



# Methodist Archivist's Newsletter

## Winter 2023/24 Edition

(Edited by Jon Purcell. Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives)



**Welcome** to this Winter 2023/24 edition of the Archivist's Newsletter. This is my last newsletter as my 6 year term of office ends on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023. Before I hand over Mary Ellis who takes up post on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 as Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives, I would like to thank colleagues from across the Connexion who have contributed to this and previous edition of this newsletter. Your help has been much appreciated.

I would also like to thank all the volunteer archivists who do such excellent for the Church as both District, Circuit and Church level. I hope you all have a blessed and well-deserved break over the Christmas and New Year break.



Some the features of this edition include:-

- An introduction to new members of the Methodist Heritage Team who will be working with you.

- News of a Working Group established by the Archives and Records Advisory Group (ARAG) to assess the current operation of Methodist archives at both District and Circuit levels and to make recommendations for how our Archives service can be developed and improved.
- An introduction to the Archives of the Methodist Church in Ireland
- Information about the Lancashire Online Parish Clerks organisation who are engaged in digitising parish and church records in the North West of England.
- Some information about the Methodist Modern Art Collection and some upcoming exhibitions.
- News about 'Heritage News' one of the many ways in which we are hoping to use both traditional and social media to communicate news and developments in Methodist heritage.

Jon Purcell. Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives.

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### **Methodist Heritage Team Update**

Since the last edition of this Archivist's newsletter, we have welcomed three new members of the Heritage Team and they now introduce themselves:-

**Introducing Professor Charles Forsdick. Chair of ARAG (The Archives and Records Advisory Group)**



Charles Forsdick has recently been appointed as a member of the Methodist Heritage Committee and chair of ARAG. Brought up in Norfolk in what was then the Dereham and Swaffham Methodist Circuit, he studied in Oxford and Lancaster and spent two years living in Brittany before beginning his academic career in Glasgow in 1995. Charles has recently been elected Drapers Professor of French at the University of Cambridge. He is also a Fellow of Murray Edwards College, home to the Women's Art Collection, the largest collection of modern and contemporary art by women in Europe. His research and teaching focus primarily on French outside France, and he has a particular interest in postcolonial literature and colonial history.

Writing a PhD on the French traveller Victor Segalen led him to spend time in the early 1990s in the London Missionary Society archives at

SOAS, where he had a particular interest in the holdings on Polynesia. Before moving to his current post, Charles was for over 20 years James Barrow Professor of French at the University of Liverpool. In Liverpool, he was a founder member of the Centre for the Study of International Slavery, a collaboration between the University of Liverpool and the International Slavery Museum.

Charles has published widely on the Haitian Revolution and currently work on debates in France, the UK and the USA relating to the memorialization of slavery. His own research falls squarely into the area of heritage studies. He served recently as Principal Investigator on a Franco-British project on dark tourism (working with heritage sites relating to penal colonies and the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi) as well as being Co-Investigator on a major Global Challenge Research Fund Network+ project, 'The Anti-Slavery Knowledge Network' (working with partners including the Ghana Museum and Monuments Board).

Much of Charles's current engagement work relates to institutional legacies of enslavement and unfree labour. His ongoing collaboration with Unilever's Art, Archives and Records Management (UARM) team explores the use by Lever Bros of unfree labour in the Belgian Congo and Solomon Islands in the early twentieth century. Another recent project in Liverpool

with researchers in Architecture, supported by the Higher Education Innovation Fund, has permitted completion of a broader scoping study of archive resources relating to Africa in the North West of England.

Charles is looking forward to working with members of ARAG and its wider stakeholder community, and is particularly committed to encouraging the use of collections in support of the priorities and calling of the Methodist Church. He is also looking forward to chairing ARAG and learning more about the Methodist Archivist's network in Britain.

