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The project team selected 60 from over 400 known chapel sites in South Gloucestershire. Once you have tried our trail maybe you could make your own one. A clue is that the windows are the first hint of a chapel.

Most of the places on the route can be reached by public transport. For information, telephone 0870 608 2 608 (daily, 7am to 10pm) or visit www.traveline.org.uk.

Information to assist disabled passengers is available on 08457 58564 or visit www.pti.org.uk.

For information about public footpaths and bridleways, telephone 01454 863646.

For information about cycle routes, telephone 01454 863794 or visit www.sustrans.org.uk.

Several towns and villages have their own heritage trails. For further information about these, and all the places on the route, visit or telephone the Tourist Information Centres in Thornbury (01454 281638) or Chipping Sodbury (01454 888686). Books on nonconformist heritage and other sources of information can be obtained through public libraries, museums and local bookshops. You can visit the council's website at www.southglos.gov.uk.

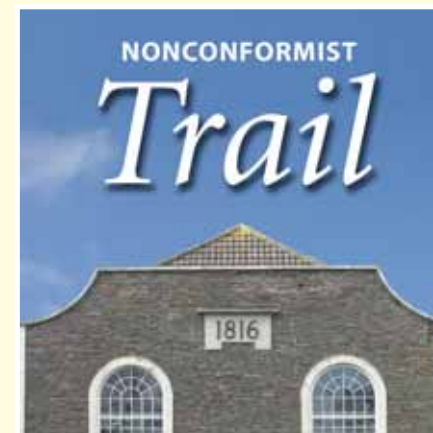
Every effort has been made to ensure that the information given in this booklet is correct at time of going to press, but you are advised to check details such as opening hours, bus services and so on before setting out.



Hanham United Reformed Church (Hanham Tabernacle)

Inside front cover: Staple Hill Methodist Church, formerly Hebron United Methodist Free Church, 1874

Cover: Whiteshill Evangelical Church, formerly Whites Hill Congregational Church, 1816



South Gloucestershire Heritage Trails are published jointly by the Museum & Heritage Section of South Gloucestershire Council and South Gloucestershire Heritage Forum. For further trails in this series and information, please telephone 01454 865783.

South Gloucestershire Council warmly acknowledges the considerable contribution to the content of this booklet which has been given by members of local churches and societies and many other individual people. It would also like to acknowledge the work of the Kingswood Chapels Survey in improving our understanding of our nonconformist heritage and to thank those who have supplied photographs for use in this booklet.

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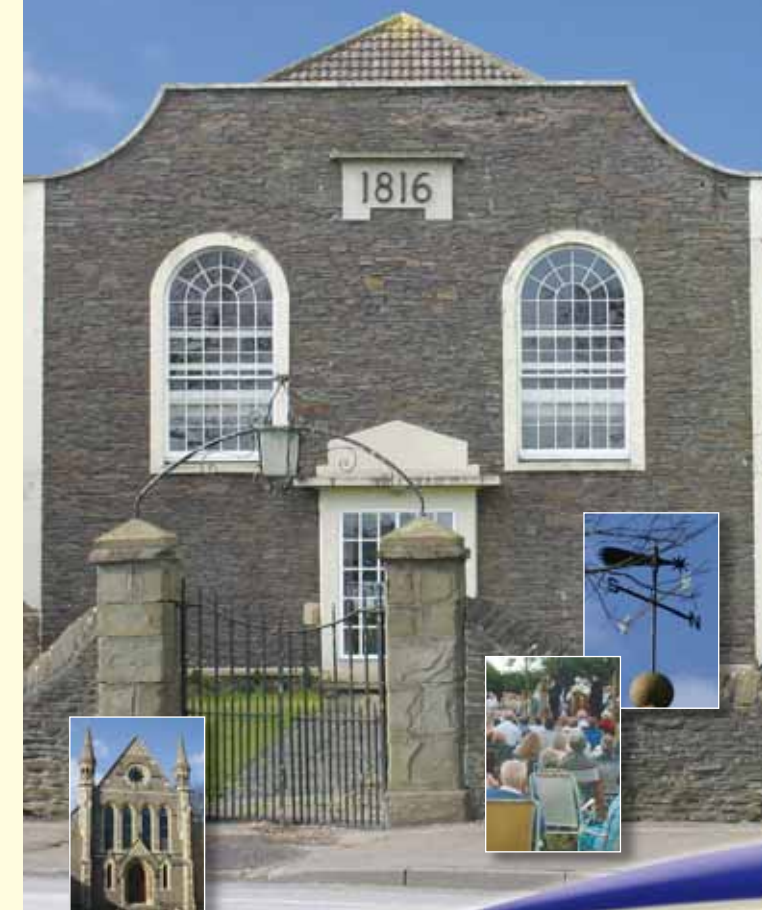
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NONCONFORMIST Trail

