

Wesley Memorial *magazine*

from Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, Oxford

Summer 2025



By the lake at Blenheim

Rest & relaxation

Dear Friends,

I sit down to write this letter just 10 days after Wesley Memorial and some members from the Oxford Circuit, joined our second Oxford Pride Parade. This is such a great opportunity for the church to speak of God's love and to be an affirming and prophetic presence.

The weather was rather less kind to us than in 2024, but given that the forecast was for torrential rain and thunderstorms, we were very fortunate. This year the parade route was reversed, beginning on Paradise Street and concluding in Radcliffe Square. The parade organisers require the group leaders to gather at 9am for a briefing and to find their place in the parade. So I headed to Paradise Street at 9am and was duly given the assembly spot for our group, located behind the Jolly Farmers pub and the Premier Inn. A rather grim spot early on a grey and drizzly morning, with no-one else in sight. Not the ideal spot for a Minister to be hanging around early on a Saturday morning, I must confess. As an ordained person, and one that wears a clerical collar out and about quite frequently, I'm used to the occasional strange look or comment. With sadness I can completely understand why, at a Pride parade, people might be cautious of lurking clergy.

My one companion, holding a place for their group behind the Premier Inn, initially looked at me with some suspicion but as it began to rain a little we struck up conversation. They asked where I was from and had I been to Pride before. I asked similar and they shared some of their story of coming out as non-binary and feeling rejected and unloved. We sat companionably with hoods up on the kerb behind the Premier Inn and spoke of many things including faith. Their group arrived and we said goodbye but throughout the parade when we saw each other we gave a smile and a wave. I thank God for the opportunities we had as Christians to witness to the all-embracing love of God who calls us beloved and precious.

It was wonderful to have a group of students with us this year, some displaying homemade signs made in a session with Kirsty. We're especially thankful to the craft group at Wesley Memorial and those who joined in at the Circuit



Celebration for the provision of crocheted rainbow hearts, brooches and prayer beads to give out to members of the public. We also had members from a variety of churches in the Oxford Circuit and picked up a few friends from other denominations along the way, which was wonderful, and we hope for an even bigger group next year.

Why does it matter? We don't know who saw us in that parade. We don't know who needed to hear that God loves them. We don't know how the conversations we had throughout landed. We may never know or see 'results' or 'impact' but I'm certain that our presence makes a difference. And it's wonderfully fun!



Sarah Bessey, a Canadian Christian author, writes beautifully about the nature of God's love:

"You're already so loved, you aren't earning a breath of love or tenderness more than what you already have just by breathing... Your name is already written in the lines of the hands of the universe. You're star-breath-of-dust, and you are beloved, intimately, faithfully, wholly. You are known."

If the presence of the Christian community at Pride can help one person to know that they are a beloved child of God, then I believe it is where we should be. We'll be there again in 2026: please do consider joining us!

With love and prayers,
Rev Miriam Moul, June 2025

Editorial

The theme of this summer issue evolved from the Church Weekend Break. The memorable phrase we all took Home was: "Never mind your 'to-do list'. What's on your 'to-be list'?"

So we offer you accounts of what we have done and also what we have been or tried to be, in response to our calling. And some still moments and reflections, for your holiday reading.

With every good wish for blessings and refreshment at some point in the coming months of summer.

The Editorial team



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Wesley Memorial wins Oxford's first gold Eco Church award.

We started on our Eco Church journey in 2018 with our first LOAF lunch (Local, Organic, Animal-friendly, Fairtrade) and meeting. Six years later we have finally achieved gold Eco Church status, the first church in Oxford and the 12th Methodist church in the country to do this.

Along the way we have:

- developed our Eco Church gardens
- committed to being a Fairtrade church
- twinned our toilets
- installed more bike racks
- celebrated God's world
- drawn awareness to green transport
- joined protests in support of the environment
- made energy efficient changes to our building
- improved our recycling
- educated ourselves and spread the word on environmental issues
- made changes to our own lifestyles
- engaged with climate change on a global level
- made plans for the future.

None of this would have been possible without the ongoing commitment and determination of our dedicated Eco Church team.



What an amazing bunch of people!



