

## “Charles Wesley – the First Methodist?”

Dear Friends,

When I first looked at the rota for our weekly Circuit pastoral letter, I was delighted to see my name opposite **21<sup>st</sup> May**, because 21<sup>st</sup> May 1738 was when Charles Wesley is said to have undergone his ‘conversion experience’. He is also said to have been ‘the first Methodist’.

As a former history teacher and a humble student of Charles Wesley, can I be a little naughty and be permitted to debunk both those claims?



### The ‘First Methodist’?

A notable biographer of Charles (and I have to say, there haven’t been many) – Frederick Gill – used this phrase in 1964 as the title of his study, and it is certainly true that Charles himself laid claim to being the first Methodist. Being naturally gregarious, when he was at Oxford he gathered round him an informal group of undergraduates which in student circles quickly became known as the ‘Holy Club’, and he wrote later that their activities ‘gained me the harmless nickname of “Methodist”’.



Historians have argued about this ever since. There are two problems with Charles’ claim. First, the ‘Holy Club’ was never a club as such. The well-known painting by Marshall Claxton showing John addressing the members, who are gathered around a table and listening intently to John (who quickly became their leader – Charles is on his right) is most misleading. And Charles wrote that statement above in 1785, when he was quite elderly!

Secondly, the term ‘Methodist’, though originally applied to this informal Oxford group, was a general term that was used in a much wider sense. George Whitefield, who parted company with the Wesleys on theological grounds, was regarded as a ‘Methodist’, along with his adherents. So too were certain evangelical groups in Wales, as were similar groups within the Church of England, and the term was even used in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to describe anyone who seemed to be religiously ‘serious’. Therefore, while it is right to celebrate our Methodist tradition, we perhaps need to accept a wider definition of the word and its place in the history

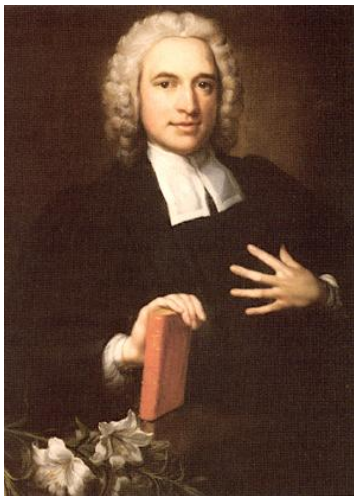
of Christianity – in which Charles had a leading role, whether or not he was actually its founder!

### The term ‘Conversion’:

It is true that both the Wesley brothers used the word ‘conversion’ without the modern tendency to use inverted commas to indicate some degree of qualification, since they assumed everyone would understand what they meant. If you have long memories, you may recall that, three years ago I wrote about just this subject – though primarily in connection with John’s heart-warming experience at Aldersgate Street on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> May 1738.

As with his brother, Charles was not converted from being an unbeliever to a Christian; nor from a sinner into a saint! Their very perceptive mother Susanna gently (but firmly) pointed out that, in her considered opinion, it was not that the brothers were devoid of faith before May 1738, but rather their spiritual crisis had enabled them to appropriate the grace of God that was already present in their lives. In a letter she wrote to Charles in December of that year, Susanna remarked:

‘I do not judge it necessary for us to know the precise time of our conversion . . . I think you are fallen into an odd way of thinking . . . All then I can gather from your letter is that till a little while ago you were not so well satisfied of your being a Christian as you are now.’



If anything, before that date Charles had been a more troubled soul than John. In his journal (of which we only have an incomplete record) he was far readier than his brother to confess his true feelings, and so on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1738 his journal entry read, ‘I was troubled today, that I could not pray, being utterly dead at the sacrament’. And this was penned by a ‘converted’ Charles!

