

HISTORY of WESLEY'S CHURCH and ORGAN

Chester Heritage Week Talk, 23.6.18

given by

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EARLY METHODISM in CHESTER

- Methodism founded by John Wesley (1703 - 91)
- Church of England clergyman, Oxford trained
- Spiritual 'conversion' at Aldersgate Street, 1738
- First open air sermon in Bristol to 3000 in 1739
- Wesley's first visit to Chester: June 20th 1752
- Octagonal Chapel in City Road opened June 1765
- 1811: Octagon Chapel 'Wesleyans' bought land in St John Street for a bigger, more central church

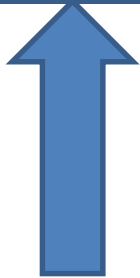
St John Street Wesleyan Chapel

Phase 1: 1812 to 1905

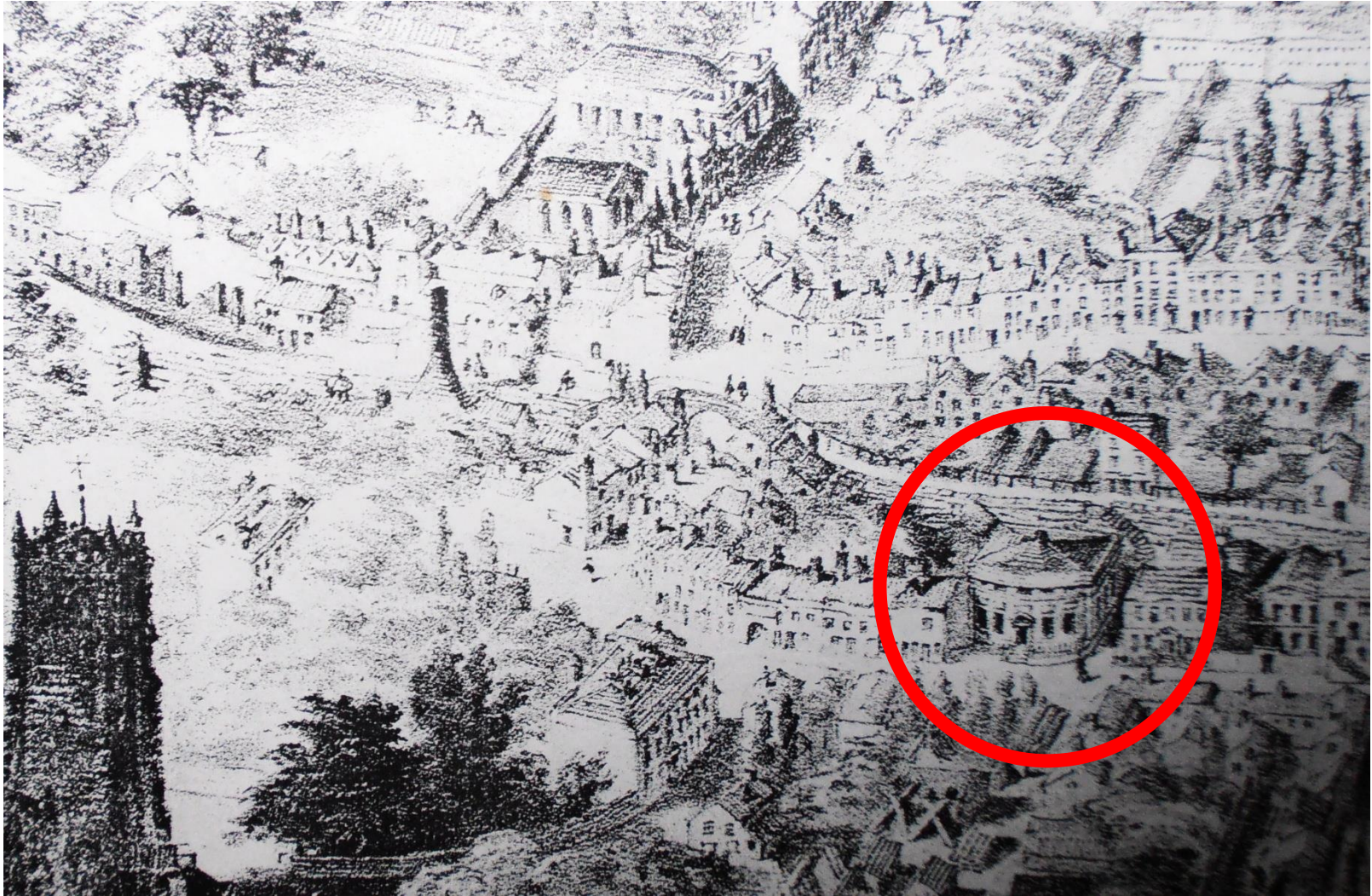
- New church opened 4th October 1812
- Cost £6,865. 19s.10d.
- Architect Thomas Harrison + William Cole II
- St John St was then: “..a mean street, prone to flooding, narrow & overlooked”
- Main church access from City Walls: entrance doors on each side at the west (City Walls) end