Jo Godfrey

A magical mystery tour of Italy

During May, a small group of friends and I travelled round northern Italy in search of artistic treasures, and were not disappointed. We arrived in Verona at the very moment that the succession of Pope Leo XIV was announced, but we only stayed for one night. We then visited Vicenza, Padua, and Ravenna. I had been to Padua and Ravenna before, but thoroughly enjoyed another fifteen minutes in Giotto's incomparable Scrovegni Chapel and a tour of Giusto de Menabuoi's Baptistery, both in Padua, as well as the ancient and breathtaking Ravenna mosaics.

The highlight for me, though, was Vicenza and the little-known Palazzo Leoni Montanari Museum, housing a large collection of old Russian icons (regarded as the best in the West), including 70 that are, since 2021, on public display in a designated gallery. The collection belongs to the Intesa Sanpaolo Bank and represents a wide range of different traditions and techniques, dating from the thirteenth to the late nineteenth century.

The three rooms of the open collection are accessed via a video sequence with a rather disturbing flashing display not unlike the movement of a fruit machine, but once inside the first room there is tranquillity, spirituality, and peace. The sequence begins with a travelling iconostasis showing in miniature the whole of the narrative that makes up the 'visual Bible' whereby Scripture is told in images: in the Russian tradition a full-sized iconostasis would form a complete screen from floor to ceiling, separating the nave from the sanctuary. In the centre are the royal doors shown here with the Evangelists at work and above them the Annunciation to Mary.

The oldest icon in the collection that is on display is from the thirteenth century, showing the Prophet Elijah going to heaven in his fiery chariot, while Elisha looks on and awaits the mantle of the prophet. In the second room is a provincial version of the same story, with Elijah's cloak billowing out like a balloon.



The royal doors

The third and last room is devoted to icons with 'revetments' (precious metals and gemstones covering a part of the painted surface of the icon, in some cases leaving only the faces and hands open to view). Here there was also a display of the different stages in the painting of an icon.



Elijah and the fiery chariot

In all, this was an excellent exhibition and well worth a visit if you are in the Veneto area and wanting to get away from the Venetian crowds. We had practically the whole icon exhibition to ourselves and the Captain of Israel's Host, St Michael himself, to accompany us!

Joanna Tulloch



St Michael

OxCSWell and wellbeing

The Oxford Centre for Spirituality and Wellbeing (OxCSWell) is based within Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust (OHFT) and has strong links with Oxford Brookes University, including the Oxford Institute of Nursing, Midwifery & Allied Health Research, whose purpose is to lead and participate in world-class research and practice.

The aim is to train carers and nursing staff to provide more than just clinical care, but also to take account of the needs of their patients from the point of view of their general wellbeing, including spirituality and religion. At the same time the health and social care staff receive support for their own wellbeing.

OxCSWell and the Department of Spiritual and Pastoral Care within OHFT work collaboratively to implement an annual programme of training and personal development events. In its first three years OxCSWell:

- organised 14 workshops for health and social care staff
- ran a conference for 100 participants
- hosted three annual lectures by nationally known academics working in the field of wellbeing and spiritual care
- presented a series of seminars for healthcare staff
- hosted a number of retreats for staff at OHFT,



which were re-formed as Oxford Health's Recovery and Renewal days run by the Trust's Spiritual & Pastoral Care Team and are still held regularly.

In addition, there is a 'PGCert' based at Oxford Brookes University: see

[Post-Graduate Certificate in Psychospiritual Care](#) for more information.

The OxCSWell Reference Group, which monitors new research, advises on progress, runs events, and provides support for the wellbeing of families, patients and staff. The group consists of clinicians and academics from Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust; Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust; Oxford Brookes University; Private Practice; and experts by lived experience. It is truly a privilege to be involved in this initiative as a member, if only in a small way, and to see how it inspires patients and staff alike, providing them with rest and recreation in the context of spirituality and wellbeing.

Joanna Tulloch

By train to Morocco

I can recommend the Mamora Bay hotel in Tangier, Morocco. It's right in the middle of the old town, with a splendid view over the harbour, and welcoming staff; and it comes at a very reasonable price. You will be woken just after 4.00 am by the call to prayer from the mosque right next door. Not perhaps the relaxation the editors asked me to write about – but an impressive reminder of the importance of prayer in a Moslem country.

