

## A Selection of Notable Events Associated with Methodist Central Hall, Westminster

This is a selection of some of the notable events that have taken place at Westminster Methodist Central Hall since it was opened in 1912. Please let us know if there are any important omissions. Copies of Orders of Service, Concert Programmes, Newspaper Cuttings and Photographs as well as personal reminiscences would be very welcome.

- 1902** Wesleyan Methodist Conference approve purchase of the site from the Royal Aquarium
- 1903** Royal Aquarium bought for £300,000 in January. Celebratory service held in the Royal Aquarium on 2nd February.
- 1904** Competition to design the building - opened in June; 132 designs received by September
- 1905** Sir Aston Webb RA, the competition adjudicator advises the trustees in January to short list 9 designs and in May the design submitted by Lanchester & Rickards is accepted
- 1908** Royal Aquarium demolished and site excavated to 17 feet below street level
- 1909** Construction begins
- 1912** **3rd October** Opening of Westminster Methodist Central Hall by Rev. Luke Wiseman, President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference. Rev. John E Wakerley first superintendent minister (from 1911) and Arthur Meale FRCO, organist. From then until 1932 Arthur Meale organised popular Saturday night concerts
- 1914** Rev Dinsdale T Young appointed superintendent minister
- 1915** **June** Public enquiry into the sinking of the Lusitania
- 1921** (and other dates) World Methodist Conference (which first met in 1881). Six Point Group and other groups seeking equal rights and opportunities for women met here (London Society for Women's Service; Equal Franchise Demonstration; National Council of Women's Institutes and National Council of Women of Great Britain among others). From 1921 to 1951 the Glasgow Orpheus Choir held London concerts in the Great Hall with Sir Hugh Robertson
- 1922** **October** Meeting of the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club to plan an attempt to climb Mount Everest (there were attempts in 1921, 1922 and 1924)
- 1923 - 1953** Sir Robert Mayer held his concerts for children here for 30 years in the Great Hall before moving them to the newly built Royal Festival Hall. The first was conducted by Sir Adrian Boult and then from 1924 the conductor for many years was Sir Malcolm Sargent. Queen Mary came to part of a concert in 1928 entering and leaving by the back door. TRH Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret also attended the concerts
- 1924** Sir Edward Elgar conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra at a concert in the Great Hall the day after being appointed Master of the Queen's Musick.
- 1929** **& onwards** Ernest Read's children's concerts began with the London Junior Orchestra; also Free Church Choir Union concerts (often associated with the Crystal and Alexandra Palaces).
- 1930** Columbia Records make a recording in the Great Hall of Clara Butt singing Land of Hope and Glory. The Great Hall is used by Sir Adrian Boult to rehearse the BBC Symphony Orchestra
- 1931** Mahatma Ghandi gave a talk to the Temperance League (Lecture Hall)
- 1932** Uniting Conference of the Methodist Church, held in the Great Hall (20th to 24th September) bringing together the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the Primitive Methodist Church and the United Methodist Church following a public service in the Royal Albert Hall.
- 1934** Council of Christian Pacifist Groups Conference attended by an estimated 5000 people in November.