What remarkable honesty! What would you think if your own minister said that to you? I hope that you and I would take comfort from Charles’ example and, rather than berating ourselves for those times when we experience spiritual ‘dryness’, instead rejoice and thank God for those precious moments when we feel a deep sense of peace and certainty of his presence and love. Incidentally, on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1738 (which happened to be Pentecost), Charles wrote, ‘I now found myself at peace with God, and rejoiced in the hope of loving Christ’. Ditto for you and I !



**A Prayer:** Loving God, we thank you that Charles Wesley, like the saints of old, was no superman, but one who simply walked in the footsteps of his Lord and trusted in his Saviour to guide and uphold him. May we who share the legacy that Charles and John Wesley have left us, be inspired by the same zeal for your Gospel of justice, peace and love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, Amen.

*Barrie Tabraham*

## Resources/Good News

### Wesley's Way

Experience the remarkable story of Methodism's founder, through this fascinating walking tour of John Wesley's London. This carefully curated route connects 15 historic sites across central London, all within easy walking distance of Wesley's Chapel on City Road.

[Follow John Wesley's footsteps in London - The Methodist Church](#)

**Saturday 24 May at Knaphill:**



The poster features a central illustration of a woman in a green shirt and orange cap serving coffee from a blue teapot. To her left is a large brown sign with the text 'MONTHLY COFFEE MORNING' in white, and 'AND SALE' in large red letters below it. To her right is a blue sign listing 'TEA', 'COFFEE', 'BISCUITS', and 'BACON BUTTIES'. In the foreground, there is a white cup of coffee on a saucer and a collection of colorful toys. The bottom section of the poster is black with white and yellow text.

**MONTHLY COFFEE MORNING**  
**AND SALE**

**BOOKS, DVDs,  
JIGSAWS, CAKES,  
BRIC-A-BRAC & MORE**

**KNAPHILL METHODIST CHURCH HALL**

**4th Saturday every month (except December)**

**10am to Noon**



The poster has a white background with a red border. At the top, the church name is in large red letters, followed by its location in smaller black text. The event title is in large black letters. Below it, the schedule is listed. Two coffee cups are shown, one on each side, with text inside them. The bottom section contains three lines of text.

**STOUGHTON METHODIST CHURCH**  
*(On the corner of Stoughton Road and Grange Road)*

**COFFEE CORNER**

Tuesdays from 10 am – 12 noon

**FREE or gift Donations**

**6<sup>th</sup> May**  
**13<sup>th</sup> May**  
**20<sup>th</sup> May**  
**27<sup>th</sup> May**

**FREE or gift Donations**

Enjoy Coffee & a Chat, Coffee & a Game, or Coffee & a Book  
The choice is yours!  
**Everyone welcome – bring a friend!**



# COFFEE AND CAKE AT ST. MARY'S

QUARRY ST. GUILDFORD GU1 3UP

APRIL - JUNE  
2025

10.30 – 12.00



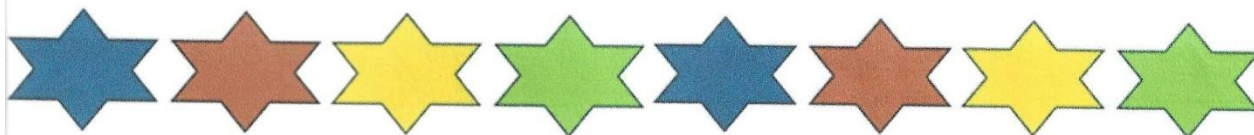
*Everyone welcome*

**SAVE THE DATES!**

**Thursday 24 April**

**Thursday 22 May**

**Thursday 26 June**



**Saturday morning events at the  
Addlestone Methodist Church café  
on Station Road**



***Come along between  
10am and 12 to enjoy  
tea/coffee and cake and  
join in with activities***

**1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of each  
month – Fun Bingo**

*Donations to Sam Beare Hospice  
or Open Doors Charity*

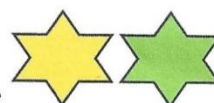


**2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturdays – popular  
hymns & songs to sing to or just  
listen to.**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday – time for our Quiz**



*Check notice board for any changes*







# PET SERVICE

**Sunday 8th June  
15:30**

Walton Methodist Church,  
Terrace Road, KT12 2SR

Do come along to this short act  
of worship where our pets will  
be blessed.