find out more about the
area's rich nonconformist heritage



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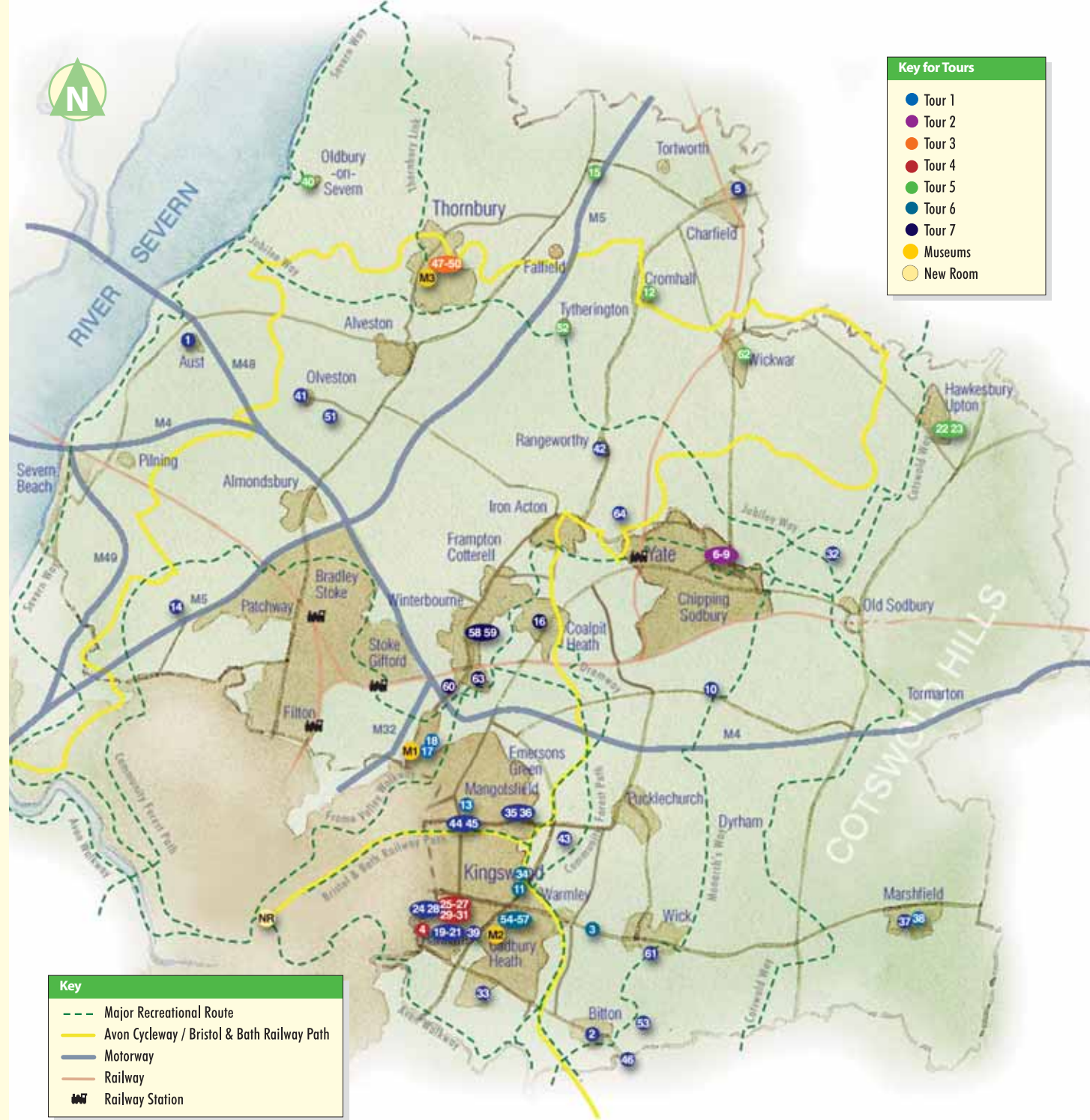
NONCONFORMITY Heritage Trail

