



# A History of Roundhay Methodist

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## Editor's note

We have researched and documented this History from the perspective that Roundhay Methodist Church is not just a building but an ever changing group of people who share a set of Values i.e. *'principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgement of what is important in life'*.

Their values may well have been shaped or influenced by the speakers each heard; the documents they read; the doctrines, customs and traditions of the Christian and other organisations they belonged to; the beliefs and attitudes of their families, friends, teachers, neighbours, employers and opinion formers of their time; the lives they all led and the contemporary national and world events that touched them.

It seems to me impossible to write a history of Roundhay Methodist Church without describing something of the lives of those who participated in Church Life and shaped what we now enjoy. I confess I find people more interesting than documenting bricks and mortar, or recounting decisions recorded in minute books, but they all play a part in our history.

I am not a trained historian but have tried hard to base my description in contemporary evidence rather than hearsay.

If I am mistaken or mislead then I apologise and assure you that I will welcome any factual corrections, additions and advice about alternative sources and opinions.

This History is a work in progress, so if anyone wants to help me expand on what is already written below; or join with me in researching and writing the more recent history of Roundhay Methodist Church, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

*Sharon Donaldson*  
Tel. 0113 232 3565  
[sharonlittle.donaldson@gmail.com](mailto:sharonlittle.donaldson@gmail.com)

*February 2014*

## **A brief history of Roundhay Methodist Church**

Methodism first took root in Leeds in 1740 after John Nelson returned from London where he heard John Wesley preach at Moorfields in 1739. Nelson began to preach and to pray with friends and neighbours.

By 1742 the first Society was founded at Birstall. The first Chapel in Leeds, called Old Boggard House, was opened in 1751 by John Wesley. It stood where Quarry Hill flats stood - where the steps to The West Yorkshire Playhouse now stand. It was recorded there were 500 Methodists in Leeds at this time.

Leeds was said to be 'a Methodist City' and in 1753 the first Leeds Methodist Conference was held at Old Boggard House. By 1794 there were more than 1000 Methodists in Leeds.

The township of Roundhay was in the parish of Barwick in Elmet until Roundhay became part of Leeds in 1912.

We don't know exactly when Methodism first started in the Township of Roundhay but well before 1815 people were meeting in the upstairs room of an ivy-covered cottage on Chapel Lane - now called Chapel Cottage on North Lane.

We believe that by 1815 a small Chapel was being used for services. It stood next to Chapel Cottage on land owned by John and Joshua Burton. An evening service was held every Sunday.

In 1831 the population of the Township of Roundhay had risen to 314.

By 1834 the Roundhay Methodists had outgrown their first Chapel and were using a newly built Chapel only yards away on land now called Mayo Close. That land was also owned by the Burton brothers. In 1851 there was an evening service with an attendance averaging about 90.

In 1867 Joshua Burton died childless. Then in 1869 John died. At this point the land on which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapel stood changed hands and the Methodists were given notice to quit. Over the years the Burton brothers and their family had given generously to many charitable causes including the Methodist Movement.

On 2nd July 1873 the foundations were laid for a new Methodist Church on Ladywood Road. This new building was called Roundhay Methodist (Ladywood) Church and seated 350. Just a year later, on 3rd July 1874, the first service was held. The Church continued to flourish and many Church groups began. Some of them are still going strong today.

In 1945 Sir Edwin and Lady Airey gave two stained glass windows in memory of their daughter; and the family of Frederick Cowling gave two stained glass windows in memory of Frederick Cowling who died in 1947. These have been moved into our 4<sup>th</sup> and current Church.

In 1950 Mrs Penrose May donated 2,200 sq yards of land adjacent to the church to build a hut for youth work. This new Hall was incorporated into the fabric of our present building.

Opened in 1986 our 4<sup>th</sup> building was constructed on Springwood Road. The Sanctuary can seat 200 and is often filled.

The original Roundhay St. John Church of England building on Wetherby Road was closed and in August 2006 Roundhay St. Johns congregation began to share the Roundhay Methodist Church building

On 14th November 2013 Roundhay St. John Church of England and Roundhay Methodist Church formed an Ecumenical Partnership taking the name Oakwood Church. On December 1st 2013 we enjoyed our first unified service.

