

A Dales Journey in the footsteps of John Wesley



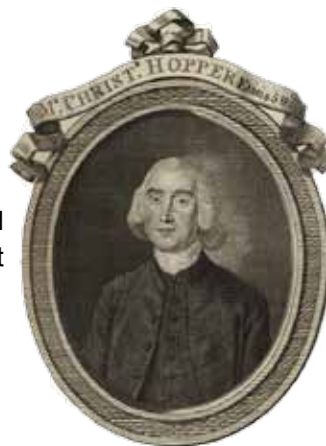
The Dales

Returning to his north east base at Newcastle from Scotland in 1761 John Wesley visited the societies of his newly established Dales Circuit in Allendale, Weardale and Teesdale before travelling south via Osmotherley and Yarm. **Their chapels, five of the oldest in the world, are still in use by Methodists today.**



Wesley instructed his preachers **“You have nothing to do but save souls. And go always, not only to those who want (need) you but to those who want you most”.**

It was to the emerging lead mining communities of the North Pennines that the evangelist preacher Christopher Hopper [right] and his convert Jacob Rowell went to save souls.



Today the North Pennines is a beautiful unspoilt area of sweeping heather clad moors, picturesque dales and small villages. But beneath the tranquillity is a story of toil, of industry and of human endeavour. For this area was the powerhouse of Britain’s – and the world’s – lead mining industry. Boom time was the century from the late 1700s to the late 1800s. Lead production soared, and so did the population as witnessed by John Wesley on his 1772 visit when riding into Weardale he saw **“both sides of the river sprinkled over with innumerable little houses three in four of which if not nine in ten are sprung up since the Methodists came hither.”**

The dales were bursting at the seams with scores of mines and thousands of miners and their families – a boisterous, energetic and young population hungry for work and dreaming of wealth. Reality for most was a life cut short by lung disease and a constant struggle to make ends meet. A miner’s life was a hard one, as you can discover at Killhope Lead Mining Museum.



North Pennine lead miners

The major mining businesses encouraged miners to take small farms and keep a few sheep and a cow to provide fresh milk and meat. Many did so, building little houses and enclosing fields with stone walls. Families in the upper dales were living at well over 500 metres above sea level and eking out a precarious existence at altitudes higher than anywhere else in Britain.

The Church of England was unable to provide for growing populations away from the parish church and the lead mining communities were largely ignored. Wesley’s Methodist foot soldiers valued humble piety and carried a message of hope, love and eternal life which contrasted sharply with the hardship and poverty of earthly toil and helped bind these proud communities together with a deep enduring faith.

Wesley, his preachers and followers met with early opposition from both Church and the landowning classes in Allendale, Weardale and Teesdale. Reporting on his visit to Newbiggin in 1761 Wesley wrote **“Most of the men are lead miners who awhile ago were turned out of their work for following this way [Methodism]. By this means many of them got into far better work and some time after, their old master was glad to employ them again.”**

By the end of Wesley's life his followers had gained a good foothold in the Dales, but comfortable in their chapels they lost much of their missionary zeal. It was the Primitive Methodists (Ranters) with their women preachers, Camp Meetings and Love Feasts who under the leadership of Thomas Batty in 1823 "sparked the most wonderful and glorious revival of the work of God" which spread from its centre in Westgate to all of the North Pennine dales.

Although the Primitives gained some of their flock from the Wesleyans it was a revival which benefited both denominations.

Every village had its Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist chapel and many hamlets too contained a chapel.



William Dowson, 1850-1879
Teesdale lead miner and
Wesleyan Methodist missionary.

In the 1880s the North Pennines lead industry collapsed in the face of cheap imports and plummeting lead prices. Many families were forced to leave to work in the coal mines or to emigrate to America, New Zealand or Australia where they carried their faith with them, building new communities and new chapels.

The legacy of mining is all around in the North Pennines if you know where to look. So too are the chapels of the lead dales which stand witness to the size and the faith of the communities who built them.

Visit our dales chapels at Keenley, Ireshopeburn, Westgate and Newbiggin to learn more of this rich heritage.

