapel one Sunday morning with his boots particularly well blacked, marked his initials with his toe on the back of the stall in front of him. This could easily be seen after fifty years if you knew where to look!)

Some time in advance of the completion of the 1926 alterations, dry rot was found in the corner of the chapel where the organ now stands, and as part of the urgent remedial work which had to be done at the time, the present organ chamber was constructed, eventually to receive the new instrument. It was thought at the time that the side wall (facing the congregation) would need to be breached to allow for a row of organ pipes being there placed, and consequently that wall is only 4.5 inches thick - so I was told by the late Mr Edward Pritchard. But when the organ came to be erected, Binns would have none of it! - and there are those who have thought that the organ, boxed in as it is, would have been heard to better advantage down in the chapel if the original idea had been carried into effect.

It is certainly time that a definitive history of the chapel should be written. Our late dear friend Will Clarke, who had been there all his life, kept his own account of the principal events and personalities as the years passed, and which he was wont to show to each minister on arrival at the manse. What became of that record I do not know. I myself in 1976, to celebrate the organ's fifty years of service, wrote all I could remember of what had happened from 1926 until then, especially during the eventful years of the 1939-1945 War. Unfortunately I did not make a carbon copy, and Brian Redwood, who was with us then and worked in the City Archives, borrowed my manuscript to show to Rev Alan Horner, the then circuit superintendent. I thought that when I got it back I would consult with Will and see if it might be possible to combine the two for publication, but my record never reappeared, although Brian Redwood made all the enquiries he could. This I have always been sorry about. I'm too old now to tackle such a job de novo, but would willingly give all possible help to anyone who might feel able to undertake such a task. The only request I would make is that if anything along these lines came to be written, it should not appear in print, if I'm still in the land of the living, until I had opportunity to read it.

I hope you will find these paragraphs useful, and now sign myself, With kindest regards, *etc etc*"

## A12.2: The Wesley Organ Specification

The organ was faithfully restored by David Wells Organ Builders Ltd., during the major clean and renovation work carried out in 2000.

In addition to the speaking stops and usual inter-manual couplers, there are manual and inter-manual octave couplers placed above the Swell keyboard. There are four thumb and toe pistons to both Great and Swell and three thumb pistons to Choir.

| SWELL |                  |     | GREAT |                     |    |
|-------|------------------|-----|-------|---------------------|----|
| 1     | Violin Diapason  | 8   | 17    | Bourdon             | 16 |
| 2     | Rohr Flute       | 8   | 18    | Large Open Diapason | 8  |
| 3     | Voix Celeste     | 8   | 19    | Small Open Diapason | 8  |
| 4     | Vox Angelica     | 8   | 20    | Clarabella          | 8  |
| 5     | Viol d'Orchestre | 8   | 21    | Harmonic Flute      | 4  |
| 6     | Wald Flute       | 4   | 22    | Principal           | 4  |
| 7     | Salicet          | 4   | 23    | Fifteenth           | 2  |
| 8     | Harmonics        | III | 24    | Trumpet             | 8  |
| 9     | Cornocean        | 8   |       |                     |    |
| 10    | Oboe             | 8   |       |                     |    |
|       | Tremulant        |     |       |                     |    |
| CHOIR |                  |     | PEDAL |                     |    |
| 11    | Geigen Diapason  | 8   | 25    | Harmonic Bass       | 32 |
| 12    | Viol de Gamba    | 8   | 26    | Open Diapason       | 16 |
| 13    | Lieblich Gedacht | 8   | 27    | Bourdon             | 16 |
| 14    | Dulciana         | 8   | 28    | Octave Bass         | 8  |
| 15    | Suabe Flute      | 4   | 29    | Bass Flute          | 8  |
| 16    | Clarinet         | 8   |       |                     |    |
|       | Tremulant        |     |       |                     |    |

Balanced Expression Pedals to Swell and Choir

61 note Manuals

30 note Pedalboard



## **APPENDIX 13: MEMORIES OF WESLEY CA. 1900-1970 BY WILL CLARKE**

I have been asked to write a few memories of our Church; these are a few thoughts on resigning from the Chapel Stewardship a short time ago.

When I was a young child the front of the Church was brickwork in a semi-circle, and the congregation entered the Church by using two passages which ran towards the City walls and then turned to the Church, one on each side of the Church. One door was near to where the Choir Vestry is now and the other was where the organ is now situated. Then two staircases went up to the galleries from each side. The pulpit was in the centre of the Church, and very high. The Minster's Vestry was behind the pulpit and between the entrances. I remember particularly the darkness and coldness of the room. This vestry was used for many years after the Church was altered.

The first major alteration was the removal of the brick built front of the Church and the building of the present front. My first memory of the Church as it then was, was a sample of the new pews being placed in the school room for the members to approve before the present seating was installed.

The organ in those days was behind the pulpit at gallery level, and the choir was seated in front of the organ and round to the galleries.

To help pay for the alteration to the front of the Church and the seating, a very big bazaar was held in the Music Hall. This hall was a hall owned I believe by the Dean and Chapter and used only very occasionally. It was situated where the Foster Brothers Menswear Store now is. This was a big event. All the stall holders were dressed in different European costumes. The bazaar was opened by the then Member of Parliament for the City, Mr A. Mond. Mr John Jones was chairman. It went on for three days and was a huge success.

The Church at this time was attended by a number of large families, all the recreation of the young was centred in the Church and School. Sunday started with morning school at 9.30am, then services at 10.30am, school again at 2.30pm, with an evening service at 6.30pm, followed very often by a prayer meeting. The youth of the Church were looked after during the week, there being meetings of one activity or another every night. The Band of Hope was always held on a Monday and was run for many years by Mr G. Beck. This activity has died and also the Young League Union which was to raise funds for the National Children's Homes. This was run by a Miss W. Butt.

About this time several of the boys of the Sunday School were asked to go round the country Churches of the Circuit to give an evening for Overseas Missions. In those days it meant going by horse drawn vehicle to Churches lighted by paraffin oil lamps. We had to learn every line of the book by heart, no papers or notes were allowed and I remember how the party was well received by the congregations. This was before motor cars, electric light or Calor gas. No cinemas were open so these excursions were an extra diversion from the usual run of things.

About this time Mr Law came into the City and immediately settled at St. John Street. He spent a lot of time with the boys of the Church and very soon had a Sunday School class, and also a well

attended Society class. Eventually he started a Scout Troup and this flourished for many years. All this time Mr E. Pritchard was Choirmaster and the choir was one of the best and most numerous in the City. The choir was his love, and he inspired the love of music in others. His other love was the property and as he was a builder his experience was very valuable to the Trustees. I remember the choir being so full that the pews in the gallery took the overflow. I also remember the George Street choir being nearly as large, with Miss Rowley and Mrs Candleland playing violins at the back of the choir.

Pepper Street Methodist Church closed when I was starting to grow up (1918). There were very few members left at Pepper Street and although it was the largest Methodist Church in the City it had to close. It is now owned by Quicks and if you go into Newgate Street Showrooms you will see the pillars of the Church (*now exposed to the exterior at the front of the Chateau furniture store*).

Perhaps it is not widely known that the Insurance Building (*now offices at No.6*) was the manse, and the Public Library was the Wesleyan Methodist Higher Grade School. The fee charged was 6d per week. This was collected every Monday morning. The headmaster was Mr Lucas who was also a Trustee, and the second master was Mr C. S. Digweed, who many will remember as a local preacher. I went to this school for a short while. The school was closed because the Trustees could not afford the money to bring the buildings up to date. City Road Methodist Church used to house the primary school at Leadworks Lane level so that both Methodist Churches in the City were very interested in child education.

The first lady I can remember occupying the pulpit at St. John Street was Mrs Laura Ormiston Chant, and I call to mind that during the service she said that a number of people had gathered together and one person said that the hymn 'Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on' was a very good hymn but rather mournful, and it would be good to have a hymn set to the same tune but on the brighter side of faith, so she wrote 'Light of the world, faint were our weary feet with wandering far, but thou didst come'. I do not know if this is the only hymn she wrote but it is the only one of her composition in our hymn book (*MHB 636*).

When I was very young a lady named Miss Butt went as a missionary to Burma. She was very interested in the cure of leprosy and was instrumental in setting up a home in that area.

There was a party of helpers from St. John Street who went out every Sunday before evening service to sing hymns and take a short service at the lodging houses in Lower Bridge Street. This was before machines took the hard work off public works and men used to do all the digging, and they had to go from site to site, and it was this type of navvy that was served in this way. Also there was a small Sunday School run from St. John Street in Belgrave.

St. John Street owes a great deal to the Davies family, both in service and in financial support. I have been told that Mr W. T. Davies thought of going to the Mission House or going into industry. He decided on industry, and helped missions in every way during his very long life. His daughter did 'some work for China' every day after a promise to do so made to a missionary, who was staying at her home. The stained glass window at the east end of the Church was placed there by Mr W. T. Davies's family as a memorial to him. Previous to this a cathedral glass window had been there, and

the sun was troublesome during the morning service. The glorious colours in the window are a lot more subdued now that the telephone exchange has been built.

The poor stewards' task was more exacting when I was young. There were a number of courts and small houses close to St. John Street and the poor stewards were responsible for the distribution of money from the poor fund to needy people who were connected, however loosely, to St. John Street. The Harvest Festival was the big event to swell the poor fund.

My grandfather used to hire a horse and cart to go round the country collecting produce for the decoration of the Church and the following sale. This was before the National Health Service was in existence and the need of the poor was very real. My father carried on the same way when he was made poor steward, but as the need for the poor fund went less the Harvest Festival collections were transferred to the Trust Fund. When I was asked to take a poor steward's appointment Mr A. Pritchard was senior and he made a rule that the communion table was laid before any of the congregation was in the Church, and the stewards were asked to do their work in strict rotation which I think added to the dignity of the service. This is now being done by Mr A Williams and his helpers.

The 1914-1918 war altered the pattern of service to the community very much. The Trustees decided not to black out the Church, but decided to hold the evening service in the schoolroom. All the activities of the Church were maintained in the war years, and the troops stationed in the area used the Church, and the more talented ones organised concerts for the troops and congregation to meet. The Scout Troup which Mr Law had started did a lot of work with ambulance trains. I do not think that the present congregation know how many casualties there were, and the number that were killed, and the greater number that were wounded during the four years that the war lasted. The caretaker had two sons; one was killed and the other one was wounded four times. All the large houses in the area were turned into hospitals. Every week a concert or social was arranged for the men who were able to walk, and this was when rationing was very severe, but there was no shortage of entertainers, or food, for the tea and cakes were always provided by the hosts. Mr Law had to join the forces (he was the scout master) and the Scout Troup left St. John Street and did not return.

There were many difficulties in using the building for so many purposes but I do not remember any of the services suffering through being cramped. The choir managed to lead the singing with the aid of an American Organ, and I do not remember an Advent time without the rendering of the 'Messiah', so strong was the love of music and singing. Once or twice this special service was held in the afternoon in the Church, sometimes in the evening in the schoolroom, but always to a crowded and appreciative congregation.

In 1917 Rev. F. H. Harry was appointed minister of the Church, and made a very great contribution to the Church. After the war finished and things got back to normal life, changes became very obvious. Youth Clubs were started, other meetings did not restart, and the pattern of life changed considerably. After a while a lot of thought was given to bring the Church building more up to date. Two main schemes were submitted and the one that was accepted was the dearest and the one we now have. Mr Harry was a well known figure carrying the plans around the City, collecting help for the alterations. Mr Percy Davies (son of Mr W. T. Davies) offered a large sum of money. Mr J. Banks

(who was a partner in Bradleys, the then well known gents outfitters, and at one time a Parliamentary candidate for the City) offered a percentage of all money raised by the congregation. And so the work to raise the money started. Each section of the Church was given a target to raise, and then there was a bazaar held in the Town Hall. Such was the enthusiasm for the alterations that the money was raised.

The original pulpit has been re-sited at Hough Green Methodist Church, which was the Church that my mother attended when she was young, and is now the Church of Christ. The pulpit, communion table and communion rail which was installed during the [1908- error] 1906 alterations were transferred to Hamilton Street when that Church was built. The front seats of the old galleries were removed, supports were taken up to the ceiling and arched over. The Chancel was built, vestries altered and, and the whole Church improved and decorated. The Church as it now stands is a memorial to Rev. F. H. Harry and his ministry. This was a very great effort, especially as this was done during a very severe depression when unemployment was at its worst.

During Mr Harry's ministry a lady named Miss Alice Walton came to Chester to take up an appointment at the Queen's School and became active in various ways at the Church. Her chief interest was foreign missions and she started a branch of the Girl's League which was a junior branch of Women's Work. This became very successful and with other keen members became very much a part of the pattern of service. The outstanding feature of the organisation was that, whenever they decided to put on something special for fund raising, they did all preparations themselves. As far as I can remember no help from the men of the Church was asked for, the preparations including stage curtains and furniture were all done by their own members.

The idea spread to the other churches in the Circuit, and even to churches outside the Chester Circuit. Even now the giving to foreign missions in the three churches was Girls' League. It was strongest and among the highest in the Circuit. The Methodist Conference decided many years ago that this branch of service should be discontinued. Also during this very active time Youth Club work was started as was the Badminton Club and Tennis Club. Also to help the great number of people living in the area a Women's Fellowship was started and maintained for years until the poorer type housing was replaced and people started moving to Blacon and other areas.

About this time my father took on the appointment of Chapel Steward. At this time in addition to the work which is now undertaken by the steward there was what was then a considerable contribution to the Trust Fund collected with pew rents. When covenanted giving was introduced this form of giving was discontinued, and for this I was very thankful.

At the time of Methodist Union [1932] Dr Wardle Stafford was appointed Chairman of the District and also Superintendent Minister at St. John Street. He had an Assistant Minister to help in the circuit work. One was Rev J. L. Warner who returned to this circuit as a Supernumerary. Then there was Rev S. Frith who is now also Supernumerary, and two of whose cousins now attend Wesley. The other assistant was Rev. W. J. Roberts who returned to Chester to minister at Central Hall and who on the death of Rev. S. J. Granville took over the Superintendency. He died not long after taking his next appointment at Bramhall. It was during Dr Wardle Stafford's time at St. John Street that the first broadcast service from the Church took place. This made a lasting impression on all who took

part, as it was I believe the first of any broadcasting from a City Church. The subject of the Dr's sermon was 'Toiling in Rowing' and a printed record of the service was later made available.

The day the 1939 war broke out the Rev. Robert Robertson was starting his ministry. This meant that again the whole Church life was to be altered. War was declared on the first Sunday in September and the Trustees again decided not to black out the Church, but to black out the school building. This decision made it impossible to use the Church, except on Sunday mornings all through the winter months. The troops came to St. John Street in considerable numbers and were entertained in several ways. There was a social every Sunday evening after service with singers drawn from the congregation and other churches as well as some from the forces themselves. Again the choir kept strong, and the rendering of 'The Messiah' on Advent Sunday was a highlight of the choir's year.

Bombing during this time was very heavy and one night all the windows on both sides of the Church were either damaged or blown out by a blast. Very little other damage was done and the picture windows at the east and west ends of the Church were not damaged. The 'Butt Window' on the north side of the Church was destroyed, but the 'Bowers Window' on the south side was repaired. The broken glass was very carefully collected from the rubble and replaced. The other four windows, which Mr Edward Pritchard used to call the sausage windows owing to the pattern of the stained glass, were replaced by the present cathedral glass leaded lights.

One of the most moving times at the Church during this time was when the school room was filled with people evacuated from London at the time of the flying bombs. The council had used the premises to store blankets and mattresses for use in an emergency and when the school room was used the beds were placed all round the room. About 150 persons were fed and slept in the room and members of the Church were asked to look after them. This included looking after them during the night and because of their unsettled state this was a trying experience for them and the helpers.

During the whole of the war periods the singing of 'The Messiah' was maintained and always to a crowded Church. We stewards had a lot of furniture removing to do and always the singing was maintained to a very high standard. The choir seems to be a recurring thought in these notes. I want to refer you to the first sentence of the preface of the hymn book. If Methodism does not sing, it is not using its birthright.

About this time my father who had been Chapel Steward for many years wished to resign owing to his progressive illness, but the Trustees decided not to accept his resignation, but to appoint his son to help in the office. This was shortly before Mr and Mrs Lloyd (who had been appointed during Mr Stafford's ministry) gave up being the caretakers. Mr and Mrs Merrill were then appointed and this happy association continued for approximately 30 years.

Rev. S. G. Granville was the next minister at St. John Street and during his very successful ministry was made Chairman of the District. He was the son of a miner, and he told that when he was a boy his father was entombed for three days in a mine, but was rescued along with his workmates. His mother who said 'The third day he rose again from the dead', set her mind that one of her sons would be dedicated to the ministry of the Church and S.G. was the chosen one. During this time the Church had to be altered from its war time footing to its peace time role. The maintenance of the building had to be attended to and improvements made. Fuel rationing was very strict. Food



rationing was still in force, but I do not remember a service being lost or a social not being held through these difficulties.

Mrs Granville died after being in Chester only a very short while. The sorrow added to the difficulties, and the distress of the minister knit everyone very close. Rev. Granville's ministry was another which was longer than most, and I feel sure that the longer ministries were a benefit to both the Church and the congregation. There was deep sorrow when he was taken ill, and he died after a long illness. He had been chaplain to army camps in the area, and had interested himself in civic affairs, and was an outstanding pastor and preacher.

His untimely death left the superintendency vacant and Rev W. J. Roberts was invited and accepted the appointment so that he served the Church as probationer, second minister and superintendent. During his ministry the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the opening of the Church was celebrated, and the occasion was brought to an end by a Church supper. It was a wonderful achievement and a tribute to the ladies of the Church to seat and provide a three course meal to a crowd that filled every inch of the old school room. After leaving Chester he went as superintendent minister at Bramhall, and very shortly after his appointment he had a stroke from which he never recovered. While he was in Chester he became very friendly with Canon Murphy from St. Werburgh's and during his illness Canon Murphy went all the way to Manchester to visit him, knowing that Mr Roberts had lost his speech and could not converse in any way.

Rev. Talbot Watkins was the next minister and set in motion the machinery that brought about the amalgamation of the three churches, and he worked to make possible the building of the Church hall as it is now and the re-naming of the Church to 'Wesley'. As the Church is now a memorial to Rev. F. H. Harry, so the Church hall is a memory to Rev. Talbot Watkins.

Rev. A. M. Hearle was the next minister to be appointed and his task has been to make a congregation able and willing to work together for the good of the Church and the community. Alterations in Church administration and different duties of committees have gone smoothly under his guidance, for which I know all are grateful.

During all the years that I was Chapel steward Mr and Mrs Merrill served the Church with devotion which will be difficult to match, and only an excellent caretaker makes the office of Chapel steward more tolerable. I thank them again very sincerely, and I thank the Trustees and the congregation for their confidence during the years.

I remember a long time ago that when social evenings and concerts were the order of the day there were two elocutionists named Duxbury who used to take a whole evening's entertainment. On one visit one of them recited the 'Book of Job' and on another visit 'Pilgrim's Progress'. On one of these visits Mr L. W. Posenett who married Mr W. T. Davies's daughter, and was brother to 'Posenett of Medec', was asked to take the chair. He introduced the speaker and then said, 'I understand there has been some difficulty in finding a chairman for this meeting. It is a very easy thing to take a chair. Happy thought. I will take it' and he sat down.

And the time when a society steward asked my father to collect, and he put the plate of the seat without my father knowing this. When he sat down after the singing of the hymn the plate cracked with the sound like a gun shot.

Many famous preachers have preached in the Church. I also remember Rev. Luke Wiseman when he was President of Conference declaring during a lecture that 'Being a wise man who had come from the east he could speak with some authority'. And another President saying 'No man broke the moral law, but if the moral law was not observed the moral law would break those who did not obey it'.

The present Speaker of the House of Commons [*Rt. Hon. Selwyn Lloyd QC, MP*] took a morning service some years ago, I think when he was Vice-President of the Conference. Dr Findley, when he was at Didsbury College, took a series of mid-week services and the Church was full for all these occasions. I am sure that he was the only one who maintained a crowded week night meeting for so many weeks. Another outstanding occasion was when 'Romany' of radio fame [*Rev. George Bramwell Evans*] took the Sunday School Anniversary. I think that the stewards did more furniture removing in that day than at any other time. Everywhere was crowded including the chancel, and even the steps in the galleries were used as seats.

Some minsters I can remember had favourite hymns:-

Rev. F. H. Harry's was 'We love the place O Lord'.

Rev. R. Roberston's was 'One who is all unfit to count as scholar in Thy school'.

Rev. S. G. Granville's was 'Christ is our cornerstone'.

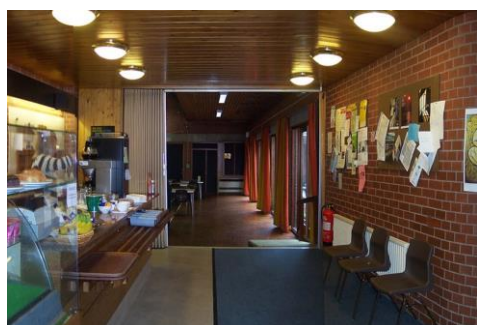
Some I don't recall so readily.

These are a few memories of the Church put down at random, without reference to any books or papers and which I hope will be found interesting, and I hope will call to mind the very fine tradition of willingness and service represented by the Church, and with the hope that the work, ministry and willingness of the 'Wesley' will go on and grow as time goes on.