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### **Introducing Olivia Threlkeld. Heritage and Collections Officer.**



Olivia is an arts and heritage professional from Mossley (Greater Manchester) although she has lived in London for the past five years – originally relocating to undertake a History of Art MA at University College London. She has worked in a number of different galleries and museums, starting out at Gallery

Oldham and more recently at the Museum of Brands, The British Museum and the National Gallery, London.

In addition to her role at the Church overseeing heritage, Olivia also enables the touring of the Methodist Modern Art Collection. Although her experience is with artefacts she is enjoying getting to grips with the records and archives of the Church and discovering its potential for mission, engagement and outreach. She has heard some amazing stories from the archives, bookshelves and safes/strongrooms since she started at the beginning of 2023 and is looking forward to hearing more. Olivia would really like to hear stories connected with your church buildings, congregations and of course archives and can be contacted at

[threlkeldo@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:threlkeldo@methodistchurch.org.uk)

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### **Introducing Samantha Parfitt. Liaison Officer for Methodist Collections.**





Hello everyone, my name is Samantha Parfitt and I'm new to the role of Liaison Officer for Methodist Collections. I have a keen interest in history, particularly the Renaissance and Georgian eras and am currently employed as a Lay Worker attached to the oldest working Methodist Chapel in the East Anglia District. I am also a Church Steward to a Methodist Society currently going through the process of ceasing to meet, which is certainly giving me firsthand experience transitioning to a closed building and the steps that are involved. My role as Liaison Officer is a port of call for enquiries relating to portable objects and artefacts, including advising on using Artefacts for Mission. I'm looking forward to contributing to the preservation and promotion of the richness of the heritage which the Methodist Church has, working alongside colleagues such as Jon and Mary in the role of Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives. You can contact me directly by email at [sammi.1980@live.co.uk](mailto:sammi.1980@live.co.uk)

With every blessing of the season,

Samantha

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**Introducing Mary Ellis. Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives.**

Mary is a professional archivist. She began her career with the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts before moving to work as the Programme Director for the

Archive Administration and Records Management courses at the Department of Information Studies at Aberystwyth University. She is currently head of Libraries and Archives Development in the Culture Division of Welsh Government.



Mary's family have a long association with Methodism and through family stories she developed an interest in the history of the church. Mary is delighted to be appointed as the new LOMA and she is looking forward to working with and supporting the volunteer District and Circuit Archivists in the valuable work they do to preserve the archival records of the church.

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**Working Group to investigate and make recommendations for improved arrangements for the handling of District and Circuit Archives**

The Methodist Heritage Committee have recently established a small number of Working Groups to engage with specific aspects of the current Methodist Heritage Strategy.

ARAG, at its October 2023 Committee meeting decided to establish a 'Start and Finish' Working Group to investigate the current operation of how Methodist Archives are handled at both District and Circuit/Church level. Much of this activity and eventual recommendations are expected to take place during 2024.

The Working Group membership includes Mary Ellis (incoming Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives), Olivia Threlkeld (Heritage and Collections Officer), Jon Purcell (soon to be ex Liaison Officer for Methodist Archives) and Julie Compton (a Circuit Steward / Circuit Archivist in the Nottingham North East Circuit). While Mary, Jon and Olivia have already introduced themselves, JC takes this opportunity to say hello.



Hi! My name is Julie Compton but everyone calls me JC.

I have been a Circuit Steward for a number of years, but recently I have

been appointed as Circuit Archivist in the Nottingham North East Circuit.

My involvement in the Archives and Records Advisory Group all came to be as an unintended and unexpected consequence (to me at least!).

In our Circuit last year we were working through GDPR training on Zoom and we discovered the existence of the Retention Schedule for Methodist Records. A whole new Methodist archiving world opened up, which I had not ever been aware of before and seemingly, nor had many others in our Circuit!

I quickly realised there were a lot of issues that needed addressing and had a number of conversations with Jon Purcell, (outgoing LOMA) where I was asking WHY? WHY? WHY? all the time.