Not that I had come to Morocco in search of Islam. My friend Robert had asked his daughter to arrange a 75th birthday party for him – and she had decreed it would be in Marrakesh. Marrakesh! Impossible, and climate change very much discourages flying. But, said a siren voice in my head, turn to the website of the [Man in seat Sixty-one...](#)

So it was (admittedly at vast expense) that I took the train from Oxford to London, the Eurostar to Paris, the Train Grande Vitesse (TGV) to Barcelona and on to Madrid, Spanish railways to the port of Algeciras, a one-hour ferry to Tangier, and finally the sleeper train to Marrakesh – arriving at 9.00 am on the morning of the party.



Coming out of Marrakesh railway station

Three days of trains, and four days back again. That for me is the essence of relaxation. I sat in my seat on the upper deck of the TGV, looking out at the countryside flashing by. Reading a book for a bit. Looking out of the window again. Wandering along to the bar for a coffee. Sauntering back to

my seat, as the train rushed on. Reading a bit more book. (I got through five). Nothing demanding my attention, or seeking my time. No need to look at my emails. I sat next to somebody for five hours and we said no more than hello. I felt I should take the chance to meet somebody new – how could I love my neighbour if I didn't even talk to him? Then I thought he looked perfectly contented as he was, and so was I.

At my Madrid hotel, I was joined by my son Alan and his partner Ellie, who live in Spain, and thought that the chance of a trip to Morocco was too good to miss. So we travelled on together. I didn't even have the stress of having to work out by myself how to catch the ferry, or where to go from the port – Alan just put the railway station into Google Maps, and we walked there.

Once at Marrakesh, relaxation essentially meant lazing. The “riad” (Moroccan house) where some twenty of us were staying was, in accordance with tradition, a collection of rooms arranged round a garden courtyard. There was a pool in the middle. In fact two pools, though only one had flamingos.



We swam, we ate, we chatted. Admittedly there was a party in the evening, with a magnificent meal, fire-eaters, and dancing. But I slunk quietly off to bed at 11.00 pm, leaving Alan to be the DJ until 3.00 am.

On the way back, I spent a night in that hotel in Tangier. And felt the need for a little austerity, such as waking at 4.00 am to pray.

Paul Spray

A 'holy space'revisited



In the Summer 2023 issue, Shipton-on-Cherwell was one of the 'special places and holy places' featured in the article 'Beside still waters...' The Church of the Holy Cross offers a special space of peace and calm, welcoming visitors of all faiths and none with this greeting:

Visitors enter this church for many reasons. You are all welcome, which is why the church is kept open.

If you came to look at a fine building, we hope that you are aware of God's presence here.

If you came thankful and happy for some special blessing, we pray that being here has increased your joy because you know it has been shared with God.

If you came overshadowed by sadness and anxiety, we pray that you have discovered that God is with you strengthening and comforting you.

If you came burdened with a sense of guilt and shame, we pray that you will leave knowing the freedom of God's forgiveness and love.

If you came uncertain about God, we pray that you will have found God drawing closer to you.

If you came out of curiosity, we pray that you will have found something to make you stop and think.

For whatever reason you came, may the peace and joy of Christ go with you.

Alan Dobson



Finishing the Camino to Santiago

Last year I wrote an article about my first experience of the ‘Camino Francés’. (WM Magazine, Spring 2024.) In April 2022 I’d walked about a third of the route with an ex-colleague. We walked 257 kms from Saint Jean Pied de Port in France to Burgos in Spain. Twenty-nine months later, in September 2024, (!) we returned, older, and a little wiser. (Packing less stuff, taking walking poles. Thank you, Kate and Alan!)

And so, on the 6th September 2024 at around 8.00 am, we headed up past the huge Cathedral at Burgos. Our aim was to get to the city of León, 177 kms to the west. It’s claimed that Pilgrims of yore would have navigated using the stars (hence the Compostela or ‘Field of Stars’). We used an app called ‘Buen Camino’. Not anything like as romantic, I’m afraid, but great for booking accommodation!

My abiding memory of this part of the pilgrimage was the dryness of the landscape, endless fields of sunflowers, distant mountains and long straight sections of Camino reaching out into the distance. I’d heard some people skip this part because it’s ‘boring’ (in their opinion). I think that really misses the point! I found it a calming, an almost meditative experience. Naturally the steeper climbs and descents require a fair degree of concentration whereas for much of this route you can allow yourself to go into autopilot mode.