## The Wesley family background



### **Susanna Wesley** 1669-1742

Susanna Annesley was the mother of John and Charles Wesley, founders of the Methodist Church. Susanna was born the 25<sup>th</sup> of 25 children. Her father was Dr Samuel Annesley, a dissenter in the Church of England. Her mother was called Mary White.

Susanna married Samuel Wesley on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1688 at St. Marylebone, Middlesex. She was nineteen. Susanna and Samuel had nineteen children, nine of whom died as infants. Four of the children were twins and a maid accidentally smothered another child. Samuel and

Susanna's surviving children were Samuel the younger, John, Charles, Emilia, Susanna, Mary, Anna, Mehetabel, Martha and Kezia.

With her husband Samuel away much of the time, it was left to Susanna to bring up and educate the children. They had no lessons until the age of five but were then given at least six hours a day. Due to the absence of their father, spiritual teaching also came from Susanna. She held a family service for her children on Sunday afternoons. Very soon neighbours and local people joined in and there could be as many as two hundred people in attendance. Susanna didn't write any books or preach a sermon but she is still known as the Mother of Methodism.

After Samuel's death in 1735, Susanna had to leave the Rectory as none of her sons had offered to succeed their father as Rector. She lived with various of her children at different times and died whilst living with her son John Wesley in 1742.

She was buried at Bunhill Fields in London.



*Spital Yard, London*

*Birth place of Susanna Annesley*



### **Samuel Wesley 1662-1735**

Samuel Wesley, a clergyman and poet, was the father of John and Charles Wesley.

Samuel was the second son of John Westley. Samuel's Grandfather was Bartholomew Westley the third son of Sir Herbert Westley of Westleigh in Devonshire, by his wife Elizabeth de Wellesley of Dangan in Co Meath. His father John had been rector of Winterborne Whitchurch, Dorset.

Samuel went to school with Daniel Defoe (author of Robinson Crusoe) and obtained his degree of Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in 1688 when he signed his name Wesley instead of Westley.

The same year he was married to Susanna Annesley. The young couple commenced their married life at Holborn, in lodgings somewhere near the quaint old houses still standing opposite Grays Inn Road.

Samuel was ordained a priest of the Church of England and received £28 a year as a London curate. He also obtained a naval chaplaincy and for six months until November 1689 he was Chaplin of a Man-of-War (a powerful Frigate).

In 1695, through the benevolence of Queen Mary, Samuel was appointed to the living at Epworth. It has been suggested that he may have come to the notice of Queen Mary because of his poem "The Life of Christ" (1693) which he had dedicated to her.

At this point Samuel was already in debt, supporting a large family and contributing to his mother Elizabeth's support. Samuel was both unpopular with the locals and very unlucky. In 1697 his barn fell; in 1702 his rectory was burned; and in 1704 a fire destroyed all his flax. By 1705 he had spent many miserable months imprisoned in Lincoln Castle for bad debt.

In 1731 he was disabled when thrown from a waggon. He never recovered his strength and died in 1735.

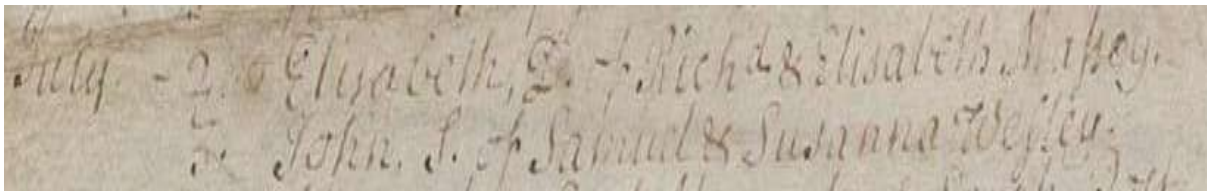
## The birth of Methodism



### John Benjamin Wesley 1703-1791

John Wesley was born in 28<sup>th</sup> June 1703, in Epworth, Lincolnshire. He was the fifteenth child of Samuel and Susanna Wesley.

The record of his Baptism (reproduced below) is not the original from Epworth Church which was destroyed in the fire that destroyed the rectory on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1709, but the duplicate copy that was required to be sent to the Bishop of Lincoln.



