

Welcome to Paisley Methodist Central Hall



Recently we renewed our roof and established a Heritage Centre. This was only possible with the financial and practical help of the organisations and people mentioned on this slide.

The Heritage Centre was opened on the 12th October 2019 and charts the history of Methodism in Paisley from its early roots to the present day.



The Baird Trust

Paisley Photographic Society

The Slack Family

Archie Leitch

Peter Drummond Architects



The opening was well attended and people were curious to read about the heritage of Central Hall and Methodism in Paisley.

As well as story boards round the walls, there are cases full of historic memorabilia.

The following slides take you on a tour round the Heritage Centre





Methodism comes to Paisley

English canal workers helped to bring the Methodist religious movement to Paisley when they worked on the Glasgow, Paisley and Arrossan Canal in the early 1800s. It spread quickly to the town and its surrounding villages. As it flourished, many groups used to meet in all sorts of places: public halls and rooms, and even private cottages, which were deemed to be churches.

Settling our differences
There were many different ideas in Methodism, and disagreement on how churches should be run. Wesleyan Methodism and Primitive Methodism were the two main strands of thought. Primitive Methodists were more closely linked to the trade union movement and their services were led by preachers, ordinary members of the congregation, rather than ministers.

In 1932 these two branches were to unite and settle their differences. But it was not until 1960 that Paisley's St James Wesleyan Methodists and Primitive Methodists were united with the Wesleyan Methodists at Central Hall.



John Wesley, the leading founder of Methodism, was regarded as a vital force in society with his personal reforms and the abolition of slavery. He was a powerful figure whose preaching had enormous influence based on his teachings.

“We should be rigorous in judging ourselves and gracious in judging others.”

John Wesley



Worship the Lord with Gladness: Come before him with joyful songs.

Psalms 100 v 2



A church raised from the dead

By the early 1900s, Methodism in Paisley was in decline. The Glasgow circuit, which oversaw the church, was ready to declare that Methodism in the town was dead. But a minister called Reverend W. H. Rolis disagreed. He volunteered to come to Paisley instead of being sent to Chester.

The beginnings of our church
Rev. Rolis founded our church in 1902. They held open air concerts in Dunn Square on Saturday nights and had a Sunday school of eighty pupils. The popular concerts, hymns, and Rev. Rolis' preaching attracted so many people it was said the church had risen from the dead. It became known as the "Lazarus church", after the miracle in which Jesus restored a man to life.

But the church still relied on renting various buildings in the town. Rev. Rolis was determined to have a purpose-built Wesleyan church, and began to raise money to build one. He was to have a major supporter in this work - a local man with a colourful past called John Slack.



Rev. Rolis, who was a former member of the Glasgow circuit, was determined to have a purpose-built Wesleyan church, and began to raise money to build one. He was to have a major supporter in this work - a local man with a colourful past called John Slack.



Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists, and Primitive Methodists, who were united in 1960, were the first to meet in Central Hall.



Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet.

Psalms 150 v 3



The power of prayer

It was amazing how quickly the money for a new church was raised, but even more amazing how quickly a building of this style and size was built. The first £2,000 went to buy the site of an old tenement. In 1906, when there was doubt about getting enough money to actually start building, Rev. Rolis said "you would not doubt if you knew how hard people were praying for it".

On 10th September 1907, a stone-laying ceremony marked the start of building work. John Slack laid the last of 12 stones. He had hoped to place £100 in donations on top of the stone but in the event was able to place £164. Just one year later there was a service to open the building.

Another £16,000 had been raised to build the church. Unlike other iconic buildings in Paisley, most of the money had come from ordinary working people, not rich mill owners or merchants. But there was still a debt of £5,000. On the evening of the opening day, Joseph Rank of the flour milling company said if the church could raise £4,000 by Christmas he would give the remaining £1,000.

“I saw something which gave me one of the keenest delights I have ever had. I was on the top of a tramcar... and I saw a notice in big letters, 'This site has been purchased for a Wesleyan Mission Hall.' Yes, on the very site where I first met John Slack. I shouted 'Glory!' and did not care who heard me.”

Joseph Rank



He answered their prayer because they trusted in him.


1 Chronicles 5:20

Our tour begins here with Methodism coming to Paisley and the story of how Central Hall was built.

If you zoom in, you will be able to read each of the panels

These boards tell a little of the history of John Slack and his role in the building of Central Hall. The other board explains the role of a Central Hall and the difference between it and a more traditional church building.





John Slack - the Lazarus of Paisley


John Slack had led a dissolute life. He worked as an auctioneer and entertainer, and owned a racehorse called "Miss Martyr", which won the Paisley races at St James Park. But his luck changed and with his gambling and drinking he had to sell his horses.

A changed man
His sister urged him to attend a meeting in Paisley where Josiah Nix, the "Racecourse Preacher", was speaking. When Slack had heard Nix before, he had declared that the church "was not for him", but this time he was converted. He signed the pledge on 31st January 1904 and worked unceasingly for the cause of Methodism until his death five-and-a-half years later.

In one year alone he visited almost 2,000 homes in his missionary and fund-raising work. Many drunkards and gamblers said "if John Slack can be converted then so can I". His notorious past helped them to see that change was possible, and his remarkable conversion earned him the nickname "The Lazarus of Paisley".


