



John Wesley's London

In last month's magazine I wrote about a return trip to York Minster. Since then we've been to visit somewhere new but a little closer to Bedford.

To reach our destination we strolled from Farringdon tube station through the daffodils of Bunhill Fields, a burial ground for dissenters - including Bedford's own John Bunyan as well as Isaac Watts, Daniel Defoe and Susanna Wesley.

Opposite Bunhill Fields visitors are met by a statue of John Wesley bearing his now famous phrase 'the world is my parish.' There are then three things to visit on the same site:

The Museum of Methodism is in the chapel crypt and has recently been refurbished. There's a brief video (introduced by Huw Edwards) which tells the story of John Wesley, and a number of well laid out displays. The museum doesn't attempt a comprehensive study of the history of the Methodist Church but instead focuses on a few areas such as hymn books, chapel building and overseas missions.

Wesley's Chapel was opened in 1778. It was built by John Wesley as his London base and replaced 'The Foundery' which was his first meeting place. The Foundery had room for a congregation of 1,500, a smaller room for classes and was also used as a school for the children of the poor and the first free dispensary in London. In times of hardship food and clothing were given out. Wesley and his preachers had lodgings there and accommodation was provided for poor widows. Wesley insisted that everyone ate the same meals at the same table.

Over the years there have been a number of changes to the new chapel which John Wesley described as 'neat but not fine' - there is some Victorian stained glass and a new organ - and it is now a very impressive galleried chapel. There is a smaller Foundery Chapel upstairs which is open for private prayer. Some of the wooden benches come from the original Foundery. This was a much simpler space and I liked it very much.

John Wesley's House has been refurbished to show what life was like in Wesley's time. When we think of Georgian townhouses we often think of Jane Austen's Bath but this was a much less grand as Wesley chose to live simply. Wesley occupied the three first floor rooms while the rest of the house was home to visiting preachers. Opening off his small bedroom is the tiny prayer room where he began and ended each day when in London. (This tended to be in the winter months - in the summer he was usually to be found criss-crossing the country on horseback, visiting other Methodist congregations and preaching. In the winter the roads became too difficult) Wesley liked his household to be in bed by nine at night and up in time for morning prayers at five in the morning. He would rise at four and spend an hour in prayer and Bible reading beforehand. Today there is a Bible open on a desk and the Methodist Covenant Prayer is on the wall:

I am no longer my own but yours.

Put me to what you will,

rank me with whom you will;

put me to doing,

*put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you,
or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing;
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, gracious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made in earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen*

The prayer room has been described as the 'Power House of Methodism' and spending a few minutes of



The First Methodist Chapel called the Foundry

quiet in there was certainly a powerful experience.

We spent a lovely couple of hours enjoying the visit, all the guides were friendly and the atmosphere was very welcoming. I would happily recommend it to anyone interested in the history of the Methodist Church. There is also a walking tour of John Wesley's London available from www.methodistheritage.org.uk.

The website features a virtual tour of the house, chapel and museum as well as allowing you to explore the collections from your own home - www.wesleysheritage.org.uk

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