*When the Wesley family arrived at Epworth in 1695, they moved into a house comprising "five baies, built all of timber and plaister, and covered with straw thatche, the whole building being contrived into three stories, and disposed in seven chief rooms – a kitchinge, a hall, a parlour, a butterie, and three large upper rooms, and some others of common use; and also a little garden empailed betwine the stone wall and the south". (G.J. Stevenson, Memorials of the Wesley Family).*

*There was also a barn, a dovecot and a hemp-kiln; all surrounded by the croft, making the whole site about three acres.*

In the middle of the night of 9<sup>th</sup> February 1709 the family awoke to discover that the house was all on fire. They rushed to get out, with the nursemaid collecting up the children. They got to the door but had to rush back in for the key. They eventually escaped what was rapidly becoming an inferno. Only then did they realise that one child was still in the house.

John, then aged five, had found his way blocked so he stood on a box at a first floor window. There was no time to fetch a ladder so one local man stood on another's shoulders and pulled John out of the house, just as the

roof fell in. It is not surprising that his mother described this as an act of God's providence. It seems very likely that this fire was not an accident but was another indication that the local people were disgruntled.



John was educated at home by his mother from the age of five until 1720 when he went to Christ Church, Oxford. He was ordained a Deacon in 1725 and became a Fellow of Lincoln College in 1726.

**Wesley, John, s. Sam., of Epworth, co. Lincoln, cler.**  
**CHRIST CHURCH, matric. 18 July, 1720, aged 16,**  
**B.A. 1724 ; fellow LINCOLN COLL. 1725, M.A.**  
**9 Feb., 1726-7, 'the founder of Wesleyan Methodism,'**  
**died 2 March, 1791, tablet in Westminster Abbey.**  
**See pedigree in *Reliquary*, viii. 188.**

*From the Oxford University Alumni 1500-1886 John Wesley*

He joined his father as a curate for two years and then returned to Oxford. The year he returned to Oxford 1729, is considered the beginning of Methodism. John and Charles Wesley with some close friends started a small group nicknamed 'the Holy Club', which met for prayer and Bible study. Later, John became a leading light for the group and in particular stressed the need for combining a deep inward faith with practical service to those in need.



The scholars used to go about the town and the local prison to do charitable work and visit the sick. Other students had a variety of mocking nicknames for the group, including 'Bible Moths' and 'Enthusiasts' - because they did more than most people thought was necessary to be a good Christian. The name that stuck was 'Methodists.'

The Holy Club members never exceeded twenty five members. It was there the Wesley brothers met George Whitefield. George became an important part of the Methodist movement, especially in America.

In 1735 John and Charles Wesley went to America to preach the Gospel to Native American people. During the voyage the ship was struck by a terrifying storm. John was afraid. He prayed along with the English passengers. The English passengers were very scared but the German Moravians sang. Later he asked one of the Moravians if they hadn't been afraid. The Moravian replied that not even the women and children had been afraid. None of them were afraid to die.

John knew that they had something he didn't, an absolute trust in God, and was deeply impressed.

John and Charles's thought their time in America was unsuccessful and they returned to England two years later.

John continued to travel the country. He mainly visited poor neighbourhoods and the people who attended his meetings were usually industrial workers or agricultural labourers. His main message was of God's love. He told the people who attended his meetings that if they loved God in return they would "*be saved from sin and made holy*".

John also had a lot to say about personal morality. In his sermons he encouraged people to work hard and to save for the future. He also warned against the dangers of gambling and drinking.

He often preached in Leeds which became a centre for Methodism. He was attacked by a mob in 1745. Leeds was later one of the three places he chose to hold his annual Conference; the others were London and Bristol.

The first Conference in Leeds was in 1753 where John Wesley spoke in favour of women preachers.

As a result the first lay women preachers became active in Leeds and the surrounding areas. Local women Sarah Crosby, Ann Tripp and Sarah Ryan were amongst the first female preachers. Sarah Crosby (1729-1804) is buried in the graveyard of St. Peter's Parish Church at Kirkgate, Leeds.

Although there were Methodist ministers, John encouraged people who had full-time jobs to become lay preachers.

It is said that John Wesley preached 40,000 sermons and it has been estimated that he traveled more than 250,000 miles on horseback preaching the gospel in any place that would receive him. "I gave them all to Christ" he once said about this unparalleled effort. John became the known as the pastor of England.

John wrote a journal throughout his life, in published form from 1735 until 1790.

John had previously proposed twice before he met and married a widow Mary Vazeille in 1751.

