



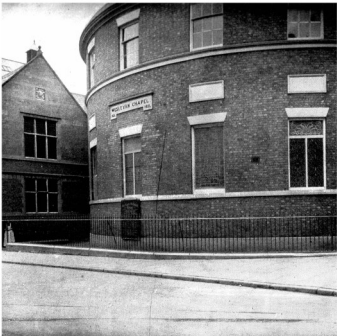
### Methodism comes to town

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 Revd 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 originated from the Octagon Chapel and which he almost certainly used on his visits.

### St John Street Chapel

After more than 40 years it was decided to build a bigger church in a more central position in the city. 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 awe-struck 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 stained glass east window in the St John Street frontage was designed by Gamon and Humphry and installed 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 stained glass window commemorating the seven members of the church who fell in the First World War. This window was designed by Henry Gustav Hiller of Liverpool, with its central panel inspired by the painting 'The Vigil' by the Scottish artist John Pettie RA (1839-93).

The chancel contains the fine three manual and pedal organ by the well respected organ builder James J. Binns of Leeds. The organ employs the Binns patent tubular-pneumatic action; this was faithfully restored by David Wells Organ Builders Ltd. during a major clean and renovation in 2000.

On the church walls are several interesting plaques. One commemorates Alderman Henry Bowers, who was an eminent Methodist and twice Mayor of Chester; another, John Dudleston, who was drowned in the Dee in 1842 trying to save his friend.

## **A United Church**

In 1965 it was agreed that the congregations of the three City Centre Methodist Churches - St John Street, George Street and Hunter Street - would merge. A report 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.' The merged Methodist Society, henceforth called 'Wesley', became based in the St John Street premises, after redevelopment to create a modernised Church Centre. In February 1970 Wesley was formally re-opened and re-dedicated by the then Bishop of Chester, the Rt Revd Gerald Ellison.

## **A new vision for Wesley**

In 1986 it became clear that major and costly roof repairs were urgently needed; the main roof 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 residents, workers, shoppers and tourists more effectively.

The whole premises underwent repair and further redevelopment over a period of three years. This included the removal of choir stalls from the chancel; the open space this created is used in worship, and for concerts and other events. A new entrance with an improved access ramp was created.

In 1989 a full-time warden was appointed to oversee Wesley's 'Open Door' policy, to enable the premises to be 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 1998.

In 2002 the Chester Fair Trading Shop made its home in Wesley.

In 2008/2010, in order to develop the next stage of Wesley's outreach and church life, the 'Renewal 2010' project was designed and implemented. This project modernised the Wesley Church Centre and its facilities. It included improving the Coffee Bar's kitchen and servery, making the hall a more hospitable space, installing new toilet facilities 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.

In June 2017 we completed our 'Regenerate!' Project refurbishment to re-imagine and modernise our Worship Space. Our vision was to combine its inspiring architecture with the flexibility needed for a wide range of worship styles and community activities. Above all, we want to create a sacred space where everyone would feel welcome as we gather around a central table, a suspended cross and sky light.

## **Wesley today**

Our Mission Statement is "A place to be, to belong and to believe". In our life together as Christian church community, and in partnership with other City Centre churches and agencies, our aim is always to find new ways of fulfilling this. As we have developed our building and the activities that go on within it, so we have encountered a diverse range of people. This constantly challenges us to make everything we do as inclusive as possible for everyone.

Our superintendent minister is Revd Neil Stacey and we have a support team of paid workers and volunteers.

We offer and host a range of community activities for people of all ages. Our main act of worship is on Sunday mornings at 10.30am, with the opportunity to participate in the services on Zoom and also to link in on Facebook.

*Refreshments are available at the Coffee Bar.  
Thank you for visiting us.*

**[www.wesleychester.co.uk](http://www.wesleychester.co.uk)**

***Registered Charity No. 1138016***

