

# Methodist Heritage News

Spring 2016

## 45 years of the Methodist Philatelic Society

The inaugural meeting of the Methodist Philatelic Society (MPS) was held in Wolverhampton in September 1970. MPS was the brainchild of Tom Aungiers, a member of Cheadle Hulme Methodist Church. It was established to “encourage the study of philately associated with Methodism and to provide a medium of communication on all related philatelic topics”.

Now after 45 years, MPS is still going strong. For an annual subscription of £15, it offers members a quarterly newsletter, a cover service for all known Methodist-related stamps, covers and postmarks, and the opportunity to contact members for help and advice.

The Revd Steve Wild (current President of the Conference and of MPS) paid tribute to the work of MPS: “It is good that we have such a society within Methodism. A real bonus to being a member is the excellent magazine which is a credit to our Church.”



This first day cover marked the inaugural meeting of MPS. It is signed by the 14 founding members of the Society.

### In this issue

#### PAGE 2

Could you be a volunteer District Heritage Ambassador?

#### PAGE 3

*Transforming the World from the Kitchen?*

#### PAGES 4 & 5

Bicentenary of the death of Francis Asbury

#### PAGE 6

Fair Isle Chapel

#### PAGES 7 & 8

Mission Shaped Heritage Conference 2015

#### PAGE 8

Dates for your diary



## Could you be a volunteer district heritage ambassador?

As Liaison Officer for Methodist Historic Objects my first task has been to become more familiar with the collections at our four accredited museums. Many thanks to the curators, staff and volunteers at Epworth Rectory, the New Room, Englesea Brook and Wesley's Chapel for making me so welcome and letting me poke around in their cupboards!

Each museum uses the MODES computerised cataloguing system and we would like to make elements of this public digitally so that our collections are more widely accessible and appreciated. Items of Connexional significance that belong in other heritage sites or are housed elsewhere are also to be included, significantly improving our current understanding of what is 'out there' in Methodist ownership.

In order to achieve this, we urgently need heritage sites and churches to take inventories of objects in their care. The artefacts pages of the Methodist Heritage website give guidelines for this and we are happy to help when needed. It is often only when churches are closing that we are contacted and find that objects are being offered to our museums, or have already been sold.

From a small wooden tamper at Paisley Central Hall to a re-used font at Knaphill in Surrey, I've seen examples of objects whose stories capture something of the life of the congregations who own them. We tend to take these objects for granted thinking they are insignificant, or worry about them becoming idols or blocks to change.

It is certainly true that some objects have more intrinsic artistic value than others and that we have a duty of care to look after museum quality objects appropriately.

However, there are also many objects which, whilst not valuable in and of themselves, could help to share the gospel story with those who visit our churches and other heritage sites, if used appropriately.

We are currently considering what resources for exhibitions and events might be provided centrally to help local churches kickstart their displays and enable them to concentrate on interpreting their local story. Feedback on this would be welcome.

We have a dedicated and expert group of district archivists, and are grateful for the help they have given local churches for many years. Many have had to become experts in a much wider heritage than just our archives.

We would like to recruit more help. A team of volunteer district heritage ambassadors would significantly improve our ability to support local churches and heritage sites to fulfill their mission potential and to share good ideas and best practice more widely. Please consider whether you feel called to this role.

**Alison Butler**

[alison@easterwhitehouse.co.uk](mailto:alison@easterwhitehouse.co.uk)

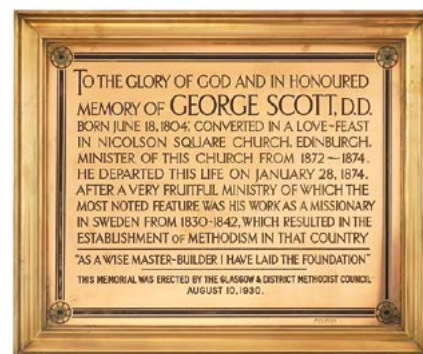
### Examples of objects that tell part of a church's story

1. A mug celebrating 100 years of Methodism
2. A love feast plaque from Scotland
3. A loving cup
4. A lectern fall



1.