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KEY TO SYMBOLS

-  Open for public worship and other activities as advertised
-  Open as advertised
-  Access at other times limited to view from road or footpath
-  Access at all times limited to view from road or footpath, no access to site
-  Bus service within walking distance
-  Public car park nearby
-  On regional cycle route 10
- ST NGR National Grid Reference number

GETTING THE BEST FROM THIS BOOKLET



Interior of the Friends Meeting House, Frenchay (see page 8)

Throughout South Gloucestershire are reminders of the people who over the course of the last four hundred years have upheld the principles of freedom of worship and freedom of conscience that have helped to shape our modern world.

Routes, themes and properties

Nonconformist churches and chapels have a substantial place in the built environment of our towns and our countryside, reflecting the contribution their churches made, and in many cases still make, to our social and economic life. This booklet is designed to give you a flavour of that rich heritage and explain why South Gloucestershire has such a special place in the history of the last four hundred years. Whether you live locally or have travelled many miles from home to explore the places you have heard of, this booklet is intended to help you find what is to be seen and experienced and encourage you to seek out more.

All the places mentioned are numbered, indexed and located on the fold-out map at the end of the booklet. Some find special mention in the text. Most places have been grouped so that you can pick and choose what you would like to see on a given occasion and save others for a future visit.

Most of the places are by the public roadside and are best seen on foot or by bicycle. Many are near public bus routes so there are plenty of ways in which you can combine themes. If you do use your car, parking may be difficult or impossible outside many of the places mentioned so please be prepared to park nearby and make the final approach on foot.

Some of the sites are privately owned. Please respect the privacy of people living and working in these places and view them from a discreet distance, remaining on the public highway or footpath. Where there is access for worship or public viewing, check times of opening before you visit.

South Gloucestershire Council can take no responsibility for injury or damage during such visits.

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Tynedale Baptist Chapel Little Sodbury

What is Nonconformity?

Nonconformity embraces all people who in conscience cannot conform to the Church of England. This is either a matter of choice or because people of their persuasion were rejected by the Church of England after attempting to reform it from within. By the mid 17th century there were already many groups like Baptists and Independents worshipping outside the Church of England although a wide spectrum of belief and practice was to be found within it. A radical process of reform had even begun to institute a Presbyterian form of governance and abolish the hierarchy of bishops.

In 1660 after the collapse of the Commonwealth and restoration of the monarchy, Charles II sought to end this state of dissension by compelling people to adhere to the beliefs and practices of the restored Church of England by a series of draconian new laws, together called the Clarendon Code. The hierarchy of bishops was restored and clergy of the Church of England were required by the Act of Uniformity of 1662 to conform. Over a fifth did not and, as a result, were ejected. Many took part or the whole of their congregations with them. All who persisted in worship that did not conform to the new Book of Common Prayer were 'nonconformist', were barred from holding any meeting of more than five unrelated persons, from holding public office and were liable to persecution including imprisonment, the confiscation of their property and the destruction of their meeting houses. They were also compelled to pay tithes to support the clergy of the Church of England.

The Act of Toleration of 1689 ended the worst of the persecution and permitted the licensing of places of worship for many, but not all, nonconformists – but an honourable name had been acquired and was to survive. The battle for freedom of conscience was not finally won until the 1850s.

Why the chapels of South Gloucestershire are so important

By the eighteenth century Baptists, Independents, Presbyterians and Quakers (the Religious Society of Friends) were building meeting houses and chapels with increasing confidence and some individual people had acquired wealth and substance through their industry. The area of South Gloucestershire was rich in resources, particularly minerals like coal and metal ores, and was just outside the jurisdiction of the City and County of Bristol, then the second city and port in England. Over the next two hundred years, nonconformists took full advantage of these circumstances to invest in industrial and commercial expansion and recycled much of the wealth created back into the community, particularly into education and chapel building. William Champion with his pioneer brassworks and Handel Cosham and the exploitation of the deep coalfield are but two of many examples.