Will Clarke (1900 – 1985)  
(written ca. 1970)

#### Appendix 14: 'Renewal 2010' - Wesley Church Centre Chester One Year On (Derek Fry, January 2011)

The first phase of the Wesley Church Centre project was completed in January 2010 on time and on budget. It transformed the centre of the premises from a dark corridor which needed much artificial



lighting and was unwelcoming (left, Fig. 90) to an open bright interactive servery area (right, Fig. 58) from which the other areas are easily accessed, with much improved disabled access,



including a lift (seen to the right of the picture). It conveys welcome and hospitality, in keeping with Wesley's mission.



The external patio has become a light, airy atrium (left, Fig. 59 and below left Fig. 91), providing a good seating area for hospitality. It has already become popular as an exhibition space and meeting / activities room – sometimes all at the same time. It gives a crucial link between the hall and servery on one side and the worship area on the other, so all the activities on the premises can be seen as a whole.

The comments from visitors have been overwhelmingly positive. The whole feel of the place has been altered and the new kitchen and servery have allowed for an improved menu and increased throughput. We are seeing an increasing community of regulars building up, particularly among older folk and those with young children, who value the play area in the far corner of the hall (see below right Fig. 60). But the changes have notably resulted in more use by 20 and 30 year olds without children.

Additional activities which the alterations have enabled include weekly bread-making sessions in the



(paved) atrium, for which the local learning disabilities outreach group and Chester Aid for the Homeless bring groups each week and others join in. There are also parents learning together

sessions with input from professionals, for which the initial 13 weekly sessions for parents with babies under six months old has shown significant demand. The volunteer development programme is providing adults from disadvantaged groups with opportunities to learn new skills in the coffee bar and at the bread-making sessions. The play area is well used and the Krafty Kids activities over the holidays attract over 30 children per session. The premises are now a recognised Child Contact Centre, providing a safe environment for children to spend time with estranged parents, under a legal framework.

Wesley is keen to build up a community based around hospitality with opportunities for discussion, worship, meditation and spiritual development. At present there are several possible other ways of making use of the refurbished premises being considered, but the approach is to develop slowly, assessing each additional use before taking on another.

D. Fry

January 2011

## APPENDIX 15: NEWSLETTER/CONTACT ARTICLES

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**App. 15.1: The St John Street Messenger, June '59 (Rev. W. J. Roberts)-  
Minister's Letter**

My dear Friends,

Whenever our Circuit history comes to be written – and this is a task awaiting some Ph.D., the year 1959 will deserve a chapter to itself. It marks a historic step forward in the development of our Circuit life. After an independent existence of nearly two hundred years, and after ninety years of almost unaltered boundaries, (apart from such trivial development as the inclusion of Bretton, the beginning of Ellesmere Port and its break-off to become a new Wesleyan Circuit, and the starting of several new causes within the Circuit!), our great and historic Circuit will be merging in September with the Hunter Street Circuit to form the new Chester (Grosvenor Park) Circuit. This will not mean the end of our Circuit, but the beginning of an important new phase in our Christian witness. The life of the new Circuit will be enriched from the start by the inclusion of two streams of honourable tradition. We are entering upon this new venture in the spirit of faith and confidence as we look forward to the future with its experiences of fellowship and its experiments in Christian adventure. Our own Circuit will bring to the Grosvenor Park Circuit a rich heritage of spiritual culture developed through our common fellowship in Christ during the years of our long history.

In the moulding of this pattern our St. John Street Church has played a leading part, and it will be our prerogative still in a large measure to set the tone and give the lead to the new Circuit. This is always recognised as the honoured privilege of the Circuit Church. At this historic juncture we have every confidence that our church in St. John Street will rise to the challenge of its responsibility, and that the fine words of Rupert Brooke can be applied to our people: "Now God be thanked Who has matched us with this hour...". I am glad to think that there is so much that is strong and healthy in our Church life. I was greatly encouraged by the fine spiritual tone of our last Leaders' Meeting as we considered the message of the recent Oxford Conference of the 'Westminster Laymen's Group'. We are grateful to Mr. Eric Spencer, who was present at the Conference, for the able way in which he introduced the subject, both at the Leaders' Meeting and previously at the Men's Fellowship, and we are hoping for great things from the 'Leaders' Group' appointed by the Leaders' Meeting. This will be a 'Committee without an Agenda', whose commission will be to strengthen the fellowship life and the witness of our Church, and to bring our activities to a yet higher degree of spiritual effectiveness. We are hopeful of great things, not because the Leaders have appointed another Committee, but because of the evidenced desire that our Church should become a more adequate instrument through which God can fulfil His purposes in Chester and beyond it. We are not unmindful of the Psalmist's ever-timely warning that 'Except the Lord build the house, their labour is lost that build it', but our sure confidence is that in all this 'we are labourers together with God'. That is what will bring our efforts to good success.

With every good wish,  
Affectionately yours,  
W.J. Roberts.



**App. 15.2: The St John Street Messenger, June '59 (Rev. W. J. Roberts)-  
St John Street Church History: Minutes and Resolutions 1854 – 1896**

'Minutes and Resolutions' is the title of the Leaders' Meeting Minute Book covering the years 1854 – 1896 which is among the archives of our Society (*now in Duke Street County Archives*). It is a disappointing record and adds little to our knowledge of the ebb and flow of life in our Church during this very important period of Methodist history. It does not really become alive until the 1880s. During the first 26 years, the discussions of the Leaders' Meeting are discussed in about half-a-dozen lines each, and are mainly concerned with the distribution of funds, and the appointment of Stewards and Class-Leaders. Until 1866 each Leader on his appointment had to subscribe to the following declaration: "I hereby declare my decided preference for the Wesleyan Methodist section of the Church of Christ, being firmly persuaded that its doctrines and disciplines are on the whole more in accordance with the scriptures so far as I understand them than any other. On these grounds I engage to promote and uphold them according to my ability; and if at any future period owing to change in sentiment or any similar cause I should be unable to do this, I shall at once peaceably resign the office of Leader with which I am now invested."

In 1855 it was resolved that 'the second Leaders' Meeting in each Quarter be entirely devoted to spiritual conversation and prayer'. Either this resolution was never put into operation or these meetings were not minuted, for this is the last reference we find to these devotional meetings. What a light would be shed on the state of the Society if we had but a clue to the discussions at these Leaders' Meetings!

In the same year Mr. H. L. Eden was requested to commence a class at Bishopsfield (Hoole), and Mr. Warburton was asked to raise a class at Boughton. It was through such local classes or house fellowships that the Church extended its influence in those days, and we, a century later, might well take the example to heart.

In October 1860 Mr. James Bowers reported that he had received a letter from a young man who confessed to having broken open two of the Poor Boxes belonging to the Chapel and having abstracted the money therefrom and also a Box in the Girls' School from which he had also taken money, and to having taken three old books from the Children's Library. He stated that he had recently been converted to God, since which he had felt it upon his conscience to make restitution, and he enclosed 20/-.

At the Overseas Mission weekend on January 27<sup>th</sup> 1861 £72 was raised, over £38 being in Sunday Collections and the remainder at the Public Meeting. In 1862 the total Sunday and weeknight Missionary collections amounted to £96 [*about £8,700 at 2012 values*]. A sidelight upon the social problems is seen in the special collections taken at this time for Indian Famine Relief and for the Lancashire Distress Fund. In 1861 the Sunday School Anniversary was held on April 7<sup>th</sup> and collections were £40. The special preachers at the Jubilee Chapel Anniversary on October 27<sup>th</sup> 1861 were Rev. John Bowers and Rev. Charles Garrett. (They were really a twelve-month out, for according to the records the Chapel was actually opened on October 4<sup>th</sup> 1812).

In 1866 Sister Ann Ryder lodged a complaint against Brother T. D. Sergeant of 'unchristian and dishonourable conduct in reference to his matrimonial engagement with her'. Brother Sergeant denied the charge *in toto*.

An interesting example of the responsibility of the Circuit Church for the smaller places is seen in the appointment by the St. John Street Leaders' Meeting in 1871 of Mr. Rowe of Birch Heath as Society Steward for Barrow. (He would probably be the great uncle of Mrs. Winifred Mitchell who now lives in the same house at Birch Heath, Christleton).

The Leader's Meeting held in February 1876 must hold the record for brevity. After a list of those present comes the laconic remark 'No business'. In May, however, the Leaders were faced with the pleasant problem of what to do with their surplus income. The meeting rejoiced to learn that the debt on the Chapel was extinguished, and the Leaders approved the principle already adopted by the Trustees of paying their 'overplus money' by quarterly payments to the Circuit Stewards as being the most convenient and the most consistent with the financial usages of Methodism. 'This was carried unanimously'. By the next meeting, however, the Quarterly Meeting had expressed a concern at the decline of income from class money in the Circuit, and the Society Stewards were asked to prepare a comparative statement on this source of income for the following meeting. The statement, however, was not then forthcoming and the Stewards were politely reprimanded, but there is no record of the statement in any subsequent minutes.

**Rev. William J Roberts**

**App. 15.3: The St John Street Messenger, September '59 (Rev. W. J. Roberts)-**  
**St John Street Church History: Finance & Membership Issues 1897 – 1913**  
[Ref.: CALS ZCR 55 acc7972]

A new Leaders' Meeting Minute Book was started in 1897 and remained in use until 1921. As a picture of our Church life during this important period it is disappointing, being a rather dull and colourless record of somewhat unimaginative discussions and decisions. But after all, much of our routine Church work is of necessity pedestrian, but it has to be done. To quote the hymn:

'If man aspires to reach the throne of God  
O'er the dull plains of earth must lie the road...'

These records however can help to bring the tonic of realism into our religious discussions, correcting as they so often do the false assumption that our fathers had not the problems we have to contend with. We shall see!

At the first recorded meeting in 1897 there were seven members present, with Rev. James Morrison in the Chair. (He was the father of the late Rev. R.T. Morrison, a frequent visitor to our pulpit who passed to the Homeland about a month ago). In 1899 there was a complaint by the Society Stewards that they had been ignored on the occasion of the Foreign Missionary services inasmuch as 'unauthorised persons' had been appointed to take the collection. In the same year the Free Church Council had divided the city into 'parishes' for house to house visitation, and this work in the St. John Street district was undertaken by a number of lady members.

Society finance was a recurring problem in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and 'a prolonged discussion took place on the question of how best to increase the income of the Society', and it was decided to convene a Church meeting 'to lay before it the matter of contributions in classes and in the offertory'. In 1901 a ten day Mission was conducted at St. John Street by Rev. J. Sadler Reece. Also in 1901 'the question of Doorkeeper' was again brought up and the matter was left to Mr. Lucas, who promised to see Mr. Grant 'with a view of inducing him to act in conjunction with Mr. Ed. Mills or others'. (A fitting comment upon the last sentence in Ecclesiastes 1:9!) At the same meeting 'Mr. Hollis in referring to the young people of the Church said that work should be found of some sort or other in the Church or School for all, and he was giving the whole matter his careful consideration'.

In December 1901 'a long discussion followed in which most of the members present took part', as to 'the steps to be taken to meet the wishes of the young people who do not find in the Christian Endeavour the kind of meeting they desire,...and the hope was expressed that some satisfactory solution would be reached'. By May 1902 an agreement was reached whereby a Guild was formed to meet alternately with the Christian Endeavour until the end of the session, after which a Wesley Guild was to be formed on Conference lines. At the same meeting another 'long discussion followed on the question of making the Sunday evening service more inspiring and popular'. In September 'the Chairman announced that the Sunday evening services would be of a more evangelical character ...Bills announcing the services were being prepared'.

The death of Mr. S. Harris was reported. He had served the Church long and faithfully as Class Leader, Lay Preacher and Sunday School Teacher. Mr. Sherratt was nominated as Mr. Harris's successor as a Class Leader, and the Minister 'referred to his suitability in every way for the work'.

Something had evidently gone wrong with the arrangement for popular evening services each Sunday, and in August 1903 it was reported that 'arrangements had been made for holding at intervals, probably monthly, on Sunday evenings, services of an especial mission character. Suitable hymnbooks containing popular melodies and refrains would be used, and a systematic and thorough canvas of the neighbourhood would be made'. Later on in the year there was a reference to a decision of this quarterly meeting of Leaders and Trustees 'to consider the state of Methodism in the city and to devise ways for improvement'.

A Class Leaders' Convention had also been arranged by the Quarterly Meeting, and the subjects for consideration were:

1. The Use of the Hymnbook in the Class Meeting.
2. The Use of Bible Readings in the Class Meeting.
3. The cultivation of 'Testimony' in the Class Meeting.
4. Some Practical Suggestions for Reviving Interest in the Class.

In early December 1904 another 10-Day Mission was conducted by Rev. W.A. Prunell, with Mr. Coe and Mr. Sherratt as Secretaries. I wonder what lay behind the following Minute: 'The question of the irregularity observed with respect to the use of the "Dead March" was brought forward. The general feeling was that if played at all it ought to be played for all deceased members. Several members were in favour of its discontinuance altogether'. In connection with 'brighter Sunday evening' movement, Social Hours had been held, but in 1905 'a long conversation followed as to the visitation work and the question of holding further Social Hours on Sunday evenings. It was finally decided to hold such a gathering on Sunday evening February 19<sup>th</sup> and that on that occasion a conversation between the Visitors and others take place with a view to infusing more enthusiasm into the work'.

In 1909 it was decided to start a Brotherhood and the following Committee was appointed: Messrs. E. Pritchard (Jn), Geo. Lloyd, J.W. Garnett, Cyril Baker, A. Pritchard, N. Hodson, Bayley, Dutton, W. Clarke, N. Webster, M. Webster and J. Davies. In 1911 Mr. L. W. Posnett complained that there was no improvement in the offertories or class contributions, and the Ladies' Sewing Meeting was asked to help. In March 1911 it was reported that 'Mr. Law had consented to take charge of the Boys' Junior Class'. There was also a revision of the membership roll, and 31 names were deleted.

In 1913 a special meeting was called to consider ways of improving Church attendances, especially in the morning, and of making the whole Church life more vigorous. Among the suggestions were:

1. A threefold pledge concerning regular attendance, a personal effort to increase the congregation, and daily prayer for the Church.
2. The modification of the evening service each Sunday, by introducing solos, and old hymns and tunes.
3. Congregational practice of new tunes with the Choir after a shortened service.
4. Changing the time of the morning service from 10.30 to 10.45am.
5. Sectional oversight of attendances, and lists of absentees to be placed in special boxes in the vestibules.
6. A working system of Door Stewards to be introduced.

They had their Church attendance problems even in the days before the Flood!

**App. 15.4: The St John Street Messenger, June '61 (Rev. W. J. Roberts)-  
St John Street Church History: Trust Accounts 1840 – 91 [Ref.: CALS ZCR 55 acc7972]**

By about 1817 the Trust accounts at St. John Street began to run smoothly, but there are constant reminders of the old financial difficulties in the many references which continue for over half a century to the payments of interest and annuities on borrowed money. This matter was tackled in 1860 – 61 when £1879. 16s. 7d. [*about £170,000 at 2012 values*] was raised by subscriptions and a long-term loan of £1,300 was received from the Chapel Committee to pay off private creditors.

The Trust accounts from 1814 to 1891 are included in a large book (*now held in the Chester Duke Street archives*) which gives evidence of competent book-keeping and careful stewardship of money by a succession of Treasurers. Over most of the years the items of income and expenditure call for no comment. In the early years the main chief sources of revenue to the Trust were Pew Rents which in 1827 (a typical year) brought in £207: the 'Quarterly Collection' £15 and the Chapel Anniversary £62. The Pew Rents and the Anniversary remained throughout the century as important sources of Trust income. In the course of the years some of the leading Ministers of the Denomination preached at the Anniversary. Among them were several who became President of the Conference, such as Revs. Richard Reece, who had close links with this Circuit, Dr. Robert Newton, John Bowers, another honoured and familiar surname in the annals of the Circuit, Dr. Jabez Bunting, Theophilus Lessey, Francis A. West, Dr. John Hannah, Dr. Samuel T. Waddy, William Arthur, Dr. W. Morley Punshon, Dr. Gervase Smith, Dr. George Osborn, G.T. Perks and Dr. Henry J. Pope. Most of these illustrious leaders took the Anniversary services several times, and it is evident that the Anniversary weekend was always a great occasion in the local Church Calendar.

Among the many entries there are some which are very interesting, especially when we bear in mind the value of money in those days. In 1818 the bill for candles came to £12. 17s. 3d., but a load of coal only cost 11/6d. The caretaker was a Mr. William Sharp, whose wages were £4. 1s. 3d. per Quarter. In 1819 'an old woman' was paid 3/-d. for weeding and clearing the Chapel yard, and in January 1820 someone was paid 3/-d. for removing the snow from the Chapel roof. The first reference to gas which I have been able to trace is in 1821 when £8 14s. 6d. was paid to the 'Gas Company'. In 1831 we find that the Organ Blower was paid 5/-d. per Quarter for his labours, and some time later a regular quarterly item is the payment of 6/6d. each to three doorkeepers. (The young men of the Youth Fellowship think that this custom ought to be revived!)

Long is the arm of coincidence. As I was rummaging through the items in this old Trust account book I received a letter from Rev. George D. Barton, a student who preached at St. John Street some time ago, to say that he had come across a beautifully bound copy of the Bible and the Hymn Book then in use, bound in a single volume and inscribed: 'Presented to the Rev. Francis and Mrs. Teal by the Trustees of the Wesleyan Chapel, St. John Street, Chester, on the occasion of their marriage, - theirs being the first to be solemnised in that place of worship. J. Brookes, Wesleyan Minister. August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1858.'

Mr. Barton has since sent me this interesting volume, but on the very day his letter arrived I had come across an entry referring to the registration of St. John Street for marriages, with an accompanying item concerning the purchase of a Milner Safe for £9. The Chapel was registered for marriages on August 19<sup>th</sup> 1858, and the charge was £3. In 1859 there is a reference to the payment

by the Trustees for the presentation Bible-Hymn-Book which cost 18/8d. (Incidentally, my bunch of official keys has a brass tag attached to the ring bearing the engraved inscription: Chester Wesleyan Chapel Safe 1858. Superintendent Minister's Keys).

In 1864 the chapel was completely decorated at a cost of £46, with an additional £9 as the rent of the Music Hall for the period when the services were held there during the decoration of the Church. In 1877 a new organ was installed by Messrs. Whitely for £188, and in 1882 extensive roof repairs were undertaken at a cost of £438, but the whole undertaking was covered by a subscription list headed by the Duke of Westminster's gift of £50. A total of £659 was raised by these subscriptions and out of the balance £100 was allocated to City Road and £73 to Garden Lane to reduce their debts.



**App. 15.5: The St John Street Messenger, March '62 (Rev. W. J. Roberts)-**

**St John Street Church History: 1812-1962 (150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year) [Ref.: CALS ZCR 55 acc7972]**

In the December Newsletter reference was made to the opening of our St. John Street Church in October, 1812. From that far distant day up to present our Church has been served by many generations of faithful people, a true succession of apostolic leaders. 'The Lord hath wrought great glory by and through His great power from the beginning. All those were honoured in their generations and were the glory of their times. There be of them that have left a name behind them that their praises might be reported. And some there be that have no memorial, but these were merciful men whose righteousness hath not been forgotten'. It would be invidious to pick and choose at random from a galaxy of illustrious names associated with our Church over the past one hundred and fifty years, but there are certain names that are thrust upon us by the frequency of references to them in the annals of the years.

The first Trustees on the new site and property were appointed on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1811, and I am sure you would wish to know their names (*all of Chester unless otherwise listed*):

|                                   |               |   |              |                                |              |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|---|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| George Lowe                       | Goldsmith     | John Jones                              | Linen Draper | Henry Bowers                   | Druggist     |
| George Walker                     | Wine Merchant | Robert Shearing                         | Druggist     | Samuel Williams                | Linen Draper |
| Thomas Jones                      | Gentleman     | Samuel Beckett                          | Waggoner     | Robert Parry                   | Currier      |
| Joseph Betteley                   | Cordwainer    | Thomas Shone<br><i>Higher Kinnerton</i> | Gentleman    | John Hitchen<br><i>Alraham</i> | Gentleman    |
| James Sale<br><i>Duddon Heath</i> | Yeoman        | John Reece<br><i>Tarvin</i>             | Miller       |                                |              |

Some of these men not only played a notable part in the life of Chester Methodism, but they also had close family links with some of the outstanding leaders of Methodism during the early part of the nineteenth century.

In the Centenary Booklet issued in 1912, several names are mentioned as having been prominently concerned with the development of the work during the nineteenth century. In 1817 David Jackson, whose portrait used to be seen in the Church Parlour, became a member of the Methodist Church after being converted at a service conducted by Alderman Henry Bowers. His life was steeped in prayer and as a class leader and local preacher and in other ways he exercised a great ministry in the Society for over half a century. The mention of Alderman Henry Bowers introduces another famous man in the history of our Church. For sixty seven years during the nineteenth century the office of Chapel Steward was filled by Alderman Henry Bowers, his son and two grandsons. One grandson, Mr. H.R. Bowers, who was one of the founder members of our City Road Church (*converted in the 1930s to Central Hall, now replaced by Caldý Valley Neighbourhood Church*), which was opened in 1873 because our St. John Street Church was too small to accommodate the congregation, became the first Chapel Steward for the new Church and remained in office until his death in 1902.