- 1935** Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction inaugural meeting, 1<sup>st</sup> July (Great Hall). Led by Lloyd George as part of his British New Deal initiative. Lord Robert Cecil, Harold Macmillan and George Lansbury were present. The Archbishop of Canterbury warned off the Anglican bishops but other denominations attended led by Rev. Dr. Scott Lidgett.
- 1936 – 1950** Church Assembly of the Church of England (Anglicans) meets here (Great Hall)
- 1937 – 2003** London Emmanuel Choir concerts. Other regular concerts were held here including some conducted by Edward Heath
- 1937** Death of Rev. Dr Dinsdale Young – 3,000 people attended his funeral service in the Great Hall
- 1938** Rev Dr F Luke Wiseman appointed Superintendent Minister.
- 1939** Rev William E Sangster preaches his first sermon on taking up his appointment as Superintendent Minister at Central Hall and during the service announces that war has been declared (the Prime Minister's broadcast was at 11.15am on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939)
- 1939 – 1945** Lower level of the building used as an air raid shelter for 2000 people.
- 1940** First London County Council concert conducted by Sir Adrian Boult, 30<sup>th</sup> August. The concert was interrupted by an air raid, marking the end of the so-called phoney war.
- 1940s** Meetings relating to the formation of the Free French forces by General Charles de Gaulle.
- 1942 & 1943** Labour Party Conferences
- 1945** **2<sup>nd</sup> June** Foundation meeting of the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs. Also the venue of many MAYC rallies, meetings and London Weekends
- 1946** Inaugural meeting of the United Nations in January and February; first meetings of the General Assembly commenced on 10<sup>th</sup> January (Great Hall) and of the Security Council on 17<sup>th</sup> January (Lib). Committees met at Church House. Church worships first at the Victoria Palace and then at the London Coliseum.  
**Delegates and others present included:**  
 Andrei Vykinsky and Andrei Gromyko (USSR), Eleanor Roosevelt, John Foster Dulles and Adlai Stevenson (USA), Jan Masaryk (Czechoslovakia), Henri Spaak (Belgium), Trygve Lie (Norway, first Secretary-General), Perez de Cuellar (Peru) and Clement Attlee, Ernest Bevin, Philip Noel-Baker, Ellen Wilkinson and Sir Hartley Shawcross (UK)  
**28<sup>th</sup> May** Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Superintendent Minister Rev. Dr W. E. Sangster unveiled a commemorative plaque in Tothill Street to mark the United Nations meeting
- 1947** **October** HRH Princess Elizabeth attends a meeting of the Mother's Union to accept a wedding gift and makes a controversial speech on family values
- 1950** **17<sup>th</sup> April** Christian Action held its first main conference. Christian Action held many meetings at Central Hall over the years
- 1955** **September** Rev Derrick A Greeves appointed Superintendent Minister; Rev. Dr W. E. Sangster moves to Home Missions Department based in Central Hall.  
**10<sup>th</sup> November** Mass rally to launch the National Campaign Against Capital Punishment, (Great Hall and other rooms with an overflow meeting at Church House chaired by Diana Collins). Speakers included Gilbert Harding (TV personality) Arthur Koestler, Victor Gollancz, Gerald Gardiner, J. B. Priestley, Montgomery Hyde MP and Lord Pakenham
- 1956** **April** Press conference during the visit to the UK by Andrei Gromyko, Nikita Krushchev and Marshal Bulganin (Great Hall)
- 1958** **17th February** Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament launched at conference in the Great Hall overflowing into other rooms. Attendees included Canon John Collins (of St Paul's Cathedral – the meeting to plan the creation of CND in January took place in his flat in Amen Court), J.B. Priestley, Bertrand Russell. At the conclusion of the meeting an unplanned march on Downing Street was stopped by police with dogs. The meeting launched the Aldermaston March.
- 1960s** **& onwards** Movements to counter apartheid in South Africa held meeting in the Great Hall. Speakers included Jawaharlal Nehru, Harold Wilson[\* ] Canon Collins and Rev Donald Soper.

