

Methodist City Centre Network

*Meeting at Brunswick Church, Newcastle
19th March 2015*

Around fifteen members of the Network came together arriving at [Brunswick Church](#) in the hour leading up to the time of the meeting. During this hour there were bacon butties, coffee and tea on offer as well as informal conversations as we met new people and caught up with those we knew.

At 11 o'clock, the Revd Eden Fletcher, minister at Brunswick welcomed us and outlined the pattern of the day. During the morning we visited the nearby [Parish Church of St Andrew](#) where we were greeted by the Revd Glyn Evans who told us (among other things) that the church dated from around 1100 and that parts of the present fabric were certainly 12th Century, but that there might have been an early building on the site also dedicated to St Andrew as a number of churches along the River Tyne were and still are including Hexham Abbey.

Coming back to the present day, Glyn talked about the City Centre Chaplaincy which began over thirty years ago in 1976 with the aim of bridging Faith and Work. Several ministers are involved in the Chaplaincy who act ecumenically in forging links with the various elements of commerce and business in the city centre. Their primary aim is to care for the people involved in the various organisations where those links have been established, but if out these caring conversations come issues to which the church can respond then action where practical is taken. A difficulty might be raised by several people who are not aware that others have the same difficulty, and the church may be able to respond by helping them to meet together and share their stories. Sometimes this leads to a recognition that a group may benefit from longer term support. This, Glyn emphasised, is the time when the group should become independently organised. Neither the Chaplaincy nor the churches have the resources to do more than help such group in their early weeks or months.

Following Glyn's talk, we spent a short time looking round the building, some venturing up the tower to look out across the city, with a few venturing further up to see the bells, bells which are no longer rung because of the risk to the structure.

The Revd Terry Hurst, a previous minister at Brunswick and now retired, led us out into the graveyard to examine some three gravestones and tell us about prominent early Methodists who are buried there including William Smith, his wife Jane and other members of his family. Jane Smith was a step-daughter of John Wesley. Terry also mentioned Henry Perlee Parker who painted the well-known picture of six-year old John Wesley being rescued from the fire at the Epworth Rectory. Parker's grave is believed to now be below an adjacent road.

After our brief excursion, which was brought to a slightly premature end, as Terry's voice was drowned out by the church bells (now rung electronically) announcing the imminence of Holy Communion to which Glyn had invited us. We joined others in the church for the service according to the Book of Common Prayer. St Andrew's uses the Book of Common Prayer for all service of worship.

Shortly after one o'clock we returned to Brunswick for lunch.

The main part of our afternoon was a tour of the building during which Eden mentioned various aspects of the work based in the building which on most days is open from 6.00am when the cleaners arrive to late in the evening when the last meeting has finished. Some seventy organisations and groups hold meetings in the building including

a Students and Young Adults group that meets weekly. Brunswick also has a cafe run by volunteers which contributes to the church's income and is home to an independent group for young people that uses a suite of rooms with a separate entrance.

The development of the building in the 1970s divided ground floor of the church from the gallery putting a floor at the level of the gallery. The original gallery pews are still in place, and the upper part of the large pulpit is still used. The space created by the new floor has chairs which can be arranged as necessary. On the ground floor the original worship area is a large meeting, and the original entrance foyer is now the cafe. Entering the building through the main door way a visitor passes through glass doors into the cafe and then can see through a recently installed glass partition with central doors into the meeting area.

Other rooms in the building have special purposes: a minister's office, a church office and a circuit office. The Wesley Room houses a display of Methodist memorabilia, including a large hand-written document signed by John Wesley relating to the building of the Orphan House, the second Methodist Chapel in England (1743, demolished 1856), numerous busts of John Wesley, items used by him, paintings including the one mentioned earlier painted by Henry Perlee Parker a smaller and earlier painting than the one of the same subject in Methodist Church House.

During the final part of our meeting Eden responded to comments and questions, and the Revd Brenda Mosedale speaking for the MCCN Coordinating Group, mentioned future meetings and possible areas of interest that might be addressed at our 2016 Conference. These were:

- Mental Health Issues
- Safeguarding
- Students
- Where and what is community in the city centre
- Relating to Civic life and institutions
- Cafés
- 'Ecumenical' developments

The mention of 'Safeguarding' prompted a short discussion about having open doors and the supervision of those who came in and the problem of welcoming all but recognising that certain groups meeting within the building may need to be shielded from interruption by 'inappropriate' persons. The discussion did not reach any strong conclusions, except to say that sometimes it was necessary to steer people, possibly out of the building.

Dates

- 17th September 2015 : Coordinating group Meeting (Milton Keynes)
- 8th October 2015 : MCCN Meeting at Gloucester
- Spring 2016 : MCCN Meeting at St Albans (details later)
- 15-17th November 2016: MCCN Conference, Heigh Leigh, Hoddesden, Herts