Original Pew Seating Plan

St John Street end



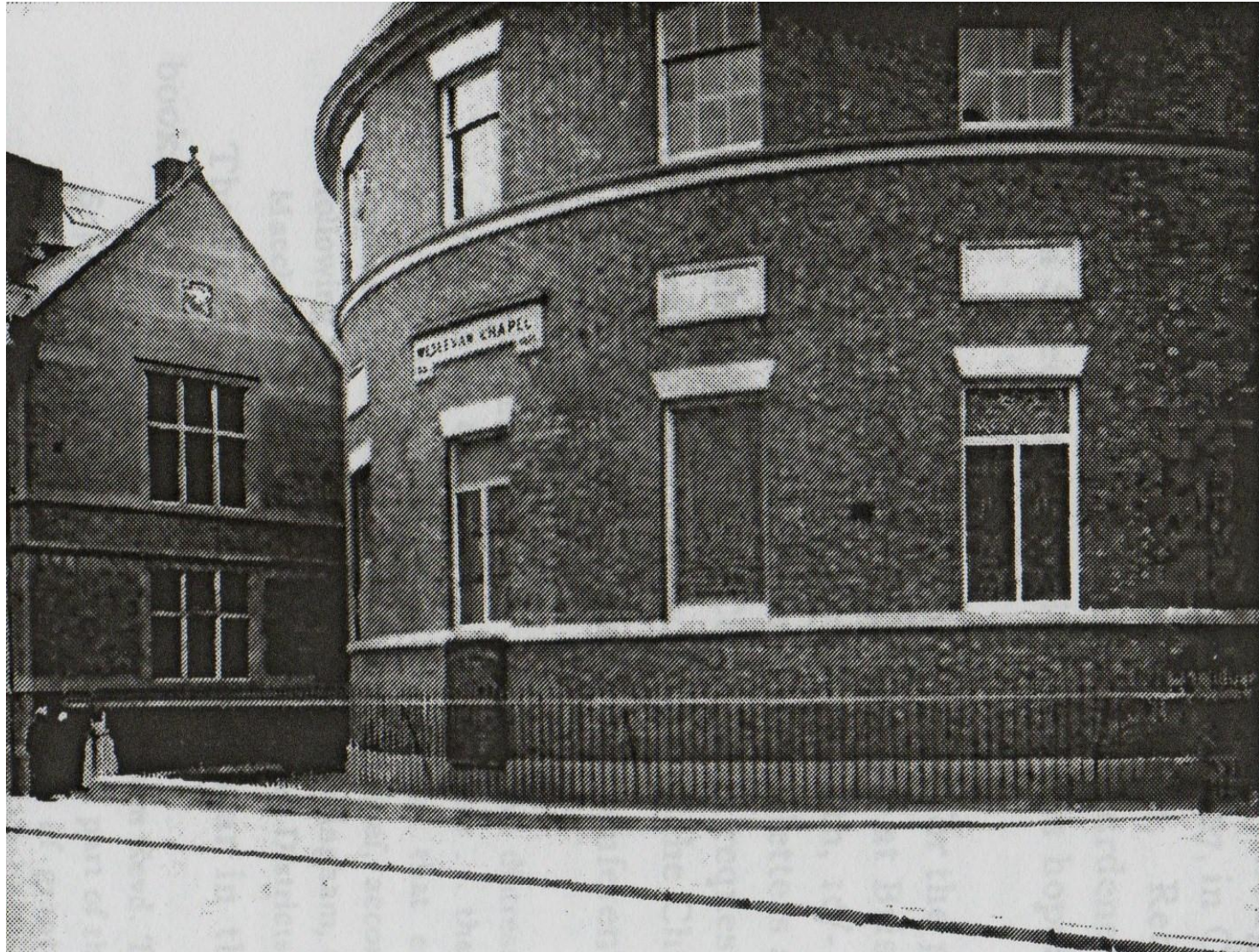
1855 View from a Balloon



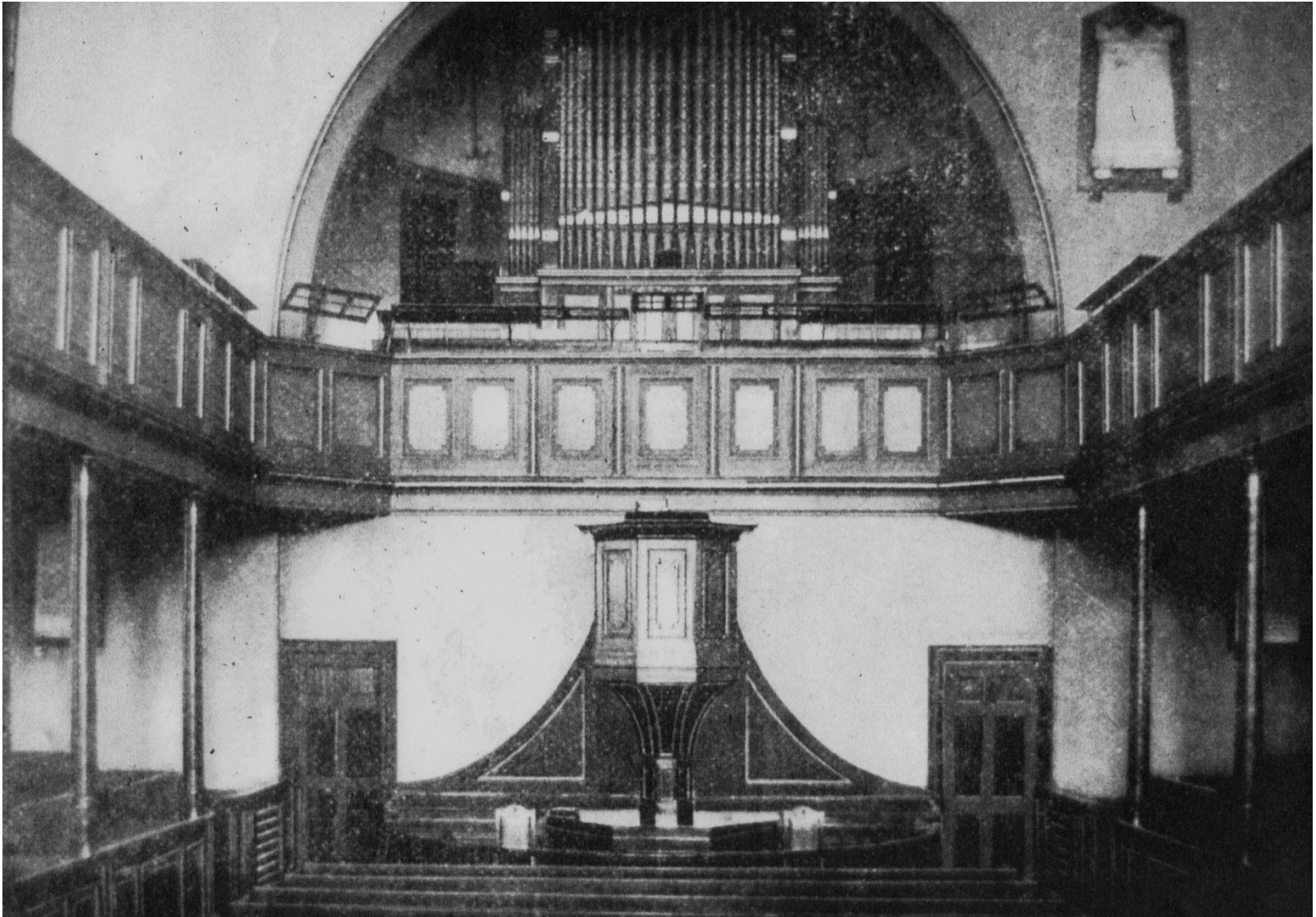
19th Century Events

- £5,070 borrowed in 1812 to fund building
- Debt finally paid off in 1873
- Income sources (1827 figures):
 - pew rents £207; quarterly collection £15;
Chapel Anniversary silver collection £62
- Original lighting: 84 candles in chandeliers
- Hot water pipes installed in church in 1838
- Gas lighting commenced in 1851