Not surprisingly, nonconformists were passionate leaders in the fight for political and social reform. You will find many people mentioned in this booklet, like Elizabeth Fry and John Frederick Denison Maurice. Their energy and influence had a national and international impact and have earned them an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

It was with the Awakening, the remarkable collaboration and subsequent quarrels between George Whitefield, John Wesley and John Cennick played out in their mission to the colliers, that South Gloucestershire took centre stage. It was around the events here that the shape of Methodism as a worldwide movement was formed.

George Whitefield depicted in the Whitfield Tabernacle Sunday School banner (now destroyed).





Name stone of Upton Cheney United Reformed Church

A choice of 7 themed tours is offered covering some 37 locations. They are designed to be enjoyed either in sequence or to stand alone. There are frequent bus services to places from which you can comfortably walk six of the tours. One tour is more extended and demands the use of bicycle or car. In addition there are a further 9 sites key to the themes of the trail.

For the real enthusiast, at the end of this booklet is an index of over 60 sites, selected from four hundred or more to be found in the area. From this you can pick places to extend one of the tours in the booklet or create new tours of your own. The sites are listed in alphabetical order and each numbered entry cross-refers to the map and to those pages where a site is referred to in the text. Unfortunately, there is not space to give a description of each entry but you will be able to find out further information from the local museum or library.

Frenchay Village Museum



Entrance B, Frenchay Hospital – can be viewed in conjunction with the trail on page 9

Kingswood Heritage Museum



Tower Lane, Warmley – can be viewed in conjunction with the trail on page 22

Thornbury & District Museum



Chapel Street – can be viewed in conjunction with the trails on pages 15 and 21

See <http://www.southglos.gov.uk/Museums/museums.htm> for current opening times.

Wesley's New Room



Broadmead, Bristol – has a growing library of Methodist chapel histories.

Some of the chapels mentioned open for public view on special occasions such as Heritage Open Days and local festivities. Details of these, times of worship and other activities can be found either on the websites of individual churches, where they exist, or the appropriate local community website or advertised in the local press.



Name stone of the former Ebenezer Chapel, Rangeworthy. The text is 1 Samuel 7.12

Check times and stopping places of buses when planning your route – contact telephone numbers and web addresses are given on the back fold-out.

You will find Ordnance Survey maps essential for finding the more obscure locations and an invaluable aid in planning the detail of your tour. Landranger map 172, Bristol and Bath, covers the whole area, or, if you prefer a larger scale, you will need Explorer maps 155 and 167. All three provide instructions on how to use the National Grid Reference to find our sites. The National Grid Reference for each site listed in this booklet is given in six-figure form, for example Mount Pleasant at Falfield is to be found at ST682926.

It is possible to visit all the places mentioned by car but, because local roads are so very busy, it is advisable to have a companion to do the navigating for you. All parts of the urban tours are within easy walking distance of a public car park. If you are able to do so, the easiest way to get around is by bicycle.

If you wish to walk, all the places are accessible by public footpath and highway. Tourist information centres have details of the extensive network of public rights of way.





The former Unitarian Chapel, Marshfield (The Old Meeting)

It is appropriate to start our trail in **Frenchay** – by the bus stop in Beckspool Road. Walk eastward up to the junction with Riverwood Road and you pass substantial houses either originally built for or owned by wealthy dissenters: on the right, Fromeshawe House, home of the prominent Unitarian, Onesiphorus Tyndall, and Riverwood, home of the Quaker, J.S.Fry, cousin of the prison reformer, Elizabeth Fry, and principal of the chocolate and cocoa manufacturers, J.S.Fry & Sons. Returning along the opposite side of the road is the Manor House, built c.1736 for the wealthy Quaker merchant, Joseph Beck, and bought in 1800 by another prominent Quaker and zealous supporter of the anti-slavery movement, Philip Debell Tuckett. Malmain, demolished in the 1930s, was the home of the Harford family, Quaker bankers who entertained William Wilberforce and Hannah More here. Frenchay Lodge was owned by the Callowhills to whom the infant state of Pennsylvania was once mortgaged. The tulip trees, native to that part of the USA, are said to be reminders of this connection.

Opposite the bus stop is the **Friends Meeting House [17]**. The main part of the present building was completed in 1809 but was extended in 1814 by the addition of a new room for the Women's Meeting over the entry into the burial ground. The interior reflects the simplicity of the Friends' approach to worship – plain lime-washed walls, benches round three sides of the elders' stand and a gallery fitted with sliding shutters to create a larger meeting room when required. The Friends had started meeting locally in 1654 and opened their first meeting house nearby in 1673. They endured violent persecution but during the eighteenth century became increasingly respected for their reformist views.

