

John Wesley in Chepstow

John Wesley was the 15th child of 19 (3 sons and seven daughters survived) born on 17th June 1703 (on the modern calendar 28th June) to Rev. Samuel Wesley (Rector of Epworth) and his wife Susanna, in the rectory at Epworth in Lincolnshire. He went to school at Charterhouse, and took a degree at Christchurch College, Oxford. Whilst at Oxford, Charles formed a group which became known as The Holy Club, and soon John also became a leading figure. Here they met up with George Whitfield. Because of the way they methodically studied the bible and worshipped, they were nicknamed Methodists.

John was ordained as a priest in 1728 and became curate to his father in Epworth for 2 years. In 1735, with his brother Charles, he set sail for America. On the ship were a group of German Moravians. During the voyage, a frightening storm sprung up, and John was very impressed by the calm and greater faith of the Moravians. Despite his training and vocation as a priest, he was constantly worried about a lack of conviction. His time in America was, in the main, unsuccessful, and he returned to England with Charles some 2 years later.

John and Charles joined a 'Religious Society' in London. On 24th May 1738, he reluctantly attended an evening service in Aldersgate Street, London and was half listening to the preface to the Epistle to the Romans by Luther, when "he felt his heart strangely warmed".

Wesley had strong views about local people being excluded from the Church, and often voiced his opinions from the pulpit. Eventually he was barred from preaching in the Anglican Church. About this time, George Whitfield was in Bristol, conducting Open Air meetings, and he invited John to join him. So at the age of 36, in 1739, John came to Bristol. His natural leaning was to the order of many institutions and methods, he was uneasy about preaching outside the pulpit.

George Whitfield was in full flow at these Open Air meetings, where he preached in the poorer areas of Bristol. Eventually he invited John to preach, and he did so. From that time on, the rest, is, as they say, history. After conducting these meetings, John would meet in homes, but he soon realised the need for premises. The result was that 'The New Rooms' were built in Horsefair, Bristol, which became John's home and base for the rest of his life.

John Wesley travelled on horseback throughout England and Wales, covering some quarter of a million miles.

He preached, it is said, over 4,000 sermons, It was not long before he stood on the banks of the river Severn, with his eye on visiting Wales, and on the 12th October 1739, John Wesley, with two Bristol friends, John Deschamps and Anthony Williams, met in the morning at the New Passage on the banks of the River Severn, and looked across the Bristol Channel to the hills of Monmouthshire.



By 4 pm, John Wesley was preaching on the Green at Devauden to 400 people on 'Christ our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption'. From there, the next day, he went onto Abergavenny, and eventually Cardiff.

The first record of any connection with Chepstow and people becoming known as Methodists, was by John Wesley, who wrote in his journal, March 19th 1762, "I preached to about twelve in the new room at Chepstow. One of the congregation was a neighbouring clergyman, who lived in the same staircase with me at Christ Church and was then far more serious than me." John Wesley records that he did so at Mr. Mosely Cheek's door. A year later, Mosely Cheek became the first of John Wesley's preachers from Monmouthshire and most likely from Wales. He was appointed in 1768 to Wales. In 1770 Wales was divided up into three circuits: Pembroke, Glamorgan and Brecon. Chepstow would be in the Glamorgan circuit, which would extend from Llanelli to Calvert in Gloucestershire, about 100 miles distant.

It is almost certain that he preached at what was then No.13 Moor Street, now the site of the police station, because in 1790 No.13 was described as the site of a former Methodist meeting house. John Wesley preached a second time in Chepstow in 1767. An entry in Chepstow Parish Records dated September 12th 1767 states that "John Wesley visited Chepstow and preached at a friend's door to a civil unconcerned population".

John Wesley preached a third time in Chepstow in 1769.