

Visit to John Wesley's Chapel and House, City Road, London

19 November

John Wesley's Chapel was opened in 1778, only a short distance from the site of his first ministry at The Foundery, Moorfields, where he began preaching in 1739. John Wesley and his brother Charles were responsible for establishing Methodism, an alternative form of evangelism which within their lifetime spread throughout the country and across America. The new chapel, designed by George Dance the Younger, Surveyor to the City of London, was a symbol of the strength and independence of the new religion. The interior is surprisingly large and airy, with a fine (restored) plaster ceiling in the neoclassical style, and a gallery on three sides facing the central pulpit, which was originally a three decker rising to the same height as the gallery, but was lowered in the mid-19th century. The original pillars supporting the gallery were ship's masts from the naval yards at Deptford, a gift from George III; a few of these remain in the vestibule while the rest were replaced with marble columns in 1891. The pews also date

from 1891, and have unusual pull-out seats at the ends to allow more people to be accommodated. In a small room to the side of the chapel some of the original Foundery pews survive, with hinged backrests for use facing either way, and Charles Wesley's organ.

Across the front courtyard is John Wesley's house, completed in 1779, where he lived for the last 11 years of his life. It is a substantially intact example of a middle-class London town house, with some of the furniture used by Wesley still in place. He apparently lived mainly in the three rooms on the first floor, the upper floors being used by visiting preachers, the ground floor for parlours and offices and the basement for the kitchen and servants' rooms. There are interesting examples of mid-18th century furniture, including a special reading chair used by Charles Wesley which could be sat on facing backwards, with curved arm supports and a book rest attached to the back, a mahogany bureau bookcase, and a pair of rush-seated mahogany chairs with pierced baluster-shaped splats. Down in the kitchen the original dresser survives, along with the fireplace and associated spit rack above.

In the crypt of the Chapel there is a Museum of Methodism which explains the origins of the religion and how it has become established across the world, while in the garden behind is John Wesley's tomb and memorial. There are even some well-preserved Victorian gents' toilets with decorative chinaware and mahogany joinery. Altogether, there was much to see and we were ably guided by Monica, to whom we are very grateful.

David Dewing