Turn right up toward the Common and on the right is **Frenchay Unitarian Chapel [18]** standing back in its own burial ground. The congregation, then Presbyterian by persuasion, dates from the 1620s. The chapel seems to have been built around 1690 and the bell-tower added later. The bell (sadly, stolen) was recast in 1752 with the inscription 'When you hear me ringing come and praise the Lord.'

On top is the weather-vane presumed to commemorate the spectacular visit of Halley's comet in 1759. The interior was modernised in the 1980s but retains the pulpit, clock and some of the box-pew panelling from the reordering of the 1800s. It is dominated by the two Tuscan pillars supporting the roof – a common feature of nonconformist meeting houses of this date symbolising stability and strength, Jachin and Boaz, the two pillars before the Temple of Jerusalem.

Nearby Clarendon House was the home of Michael Maurice, minister here and father of John Frederick Denison Maurice, a leading theologian of his time and well-known as a founder of the Christian Socialist movement.

It is a walk or cycle ride of about a mile to **Downend Baptist Church [13]**. Go down Frenchay Hill, turning left at the bottom over the Frome onto Frenchay Road. Follow its continuation, Croomes Hill, left into Downend Road, right into Carpenters Shop Lane (cyclists dismount) and across into Salisbury Road. The gabled building at the heart of the present complex was erected in 1786 for a congregation that had been worshipping in the area since 1725. The enterprise was led by Dr. Caleb Evans from the much older Baptist church at Broadmead in Bristol whose turbulent early history from its founding in 1640 was so well recorded by Edward Terrill from Almondsbury. The essayist, John Foster, was one of the early pastors of Downend. The Sunday School building was added in 1862. The church fell on hard times in the late 19th century but was reformed and refitted. It has been refurbished and developed again to fit it for the needs of a flourishing church of the 21st century.

The last example of a chapel of this date is a bus ride way – **The Old Meeting, Marshfield**. It is tucked away behind the main frontage of the south side of the High Street. It was completed in 1752 for a congregation of Presbyterian persuasion which had been meeting nearby since 1680 but who later inclined to Unitarianism. The dedication inscription is lengthy, proclaiming that the chapel was built 'for promoting pure religion, the Glory of God, and the happiness of mankind, and also as a worthy effect of that glorious national constitution by which we enjoy our Christian freedom and liberty of conscience.' The chapel closed in 1886 but has been preserved for community use including serving as the British Legion Hall. A small burial ground lies behind.

Friends Meeting House
ST641779



Frenchay Chapel
ST640776



Downend Baptist Church
ST651765



Marshfield former
Unitarian Chapel ST777737





Gathering at Hanham Mount on 23rd June 2003 to mark the tercentenary of John Wesley's birth.

The wild remote wastes of Kingswood Forest had attracted open air meetings of persecuted nonconformists from early days. Scattered squatter settlements had grown up over much of the area between Cromhall, Bitton and Bristol, particularly as the demand for coal grew from the 16th century, and with them a thin scatter of meeting houses of the Old Dissent. By the 1730s the Church of England was organisationally unable to do anything to serve the growing population (it was not until 1756 that the new parish of St. George was established and 1820-50 before resources were created for churches at Kingswood, Fishponds, Frenchay, Hanham and Two Mile Hill).

Using Bristol as his base, it was the charismatic evangelist, George Whitefield, who held his first of what became frequent open air meetings throughout the area at Rose Green on 17th February 1739. Anxious that the impetus should not be lost and determined to continue with his planned mission to Georgia, Whitefield invited a reluctant John Wesley from London to Bristol to continue the ministry. Wesley, arriving on 31st March, 'could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields' but on 2nd April took up the task upon Whitefield's departure for America.

Hanham Mount [20] was a particularly favoured site for these open air gatherings. Although now swallowed in suburban housing, the site is preserved to commemorate the work of Whitefield and Wesley and still used for open air services. A pulpit, a replica of that from the Colliers' School, now graces the spot which commands the hillside and views right across the Avon valley.