2.



3.



4.



# Transforming the World from the Kitchen?

## The story of women working together in British Methodism

Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB) in partnership with the Epworth Old Rectory



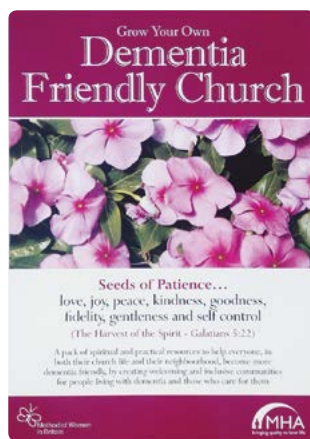
The partnership between Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB) and Epworth Old Rectory is now well established and work towards an exciting new exhibition is under way. MWiB's Heritage and Archives Researcher, Sarah Braisdell, has been working on the project for over a year now, piecing together the story of the established women's movements in British Methodism. This has been greatly helped by women from across the Connexion who have been engaging with the partnership through their donations of objects and memories to help establish the new Methodist Women Collection. MWiB and Epworth Old Rectory are very grateful to the women of Methodism for their

enthusiasm and support of this project so far, because without them this exhibition would not have been possible.

These objects will form the basis of the exhibition *Transforming the World from the Kitchen?* The exhibition is housed in the back kitchen at Epworth Old Rectory and tells the story of British women in Methodism from the formation of Women's Work in 1858 through to the movement's current phase. It will highlight the desire of every generation of Methodist women to join together to work for the betterment of self, Church, community and the world, and make links to the contemporary work of MWiB, especially the focus on

dementia-friendly churches. Parts of the story will also appear in other rooms at the Old Rectory, linking the stories of recent generations of Methodist women to the story of Susanna Wesley, the mother of Methodism.

The exhibition can be viewed at Epworth Old Rectory from 19 March until 29 October 2016. Further information regarding opening times and admission charges can be found at [www.epwortholdrectory.org.uk](http://www.epwortholdrectory.org.uk). To book a group visit to the exhibition please contact Epworth Old Rectory through the website or call 01427 872268. For further information or to donate memories and objects please contact Sarah Braisdell - [sgbraisdell1@gmail.com](mailto:sgbraisdell1@gmail.com).