Poor Jon!

I was invited onto this Advisory Group and Working Party, not because I have a background in archiving: I don't at all; but because I am prepared to ask questions, challenge the status quo and to ultimately improve our Methodist archiving processes. I'm here to work for change so that our precious volunteer archivists will be supported and valued for all the really great work they do to honour our predecessors and to preserve our Methodist heritage.

Work so far has included the preparation of role profiles for both District and Circuit Archivists, a questionnaire and follow up zoom meetings involving some District Archivists together with an initial analysis of the challenges and opportunities affecting our cohort of volunteer archivists who do so much good work for the Church,

Topics under investigation include recruitment to current vacancies at District and Circuit level, training for new and not so new archivists, better communication at all levels, liaison with Local Record Offices together with better support mechanisms for everybody involved in this very important work with archives. Elsewhere in this newsletter, Methodist archives have been correctly described as ‘The Ministry of Memory’ I can’t think of a better description!

The Working Group members ask for your blessings and continued prayer as we engage in this very important activity. We will keep you informed, will ask for your involvement, and we earnestly hope that any recommendations which we make to ARAG and Heritage Committee will make all your commitment, hard work and enthusiasm feel valued and appreciated. (Jon P)

<b>The Methodist Modern Art Collection</b>
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Since Olivia has mentioned the Methodist Modern Art Collection,

we thought it might be useful to publicise this wonderful collection; the archives of which are in the process of being deposited in the Methodist Archives Research Collection held at the John Rylands Research Institute and Library at the University of Manchester.

***Why does the Methodist Church have a Modern Art Collection?***

It’s because two Methodist individuals in the 1960’s (John Morel Gibbs and Revd Douglas Wollen) purchased contemporary works of art by young artists with a Christian theme that could open up faith conversation. This core collection of works was given to the Methodist Church in Britain with the view it should tour and benefit churches throughout the connexion.

The collection has grown modestly since then with many artworks that have been donated and a smaller number that have been purchased or commissioned with money given specifically for that purpose: their acquisition has not been a charge on general Methodist Church funds.

It is now looked after by a Management Committee (appointed by the Methodist Conference) who pursue the original aim of enabling people within and outside of the church to connect with faith through the medium of art. The artworks in the collection are varied in style & content and are used to engage in conversations with young people,

interfaith dialogue and are regularly used in worship.

### ***What is in the collection?***

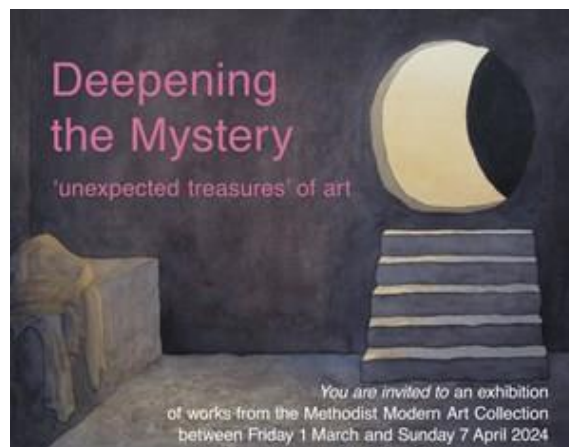
There are over 50 works of art including some by well known artists such as Graham Sutherland, Elizabeth Frink, William Roberts and Patrick Heron.

Most of the pictures depict scenes for the life and teaching of Christ; some artists were or are believing Christians, others not. Works are still being acquired to ensure that the ideas and concerns of today's artists are represented in the Collection. The founders of the collection were pioneering in collecting women artists and artists from around the world from the beginning – a particular strength of the collection.