1903 Exterior (with 1894 schoolroom)



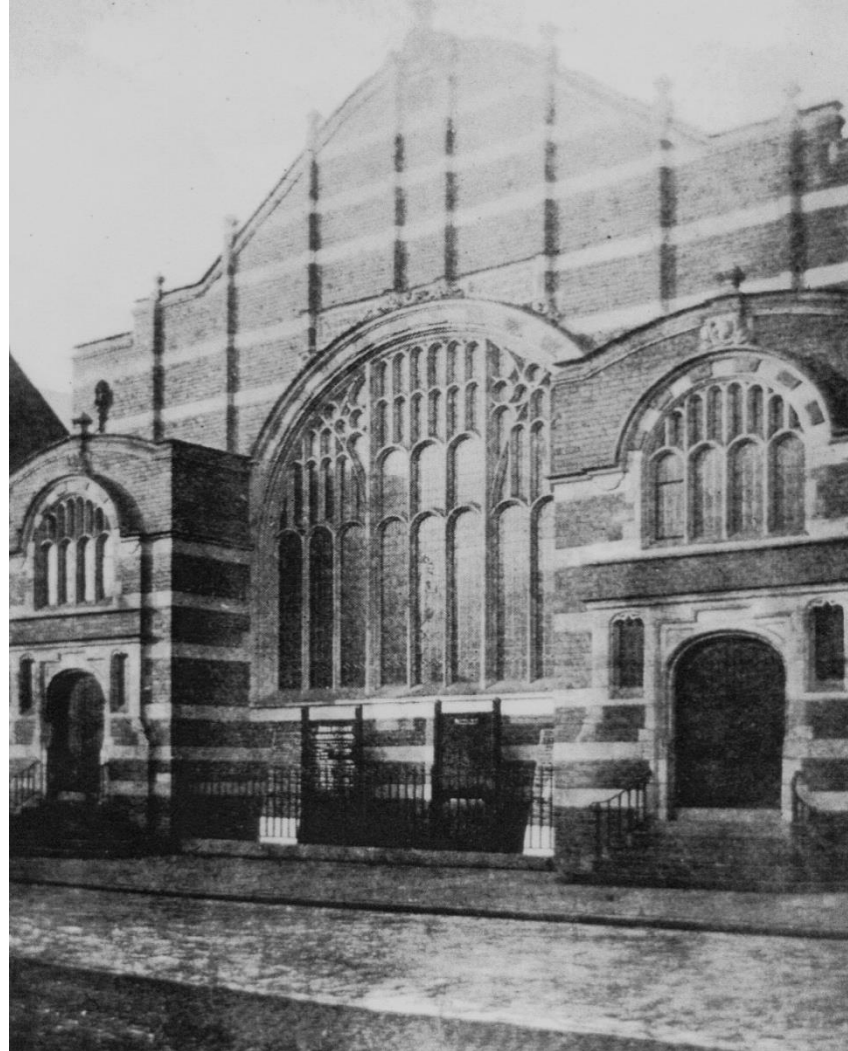
1903 Interior: view towards City Walls



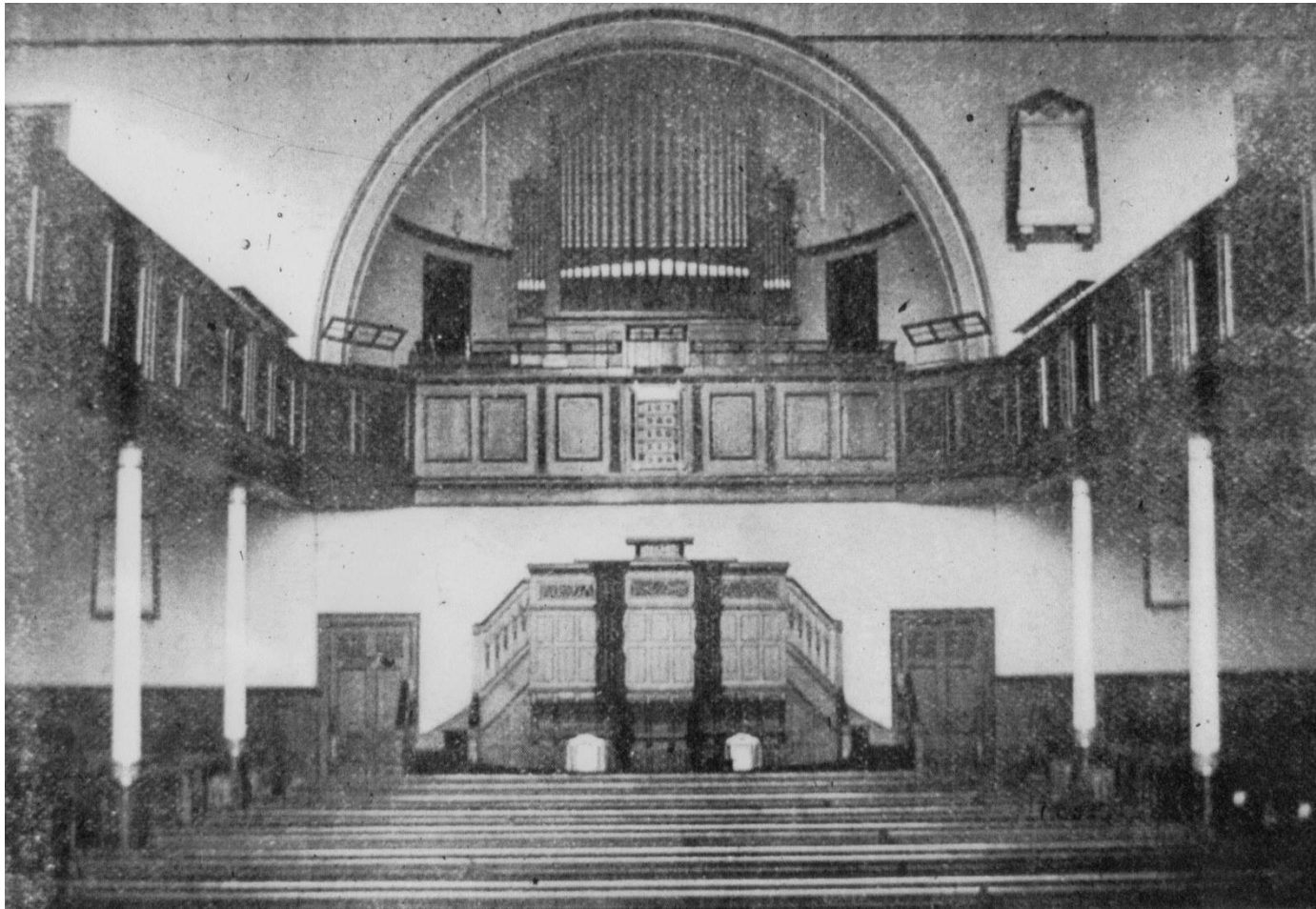
Phase 2: 1906 to 1926

- 1906 Improvements: main access moved to St John Street end; natural light enhanced
- Brick bow frontage to St John Street replaced
- Current frontage with steps/entrances each side
- New east window with plain cathedral glass
- New pews and pulpit
- New glass and wood canopy over rear central pew, to restrict draughts
- In 1914, the east window was replaced with the stained glass memorial window

1906: New frontage & entrances



1906 Reconstruction: new pulpit and pews (looking towards City Walls)



1914: East Memorial Window

designed by Gamon and Humphry
in memory of William Twiston Davies JP



Phase 3: 1926 to 1969

- 1926 Reconstruction
- Chancel added with choir pews, new pulpit and communion table
- Electric lighting installed
- West window in memory of the seven church members who fell in the Great War
- New 3 manual organ by James J Binns of Leeds
- Balconies cut back: new pillars/arches
- Cost £5,500