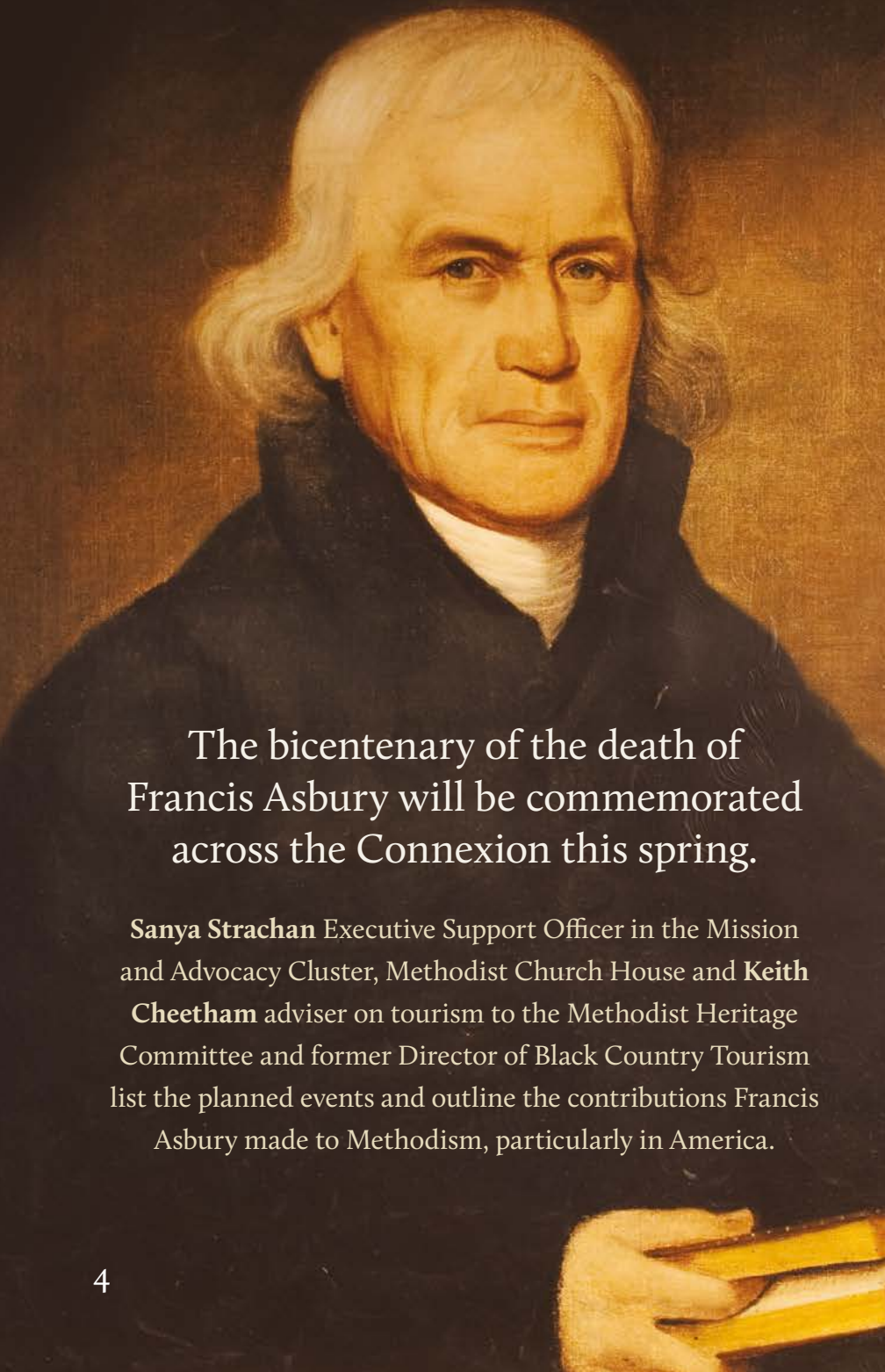
Methodist Women  
in Britain

Methodist Women in Britain, *Grow Your Own Dementia-Friendly Church* resource pack produced jointly with MHA and launched in 2015

Mrs Caroline Wiseman (1834 - 1912), Secretary of Women's Work from 1874 until her death (Artist: Arthur Trevelthyn Nowell, painted in 1908. Oxford Brookes University).

Image courtesy the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University.

# Bicentenary of the death of Francis Asbury



The bicentenary of the death of Francis Asbury will be commemorated across the Connexion this spring.

**Sanya Strachan** Executive Support Officer in the Mission and Advocacy Cluster, Methodist Church House and **Keith Cheetham** adviser on tourism to the Methodist Heritage Committee and former Director of Black Country Tourism list the planned events and outline the contributions Francis Asbury made to Methodism, particularly in America.



**O**n the plinth of his equestrian statue in Washington DC, Francis Asbury is described as "the Prophet of the Long Road". He had been the driving force of Methodism in America.

Asbury was born on 20 or 21 August 1745 in Hamstead, on the border of the Black Country with Birmingham, to parents Joseph and Eliza Asbury. Within months they moved to a new home in a cottage at the nearby hamlet of Newton, close to Great Barr. It was to become the only home Francis would ever know (now known as 'Bishop Asbury's Cottage'). His mother was a devout Christian and major influence on the boy, and he was sent to school at Snails Green. Francis was a good scholar and able to read the Bible by the age of six. At 13, he left and became apprenticed to a chape maker and blacksmith, probably at the Old Forge in the Sandwell Valley.