One whose Trusteeship of the Church covered most of the nineteenth century was Mr. Matthew Harrison, whose father was Mr. Robert Harrison, one of the early Methodist preachers ordained by John Wesley. He lived for sixty years in the same house in Castle Street and was a great reader and collector of books. It was said of him that 'he was a familiar figure in the streets of Chester, as he wended his way twice a day with unfailing regularity to the services at the Cathedral'. He married the daughter of Rev. George Morley and the grand-daughter of Richard Williams of Rackery Farm,

Gresford, who, with his family, played an important part in the development of early Methodism in Chester and the neighbourhood.

A name which becomes prominent in the second half of the nineteenth century was that of Mr. W Twiston Davies. He and the members of his family were generous supporters of the Church and of the Missionary Society and our great West Window is a fitting memorial not only to Mr. W. T. Davies, but to the sons and daughters who erected it in memory of their father. Mr. W. T. Davies was the son of Rev. Samuel Davies who entered the Ministry in 1806 at the age of eighteen, and who was one of the pioneers of Welsh Methodism. When the late Miss E. Ruth Davies, who was the daughter of Mr. W. T. Davies, died two years ago a remarkable record of close interest and service extending over one hundred and fifty years in three generations came to an end.

The names of the members of the Butt family will be linked not only with the Church, but also with its long tradition of missionary interest. Mr. A. W. Lucas and his second-in-command, Mr. C. S. Digweed, are names linked with the old Wesleyan Day School attached to the Church.

When the Trust was renewed in 1881 (it had previously been renewed three times since 1811) the following were the Trustees:

|                   |                  |                 |               |                 |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Matthew Harrison  | H.R.Bowers       | J.D.Bowers      | Charles Parry | George Williams |
| W. Twiston Davies | Charles Lee      | Richard Jones   | Robert Evans  | John Griffiths  |
| Alfred W. Butt    | J. Stringer Moss | Samuel Clemence |               |                 |

To jump hurriedly over the passing decades, another renewal which could be mentioned was executed in 1923, when we find an enlarged Trust with the following Trustees:

|                       |                  |                     |                 |                   |
|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| J. Stringer Moss      | A. Percy Davies  | George E. Oldmeadow | W. H. Marchant  | Thomas Williamson |
| John Kershaw          | M. S. Webster    | Arthur Coe          | Joseph Banks    | J. C. Belton      |
| Leonard W. Posnett    | Edward Pritchard | John Ratcliffe      | Charles Whalley | J.W. Abley        |
| A. P. Barber          | G. Beck          | E. Carter           | W.E. Clarke     | C. H. Haynes      |
| E. H. Law             | G. J. Lloyd      | J. W. F. Massey     | A. Pritchard    | W.D. Shepherd     |
| W. Sterndale- Bennett |                  |                     |                 |                   |

Many of these names are still remembered among us with affection. (I am surprised to discover that I can remember fifteen of them). We send our greetings to the sole survivor of this noble company!

By 1938 many of the Trustees appointed in 1923 had died and in June 1938 the Trust was again renewed when the following new names were added to those who still remained:

|                 |                  |                |                 |              |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| H. L. Garry     | Leonard H. Smith | William Clarke | H.C. Groom      | T.W. Wickham |
| Herbert Collins | A. Lawson        | F.E. Pritchard | J. R. C. Lumley | S. Caton     |
| G. E. Shawcross |                  |                |                 |              |

The present Trustees were appointed in November 1954, and the full list as then constituted consisted of:

|                 |               |                 |                 |                 |
|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| J.W. Abley      | A. P. Barber  | G. E. V. Carter | G. E. Chambers  | W. Clarke       |
| H. Collins      | H. G. Collins | L. R. Dawson    | W. Gill         | J. S. Gledhill  |
| T. R. Goodwin   | H. C. Groom   | F. Hayter       | C. Ireland      | C. R. Jones     |
| G. Kemble       | E. H. Law     | A. E. Lawley    | J. R. C. Lumley | E. P. Pritchard |
| F. E. Pritchard | O. Pritchard  | C. Shonton      | G. H. Shepherd  | E. Spencer      |
| F. H. Taberer   |               |                 |                 |                 |

Those who then undertook the responsibilities entered into a great tradition of service. From generation to generation since 1811 has the responsibility been shared and carried on. At times great demands were made of the Trustees, but they met the challenges with confidence and courage and won through. In the course of the century and a half, day and Sunday School premises were built and equipped, in the early years of this century the Church was extensively altered, and it was then that the great West Window was erected, and in 1926, during Rev. F. H. Harry's ministry the present chancel was added and a new organ installed.

The present Trustees are now looking ahead to the challenge of tomorrow in the spirit of confidence, for they have entered into a great inheritance and are worthy of their heritage.

**App. 15.6: Postscript: Methodist Church Act 1976 (Rev. Ralph Fennell, October 2011)**

*In the 1960's and 70's "restructuring" was all the rage for many organisations. The church didn't escape. Indeed, there was need for change. The President's Council was created in part to provide some continuity between Methodist Conferences. The seven Divisions were established to encompass and concentrate the many departments and committees that existed at Connexional level. At District and Circuit level councils and committees were reduced in size and frequency of meeting and lay chairmanship was encouraged over a large area of activity.*

*The climax to all this restructuring was the Methodist Church Act 1976. This replaced the 1929 Methodist Church Union Act which legalised the coming together of the Wesleyans, Primitives, New Connexion etc. One of the main effects of the Act was to transfer the management of Methodist property, which ultimately belongs to the Conference, from local trustees to local church councils. Previously, the trustees, who were appointed for life and could not be got rid of unless they resigned, were responsible for the property and the contents, including hymn books and the like as well as lettings and allocation of rooms while the Leaders' Meeting looked after the life of the Methodist "society" i.e. the worship and various church activities e.g. Sunday School, Choir, Fellowships, outreach etc.etc. In those days church stewards were called society stewards, communion stewards were called poor stewards and property stewards, appointed by the Trustees, were called chapel stewards i.e. they were responsible for the "chapel", the building while the society stewards were responsible for the "society" or as we would say today the "church"*

*The split of roles between trustees and leaders sometimes led to division!! This was especially likely to be the case when trustees, appointed for life, moved away and when age distanced them from younger families and the young people in the church. Some trustees were very resistant to change. All this changed when the 1976 Act made church council members Management Trustees while the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes became the Custodian Trustees for all Methodist property.*

*As you can imagine some resisted the changes and even carried their opposition to Parliament itself. This involved great expense for the Church and those who resisted the proposed changes. The opposition was intensified by the Act enabling the Conference to amend the doctrinal clauses, subject to stringent safeguards, in the 1929 Act where they had previously been unalterable without Parliamentary approval. This meant that after 1976 in matters of doctrine the church was free from state interference. This pleased all except those who wanted the doctrinal clauses set in concrete.*

*Rev. Ralph Fennell, 26/10/11*

During my long association with Chester Methodism, going back to 1935, I have naturally seen many changes. At St. John Street there has been an almost complete transformation of the scene, and of the 1935 membership of 181 not many more than a tenth are still with us. The towering figure of Rev. Dr. J. T. Wardle Stafford, the genial and able Superintendent, dominated the official life of the church. He and his friend, Dr. Dindale Young, were among the last of the classic preachers deriving their inspiration from the Victorian pulpit giants remaining in the Methodist Church. I well remember the service broadcast from our Church in October 1935 and the breathless excitement of the preparations. I was preaching in the morning and the service was taped to test the instruments. It was a rare honour in those far off days for a church to be on the air and we came out of the ordeal with great distinction. The Choir, under the baton of Mr. Edward Pritchard, with Mr. Kendrick at the Organ, was at its best and Dr. Stafford's sermon on 'Toiling in Rowing' was afterwards published.

My first clear memory of the Church is of a frolicsome Harvest Social with Mr. Edward Pritchard in charge ably supported by Mr. Len Smith, who was at that time the heart and soul of the younger social life of Chester. Rev. F. W. Harry, although retired, was then a vigorous and popular colleague who had a fund of good stories. He was a great friend of the then Bishop of Chester, Rt. Rev. Geoffrey Fisher [*subsequently Archbishop of Canterbury*], whose Secretary was Miss Marjorie Barry. The Society Stewards in those days were Messrs. E. H. Law, Ian H. Smith and T. W. Wickham, with Messrs. A. Pritchard, F.E. Pritchard, T. Williams, R.C. Groom and S. Caton as Poor Stewards. [*T. W. Wickham's daughter, Miss Marjorie Wickham, was a leading drama producer in Chester for many years, at The Little Theatre. She produced the annual passion play at St John Street, and at Wesley, until well into her eighties*]. The representatives to the Leaders' Meeting were Messrs. E. Pritchard, W. E. Clarke, C. B. Skelly, Mrs. Law, Misses Ellis and Cornish. The Trustees' Secretary was Mr. W. D. Shepherd, with Messrs. E. H. Law, and Percy Davies as Trust Treasurers. Mr. Percy Davies was in poor health at that time, but he was a generous supporter of the work. Concerned at the falling investment of the Church, he increased the capital a few months before he died to make good the loss and we are still benefiting from that.

The premises were meticulously supervised by Mr. W. E. Clarke, the Chapel Steward, so that it is little wonder that his son is such a fine successor in office. Of the Class Leaders then in office, Misses M. E. Walker and G. Owen are still with us at St. John Street. The Choir was then, as now, of excellent quality and one the social events that remain with me in memory is a delightful Choir get-together held on a Spring evening at Mr. and Mrs. E. Pritchard's hospitable home at 'The Elms', Pulford. If my memory serves me aright, the Church was not bursting at the seams with fellowship meetings, and yet it was in many ways a fine Church. Mr. H. H. Pullan, recently if not still at Shrewsbury, and I in our youthful zeal tried to make good the deficiency, but not more than five of us ever turned up. It taught me one valuable lesson: that churches of good quality can differ greatly in the expression of the fellowship life.

There was at that time a Junior Guild with Mr. Pullan as Warden, Miss Gwen Owen as Secretary and Miss P. Clarke as Treasurer. The Girls' League was active with the late Miss Cicely Clarke as President, Miss Marjorie Wickham as Secretary and Miss M. Harry as Treasurer. There was a Ladies' Sewing Meeting on Tuesdays under the presidency of Mrs. Stafford, with Mrs. Barber as Secretary

and Miss L. Pritchard as Treasurer. A meeting which I used to attend quite often was the Women's Fellowship (rather more non-selective than the present one) over which the late Mrs. Ably used to preside - and she always had a good way with those ladies - and the meetings always ended with a refreshing cup of tea. Thinking of tea, Mrs. Law was always an able leader in that important department of Church life, and she and Mrs. Law and a hospitable home for newcomers to the Church.

By comparison with 1935, our Church has made progress. Our present fellowship life is much more vigorous, our normal congregations more consistently good, and the members generally are taking a more responsible share in the leadership of the Church. I used to wonder how the Church would survive the passing of a few outstanding generous benefactors, but it has done so and is in a healthier condition now than it was a quarter of a century ago. The appearance of the Church has not altered except that the pulpit then was considerably higher than it is now and every preacher had literally to look down on the congregation except Mr. Potts and old Mr. and Mrs. Doubleday, who started attending the Chapel late in life and who loved to sit in the gallery above the pulpit.

The Sunday School in those days was larger than it is now and was largely drawn from the neighbourhood, but comparatively few 'children of the regiment' attended. The Circuit Stewards were then Messrs. Leonard Posnett and Mr. Rowse Mitchell, but on Mr. Posnett's death in 1936, Mr. E. Pritchard came into the office. The Central Hall Minister was Rev. T. H. Mallinson, who helped to consolidate the work there during the transition period when the old City Road Church became Central Hall. The change was not altogether popular and Mr. Mallinson had a difficult task. He is still very alert in retirement at Nottingham and remembers with amusement the day he accepted my challenge to come with me to the Races. When I returned to the Circuit in 1950 I naturally found many changes, but I was glad to see so many old friends still in office especially at the Central Hall, but at the Hall every one of the old leaders has now passed on to the irreparable loss of the work there.

Among the great changes that have taken place since 1950 must be mentioned the fusion of the Hunter Street Circuit with the Chester (St. John's) Circuit in 1959. The two Circuits had been thrown into very close fellowship two years previously through the unfortunate breakdown in health, and subsequent death, of Rev. Lancelot R. Black after a faithful ministry. During the interregnum and first year of Rev. K Wilson's ministry I was asked to be acting-Superintendent of Hunter Street, which brought me into close touch with many excellent workers and helped to pave the way for the fusion of the Circuits.

I had known Hough Green well in the old days and things were not easy there then. The late Mr. C. S. Digweed and I spent the whole of Lent 1936 canvassing the Lache Estate which was then in building, but with little result. One bright spot was the Boys' Brigade, and in this activity we had close ties with Saltney (High Street). I still treasure the Chaplain's Badges which I received from Mr. J. H. Reece at a B. B. Special Service at Hough Green in our young days. Another notable development was recently made possible at Saltney when Hough Green decided to join forces with High Street and sell their property in order to enable the Saltney building scheme to come to fruition. This was a closure which meant progress, and what a wonderful achievement the building of that fine Church has been. The dreams of many years have been fulfilled and the united Church is exercising a wonderful ministry in Saltney.

Four years ago the Central Hall had to face an expenditure of nearly £4,000 on fabric repairs, and the way in which Rev. George Artingstall and his people faced that challenge is an epic story. Strangely enough, St. John Street had to face similar foundation troubles at the same time and met the challenge without flinching.

When I look back and compare today with my first introduction to Chester Methodism, I thank God and take courage. Some of the little country chapels have lost ground, notably Hargrave, which was strong when the Buckley, Houlbrook and Cookson families attended, and Milton Green, where the Rowe family were then all at home and where Mr. W. Povey was such a tower of strength until his sudden death two years ago. Most of the other churches are stronger, such as Rowton which now has three times as many members as it had then. Apart from the cases mentioned congregations also compare favourably with what they used to be except in one case, and this is remarkable when we consider that there were then no Sunday cinemas to compete with the Churches.

I am not in any doubt about the future. St. John Street is a progressive Church in a progressive Circuit. We cherish what is sometimes called 'the St. John Street tradition' which combines dignity with adaptability, and we seek to be a comprehensive Church free from sectarian bigotry. The Society is over two hundred years old, and the Chapel is one hundred and fifty, and we show no signs of age except mellowness and charity. St. John Street is a Church that is constantly renewing its youth, and for this we owe a great debt to those many fine individuals and families who have settled among us during the past fifteen years and who have supplied us with so many leaders. The Church is increasing in numbers and influence and is constantly welcoming new friends. May the Guiding Hand direct your future and increase your strength to match the challenge of tomorrow.



**App. 15.8: Contact No. 3: February 1972 (Brian Redwood) – Part 1: The First Society in Chester**

[Ref.: CALS ZCR 55 acc7972]

*[Brian Redwood, and his family, worshipped at St. John Street and Wesley for many years in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. He was the County Archivist for Cheshire.]*

In March 1747 John Bennett wrote to John Wesley, 'Last week I spent three days in and about Chester, and the Word was gladly received. I am assured that the time is come that the Gospel must be preached in that City.... I heard a religious Society was kept in the City, and so I made enquiry and found them out'. This was eight years after Wesley's opening evangelical campaign, the acquisition of the Foundry Chapel in London and the building of the New Room at Bristol.

John Bennett, who was in charge in the Yorkshire circuit, which included most of the adjoining counties, continued to nurture the societies springing up throughout the county, and in 1750 he was able to use the home of George Catton at Huntington Hall to preach in. The following year Richard Jones, a tobacco pipe maker in Love Lane, opened his house for preaching and so provided the base for the first regular Methodist Society within the City. It was not the first in the area, for as early as 1744 a religious society, which had been meeting in Bunbury Church vestry with Episcopal blessing, became Methodist and had to move to Richard Cawley's house in Alpraham.

The house in Love Lane was too small for the rapidly growing body of adherents, so in 1752 they rented a barn by St. Martin's Church. This had belonged to William Pemberton. It was registered with the diocesan authorities under the provisions of the Toleration Act, 1689, as being 'designed for a place of Religious Worship' by Jonathan Pritchard. It was a large and lofty building into which a gallery was built so that it could accommodate nearly 200 persons. It stood on the south side of the square then existing by the church at the west end of White Friars and Cuppin Street, the area being called St. Martin's Ash.

Here Wesley preached on his first visit to Chester in June 1752. He rode in from Manchester at 6pm, was preaching 'in the accustomed place, a little without the gates, near St. John's Church', and the following day, Sunday 21<sup>st</sup>, he writes, 'I preached at seven in a much larger house which was just taken, near St. Martin's Church, as eminent part of the town as Drury Lane is in London.... At one, I began preaching again, on 'We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord'. But the house not containing half of the congregation, I was obliged to stand at the door, on one side of a kind of Square, large enough to contain ten or twelve thousand people'. He preached again at 4pm to a larger congregation which included 'an abundance of gentry'. One man screamed and hallooed, but the rest were steadily serious.

He left on Tuesday for Bristol, but returned in a week's time to find that a mob had pulled down the house without hindrance from the authorities, so he preached in the old room at Love Lane, and on the Sunday preached from the ruins. The clergyman officiating in St. Martin's was deeply disturbed. Preaching on Luke chapter 13, 'It is impossible but that offences will come; but woe unto him through whom they come', he concluded 'I am sorry that any such outrage should be committed, particularly in this parish, where I have been teaching so many years. And to how little purpose!'

John Wesley continued to visit Chester frequently, and from his journal can be gleaned some details of the progress of the Society. There was evidence of more trouble from the mob, some dissensions amongst members happily overcome, but a continuing growth of membership. George Walker, the first Society Steward of St. John Street, describes the Chester Society in 1763 as having 140 members divided into eight classes, and being the head of the Chester Circuit, which must have covered more than the county. The Society was evidently in need of better premises. In 1764 they acquired land by the Bars and proceeded to erect a Chapel.

Brian Redwood

**App. 15.9: Contact No. 5: July 1972 (Brian Redwood) –  
Part 2: The Octagon**

The premises acquired by the Society in 1764 lay on the north side of Foregate Street. Its situation can best be understood by reference to Hunter's Map of Chester, 1789. At that time City Road did not exist and behind the houses in Foregate Street were long gardens backing on to a field which was bounded on the north side by the canal. Until recently, the site was occupied by the Presbyterian Church of Wales on City Road, now part of the new roundabout.

From Foregate Street a passage ran back flanked by three houses on either side and in the plot of ground at the rear was erected a chapel in octagonal shape. Tradition has it that it was on the recommendation of John Wesley, which is supported by the regulation first set out in the 1770 edition of Large Minutes of Conference: 'Build all preaching houses, if the ground will admit, in the Octagonal form. It is the best for the voices, and on many accounts more commodious than any other'. The chapel had a diameter of 46ft within the walls. Along one wall was set an elevated pew with a desk in the centre, behind which the preacher stood, flanked on either side by the leaders. A gallery stood round the other sides and the building was estimated to seat 600.

On 17<sup>th</sup> April 1765, the 'house lately built for (public) worship on ..... a backside on the north side of Foregate Street near the Bars' was licensed by the City Justices, the certificate being signed by George Lowe, Thomas Bennett, Thomas Lowe, Edward Robinson, John Roberts, Samuel Collin, Owen Williams, Thomas Fearnall and Richard Jones. These were all evidently residents of Chester, the last named being the man in whose house in Love lane Methodists first met regularly within the City. Thomas Bennett who hailed from Christleton and had set up in town as an ironfounder, was later described as the 'principal instrument of erecting the Octagon Chapel'. The Lowes were members of a family prominent in Chester Methodism, who are still well known as the leading firm of goldsmiths [*in Watergate Row*]. George Lowe and Thomas Bennett were also appointed trustees, but to them were joined gentlemen and farmers from the country around: Richard Bruce and Richard Barker, both of Acton near Northwich, Joseph Brown of Bull's Green near Tarporley, James Woolridge of Duckington and John Gardner of Tattenhall. Their addresses are an indication of the area served by the Chester Circuit at the time, and the importance of the Octagon as the centre for Methodist witness. As there was a preacher's house to accommodate both 'Assistant' and 'Helper' it must have been one of the most desirable of stations, but the itinerants only stayed one year at this time.

The opening service was held on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1765, conducted by John Hampson. He had been a companion of Wesley's early years of itinerancy, and was now settled near Northwich, where he produced, in 1767, 'A Collection of Hymns calculated for Promoting the Public Worship of Almighty God', printed at Chester. His address concluded, so Mary Gilbert noted in her journal, with saying that as God has given us a more convenient place to worship Him in, we ought, in gratitude, to let our lives and conversations be more exemplary than ever before! Apt words for Wesley today! That journal, compiled by a girl who died three years later at the age of 17, was described by Wesley as 'a master-piece of its kind. What a prodigy of a child! Soon ripe and soon gone'. It was published a few years later, to add to the growing quantity of edifying literature which was characteristic of the time.

**Part 3: Methodist Attitudes in Early Octagon Days**

In the same month that the Octagon was opened (*June 1765*), there arrived in Chester Francis Gilbert and his family. They were strong Methodists, on friendly terms with Wesley, and their business connections lay in the West Indian trade, with substantial property and influence in the island of Antigua. In Francis's household was his niece, Mary, whose diary has already been quoted. She described her arrival thus:

"About eight on Wednesday morning we set out again from Warrington and had a delightful journey the rest of the way to Chester, where we arrived about noon. In the afternoon we took a walk round the walls. You have here an extensive prospect of a fine open country, far unlike the barren Kendal mountains. We then walked to the dock, and from then to the Preaching House. Mr Guildford preached."

