

Introduction

Welcome to the Methodist Church here at High Street, Maidenhead.

We hope that your visit to this long - established and continuously active church will be both be for you an architectural interest and an appreciation of the lives of some of the people associated with it over the past 150 years or so.

There has been a Chapel on this site since 1841 which was built for the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. Originally it was a rectangular shape measuring approximately 65 ft x 35 ft. A partition across its width allowed about three quarters of the building at its north end to be used for worship whilst the remainder consisted of two rooms one above the other. A gallery at the northern end (above today's vestibule) also housed the organ. The foundation stone was laid on 30 March 1841.

The property and grounds (about one third of an acre) were purchased by the Methodist Church on 8th October 1858 and redeveloped. Consequently the partition and two rooms were removed and the worship extended to south wall. New pews were added, basic heating installed and the gallery repaired. The normal seating capacity was therefore increased to 400 with space to accommodate 550 "at a push" should circumstances require. A Vestry and Schoolroom were built on the southern end of the site.

Since then the church interior has had considerable alteration the most significant of which have been the addition, and subsequent removal, of galleries along the side walls and the addition of the two transepts. The last major refurbishment of the interior took place in 1991 when the whole of the church interior was gutted, the pews removed, the ceiling woodwork grit-blasted, the walls re-plastered, galleries rebuilt, organ re-positioned, floor re-carpeted, new lighting installed and more glass incorporated into the main and side entrances.

The Bell and the Clock

The Bell

A bell was cast in by the firm of Samuel Knight in their Wokingham premises before the firm moved first to Reading and later on to London in 1710. The bell was cast for Bray Church and was subsequently sold to the Countess of Huntingdon for her Maidenhead Chapel. It is inscribed:

SAMVELL KNIGHT MADE MEE 1703

The Clock

A clock was purchased along with the bell in 1841. It was however an erratic timekeeper and the subject of complaint both through the columns of the Maidenhead Advertiser and via a letter of complaint from the Town clerk to the Church Trustees. The clock mechanism was eventually replaced and the clock face repainted and re - gilded. It was formally started by the Mayor of Maidenhead John Truscott church member and Trustee of the church at 9.30 a.m. on Wednesday 21 June 1899.

The Windows

The Shepherd Window (North gallery)

Presented by John Wesley Walker (q.v.), Mayor of Maidenhead and prominent Methodist, in 1905 in memory of his parents Robert and Ann. Robert was himself Mayor of Maidenhead in 1870 and 1871 and served the High St Church in many capacities for 41 years.

The centre panel of the window depicts the Good Shepherd holding a lamb.

The L.H.S panel shows an angel with a scroll bearing the inscription “In Domine confide” (Trust in the Lord) the motto adopted by the Walker family.

The R.H.S panel also shows an angel bearing the inscription “Me vides O deus” (Thou God seest me) this being the text of the sermon preached to John Higgs (q.v.) that triggered the introduction of Methodism into Maidenhead.

Two part window (West wall) 1898

The L.H.S panel was presented by William Mills in memory of his wife Eliza Ann an active worker in the church for 13 years. It depicts an angel bearing the text “Glory to God in the Highest” sometimes misread as glory to God in the High St” !

The R.H.S panel was given in memory of Thomas Henry Bromley , a member of the Church for 35 years, by his family. The window depicts an angel bearing the text “Peace on Earth”

Two part window (East wall) 1898

The L.H.S panel was presented by Charles William Cox, subsequently Mayor of Maidenhead on no less than nine occasions between 1883 and 1927, in memory of his his mother Sarah Cox.

The R.H.S panel was given in memory of Thomas Hine, a Methodist Local Preacher, by his wife Elizabeth and family. Thomas Hine, a local Butcher and much respected and known as “Holy Joe” died shortly after being gored by a heifer that fractured his spine.

Two part window (East transept) 1898

Presented by Mr C B Foster, an active member of the Church and member of the founding Committee for the Wesleyan Day School in 1863, in memory of his uncle Charles and aunt Martha Brown.

The L.H.S panel shows an angel with the text “We praise thee - We bless thee” and the R.H.S panel shows an angel with the text “We acknowledge thee to be the Lord”

The Sanctuary Windows (1878)

The east panel was presented by Richard Silver, Mayor of Maidehead 1877, in memory of his grandmother Susannah Silver. The panel depicts crucifixion symbols - hammer and tongs - on the Tree of Life. It is surmounted by the Crown of thorns.

The west panel was presented by Richard Illsley, Justice of the Peace and Mayor of Maidenhead in 1878, 1879, 1890 in memory of his mother and brother. The panel depicts crucifixion symbols - spear and sponge - on the Tree of Life. It is surmounted by three nails.

The memorials (outside)

The Graveyard

For many years there was a graveyard to the south and east of the church which ultimately contained about 200 graves. With its demise, 20 of the gravestones were saved or repositioned and remain today. It is certain that several of the people named were original members of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion before the property was purchased by the Methodists. Information on most of them is very scant but some of the people mentioned are described below.