A visit to Wesley's New Room in Bristol is highly recommended. It was founded by Wesley in 1739 for followers of Whitefield and survives largely as rebuilt in 1748.

Hanham Mount
Public open space ST647728



Wesley's New Room
Broadmead, Bristol



The Colliers' School and Chapel before remodelling in 1895

Whitefield's last task before his departure for America was to lay the foundation stone of a free school for colliers' children. Wesley was not satisfied with the colliers' choice of site and on 14th May 1739 'at last pitched upon one between the London and Bath Roads, not far from that called Two Mile Hill.' Here he purchased the land and built the **Colliers' School [24]** consisting of a large schoolroom with four smaller rooms at either end partly to serve as lodgings and partly set aside for an adult school. John Cennick was recommended as its first headmaster by Whitefield. It is possible that Wesley had fitted the main schoolroom with galleries and a pulpit because when Whitefield returned in March 1741, he accused Wesley of 'perverting his design' for the school. He also arrived in the midst of a fundamental disagreement between Cennick and Wesley on the doctrine of predestination. Whitefield conceded the school to Wesley. Cennick with his followers were ejected from the Kingswood Society, splitting Methodism into the Calvinists and the Wesleyans at about the same time that Methodists were firmly refused communion by the Church of England.

No trace survives on site of the school/chapel. It continued in use as a free school until either 1793 or 1803. It was demolished in 1919. Wesley proceeded with his plans to establish a fee-paying school – **Kingswood School [28]** – on adjacent land. This four-storey building opened in 1748 but was sold in 1851 when the school moved to its present location in Lansdown near Bath. The purchaser, Russell Scott invited Mary Carpenter, the Unitarian philanthropist, to join him in setting up a reformatory school on lines pioneered in Germany. This served young offenders until 1984 by which time none of Wesley's buildings were left. The school now houses the Kingswood Foundation.

Colliers' School site only ST643734

Kingswood School site only ST642733

Kingswood Reformatory
Britannia Road



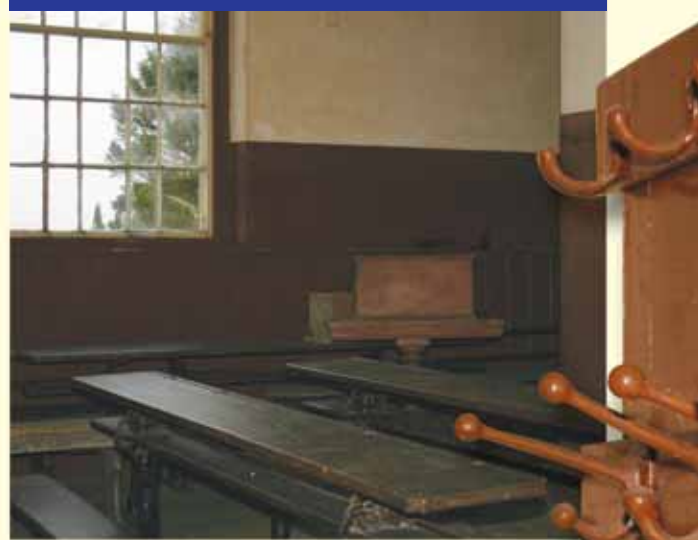


Upton Cheney United Reformed Church

Upton Cheney United Reformed Church [53] was built in 1834 for an Independent congregation that had been meeting locally for some years, originally inspired by the preaching of John Cennick. Its exterior is designed in a restrained Classical style in dressed Bath stone with an ogival roofed porch and offset door, so necessary on this exposed hillside. An extra leaf has been added to the door to allow room to swing the coffins into the church.

Inside it is a typical 19th century chapel of this size: two blocks of pitch-pine pews, grained and varnished, on either side of the single aisle, a raised area or rostrum across most of the end facing the entrance door with its white painted turned balustrade and in the centre, the pulpit for preaching the Word. Behind is an arched panel bearing the painted text, 'O Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness.' There is also a harmonium, a piano and a hymn board. The only modern comforts are the electric lights and portable gas heaters.

It was common for larger chapels to have galleries on three sides and a rostrum large enough to take a choir. Baptist churches were also equipped with a large tank for adult baptism by total immersion. This was normally kept boarded over and provided a space for the communion table.



