

**WESLEY'S, 4 CHURCH STREET, WOLVERTON MK12 5JN (REF: PRD2013)**

**BUILT:**

1892 by Ewen Harper of Birmingham (Architect) & Builder H.C Burden

**OLD CHAPEL:**

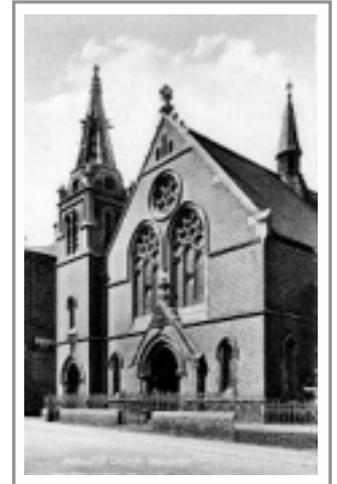
The Old Chapel of 1869/70 which stood on the same site as Wesley's, simply became too small for the flourishing congregation which had been founded as early as 1839

**WESLEY'S 1892:**

In 1892 Wesley's replaced the Old Chapel. By now the Wesleyans were the strongest non conformist group in the Wolverton Railway Town Area.

**CONSTRUCTION:**

Red Brick with Stone Dressings. A shallow Gabled & Crockfted south porch with carved geometric windows and rounded in the gable. Stain glass windows which are hand painted at the stage end of the church. The tower to the front left with large wooden doors used to have a unusual open spire which was part destroyed by a lighting strike in the 1960s, falling into the adjoining alleyway it was subsequently removed at that time.



Late 1800s

The Naive has a tiled bellcote and large school rooms and facilities to the rear. Wesley's has unusual iron pillars inside in keeping with railway town designs and a wonderful wall mural of the beatitudes.



It is designed in the Early English period of Gothic Architecture, and consists of a naive with open timbered roof, well lighted with celestory windows, lean-to aisles on each side, chancel, and a gallery extending across the end of the naive, a minister's and choir vestry; also a kitchen for use at public teas etc; with lavatory. The archway to the main entrance porch is of deeply moulded stone, with richly carved pedimeal, leading to an inner lobby on either side, and is well warmed and fitted with double sets of swing doors to protect from draughts. A similar separate entrance given access to the gallery stairs. **The Exterior** of the building is somewhat attractive, and is built of best red bricks with stone dressings, while the tower and spire give it an additional importance. **The Interior** is also well in keeping with the requirements of the congregation, and due consideration had been made for comfort and convenience; the heating and ventilation were considered to be good, based upon the sound principles of the day.

**1909 COVENANTS:**

LNWR helped with additional land in the form of a linear strip between Wesley's and St Georges Church Hall (now Madcap) which had been built in 1902 by CM Orland Scott/ Henry Martin the builder of Northampton.

LNWR & Trustees put restricted covenants on both the Church and the strip of land stipulating no building and that The Wesley's could only ever be a Christian Church.

**WESLEYAN/METHODIST CONGREGATIONS HISTORY OF BUILDINGS LEADING TO  
WESLEY'S BEING BUILT**

**READING ROOMS**

In 1839 the congregation started to meet in the Wolverton Railway Works Reading Rooms which was then called the Chapel by the Grand Junction Canal, but the congregation grew substantially requiring larger premises.

**NEW CHAPEL:**

A foundation stone was laid around Christmas of 1869 and the new Chapel opened on Monday April 11th 1870. Thanks to the munificent work of LNWR company. It was marked by a large opening service attended by some 400 people who later adjourned to the science and art institute for a most enjoyable tea.

The opening message of the Chapel was given by the Rev L H Wiseman MA of London who text was "We preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ The Lord!"

The collection that day was most liberal.

**WESLEY'S:**

Some 22/23 years later the new chapel (opposite the Science & Art Institute and next to St Georges Church Hall) was no longer sufficient for the requirements of the Wolverton Wesleyans who had continued to grow in numbers.

On 2nd April 1892 a most important function took place, in the laying of the foundation stone, or stones by Lord Carrington of the present handsome edifice. The new design and words to be done by the clever architect Mr Ewen Harper which the present building clearly manifests.