The following Monday they visited the Infirmary – "Everything is neat and clean about it" – and on the Thursday went to 'Crislington' where Francis already had a preaching engagement. There they looked with interest at the "delightfullest, tho' oddest contrived garden" made by the Rector who "one would think by the manner of his laying it out...had very little else to think of. Some parts of it represent a field of nettle, a general's tent, with cannons all around it, a mount, a tower, a draw-bridge, and everything to represent a camp of soldiers."

The family regularly entertained Wesley in his visits to Chester and the effect on them of Mary's spiritual life is duly recorded.

"This morning I found my desires very earnest for the blessing while Mr. Wesley was preaching on Isaiah XXXV v. 8 – 'And a highway shall be there, and a way etc'. And else afterwards while he was administering the Sacrament. In the evening, I was again encouraged to come to the Lord while Mr. Wesley was inviting us to come and drink of the water of life freely, but still I had not the power to accept the invitation. We afterwards had a comfortable Love Feast\*."

Another member of the household was Mrs. Mary Leadbetter, who married Francis in 1767 and of whom Wesley said when consulted beforehand "No man in his senses can object to her". In that year she contributed to a 'Spiritual Letter by Several Eminent Christians' (printed in Chester) the following profession of faith:

"Now the religion on which the Methodists profess may be thus explained: that in order to attain everlasting life, we must receive the knowledge of salvation by the remission of our sins, and then press forward after holiness, which is the mark of our high calling in Christ Jesus. And all this is not effected by our own strength; for of ourselves we are not sufficient so much as to think the good thought, it is only by the power and grace of the holy spirit of God, which our Saviour assures us in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Luke, and the 18<sup>th</sup> verse, he will no more withhold from those who pray for it, than an earthly parent would deny any necessary gift from his child who asked for it."

A rather different picture, and a much more compelling one, comes from Samuel Bradburn's memoirs. He, who was to be a President of the Conference, was the son of a soldier settled in

Chester after discharge, and was apprenticed to a shoemaker. The family were regular attendees of the chapel, but he fell into evil ways, apparently evoked by a visit to the Chester races. Then:

“One evening in the close of the year 1769, while looking at some decayed flowers, I was suddenly carried as it were out of myself with thoughts of death and eternity. I attempted to banish these ideas, but, like the prodigal, I now came to myself. But my sins were set in full array before me, particularly that of ingratitude to my good and generous God. This caused my very bones to tremble. Hell from beneath seemed moved to meet me....I went to bed, but not to rest. My friends concluded I was in a high fever.”

He became a member the following year and in March received his call to preach:

“At the very moment Mr. Wesley gave me the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, the thought came into my mind that I was called to preach, and ascribing it entirely to diabolical agency, I instantly went to prayer....I endeavoured to banish this thought, but grew dull and melancholy.”

However, he was encouraged and assisted by those around him, including the saintly Vicar of Madeley, John Fletcher. He first preached at Wrexham in 1733 and in the following year he was formally appointed to the Liverpool Circuit.

Brian Redwood

*\*John Wesley borrowed the practice of holding Love Feasts from the Moravians. In the early Christian Church the lovefeast (or agape) had been used as a communal meal preceding the eucharist. In the early days of Methodism it could include the sharing of cake and water alongside prayers, conversation, personal testimony and hymn singing.*

We are fortunate in having in the Church archives a memoir of the foundation and growth of Methodism in Chester written by George Walker, the first Steward of the St. John Street Chapel. His father, John, a silversmith in Eastgate Street, regularly entertained Wesley in his later visits to Chester. George had many memories to quicken his veneration for his leader. One such was of Wesley's passion for method and order, and as an instance of this he related that when a company was invited to meet the revered founder, no interest nor persuasion could prevail on him to delay his early retiring, but at his usual time with the greatest ease and politeness after family worship, he left the company with his patriarchal benediction.

Of this period George Walker writes, 'In between the erection of the Chapel and the death of Mr. Wesley may be called in the annals of Methodism in this place a kind of interregnum, things appeared to pursue an easy natural course, and nothing deserving to be handed down to posterity happened'. But this natural course included running a Sunday School for illiterate children and active evangelism by preaching in various parts of the City at different times and seasons. These efforts, says Walker: "ended in the engagement of a large room in Commonhall Lane (in 1776) formerly used as a chapel by the Anabaptists, in which Sunday preaching was had at 2 o'clock to a congregation of about two hundred hearers who completely filled the place. In addition to which service, several of the classes were set there, and preaching was also had there on Wednesday evenings at seven o'clock" (instead of at the Octagon). At this date Sunday services were held in the Octagon at 8am and 6pm.

How the growth of Methodism was viewed by the Anglican clergy can be seen in the returns made to the Bishop in 1778 and 1789. The most reactionary sentiment was expressed by the incumbent of St. Bridget's who wrote in 1778 'A few "Conventiclers" who are converted from John Wesley, a literate MA and Perfectionist to an illiterate Yorkshire weaver, Calvinistical, who has had skill of out-hypocriting, and to build a Conventicle as well as a good house adjoining in St. John Parish, and to levy on seats a genteel income. I am informed that the two magistrates of Chester have never licensed any Conventicle, and are determined not to license any'. The vicar of St. John's however knew better and reported the Octagon licensed. Most of the clergy at this date suggest a tendency to decrease in numbers, but eleven years later admit to increases. St. Oswald's Vicar stresses the restlessness of Dissent (1778): 'As for Independents, Anabaptists, Methodists and Moravians, I cannot ascertain anything definite about them. They appear to mix with one another and go from one meeting house to another, seemingly to me out of love of novelty; however there are some Methodists that appear very regular and frequently Communicate with us.' The reference to regular attendance at the parish church is a reminder of the importance which Wesley attached to maintaining communion with the Established Church, and points forward to the bitter quarrel on this issue after his death.

We actually have a Circuit schedule for 1799 to set against these impressions. The Circuit at that date comprised thirty Societies totalling 605 members of whom 152 belonged to Chester. These later were divided into ten classes, and the figures given show that seventeen members were new, nine had removed, thirteen were back and four dead. Society membership outside Chester ranged



from six at Northop to twenty eight in newly established Heswall, and the Circuit stretched to Delamere in the east and to Whitchurch in the south.

Wesley's last visit to Chester was at Easter in 1790, a year before his death. He was then eighty seven, and yet still able to fill his day with travelling and engagements. His Journal records setting out from Manchester on the Monday: 'Calling at Altrincham, I was desired to speak a few words to the people in the new chapel: but almost as soon as I got thither the house was filled.....About twelve I preached in the chapel at Northwich to a large and very lively congregation and in the evening met once more with our old affectionate friends at Chester. I have never seen this chapel more crowded than tonight, but still it could contain not near the congregation. With this and the following evening I was greatly assisted to declare the power of Christ's resurrection, and to exhort all who were risen with Him to set their affection on things above.'

James Crawfoot reports that after service the following day he preached to a meeting of travelling and local preachers in the vestry, ending with these words, 'Fellow labourers, wherever there is an open door, enter in and preach the Gospel, if it be two or three, under a hedge or under a tree; Preach the Gospel, go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in thither the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind; and the servant said "Lord, it is done as Thou hast commended and yet there is room." 'He then lifted up his hands', says Crawfoot, 'and with tears of joy flowing down his cheeks repeated "And yet there is room, and yet there is room." The influence I felt will never be forgotten by me.'

Brian Redwood

The death of John Wesley removed the principal authority among the Methodists in favour of retaining membership of the Established Church. Although deeply reluctant to separate, Wesley had felt compelled to take two drastic steps to ensure the continuance of Methodism as an effective religious society. In 1784 for the first time an ordained minister served in the United States, and this was followed by other ordinations for service elsewhere and subsequently in England. In the same year by Deed of Declaration he constituted a conference of one hundred men, all preachers, as his successor.

George Walker, reviewing the situation in retrospect described how Wesley had been “in fact the employer and the leader of all the preachers in his connexion, his will upon all points was absolute and he required the most prompt obedience. After his death the great body of preachers....were not likely to submit to the monarchical kind of government they had endured under his directions – the natural consequence was, the body of preachers established amongst themselves the first conference after his decease, a republican kind of government...” electing a president and other officers from their members annually.

Neither preachers nor members were in a mood to continue to defer to the Established Church, which spurned what Methodists had to offer, but there was a strong division of feeling as to how far separation should go. The two most obvious impediments to a full church life were the rules that Communion should be taken only from episcopally ordained ministers, and that services should not be held in conflict with Church services. These rules had already been modified to meet special cases, so the demand for freedom for ministers and congregations to do as they wished became clamant, and conference was forced into a succession of compromises, culminating in the Plan of Pacification promulgated in 1795. This provided that the Sacrament might be administered by preachers and services held in church hours, if a majority of trustees and class leaders meeting separately approved. Most Societies took up the option. There was, however, continued agitation led by Alexander Kilham, who wished to give the power of decision completely to the trustees - those in legal control of church buildings. He became a focus for dissent and established a separate conference for what he called the New Connexion.

These divisions were reflected in Chester. In 1792 preachers and society leaders at the Octagon united in following the lead of the Conference, which forbade administration of the Lord's Supper in the Societies for that year, and the holding of services in church hours without Conference assent. But in the following year, a group led by Richard Condry wishing to exercise full freedom broke away and used the meeting house in Commonhall Lane. The matter was brought before a District Meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 1793. The bitterness of the quarrel is shown by the charges made. There Mr. Condry asserted that the separation had taken place on an apprehension that Thomas Bennett, George Lowe and George Walker (Trustees) had acted in a manner contrary to uprightness in the business of settling the preaching house at Commonhall Lane, that revenues had been misapplied and accounts unfairly kept. As a result he proposed that the separatists should meet at Commonhall Lane as a separate society and “be countenanced by the preachers in the purchase of premises whereon to fix up and erect a new preaching house”.

The Meeting vindicated the honour of the Trustees, resolved that they had no authority to countenance such a separation and prohibited preachers, both travelling and local, from preaching at Commonhall Lane as long as the separation should continue. But the separatists were undeterred and Walker reports that in 1794 they “erected in the most spirited manner a new chapel in Trinity Lane”, 12 by 19 yards within. Perhaps this move was forced on them. A marginal note on a copy of the “address” written in defence of the separatists, states that they were turned out of the meeting house by the proprietor who appointed a Baptist Minister to preach there instead.

Attempts were made to re-unite the group, and following the Plan of Pacification in 1795 terms were put forward which reflected the conservative line followed by the Octagon leaders. They required the people of Trinity Lane to avoid preaching at Church service times, not to administer the Sacraments there for that year, laid down distinct times for preaching at both places and set down how the finances of both churches were to be administered jointly. These conditions were copied into the Octagon account book which begins in that year. They are signed by George Lowe, but there is a blank where the assistant preacher, James McDonald, was to have signed. He had doubts about the clause forbidding the administration of the Sacraments and insisted on calling a District Meeting to satisfy himself and others of the Conference decision, which had been reported verbally to him by his brethren. The trustees and the stewards protested at the unnecessary expense, but the meeting was held and upheld the clause. From that date Trinity Lane “professedly opposed the people of the Octagon contrary to the intention of Conference. First by giving out a prayer meeting at six o’clock on Sunday evenings being the time of preaching at the Octagon. Secondly altering the time of their monthly collection to the same Sunday as the Octagon after agreeing to the second Sunday after the Octagon. Thirdly withholding their money from the general account as agreed by them in the “fifth article” of the conditions.

Two years later they joined the Kilham New Connexion. This body, says Walker, established a “code of laws, very much resembling those of the Connexion from which they separated, holding their annual conferences, preaching the same doctrines, using the same hymn-book, viz. Mr. John Wesley’s - observing a very similar mode of discipline, such as Class Meetings, Society Meetings, love feasts, Watchnights etc – differing from the main body of preachers more in the secular affairs of the Church, than on either points of doctrine or that of church discipline.”

To Walker it seemed that the separation need never have taken place. The preachers had been active in promoting independence from the Established Church, but had been determinedly opposed to a caucus of old members and original trustees. Not until 1806 was the “new plan” adopted by the Octagon Society, twenty years too late. Yet Walker saw God’s providence bringing good out of evil, for these divisions had achieved the beneficent result of two thriving churches and societies “engaged to promote the reign of the Messiah upon the Earth”.

Brian Redwood

The commitment to evangelise, the practical concern for the reformation of moral and social habits, combined with John Wesley's deep interest in education, made Methodists particularly sensitive to the movement for establishing Sunday Schools, which developed with astonishing rapidity in the last two decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The movement was particularly associated with Robert Raikes of Gloucester whose trade as a printer gave him the means to make his views widely known. He saw children roaming the streets, uncared for, and breaking the Sabbath with their noisy games, recognised the widespread need for literacy if everyone was to have the chance of reading the bible, and vigorously campaigned to establish Sunday Schools as the cheapest and quickest way to fulfil these aims. He opened the first school in 1780, and within two years the Methodist Society in Chester followed his initiative.

George Walker, writing thirty years later as one deeply involved, talks of the enthusiasm with which the Methodist Societies warmed to the work. The plan was to give free instruction in the chapels, without regard for the situation or religious opinions of the parents, furnishing books free to all poor children. Instruction took place between service times, and as these were at 8 am and 6 pm at the Octagon, a large part of the day was available. The main object was to teach reading and a knowledge of religious principles and the bible. There seem to have been a spontaneous outbreak of Sunday Schools in different parts of Chester in the years 1781 and 1782 or thereabouts. Thomas Fearnal in 1824 recalled schools in Handbridge and Flookersbrook, before the Octagon school started, and George Lowe refers to one in Commonhall Lane at the same time.

One of the most attractive features of the early Sunday School movement was its un-denominational character. Richard Rodda, preacher at Chester in 1785 and 1786, describing the situation then, speaks of rules being submitted to and approved by the Bishop. 'We soon had nearly 700 children under regular masters, and, with these, several assistants, who taught the children *gratis*, having nothing in view but the good of the rising generation. We had no intention of making disciples of Methodism, but to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, that they might be useful members of civil and religious society'. It was in those years that the National Society for the Establishment and Support of Sunday Schools throughout the kingdom of Great Britain was founded – (a forerunner of the Sunday School Union) - and the Octagon trustees built a school on the west side of the Octagon yard. It was a brick building of two storeys, 16'3" x 26'9", furnished with desks and benches and other requisites.

Bishop Beilby actively supported the movement, and in a sermon preached on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1787 for the benefit of the charity schools in the city advocated the establishment of General Sunday Schools, commending at the same time the existing Sunday School as an example. The sermon was followed by a meeting of clergy and gentry called by the bishop, at which a plan for an annual fund based on a 5 shillings subscription by the inhabitants of the city was set out. Perhaps in anticipation of this lead from the palace, a Committee of the Sunday Schools had been instituted at the Octagon the previous January. This was naturally dominated by the Methodists who had taken a leading part in actually setting up and running schools. They had expected to be used by the Bishop, who had praised their efforts and approved rules of management submitted by them. But it soon became

clear that the new proposals were for an exclusively Anglican organisation. Support for existing Methodist schools was ruled out, and the fund was used to establish and maintain schools at convenient parts of the city, without regard for parochial organisation

The Octagon school was first financed by individuals directly approached for subscriptions, a method which soon became 'beyond description exceedingly painful'. Following on from a public concert of sacred music of Christmas Day, 1785, the next years it was decided to make the occasion for a Sunday School collection. This produced about £6. Two printed programmes for this period survive, pasted on the flyleaves of the Trustees Minute Book. The one for 1799 offers of hymn, prayer, hymn for congregation, ode sung by the scholars, charity sermon, and selection from the 'Messiah'. Over the years, the need for a larger income became more pressing, and ways were sought to make the annual choral service more productive. There was considerable resentment against numerous people who came for the entertainment without contribution to its object. The expedient hit upon was to have a silver collection on entry at the door. This however raised serious scruples. Had not Conference in 1800 resolved 'Let none in your connection preach charity sermons where "band of music and theatrical singers" are introduced'? The taking of money at the door savoured too much of the theatre. However in 1805 the scheme was given a trial and an elaborate concert put on with the support of hired performers. The chapel was crowded with 'a most respectable audience' and the collection was four times greater, grossing £41 [*about £2,600 at 2012 values*]. Expenses were correspondingly higher, yet the net gain was still £26. Unease was felt about the effects of such elaborate choral efforts particularly on the young. Singing anthems had the tendency 'to draw the minds of those pious young'. Some suspected that members of the Society, who assisted in the performances, more in the spirit and harmony of the sweet sounds they sang than in the sacred and sublime truths of the divine words which they rehearsed. Thus Christmas concerts for the following years combined greater simplicity with economy, placing emphasis on the children's performances, but the practice of a silver collection on entry was fruitfully maintained!

An indication of school practice and attitudes is given in the earliest list of Rules entered at the end of the first Sunday School Minute Book. Subsequently more elaborate rules for management were established, but the first is short enough to be given complete.

### **Rules relating to the Scholars**

- 1<sup>st</sup> The Scholars must all come to school clean washed and combed at the time specified.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> They are not to go out at all if they can possibly avoid it, or at least until the first hour is gone over.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Not a word must be spoken in school hours to any person but their teacher – no looking off books or getting lessons aloud.
- 4<sup>th</sup> If a scholar neglects coming to school three Sundays together without sending a reasonable excuse or should absent him of herself now and then, he or she shall be excluded.
- 5<sup>th</sup> If a scholar be convicted of cursing, swearing, lying, quarrelling, calling nick-names, using indecent language, or behaving himself improperly in any way which may not be here

specified, shall be admonished for the first, punished for the second and excluded for the third.

- 6<sup>th</sup> When they are dismissed they must go directly home, without loitering in the streets, and if any be seen running, jumping, playing, or in any other respects misbehaving on the Lord's Day, to be treated according to the 5<sup>th</sup> rule.
- 7<sup>th</sup> When they go to Chapel, they must walk regularly, neither thronging or pushing each other, not to speak one word from the time they leave the school, until they return from Chapel. They must go reverently and quietly to their seats, sit, stand and kneel with the Congregation. They are not to go out on any pretence whatever and if either by word or action they disturb those that are near them, their names shall be taken down and reported for bad behaviour.

Brian Redwood

The rapid growth of Methodism in Chester in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century outstripped the accommodation available in the Octagon, which was also showing some structural deficiencies. So in 1810 the Society cast around for a new site. We should remember that at this time England was still engaged in a long war with Napoleon which had gone on intermittently since 1793. In 1810 her army was locked in struggle in the Spanish Peninsula. The economy was suffering, made worse by a series of poor harvests. Prices were rising rapidly and the Government was fearful of revolution. It was particularly suspicious of Methodism with its itinerant ministers.

Such was the situation in which the Chester Methodists sought to find a new home. At first they acquired a site in Foregate Street on the north side, west of Queen Street, for £1600. But it lay next to some Tanyards, and because of a substantial house there, was expensive to develop. Then a site in St. John Street came on the market - the house and grounds of Alexander Eaton, an attorney. This was the house now occupied by the Royal Insurance Company (*now No. 6 St. John Street*). The site included the house of Robert Fearnall, butcher, to the north, now occupied by the library (*in 2011 by Cruise*) and to the south a house and cottage, with a further space behind six cottages fronting the street and the City wall. This was purchased on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1811 for a total cost of £2501. 15s. [*about £150,000 at 2012 values*] and the Foregate Street property sold.

St. John Street was then very different from its present state. Objectors to the purchase called it a mean street, liable to flooding, narrow, and overlooked by the City walls, which meant that the place would be constantly annoyed by those ill-disposed and attracted by the sounds of worship. On the contrary, the protagonists argued that it was central, in the midst of population, and the city walls would provide convenient access. Opposite the site was a timber yard.

The Building Committee asked Thomas Harrison, the distinguished local architect, to draw up plans. He, however, declined because of other engagements, but consented to draw sketch plans for which he was paid £20. The drawing of plans was then entrusted to Mr. B. Gommer of Ruabon, but when he failed to produce them the job passed to William Cole, the leading builder of the city, who was the principal contractor for building the Castle. He was appointed clerk of works and contracted for the masonry work.

The Chapel was erected on the site of the buildings to the south of Eaton's house, and a separate schoolroom was built on the vacant land by the city wall at the south-west end of the Chapel. The house itself was sold to Mrs. Slaughter of Eccleston for £1200 (only to be repurchased in 1845) and Fearnall's house was improved for use as the preacher residence. The original access from the City walls came down behind Fearnall's, but the Corporation allowed them to build the existing stairs to the walls and to retain control of the passage by erecting a gate at the top.

The total cost of land, buildings and improvements was £6865. 19s. 10d. [*about £410,000 at 2012 values*] of which over £5000 had to be borrowed. The opening service took place on October 4<sup>th</sup> 1812.



One can best appreciate the original buildings by looking at the photographs of both front and interior in Bretherton's 'Early Methodism in Chester', which shows it as it was in 1903. It had a semi-circular front, the loss of which some will regret. The curved stone inscription on the front 'WESLEYAN CHAPEL AD 1811' is still at the rear against the City wall. Inside, the pulpit occupied a high central position, with the communion table in front and below contained within a semi-circular rail. Behind, occupying the area of the present chancel was the vestry from which stairs issued to the pulpit.

