



Gordon Gostelow who plays John Wesley in 'Ride! Ride!' at the foot of the famous equestrian statue of the preacher in Bristol  
Photo: Bristol United Press

# NEW WORLD NEWS

FOR MORAL RE-ARMAMENT

## No easy ride

JOHN WESLEY'S JOURNEYS around England were no picnic. He was attacked by mobs, pelted with stones or rotten fruit, heckled, ejected from churches. He was satirised, lampooned, caricatured and smeared.

Could, then, a modern-day musical about John Wesley expect to fare much better? Hardly.

Even during the weeks of rehearsal the stones started to fly. Writing about the show (he hadn't seen) a correspondent in *The Stage* described the songs (he hadn't heard) as 'rather comfy' and compared them with *Stars on Sunday*. He capped it all with the information (untrue) that the show was financed by the Joseph Rank Trust to the tune of £30,000. Ronald Mann, on behalf of Aldersgate Productions Ltd, replied the following week: 'Ride! Ride!' has received no money from the Joseph Rank Trust but is financed entirely by 25 individual backers. I think also that anyone going to see it with the idea that it is "rather comfy" and in the spirit of *Stars on Sunday*, is in for a delightful shock.'

Before the show reached its first stop, Nottingham, most of the bookable seats in the Theatre Royal were taken. Pleasant though this sounded to most people, it didn't please one local resident who wrote to the *Evening Post* complaining that he couldn't get his usual seat.

A Methodist from Newark decided, before he had seen it, that *Ride! Ride!* (2½ hours long) must be a life of John Wesley, (who lived 88 years, rode 250,000 miles, preached 40,000 sermons, wrote 233 books and pamphlets) and then complained to the *Methodist Recorder* that he had been mis-

The show, naturally enough, received mixed treatment from the critics but sometimes it was hard to believe that different critics had been watching the same show. Wrote Rex Edwards of the *Leicester Mercury*: 'Gordon Gostelow's embodiment of Wesley is a towering, spell-binding thing to watch... he suggests... the rudeness and the restless single-mindedness which so often goes hand-in-glove with strong convictions and a profound reforming streak.' While Emrys Bryson of the *Nottingham Evening Post* complained: 'I longed to be scorched by the fierce flame of the man who until he was 70 got up at 4 am and clattered on horseback the length and breadth of England, defying persecution and the mobs. I wanted to be taken into his mind and see his doubts and fears, and his divine anger.'

### Authentic or trite?

In Leeds *The Guardian's* Robin Thornber and the *Yorkshire Post's* Desmond Pratt also attended the same performance. Thornber found: 'The substance is slight and the treatment mostly trite.' Pratt, on the other hand, began: 'The considerable virtue of this serious musical play is its authenticity' - a view echoed by Charles Kitchen, reviewing the show on BBC Radio Leeds: 'This is no fanciful production of something vaguely associated with Wesley and Methodism in this country. This is the real thing.'

However, even critics can be undone by their proof-readers, even when trying to score with a telling opening sentence. *The Leicester Mercury* was no match for *The Guardian*. 'One of the most astonishing theatrical events we are likely to see this

year,' wrote Thornber. While, in contrast to his headline, 'Odd — but rivetting', Rex Edwards' opening sentence read, 'Ride! Ride!... must be the oldest stage enterprise of 1976.'

In Newcastle, the opening night evidently ended as dramatically downstairs as it had begun upstairs. 'The commissionaire was doing a little dance in the foyer as the closing strains of *Ride! Ride!* filled the Theatre Royal,' observed Avril Deane of *The Journal* who was obviously leaving early to file her review. At the beginning of the show, when John Wesley begins his famous Oxford sermon, 'Let me ask you in tender love is this a Christian city? Are all your magistrates, all heads of government of one heart and soul?', a voice rang out clearly from the gallery, in reply, 'No, they're not!'

### Lone Ranger

Meanwhile some of the audiences had found the portrayal of the sordidness of eighteenth century London streets ('Don't blink, or you'll miss it,' commented one reviewer) a little hard on the stomach. The Bishop of Bradford, interviewed on Radio Pennine, was asked about this. He replied that in his view it was necessary to depict the evil which John Wesley was up against in his day.

But as in his day, so now, Wesley himself continued to be the main target. The critics of the two Liverpool papers concurred in poking fun at the stage portrayal of the itinerant preacher. 'The wearied energy of an RAC man on 24 hour call,' chortled the *Daily Post*. 'A Lone Ranger figure riding to the rescue of a poor maiden in a madhouse,' gurgled *The Echo*.