Lord Carrington & Burden Builders  
C.A. Park Esq & Ewen Harper, Architect

At 1.30pm a large and joyous parade started and was attend by many important dignitaries and Wesleyans and other denominations and lead by the Wesleyan Brass Band. Shortly before three o'clock a large company assembled on the proposed site for Wesley's and 17 foundation stones were laid. The principal stone being laid by Lord

Carrington. Tea was then served to 500 people at the Wolverton Art & Science Institute. In the evening a monstre meeting was held in the large dining hall of the Carriage Works lent by Mr Park, the esteemed carriage superintendent of the LNWR Co. The address being appropriate and encouraging by Mr W.W. Carlile of Gayhurst House.

By 1892/93 After 52 years of Methodism in Wolverton which commenced with young and tottering legs, it had grown to be the most influential and active non conformist Church in the town.

Wesley's was officially opened with Great "Éclat" on Saturday November 19th 1892 just over 7 months after the laying of the foundation.

The total cost of Wesley's came to £2,400. £2,220 for builders contract and £180 for furniture and architects fees.

The opening ceremony was performed by Rev Dr. Rigg, president of the Wesleyan Conference.

Opening Anthem: Stand up for Jesus

Opening Sermon: Psalm 84

Tea followed at the Arts & Science Institute for 400 plus people.

Wesley's continued to flourish well into the second half of the 20th century.

**1930/40s** the Wolverton Town Orchestra having converted to Christ became Wolverton Convert Band which travelled the surrounding towns and villages telling of Jesus for 20 years or more.

**1950/60/70s:** It was a key venue for much Church & Community use with great appeal and influence for good.

**late 1970s & early 80s** its numbers dwindled and the congregation moved to the other Methodist Church in Church Street, Wolverton, called West End (Built 1907).

**Early 1980s** Wesley's was let out to tenants, and many detrimental changes also occurred to the building, and covenants were ignored and **The Rear Half** of the property demolished taking the following facilities and functions away from the church:

- Toilets
- Kitchens
- Sunday School Rooms
- Church Offices
- All level floors removed
- Storage
- Badly re routed & damaged drains
- Regular flooding over 30 years
- and more besides



New service alley way between Wesley's and Foundation Foyer floods regularly and then fills Wesley's cellars and walls.



**The Front Half** of Wesley's also suffered badly in that as well as losing all of the rear halves facilities and uses, it had the following neglect, detrimental changes and alterations done to it. (The Front & Rear separation & demolition were very badly done!)

- Majority of church pews were removed leaving no seating
- Victorian airways were blocked up or boarded over leaving no airflow
- Several holes were left in the roof and tower allowing water damage to occur for several decades
- Substandard flooring was put in the old organ room
- The Large Ornate Organ was removed
- Balcony was redesigned as offices/additional rooms
- Stain glass windows were significantly vandalised
- Drains smashed & filled with concrete & tarmac
- Drugs and needles were used and left on the premises
- Little or no maintenance of the property was carried out in a correct manner, and for twenty to thirty years it suffered appalling neglect
- The demolition of the rear building made what was an inside wall into an outside wall and along with very bad drainage alterations left the property with continual flooding in the new alley way between the front and rear half, which has soaked into the cellars of the front half causing great damage
- The beautiful wall mural began to lift off the wall, and workman trying to install electric cables also smashed through the wall dangerously close to the mural causing lifting
- Subsequently the blocked airways, the continued water damage and lack of basic maintenance, along with a faulty floor design left the building with repeated and substantial dry rot attacks, as well as brown rot and other infestations. This also progressed into the plaster and walls of the building from the cellars through the main hall floors and up to the window sills in the main hall.

### **March 2012 - Kings Church purchased Wesley's**

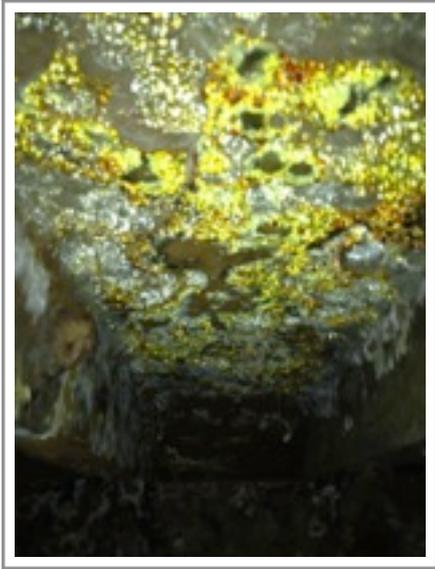
King's Church purchased Wesley's (front half) from the Methodist denomination in March 2012 with the single goal of restoring the building to its original use as a church in the community. After many varied surveys and reports of all kinds it was discovered that the 20/30 years of neglect and rear half demolition as previously described had left Wesley's in a desperate state. One simple example would be the continual water damage and blocked ventilation has caused the dry rot to savage the property, which has only got worse over time and seriously put the whole property at risk. After several site meetings with Listed Buildings it was agreed that **Section 9 Emergency Repairs** were carried out