The Higgs/Walker Vault (Situated under the church)

Mary Ann Curtis Treffrey Born Mary Ann Curtis Cullern daughter of Thomas Cullern Mayor of Maidenhead 1793. Influential in establishing the Sunday School at the Methodist Chapel in Holyport. Married to Robert Walker (snr) then after his death to Richard Treffrey President of the Methodist Conference 1833. Mother of Robert Walker (jnr), grandmother of John Wesley Walker and step-mother to Jemima Griffin Higgs.

John Higgs (see description on internal memorial)

Robert Walker (jnr) Local Preacher. Sunday School Superintendent 1845 - 1886. Mayor of Maidenhead 1871 & 1872. Various Postmaster, Chairman of the Maidenhead Gas Company and Magistrate. Jemima Higgs' half-brother. Foundation stones bear his name. His portrait is in the vestry.

Ann Walker. Born Ann Wright daughter of Murrel and Mary Wright of Sunninghill. Married Robert Walker (jnr) in 1847. Her portrait is in the vestry.

Jemima Higgs. (see description on internal memorial)

The Stuchbury Memorial

Thomas Stuchbury was an elder in the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. Thomas, and his wife and his youngest son William Owen were buried in the graveyard before the Methodists came. Three of their children were buried elsewhere but their daughter Sarah (a member of the West Street Congregational Church) was interred in the family vault in 1917 aged 97.

The Portrey Memorial

Memorial stones on the East Side of the Church name five of the **Portrey** Family, **Joseph** (father), **Martha** (mother) and three of their children **Richard Watson**, **Jabez Bunting**, and **Robert Newton**.

Joseph Portrey was Superintendent Minister of the Windsor & Maidenhead Circuit and it was while in Windsor that his son, **Richard**, died and was interred here at High Street in April 1869. However shortly after being transferred to the Shaftesbury Circuit, **Joseph** himself died and his remains were brought back, by train, to be interred at High Street in October 1880.

Within a year **Martha**, Joseph's widow, died and was also interred at High Street.

Tragedy then struck the family as the two remaining sons, Ministers of Religion, both died - **Jabez Bunting Portrey** in Adelaide and **Robert Newton Portrey** in the West Indies, the latter having been married in September 1881 leaving a widow Alice (nee Pearce) and no children.

The only surviving child of the Portrey family was their daughter **Susannah Wesley Higgins** with her three young daughters Helena Victoria, Susannah Portrey and Josephine Alice

The Memorials (inside)

Revd Griffith Davis (West Transept)

Revd Griffith Davis served as the first pastor of an earlier Countess of Huntingdon's chapel in White Hart Lane, Maidenhead. Born in 1790, he began his pastorate on Christmas Day 1815 serving there for 21 years until his death at the age of 46.

John & Jemima Higgs (West wall) 1886

John and Jemima Higgs were responsible for introducing Methodism to Maidenhead in 1829. It was at Jemima's instigation that John became a Christian. John was active in the Windsor circuit for 21 years and besides his church works he was Mayor (1844/5), Alderman, Magistrate and Postmaster. Jemima was the daughter of Robert Walker (snr.) Portraits of John and Jemima hang in the Minister's vestry. They are interred in the family vault under the church.

Centenary Celebration Stone. (West wall) 1929

A stone to commemorate the church restoration and enlargement by the addition of Choir Vestry and a Front Porch. Laid by Revd John Ritson, President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference in 1829.

Centenary Celebration Stone (East wall) 1929

To commemorate 100 years since the preaching of the first Methodist sermon in Maidenhead by the Revd William Pollard 2 July 1929

Commemorative Plaque 1993 (Vestibule)

A brass plate to commemorate the church refurbishment in 1993 to the design of Mr Christopher George Lelliott Architect and Local Preacher, member of the Methodist church at St Mark's Crescent.

The 1914 - 1918 War Memorial (East wall)

In Honoured Memory of Members of this Church and Congregation, who fell in the Great War of 1914 - 1918:

William Henry Truscott,
Frederick Muggridge,
Jack Wonnacott,

Arthur Charles Upson
Kenneth Ditton
Ernest Southgate

Wall Hangings (East transept)

Two wall hangings worked and presented to the Church by Mrs Ruth Daniel. One is representative of the "The Lord is my shepherd" and the other of "Fishers of Men"

Memorial stones (East and west transepts)

Four memorial stones laid as part of the church development in 1877. Dr T F Higgs (a nephew of John Higgs) and Robert Walker laid stones for the east transept and William Woodbridge, Sunday School Superintendent, Trustee and Mayor of Maidenhead 1877 and Thomas Fidler (Mayor of Newbury 1864 and father in law of John Wesley Walker) laid those for the west transept.

Chair memorials

Throughout the church there are many brass plates on chair backs naming individual relatives of church members. The scheme was inaugurated as part of the church's 1991 Refurbishment and to date (2009) there are ?? such commemoration plates.

Memorial stones (South porch)

A collection of memorial stones that formed part of schoolrooms demolished in 1972 as part of the Maidenhead town centre by-pass development scheme have been preserved in the south porch along with the stone laid at that time by Revd Cyril Wainwright Chairman of the District.