Coffee, tea, biscuits and cakes  
served afterwards.

**[www.waltonmethodist.org](http://www.waltonmethodist.org)**

Charity No. 1174524



**JOIN US AT GODALMING UNITED CHURCH TO MARK THE  
10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF  
'THY KINGDOM COME'**



***The church will be open from 2.30 pm to 4.30 pm for private prayer in the Sanctuary on Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> May and Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> June.***

***We will also be having Afternoon Tea and Cakes on both Saturdays from 3 pm – 4.30 pm in the River Room and Gardens.***

**Displays of local and national charities will be around the church premises which highlight the positive actions that are already taking place, which are improving people's lives and so bringing us all closer to how we imagine God's Kingdom on Earth would look.**

**Come and have a look around the displays and have a tea and cake with friends. We will also have a Bring and Buy Sale.**

**Donations received from the teas and Bring and Buy on 31<sup>st</sup> May will be sent to Christian Aid and on 7<sup>th</sup> June to the Red Cross Appeal for Gaza.**

***Godalming United Church, Bridge Road, Godalming  
GU7 3DU***





**YOU ARE INVITED  
TO JOIN US TO CELEBRATE  
TRINITY  
METHODIST  
CHURCH**

**60<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary**  
1965-2025

**SATURDAY 14TH JUNE 6PM**

**ANNIVERSARY SHOW**

FREE TICKETS: [SIXTYTRINITY@YAHOO.COM](mailto:SIXTYTRINITY@YAHOO.COM)

**SUNDAY 15TH JUNE 10:30 AM**

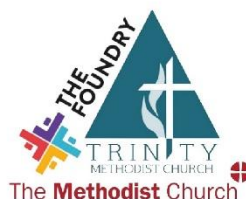
**WORSHIP WITH**

**REV. ANNA CARRINGTON**

**FOLLOWED BY BUFFET LUNCH**

**RSVP BY 7TH JUNE**

[TRINITYWOKING@BTINTERNET.COM](mailto:TRINITYWOKING@BTINTERNET.COM)





# TRINITY 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY SHOW

SATURDAY- 14<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2025  
@ 6.30PM



BRING YOUR OWN  
REFRESHMENTS (no  
alcoholic drinks  
allowed on the  
premises)

Trinity Methodist  
Church, Brewery  
Road, Woking,  
GU21 4LH

FREE  
ENTRY!



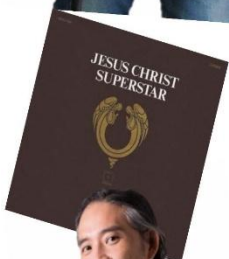
*Featuring current and past  
Trinity members from the  
English and Chinese  
congregations.*

For **free tickets** please  
**contact**  
[sixtytrinity@yahoo.com](mailto:sixtytrinity@yahoo.com)

This is also a fundraising event for  
the upkeep of this church building  
and our work with the local  
community – any donations would  
be appreciated.



SCAN ME





# WINTERSHALL

*Experience the story*



## The Life of Christ

*The greatest story of all time*

17 - 21 June 2025  
10am - 3.30pm

Our powerful, biblical, outdoor drama  
takes you back to a time when  
Jesus lived on earth.

See the remarkable events of Jesus' life  
re-enacted as you follow the actors  
around Wintershall's beautiful lakes  
and ancient woodland.



**BOOK NOW**  [wintershall.org.uk](https://wintershall.org.uk)

[admin@wintershall.org.uk](mailto:admin@wintershall.org.uk)

Wintershall, Bramley, Surrey GU5 0LR

Registered Charity Number 1167111