May/Aug 2012 to save the property, which included temporary roof repairs and the removal of grossly infected timber floors and some plaster work. Much of the remaining floor and plaster work is still infected, but the increase in ventilation has temporarily slowed its march! The building has failed to dry out in the 8 months or so due to the continued drainage and damp problems that have existed for decades, and reoccur every time it rains. The loss of the rear building as previously stated means that the front half now has to somehow achieve all its proper church and community functions in just half of its original premises.



2012

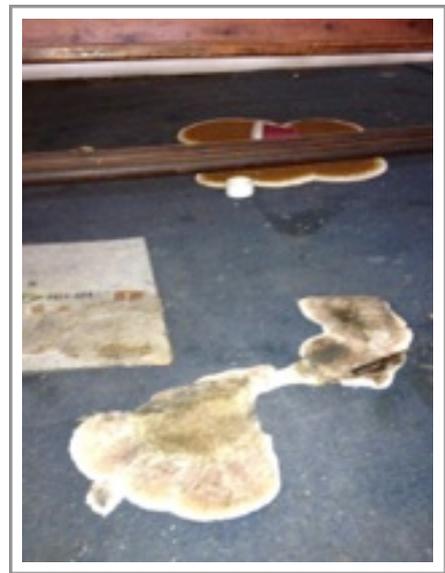
## ROTS & INFESTATIONS



70 foot long cellars having been blocked off were full of dry rot across walls and floors at a disastrous level. One cellar being completely covered over every surface.



Main Hall Floors producing fresh dry rot spores in large 2ft. pancakes. Carpet tiles full of dry rot underneath.



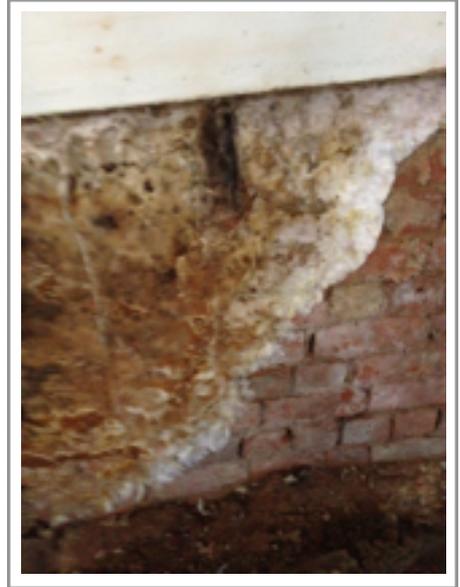
Beams & Floor Boards destroyed by rampant dry rot over large areas with floors collapsing & very dangerous