- 1961**            **October**    “Colour Prejudice Must Go” Christian Action meeting (Great Hall) addressed by Martin Luther King Jr., Robert Resha and Stuart Hall
- 1964**            **September**    Rev Maurice Barnett appointed Superintendent Minister
- 1966**            Theft of the World Cup from the Library where it was the centre piece of a stamp exhibition (it was retrieved a few days later with the help of a dog called Pickles!)
- 1967**            **Autumn**    Joint meeting of Anti Apartheid Movement, Movement for Colonial Freedom and the United Nations Association
- 1968**            **12th June**    First public performance of the original version of “Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” by Andrew Lloyd-Webber & Tim Rice
- 1969 - 1970**    Rebuilding and enlargement of the Hill organ by Rushworth & Draper – Dr W. S. Lloyd-Webber Director of Music & organist (1958-1982)
- 1969**            **March**    Launch of Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Trust attended by Coretta Scott King and Canon Collins
- 1972**            **5th October**    Uniting Assemblies of the United Reform Church (Great Hall) followed by a service in Westminster Abbey,
- 1976**            Statue of John Wesley by Samuel Manning unveiled outside the Great Hall by George Thomas, Speaker of the House of Commons. Previously the statue stood in Richmond (Surrey) Methodist Ministers’ Training College.
- 1978**            **13th – 16th December**    London Emmanuel Choir Christmas Concerts,
- 1979**            World Disarmament Campaign Launch
- 1980**            Rev Irvonwy Morgan appointed Superintendent Minister
- 1981**            Rev R John Tudor appointed Superintendent Minister
- 1982**            **1st March**    First annual Daffodil Day Rally  
Celebration of the 50th anniversary of Methodist Union in presence of TRH the Duke and Duchess of York
- 1984**            His Holiness the Dalai Lama addresses a meeting during his visit to London at the invitation of the Dean of Westminster
- 1985**            **18th December**    Visit of TRH the Prince and Princess of Wales attending a Royal Christmas Concert,
- 1988**            **26th January**    Thanksgiving concert for the life of Jacqueline Du Pre, virtuoso cellist
- 1990**            50th anniversary of Sunday Half Hour on BBC radio (Great Hall)
- 1991**            Basil Hume, Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster attended. Winnie Mandela took Nelson Mandela’s place at an event to celebrate his release because he was indisposed
- 1993**            Lecture followed by question and answer session by Mikhail Gorbachev. Lord (Bernard) Wetherill was in the chair and Sir David Steel, Lord (Geoffrey) Howe and Lord (Dennis) Healey were on the panel for the question and answer session  
80th birthday celebration for Trevor Huddleston on 15th June (Great Hall) attended by a Julius Nyrere, Jay Naidoo, Barbara Castle, Mzakhe Mbuli, Desmond Tutu, Adelaide Tambo, Sir Shridath Ramphal with a message read from Harold Wilson
- 1995**            Rev Dr Peter C Graves appointed Superintendent Minister.
- 1996**            **10th – 12th January**    50th anniversary celebrations of the United Nations
- 1997**            **June**    Methodist Conference (and other dates)
- 1998**            **31st May**    United service of thanksgiving for the life of Mother Theresa of Calcutta (1910-1997)
- 2000**            **July**    Visit of President Boris Trajkovski of Macedonia, Methodist preacher and holder of the World Methodist Peace Award (later tragically killed in an air crash)  
Rev Dr Malcolm W White appointed Superintendent Minister
- 2001**            Rev Martin H Turner appointed Superintendent Minister

- 2002** Filming of “Calendar Girls” (in the Great Hall and on the Grand Staircase) - released September 2004  
1st September Dedication of the new chapel in the area originally constructed and used (for 90 years) as a bank.
- 2002 – 2003** Bloody Sunday Inquiry (The Rt Hon Lord Saville of Newdigate, The Hon Mr William L. Hoyt, The Hon Mr John L. Toohey)
- 2003** **January** Filming of “If Only”- released in 2004 (Great Hall & Grand Staircase)  
**12th February** Televised debate on the prospective war in Iraq broadcast from Great Hall.  
**July** Installation of Bernard Sleight paintings from Holy Trinity (Methodist) Church, Blackwell (Grand Staircase)  
**1st November** Signing of an Anglican Methodist Covenant (Great Hall and at Westminster Abbey) in the presence of HM The Queen.  
**December** “Big Sing” broadcast by the BBC (Great Hall)
- 2004** **28th May** The Dalai Lama gave a lecture on world peace as part of visit to the UK attended by HRH The Prince of Wales (Great Hall)  
**September** Major refurbishment works begin.
- 2005** **1st January** Share Jesus International Upper Room event rearranged to remember victims of, and the suffering caused by, the Asian Tsunami (tidal wave caused by a submarine earthquake) (Library and Lecture Hall)
- 2005** **6th June** HM the Queen attended a Concert of Reconciliation to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of VE day. She also unveiled Samuel Manning’s statue of John Wesley in its new position in the Entrance Lobby.  
**October** Weekend of celebration to mark the completion of major refurbishment work

### Sources:

1. Various Methodist Central Hall Westminster publications
2. Methodist Central Hall Westminster Archives - Richard Ratcliffe, Archivist
3. History of Methodist Central Hall, Westminster by Brian Frost (unpublished manuscript of 1999)