And what of the cast, who have travelled all these miles in John Wesley's footsteps — not on horseback, it must be admitted — but by train and bus and car? Interviewed in the *Birmingham Mail*, actor Jon C P Mattocks declared, 'Spiritually it has no effect on me.' Whereas Gordon Gostelow told the London *Evening News*, 'Its message is very powerful



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indeed. Certainly it has had an enormous impact on me. I was raised as a Methodist and playing this role is both a great honour and a compelling experience. Even during rehearsals, I constantly found myself being reminded of my boyhood roots. Life is taking on much more meaning for me as a result.'

And Gregory Kane, interviewed on BBC Radio Humberside, acknowledged, 'It has, I think, changed me for the better — a very good thing—my wife will be very pleased, and my various creditors.'

## Daring act

Naturally enough the *Methodist Recorder* has given great prominence to the show, with news, interviews, photographs and a four-page pull-out supplement. But what has pleased Methodists has been the ecumenical nature of the response. Under the headline 'Daring Act of Faith', the review in *Reform*, the magazine of the United Reformed Church, concluded, 'What an extraordinary experience the play provides — on account of the confident naivete, the daring act of faith that brought the whole thing into being.' Writing in the *Methodist Recorder*, the Rev Brian Greet, Chairman of the Nottingham and Derby District of the Methodist Church, declared, 'Notably the most enthusiastic comments on the first night, when I attended, came from the Salvation Army Major, the Roman Catholic Vicar-General and the Anglican Diocesan Bishop.'

Thanks to radio and television the impact and message of *Ride! Ride!* have gone far beyond the four walls of theatres, packed though these have often been. National and local radio broadcasts and television programmes have carried interviews with the cast and management, and songs from the show, to millions of people in their homes.

## Rough going

But what of the facts and figures? Over 71,000 people saw *Ride! Ride!* during its eleven-week tour and they paid over £80,000 to do so. Wesley himself would not have been displeased with the crowds, nor the collections! But *Ride! Ride!* has a big cast and an orchestra, and theatre rentals are costly. At the close of the tour Aldersgate Productions Ltd is in the black — but only just — and the Company is looking for a good run in London to repay all its production costs.

Like the man it portrays, *Ride! Ride!* knows the stones of criticism, but like Wesley also it has continued to draw the crowds and to challenge them with its message. Like Wesley too, may it also continue to do so for a long, long time, even though the going is often rough.

**Hugh Williams**

THERE ARE TWO IDEAS circulating today, which are swallowed by the unwary and gulped down by those who should know better.

One is that the way to deal with the things that are wrong in the world is to change the system; since human motivations cannot be changed, violence is justified wherever necessary. This, the dogma of the Left, is accepted by many who are not leftists.

The other is what might be called the doctrine of the Right: a personal faith may be admirable, and church-going commendable, but for Christians to try and change society is naive, foolish and dangerous. We saw this in some of the right wing reactions to the Archbishops' Call to the Nation.

Both heresies claim to have history on their side. But is it? It is worth studying how change in British society which took place in two or three generations from 1776 onwards was brought about.

## Cultured and dissolute

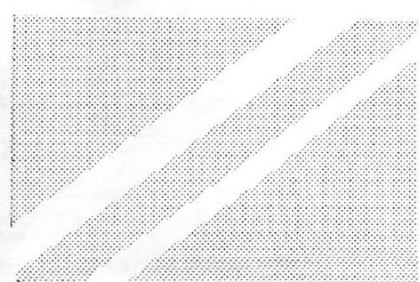


Two hundred years ago Britain was politically and socially at a low ebb. The war with the American colonies into which the corrupt government of Lord North had blundered had been lost. A rich and selfish aristocracy with high standards of artistic taste — cultured, magnificent and dissolute — ruled the country entirely in their own interests. The poverty of the masses affected by the industrial revolution which was getting under way hardly disturbed them. It was producing appalling conditions in 'the dark, Satanic' cotton mills, in the coal mines and in the gin-soaked slums. It was a time of nouveaux riches factory owners, slave-ship owners and 'Nabobs' back from India. Trade was booming and craftsmanship was at its best, but the corruption of political life, with a parliament dominated by the owners of the 'rotten boroughs', seemed irredeemable. The church, with a few notable exceptions, reflected the cultured materialism of the oligarchy.