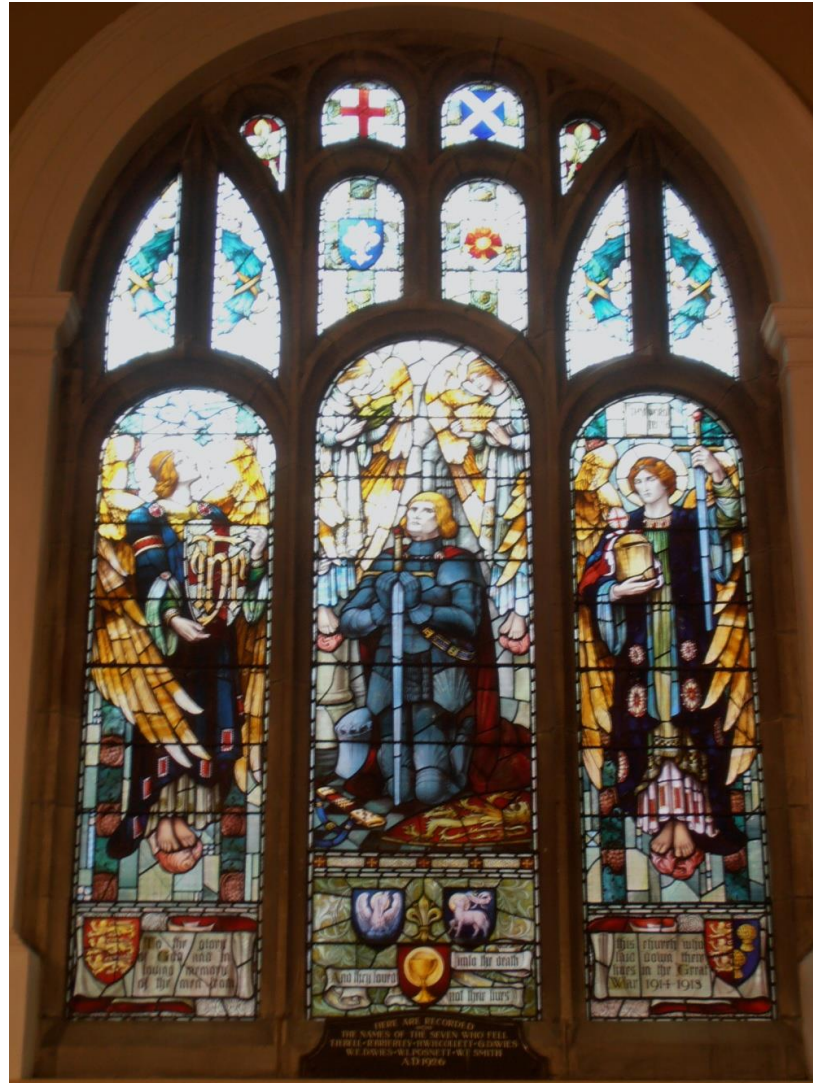
1926 Reconstruction



West Memorial Window

Designed by Henry Gustav Hiller

Inspired by a painting by the Scottish artist John Pettie RA: 'The Vigil',



'The Vigil' by John Pettie RA (1839-1893)



1926 Reconstruction (later interior view)



1926 Reconstruction (later exterior view)



1926 - 1969

- 1932 Methodist Union (Wesleyan + Primitive + United)
- Second World War:
 - Church not blacked out - schoolroom used for winter evening services
 - Social for troops every Sunday evening
 - Choir performed Handel's 'Messiah' every Advent Sunday
 - All church side windows were blast damaged
 - 150 evacuees fed/slept in schoolroom during the flying bombs assault on London
- Chester Methodist Circuit mergers in 1959 (4 to 3) and 1963 (3 to 1)
- Unification of St John St, George St & Hunter St Churches: 1967 - 70
- Congregations worshipped at George St from July '68 while major redevelopment at St John St to create 'Wesley Methodist Church'.

Phase 4: 1970 to 1986

- Wesley reopened on February 21st 1970
- Renewed Church Centre: hall, lounge, coffee bar and upstairs rooms
- New straight entrance ramp and foyer to access the Church itself and Church Centre
- Enclosed patio area between Church and Church Centre

Wesley Methodist Church 1970



Phase 5: 1986 – 2009

- Crisis in October 1986: Pieces of ceiling fell....Church roof structure started to fail - worship moved to Hall
- Heart-searching about future. Decision to stay in City centre and redevelop in stages between 1988 and 1993
- Stage 1: main roof replaced, chancel pews removed. Worship resumed in church on 11.12.88
- Stage 2: Church Centre works, flat roofs, new boiler
- Stage 3: New curved entrance ramp & lobby, foyer works, kitchen, toilets, screens, lighting
- Total project cost £330,000