### ***Where and when can I see the collection?***

The Collection can be seen at several different places in and around Britain each year although not all the paintings, sculptures & stained glass are exhibited each time. The collection is not always to be found in Methodist Churches; it has been exhibited in cathedrals, schools and art galleries – and was recently at 3Generate 2023 where a painting was made into an 'immersive' projected experience for the young people in attendance

**The Collection is on tour during 2024 and the following information might be useful.**



### **March - 7 April 2024**

WELWYN GARDEN CITY

### **Deepening the Mystery: 'unexpected treasures' of art**

Focolare Centre for Unity, 69  
Parkway, Welwyn Garden City AL8  
6JG

A programme of events is planned and details will be available.

For more information contact Paul Gateshill

email: [art2024@focolare.org.uk](mailto:art2024@focolare.org.uk)

Facebook: [Art 2024 at WGC](#)

### **16 May - 13 June 2024**

EASTBOURNE

### **'New Visions'**

Emmanuel Church, Greenfield  
Road, Eastbourne BN21 1JJ

Website: [www.emmanueleastbourne.org.uk](http://www.emmanueleastbourne.org.uk)

Contact: Revd Paul Tabraham;

email: [contact@emmanueleastbourne.org.uk](mailto:contact@emmanueleastbourne.org.uk)

For further information about the collection is available in a very useful publication 'Seeing the Spiritual – A



Guide to the Methodist Modern Art Collection.' ISBN 0-9538135-5-x

To browse the works in the collection click here : <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/life-and-faith/the-methodist-modern-art-collection/>

### **Lancashire Online Parish Clerks**

Very occasionally Methodist archivists are contacted by individuals who wish to digitise Methodist marriage, baptism and burial registers with the aim of making these more accessible and to aide researchers and genealogists dealing with family history.

One volunteer organisation working in the North West of England is the Lancashire Online Parish Clerks and Lynne Ayton, Assistant County Co-Ordinator has submitted this very interesting article which describes their activities. (Jon P)

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Over 10.5 million parish records online for free, indexed and searchable? Surely there has to be a catch! But no, there's no catch – just a group of volunteers who want to share their Lancashire heritage with anyone who would like to find out about it.

Lancashire Online Parish Clerks (LOPC) started life about 20 years ago when the site founder Paul Dixon was researching his Lancashire family history. Being based outside

the UK, he found it difficult to search church records, as little was available online at that time. He had heard of other counties setting up 'online parish clerk' groups, and posted a message on a genealogy forum to ask if anyone was interested in setting one up for Lancashire. A few volunteers started to work on the various tasks needed to acquire images of parish registers, transcribe them, and put the results online. Paul himself wrote the software, despite never having designed or built a website previously. No-one in those early days could have foreseen that this would grow from such modest roots into something which is now a well-known and valued source of information about Lancashire's parish records and related material.

The group now consists of around a hundred members, all of them volunteers. They come from all around the world, though most have a Lancashire connection. Some spend the occasional hour or two, while others work full-time. Most of these are transcribers, but we also have photographers, checkers, systems developers, a Latin specialist and more. Transcribing is great fun and hugely rewarding, and we are in the lucky position of having a waitlist of people waiting to join the group. We train and mentor people ourselves, using our own templates and standards, aiming where possible to match people with their areas of interest. We are very grateful for the work of our volunteers.

Transcribers generally work from photographs of the original registers. These may be taken by us, or we may use existing images if these can be provided to us free of charge. We make our transcriptions available not only on our website but also, where requested, to the organisation (e.g. church and/or archive) which owned, supplied or gave permission for the material to be used. We do not sell our work nor gain any payment from it, and we have no affiliation to any other organisation, religious group, or commercial enterprise. The modest costs of running our website are funded wholly by donations from the public.

Initially most of our work focussed on Church of England registers, largely because this was the material that we were able to obtain. Around 10 years ago, we were invited to work on the Roman Catholic registers of Salford Diocese. This involved a steep learning curve for us, since most of the registers were in Latin! At the moment, non-conformist registers are under-represented on our website, but this situation is changing as we gain greater access to the records.

