

A WESLEY WALK IN NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

The Orphan House Plaque On the fascia of Barratt's shoe shop, Northumberland Street which stands on the site of the forecourt of the Orphan House built by John Wesley in 1743. In truth it never fulfilled his vision of being that which its name implies. Nevertheless it served for more than a century as a preaching house, a residence for himself and his travelling preachers and as the northern headquarters of Methodist outreach throughout the north of England and Scotland. The Orphan House being just outside the old town wall was potentially under threat from the cannon on the Pilgrim Street Gate at the time of the Jacobite threat in 1745. It survived but was demolished in 1856 and replaced by the Wesleyan Orphan House Schools which served the city well for a further century until they too disappeared as part of major redevelopment in the city centre during the 1950's.

Brunswick Methodist Church An 1820 Grade 2 listed building and a fine example of early 19th Century Wesleyan architecture. Brunswick succeeded the Orphan House as the mother church of Methodist in north east England. With fine traditions of music and preaching Brunswick has been a focal point for traditional Methodist worship and social outreach throughout its life. In 1980, following amalgamation with Central, the former Primitive Methodist city centre church on Northumberland Road, the gallery was floored out and the ground floor is now used for many and diverse community activities such as Listening Post, The Children's Society - SCARPA and the Coffee Shop in the foyer area. Brunswick has a significant collection of paintings, engravings and memorabilia, some of which date from John Wesley's own time. These can be viewed by appointment with the church staff and presentations are given to groups of interested people.

St Andrew's Church was the parish church of the Wesley family during their time in Newcastle. Outside the west door stands the tomb of the family of William Smith and includes the name of "John Wesley The Founder of Methodism", in a reference to Mr Smith's wife, Jane Vazeille, who was Wesley's stepdaughter. William Smith, a native of Corbridge, became a leading member of the early Methodist community in Newcastle and a close friend of John Wesley. There is a fine portrait in oils of him in the Wesley room at Brunswick. St Andrew's is usually regarded as the oldest church in the city and has part of the ancient city wall adjacent.

Fenwicks department store is an appropriate neighbour to Brunswick. The firm was founded by John James Fenwick (1846-1905), a committed Wesleyan Methodist, who worshipped at Brunswick and served in many lay offices, including those of Circuit Steward and Sunday School Superintendent.

Bainbridges store (now John Lewis) also has strong Wesleyan Methodist roots, the founder being Emerson Muschamp Bainbridge who was treasurer of Brunswick for 33 years. Within the church youth area there is a marble memorial celebrating the fine example in church and in business of this notable businessman.

Grainger Town has strong Methodist connections in that Richard Grainger (1797-1851), the great developer of Newcastle, was a member of Brunswick and taught in the Orphan House Sunday School. Most of the handsome rebuilding of central Newcastle was the work of Grainger and his principle architect John Dobson. Grey Street in particular is highly regarded as one of the finest streets in England.

Nelson Street (site of) A rather grand setting for one of Newcastle's early Primitive Methodist churches. In 1899 the congregation moved to Central Methodist Church on Northumberland Road, a cathedral of Primitive Methodism in the North East.

The Literary and Philosophical Society on Westgate Road was designed by John Green and is a fine product of the age of improvement in Newcastle upon Tyne. Liberal-minded businessmen, scholars and ministers, amongst whom the Unitarian William Turner was outstanding, led this movement. The Wesley Historical Society (N.E. Branch) is grateful to have been allowed to house an important collection of Methodist Books within the Lit & Phil.

The Discovery Museum, Blandford House, Blenheim Street On permanent display in the Georgian section of "The Newcastle Story", is an original oil painting of Rev. John Wesley's study. This was a wooden structure situated on the roof of the Orphan House in Northumberland Street. Although the artist is unknown, it is thought to have been painted about 1856, the point at which the Orphan House was demolished. By that time the Orphan House as a whole was in a state of considerable disrepair, which accounts for the rather unkempt appearance of the study. (Note: Blandford House is the home of the City Archives where a great deal of Methodist material is stored).

St Nicholas Cathedral Two memorials of interest to Methodist historians are within the cathedral. In St. George's Chapel is a stone tablet dedicated to the memory of Mr John Stephenson who sold John Wesley the land on which the Orphan House was to be built. The second is in the south aisle and remembers Matthew White Ridley with whom Wesley had dealings in 1745 when Ridley was Lord Mayor of Newcastle.

Wesley Square A fine open space on the Quayside immediately in front of the Law Courts. It was developed in 1996 and has at its centre the refurbished obelisk that had been placed a little way from its present site in 1891 to mark the centenary of Wesley's death. It records the first sermon preached by John Wesley in Newcastle in May 1743, even giving the text. It was the generous gift of one of Newcastle's Methodist businessmen, Utrick A. Ritson (1842-1932).

The Keelmen's Hospital A brick structure of 1701, with an open square within, which served as a place of retirement for aged keelmen. It became an important base for both John and Charles Wesley, the latter being named as their chaplain by the keelmen on his first extended visit in 1742. Charles was in fact the founder of Tyneside Methodism and the first society was formed and nurtured by him. John continued to visit the city throughout his life building the work in Newcastle and throughout Scotland and northern England.

All Saints Church Near to the Keelmen's Hospital and up from the quayside it is mentioned often in John Wesley's journal. However the present structure dates from 1796 and is entirely different in design from the medieval church that Wesley knew.

The Sallyport Tower (Wall Knoll Tower) One of the old gateways in the city wall of Newcastle, a little to the west of the Keelmen's Hospital. The Carpenters' Company built the superstructure in 1716 as a meeting room. A hundred years later it was used for Sunday School work under the auspices of the Orphan House Schools.

Author: Terry Hurst

(Based on original notes by Geoffrey E. Milburn – 1999)