Brian Redwood

The Rev. Kenneth Bounds, at present Superintendent Minister at Aston-under-Lyme, has produced an attractively personal history of Methodism in this city. He modestly refuses to call it history, because it is personal and selective, but no-one else so far has attempted to bring together the different strands of our history, issuing from the inspiration of the Wesleys through divergent offspring, Wesleyan, New Connexion and Primitive, to the Union of 1932, and beyond to the coming together of George Street, St. John Street and Hunter Street societies finally at Wesley in 1970. It comprises 22 closely written pages with an introductory location map for the various churches, and a line drawing of the George Street church. It can be purchased from Mr. Rose, 144 Henrietta Street, Ashton-under-Lyme.

The tone is set in the opening paragraph. "My first memory of Methodism in Chester relates to a Sunday afternoon in 1918. I was standing outside the Pepper Street Methodist Church, with my brother, Cyril. We had just come out of Sunday School, and one of the leaders turned to Cyril and said, 'Remember, lad, do not come back next Sunday, for we shall be closed'. We went home....and found Mother sitting in the parlour. Cyril told her what the leader had said. Her reply was, 'Yes, I know they were to close. You must go to George Street, then.' So George Street became the centre of family loyalties." Those who heard him speak at the local branch of the Wesley Historical Society in Altrincham earlier this year will remember the sad and valedictory remarks, meditating on subsequent closures and declining membership. What of the future? That is the challenge to us and our societies as we seek to understand and forward God's purpose.

The Bounds are a Chester family, familiar if for no other reason through the family shop, in Grosvenor Street, run now by the author's brother (Cyril). So the history is illuminated by his personal knowledge of persons and places. But the author has read widely, ranging through John Wesley's Journal and Letters, the files of an earlier historian, Francis Bretherton, and the circuit and society reports now in the care of the Chester City Record Office. For example he quotes at the beginning of his chapter on "The Age of Transition" the result of a religious census taken by a local newspaper on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1903 (a pity he did not take the opportunity to compare it with the national religious census taken in 1851):

|                 |               |              |                      |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------|----------------------|
| St. John Street | Wesleyan      | Seating 1000 | Total Attendance 357 |
| George Street   | Primitive     | Seating 850  | Total Attendance 761 |
| Hunter Street   | Primitive     | Seating 500  | Total Attendance 282 |
| Tarvin Road     | Primitive     | Seating 200  | Total Attendance 170 |
| Pepper Street   | New Connexion | Seating 1200 | Total Attendance 177 |

My recollection of a census taken at Wesley last October was in the region of 214 people attending and we are heirs to four of the five churches!

Mr. Bounds' Reminiscences can be thoroughly recommended for readable history, anecdote and recollection of recent and distant past. His grandchildren for whom he wrote it are fortunate in having such a gift, and we are grateful to be allowed to share that good fortune.

Brian Redwood.

Primitive Methodism in Chester began in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as an off-shoot of Wesleyan Methodism in the Potteries. Hugh Bourne and William Clowes are generally reported as the founding fathers, although, to be strictly accurate, credit should be given to a large number of other people – itinerant evangelists who spread the dynamic faith throughout the countryside around Tunstall in the years from 1811.

The opening of the western half of Cheshire to Primitive Methodism is generally attributed to John Wedgewood. Born in Burslem in 1788, Wedgewood trained as a potter, and could have enjoyed a comfortable income even if he had not also been the heir to his father's property. His uncle was a vicar of the parish church, but seems to have made little impression on John, whose conversion did not take place until about 1809. Then he went about the streets "like one wild, telling all he met what a grand change he had experienced". He probably took preaching appointments in the Burslem Wesleyan Methodist Circuit soon after his conversion, but his impetuous nature probably brought him into the same sort of conflict with the Circuit authorities as Hugh Bourne. By 1812 he had formed links with the Primitive Methodists, and preached in their Derbyshire 'Mission Field'.

Up to the end of 1818 the Primitive Methodist progress in Cheshire was slow. They had made no impression on the western half of the county, where the Wesleyans were also spread thinly, although Primitive Methodist activity in the south east had grown considerably between 1816 and 1818. However, in the early summer of 1819 Wedgewood spearheaded a mission into the area around Bulkeley, Faddiley, Spurstow, Tiverton and Chorley Green. Wedgewood was not a great administrator and, after exercising his evangelistic gifts for some weeks in these villages and the surrounding countryside, he turned to 'fresh pastures'. He preached along the Welsh border, in and around Sutton Green in Denbighshire, and then moved north though Churton, possibly even preaching in Chester. Revivalism was in the air, and Bourne noted in his journal on November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1819:

"John Wedgewood direct to Stanney, near Chester, about five miles distant near the canal: go through the North Gate, then four or five miles by canal. A miller at Stanney mill (sic) named Yoxon: another house named Machir of Maker: an awakening has taken place, but it does not appear that any are converted."

This journey opened up part of the Wirral: for Wedgewood, typically, did not stop at Stanney. He preached at Great Sutton, at Two Mills, Neston and Saughall at the invitation of one, Thomas Langford, a member of the Methodist New Connexion, early in 1820.

The revival in Cheshire was too extensive to be left entirely to Wedgewood. He now saw himself as a "sower of the seed" and he left the "tending of the garden" to the Holy Spirit. So he paid little attention to the formation of classes or the appointment of leaders. Consequently the Tunstall Circuit took steps to supply the newly opened million(sic)(?*milieu*) with regular preaching, and drafted other men into the area to assist Wedgewood. It was one of these, Samson Turner, who formed the Society in Huxley, and other preachers in the following months extended the work to several surrounding villages.

By December 1820 the number of places in the western half of Cheshire had grown to fifty two, but the expansion had slowed dramatically and, at the March Quarter-day of 1821 it was decided to resume a bold policy for the summer months and, amongst other things, to arrange special missions for the town of Nantwich and the City of Chester.

Several attempts had already been made to gain a foothold in Chester over the months after Wedgewood's visit, without much success. The first detailed account of Primitive Methodist preaching in the City is that of Thomas Brownsword, following the decision of the March Quarter-day:

"Sunday March 18<sup>th</sup>. I went to Chester, and at eight o'clock preached on the Cross, to about 500 people. Many seemed much affected. We then went into Watergate Street and held a prayer meeting in a yard. Here I gave an exhortation; it was a good time. I then went to Handbridge and preached at ten, to a large concourse of people. I believe good was done. I then visited some sick, and while praying, two women were much affected, and began to beg for mercy. I intended to preach in Boughton. A large company assembled, but the weather was so unfavourable that we were obliged to divide into companies, and go into three houses and hold prayer meetings. I then gave an exhortation. I believe much good was done: many were in distress, and some obtained pardon. I went to Tarvin and preached to many people."

Brownsword's efforts were followed up the next Sunday by local preachers, including Thomas Langford and James Shone, both from Saughall. Langford, especially, preached to the extent that he played a leading part in the intense campaign in the City that ensued. "He sometimes preached five times on a Sabbath: at the North Gate at nine o'clock, at the Bowling Green at half-past ten, at the Cross at one, at Handbridge at half-past two and at Boughton at six." But these efforts met with a good deal of opposition. According to Thomas Bateman there was a lot of persecution from "certain lewd fellows of the baser sort", who not only attended the meeting and interrupted them by "hooting and strange noises", but sometimes knocked the people down as they walked along the streets. Undeterred by such hardships, the people rented a "large upper room" in King Street, though:

"The wicked rabble followed and much annoyed the peaceable worshippers, singing loud songs whilst other people sang hymns, shouting 'Amen' at the top of their voice while the preacher was praying or preaching, and doing mischief to the people as they came in or went out."

The incessant harassment undoubtedly deterred some, and the worshippers eventually became so disheartened that it looked, for a time, as if the work might have to be abandoned. But, quite suddenly in the latter part of 1821, the persecution tailed off, for reasons that are not altogether clear. Some contemporaries attributed it to divine intervention. Thomas Bateman of Chorley, for instance, claimed that when it was seen that "without divine help, the struggle must be given up", then "many and earnest prayers offered and Providence intervened." The instrument of this Providence was John Ride, one of the most controversial of the early preachers:

"On arriving at the preaching room he found it crowded mostly with persecutors. ....on Mr Ride's entering the room one of these godless disturbers of the worship cried out "Make room for the parson". Then going towards him said, jeeringly, "I will make a way for you, sir", and marched before him in the same spirit and manner. Mr Ride ascended the pulpit and began the service with emotions suitable to the occasion.....The persecutors sang profane songs while he sang the first hymn, and when he began to pray aloud they impiously shouted "Amen" so as to

almost drown his voice. He, however, continued to pour out his soul to God with a fervour that few could equal.....after he had been engaged in prayer for some time the power of God descended among the persecutors, several of them were 'pricked in their hearts' and cried aloud for mercy, and the rest were terror stricken and fled from the place."

John Petty, a Primitive Methodist historian in the mid-nineteenth century, claimed to have received this account from John Ride himself, and other nineteenth century writers accepted it as a "gracious interposition of the Almighty" to check the persecution. It is possible, however, that the easing of the situation after the first few months was due to more mundane factors. The rabble may simply have tired of their sport, and probably the association of several respectable citizens with the new cause acted as something of a deterrent. One of the leaders was Captain Howie, master gunner at Chester Castle; another was Ephraim Sedler, a farmer at Huxley. Some Wesleyans also were sympathetic; Samuel Jones gave the missionaries a 'hearty welcome' and, on occasion, even helped with the preaching.

At first the official attitude in the town was as hostile as that of the mob. In fact, the antagonism of the magistrates goes some way to explain the vehemence of the persecutors. Complaints met with little comfort: "You are served right. Why don't you stop a home? Why do you come here disturbing the peace of the city?" The perseverance of the preachers, however, eventually won a sort of grudging respect. Thomas Langford was arrested along with two colleagues for preaching in the open air at the Cross. When brought before the mayor and two other magistrates he defended himself by appeal to scriptures. One of the magistrates, a clergyman, disputed the interpretation Langford placed on a passage and was therefore challenged to give a better one. "As if panic stricken, he could not muster courage to open his mouth again." This incident, if indeed it took place as related, may have been a turning point for the Primitive Methodists. "The mayor, pleased with the controversial ascendancy gained by the humble lay-preacher over his clerical opponent, ordered the constable to accompany the plain, earnest man of God to some convenient place in the open air, where they could discharge their duty without blocking up a thoroughfare and to defend them against annoyance from persecutors."

There were, however, other less obvious connections which may have affected the attitude of the authorities once they became known. A cousin of Thomas Bateman's father, for instance, was Deputy Town Clerk and on at least one occasion when Bateman preached in the city he determined to appeal to his relative if he met with any opposition in the streets or in the preaching room. This visit was probably in October 1821, but the harassment seems to have much less acute and Bateman had no cause for complaint. On December 8<sup>th</sup>, when he next visited Chester, the position was even better, and he wrote:

"The work prospers much in this ancient city now. Thank God! After a storm there comes a calm."

At the December Quarter-day it was agreed that Chester should be planned twice each Sunday – at two and six – and, in addition, Boughton appeared on the plan at ten. Preaching had begun there in July 1821, in the house of Thomas and Sarah Ellis, in Steven Street where the society worshipped until the building of Steam Mill Street Chapel in 1824.

**App. 15.17: Contact No. 44: Sept '80 (unattributed):**

**Sunday Schools (200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Robert Raikes' first Sunday School in Gloucester)**

[Ref.: CALS ZCR 55 acc7972]

*Much has been said and written about Robert Raikes this year. The Methodist Recorder, for example, issued a special supplement. It is not our intention to tell the story of the birth of Sunday Schools yet again, but we thought the following notes, found among the papers of the late Mr Evan Lane, would be of interest.*

The first Sunday School in this area appears to have been the one instituted in 1782 (as against Robert Raikes' first Sunday School in Gloucester in 1780) at Chester - not essentially Methodist, but for all denominations. The organisers were soon in financial difficulty, and a few years later organised their first Sunday School Anniversary. Two grand pianofortes were brought in, most celebrated singers, and the popular preacher, Samuel Bradburn, was brought over from Bolton. A silver collection was taken at the doors. They really went to town on this, but they had afterthoughts: the fear was expressed that their younger members had been brought into undesirable association with worldly musicians. They thought that this was the beginning of the end for Methodism. The matter even got to Conference in 1800, where the question was asked, "Can anything be done to prevent what appears to us a great evil, bands of music and theatrical singers being brought into our chapels, when charity sermons are to be preached?" A directive was issued to the itinerant preachers to have no part in such charity sermons.

The layout of the classes at Chester was :

Upstairs- 1<sup>st</sup> Bible company, Miss Janet Lowe; 2<sup>nd</sup> Bible company, Miss Roberts and Miss Speed; 1<sup>st</sup> Testament company, Miss Jones and Miss M Lowe; and so on to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Testament company, the Spelling class and (most intriguing) the Card class etc

Below - 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Bible companies; 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Testament companies; Spelling class; Reading made easy.

They even allotted how the time was to be spent in Sunday Schools:

|   |                          |            |                |
|---|--------------------------|------------|----------------|
| 1 | Singing and praying      | 10         | minutes        |
| 2 | Call over Teacher's Roll | 5          | minutes        |
| 3 | Deliver books            | 5          | minutes        |
| 4 | Tasks                    | 20         | minutes        |
| 5 | Read                     | 45         | minutes        |
| 6 | Call in books            | 5          | minutes        |
| 7 | Spell and catechise      | 20         | minutes        |
| 8 | Mark class paper         | 5          | minutes        |
| 9 | Dismiss                  | 5          | minutes        |
|   |                          | <b>120</b> | <b>minutes</b> |

The books reveal that the following were some of the Minutes passed:

July 19<sup>th</sup> 1815: Resolved that greater strictness be observed in the school as it respects corporal punishment.

September 13<sup>th</sup> 1815: That no teacher be permitted to use a cane in school.

October 24<sup>th</sup> 1815: That every scholar at entering or going out of the school must make a Bow or a Courtesy (*sic*).

1823: The children to be detained after the morning service and reprimanded by the preacher if they have misbehaved.

Item of expenditure – Spanish Juice for the Singers, 1s./1d.

March 26<sup>th</sup> 1839: Mr and Mrs Sergeant of London were engaged as teachers



**App. 15.18: Contact: June '03 (Ken Jackson):**

**John Wesley in Chester**

John Wesley visited Chester on numerous occasions, often on his way to or from Ireland via Parkgate or Holyhead. His congregations were often serious and attentive. For example on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1762 he wrote in his Journal, "I rode on to Chester. Never was the society in such a state before. Their jars and contentions were at an end and I found nothing but peace and love among them. About twelve of them believed they were saved from sin, and their lives did not contradict their profession. Most of the rest were strongly athirst for God and looking for him continually."

It had not always been so. On Wednesday and Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1752, the mob spent its time pulling down the house where Mr Wesley had preached during the latter part of June. Here is his journal entry for that June visit. On Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> June 1752 he rode to Chester from Bolton and preached "at six in the accustomed place, a little without the gates near St John's Church."

"The following day I preached at seven (in the morning) in a much larger house near St Martin's Church. At one I began preaching again on 'We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord'; but the house not containing half the congregation, I was obliged to stand at the door on one side of a kind of square, large enough to contain ten or twelve thousand people. At four I preached in the Square to a much larger congregation among whom were abundance of gentry. One man screamed and hallooed as loud as he could, but none....regarded him. The rest of the congregation were steadily serious from the beginning to the end."

During this visit he walked round the walls, commended the convenience of the 'Rows' but was upset that the Mayor and the Magistrates had not prevented the destruction of the house in which he used to preach. Perhaps in order to make clear that he could not be intimidated by the mob he preached outside the destroyed house and expounded the principles of Methodism, "that sect which is everywhere spoken against."

In August 1765, Mr Wesley rode over to Chester from Leeds, preached in "the new house" which had been opened in June (and was almost certainly the Octagon Chapel) on the Friday evening (16<sup>th</sup> August), again on the Saturday morning and evening and twice again on the Sunday. So large was the evening congregation that "multitudes were constrained to go away." His comment on the weekend was, "So does truth win its way against all opposition, if it be steadily declared with meekness of wisdom." The following day he preached in Northwich (where previously the townsfolk had hurled missiles at him, though none had reached its mark) and Manchester before opening the twenty-second Methodist Conference in Manchester on 20<sup>th</sup> August.

Things had gone wrong in Chester by 1784, however. On Monday 5<sup>th</sup> April Mr Wesley preached at Alpraham to an unusually large congregation and then writes, "I was surprised when I came to Chester to find that .... Morning preaching was quite left off, for this worthy reason: 'Because the people will not come, or, at least, not in winter.' If so, the Methodists are a fallen people. Here is proof. They have 'lost their first love,' and they never will or can recover it, till they 'do the first works.'" He goes on, "In the year 1738, when God began his great work in England, I began preaching at the same hour (5.00 a.m.), winter and summer, and never wanted a congregation. If

they will not attend now, they have lost their zeal, and then, it cannot be denied, they are a fallen people.”

The following day he crossed over to Liverpool where things were much better, “a people much alive to God, one cause of which was that they have preaching several mornings a week and prayer meetings on the rest, all of which they are careful to attend.”

It was in Chester that Mr Wesley met with “one of the most extraordinary phenomena that I ever saw, or heard of: Mr Sellers has in his yard a large Newfoundland dog and an old raven. These have fallen deeply in love with each other, and never desire to be apart. The bird has learned the bark of the dog, so that few can distinguish them. She is inconsolable when he goes out; and, if he stays out a day or two, she will get up all the bones and scraps she can, and hoard them up for him till he comes back.”

More seriously, his final Journal comment on Chester on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> April 1790 was that “in the evening (he) met with our old affectionate friends at Chester. I have never seen the chapel more crowded than tonight; but still it could not near contain the congregation. Both this and the following evening I was greatly assisted to declare the power of Christ’s resurrection, and to exhort all that were risen with Him to set their affections on the things above.”

John Wesley broke off writing his Journal on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1790, though he continued his diary entries to within six days of his death. So ended a life of sacrifice and devotion to God which we celebrate this year, the three hundredth anniversary of his birth.

Ken Jackson  
2003

## Appendix 16: Marriages and Baptisms at Wesley

### Registered Marriages Since 1900

*The Wesley safe only holds registers dating from 1900. The Registers for 1858 to 1899 are yet to be located. (The copies will be at Somerset House).*

| Decade starting 1 <sup>st</sup> January | Number of Weddings | Comments   |
|---|--------------------|--|
| 1900                                    | 26                 | Church rebuild in 1906   |
| 1910                                    | 39                 | Great War 1914-1918  |
| 1920                                    | 47                 | Church rebuild in 1926   |
| 1930                                    | 46                 |  |
| 1940                                    | 62                 | Second World War 1939-45   |
| 1950                                    | 41                 |  |
| 1960                                    | 44                 | Unification of St John St., Hunter St. and George St. During Church House rebuild in 1968/9, worshipping at George St. |
| 1970                                    | 59                 |  |
| 1980                                    | 39                 | Church Roof rebuild 26 months in 1986/88. Worshipping in Hall.   |
| 1990                                    | 30                 |  |
| 2000                                    | 15                 | 'Renewal 2010' Church Centre rebuild July – Dec 2009   |
| 2010                                    | 4                  | 2010 and 2011 only   |

## Registered Baptisms Since 1837

*The Register in the Wesley safe does not cover the early period 1812 – 1837.*

| Decade starting 1 <sup>st</sup> January | Number of Baptisms                              | Comments   |
|---|---|--|
| 1837                                    | 23  | Register starts in 1837  |
| 1840                                    | 151   |  |
| 1850                                    | 166   |  |
| 1860                                    | 231   |  |
| 1870                                    | 309   |  |
| 1880                                    | 257   |  |
| 1890                                    | 94  |  |
| 1900                                    | 85  | Church rebuild in 1906   |
| 1910                                    | 46  | Great War 1914-1918  |
| 1920                                    | 48  | Church rebuild in 1926   |
| 1930                                    | 46  |  |
| 1940                                    | 73  | Second World War 1939-45   |
| 1950                                    | 65  |  |
| 1960                                    | 97 #<br>(+106 at George St prior<br>to 11/8/68) | Unification of St John St., Hunter St. and<br>George St. During Church House rebuild in<br>1968/9, worshipping at George St. |
| 1970                                    | 81  |  |
| 1980                                    | 58  | Church Roof Rebuild 26 months in<br>1986/88. Worshipping in Hall.  |
| 1990                                    | 58  |  |
| 2000                                    | 20  | ‘Renewal 2010’ Church Centre rebuild<br>July – Dec 2009  |
| 2010                                    | 3   | 2010 and 2011 only   |

# After 11/8/68 baptisms were registered in the newer George Street register. The figure quoted adds the St. John Street entries to 11/8/68 (76) to the George Street register entries thereafter (21).

## Appendix 17: Stained Glass Windows

### A17.1 The Warrior Window (facing City Walls)

#### A17.1.1 Designer

The World War I memorial West Window was designed by Henry Gustave Hiller (1864 - 1946). He trained at the Manchester School of Art and first worked for another stained glass artist, Reuben Bennett, also in Manchester. In 1890 he set up his own studio in Liverpool and his windows are found in many churches in the old counties of Cheshire and Lancashire. Hiller retired to Anglesey in 1936 and is buried at Llanfaelog. The window, installed in 1926, is signed in the bottom right hand corner: H G HILLER & Co LIVERPOOL.