It’s clear that lots of people who have walked the Camino get drawn back to the experience and we met a group who’d walked the route five years previously and were having a reunion by walking sections again. They’d come together again from all over the world. One of them had picked up a nasty sprain but this didn’t seem to impede her in the slightest as, although she had to ditch the walking, she got taxis and buses everywhere, and was always ensconced in the local bar at the next ‘stage’. The many ancient pilgrim hospitals dotted along the route bear witness to how people coped with injury and illness in the past.

Unsurprisingly, many people are motivated to walk the route by life-changing events: retirement, the loss of a job or a bereavement. This latter reason applied to Peter who’d walked all the way from the Netherlands. He’d literally walked out of his front door and headed south, down through Belgium and France. He’d found the route through France tough because of the social isolation, missing the hostels and communal meals that form such an important part of the ‘real’ Camino experience. He was walking about 20 kms a day. Not bad considering he was 79! (There’s hope for me yet I thought). Our paths would often cross – I’d see him with his steady pace, or sitting under the shade of a tree stretching his long legs.

One of the phrases you’ll hear when walking the Camino is “The Camino will provide”. Certainly we heard many stories where this seemed to be true, like the woman we met who fell badly, and was attended to by the next pilgrim who came up behind her, and who just happened to be a recently retired A&E nurse! She bound up her ankle so well that when, at a later date, the fracture was revealed under x-ray the bone was perfectly aligned !

Trusting in Providence when it comes to accommodation was a challenge for us. Certainly there are a great deal of options available, but the thought of having to traipse around at the end of a long day finding a bed did not appeal! Generally (and unsurprisingly) the younger, faster and fitter pilgrims were, to use the modern parlance, ‘chilled’ about this. I, on the other hand, was getting good at using my Camino App which allowed me to book ahead. We stayed in a huge range of accommodation, from what you might term ‘bijou’ hotels to multi-bunkbed dormitories where you sleep two feet away from someone’s drying socks!! I guess night-time trials exposed my intolerance and impatience, but really, do people have to get up at 4.30 am and start fiddling with plastic bags? The other issue or ‘culture shock’ is the mediterranean propensity to never bypass an opportunity for a party (or a procession for that matter)! We spent one night in an

ancient dormitory, under the eaves of the oak roof. You could well imagine a medieval pilgrim lost in thought, staring up at the same ancient roof beams. However, come 12.00 am the music started. Boy, it was loud!! I think they call it 'House' music. The party finally wrapped up at 5.00 am. Later we found out it was a wedding party and the WHOLE village turned out, so no chance they were going to turn it down for a few grumpy pilgrims.

We approached León with a glorious view of the city, dominated, of course, by the Cathedral. I really thought I'd seen the most extraordinary cathedral I'd ever encountered at Burgos, but for me León was in a different league. The height and the extraordinary stained glass were something else! They are more like stained glass walls than windows, so the light in the building is heavenly.

Finally, In April this year we returned to Spain to walk the last 312 kms. Since our last visit, my father-in-law, Paul, had died. He'd inspired me to walk the route, so I'd packed a picture of him to leave at the Iron Cross where pilgrims traditionally leave a rock or stone in commemoration of a loved one.



On this final section of the route, you move from the Castile-León region into Galicia. There are some fairly hefty climbs and you move into a very different landscape, one at the mercy of Atlantic weather fronts. It's the wettest part of Spain and you're warned to be prepared for very changeable conditions. It snowed as we crossed the mountains and we had a couple of days of driving rain. The lush landscape was dotted with small villages and dairy farms... think Cornwall in August. My walking poles really proved their worth, particularly on the treacherous descents. Numbers on the route picked up after Sarria, as pilgrims can do just the last 100 kms and still receive their 'Compostela' certificate. However, the route didn't ever feel crowded and I was in awe of the number of Spanish families we encountered doing the walk with their children. (It was Easter vacation). When our children were younger, we would struggle to get them all round Port Meadow, let alone walking in the

mountains with a backpack! What struck me on this final leg was how the Camino had helped restore my faith in humanity. Inevitably pilgrims get into all sorts of scrapes. We met an elderly American lady who was walking alone, and was lost and confused on the mountain sections. The way everyone pulled together, overcoming language barriers to untangle all the logistical complications of accommodation and forwarded luggage, was truly inspiring!!

On the 23rd of April we finally made it into Santiago, emerging through the ancient gateway into the magnificent square in front of the Cathedral. I'd walked this final section with my ex-colleague Pauline, and Cate who we'd met on the path back in



September. We all felt a huge sense of relief and joy to have accomplished the route, and stood around in a kind of daze letting it all sink in. We stayed a couple of nights in the Parador, a vast building that had originally been a pilgrim hospital and administrative centre.