In the 30 years after 1776, British society was shaken by the repercussions of the French Revolution; the country was plunged into a war with France in which we finally stood alone against the military genius of Napoleon; there were rebellions in Ireland, wars in India, a mutiny in the navy, the monarch went off his head, and the National Debt soared. Britain's troubles seemed endless. Had there been TV political commentators and experts on the media to survey the scene, their forecasts of Britain's prospects would have been gloomy.

But the experts would have been completely wrong. These years saw the beginning of a clean-up of public life, started by the new government of young William Pitt, and of major reforms which led to the transformation of our society, accomplished without violent revolution. 'The England

# The spirit



that is about us,' wrote historian J R Green, 'dates from the American War. It was then that the moral, the philanthropic, the religious ideas which have moulded English society into its present shape first broke the spiritual torpor of the eighteenth century.'

How did this happen? There were many factors at work. In the last resort it was the extremity of the need which fired the spirits of millions of ordinary people; and it was the inspired leadership of a few, who introduced new standards of service and of comp into public life. One particular group of men played a unique part. Through their teamwork they accomplished far more than they could ever have done as individuals.

In 1776 John Wesley was at the height of his tireless campaigns across Britain, riding to all corners, through all weathers, and establishing 'cells' of poor but undaunted people. By then he had started training and sending out 'lay preachers'. One of those he had met, converted by the preaching of his colleague John Whitfield, was a former slave-ship captain, John Newton. Later, this man was ordained and had a parish in London. It was to John Newton that the young Wilberforce turned first at the crisis of his life in 1785.

## My darling object



In 1776 William Wilberforce, the son of a merchant in Hull, had just gone up to Cambridge University. He enjoyed life there and was a friend of William Pitt, a fellow-student. He was good at parties and had no other aim in life than success in politics. In 1780 he fought the elections, surprised everybody by his eloquence and got in as the member for Hull. He distinguished himself in Parliament and, when in 1783 Pitt became Prime Minister at the age of 24, Wilberforce's prospects of high office were splendid. Of his life in Parliament he wrote, 'My own distinction was my darling object.' By chance, taking a tour of the continent in 1785 with a friend, he read a book which led him to re-think his aims in life. On his return he radically changed his life-style. He went to stay quietly with his uncle, John Thornton, at Clapham; he began to get up early to seek



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the guidance of God and wrote his thoughts in a Journal; after some hesitation he went to the Rev John Newton, and talked with him; and finally went to see his friend Pitt and told him of his decision. He formed the conclusion that he was being called to a greater task: 'God Almighty has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners.'

## Campaign headquarters



In 1789 he introduced his first Motion in the House for the abolition of the slave trade. Pitt supported him, but it was defeated. He continued for the next 18 years, almost annually, against intense opposition, to introduce similar Motions, and in so doing to rouse the nation.

In 1799 he married and took a house in Clapham on the estate of John Thornton, whose son Henry became an MP and one of Wilberforce's closest allies in Parliament. His famous oval library, designed by Pitt, became the headquarters where they and their friends planned their campaigns.

He was joined at Clapham by Granville Sharp and by Macaulay. John Shore took a house there, and so did Charles Grant, with others of their friends dedicated to cleaning up the East India Company. Soon there were other MPs. They were visited frequently by others with similar aims, including Hannah More the writer; and they had as the vicar of their church a man who was heart and soul in their support.

In 1776 Charles Grant was working for the East India Company — and turned a corner in his life. He was doing well and had rapid promotion, but extravagant living, some bad business deals and reckless gambling had got him into debts totalling £20,000. Then he had some shattering experiences. In three years he lost his 'good uncle', his brother died, then a close friend; then he lost both his children within nine days. He turned to God and found an experience which completely altered his life. From that time he started a friendship with John Shore, a colleague in the Company, who later became Governor-General of India. Their partnership was to become famous.

Granville Sharp, who started life in extreme poverty as a draper's assistant and had studied Hebrew, Greek, Latin and law, had well equipped himself to take up the fight against the slave trade. He was joined by a young Cambridge graduate, Thomas Clarkson, who in search of academic distinction wrote a thesis on 'Is it lawful to make slaves of others against their will?' By the time he read his prize essay to the Sennate, he found himself overwhelmed by the iniquities which his studies had convinced him were true and his conscience told him were intolerable. With some Quaker friends they formed the Abolition Committee. Clarkson was a prodigious worker. In search of one sailor who had a vital piece of evidence, he once searched the ships of port after port until on the 317th ship he visited he found the sailor.

