

Wapping-in-the-Wash

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In Wesley's Day

of London along the north bank of Father Thames—though he used the word "wose" for "wash." It was in 1571, during his lifetime, that the Commissioners of Sewers had recommended that houses should be built there in order to prevent the periodic inundations. By Wesley's time it was an overcrowded, insanitary haunt for sailors and hangers-on of the shipping trade, famous for its Execution Dock, where pirates hung in chains.

Two hundred years ago, on Monday, February 3, Charles Wesley records that he "opened our new Chapel in Wapping, by preaching to a numerous audience from 1 Cor. xv. 1"—"I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received." As the text suggests, this chapel at Wapping was no new venture. Methodism had got an early foothold there, and for a time Wapping had even been the rallying-point for London Methodists.

As early as 1736 a religious society was meeting at Wapping, probably in connection with the chapel built there for the Huguenot refugees who flocked to the safety of East London after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Prayers were read in this society by an Oxford Methodist, the Rev. Thomas Broughton, then Chaplain at the Tower.

In 1738 John Wesley records preaching three times at the Parish Church of St. John the Evangelist, an "architectural monstrosity, with its four corner towers, and its Doric porticoes," which was replaced by a brick church in 1794. The last occasion of his preaching was on May 21, three days before his "heart-warming." So outspoken was he that here, as elsewhere, he was told he could preach no

more, though over forty years later, when Methodism had become more or less respectable, the pulpit was again opened to him, while a great crowd listened attentively.

The public preaching at St. John's, however, was but a small incident in the Methodist witness at Wapping. Already Wesley was in touch with Mr. Parker, one of the mainstays of the growing society there. Soon he—and his brother Charles—were holding regular Friday evening cottage-meetings, either in Mr. Abbot's parlour, "more than filled," or at Mr. Parker's, filled twice over. Sometimes they conversed into the small hours, staying the night at Parker's. On one occasion, after retiring at 12.15, Wesley records getting up at 5.30—"singing"! At Parker's home in Wapping, John Wesley tells Whitefield, "I have commonly had more power given me than at any other place."

Many strange happenings are recorded in the Methodist annals of Wapping—a lunatic child healed by prayer; people in spiritual convulsions under an impromptu sermon changed at the last minute by John Wesley; the master-at-arms of H.M.S. Teyler asking for special thanksgiving prayers to commemorate a four-fold deliverance from privateers; the great panic caused by George Bell's prophecy that the world would end on February 28, 1753.

The 1746 Wapping Chapel continued as a regular preaching-centre. Here the 1748 Conference instructed the preachers to hold regular Leaders' Meetings in conjunction with the weekly preaching-services, now changed to Monday evenings. In 1754 Wapping was one of the places at which Conference "delegates" preached. Wesley himself continued to visit the parish at least twice a year, and in 1764 opened a new chapel there. Till within a month of his death he was still preaching to the loyal Methodists at Wapping-in-the-Wash.

F. B.

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