John Slack died in 1909. His grave is in the cemetery at Paisley. The church where he was converted is now the Central Hall. The building was built in 1904 and is now the Central Hall. The building was built in 1904 and is now the Central Hall. The building was built in 1904 and is now the Central Hall.

Part of this statement that stood at the end of the race track with the auctioneer's Museum that, when John Slack used to drink, judging by the association on the central image, it would have been a fairly good!




"I cannot speak too strongly of Mr Slack's zeal and devotion. His daily life has been a sermon"

Rev. R. M. Kedward



I tell you there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.
Luke 15 v10




In my Father's house are many mansions


Like other Methodist Central Halls, the building has space for many different activities. The main hall is one of the largest churches in Paisley; originally it could seat up to 1,400 people, although renovations in 1983 reduced the capacity to 750. It has the best acoustics in town, because it was designed as an entertainment venue as well as a church.

On the ground floor, there is space for four shops, designed to link the hall to the commercial life of the town and provide some rental income. Meeting rooms on the first and second floor can be used by local organisations, and the staircase is housed a flat for the caretaker.

Paisley Central Hall held concerts on Saturday nights that were a mixture of musical entertainment and community singing of popular songs and hymns. There was often standing room only at a time when people had little access to music or entertainment. It was also used as a cinema until 1920.

The building continues to serve the community. Its main purpose is still as a place of worship, but many organisations use the various rooms for drama, dance, keep fit and hobbies. We have hosted concerts by Jimmy Logan and House McDonald and by choirs from Africa, California and Mexico as well as numerous local choirs.





Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.
Hebrews 3 v6

Next there are boards on how Central Hall was used during the two World Wars and the Votes for Women campaign.

A new vision for the church

Central Hall was built to be used by local communities rather than as traditional churches. Paddy McFadden, the first Minister of Central Hall, is shown in the photograph below, speaking to a group of women, and one of only 16 in the whole of Britain.

The hall was part of a more radical approach that was based on people in their own homes. The building was designed to be used by the community, not just for church services, but also for meetings, social events, and as a place where people could meet and talk to each other. It was a place where people could meet and talk to each other. It was a place where people could meet and talk to each other.



Can we still be your church? It's not as easy as you think. We are looking for people who are strong and active.


VOTES FOR WOMEN

Support for change

One of the first organisations to hold meetings in the hall was the campaign for votes for women, which was very active in the town. A number of women in the church were among the movement's local leaders, and they made Central Hall their headquarters. The superintendent minister of the time, Mr. Walter Spencer, lent his support to the campaign.

Votes for Women
The Franchise Campaign supported the local women's Franchise League, which was opposed to the franchise. The League preferred peaceful protests, withholding taxes and creating a census form.

However, three members once chained themselves to a window grille in the Ladies' gallery in Parliament. The grille had to be removed with them still attached, and the locks fled off in a committee room.




I learned more about Christianity from my mother than from all the theologians in England.
John Wesley

Help during wartime


The church played a key part in the community during both World Wars. Many young men in the congregation volunteered for the forces in the First World War. To keep up morale, the church continued with concerts in Dunn Square and on Saturday nights in the Auditorium. The Rev. Proudlove visited wounded soldiers and comforted the bereaved. Military authorities used the lower halls. The church lost 32 young men killed in action.

in the Second World War, Rev. S. J. Jackson was the superintendent minister. He became the minister to Methodist soldiers stationed in the Paisley area, and was also chaplain to the army lads stationed at Abercorn School. At the 1940 church anniversary he reported an increase in membership and record collections.


The large attendances were despite 150 men and women from Central Hall's congregation joining the forces. Nine members of the church were killed in the Second World War, including Sister Jean McNair, who died during the blitz in London.



Assailed from Chamberlain took shelter in the hall after a terrible day. In March 1941, every person who had been in the hall had to be evacuated. The hall was used as a shelter for the night. The hall was used as a shelter for the night. The hall was used as a shelter for the night.




"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can."
John Wesley



For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
John 3 v 16

Three comrades in faith

Paisley Methodist Central Hall is here because of the inspiration, faith and hard work of these three gentlemen.




From left to right:


John Slack was an insurance underwriter and industrialist. Although not originally from Paisley, he was well known throughout the town, mostly as a Methodist preacher and chorale leader. He had not been in church for many years when his spirit was called but he was to become a devoted member of the congregation to build the hall.

Josiah Nix learned the weaving trade in Glasgow as an apprentice shoemaker. In particular, he was well known in the town for his skill in making and mending shoes. He had the habit of making and repairing shoes in his spare time, and the challenge of making shoes in his spare time. He was well known in the town for his skill in making and mending shoes. He had the habit of making and repairing shoes in his spare time, and the challenge of making shoes in his spare time.

Rev. W. H. Rolls came to Paisley because he believed the Methodist Church here could be the centre of the town's spiritual life. He was well known in the town for his skill in making and mending shoes. He had the habit of making and repairing shoes in his spare time, and the challenge of making shoes in his spare time.



The church quickly became a popular centre for community events. Harvest Festivals were the highlight of the church year and were held annually.



Christ, however, was faithful over God's house.
Hebrews 3 v6

On this board we have a couple of historic pictures. The top one shows John Slack, Josiah Nix and the Rev. W. H. Rolls standing outside the gates of Central Hall.

The second picture shows a Harvest festival, displaying all the fruit and vegetables.



We hope you have enjoyed this view of our Heritage Centre and that you may be able to visit the centre and the rest of the building in person in the not too distant future.