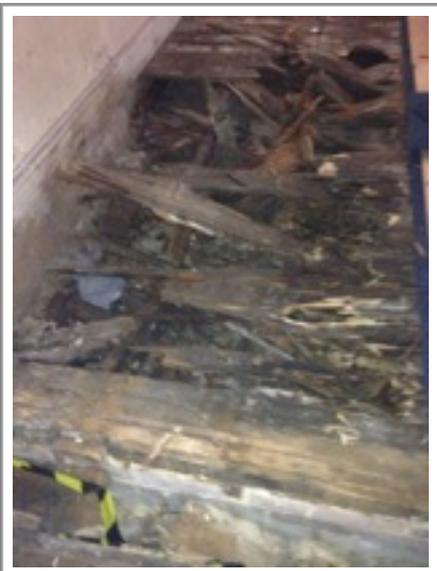
## WALL INFESTATIONS & COLLAPSED FLOORS



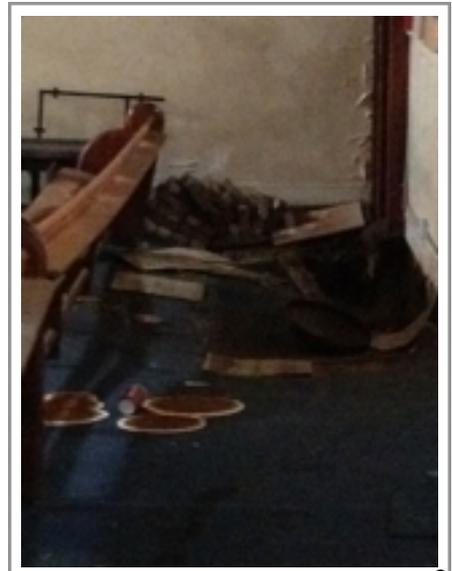
Walls substantially covered & infested with dry rot up to the window cills to date.



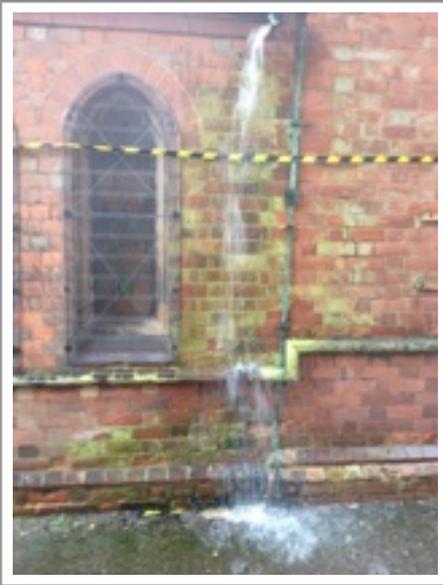
Serious Brown Rot infestation to main hall floors under balcony. Substantial Dry Rot infestation in woodblock floors & foundations



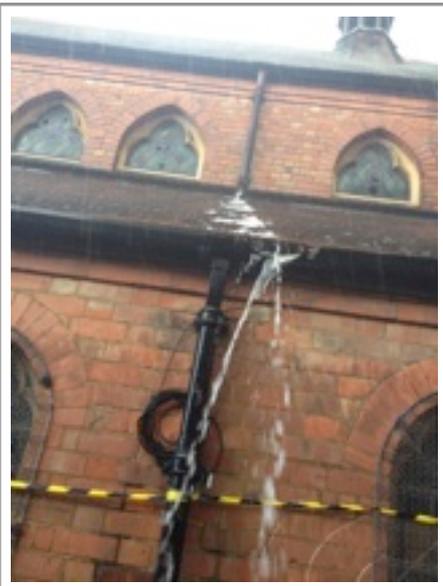
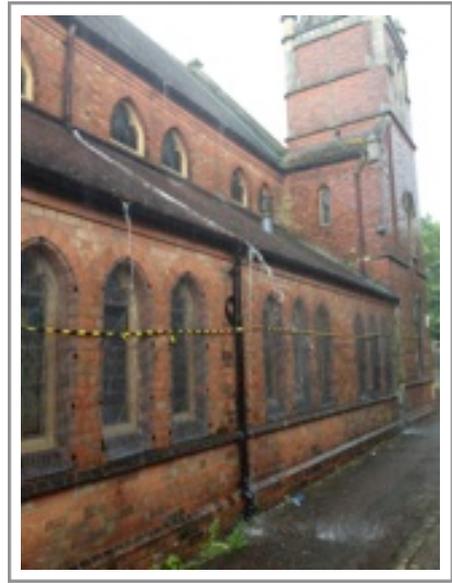
Large areas of floor collapse throughout main hall and all ground floor offices. Brown Rot collapse under balcony. Dry Rot collapse along left side of hall.