Yarm and Osmotherley

John Wesley frequently visited Yarm and Osmotherley on his journeys to and from Newcastle. Yarm was a staging post on the road from London to South Shields, with two coach services daily in each direction.

In medieval times Yarm was the most important town and port on the Tees, built in a horse-shoe bend of the river. Its stone bridge, built in 1400 by Walter Skirlaw, Bishop of Durham, was the lowest on the river, while its port was at the upper limit of the tidal reach. It could take up to four tides for a ship to reach it.

In the eighteenth century, in the period of Wesley's visits, the town was thriving. Trades included rope makers, brewers, tanners, nailers, clockmakers and shipbuilders. Vessels of up to sixty tons traded with London and the Continent and Yarm attracted trade goods from a wide area, including lead brought by pack horse from Swaledale and Teesdale.



Yarm High Street

It was in a barn, owned by a wealthy merchant named George Merryweather that the first Yarm Methodists held their meetings. The Merryweather family were shippers of salt from Northumberland. They were friends and supporters of John Wesley who stayed with them in their house (which still stands tall in Yarm High Street) on nineteen occasions. They also provided the site on which the Chapel was built. This octagonal chapel, one of fourteen built by Wesley, seems to have been his favourite: he declared it to be "by far the most elegant in England".

Another merchant benefactor, John Robert Clapham, established a Primitive Methodist chapel in Yarm.

Osmotherley is an attractive village on the western edge of the North York Moors which grew rapidly from the late eighteenth century with the building of the Cote Ghyll linen mill and bleaching mills. It was also know for the mining of alum, jet and ironstone.

Religion was a strong influence, especially from the nearby Carthusian Mount Grace Priory. Both the Quakers and Methodists had early congregations and buildings in the village. John Wesley first visited Osmotherley at the invitation of a Roman Catholic Franciscan friar. He initially preached in the parish church and in the open air, reputedly at the village's barter table, then in the Methodist chapel, built in 1754, one of the oldest in the world.



Images

Front Cover:
High House Chapel [© Weardale Museum]

Statue of Wesley on horseback
[© New Room, Bristol]

Christopher Hopper, Wesley's Helper.
[© Oxford Brookes University]

North Pennine lead miners
[© Weardale Museum Collection]

William Dowson, missionary
[© Newbiggin Chapel Collection]

Yarm High Street
[© Stockton Library Service]

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Places to Visit on your Dales Journey

1. Keenley Chapel - East Allendale - NE47 9NS



In 1750 Keenley was the second Methodist preaching place built in the north of England after the Orphan House in Newcastle and so lays claim to being the oldest Methodist Church still in use. It was here that John Wesley lost Grace Murray when his brother Charles whisked her away to marry another. Here Christopher Hopper found his vocation and together with Jacob Rowell, formerly a notorious follower of cock-fighting, preached in the Northern Dales.

For Access: Tel 01434 -602041

2. Isaac's Tea Trail walk in the Allen Valleys



Follow in the footsteps of the legendary tea seller and philanthropist Isaac Holden. Significant amongst Isaac's achievements was raising funds to pay off the debts of Allendale's Methodist chapels. Further a field he spoke of his Christian faith by the wayside, in railway carriages or as he sold tea - wherever his calling took him. The 36 mile walking trail also includes places where John Wesley preached, at Keenley, Allendale, Nenthead and Alston, as well as the locations of over 20 historic Methodist chapels.

"A Guide, Isaac's Tea Trail: Hidden Heritage in England's North Country" from: The Office, Heritage Centre, Allenheads, Hexham, Northumberland, NE47 9HN

Contact: tel. 0191 - 4194471 rogermorris@gmail.com
www.northumberlandlife.org/teatrail

3. Killhope Lead Mining Museum - DL13 1AA



A visit to Killhope North of England Lead mining Museum is essential to grasping the psyche and mindset of the lead mining Methodists. Experience first hand the dark underground world of the lead miner by taking a trip into Park Level Mine with one of their knowledgeable and friendly guides. Enjoy breathtaking scenery, underground adventure, fascinating lead mining history, beautiful woodland walks and amazing wildlife.