Another in the anti-slavery team was Zachary Macaulay, who started as an overseer of slave labour on a Jamaica sugar estate. He finally threw up 'really great offers' and came home to join others in the fight against the slave trade. He made it his life's work, tireless in collecting evidence, sifting reports, writing pamphlets. It is said of him that 'he rose and took pen in hand at four in the morning'.

The aim of this group of friends, who met at weekends, shared hospitality, played games with the children, studied and planned together, was much more than the abolition of the slave trade. It may be said that by concentrating on this highly controversial issue they were able to deal with one monstrous evil, which roused a nation-wide public opinion which was then mobilised to deal with other issues.

Hannah More, for example, in her work for the education of the poor and for Sunday schools, did not hesitate to attack the profligacy of the landlords. She wrote in *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great*, 'To expect to reform the poor while the opulent are corrupt is to throw odours into the stream while the springs are poisoned.'

## Storm of opposition



The East India group fought notable battles for reforms in the Company. They had to persevere through many set-backs. In the debate on the renewal of Company's charter in 1793, they proposed the appointment of chaplains in India and on board the larger merchantmen sailing there. The idea that the British staff of the Company needed chaplains shocked the Directors at India House and roused a storm of opposition; further they thought that preaching Christianity in India would interfere with the Company's trading prospects. Their motion on the Charter was thrown out.

During the next 20 years the Clapham

group worked hard to reverse this set-back. They founded the Church Missionary Society; they sent missionaries to India without the Company's licence; and finally, after a colossal campaign through the country, their appeal to Parliament was supported by 837 Petitions, bearing half a million signatures, and in 1813 the Charter was amended in their favour.

## Dangerous radicalism



The wide range of issues they tackled besides slavery is not generally known. They fought corruption in politics; they supported penal reform; worked for the abolition of duelling, of brutal sports (bull and bear-baiting), of the press gang. In 1796 they founded a Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor; later, a Society for the Relief of Persons Imprisoned for Small Debts. They tried to improve the conditions of work for wretched chimney sweeps.

It is fashionable to criticise them today for not attacking the class structure and for their blindness to many social evils and their conservative reaction to the French Revolution. It is forgotten that when they founded the Sunday School Society in 1785, it was condemned as 'dangerous radicalism'!

Perhaps their greatest work was not so much in the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, and finally of slavery itself in 1833 (the year Wilberforce died), as in the organisation of public opinion so as to create a public conscience in Britain. They prepared the way for the great reforms of the nineteenth century — for Shaftesbury and the Factory Acts; for the Reform Bills of 1832 and later; for the new standards of administration in India set by Sir Henry Lawrence and others; and for the Trevelyan-Northcote report of 1853 on the reform of the civil service.

The facts are that a revolution in British society took place. It happened without bloodshed and it was pioneered through a number of 'cells', as effective in their own way as any Communist cells, started by John Wesley and the Methodists and then systematically by Wilberforce and his team at Clapham. Their spiritual descendants drew from the same roots and built a network of families (for many of them intermarried) dedicated to the idea of a Christian Britain setting an example to the world, and to the reform of their own society, of British life.

It is interesting, in our situation today, to reflect on the train of events set in motion by the costly decisions of a small group of men and women who felt that God had called them for a particular purpose some 200 years ago. Could it be that similar decisions in 1976, in Britain's present crisis, would lead not just to economic recovery but to a moral and spiritual renaissance, with vast consequences for Britain and the world?





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## A theologian looks at Caux

The second of a series of reflections by the Rev Richard Bevan, Rector of Grasmere.

MANY OF MY DISCUSSIONS with people at Caux were heart-searching as much as thought-provoking. They covered matters of heart as well as head. They seemed to be solely ideas, but in fact they were invitations to action. I have written down in my notebook something that must have impressed me, 'The answer can be found in every human heart.' Just so, human hearts are the key to world-wide revolution.

When enough hearts find the answer to the human malady of hate, greed and selfishness, the results will be overwhelming. This may seem too simple, but in fact it is true. Man's world is narrowly and harmfully small and egocentric, until God speaks decisively to the listening recipient, and then the answer to God's call must be, 'Here am I, send me!' coming from a heart touched by God.

My son, Nick, said at Caux, 'One part of the world is as much the world as the rest. For most of the time most people only see their own world — the rest of the world doesn't exist. You have to take the world in. It must make an impression on your mind *before* you can go out to the world with the world in your heart.'