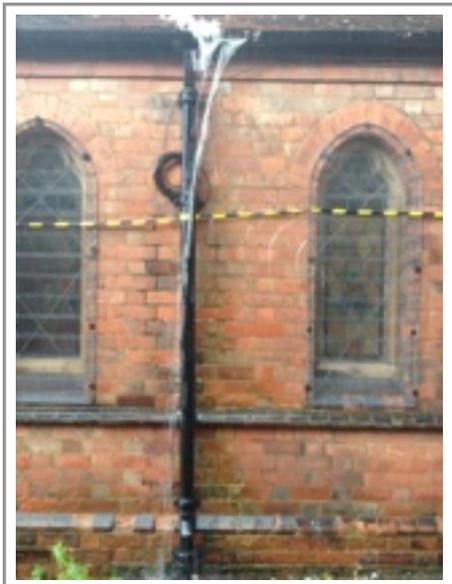
## NEGLECTED ROOF & GUTTERS



Broken & damaged guttering & downpipes of iron, plastic & asbestos.



Gutters significantly blocked & wrong specification for the flow of water from these large roofs.



Ground level drains smashed & filled with concrete & tarmac in alley way. Water has no where to go but back in to Wesley's, which it has done for the past 30 years.



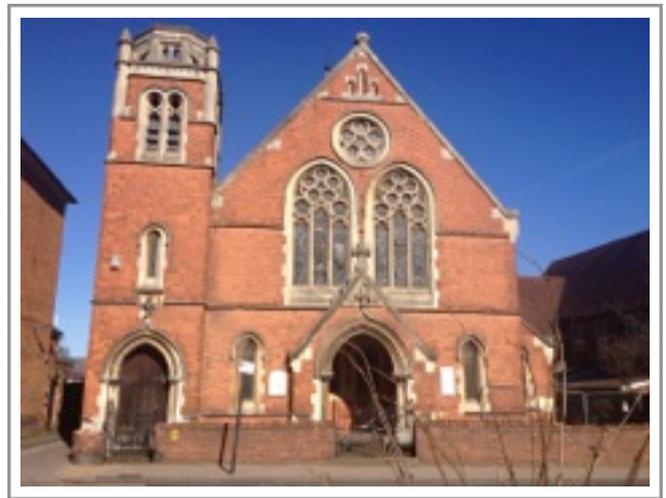
**Wesley's**



Late 1800s/Early 1900s



1980s



March 2013

## King's Church - Future Plans for Wesley's

### Restoration to a Church:

King's Church purchased Wesley's with the sole aim of restoring it to its original & covenanted use as a Church.

### Investment to Date:

Since March 2012 King's Church have spent over £40,000 on Section 9 Emergency Works, Architects Fees, Structural Engineers Fees, a large number of surveys, fact finding reports & exploratory works to prepare for the formal planning application. Martin Ellison of Listed Buildings, has been particularly helpful throughout this whole process with conversations & site meetings.



### Main areas of restoration and additional alteration needed to restore & return Wesley's to full church & community use:

**Full Restoration** of all areas of the building to its original state, keeping to this as much as possible

### Necessary Alterations & Additions:

- Extension to provide toilets
- Kitchen addition
- Floor change
- Cellars & fire escapes opened up & added for use
- Balcony - already changed to offices/rooms but long term we intend to return it to its original use, dependent on securing additional premises to provide rooms.

### Floor Change

Sadly half of the building was demolished over 20 years ago taking with it all the facilities & Sunday school rooms with level floors and halls with level floors etc. leaving the main meeting hall (show piece part of the Church) with a sloping floor & pews on its own. Our challenge is how to restore this into Church Community with Sunday School rooms, toilets, kitchens, and meet all the Health & Safety criteria & full church use of the modern age, whilst preserving & conserving Wesley's, and telling its story since 1892.

All the pews which were fixed and designed for the sloping floor were removed to West End Methodist Church or cut up with a chain saw over 20 years ago. Only 4 or 5 remain which we consider listed in our thinking!

For over 20 years Wesley's has remained derelict and full of damp & dry rot has exploded in it etc. with no one willing to take on the cost or challenge until we purchased it in March 2012. Our simple thoughts on the floor which has to now achieve what all the original whole building achieved (before demolition of rear part) are now as follows:

- It SADLY has to change for the following reasons.....
- Dry Rot ravaged:** both Aquafoss & Rudders & Paynes have said the floor has to go as Dry Rot & other infestations have run riot and will keep coming back for up to 3 years etc. Also no Dry Rot Company will give a guarantee if it stays as the building can't achieve the 20% damp level due to all the other cellar & ground water level issues that have been present for most of its life. Dry Rot attacks are recorded for many decades and have never been defeated yet. So Block & Beam Floor, and Iron RSJs etc. in the cellar will survive further attacks, where as wood will not etc. We need to get serious with the floor to save the whole building from succumbing to DRY ROT in future as it is already half the way up the wall in places.