*Information provided by Peter Jones, stained glass window enthusiast from Anglesey, by email to Rev. Neil Stacey on 10/4/11.*

#### A17.1.1 Design

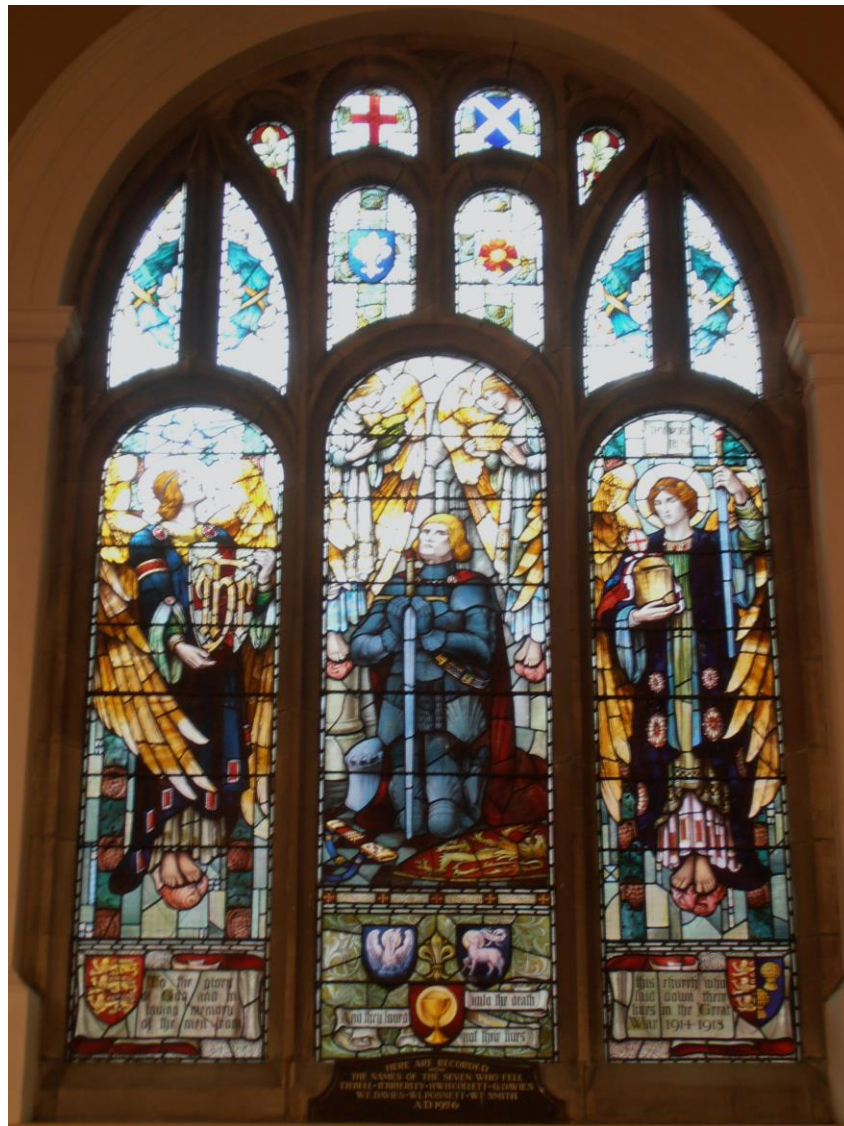


Fig. 92: The Warrior Window

The window in the chancel of our church bears the inscription “To the Glory of God, and in loving memory of the men from this church who laid down their lives in the Great War 1914 – 1918”. This is followed by the names of the seven men who laid down their lives.

In medieval times, when very few people could read, religious instruction was given by pictures and carvings in the churches. The ordinary men and women soon became familiar with the symbols used, and so were able to interpret the lessons in the stained-glass windows and on the woodwork of the rood screens.

In the centre of the window is a young man in full armour. The hour of dawn is approaching and he has kept his vigil before the altar throughout the night. The early morning light flashes upon his shining sword, helmet and shield. This is contrast to the darkness of the massive stone pillars of a Norman Church. Why is he kneeling in the Sanctuary? His earnest-looking face gives us no answer. He is a young Esquire, waiting to receive high knighthood from his Sovereign, so that he may be dedicated to God’s work. The sword is the symbol of his power.

The inspiration of this centre-piece comes from the painting ‘The Vigil’ (see below) by the Scottish painter John Pettie RA (1839 - 1893), which is in the Tate Gallery. The young man, coming from the Age of Chivalry, embodies the highest ideals of English manhood, and is a most fitting subject for the Memorial Window.



**Fig. 93: ‘The Vigil’, John Pettie RA**

What, immediately, strikes you is the apparent loneliness of the young man, but the artistry has surrounded the kneeling figure with angels bearing in their hands symbols of encouragement and of a promised reward.

The window is divided by stone mullions into three lights, with tracery above them, having smaller representations of heraldic or symbolic influence.

Behind the knight in the centre panel are stone pillars of the church; beside him, on the ground, are his helmet and his shield. The shield bears, on a red background, a golden lion rampant – the emblem of valour. His empty scabbard also lies beside him, for he is holding his unsheathed sword. Above his head are two angel figures: one bearing a wreath and the other a crown, both symbols of victory.

The angel in the left-hand window is clad in blue raiment, enriched with ruby ornaments – ‘Having on the breastplate of righteousness’; he has a shield emblazoned with a ruby cross on which is the sacred monogram: I.H.S. ‘JESUS HOMINUM SALVATOR’ - ‘Jesus the Saviour of men’. This is the ‘Shield of Faith’ of which St. Paul speaks in Ephesians, chapter 6.

On the other side of the knight is an angel in purple, bearing in one hand ‘the Helmet of Salvation’ and aloft in the other ‘the Sword of the Spirit’, which is ‘the Word of God’. To remind us of this the open book of the Gospels is above the angel’s head, and on the pages we can read – ‘Thy Word in Truth’.

The four tracery lights above the figure of the knight contain heraldic blazons; these are flanked on either side by lights containing laurel wreaths, symbolic of honour. In the top left-hand light is St. George’s Cross; besides being the patron saint of England, St. George is also the soldier’s patron saint. By the side of this cross is a shield bearing a diagonal blue cross on a white background, for St. Andrew, patron saint of Scotland. Below St. George’s Cross is a shield with the Fleur-de-lis, recalling the time when this heraldic blazon was claimed by the English kings as their right! Below St. Andrew’s Cross is the red rose of Lancashire, used by Kings Henry IV, V and VI of England.

These four tracery lights are of two countries who in olden days were bitter enemies – England and Scotland, and England and France. Now there is fellowship in days of peace.

In the bottom left-hand corner of the window is a shield bearing the Arms of England and in the bottom right-hand corner are the Arms of Chester.

The lower part of the centre light contains three shields emblazoned with ecclesiastical symbols – The Pelican which, according to legend, fed her young with blood from her own breast; a symbol of self-sacrifice. The next symbol is the lamb surmounted by a flag – the Lamb of God. The centre shield bears the Chalice and Paten - sacred vessels used in Holy Communion. It recalls the legend of Joseph of Arimathea, who is said to have brought the Holy Grail to England; so we get the search for the Holy Grail (Vessel) by King Arthur and his Knights. It is said that only three knights – Sir Bors, Sir Percivale and Sir Galahad – saw the gleam from the Holy Spirit because ‘they had conquered the inclinations of their eyes and hearts’ which cause men to stumble.

The Knights of King Arthur, the Crusaders, and soldier of later days are represented so that those who see the window may read the right lesson from it.

Major John Potts

*(Article printed in April 1990 Contact Magazine, using material from the pamphlet ‘The Warrior Window’ by M. Harry, published in Chester in 1927 by F H Taberer, printer)*



## A17.2 East Window (facing St. John Street)

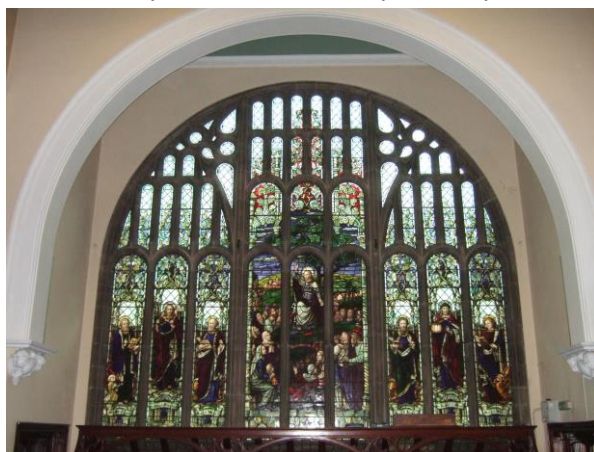
### A17.2.1 Designer

The East Window was designed by Gamon and Humphry. This appears to have been a loose association, as both also produced windows independent of each other. Gilbert Percival Gamon was born in Neston, on the Wirral, in 1871. He trained with Shrigley and Hunt, a major stained glass company. Shrigley and Hunt were originally based in Lancaster, but later opened an additional studio in London, where Gilbert Gamon trained. In the early 1900's he was invited into partnership with Arthur Hunt, but declined and set up with Godfrey Wood Humphry, using a business address in Grafton Street, London. He entered the army for World War I, with his family living in London. After the war he initially stayed in London, but by 1926 he had moved back to the North-West, to Hoylake, where he died in 1941. Godfrey Humphry designed a number of windows independently of Gamon and he died earlier, in about 1927. The window is signed "G & H", near the bottom left of the central window panel, above the plaque.

*Information provided by Peter Jones, stained glass window enthusiast from Anglesey, by email to Rev. Neil Stacey on 10/4/11.*

### A17.2.2 Design

The Listed Building description for Wesley describes the East Window, which is pictured on the front cover of this Bicentennial History and Fig. 94 below, as a "large 9-light round-arched window with quasi-panel tracery". The original 'cathedral glass' window installed in the new church frontage to St. John Street in 1906 was replaced with this fine stained glass window in 1914. The plaque underneath the window reads: "To the Glory of God and in loving memory of William Twiston Davies, Justice of the Peace of this City, this window was placed by his children. A. D. 1914".



**Fig. 94: East Window**

From the left, the first three panels depict respectively St. Matthew, Jesus 'The Good Shepherd' and St. Mark. The middle three panels show Jesus Christ preaching the Sermon on the Mount to a listening crowd below. The right three panels depict respectively St. Luke, Jesus 'The Light of the World' and St. John. The text across the bottom of the three centre panels is from the Epistle of James, chapter 1, verse 27, in the Authorised Version: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

### A17.3 Illuminated Side Window ('Bowers Window')



**Fig. 95: The Bowers Window**

This window, which was damaged in the Second World War (as noted in section 5), depicts the empty tomb: "He is not here for he is Risen". It is inscribed "The gift of many friends and a memorial of loving esteem for Alderman Thomas Bowers who for thirty years faithfully laboured as Steward to the Trustees of this Chapel and in this as in other offices saw the pleasure of the Lord prosper in his hands and being called to (...suffering) knew also the power of the resurrection and having served his generation according to the will of God fell on sleep July 29<sup>th</sup> 1878".

## Appendix 18: Memorial Tablets at Wesley Methodist Church, Chester

*Researched by Robin Spencer*

There are seven memorial tablets on the walls of the worship area. They commemorate some of the earliest Methodists in Chester, and are of considerable historical interest. The language in which the memorials are couched is elegant, carefully judged and characteristically Victorian in tone. The text of each memorial is set out below, followed by a brief note. The primary source of these notes is Bretherton's *Early Methodism in and around Chester 1749-1812*, published in 1903 (Reference 1), but many other sources have been consulted. The memorials are recorded in the order in which they are situated, starting from the south wall to the left as one enters the worship area from the main door at the rear, then returning to that door before crossing beneath the east window and moving down the north wall opposite.

### A18.1      **John Sellers (1758 – 1790)**

SACRED TO THE MEMORY  
OF  
**JOHN SELLERS,**  
INSTRUCTOR OF YOUTH IN THIS CITY;  
AND LOCAL PREACHER.  
TO THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF THE  
RISING GENERATION COMMITTED TO HIS CARE,  
HE WAS CONSCIENTIOUSLY ATTENTIVE,  
AND  
WHILST DISCHARGING THE STILL HIGHER DUTIES  
OF CALLING SINNERS TO REPENTANCE,  
HE WAS FAITHFUL, AFFECTIONATE  
AND SUCCESSFUL.  
THIS INDEFATIGABLE SERVANT OF THE LORD  
WAS CALLED TO HIS GREAT REWARD  
MAY 30 1790, AGED 32 YEARS.

#### **Notes:**

John Sellers provides the closest link with John Wesley himself, and is mentioned by Wesley in his journal and letters on more than one occasion on his visits to Chester, most notably his last visit in 1790. John Sellers was a schoolmaster, local preacher and class leader. With George Lowe (goldsmith), Sellers had (according to some accounts) set up Chester's first "Sabbath School" at the Octagon Chapel in 1782. He already ran an educational establishment in Queen Street. John Wesley's last visit to Chester (aged 87) was at Easter 1790. In his journal he records his prodigious itinerary. Having preached twice in Manchester on Easter Sunday, on Monday he travelled to Chester, stopping en route to preach at Altrincham and at Northwich. He preached in Chester on successive evenings, presumably at the Octagon Chapel, which was so crowded that "...it could hardly contain the congregation." In his journal for 5<sup>th</sup> April 1790 Wesley writes of this last visit:

“...I was greatly assisted to declare the power of Christ’s resurrection, and to exhort all that were risen with Him to set their affections on things above. Here I met with one of the most extraordinary phenomena that I ever saw or heard of. Mr Sellers has in his yard a large Newfoundland dog, and an old raven; these have fallen deeply in love with each other, and never desire to be apart. The bird has learnt the bark of the dog, so that few can distinguish them. She is inconsolable when he goes out, and if he stays out a day or two, she will get up all the bones and scraps she can, and hoard them up for him, till he comes back!”

This charming recollection is the more poignant because John Sellers died only eight weeks later, at the early age of 32 years. The memorial tablet was erected by one of his former pupils, Rev. George Marsden, who went on to become President of Conference.

**A18.2      John Dudleston (1817 – 1842)**

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF  
**JOHN DUDLESTON**  
*EARLY IMPRESSED WITH THE VALUE OF ETERNAL THINGS  
HE RENOUNCED THE VANITIES OF THE WORLD  
AND EMBRACED THE RELIGION OF CHRIST,  
THE PROFESSION OF WHICH HE ADORNED,  
BOTH IN EXPERIENCE AND IN PRACTICE.  
HIS CAREER ON EARTH WAS SHORT.  
IN SAVING THE LIFE OF HIS FRIEND HE LOST HIS OWN;  
BEING DROWNED IN THE RIVER DEE. JUNE 10<sup>TH</sup> 1842.  
AGED 25 YEARS.*

***‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your  
ways my ways saith the Lord.’ Isaiah.***

**Notes:**

It has proved impossible (so far) to find any contemporary account of John Dudleston’s dramatic and heroic death. It appears not to be recorded, for example, in the *Chester Chronicle* for the succeeding weeks, nor is there any report of the inquest which must have been held. It is not mentioned in Bretherton’s book. Research in the monthly *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* reveals no obituary or other reference to his death. This is all the more surprising given the fact that this memorial tablet was erected. John Dudleston is also commemorated on the Janion family gravestone outside and at the back of the church (set into the city walls). He is described as the nephew of one of the Janions, but owing to erosion the inscription cannot be read in full. The head of the family, Joseph Janion, was one of the principal historians of early Chester and Cheshire Methodism, whose main work was published in 1833. He died in 1838 (four years before John Dudleston’s death) at the venerable age of 88 years.

**A18.3      Thomas Bowers (1798 – 1848)  
              Maria Bowers (1792 – 1852)**

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF  
**MR THOMAS BOWERS**  
OF THIS CITY,  
WHO EXCHANGED MORTALITY FOR LIFE,  
JANUARY 28<sup>TH</sup> 1848 AGED 50 YEARS.

EARLY IN YOUTH, HE ACQUAINTED HIMSELF WITH GOD  
THROUGH FAITH IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,  
AND PURSUED A COURSE OF EMINENT CHISTIAN CONSISTENCY  
TO THE END OF HIS DAYS.

AS A MEMBER OF THE WESLEYAN SOCIETY  
HE WAS CORDIALLY ATTACHED TO ALL ITS INSTITUTIONS,  
AND SUSTAINED THE IMPORTANT OFFICES WHICH WERE CONFIDED TO HIM,  
WITH EXEMPLARY ZEAL AND FIDELITY.

BUT HE WAS 'A LOVER OF GOOD MEN' OF EVERY COMMUNITY,  
AND REJOICED IN THE SUPPORT OF TRUTH AND CHARITY,  
WHEREVER THEY WERE FOUND.

TO THE POOR AND AFFLICTED  
HIS HEART AND HAND WERE FREELY OPENED  
IN SYMPATHY AND AID.

AS A HUSBAND AND FATHER, HE BLENDED THE FONDEST AFFECTION  
WITH WISDOM AND RELIGIOUS CARE:

AND, AS A FRIEND,  
HE WAS CONSTANT, GENEROUS, AND SINCERE.  
'YET NOT HE, BUT THE GRACE OF GOD'

**ALSO**  
**TO THE MEMORY OF**  
**MARIA**

RELICT OF THE ABOVE,  
WHO AFTER A LIFE OF EXEMPLARY CHRISTIAN PIETY,  
ABOUNDING IN OFFICES OF UNSELFISH LOVE,  
AND IN THE FRUIT OF PATIENCE AND PEACE,  
FELL ASLEEP IN JESUS, JULY 2<sup>ND</sup> 1852 AGED 60 YEARS  
'ONE IN CHRIST JESUS'.

**Notes:**

Thomas Bowers was the son of Alderman Henry Bowers (see memorial A18.5 below). He was chapel steward at St. John Street for a short period from 1816 as a very young man (at only 18 years of age) and was again chapel steward from 1831 for 17 years until his death in 1848. His son Thomas Bowers junior, also an Alderman, was chapel steward from 1848 to 1878. He is commemorated in the "Bowers window" adjacent to the main entrance door at the rear of the church. Another son, James Done Bowers, was thereafter chapel steward from 1878 to 1895, completing a continuous period of family service as chapel steward, father and sons, of 64 years. The use of the word "relict" in the memorial rather than "widow" is particularly archaic and quaint.

**A18.4**            **Margaret Lough (1767 – 1835)**  
                     **Ann Lough (1774 – 1836)**  
                     **Sarah Lough (1769 – 1849)**

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF  
**MARGARET LOUGH**

SHE ADORNED THE GOSPEL OF THE REDEEMER  
AS A MEMBER OF THE METHODIST SOCIETY;  
HER PIETY WAS PRACTICAL AND DEVOUT,  
AND HER DEATH WAS PEACEFUL AND TRIUMPHANT.  
OCTOBER 5<sup>TH</sup> 1835 AGED 68 YEARS

ASLO OF  
**ANN LOUGH**

HER CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE WAS SCRIPTURAL  
AND HER REGARD FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST  
WAS SHEWN BY THE CONSECRATION OF HER TIME  
AND PROPERTY TO HIS SERVICE.  
SHE ENTERED INTO THE JOY OF HER LORD  
MARCH 8<sup>TH</sup> 1836, AGED 62 YEARS  
HAVING BEQUEATHED £300 TO THE USE OF THE TRUSTEES  
OF THIS CHAPEL

ALSO  
**SARAH LOUGH**

WHO DIED SEPTEMBER 15<sup>TH</sup> 1849 AGED 80 YEARS.  
HER END WAS PEACE.

**Notes:**

There is no mention of these three women in Bretherton's book, but presumably they were sisters. It has proved very difficult, so far, to find more than the barest information about them. There is no obituary for any of them in the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*. This may be because members of the Chester Wesleyan Circuit were remiss in submitting obituaries. Of those commemorated in the seven memorial tablets, the only two for whom obituaries appear in the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* are Sarah Broster and Phillis Downes, and both were living in other parts of the country when they died. Nor is there any mention of the name Lough in the relevant trade directories for Chester held by the Cheshire Record Office: *Cowdroy's Directory of Cheshire 1789* and *Pigot's Directory of Cheshire 1822*. The inference must be that the three women were of independent means. Miss Lough, is recorded in the street directory for 1828 as living in Nicholas Street. This accords with the residential address given in Ann Lough's will dated 3rd December 1835 (which has been examined). She made this will a few weeks after the death of her sister Margaret. It is reasonable to assume, given their dates of birth, that the Lough sisters were among the earliest members of the Octagon Chapel and subsequently St. John Street. It is likely that, as girls, they would have heard John Wesley preach. The sum of £300 bequeathed by Ann Lough on her death in 1836 equates to about £26,000 at 2012 values. In her will the bequest was made "to assist in defraying the chapel debt."