The Asburys attended the parish church of All Saints at West Bromwich, where the vicar was a man of great Methodist enthusiasm and a friend of John Wesley.

Meanwhile, whilst still working at the Old Forge, Asbury was approached by one of Wesley's preachers, Alexander Mather. He suggested Asbury quit his job and join the Methodist movement as a full-time itinerant preacher on trial. Without hesitation Francis accepted the offer. Over the next five months he was joined by another preacher, William Orpe, and their area covered the Black Country, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire.

At the London conference in 1767, Asbury was assigned to the Bedfordshire circuit, covering towns such as Luton, Bedford and Northampton. By the following year Wesley gave Asbury the tough job of dealing with smugglers on the Essex coastline covered by the Colchester Circuit. Two months later he was transferred to Salisbury as Superintendent of the South Wiltshire Circuit, where other Methodist centres included Winchester and Portsmouth (from where he travelled to and spent a brief spell on the Isle of Wight).

It was in July 1771, aged 26, that Francis Asbury went to John Wesley's Chapel (the New Room) in Bristol to attend the annual conference of Wesley's preachers. In the previous decade Methodists had been crossing the Atlantic to settle in colonies on the American seaboard. Wesley asked his assembled preachers, "Our brethren in America call aloud for help. Who are willing to go over to help them?" Francis Asbury took up the challenge, went back to say farewell to his parents and returned to Bristol to sail from the little port of Pill on the River Avon and over to the New World.

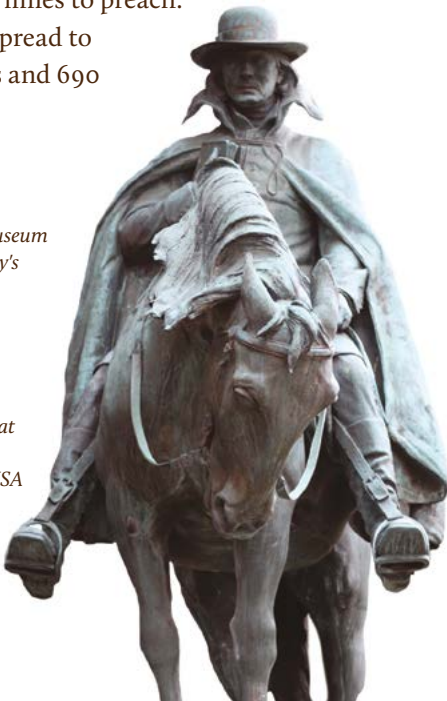
After eight days at sea they landed at Philadelphia on 27 October 1771. Unlike other preachers, Asbury never settled in one place but travelled around the eastern side of America, preaching wherever he found an opportunity. When the American War of Independence broke out in 1776, Wesley recalled his preachers back to England, but Asbury remained. In 1784 Wesley named Asbury and the Revd Dr Thomas Coke as co-superintendents of the work in America. At the Baltimore Conference on 24 December 1784, Dr Coke carried out the commission of John Wesley in ordaining Francis as its first Bishop. The Methodist Episcopal Church was established. By that time there were more than 15,000 members, 86 preachers and 39 circuits in America. Asbury died on 31 March 1816 in Spottsylvania, Virginia. By this time, Asbury had travelled 270,000 miles to preach.

Methodism had spread to 214,000 members and 690 preachers.

*Above: Today, Francis' childhood home is a museum known as Bishop Asbury's Cottage*

*Left: Portrait of Francis Asbury*

*Right: Statue of Bishop Francis Asbury located at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, USA  
© UMNS/Kathleen Barry*



**Saturday 9 April 2016**

## **FAMILY FUN DAY**

**Asbury 200th Anniversary Connexional Launch Event at the Black Country Living Museum, Tipton Road, Dudley DY1 4SQ.**

**Come and discover your living history in an exciting day for all the family.**

**Commemoration service in the former New Connexion Providence Chapel.**

Victorian Sunday School experience  
(be on your best behaviour!)

