THE PARISH OF WADDESDON

300TH Anniversary

John Wesley 1725 – 2025
Fleet Marston and Upper Winchendon

EXTRACTS ON THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF
The Reverend John Wesley

from Christian Leaders of England in the 18th century

Author John Charles Ryle, chapter IV pages 64 - 105
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A prayer as we begin reading this inspiring precis



***Gracious God**, we thank you for the life and witness of John Wesley, and for the Wesley 300 events taking place at Upper Winchendon and Fleet Marston. May these gatherings not only celebrate a legacy but become a living witness — drawing hearts to Christ, inspiring renewed discipleship, and offering your hope to those who are seeking. Use these events as moments of encounter, outreach, and transformation.*

***Lord, in your mercy:** Hear our prayer.*

John Wesley was born 17 June **1703** at Epworth north Lincolnshire where his father was Rector.
John's mother was a woman of extraordinary power of mind. To the influence of his mother's early training and example, he was indebted for many of his peculiar habits of mind and qualifications. John was ninth of a family of at least 13 children comprising three sons and ten daughters.

John had an unhappy and 'unsuited' marriage to a widow lady named Vizelle and no children.
John died from old age aged 88 on 2 March **1791** in London. Before falling asleep in Christ, with all his remaining strength John cried out,
"The best of all is, God is with us" in holy triumph John again repeated
"*The best of all is, God is with us.*"

From John's mother's account we learn she began educating all her children aged 5 years. The way of teaching was this: the day before a child began to learn, the house set in order, every one's work appointed them, and a charge given that none should come into the room from nine to twelve, or from two to five, which were school hours.
In **1709** when John was six years old, the remarkable event recorded by his biographers is his escape from being burnt alive, when Epworth Rectory burnt down. John was pulled through a bedroom window, stood on another man's shoulders before the roof of the house fell inward, with John and his deliverer escaping unhurt.

In **1714** aged 11 John was placed at the Charterhouse School in London, a boy's first entrance at a public school.

In **1720** aged 17 John went to Christ Church, Oxford as an Undergraduate.

In the beginning of **1725** aged 22, he seems to have gone through much exercise of mind as to the choice of a profession. He began to study Divinity, and to go through a regular course of reading for the ministry.

On 19th September **1725** he was Ordained Deacon at Christ Church, Oxford by Dr Potter the Bishop of Oxford, who later became Archbishop of Canterbury. On 3rd October **1725** aged 22 John came by horse to preach his first sermon following Ordination in St Mary's church, Fleet Marston in the morning, and in the afternoon at St Mary Magdalene church, Upper Winchendon. His text for both sermons was Job 3 v 17 ***"There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest."*** (Sermon 127)

In **1726** John was elected Fellow of Lincoln College. The eight years following John's election from **1726-1734** he was resident in Oxford acting as tutor and lecturer in his college. Assisted by his brother Charles, then a student of Christ Church in November **1729**, John gathered a small society of four like-minded young men to spend some evenings in the study of the Greek Testament. They were later joined by others and soon began to think of doing good to others.

In Summer **1730** they began visiting prisoners in the castle and poor people in the town, sending neglected children to school, giving temporal aid to the sick and needy, distributing Bibles and prayer books. Their first steps were taken cautiously, with reference to their father for advice. Acting by his advice, they laid all their plans before the Bishop of Oxford and his Chaplain and did nothing without full ecclesiastical sanction.

A kind of opposition and persecution arose against John and his companions as enthusiasts, fanatics. They were nicknamed “Methodists” or “Holy Club.” They manfully persevered and held their way, greatly encouraged by the old Rector of Epworth.

The providence of God opened up a new sphere of duty in the colony of Georgia, North America. Charles and John set sail and landed in Georgia on 6th February **1736** after a stormy four-month voyage. John remained there two years. If he achieved little in Georgia, he certainly worked hard.

By the time John landed at Deal on 1st February **1738** he was much humbler and wiser and had experienced the inward work of the Holy Spirit.
John says “*The faith I want is a sure trust and confidence in God through the merits of Christ my sins are forgiven, and I reconciled to the favour of God.*
I want that faith which St Paul recommends to all the world, especially in his Epistle to the Romans; that faith which makes every one that hath it to cry as in Galatians 2 v 20 ‘I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.’ I want that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it.”

In Spring **1738** John began a religious society at the Moravian Chapel in Fetter Lane, London which was the type and pattern of all Methodist societies formed afterwards. The rules of this little society with some additions, and improvements contain the inward organisation of Methodism.

In Winter **1738** John after returning from a visit to the Moravian settlement in Germany, began following Whitefield's example of preaching in the open air, in rooms, or wherever men could be brought together.

For fifty-three years from **1738 to 1791** John was always occupied in the same business, going up and down the land evangelistic preaching. John was busy about one thing, attacking sin and ignorance everywhere, preaching repentance toward God, the work of the Spirit and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ everywhere. John was ready to preach anywhere at any hour. John as a man of method, was shut out from the Church of England by the folly of its rulers, John laid the foundation of a new religious denomination Methodism with preachers, lay-preachers, class-leaders, circuits, bands.

John preached within a few days of his death, and the texts of his two last sermons were curiously characteristic of the man. The last but one was at Chelsea, on 18th February **1791** on the words "The king's business requireth haste" 1 Sam 21 v8. The last of all was at Leatherhead, on Wednesday 23rd February **1791** "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found" Is 55 v6.

From John's writings and **65** years of ministry and preaching we see he was a bold fighter on Christ's side, a fearless warrior against sin, the world, and the devil, and an unflinching adherent of the Lord Jesus Christ in a very dark day. He honoured the Bible. He cried down sin. He made much of Christ's blood. He exalted holiness. He taught the absolute need of repentance, faith, and conversion. John was a mighty instrument in God's hand for good and a foremost evangelist of England in the 18th century.

I am grateful to Rev Mike Butterworth for kindly loaning me this title so that these extracts can be shared with you. It has been a fascinating and inspiring read. My prayer is that you would find it equally so.
Susan Becker, July 2025

3rd October 1725 John preached in Fleet Marston and Upper Winchendon on this **scripture Job *3:17 (KJV)***

11 Why died I not from the womb?
why did I not give up the ghost
when I came out of the belly?
12 Why did the knees prevent me?
or why the breasts that I should suck?
13 For now should I have lain still and been quiet,
I should have slept: then had I been at rest,
14 With kings and counsellors of the earth,
which built desolate places for themselves.
15 Or with princes that had gold,
who filled their houses with silver:
16 Or as an hidden untimely birth I had not been;
as infants which never saw light.
17 There the wicked cease from troubling;
and there the weary be at rest.
18 There the prisoners rest together;
they hear not the voice of the oppressor.
19 The small and great are there;
and the servant is free from his master.

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Please join us for services

Second and Fourth Sundays 9:30am

in Upper Winchendon HP18 0EP

further information

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**Please use Rev John Wesley's words as you pray,
reflect and continue your faith journey with us**

*I build on Christ, the rock of ages;
on His sure mercies described in His word,
and on His promises,
all which I know are yea and Amen*

I the chief of sinners am, but Jesus died for me

Prayer is where the action is

*God does nothing except in
response to believing prayer*



Do all the good you can
by all the means you can
in all the ways you can
in all the places you can
at all times you can
to all the people you can
as long as ever you can

I look upon the whole world as my parish

"The best of all is, God is with us"
were John Wesley's last words