My own ancestors were Methodists, founders of their local Primitive Methodist chapel in the heart of the Lancashire mining community, and I have a deep personal interest in obtaining greater representation of Methodist registers on our website. I'm sure that readers of this article will be all too familiar with the

challenges – not least of which is locating the records! We are very grateful to Methodist Heritage for their support and who have helped us along the way. With your help, we hope to put more people in touch with their Lancashire roots.

Lynne Ayton  
Assistant County Coordinator  
Lancashire Online Parish Clerks

*LOPC website: <https://www.lanopc.org.uk/>*

*General enquiries: [qc@lanopc.org.uk](mailto:qc@lanopc.org.uk)*

**PLEASE NOTE – permission, requests or enquiries from external sources to digitise any Methodist archives containing personal information MUST be forwarded to Liz Millard, Senior Administrator, Methodist Church House, 25, Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9SF.**

**Email:**  
[millardl@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:millardl@methodistchurch.org.uk)

**Tel: 020 7467521**

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**The ‘Ministry of Memory’ The Methodist Historical Society of Ireland Archives.**

As a former member of the Methodist Church in Ireland and a History graduate of Queen’s University Belfast, I lived quite near to the building now housing the Church’s Archive Centre in Belfast so it was a

good excuse to invite Jennifer Stutt, Secretary and Associate Archivist, to tell us a little bit about a ‘nearby’ Methodist archive. This archive is the Irish ‘twin’ to the British Methodist archives held in the John Rylands Research Institute and Library in Manchester (Jon P).



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The Methodist Historical Society of Ireland was established in 1926 and is the major repository in Ireland of Methodist history. It is the largest centre for the cataloguing and storage of Irish Methodist records. Its unique collection encompasses more than 250 years of Irish Methodist history – from its eighteenth-century origins to the contributions of its present-day members.

Since 1926, when the Irish Methodist Conference approved the creation of the Wesley Historical Society ‘Repository’ at Wesley College in Dublin, the archive has found home in five different locations. Finally, in 2002, at the invitation of the Board of Governors of Edgehill Theological College, it moved to its purpose-built archival suite at Edgehill House. This suite includes a reading room, library facilities and climate-controlled archives.

In these archives are original letters from John Wesley, corresponding with, amongst others, leaders of the

early Dublin Society, dating from the late 1770s as well as his hand-written class list of the Dublin Society. Other members of the Wesley family are represented by autograph poetry by brother, Charles, a musical score by nephew, Samuel, and a deathbed lock of hair belonging to Charles obtained by his daughter, Sarah – as well as a letter from her to her mother.

There are also journals of early Irish preachers and portraits of leading personalities of the Methodist movement in Ireland. In addition to unique documents, the library holds scores of busts, silver and pewter plate and other memorabilia dating from the eighteenth century through to the present. In addition, in more recent years, the library has received 16mm film, transparencies and audio tapes reflecting twentieth-century Irish Methodism.

To date, about eighty-five per cent of Irish Methodist records including baptismal and marriage registers are held in the MHSI archives. The Society has become the first port of call for students in Ireland and overseas interested in the

documentation and study of Irish Methodist History. Its unrivalled collection of Irish Methodist printed pamphlets and periodicals and original manuscript collections provides a rich resource for all who wish to explore the story of how Methodism arrived in and contributes to Ireland today.

Over several years the Society has developed and established policies outlining its commitment to best archival practice for collection, preservation and access of the valuable collection it has responsibility for.



The Society will celebrate its centenary in 2026. To mark this occasion the Society launched a most ambitious project to make available online its unrivalled collection of Irish Methodist periodicals. These all-Ireland newspapers dating from 1859 hold within their pages stories and issues that concerned individuals, circuits and the Irish Methodist Church during the tumultuous years of Home Rule debates, two World Wars and partition in Ireland. Also included are notices of deaths, marriages and births which until now have only

been available to those able to view the original newspapers.