Access: Open daily from April 1st - October 31st 10.30am - 5pm
Due to the rugged landscape of Killhope, access to certain outside areas and the mine can be difficult for people with wheelchairs and those with mobility problems.

www.killhope.org.uk Tel 01388 537505

4. High House Chapel - Weardale - DL13 1HD



Built in 1760, it was here that Wesley witnessed how the fires of Methodism took hold to create an enormous society of 266 members among the lead miners of Weardale. It is now the oldest chapel in the world in continuous weekly use. The adjoining manse has been turned into a wonderful folk museum which tells many stories including Wesley & his early evangelists in the North Pennines.

Sunday Services 10.45am - all are welcome

Access: Open to the public during Weardale Museum hours: 2pm - 5pm
Easter & Bank Holidays, May 1 - Oct 31 Wednesday - Sunday.
August every afternoon. Out of season and group visits by appointment.
Contact: Tel 01388 517433 www.weardalemuseum.co.uk

5. Westgate Chapel - Weardale - DL13 1LQ



Weardale has a proud history of Primitive Methodism with Westgate at its heart. The Primitive Methodists built an 1823 chapel here, but as lead mining and the congregation boomed, they needed a larger place of worship. The new chapel opened in 1871, the old chapel next door becoming the schoolroom. The 1871 building is outstanding, retaining its Victorian layout complete with a full set of pews, high quality ornate ironwork, superb woodwork and original windows and plaster details. It is a wonderful gem of a building which since its closer in 2008 has been adopted by the Historic Chapels Trust.

Access: By appointment only
Contact: Tel: 020 7481 0533 to find the details of the local keyholder.
www.hct.org.uk/chapels

6. Newbiggin Chapel - Teesdale - DL12 0TY



In 1759 in this picturesque hamlet in beautiful Upper Teesdale, local lead miners and others bought the land on which the oldest Methodist Chapel in the world in continuous use stands. It houses still a pulpit from which John Wesley preached. With its strong connection in the nineteenth century with the London Lead Mining Company, the chapel remains a place of worship, peace and tranquillity.

Access: At reasonable times - A list of key holders is posted at the entrance.
No disabled access - there are steps to the entrance.

Contact: Tel. 07770569714.
www.newbigginchapel.co.uk

7. Timothy Hackworth Museum, Shildon DL4 1PQ



Better known as one of the earliest railway locomotive engineers Timothy Hackworth was a staunch Methodist local preacher. His concern for the spiritual and social welfare of the men and their families led him to provide a chapel and the world's first railway institute.

The Hackworth home at 'Soho Cottage' is now incorporated into The National Railway Museum, Shildon. It tells the story of the part played by Hackworth in the birth of passenger railways with the Stockton & Darlington Railway, and throughout the world.

ACCESS: Open daily 10am - 4pm
<http://www.nrm.org.uk/PlanaVisit/VisitShildon>

8. Yarm Octagonal Chapel, Teesside - TS15 9AJ



The unique octagonal chapel on the banks of the river Tees was a favourite of John Wesley, who first preached here on 24th April 1764. Methodist heritage at Yarm is connected to trade and commerce. Originally Yarm was a seaport trading with the French and Flemish towns. The octagonal chapel at Yarm opened at Christmas 1763 was regarded by John Wesley as 'by far the most elegant in England'. This building is still used today by a lively healthy church. It is not a museum but a well fashioned tool for mission.

Access:
Saturday and Sunday 10am - 12.30pm and most evenings by arrangement.
Contact: Tel. 01325 332824

9. Osmotherley Chapel, Nth. Yorkshire DL6 3BJ



Osmotherley is a small village with a Chapel built in 1754, in which John Wesley preached, still in use. It was not only known for its weaving and spinning mills and cottage textile industry but also grew as a result of mining in the vicinity including alum, jet, ironstone and even coal.

Osmotherley is a village which appeals to many interests and is lovely for a summer visit. The Chapel welcomes visitors and exhibitions by artists, photographers etc

Sunday Service 6.30pm

ACCESS: Weekends only. Last weekend in May to last in August:
Saturday, Sunday 9am-5.30pm.
Contact: 01609 883227