

FREETOWN 1811 2011 METHODIST MISSION SIERRA LEONE

1811-2011 The Bi Centenary Celebration of Methodist Mission in Sierra Leone is based on the arrival of Rev George Warren and his three schoolteacher colleagues, Jonathan Raynor, John Healey and Thomas Hirst, in Freetown on board a ship the *Traveller* on 12 November 1811.

The year of this historic event provides the opportunity for a number of mission related initiatives, which included a Bi-Centenary lecture given Rev Dr Sahr John



Yambasu who on Saturday 9 July addressed the issue of mission with *Mende and Methodists: The Untold Story of an Emerging Church*. Sahr Yambasu was born in one of the remotest areas of Sierra Leone, but studied for ordained ministry in Freetown, where he later served as Principal of SLTC & CTC. During the war, security issues for his family forced them to return to Ireland, where he had studied for his doctorate. His annual visits to Sierra Leone involve a number of mission related endeavours but are aided by international flights taking about 12 hours. Warren and his colleagues required 52 days, some of the time being chased by pirates. Their arrival was intrinsically linked to the work of Wilberforce

and Wesley, for the liberty of God's people, and as we are now serving in the Wilberforce Circuit, it is only proper that we reflect on what this historic events means for Methodists in mission today.

It is highly unlikely that William Wilberforce or John Wesley ever met George Warren but both men played a significant part in the arrival of Warren and his three schoolteacher colleagues, Jonathan Raynor, John Healey and Thomas Hirst, in Freetown on 12 November 1811.

Wesley and Wilberforce were born in places only 30 miles apart but were separated in age by more than 55 years. Together they shared a great a love of God and the transformative nature of Christian mission. Wesley's relationship with Wilberforce was that of a teacher and inspirer, in which the young William grew to an understanding of what Christianity required of wealthy and influential young men like him, who entered into political responsibility at an early age. John Wesley wrote his last letter to Wilberforce in 1791, in which he



expressed his oppositin to slaveryand encouraged him in taking parliamentary action to bring about a change in the law. The eventual abolition of Britain's transatlantic slavery in 1807, was of major significance in the arrival of George Warren in Freetown, twenty years after Wesley's last letter to Wilberforce.

During John Wesley's lifetime it was the Rev Dr Thomas Coke who had encouraged him to ensure that the Methodist movement engage in mission beyond the British Isles. It was also Coke who insisted that young preachers were sent not just to where they were needed, but to where they were needed most. And that meant sending Warren and his colleagues to Sierra Leone, in response to a letter written by Methodists in Freetown some years previously, which asked for one or more of 'Mr Wesley's preachers' to be sent to assist them in God's work.



Very little can be learnt of George Warren prior to 1811 and the date and place of his birth are unknown, but we do know he served as one of Mr Wesley's itinerant preachers in several circuits in England and Wales, before offering to serve God's mission in Africa. Jonathan Raynor, John Healey and Thomas Hirst were all of from Dewsbury in Yorkshire, and they too were willing to serve the Methodist movement in its missionary endeavour, even if that involved travelling to what was known as 'the white man's grave', to address the educational needs of Freetown and its growing population of returned and freed slaves.

In September 1811 as Warren and his colleagues set sail from Liverpool, and lacking the benefits of radio, television or even photography, they would have known very little about where they were heading for on the ship "*Traveller*" with Paul Cuffee as its captain. A Quaker and devout Christian, Cuffee was the son of a freed African father and an American Indian mother, Cuffee had been to Sierra Leone and was in regular correspondence with Wilberforce who had



encouraged him to seek the support of the Methodist Church in London in establishing 'The Friendly Society', a cooperative organisation. With a journey of 52 days at sea, the Methodist missionaries would have had much to discuss and pray for as they headed towards Freetown, to begin their ministry and mission in what became the Methodist Church in Sierra Leone.

This year the MCSL will ensure that the bi-centenary of the arrival of the four missionaries, will asks of us some serious questions not just of who has influenced the growth of the church, but how Wesley, Wilberforce and Warren are still present in what we seek to do today. The bi-centenary programme will involve memorial services with special hymns written for the



occasion, public lectures by people who have also contributed to God's mission in Sierra Leone, and will have the assistance of prayers from across the United Kingdom and the African continent, as we honour the ministries of the first four young missionaries. Their commitment to God's mission was a costly one, with Revd. George Warren dying of a fever on 23 July 1812. It is therefore appropriate that in the spirit of Wesley, Wilberforce and Warren we too should be asking, "What price are we willing to pay for God's mission in the 21st Century?"

--

Posted By Peter and Janice to [ClarkServInSalone](#) at 7/19/2011 06:42:00 PM