1988 Roof Replacement



Chancel layout after 1988



Phase 5: 1987 - 2009

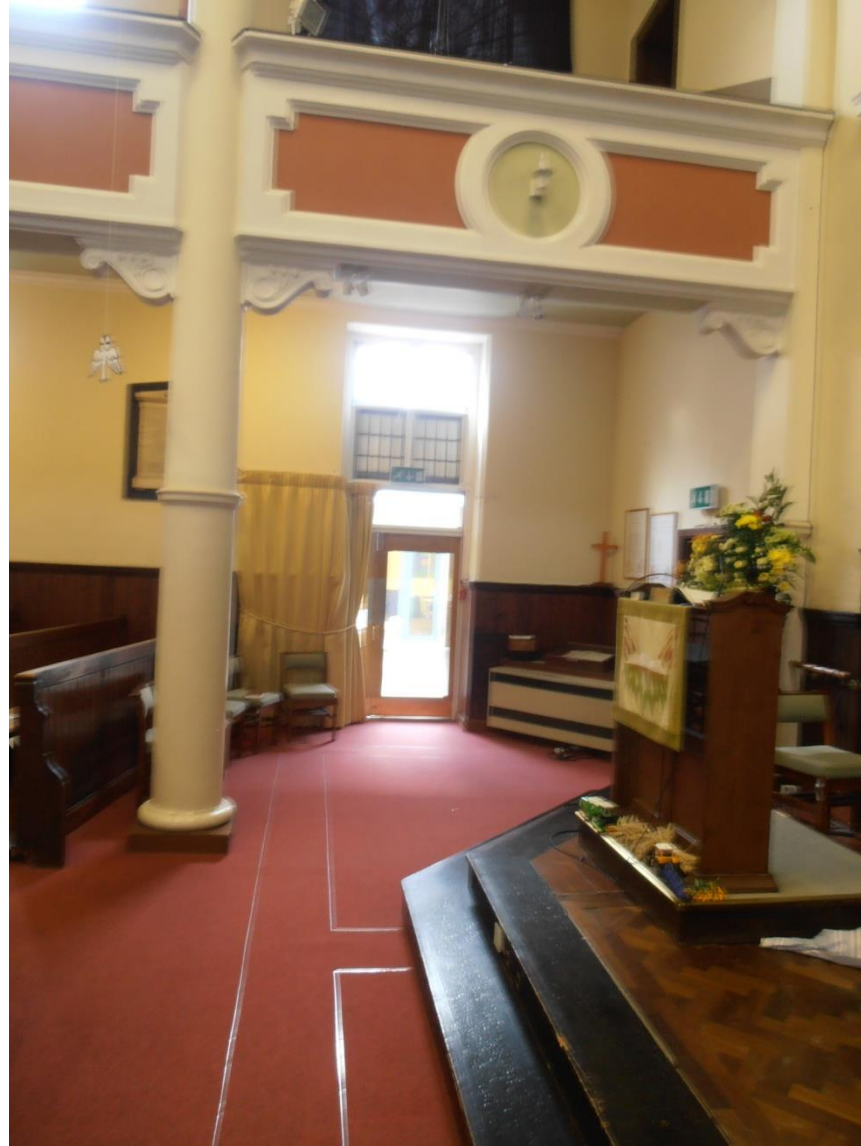
'Open Door' to 'Renewal 2010'

- 1987 onwards: 'Open Door' at Wesley Church Centre, 10am-1pm daily
- 1988: 'Music at Wesley' concerts started
- 1989: Full time warden appointed
- 1994: Sunday Trading Act
- 1998: Grade 2 Listed Building designation
- 2008: 'Renewal 2010' project work and fundraising started
- Construction period July to Dec 2009

Phase 6: 2010 to 2017

- **‘Renewal 2010’** Project cost £480,000
- Improved hospitality, accessibility, outreach support facilities – main focus on Church Centre
- Improvements to Coffee Bar serverly; kitchen and hall; new toilets; enclosed atrium; disabled lift; new church entrance area; disabled access ramps
- New entrance door to Worship Area from foyer and atrium, access ramps, some pews removed

'Renewal 2010': level access to atrium



‘Renewal 2010’: new entrance door and access

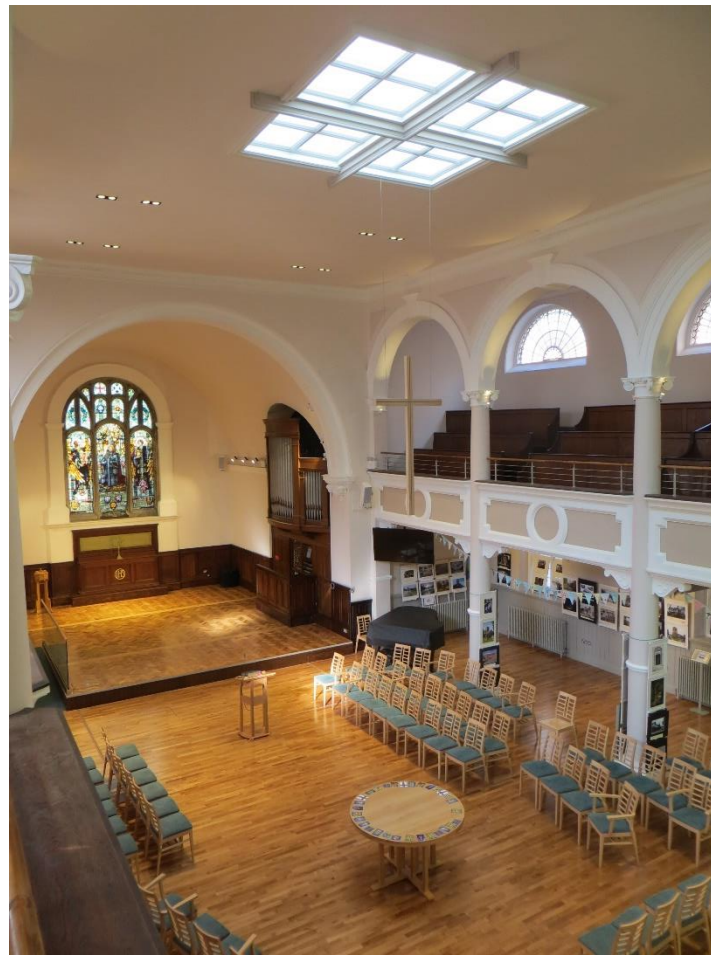


Phase 7: 2017 onwards

Project 'Regenerate!'