He suffered from various ailments, including hereditary gout, had undergone a surgical operation in 1774, and by 1789 had Diabetes.

John died on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1791 at the Chapel House in City Road, London. His body was visited by vast crowds at both house and Chapel. He was buried in a vault to the rear of the Chapel on 9<sup>th</sup> March.



*John Wesley preaching on his father's grave*



## **Charles Wesley 1707-1788**

Younger brother to John, Charles was the eighteenth child born to Susanna and Samuel. At first thought to be dead, he was born prematurely and lay silent for weeks wrapped in wool.

He is remembered mostly for the thousands of hymns he wrote.

When John and Charles went to America, Charles was appointed Chaplain to the garrison and colony at nearby Fort Frederick, St. Simon's Island, arriving there in 1736.

It did not go well. Charles was rejected by the settlers. Shot at, slandered and suffering from sickness, he returned with John to England the following year. Charles recorded "*I went to America to convert the Indians, but, oh, who will convert me?*"

In April 1749 Charles married Sarah Gwynne (1726-1822). Only three of their children survived infancy - Charles junior, Sarah and Samuel. Their six other children died between 1753 and 1768 and were all buried at Bristol. Two of their children, Samuel and Charles junior were considered child musical prodigies.

Despite their closeness as brothers Charles and John disagreed about separation from the Church of England. Charles strongly opposed it.

Charles Wesley's hymn 'Love Divine, All Loves Excelling' was sung at the funeral of Baroness Thatcher in St. Paul's Cathedral. It was selected by the former prime minister herself. She was raised as a Methodist. Charles's best known work is 'Hark! The Herald Angels Sing'.



## **Brother and Sisters of John and Charles Wesley:**

### **Samuel (Sammy) 1690-1739**

Samuel obtained his masters degree at Oxford University. He was ordained as an Anglican clergyman but eventually became a headmaster of an endowed school. He was gifted poet. He supported his mother who was heartbroken when Samuel, her first born, died.



*Samuel Wesley the younger*

### **Emilia (Emily) 1692-1771**

Emilia Wesley was born in 1692, older sister to John Wesley. She was baptised by her father. Emilia developed a good 'ear' for music and poetry. In 1735 she was married by her brother John to Robert Harper an apothecary. The marriage was not a happy one. In later life she became a Methodist.

### **Susanna (Sukey) 1695-1764**

Susanna was a happy child and loved life. She married a wealthy land owner in 1719 and had four children. Unfortunately Richard beat his wife and so Susanna left him.

**Mary (Molly) 1696-1734**

Mary was born 'a cripple'. She was not expected to marry but fell in love with her father's curate, Johnny Whitelamb and they married in 1733. Samuel Wesley Mary's brother requested the Lord Chancellor transfer his own living at Wroot to Johnny Whitelamb. They were happy but only a year after the marriage Mary died in childbirth.

**Mehetabel (Hetty) 1697-1750**

When Hetty when only eight years old she could read St. Marks Gospel in Greek. She fell in love with a lawyer but her father refused permission to marry. She eloped to London but soon found her lawyer had no intention to marry. Mehetabel returned home pregnant and in disgrace. She was quickly married to a local plumber and they had a number of children but none survived into adult hood.

**Anne (Nancy) 1701-?**

Anne was a twin. Her twin brother died seven months after they were born. She married John Lambert, a surveyor, in 1725. They had a happy marriage.

**Martha (Patty) 1706-1791**

Martha was the longest lived of the sisters. She was a link to the succeeding generations who forwarded information to Adam Clarke, the first biographer of the Wesley family. Martha married Westley Hall, a member of the Holy Club. He was unfaithful to her so she left him.

**Kezia (Kezzy) 1709-1741**

Kezzy was Susanna's last child born when Susanna was forty. Kezia suffered from poor health. During a visit, Westley Hall forgot he was married to Martha and a romance started.



**Mary (Molly) Vazeille 1709 - 1781**

In 1751 Mary Vazeille became the only wife of John Benjamin Wesley.

She was the widow of a London Merchant Anthony Vazeille who died in 1747. Mary and Anthony had four children.

Before marrying Anthony, Mary had been a domestic servant.

When widowed she became 'worth a fortune' of between £3000 and £5000, though only had a 'life interest' in half.

Mary and Anthony's youngest son Noah was under five years of age when they

married. For the next four years she usually accompanied John on his travels.