**Vintage bus trips to Francis Asbury's childhood home.**

Nail-making and chain-making in the forge.

**Exhibition.**

Talks.

**Join our 'flash mob' costumed choir.**



### **Work and Chapel: Black Country Methodism**

Come and commemorate the 200th anniversary of the death of Bishop Francis Asbury, Black Country boy and first Joint Superintendent Methodist minister in America.

In partnership with the Black Country Living Museum, we are celebrating Asbury's early years as a local apprentice metal worker, and the impact of Methodism on the industrialised Midlands of the nineteenth century.

**For more information, visit:**

[www.methodistheritage.org.uk](http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk)

[www.bclm.co.uk](http://www.bclm.co.uk)

Look for the #asbury200 hashtag on Twitter



**For more information regarding district events in 2016, please go to the relevant website:**

Beds, Essex & Herts: [www.behdistrict.org.uk/](http://www.behdistrict.org.uk/)

Birmingham: [www.birminghammethodist.org.uk](http://www.birminghammethodist.org.uk)

Bristol: [www.bristolmethodist.org.uk](http://www.bristolmethodist.org.uk)

Southampton: [www.southamptonmethodistdistrict.org.uk](http://www.southamptonmethodistdistrict.org.uk)

Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury: [www.wsmethodist.org.uk](http://www.wsmethodist.org.uk)



**For more information,**

contact Sanya Strachan

email: [strachans@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:strachans@methodistchurch.org.uk)

tel: 020 7467 3770

# Fair Isle Chapel



As a follow-up to Jo Hibbard's feature in the last issue on Shetland's historic spaces, John Best one of the four ministers in the Shetland District writes about Fair Isle and its chapel.

Fair Isle, Britain's most remote inhabited island, lies midway between Shetland and Orkney. Visitors travel by a reliable ferry, *Good Shepherd*, or fly in on scheduled flights. Fair Isle is a mere three miles long, one mile wide, world famous for its distinctive patterned knitwear, and owned by the National Trust for Scotland.

A short description would include a safe harbour, single-track roads, electric power from diesel and wind generators, school and community centre, well-maintained houses, museum, post office and shop, two lighthouses and a world renowned bird observatory. Dramatic cliffs, open access across crofting land, amazing views of an ever changing sea make this a special place and home of choice for about 60 people.

Amongst the special places to visit is the Methodist chapel. The first visiting ordained Methodist minister arrived in a 22 foot open boat on 5 June 1824. The 'Methodist societies' of that time were led by 'exhorters'. These were lay members leading worship long before the advent of local preachers became a recognised preaching order. Minutes of Lerwick Circuit Meeting, recorded on 1 October 1884, stated:

"The chairman reported on the wretched condition of the chapel in Fair Isle, it being beyond the possibility of repairing."

It shows great initiative that the second chapel was built on the same site, by local voluntary labour and completed sometime in 1885 and legally secured on 29 January 1886. Taking into account prevailing winds, the second chapel was turned completely round with a door now at the east end. The exterior walls of the building are rough natural local stone, with the corners dressed in sandstone. Above the porch on the

east gable there is a small bellcote, an important feature in past years for visitors asking where the service was; they were told to follow the bell.

The interior is lit by two clear glass windows on either side letting in natural light.

Many factors influence worship as the congregation includes Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, Roman Catholic, Church of Scotland, Romanian Orthodox, individuals not wanting a specific church label - and during the holiday season the mix is even greater.