Thanks to the generosity of individual members and drawing on MHSI reserves, this project is now complete, well ahead of schedule! All this material is now available online and may be viewed under 'Publications' through the Society's website

<<https://methodisthistoryireland.org/>>

A key responsibility of work at the archives and library is indexing and making accessible the material we hold. The centre is currently staffed by a team of four volunteers. Robin Roddie is the Archivist, who oversaw the move to Edgehill House and the creation of the present centre. Jennifer Stutt is Associate Archivist and Secretary of the Society. She is responsible for receiving all new material, ensuring that items are clean and free from wildlife and unnecessary ironmongery. They are then placed in acid-free boxes, catalogued and uploaded to the Society's online catalogue. This may be viewed under 'Collections/Catalogues and Research Tools/Online Catalogues' through the Society's website <<https://methodisthistoryireland.org/>>

Beryl Johnston has been a volunteer since 2000. Over that time, she has provided a hugely valuable and



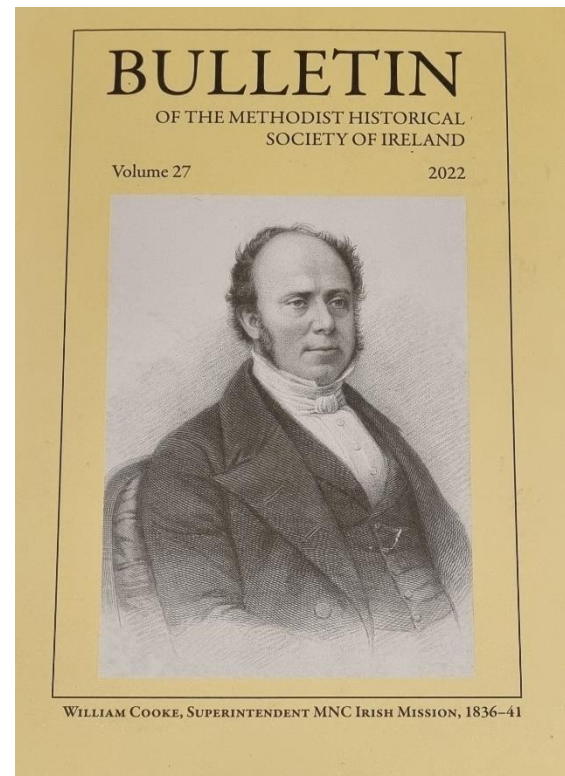
detailed card index to the *Irish Evangelist*, (1859-1883), and has recently begun a similar exercise on the Dublin-published-monthly, *The Irish Methodist Church Record*, (1893-1929).



Rev. Dr Edmund Mawhinney joined the team in 2016 and has been responsible most recently for uploading the contents of the *Irish Evangelist* index cards prepared by Beryl Johnston to the inhouse data base, Cardbox. He has also created searchable listings of Irish Methodist Missionary partners, plus local history files containing items of interest and ephemera pertaining to individual Methodist Societies.

The Society's journal, *The Bulletin*, has been published since 1986. Over the years it has become a scholarly publication which is now to be found in the leading universities of Ireland, the UK and overseas. Dr Stephen Skuce is the current editor.

The Society hosts several lectures each year and arranges an annual Pilgrimage. It also welcomes groups who visit the Archives wishing to



explore various aspects of their Methodist heritage.

Jennifer Stutt

Secretary and Associate Archivist

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A Methodist Heritage e-newsletter is being delivered into inboxes every other month to let subscribers know what's on at the four Methodist museums, to share stories from the archives and other heritage news from around the connexion. News of blue plaques, new writing and national church award winners all in the latest issue here

: <https://methodist-news.org.uk/t/BVI-8HGG8-A493D6F14FA10A1E1D730J87081EEE8296E731/cr.aspx>

If it is of interest, please sign up to receive the newsletter here

: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/sign-up-for-newsletters/>