Once our tired muscles had been soothed, it quickly became evident that we'd caught the 'bug', as, before long, we were planning to go back in 2026 to walk the 92 kms from Santiago to Finisterre -- the coastline with mystical significance to the Druids and Celts. The place that they believed was the 'end of the earth'. I certainly don't intend this to be the end of my Camino experience, just the beginning.

Tom Walker

(I'd recommend Clare Balding's recent series 'Ramblings' on the Camino'. Available on BBC SOUNDS.)

Reflections on the Church Weekend Break

A place to grow

The fact that the minibus came to my house to pick me up was a touching, personal gesture. My bags were carefully stowed, fussed over to ensure they wouldn't slide, and in that simple act, a question began to form: Could I truly belong here? It had been a long time, and a faint hope mingled with my uncertainty.

As we rounded the corner into the church weekend site, a wave of panic washed over me. Painful, confusing memories of past experiences in similar places swirled, making me feel faint. I hurried past the polite welcomers, straight to the dinner hall, knowing a meal would ground me. Once settled, I confided in some of my new friends. They didn't know what to say, of course, but their quiet listening and genuine efforts to help were exactly what I needed. The panic began to recede.

I had decided to give this church a 'proper go', and that meant stepping outside my comfort zone, getting to know people. As I settled into the weekend's rhythm, having conversation after conversation, a profound realization slowly dawned: these people genuinely don't pity me for being gay. They aren't trying to be 'big' or 'do their bit for Jesus' with strained smiles, fearing they might 'catch gayness' like a cold. In fact, they simply don't seem to think there's anything wrong with me at all. I was being treated as normal, as an equal, as one of them. It was as if the concept of treating me any other way than human was utterly alien to them. The weight of this realization was almost overwhelming. Could I truly belong to a group like this?

I arrived at the weekend with a sense of duty, a task to complete to get to know the church. I left profoundly surprised by the spiritual experience I had. The discussions

touched me deeply, and I felt God's closeness and presence. His words penetrated my heart, bringing tears, warmth, and excitement.

During our conversations on spiritual growth, we discussed the New Testament's seed and plant metaphors: *I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow.* (1 Corinthians 3:6). This resonated deeply, given my house full of houseplants — a stereotype about gay men that happens to be true for me! I reflected on how little is truly 'done' for most plants to thrive. Mostly, they just need to be left alone, allowing God to do His work. I water them occasionally, perhaps move one closer to light in winter, but largely, I am unobtrusive. I try not to knock them over, and they're usually forgiving if I do, as long as it's not a habit. If I were to routinely disrupt or trample them, I would surely subvert God's work, prevent growth, and likely kill them.

Similarly, in our spiritual lives, we cannot force our own growth, nor can we force others'. God is the one who makes us grow. However, we can choose to seek favorable conditions. We can 'plant' ourselves where there is good light and water, where we won't be constantly knocked over or trampled. That is our responsibility. Then, growth may occur, in God's timing and way. While no one at Wesley Memorial is 'doing' anything particularly overt, I feel myself growing. I'm in a place where growth can truly occur.

My friends kindly offered me a lift home. I hoped they wouldn't expect me to be too chatty; I was utterly exhausted, with few words left, but my heart was full.

Mark Ellis

It was a truly wonderful experience for Jenny and me. I particularly loved the opportunity to share and express our thoughts on Christian life and church life, while also listening to the perspectives of others. Engaging in open and honest discussion allowed us to deepen our understanding and appreciation of our faith community. I

found it inspiring to hear how others live out their beliefs. The atmosphere was warm and welcoming, making it easy to connect and participate. I genuinely enjoyed every moment and am grateful for the chance to be part of the Weekend Break.

Jack Sanga

Seeing Beyond: a reflection on art and Christian Faith



The Five Thousand — Eularia Clarke

These five thousand are not to be found in 1st-century Palestine, but somewhere in mid-20th century Britain. Bread and fish have become fish and chips. The preacher isn't Jesus, but a vicar standing in a stone pulpit bizarrely transplanted from a church to the middle of a field. Bikes lie discarded by the side, and water for tea is being boiled.