Yes, the malady is egocentricity, and the cure results in cosmic concern. In between, the still small voice speaks to the mind and changes the heart of the individual. This is action as a result of dynamic and radical personal awareness, conviction and commitment. Conrad Hunte, the West Indian cricketer, said to me that he believes that 'the world changes, when the individual changes. God gives each one of us His answer through guidance. "The answer can be found in every human heart."'

### Vital contact

Few people understand how vital is God's contact with a person's mind and heart. It is the most powerful contact in the world. The real enemy is within myself, and is a core of self-centredness in my heart. God is love, and to be cured I must find love, I must find God. Love is the only healing, uniting, fulfilling agency. Without it, man falls away into those chaotic, disruptive dissociations, of which he is the victim.

Once God takes over, He restores order, and life is channelled in the proper direction, so that God is first, then neighbour next and

self last. This does not mean that one loves neighbour more than self, but that there is priority of courtesy, care and consideration of neighbour as a result of love of God and neighbour. Without this, self obtrudes continually and destructively. It is quite certain that if God does not come first, and neighbour next, self will receive an inordinate amount of love and attention with resulting disorders.

The medical officer at Caux during the time of my visit was from Holland. One evening at dinner he and I had a long and deep discussion of the human condition. We both agreed that the human problem is the same as *my* problem and *your* problem: it is everybody's problem. The doctor said: 'If God wants me to think of others, I want to think about myself. If I am hurt by others, I want to go on thinking about it.'

### Ridiculous to rebel

'As long as a person's inner core is self-centred, he cannot live according to God's will. God loves me more than I love myself. This is a surprise to most people. They have never thought about it. What He wants me to do is not because He hates me, but because He loves me more than I love myself. How ridiculous then to rebel against Him.'

The doctor spoke of human affairs on the broader scale: 'Could it be that our civilisation, which has good laws, good traditions, is basically a self-centred civilisation? Could this be what is wrong? What we are mainly taught at school is knowledge of hard work to get a good job, to be polite and not be late, and behave well to serve our own interests. If you keep going like this, you end up with a self-centred civilisation, which doesn't know it is wrong. But, if we are taught also to care, to care for others, care for our nation, care for the world, even a philosophy of how glorious is civilisation born out of care, this addition can play a part in giving us a changed outlook on life, less self-centred, more consciously corporate, socially responsible.'

The doctor felt that much human sickness was often because people lived for themselves, a soul-destroying existence.

Speaking of his own realisation, he concluded, 'There is an enveloping self-centredness. I am over 50 years of age, and

only the other day, or at any rate quite recently, it dawned on me how selfish I was. God would surely like His children to be aware of this basic self-centredness often. But finally, it needs tremendous love for people to bring them to change. If you force them, you push them further into the pool of self-centredness.'

One thing is certain. The cure cannot be brought about by compulsion. We can seek and pray for change in our own life and the lives of others. We can help them by our example. We can make sure that we do not put obstacles in their way. We can put them in touch with those whose lives have been changed. Most of all we can love them. However, the cure is God's work, and He does it by entering the heart as well as the mind of the individual. We can help God by a delicate awareness of the other person's need and by our own daily reliance upon His guidance.

### TEN PENCE OVER

AN OPEN LETTER To All Generations was presented to the Brazilian Minister of Education, Nay Braga, in Brasilia in April. In part it reads:

'Our conviction is that Brazil could be a reconciler between nations when each one has an answer to hate and fear in their hearts. We write this letter to urge Latin Americans of all ages to sacrifice selfishness and dishonesty in order to reach these aims. On this basis, all of us will fight that our schools and universities become examples of the reconstruction of society on this continent and in the world.'

This letter resulted from the conference for students held in Sitio Sao Luiz MRA centre in February (NWN Vol 24 No 19). Following the conference, a telegram was sent to the President, asking for an interview for some of these students to express their convictions. The reply came from the President's office, saying he was travelling but that he had asked the Minister of Education to receive a group. His answer arrived in the middle of a weekend with 70 young people at the Sitio.

Young people from Brazil and overseas, a general and a former port worker made up the delegation of nine who set off by minibus to cover the 1,000 miles to Brasilia. Before leaving, £150 was raised in one day — half of the expected cost of the venture. But in Brasilia the men were given free hospitality by the Dragoons of Independence Regiment, which guards the President — and the girls were invited by the Commandant of the Regiment to stay in his home.

The group spent three days in Brasilia meeting senators, deputies and military authorities. At the end of the trip ten pence was left over from what had been raised and every need had been met.