

Our Speakers (with a short bio and list of their specialist subject talks)



All our speakers are able to give a talk of introduction to the New Room: its history and current facilities.

Rev. Ward Jones, Chair of the New Room Management and Engagement Committee
Former chair of trustees. Ward has led a team of Trustees through a major development project to open a new Visitor Centre at the New Room.

John Hopper, Volunteer

John is an experienced speaker. He has served 35 years as a Methodist Local Preacher and has been involved in volunteering with the New Room for over 10 years.

David Worthington, Director of the New Room

David has an extensive knowledge of Methodist history, with a particular interest in its connections with America. He has been managing the New Room for over 12 years and has been involved throughout the Horsefair project to develop the new Visitor Centre.

- Methodism come to America – The Bristol Connection
- The Founders Fathers of American Methodism; George Whitefield, Thomas Webb, Francis Asbury & Thomas Coke.
- The Founding Brothers of Methodism; John & Charles Wesley

James Gibbs, Volunteer

In 2007, James Gibbs retired from a career in full-time teaching that had taken him to universities in Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, Belgium and the UK. He continues to be involved in academic life, writing, researching and presenting papers on his fields of interest that include African literature and theatre.

- The Calabar Princes at the New Room
- Methodist History: African-heritage congregations in the UK
- Lamplough, Oatley and Methodist Heritage

Kate Rogers, Collections Manager

Kate joined the New Room in 2017 having previously worked for the Bath Preservation Trust at No.1 Royal Crescent as Exhibitions and Events Officer. Kate has a background in design for museums and a love of 18th century social history.

- Behind the Scenes: The Role of a Museum Curator
- Collection Highlights: A whistle stop tour through the fascinating objects found in the New Room's museum, library and archives. This presentation can be adapted to cater for the interests of the group.

- If Walls Could Talk: Using objects found on display at Charles Wesley's house, Kate explores the intimate history of life at home in the 18th century.

Gary Martin Best, Historical Consultant of the New Room

One of the leading Methodist historians in Britain. He is a former Headmaster of Kingswood School 1987–2008. He has been a Methodist local preacher since 1973 and from 2009–2018 was Warden at the New Room responsible for creating the new Centre and the new and much-acclaimed Museum. He is currently the New Room's Historical Consultant.

All of Gary's talks will last about an hour and can be done without any technical requirements.

1. John Wesley – the world is my parish

This provides an overview of the role played by John Wesley in the eighteenth-century revival that created Methodism and why he became such an iconic figure in both Britain and America.

2. John Wesley and Social Justice

This is a wide-ranging lecture that looks at Wesley's political manifesto, including his attacks on consumerism, his demand for a fairer society, and his radical attitude on the role of women. It also examines some of the practical ways he helped, ranging from food banks and prison reform to his anti-slavery campaigning.

3. John Wesley and Slavery

This examines the important role played by Wesley in the anti-slavery movement in the eighteenth century and covers not just his influential writings and his involvement with the emerging society to abolish the slave trade in Britain but also Methodist attempts to persuade the founding fathers of America to ban slavery. It also includes local events, such as the New Room's role in helping escaped slaves.

4. John Wesley and 'Well-being'

This examines the remarkable role played by Wesley in tackling disease and promoting the physical well-being of people in the eighteenth-century. It includes an exploration of his best-selling book 'Primitive Physic', which was the most popular medical self-help text for over a hundred years.

5. John Wesley and Education

John Wesley has been described as primarily a teacher rather than a preacher. This examines why he thought education was so important, the many ways in which he encouraged education (his writings, libraries, schools, etc) and what was distinctive about his philosophy on a Christian upbringing and on education in schools, particularly Kingswood School which was created as a 'model' school for the children of his friends.

6. Charles Wesley – the Man made for friendship

This looks at the vital role played by Charles Wesley in the eighteenth-century revival that created Methodism. It shows why he was far more than just a hymn writer and why Methodism could not have happened without his contribution.

7. The story of two brothers

This looks at the ups and downs of the relationship between John and Charles Wesley and their respective contributions to Methodism.

8. Women in eighteenth-century Methodism

This examines the problems facing women in the eighteenth-century by looking at the lives of Susanna Wesley and her daughters. It then goes on to explore why two-thirds of early Methodist members were women, looking at why they joined and what roles they played, including the early female lay preachers.

9. John and Charles Wesley For Today

This looks at why what the Wesleys were saying still has a relevance for Christians today – it is a quite wide-ranging lecture, covering issues of individual commitment, the role of fellowship, the importance of habit, living out your faith, and challenging society.

10. George Whitefield

This provides an overview of the most important and influential preacher of the eighteenth century from his early life in Gloucester and Bristol and his open-air preaching tours to his outstanding success among the aristocracy in London and his major role in helping create the United States of America.

11. John Cennick

This tells the remarkable eighteenth-century story of the first Methodist lay preacher and hymn writer, including his first work in Kingswood, Upton Cheney and other places around Bristol, his time as ‘the apostle of Wiltshire’, his major role in London and nationally as a key leader of the Calvinistic Methodists, and his eventual role as a Moravian preacher when he became ‘the apostle of Northern Ireland’.

12. Grace Murray

This tells the remarkable eighteenth-century story of one of the first female Methodist preachers and how John Wesley was prevented from marrying her by his own brother. It provides an insight into the way in which women were given opportunities for leadership in eighteenth century Methodism but also shows the difficulties under which they worked.

13. Susanna Wesley

This examines the difficult life faced by the remarkable mother who shaped the religious thinking of John and Charles Wesley and who is now regarded by many as being one of the great female spiritual figures of the eighteenth-century.

14. The creation of the Methodist Church in America

This looks at how Methodism crossed the Atlantic and explores the work of key figures, including George Whitefield, Thomas Webb, Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke. It includes the role of Methodists in the lead up to the War of American Independence and how the creation of the United States led John Wesley to create a separate Methodist Church.

15. Superstition and Credulity : why early Methodism came under attack

John and Charles emphasised the importance of rational Christianity but this examines why others were able at times to accuse them of irrationality. It includes looking at the story of the Epworth Ghost , the activities of the so-called Perfectionists, and, more locally, the exorcism of George Lukins in Bristol in 1788.

16. The trials and delights of being a writer

This explores the art of writing and publishing from the perspective of a person who has published both fiction and non-fiction.

17. Creating a Museum

This explores how the new Museum at the New Room was created from inception (the aims, the fund-raising, etc) and implementation (deciding on content, producing materials, working with designers, attracting new acquisitions, operating within the constraints of a listed building, etc) to completion (attracting visitors, publicity, etc).

Also for churches wishing to have a half-day or full-day to reflect together, Gary Best can provide the following sessions:

18. Aspirational, Compassionate and Prophetic

An exploration of Wesleyan ideas that are relevant and helpful to Christians today

19. Thoughts on Lent

An exploration of why Lent is an important time in the Christian calendar

20. The Inspiration of Charles Wesley

What Charles Wesley's hymns have to say to us today about the Christian faith.

Please contact info@newroombristol.org.uk or call 0117 9264740 to arrange a booking.