This painting reminds me of the paintings by Pieter Bruegel. Partly because of the colour palette used, but also because centre-stage are ordinary people, totally oblivious to the fact that they are being painted, each group forming its own little cameo. Some are listening raptly as they eat their meal. Others are preoccupied with making tea or feeding their children. Others again are completely distracted or simply having a little nap.

And so the miracle of 5000 portions of fish and chips having arrived seemingly out of nowhere fades into the background and instead we are left wondering who all these people are and why they have come along. Do they genuinely want to hear what the preacher has to say? Are they here out of habit? Or because they had nothing better to do? Or because they had heard that something exciting was going to happen?

As a lay preacher myself, I can't help seeing my congregations here, wondering what has drawn them to

come to church on a particular Sunday. What concerns and worries, what joys or fears, what needs and desires have they brought with them? What do they hope for, what do I hope for when attending a service? Are we ready to be surprised by a miracle? Are we ready to connect with God? Are we ready for God to feed our inner being with spiritual food? Or do we sit there longing for it and somehow feeling that we are left out and never get our portion of fish and chips; never experience the miracle of knowing ourselves loved and accepted by God, excited and inspired to listen out for God and go on a journey with God?

These people seem to treat their fish and chips as perfectly normal, as though they had expected it all to be provided. Or has the initial astonishment, excitement and joy at finding that there was enough for everyone simply faded? Some, now, are drawn to listen to the preacher while others have needs, responsibilities and desires which stop them from engaging. How can we keep alive our desire to follow God when all the rest of life crowds in on us? How do we keep ourselves focussed, not on whoever the preacher may be, but on Jesus? How can we keep our hearts and minds open, listening for God in the words of a preacher, in one another, in the places we least expected God to be?

Vicky Davies

Biblical References:

*The feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14:13-21
Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-14)*

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The painting is from the Methodist Modern Art Collection, oil on canvas laid down on board, 1962.

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A large copy can be viewed in Wesley Memorial.

Gallery



Gathered at the Weekend Break in High Leigh Centre



The Christian Aid Street Market on May 17th. The total from this effort plus the appeal for Myanmar and donations in the week: over £4000!



Bladon Junior Church dancing at the Circuit Day on Sunday 1st June

Looking for new trustees for the Solomon Trust



CMCS Oxford is operated by the wonderful trustees of the Solomon Academic Trust (SAT), a Christian charity which supports Muslim and Christian academics and students as they work together on issues of faith and life. Currently there are six trustees but we are looking for some new members with specific skills who are interested in Christian-Muslim relations.

Could you recommend someone or are you interested yourself?

The role

Trustees don't have to be experts in Christian-Muslim relations, but it helps if they are interested. They provide governance for all the SAT projects, ensuring that the charity is well-run, that finances are raised and used responsibly, and that we operate in accordance with the

law. Currently, there are gaps in the expertise of the trustee body and we are looking for some new trustees with experience of finance, human resources, the law and communications. You can read more about the role of trustees on the website. www.cmcsoxford.org.uk

The commitment

Trustees are required to attend 4 meetings each year held at our Centre in Oxford, ideally in person, but participation can be via Zoom when necessary. Reasonable travel expenses to attend are reimbursed. There are a few emails to read and, very occasionally, trustees may be required to attend an extra meeting online to discuss urgent matters. In the first instance, interested persons are contacted by the chair of trustees for an exploratory conversation. The next step is for a potential trustee to attend a meeting to meet everyone and get a feel for the nature of the work. If you think this might be for you or would like to recommend someone else then please email director@solomonacademictrust.org.uk.



Pride March - ready to go!

The John Wesley Lecture 2025

John Wesley and the Architecture of Early Methodism,

Dr Mark Kirby, Research Fellow in Architectural History, Lincoln College

This talk covered the architecture of Wesleyan Methodism, during the lifetime of John Wesley (1703-1791). Dr Kirby explained that his expertise really lies in Anglican architecture up to 1736, but that he had been very happy to explore the development of Methodist architecture over time after that date, starting with Wesley's 'Foundery' in 1739, and leading eventually to the 1778 City Road Chapel. After Wesley's Aldersgate 'conversion' experience in 1738, and his open-air preaching, which resulted in his exclusion from Church of England pulpits, the need for Methodist buildings became apparent. The first were the New Room in Bristol and the Foundery in London in 1739. Later, in the 1760s and 1770s, octagonal preaching houses developed. (Photos on page 15)

Methodist building was strongly influenced by recent Church of England building, focused on the need for everyone to be able to see and hear the preacher, with high pulpits and galleries surrounding them, and without transepts. The earliest Christian churches were seen to be ideal, having a pure and 'primitive' form in which non-believers were drawn deeper into the building as their spiritual journey progressed, with the altar behind the pulpit.