**A18.5**            **Alderman Henry Bowers (1770 – 1830)**  
                     **Elizabeth Bowers (1769 – 1824)**

THIS TABLET IS INSCRIBED IN MEMORY OF  
**ALDERMAN HENRY BOWERS,**  
 WHO  
 IN THE VIGOROUS MATURITY OF HIS DAYS,  
 RENOUNCED THE VANITIES OF THE WORLD  
 FOR THE SERVICE AND REPROACH OF CHRIST.  
 HAVING TWICE SERVED HIS FELLOW CITIZENS  
 AS MAYOR OF CHESTER,  
 AND ACCOMPLISHED A LONG PERIOD OF USEFUL LABOUR  
 AS A CLASS LEADER AND LOCAL PREACHER,  
 IN THE METHODIST SOCIETY  
 AND AS AN ASSIDUOUS AND FAITHFUL GUARDIAN  
 OF THE INTERESTS OF THIS CHAPEL  
 HE FINISHED HIS COURSE WITH JOY,  
 ON THE 8<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF JANUARY IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1830,  
 AND IN THE 60<sup>TH</sup> YEAR OF HIS AGE.  
 HE IS REMEMBERED WITH AFFECTIONATE VENERATION,  
 AS A ZEALOUS, CONSISTENT AND DEVOUT CHRISTIAN.  
 AS AN ABLE, ACTIVE AND UPRIGHT MAGISTRATE,  
 AS A FATHER WISELY KIND AND EMINENTLY SUCCESSFUL  
 IN CONVEYING SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS TO HIS FAMILY;  
 AND AS A MAN IN WHOM GREAT BENEVOLENCE  
 WAS COMBINED WITH QUICK DISCERNMENT,  
 AND EXTRAORDINARY ARDOUR  
 WITH INVINCIBLE PERSEVERANCE.

IN THE SAME GRAVE, REPOSE  
 THE EARTHLY REMAINS OF **ELIZABETH**, HIS WIFE,  
 WHOSE AMIABLE CHARACTER AND STERLING PIETY  
 JUSTLY ENDEARED HER TO HER FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

SHE DIED IN THE LORD ON 26<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF APRIL 1824 AGED 53 YEARS

**Notes:**

Henry Bowers was one of the most colourful characters in early Chester Methodism, and members of his family were prominent in Chester Methodism throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was a druggist by trade and profession, but also a magistrate, a member of the Corporation (City Councillor), the Captain of a Company in a Regiment of Volunteers, and the proprietor of a theatre in Chester. He underwent a conversion experience comparatively late in life in 1810 (at the age of 40), during the latter days of worship at the Octagon Chapel. He had begun to attend evangelical preaching wherever he could hear it, notably at the Cathedral. Given his prominent position in society his visits to the Octagon were made as secretly as possible to avoid attracting attention. His own expressive phrase was that he practised “Nicodemussing”: see John, chapter 3. (Nicodemus, as a leading Pharisee and member of the Jewish council would visit Jesus by night, and it was to him that St. John records Jesus imparting some of his greatest truths). Following his conversion Bowers soon became a class leader and local preacher. Such was the novelty of an alderman occupying a Methodist pulpit that his first sermon in Chester attracted many who were not accustomed to attend the chapel. Local preachers were required to apply at Quarter Sessions for a licence to preach under the Toleration Act 1689. The ordeal for Bowers, as an alderman and magistrate, of having to make such an application before his fellow magistrates was the more acute because he had to produce to the court the circuit plan on which he was shown as being only “on trial” as a preacher. Writing many years later Rev. Josiah Goodwin said of a class meeting led by Bowers in the early years of the



century: “The leader stood in a desk, and from thence gave his exhortations to the members, in a manner so able, authoritative, and impressive that his youthful hearer never forgot it.” Bowers was one of the founding trustees of the new St. John Street chapel, and a generous initial subscriber. His wife, Elizabeth Bowers also became a devoted class leader. Bowers was twice Mayor of Chester, in 1817 and 1827. When his first election was opposed on account of his public embracing of Methodism, and it was suggested he might content himself with private membership and leave off preaching, he replied: “No, I esteem it a much greater honour to preach the Gospel than to be Mayor of Chester, and I will make no such stipulation”. Reference has already been made to one of his sons, Thomas Bowers (see memorial A18.3 above). His other son, Rev. John Bowers, candidated for the ministry at the unusually young age of 17 years. He rose to the front rank of Methodist preachers of his day. He became Governor of the Didsbury Theological College, and in 1858 was elected President of Conference.

#### **A18.6 Sarah Broster (1770 – 1837)**

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF  
**SARAH BROSTER**  
 LATE OF THIS CITY  
 WHO EXEMPLIFIED THE POWER OF RELIGION  
 FOR A PERIOD OF TWENTY FIVE YEARS  
 REJOICING IN ITS BLESSINGS AND  
 EXHIBITING ITS FRUITS  
 IN THE OFFICE OF A CLASS LEADER,  
 SHE WAS FAITHFUL,  
 CONSTANT IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON.  
 SHE WENT ABOUT DOING GOOD;  
 HER END WAS PEACE.  
 SHE DIED MARCH 28<sup>TH</sup> 1837 AGED 66 YEARS.

#### **Notes:**

Sarah Broster’s grandfather Alderman Thomas Broster, was Mayor of Chester in 1752. He came to John Wesley’s aid on his third visit to Chester in 1753, taking steps to prevent a riot when a large mob assembled outside the house where Wesley was preaching. Wesley described him in his journal for 27<sup>th</sup> March 1753 as “a man of courage as well as honesty.” Her father, Alderman Peter Broster, was also Mayor of Chester, in 1791. She is commemorated in a book by Rev. P.C. Turner published in 1839, two years after her death, entitled *Memoirs of Miss Sarah Broster of Chester* (available for e-reading on the internet, by googling the name of the book). By the time the book was published, this memorial tablet in St John Street had already been erected. The *Memoirs* recall her speaking of her conversion experience on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1812 as “the most momentous and memorable day of my life”, this date no doubt explaining the reference in the memorial to the period of 25 years faithful service thereafter, until her death in 1837. She was a close friend of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Bowers (see memorial A18.5 above), and had been their bridesmaid. In a letter to Mrs. Bowers dated 21<sup>st</sup> July 1812 she wrote of a sermon which had recently made a deep impression upon her on “your husband’s favourite text – Nicodemus”, a text on which she had heard Mr. Bowers himself preach the previous year. She was also a close and lifelong friend of Phillis Downes (née Williams): see memorial A18.7 below. Much of their correspondence is set out in the *Memoirs*. Sarah Broster never married, but accompanied her brother when he moved from Chester to live in Edinburgh from 1824 to 1826, and then moved to London where they lived in Cadogan Place, Chelsea. She continued throughout to play a full part in the life of the church as a class leader. In 1829 she moved back to Chester, and remained there until 1834 when she and her brother moved for the last time to live at East Cowes on the Isle of Wight where she died in 1837, just a few months after her friend Phillis Downes. The *Memoirs* recount that there was, even in her latter years, “a delightful vivacity in her conversation, harmonizing, however, with the most solemn truths of our creed, and with her

consciousness of the presence of God.” Shortly before her death she spoke of her “hope to meet all my Chester friends in heaven.”

**A18.7      Phillis Downes (1780 – 1836)**

IN MEMORY OF  
**PHILLIS DOWNES**  
(LATE OF CHESTER) DAUGHTER OF  
PHILIP WILLIAMS OF RACRE  
WHO DIED DECEMBER 12<sup>th</sup> 1836  
AGED 57 YEARS

THIS TABLET IS ERECTED  
BY A FEW OF HER FRIENDS IN TOKEN  
OF THEIR ADMIRATION OF HER PIETY,  
HER UNWEARIED ZEAL AND LIBERALITY  
AND HER STEADFAST ADHERENCE  
TO THE DOCTRINES AND DISCIPLINE OF  
WESLEYAN METHODISM

**Notes:**

Phillis Downes was a member of the extensive Williams family, who lived at Rackery (or Racre) near Gresford. It is explained in Palmer’s *History of the town of Wrexham* (1893) that the name “Rackery” is an English corruption of the Welsh “Yr Acre” (The Acres). Her father and mother, Richard and Elizabeth Williams, had founded an early Methodist society at their farmhouse at Rackery, where he remained a class leader for over 50 years. They and their children became members of the Octagon Chapel in its final years. They had nine surviving children, six daughters and three sons, all of whom (Bretherton records) “rose to positions of honour and usefulness in the Christian Church.” The eldest daughter Margaret was set up by her parents in a linen drapery business in Chester, in Shoemakers’ Row, Northgate Street. A brother and several sisters, including Phillis, joined her and in due course apparently took over the business. They lived over the shop, where a room in the house was appropriated “for the purpose of public prayer and weekly meetings for the spiritual good of her neighbours.” In 1798 John Bryan of Llanfyllin became an assistant in the drapery business. He underwent a conversion experience and initially joined the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists in Chester, but soon transferred to the Octagon Chapel. He became a local preacher and then, in 1801, a Wesleyan Methodist minister, serving for 30 years stationed throughout Wales as well as England. He translated several of Charles Wesley’s hymns into Welsh. In Phillis’s obituary in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* in 1837 it is recorded that “at the age of twenty-one (*this would have been 1801*) she was placed at the head of a large establishment; this, however, only made her more frequent and earnest in prayer, so that she was enabled to be ‘careful without care’...” The business was clearly successful. Phillis, her sister Martha and her brother Samuel, are recorded first in the list of subscribers to the new chapel at St John Street, giving £100 (about £6,000 at 2012 values) and Phillis subscribed a further £50 on her own account. Samuel was one of the founding trustees and served as chapel steward from 1821 to 1823. Phillis was a class leader at the Octagon Chapel and subsequently at St John Street. She married John Downes, a hat manufacturer from Manchester, and lived with him there until her death. She was a great friend and correspondent of Sarah Broster (see memorial A18.6 above). In one of her last letters some months after Phillis Downes’ death, quoted in *Memoirs of Miss Sarah Broster of Chester* (1839), Sarah Broster wrote to a friend in Chester: “I hope that for the few remaining days of my life, the Spirit of God will so abide in my soul, that, being fully renewed in righteousness, I shall again, with my very dear friend Mrs. Downes, and with many others that I have known, and many that I do not know and love, be blessed, for ever blessed, in joining the heavenly chorus of praise and thanksgiving to God.” It is fitting that the memorials to Henry and Elizabeth Bowers, and to their young friends and protégées Sarah Broster and Phillis Downes, are located next to each other on the north wall.

## **Appendix 19: Dee Bridge Disaster, May 24<sup>th</sup> 1847 (source: 'Wikipedia')**

*This appendix is included for general interest and in relation to the disaster occurring soon after a Sunday School trip by rail to Ruabon on the same line – see section 3.2 of this History.*

### **A19.1 Robert Stephenson and the Early Railways**

Robert Stephenson (1803 - 1859) was the son of George; together they developed many of the early railway projects and pioneered the design of steam locomotives. Robert established the firm of Robert Stephenson and Company in 1823: its Forth Street Works in Newcastle were the first locomotive works in the world. They built locomotives such as 'Locomotion', which George used in 1825 for the opening of the Stockton and Darlington line. In 1827 his father was building the Liverpool and Manchester Railway. Robert took charge at the Forth Street Works and worked on the development of a locomotive 'Rocket', which had a multi-tubular boiler to obtain maximum steam pressure from the exhaust gases. 'Rocket' competed successfully in the Rainhill Trials; none of its competitors completed the trial. The Liverpool and Manchester Railway opened in 1830.

In 1833 Robert was given the post of Chief Engineer for the London and Birmingham Railway, the first main-line railway to enter London, and the initial section of the West Coast Main Line. In 1838, he was summoned to Tuscany to direct the works for the successful Leopolda railway. He later advised on new railway projects in France, Spain and Switzerland.

Robert Stephenson constructed many bridges for the new railway lines, including several famous ones. In 1850 the railway from London to Scotland via Newcastle was completed. He designed the High Level Bridge at Newcastle upon Tyne, with rail traffic carried on the upper deck and road traffic on the lower one. He also designed the Royal Border Bridge over the Tweed for the same line, an imposing viaduct of 28 arches. In the same year Stephenson and William Fairbairn's Britannia Bridge across the Menai Strait was opened. This bridge had the novel design of wrought-iron box-section tubes carrying railway lines inside them. The Conwy railway bridge between Llandudno Junction and Conwy (which is still used by trains) had been built in 1848 using a similar design.

### **A19.2 Collapse of the Dee Bridge in 1847**

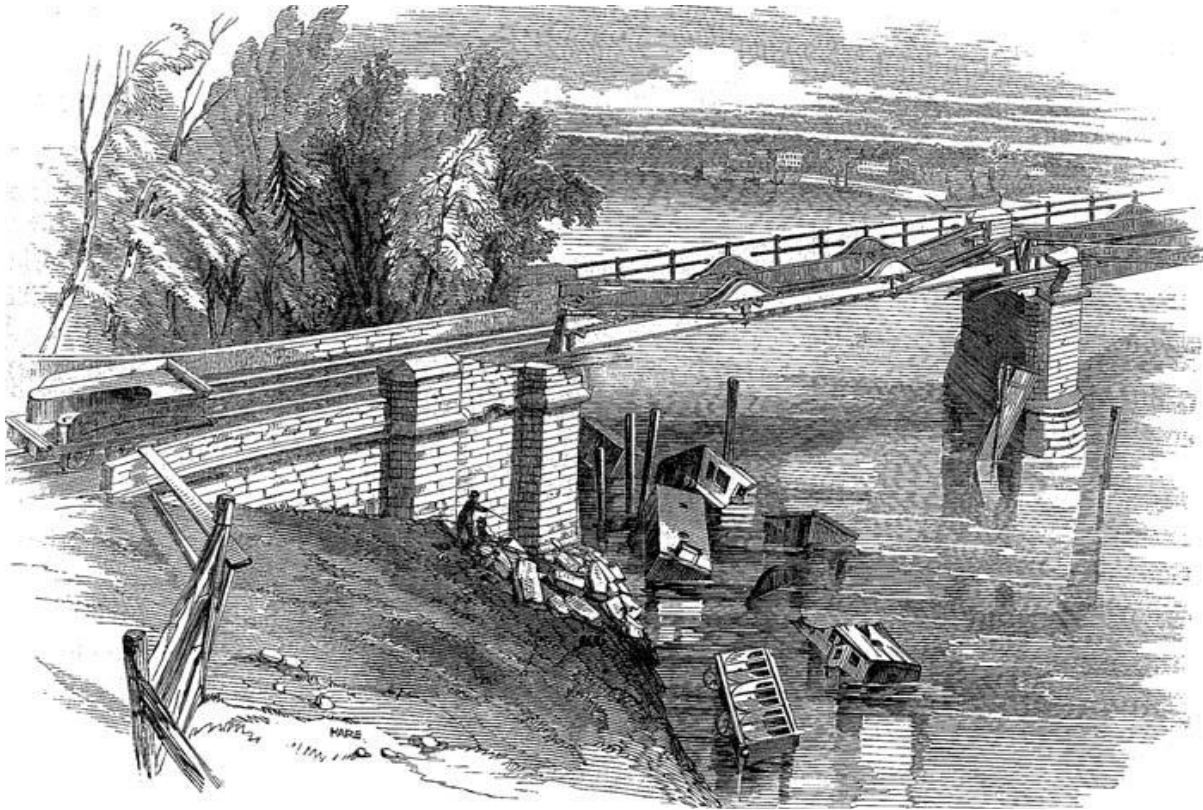
The railway line from London to Holyhead was built in the 1840s. For the crossing of the River Dee in Chester the chief engineer, Robert Stephenson, chose a design based on cast iron girders. These had been used before in railway bridges, but the girders were exceptionally long (98ft) for the Dee bridge. The bridge was brought into service in November 1846.

On Monday 24 May 1847 at about 6.15pm, a local train to Ruabon was crossing the third span when one of the girders failed suddenly. The engine and tender made it to the far side, but the passenger carriages fell into the river, 50ft below. Five lives were lost and about 20 people were injured (see the etching Fig. 96 below). There was a national outcry about the accident and Robert Stephenson came close to being accused of manslaughter for the design.

Brittle failure of the cast iron girder was probably caused by repeated flexing as trains traversed the bridge. The extra load from ballast put on top of the oak beams supporting the track a few hours

earlier (to prevent cinders from causing a risk of fire) was a contributory cause. Other cast iron railway bridge failures occurred in subsequent years until a major review in 1891 recommended that the cast iron structures should be replaced with wrought iron or steel structures.

**Fig. 96: View of Dee Bridge Disaster - etching from Illustrated London News of 12 June 1847:**  
*the view is from the south bank of the Dee looking north west*



A20.1 Chester Courant. Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September 1812 (page 1) [Ref.: CALS MF 227/6]

14TH SEPT. 1812

PUBLIC NOTICE

**METHODIST NEW CHAPEL,**

*ST. JOHN'S STREET, CHESTER*

The Committee of trustees engaged in building this Chapel, respectfully inform the Subscribers and the Public, that the pews may be taken on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> and Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> of this instant, attendance will be given for this purpose in the Vestry Room, on the morning of each of these days, from ten till twelve o'clock: but no Pews will be let upon the first day except to the Subscribers, who will be permitted to select them in rotation, according to the amount of their respective Subscriptions, the highest first, and so on to the lowest. All the Subscribers who intend to take Seats are requested to attend on this day, as no further preference will be given. On Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> the remaining Pews may be taken by Non Subscribers, and the first applicant will be permitted to engage the first Pew, not taken the previous day by a Subscriber.

**THE CHAPEL WILL BE OPENED**

*ON SUNDAY THE FOURTH OF OCTOBER*

The Hours of Service will be,

*Half-past Ten in the Morning, half-past Two in the Afternoon, and Six in the Evening*

It is expected that the Rev. SAMUEL BRADBURN, and the Rev. JOHN GAULTIER, from *Liverpool*, and the Rev. JABEZ BUNTING, from *Halifax*, will preach upon this occasion.

In order to accommodate the friends of this Interest with room, and also to aid the Subscriptions, it is intended that every person shall give Silver as they enter the doors, at each of the services. The Sum thus raised will be added up to the Collections, which will be made immediately after every Sermon.

A20.2 Chester Courant, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1813 (page 2, column 4) [Ref.: CALS MF 227/7]

*Chester, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1813*

**OCTAGON CHAPEL**

***CHESTER***

**TO BE SOLD AT AUCTION**

BY MR. JOHN POWELL

*At the Hop-pole Inn, on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> day of this instant, at five o'clock in the evening, subject to such conditions as shall be then and there produced:*

A Large and Valuable FREEHOLD PROPERTY, situate in Foregate-street, consisting of an extensive Brick Building, commonly called the OCTAGON CHAPEL, and lately occupied as a place of public worship, by a large dissenting congregation, measuring from forty to fifty feet diameter within, annexed to which is a small Vestry; also, all the interior furniture, consisting of a large Gallery, and upwards of Sixty Pews, a large Pulpit, &c. &c. &c. A convenient Dwelling-house, behind and adjoining the Chapel, to which there is a road round the building; also, a pleasant garden, thirty six feet by seventeen, each of which is now in the occupation of the Rev. William Hill. There is a road

leading from the street to the chapel, of sufficient width to admit a cart or carriage, and the whole is well calculated for any establishment requiring extent of ground or building. Immediate possession may be had.

**A20.3 Chester Chronicle, 22<sup>ND</sup> June 1906**

## St. John St. Wesleyan Chapel.

### RECONSTRUCTION SCHEME.

Not a few Cestrians, I imagine, regret the disappearance of the old semi-circular chapel which for nearly one hundred years—to be exact since 1811—stood in St. John-street. I for one share the feeling of sorrow at the extinction of these old landmarks. But to me the pang of regret is often blunted when I discover that what we lose in historic association we gain in architectural beauty, character, and dignity. The St. John-street building is a case in point. The old chapel has, and long will have, a hallowed place in the memories of hundreds of Cestrians and county people, but nevertheless it was inelegant and even ungainly.

—o—

Instead of that dull semi-circular red-brick frontage, with its ominous cracks, we have to-day a structure which forms a distinct addition to the architectural attractiveness of our constantly improving city. And if in this period of Chester's renaissance—for the advance in the artistic improvement of the city during the last twenty or five-and-twenty years may fitly be described by that title—if St. Werburgh's-street provides a monument to the name of Douglas, this splendid new chapel front in St. John-street, even standing alone, will perform a similar service to that of Lockwood.

—o—

Much of the scaffolding having now been removed, an almost perfect view can be obtained of the handsome brick and stone front which Mr. W. T. Lockwood, F.R.I.B.A., has designed, and which Mr. Morton Browne has erected. The design is unique; I have seen nothing like it in this part of the country; it is dignified; it improves the street. The large tracery window and the two porch entrances compel admiration, while the general effect is calculated to satisfy the most aesthetic mind. I can well imagine some Charles Brown of the future gazing on this building and soliloquizing: "Designed by a Cestrian, built by a Cestrian, all that beautiful stonework brought from a Cheshire quarry. Delightful!"