Right: The chapel's light blue pews have earned it the nickname 'the Blue Chapel'



Below: The large community painting at the east end of the chapel



Below: One of the chapel's two stained glass windows



# Mission Shaped Heritage Conference 2015



**Tim Grass** offers some personal reflections on the Mission Shaped Heritage Conference, which was held at Cliff College in July last year.

This was one of the most stimulating conferences I have been to for years. The gathering brought together about 70 people involved in (primarily Methodist) heritage, whether at historic sites, as archivists, as ministers or as academics. The three days we spent together enabled the participants to develop the vision of the Methodist Heritage Committee that “‘Methodist Heritage’ should become a recognised brand name of the Methodist Church, synonymous with a warm, Christian welcome and excellence in interpretation, collection management (including of its historic buildings, artifacts and archives) and in scholarship in the Church’s history”.

An opening presentation by the President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Steve Wild

from Cornwall, enthused us with the missional potential of heritage. He stressed the importance in Scripture of people taking a look back, and argued that telling the Methodist story honestly provides great opportunities for sharing the gospel.

Two excellent papers were given by Peter Forsaith (Research Fellow, Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University) on *Methodism, Mission and Myth: History and Heritage*, and David Hart (Chair of the Archives and Records Advisory Group) on *Methodist Heritage and Mission: A Case of Mistaken Identity?* Peter explored the tension between the need of communities for stories (founding myths) on which to hang their present identity and the Christian commitment to truthfulness and transparency. His conclusion was that “good heritage and good history should be two sides of the same coin. Both can serve the Church’s mission”. David argued that heritage depicts those past beliefs, values

and practices which are seen as crucial to the identity of an organisation or community. In understanding our heritage, we should however remember that there was never a single ‘Methodism’ but several, and take care not to present the story as one of constant progress to the present.

The Right Revd Colin Fletcher, Bishop of Dorchester, spoke about *Heritage as Opportunity: Buildings for Community*, and on what has been done to make redundant churches available for community use in Oxfordshire.

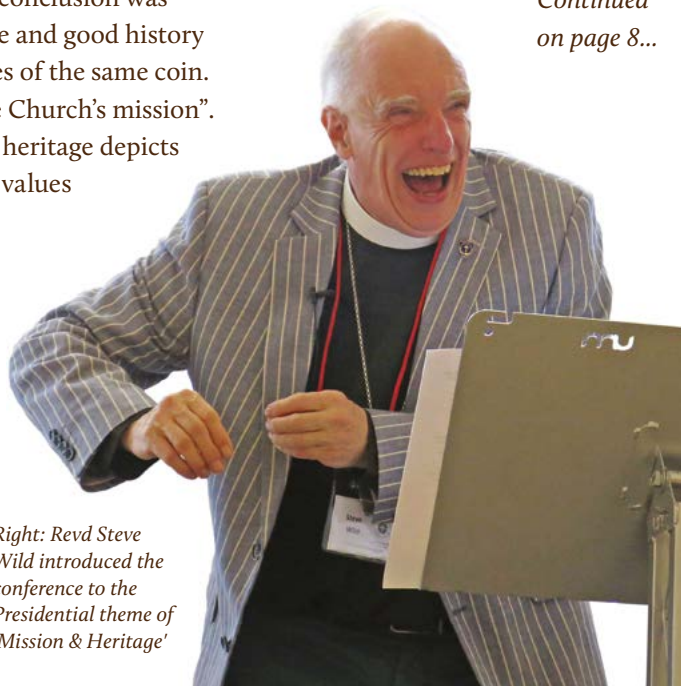
Terry Stevens (Managing Director of an international tourism consultancy) led a thought-provoking session, *Connecting with the Visitor: The Need for a Creative Approach*.

*Continued on page 8...*

*Right: Dr Jill Barber shares the voices from our past*



*Right: Revd Steve Wild introduced the conference to the Presidential theme of 'Mission & Heritage'*



## Dates for your diary...



### Who do you think you are? Live

7-9 April, National Exhibition Centre.  
Come and see us on stand 184.