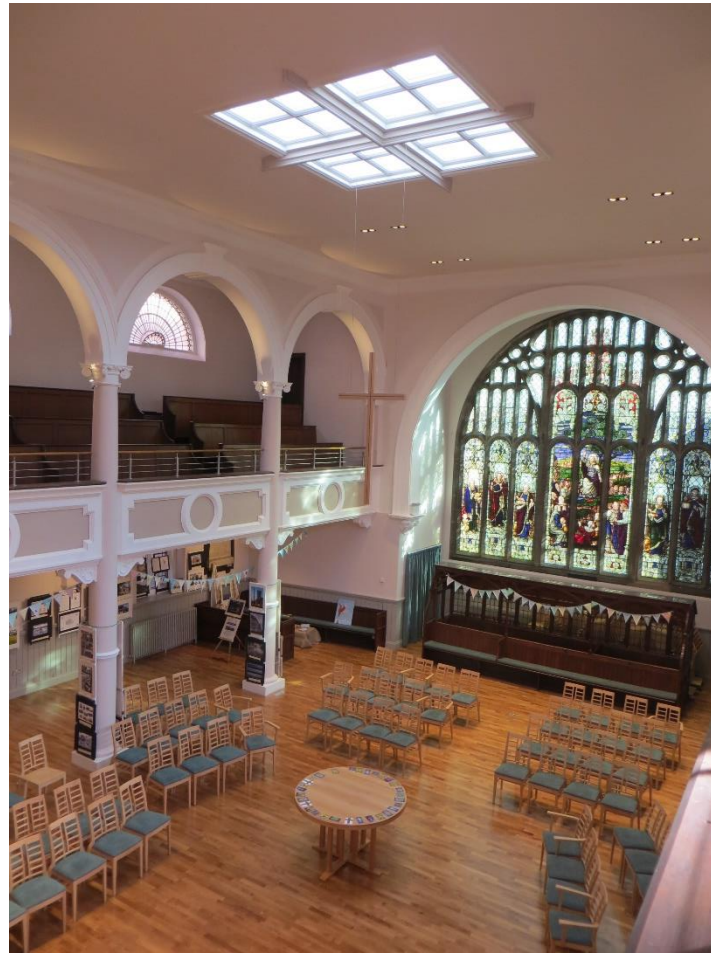
- Initiated in 2013; implemented in 2017 for £567,000.
- Aim: to restore and modernise the historic, but under-utilised, Worship Space...to make everyone feel welcome
- Enable range of worship styles + community activities
- Remove most pews to provide flexibility
- Rationalise floor levels + install underfloor heating
- Rising stage for performance and to lift piano
- Central roof light for brightness and inviting focus

Renewed Worship Area in 2017: Looking towards Chancel



Renewed Worship Area in 2017:

Looking towards East Window and St John Street



Wesley's Organ

(No information is available about the balcony organ shown in 1903/1906 interior photos)

- Organ installed in the new chancel in 1926 for £2,000
- Built by James J Binns of Leeds
- Patent tubular pneumatic action
- Organ chamber and keyboard designed for a Choir organ in 1926, but choir pipes not fitted due to a shortage of funds
- Choir organ completed in 1948 for £400
- Organ cleaned in 1977 and restored for £23,000 in 2000 by David Wells Organ Builders, Liverpool
- A very fine instrument - registered as historically significant by The British Institute of Organ Studies

Wesley's Organ



Wesley Now

- Wesley has modernised premises and a flexible/elegantly restored historic Worship Area in Chester City Centre
- Weekly Sunday morning and Thursday lunchtime services in a variety of styles; plus various fellowship meetings
- Hospitality and community outreach via 'Open Door', based on the Wesley Café, 6 days a week
- Popular with shoppers, residents, user groups, visitors (particularly those with young children)
- Breadmaking, Foodbank, Crèche, Toddler groups, U3A, Fair Trade Shop, Weight Watchers, Rock Choir, special events....
- 'Music at Wesley' Tuesday Lunchtime Concerts weekly from Sept. to May + Saturday organ recitals & other concerts
- **'A place to be, to belong and to believe'**