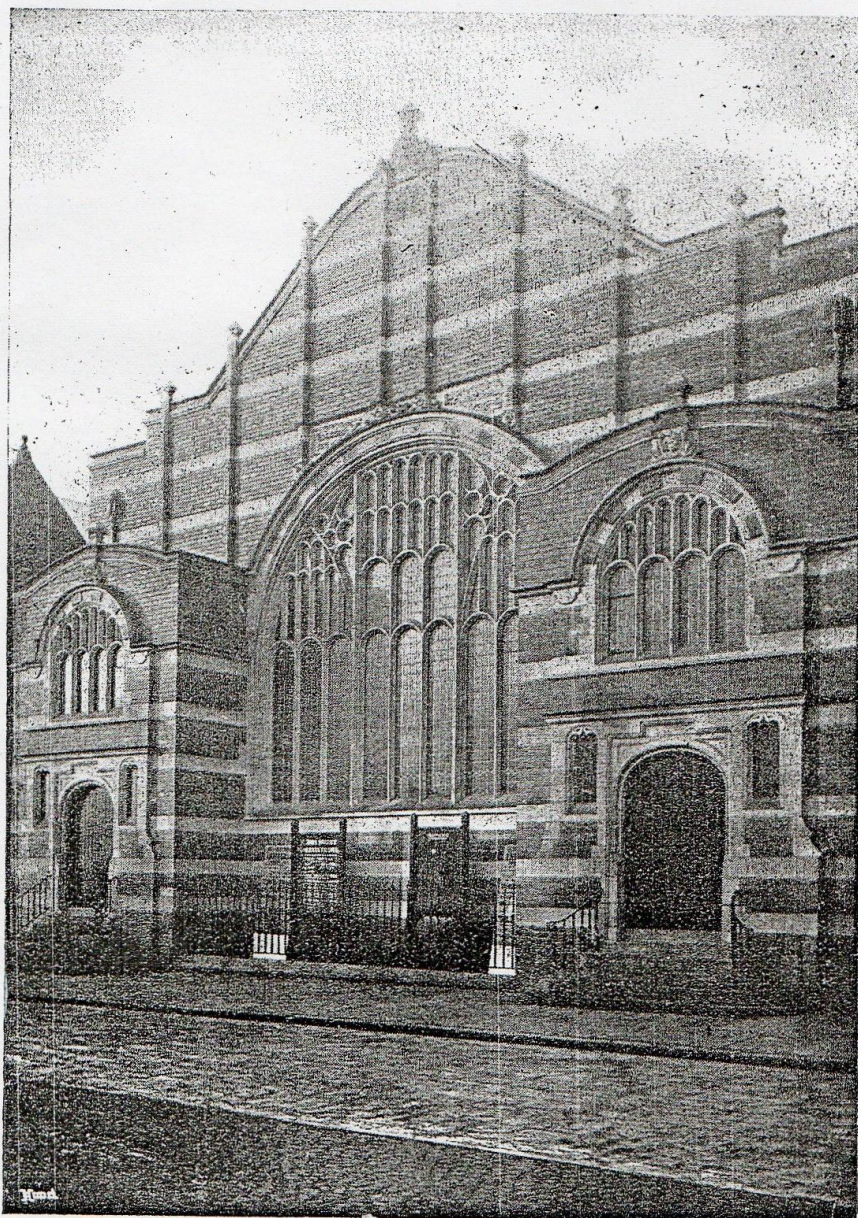
—o—

Of course, the alterations are not all external, as was foreshadowed in a special article published in the "Chronicle" a month or two ago. The body of the chapel has been re-seated throughout, the rostrum being left in abeyance for the present. It is expected that this transformed edifice will be ready for formal opening in September. Meanwhile those Cestrians who rarely pass along St. John-street would do well to pay this place a visit, for I feel sure that not one amongst them will say that my appreciation is exaggerated.



*Copied with acknowledgement to the Chester Heritage Centre*

A Brief Account  
OF  
Methodism in Chester.



ST. JOHN STREET WESLEYAN CHAPEL.

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS held Nov. 28th & 29th, 1912.





**M**ETHODISM was introduced into the City of Chester about the year 1746. The first preacher who visited its neighbourhood was Mr. John Bennett of Chinley, who commenced his labours at Huntington Hall, then the residence of Mr. George Calton. Thence the preaching was removed to the residence of Mr. Richard Jones in Love Lane, where the first Methodist Society in Chester was formed in 1751. Open air preaching took place also near St. John's Church, in the square near St. Martin's Ash, in Boughton, in Queen Street, and on the Dee Banks. Early in 1752 this house became too small for the increasing number who flocked to the services, and the Society procured and fitted up a capacious barn in St. Martin's Ash, on the South side of St. Martin's Church. From this time Chester was regularly visited by the travelling preachers, and periodically by the Rev. John Wesley, particularly on his way to and from Ireland, for which he embarked at Parkgate. It then formed part of the Cheshire Circuit, which comprised Lancashire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and parts of Yorkshire.

In 1764 the Society purchased some property near the Bars, in Foregate Street, where they built the Octagon Chapel, capable of seating 600 persons, and a house for the preacher, when Chester was made the head of a very extensive circuit, including what are now the Wrexham, Tarporley, Mold, Frodsham, Birkenhead, Nantwich and Whitchurch Circuits.

During the period immediately following the erection of the Octagon Chapel some remarkable men were brought under Methodist influence. Among these may be mentioned Samuel Bradburn, a shoemaker, who was converted in 1769 and entered the Methodist ministry. He is known as the Methodist Demosthenes, and became President in 1799.

John Gaultier also entered the ministry from Chester in 1785, and was President in 1817.

At the Watchnight Service in 1786, William Moulton, who had been brought up in the Established Church, gave his heart to God. Thus Methodism gained the remarkable Moulton family.

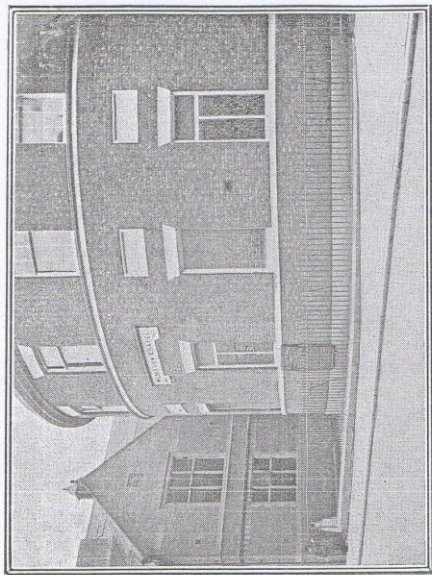
Richard Reece, of Tarporley in this circuit, was received as a minister on trial at the Conference of 1787, and became President in 1816, and again in 1835.

During the last few months in which the Methodists worshipped in the Octagon Chapel, the noteworthy conversion of Henry Bowers took place. He soon became a class-leader and local preacher, and in these offices, and as Alderman of the City, and afterwards in 1817 and 1827 as Mayor, he rendered special service to his native city, and to the Methodist Church.

His son, Rev. John Bowers was a very successful Methodist Minister, and was Governor of the Theological Institute at Didsbury during the last twenty years of his active ministry. He was elected President in 1858.

As the Methodist Society continued to increase in number and influence, it became necessary to obtain still greater accommodation, and in 1811 the Chapel in St. John Street was built.





ORIGINAL EXTERIOR.

The Trustees had to borrow £5,070 out of the £6,865 which this undertaking cost. But our fathers built Churches in faith, and left posterity to pay for them. It was not until 1873—a period of 60 years—that it is recorded that “During the year the Trustees have been able to make arrangements for the entire extinction of the debt on the premises, on the occasion of the laying of the top-stone of the City Road Chapel.”

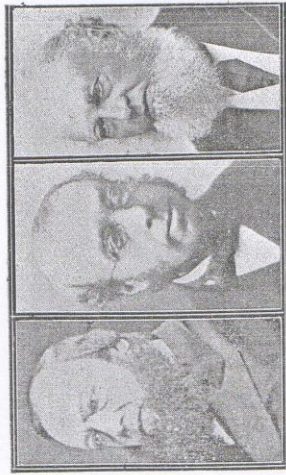
The Chapel was opened for public worship on October 4th, 1812.

The Superintendent Minister,—the Rev. John Braithwait took the introductory part of the morning service, and the Rev. Samuel Bradburn preached.

The Rev. John Gaulter preached in the afternoon, and the Rev. Jabez Bunting at night.

During the past century, many notable and good men have been associated with the Church meeting in this venerable sanctuary.

Among the converts in the New Chapel was a man of most interesting character. In 1817 David Jackson, deeply impressed by the preaching of Alderman Henry Bowers, became a member of the Methodist Church. He was a man whose life was steeped in prayer, and as a class-leader and local preacher, was eminently useful for half a century. Older members of the Church to the present day speak of him with great regard and affection.



Ald. T. Bowers. Mr. Jas. D. Bowers. Mr. H. R. Bowers.

For sixty-seven years out of the century, the office of chapel steward was filled by Henry Bowers, his son, and two grandsons. It is interesting to note that in 1848, when one of the grandsons, Alderman T. Bowers, took office as chapel steward, there was still a debt of £4,000 on the Trust. At his retirement in 1878 the trustees record that “There is only a floating balance.” A brother, James D. Bowers, then held the office till 1895. We must not forget that at this time, and till his falling asleep in 1902, at the age of eighty-one, Henry Richard Bowers was steward of the fine Church in City Road, built in 1872-73 because St. John Street was too strait to accommodate the worshippers.

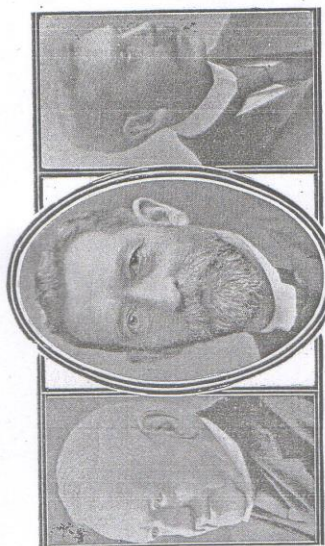
Associated with Mr. H. R. Bowers in the erection of City Road Chapel, were Mr. John Griffiths, Mr. Robert Evans,



and Mr. Robert Challinor, who served the Church in a most acceptable manner in many ways, and who are remembered with much esteem.

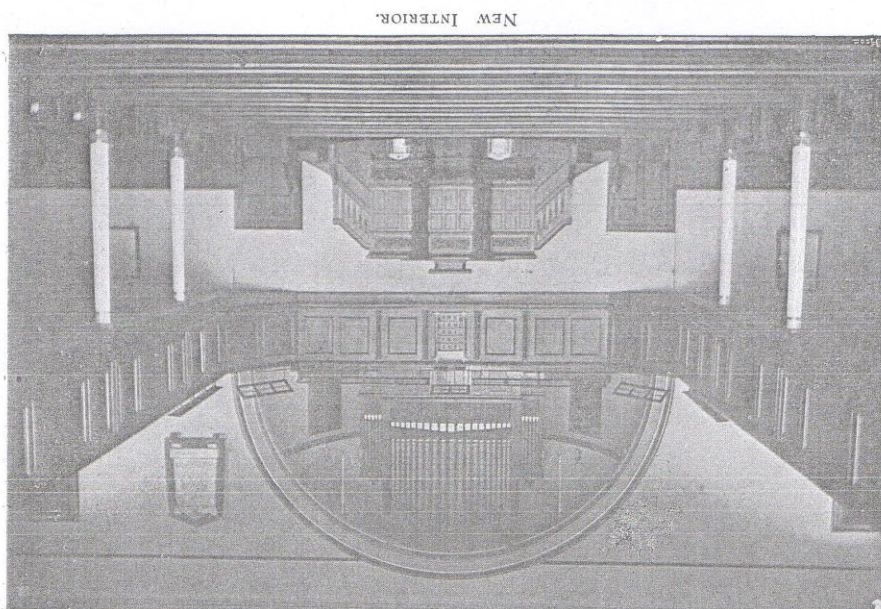
In 1856, through the influence of Mr. Joseph Beckett, Mr. Meacock, and other Methodists, who were residing in the neighbourhood, a chapel was built at Saltney, and a very healthy and vigorous cause was established, which has been sustained until the present time.

Another extension was made in 1888 by the successful establishment of Methodist services in Garden Lane.



Mr. W. T. Davies, J.P.   Rev. John Davies.   Mr. A. W. Butt.

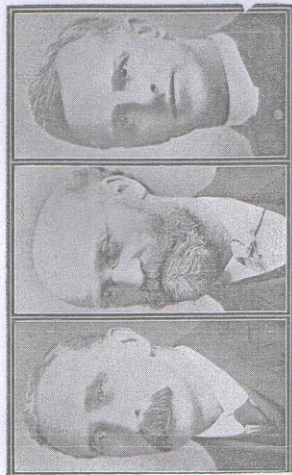
Prominent among the workers of the St. John Street Society, have been the late Mr. W. Twiston Davies, J.P. (whose son, Mr. S. P. Davies, is now secretary of the Trust), a devoted advocate and supporter of Foreign Missions; and Mr. A. W. Butt, following in the footsteps of his father, Mr. Francis Butt. Largely owing to the initiative and efforts of these gentlemen, an extensive scheme of reconstruction was carried out in 1905, and the body of the chapel was re-seated.





New and commodious Sunday Schools were also erected by their instrumentality, in association with Mr. J. D. Bowers and Mr. John Mills, who with a number of other worthies—"After they had served their generation by the will of God, have fallen asleep."

Many families formerly connected with this place of worship have left the city; and some have become adherents of City Road, Garden Lane, and other Churches; but the work and worship have been continuously carried on.



Mr. W. H. Marchant. Mr. A. W. Lucas, F.G.S. Rev. D. Hinchcliff.

Under the ministry of Rev. J. Davies and Rev. D. Hinchcliff, the Sunday Services have been ably and acceptably sustained. We have a vigorous and well attended Wesley Guild, and Pleasant Monday Afternoon; and weekly meetings for Prayer are held.

The Sunday School is also a very encouraging department of our work; and the Band of Hope is very successful. Not only is Temperance teaching given, but also on alternate weeks the members are instructed in various departments of useful and entertaining work.

The maintenance, lighting, cleaning, warming, and care of the premises require an average annual outlay of about £150 per annum.

Towards this, the seat rents average about £70 per year, the Anniversary Services yield about £20 per year, and the Sunday School contribution is £15 per year.

These are the only sources of regular income, so about £50 per year has to be raised by special efforts.

The Trustees therefore earnestly appeal to the members of the Church and congregation to generously contribute to the support of the place in which they meet to worship God, and with which they have so many hallowed associations.

ALFRED W. LUCAS,  
*Trustees' Treasurer.*

A complete list of *all* the Preachers appointed to the Chester Circuit from its commencement, cannot fail to be of interest to Chester Methodists. They are as follow :—

- 1765 Alex Mathers, Wm. Menthorpe.
- 1766 Thomas Johnson, Parson Greenwood.
- 1767 Thomas Taylor, Moseley Cheek.
- 1768 Thomas Oliver, William Harris.
- 1769 John Shaw, Richard Seeds, Samuel Bardsley.
- 1770 John Shaw, J. Guilford, R. Costerdine, W. Linnell.
- 1771 Thomas Guilford, B. Thomas.
- 1772 John Oliver, Robert Costerdine.
- 1773 John Oliver, Thomas Briscoe.
- 1774 William Collins, F. Wrigley.
- 1775 William Collins, Thomas Carlisle.
- 1776 John Mason, Robert Roberts.
- 1777 John Murlin, Robert Roberts.
- 1778 J. Barry, Robert Costerdine.
- 1779 J. Barry, William Hornet.
- 1780 William Boothby, Jonathan Hern.
- 1781 William Boothby, Jonathan Hern, W. Simpson.



- 1782 John Fenwick, John Goodwin, John Oliver.  
 1783 Duncan Wright, John Goodwin, George Gibbon.  
 1784 Duncan Wright, Thomas Corbett, E. Jackson.  
 1785 Richard Rodda, John Fletcher, M. Horne, J. Kaye.  
 1786 Richard Rodda, Thomas Briscoe, J. Beaumont.  
 1787 Andrew Blair, William Ellis, James Rydall.  
 1788 Robert Roberts, George Lowe.  
 1789 Parson Greenwood, F. Truscott, J. Denton.  
 1790 Parson Greenwood, Richard Seede, J. Wiltshaw.  
 1791 James Thom, George Lowe.  
 1792 F. Wrigley, R. Condy, James Thom.  
 1793 John Booth, Samuel Bardsley.  
 1794 John Booth, Owen Davis, Thomas Himmens.  
 1795 John McDonald, William Simpson, John Collier.  
 1796 John Goodwin, R. Crowther, M. Emmitt.  
 1797 John Goodwin, R. Crowther, Isaac Lilly.  
 1798 Thomas Hutton, James Rydall, George Morley.  
 1799 Thomas Hutton, James Rydall, George Morley.  
 1800 Samuel Botts, James Gill, John Penman.  
 1801 Alex. Duter, John Kershaw, John Penman.  
 1802 Alex. Duter, Joseph Cooke, George Lowe.  
 1803 F. West, James Townley.  
 1804 F. West, James Townley.  
 1805 Robert Millar, Thomas Preston.  
 1806 Robert Millar, Thomas Preston.  
 1807 Matthew Lumb, A. B. Seckerson, J. Reynolds.  
 1808 John Ogilvie, Samuel Warren.  
 1809 John Ogilvie, Samuel Warren.  
 1810 John Braithwaite, Isaac Muff.  
 1811 John Braithwaite, Isaac Muff.  
 1812 William Hill.  
 1813 John Doncaster.  
 1814 Edward Oakes.  
 1815 Thomas Pinder.  
 1816 William Aver, James Blackett.  
 1818 George Warren, Andrew Taylor.  
 1819 Andrew Taylor, George Sykes.  
 1820 James Bogie.
- 1821 Joseph Fowler.  
 1822 William Coultas.  
 1823 John Greeves.  
 1824 William Smith.  
 1825 John Hick.  
 1826 William Hinson.  
 1828 William Jackson, Joseph Rayner.  
 1831 James Shoar, Edward Walker.  
 1832 Duncan Kay.  
 1833 James Heaton.  
 1834 Thomas Edwards.  
 1835 John Stamp, J. Stawe, J. Healey.  
 1836 John Morris.  
 1838 Ralph Scurrah, Samuel Fiddian, Wm. Lindley.  
 1840 Wm. France, Jos. Hargreaves, Wm. Prescott.  
 1841 Thomas Stead, W. H. Clarkson, Edward Jones.  
 1844 John R. Brown, Wm. H. Taylor.  
 1847 Charles Cheetham, Joseph Akrill.  
 1850 William B. Thorneioe, John Tucker.  
 1852 Frederick F. Woolley.  
 1853 William Jessop.  
 1854 Thomas Dicken, William Jessop.  
 1856 Thomas Brookes.  
 1857 Thomas Brookes, James E. Cooke.  
 1858 John Henshall.  
 1860 Levi Waterhouse.  
 1861 James Millar, Charles Swannell.  
 1862 John C. Pengelly, John F. Moody.  
 1864 Nathan Raw.  
 1865 Phillip Fowler, Wm. Willan, Joshua Johnson.  
 1886 Wm. Willan, Samuel McAulay, Joseph Olphert.  
 1868 Richard Martin.  
 1869 John Pogson.  
 1871 Thomas Kent.  
 1872 John Clegg.  
 1873 William Bond.  
 1874 George Smith.  
 1875 Joseph Dawson, Thomas Puddicombe.



- 1876 Benjamin Smith (3 years).
- 1878 Nehemiah Curnock (3 years).
- 1879 James Chalmers (3 years).
- 1881 Alfred Sargent (3 years).
- 1882 John S. Workman.
- 1883 John M. Bamford (3 years).
- 1884 Alfred H. Vine (3 years).
- 1886 Isaac E. Page (3 years).
- 1887 William Oldfield (3 years).
- 1889 Richard Peart (3 years).
- 1890 Samuel E. Keeble, S. Gamble Walker (3 years).
- 1892 Frederic Haines (3 years).
- 1893 Edmund Potts (3 years).
- 1894 Richard W. Watson (3 years).
- 1895 James Morrison (3 years).
- 1896 John W. Blackett (3 years).
- 1897 F. F. Bretherton B.A. (3 years).
- 1898 J. Bourne Jones (3 years).
- 1899 Arthur W. Ward, B.A. (3 years).
- 1900 Wilfred S. Hackett (3 years).
- 1901 Thomas Hollis (3 years).
- 1902 Alfred S. Sharp (3 years).
- 1903 Wm. A. Prunell (3 years).
- 1904 Timothy Wheatley (3 years).
- 1905 Richard Wormwell (3 years).
- 1906 Percy H. Simpson (1 year).
- 1907 Woodthorpe Baker (Died, May 1908)
- 1907 Samuel G. Haywood (3 years).
- 1908 E. Wright Adcock (3 years).
- 1908 Thomas A. Pye (3 years).
- 1910 T. Maltby Kerruish (2 years).
- 1911 John Davies.
- 1911 David Hinchcliff.





# LIST OF REFERENCES

| Ref. No. | Title   | Author              | Date |
|----------|---|---------------------|------|
| 1        | <b>Early Methodism in and around Chester 1749-1812</b><br>(Recently re-published in hardback by BIBLIOLIFE) | F. F. Bretherton    | 1903 |
| 2        | <b>Reminiscences of Chester Methodism</b><br>(Copy in Reference Section of Chester Central Library)         | Rev. Kenneth Bounds | 1975 |

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With grateful thanks and acknowledgement to the following:-

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|--|
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| <p><b>Recent contributors of advice, assistance and material:</b><br/> Ruth Blakebrough-Miller, Neale Evans, Rev. Ralph Fennell, Derek Fry, John Griffiths, Rosemary Hall, Rev. Claire Heald, Andrew Herbert, Ken Jackson, Peter Jones, Jennifer and Michael Kennerley, Jan McCarthy, Cyril Morris, Nigel Mountford, Audrey Spencer, Robin Spencer, Rev. Neil Stacey, Eileen Unsworth.</p>   |

## Feedback Request

The author of this document is Wesley's Organist and a member of Church Council. Any feedback comments, corrections or new information relating to the history of the St. John Street Wesleyan Chapel/Wesley Methodist Church will be gratefully received via the Wesley Church Centre office:

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