Mary was of a jealous character and the marriage struggled. She left John Wesley in 1771, although in her will dated 1779 she left him a gold mourning ring "in token that I die in love and friendship towards him".

John Wesley's last reference to Mary was in a kindly letter, mentioning the children of Mary's married daughter in his will as "my dear grand-daughters".

## How Methodism came to Leeds



### **John Nelson** 1707 -1774

John was born in October 1707 at Birstall which is 12 miles south east of Roundhay. He became a stone mason, like his father.

In 1725, at the age of nineteen, he was married to Martha. There is birth evidence that they had at least five children, two girls and three boys.

He was one of the most successful of John Wesley's lay assistants.

Since the early age of 9, John Nelson had been much troubled about religion.

In 1739 he was in London working as an ornamental stonemason. Still greatly troubled he went to The Foundry Chapel Moorfields, a converted foundry which was John Wesley's first London base, where he heard a Mr. Whitefield speak.

John Nelson was so moved by what he heard that he was quite overcome and his religious troubles began to ease.

He was later to walk and talk with John Wesley before returning home in 1740.



*John Nelson's birth place at Birstall*





*The Foundry Chapel, Moorfields in London where John Nelson first heard Wesley*

When John Nelson returned to his home at Birstall he started to preach and pray with friends and family. His words soon attracted a following and he founded the Birstall Methodist Society between 1741 and 1742. John and his wife Martha are both buried at the Parish Church of St Peter's at Birstall.

William Shent, a barber and wig maker became a lay preacher and in 1742 invited John Nelson to preach outside his shop in what was then the market place. The site became a regular preaching point for others, including John and Charles Wesley. William's shop became the first meeting base.

Methodists suffered from their unruly behaviour of mobs in Leeds as in other places. The Leeds Methodists received help from Matthew Chippendale whose house stood in a field called Applegarth. Its local name was Boggard Close (or field). This house served the Leeds Methodists until a new Chapel was built around the framework of the old structure between 1750 and 1751. It stood on the site where Quarry Hill flats were later built, next to the steps on the north side of the present West Yorkshire Playhouse at LS2 7UP. It was later known as Old Boggard House or 'Boggart' until St Peter's Mission Chapel was built adjacent in 1834.

A public meeting there on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1813 led to the formation of the (Wesleyan) Methodist Missionary Society which was highly influential in Methodism becoming a world church.

On 6<sup>th</sup> October 2013 a Leeds Civic Trust Blue Plaque was unveiled marking the site of the Old Boggard House.



*Old Boggard House sometimes called Boggart House, Leeds*

In 1742 John Wesley, recognising the work of lay preachers, visited Birstall and lodged in Nelson's cottage. John Nelson became the most successful of Wesley's evangelists. Nelson kept a journal for a year or two of his experiences.

From 1750 until 1770 Nelson was stationed as official preacher to Methodist societies in London, Bristol, Birstall, Leeds, Derby, Yarm, and York, and he paid one visit to Ireland.

At the time of his death on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1774, John Nelson was still serving as a Methodist lay preacher in Leeds. It is reported that thousands of people lined the funeral route and many followed the cortege from there to Birstall where he was laid to rest in the grave yard of the Parish Church. A brass tablet in his memory was placed inside the church.

## **How Methodism came to the Township of Roundhay**

### **The first meetings**

The first record of Methodism in Roundhay was of local people meeting in the upstairs room of an ivy-covered cottage on Chapel Lane in the early 1800's.

The cottage still exists.

A Chapel was soon to follow, built on adjacent land owned by John and Joshua Burton \_ \_ \_

### ***Ongoing project, more to follow* \_ \_ \_**

The next chapter will follow the people behind the first Chapel on Chapel Lane, now known as North Lane, their lives and families, the land, and the development of the early Church and its buildings.

## Acknowledgements

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### **Epworth Old Rectory** Home of the Wesley family

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### **Links to the past**

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### **London Metropolitan Archives** Parish records: Mary Wesley died 1781

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### **The Methodist Church in Britain**

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### **Viewpoint: Susanna Wesley**

By Beverly Whitaker, Kansas City, Missouri

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**Wesley Centre Online**

<http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesley-the-methodist/john-wesley-after-the-portrait-by-j-w-l-forster/>

**Wikipedia**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Wesley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wesley)

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