- **Air Flow:** raising the floor to level will increase the much needed airflow & makes venting easier to achieve.
- **Health & Safety & Multi Use:** All the pews bar 4 or 5 are gone and **prohibitively expensive** to replace. If we could replace the pews and restored the sloping floor, we could not achieve much community use or all the Sunday School/Youth/Play Groups etc. as the pews would dictate only sit down service/productions type meetings. If we tried to use a sloping floor without pews, cups of coffee, sitting on chairs etc. would be a Health & Safety night mare.
- **Community Groups:** Local groups & schools would use the building for displays & projects etc. if the floors are level, but not if sloping.
- **Kings Church own Youth Groups & Mums & Toddlers Groups to the Community etc:** These will all work with a level floor, but not a sloping on at all, severely restricting it's use. Formerly all this was achieved for 100 years in the now demolished rear building and well used by Wolverton Community for most of that time. We want to do this again (Original Use of the Whole Building) but have to achieve it in half the building, of which the current floor was designed for one type of meeting only.
- **Fire Safety:** A beam & Block Concrete Floor allows better fire escape time (Building Inspector). Replicating original type features on top very possible.
- **Finance:** We have to pay for whatever we agree, so affordability is an issue. For example stones thrown through the stain glass windows (hand painted in places) will cost us £35,000 to repair in the latest quote.
- **Our Current Thinking:** A Beam & Block Floor (with wood finish) but to reproduce the original look under the Balcony including Fitting & Fixing the pews we have under-there (making them LISTED)! and to show what was there, and leveling the floor from there to the front. All this and the all-important (discussed with LB) detail will be in Walkers drawings.

#### **Note:**

Full details are all in Walker Architects Drawings & The Planning Application:

#### **Future Use:**

Once all these works are approved, additional grant monies raised to match our funds and all the works of restoration and alteration completed. Wesley's will be the home of King's Church and once again restored to its full & proper use including:

- Full Church use
- Church Services (Public Christian Worship) as per 1909 Covenant
- Youth Groups
- Weddings
- Funerals
- Children's Groups/Mums & Toddlers
- Community Use
- Choral & Singing Performances (Acoustics special)
- A Historical Site for school, community, visitors & Listed Buildings to see & use

**Personal Comment:**

I was a choir boy from early childhood, head choir boy for St. Michael's in Basingstoke, Church of England, Head Chorister for Hampshire Choir School and annually sang with the massed choirs in Winchester Cathedral. Became a member of a Baptist Church in the mid 1970s and moved to Milton Keynes in 1983 as part of the church team to start what is now King's Church. I have lived and worked in Wolverton for the past 30 years. We have hired all three of the local schools throughout this time and have run many community youth works to this day. I was also an Estate Agent (ANAEA) for the best part of 10 years and my Father was a Chartered Surveyor (ARICS) and my Son is an Estate Agent. The simple point of mentioning all this is we are steeped in church history, church buildings and buildings in general and we feel very excited to have found this wonderful building which we believe is a perfect match for us and us for it.

**We are extremely excited about this whole project and cannot wait for the opening day!**

**Andy Forbes**  
**Pastor of King's Church**

**Report:** compiled by Andrew & Shaaron Forbes, Pastors King's Church MK

**Research references include:**

Marjorie Tissington: Pianist/Organist, started Wesley's in 1932 at 14 years of age

Choir Masters Grandson: 1960/70s - Eton Crescent, Wolverton

Rise & Progress of Wolverton, Stantonbury compiled by Bill Edgar

A guide to Historic Buildings of Milton Keynes: ISBN 0903379058

Bucks Standard News Paper

[www.wolvertonpast.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.wolvertonpast.blogspot.co.uk)

Local Wolverton People

Small excavation digs to check foundations, pipes and original boundary wall sites.

Listed Buildings Letter 5/10/12



The unusual spire was designed by Birmingham Architect Ewen Harper, in 1896 following a previous successful similar design on Wesley's Methodist Church, Wolverton in 1892



Westend Methodist Church, were Wesley's pews were moved to in 1980s.



Wesley's interior showing a choral & orchestral performance in 1971/72.