A key issue for John Wesley was that he expected Methodism to supplement the Church of England with additional preaching. So Methodist buildings were not to be churches, chapels, or even 'meeting houses' such as the early Dissenters had established, but 'preaching houses'. They needed their own style, and space for functions beyond preaching, particularly accommodation for preachers.

Two buildings were erected in 1739 along similar lines, The Foundery in London and the New Room in Bristol had 2-level pulpits and benches, not pews, at ground level. These were followed by octagonal preaching houses in the 1750s. This shape had already been used by Wren in London, by Dutch and French Protestants, and by

Presbyterians in Norwich. The shape was thought to refer back to early church practice, when churches were sometimes circular. By 1770 Wesley was advocating octagonal shapes, although only fifteen were built including in Rotherham, Whitby and Yarm. The design proved difficult to scale up, and after 1776 the City Road Chapel became a model for new buildings, with its somewhat elaborate Palladian facade.

Over time Methodist buildings incorporated high-church elements such as plasterwork, figurative art, and triple-decker pulpits. They were no longer just preaching houses, but held baptisms and communion services, and came to look more like 18th-century parish churches. Towards the end of the 19th century, with an explosion of Methodist building, they came to look more and more like Anglican churches, including stained glass.

Dr Kirby concluded by asserting that, by the time of Wesley's death in 1791, Methodist buildings had come a long way from the Foundery and New Room to the City Road Chapel. Collectively the preaching houses of this period constituted a series of architectural experiments as Wesley and his followers sought to give physical expression in stone and brick to their beliefs and identity as well of course as serving their practical needs.

In the 19th century, chapel and church building by all denominations became far more architecturally ambitious and competitive. "Something of an irony", noted Dr Kirby. 17th and 18th century dissenting and Methodist places of worship were deliberately designed **not** to look like Anglican parish churches, but by the late 19th century many were indistinguishable from them, or at least from the "more sober ones".

Which brings us back to reflect on our own building of 1878!

Diana Musgrave & Kate Dobson



The Foundery: Wesley's first place in London



The Rotherham Octagon, 1761

Rainbow House at 40

Friday 2nd May saw Rainbow House celebrate its 40th birthday, as promised, with Oxford's Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Tiago Corais, and happy guests who had supported us or worked for us in the past. It was a joyful occasion, enhanced by the excellent display created by Alison, and by a plentiful supply of cupcakes, suitably decorated with rainbows.

We reported to the Oxford press: "Rainbow House drop-in for children under 5 with a carer has been welcoming customers young and older since May 1985. Our unique offering combines a café with healthy food, at good prices, with all the entertainment facilities of a playgroup. We are open from 10.30 am to 2.00 pm every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday during school term-time. Some of our present customers were brought as tiny children, and now bring their own little ones. Many visitors from overseas express their delight at finding a place to relax and meet people. We still cherish the warm farewell from a Spanish customer: *Now we are travelling back to Spain, but we will not forget our mornings here. We will miss you! ¡Gracias y hasta la vista!*

Our report was published in the Oxford Mail, briefly, and in the Methodist Recorder, at greater length. We want to share the good news that the Rainbow House drop-in formula has lasted well for 40 years, and remains successful. It is well worth imitating!



Thank you to all who support us: church staff and members; Mel especially, whose singing with ukulele draws in the crowds; and to our wonderful volunteers. Much credit goes to Christine, our coordinator since 2018, who manages everything calmly and efficiently, and provides such appetising meals, always beautifully presented.

We can estimate that thousands of customers have been welcomed in the forty years, at the rate of at least 50-60 per week. All the appreciative comments we receive commend the warmth of the welcome, which is our own version of telling the Good News!

Kate Dobson

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Contributions, letters, questions, pictures, book reviews and any other items suitable for publication are always welcome. Please email them to the editorial team, stating if you are also willing for them to appear on the church website. Please include photos separately, and check that anyone displayed in a photo is happy to be included in the publication.

All items may be edited by the team.

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