### Inaugural Methodist Research Conference (Methodist Studies Seminar)

27 April, St John's College, Durham. *Speakers include Professor Tom Griggs (Aberdeen) and Professor Mike Higton (Durham).* This free event is being sponsored by the Discipleship & Ministries Learning Network. Booking essential: p.a.brissell@durham.ac.uk.

### The Manchester Wesley Research Centre Annual Lecture

14 June at 5pm. *The Method of John Wesley's Practical Theology reconsidered*, Professor Kenneth J Collins, Asbury Theological seminary. Details: www.mwrc.ac.uk.

### Wesley Historical Society Annual Lecture and AGM

25 June, Brunswick Methodist Church, Newcastle upon Tyne. *Charles Wesley and Eighteenth-Century Poetry* Emeritus Professor John Watson (formerly Professor of English, University of Durham). Details: johnahargreaves@blueyonder.co.uk.

### The Churches Visitor & Tourism Association

CVTA is running a series of monthly seminars around the country from April to October. The first seminar will take place in Leicester on 23 April. Details: cvta.org.uk.

### SAVE THE DATE

The Methodist Philatelic Society's next Annual General Meeting will be held at Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London EC1Y 1AU on Saturday 8 October. For further details, contact Terry Smart, 11 Northwood Park, Woodlesford, Leeds LS26 8PE or via www.methodistphilatelicsociety.co.uk.

## Mission Shaped Heritage Conference 2015

Continued... from page 7

He urged us to work more closely with tourism promoters in 'destination management'. He also made the timely point that 'wellness tourism' is on the increase, and that people are less willing now than formerly to let us get away with poor quality visitor provision because we rely on volunteers or are charitable agencies.

Dr Jill Barber, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference and Project Director at Englesea Brook Chapel and Museum of Primitive Methodism encouraged us to discover our USP (Unique Selling Point). She also reminded us that there are multiple audiences with whom we are sharing our story and we therefore need to develop the appropriate means in each case to achieve our aims. But before we do this with people who do not belong to our churches, we would do well to consider how we familiarise our own people with their tradition's faith story, and how we help them to relate that to the gospel.

The conference communion service was preceded by a presentation of John Wesley's experience of the doctrine of assurance as providing the impetus for mission. The devotional sessions were well presented, taking various artefacts and exploring their relationship to the Christian faith, as well as giving us opportunity to sing some traditional Methodist hymns which risk falling into disuse. For example, one session took a love feast cup and explained what a love feast was, and how someone in the speaker's church had been converted a couple of centuries ago through hearing the testimonies often given on such occasions.

In a presentation entitled *Seeing the Spiritual*, Sarah Middleton of the Methodist Collection of Modern Christian Art, outlined the collection's capacity to share the gospel in non-threatening and inspiring ways. In the final session, Sarah Friswell, chair of the Methodist Heritage Committee, introduced the Connexion's current five-year heritage strategy.

To conclude, as Jill Barber put it, "Heritage is about using the past to challenge the present, and help determine our direction of travel."

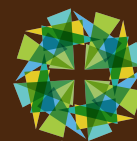
**Tim Grass** is Librarian of the Manx Methodist Historical Society and a member of a group seeking to develop faith tourism on the island.

The deadline for submission of articles for the Autumn 2016 newsletter is 4 July 2016. Please send your ideas to: **Jo Hibbard, Director of Engagement, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR**  
Tel: 020 7467 5257 Email: hibbardj@methodistchurch.org.uk

You can visit the Methodist Heritage website at:  
[www.methodistheritage.org.uk](http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk)

*Heritage News* is the bi-annual newsletter of **Methodist Heritage**, part of the Methodist Church in Britain, registered charity no. 1132208.

For more information about what the Christian people called Methodists believe and what the Methodist Church does in Britain and around the world today, visit [www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk).



**Methodist  
Heritage**

The **Methodist Church**