The interior of the schoolroom

The roof line of the chapel extends back to include a school room on the ground floor and a lodging room above. Although this lower room later served as a Sunday School, when it was first built it was used as a Day School for local children who otherwise would have had no access to any education.

The School Room still has its teacher's lectern, its desks, each fitted with a bench and holes to take the ceramic inkwells, its easel and its clock, all dating from the late 19th century. This room also served for other social functions and meetings.



Behind the chapel, is the burial ground where can be found the grave of William Clark who was instrumental in building the chapel in this place. The collieries in the Golden Valley have long gone but this now peaceful pastoral spot is still used for burials.

TOUR 2



Chipping Sodbury, Friends Meeting House

Start on the north side of High Street, walk west and turn right into Brook Street. Tucked away on the brow of the hill is the former **Friends Meeting House [9]**, now converted into a private dwelling. The shell hood over the door bears the date 1692 and is likely to be the date of this charming building. Is this the earliest surviving nonconformist meeting house in South Gloucestershire?

The Baptists have been established in the town since 1656, almost as long as the Friends. On the south side of High Street is their church hall which served as the main church between 1965 and 1991 when the **new church [7]** was opened on the site behind. Just round the corner in Hounds Lane is the former **Baptist Church [6]**, a rather grand building of 1819 set in its own burial ground.

Down an alley on the north side of Broad Street is **St Lawrence Roman Catholic Church [8]**. It should be no surprise that Roman Catholics were caught in the same legislation that defined nonconformists. Although founded here in 1838, this church is in just the situation that many early urban nonconformist churches occupied – accessed through an entry on the main street frontage and located in a converted outbuilding running back from the main block.

Former Friends Meeting House
ST726824



Chipping Sodbury Baptist Church
ST727821



Former Baptist Church
ST727821



St. Lawrence Roman Catholic Church ST728822



TOUR 3



Thornbury Methodist Church

Start in the High Street at the **Methodist Church [49]**. This is a good example of the use of the spikey Gothic revival style of architecture for a late 19th century church. The present building replaced **Wesley Chapel [48]** (turn south down High Street and left into Chapel Street to what is now Cossham Hall). This was built in 1789. John Wesley himself preached here in 1789 and 1790. The chapel

was extended in 1835 but eventually still proved too small. In 1888 Handel Cossham purchased the building and presented it to the town for community use.

Handel Cossham was born in Thornbury in 1830 and became a member of the Congregational, now **United Reformed Church [50]**, which stands further down Chapel Street. Cossham made his fortune by predicting and exploiting the deep coal seams in the Kingswood coalfield and used his wealth liberally to endow chapels and other works of community benefit in the area of South Gloucestershire. eg. Cossham Hospital. The present United Reformed Church is a fine building opened in 1826 for a congregation that had been worshipping in the area since 1662.

In Gillingstool, across Rock Street and the Bath Road car park, is the **Baptist Church [47]**. The chapel building of 1828 stands in its burial ground with a suite of new buildings attached to the rear to provide modern facilities for the church.

Thornbury Methodist Church
ST6635902



Cossham Hall
ST636897



Thornbury United Reformed Church
ST637899



Thornbury Baptist Church
ST640900





Whitfield Tabernacle in the 1980's

A relatively short walk along Regent Street and Two Mile Hill encompasses the history of the Awakening after the breach between Whitefield and Wesley. Start in Park Road.

On 9th June 1741, George Whitefield wrote to John Cennick instructing him to build a room for their followers 'not too large or too handsome.' The result was the **Whitfield Tabernacle [30]**. The original building still stands, though terribly vandalised in the recent past. It was altered and extended in 1802 and 1830. The north front of this, the last surviving chapel of the Awakening in this area, gives a good idea of the appearance of these buildings. Although long stripped of its furnishings, it ranks with Wesley's New Room in Bristol in its significance. After Whitefield's death in 1770, the society moved from Calvinism to Congregationalism and, as it grew, it found the premises too small and so built a new church. The Tabernacle remained in use as both a Sunday School and, until 1905, a day school of the British School movement.

The New Tabernacle, Whitfield Congregational, later **United Reformed Church [31]** was commissioned in Early English style from Henry Masters of Bristol. It opened in 1852 on land adjoining the burial ground and at the end of a driveway from Regent Street. This church was closed in 1983 and stands bricked up and derelict. For a short while there were plans to refurbish the old Tabernacle as the church but after a period of temporary use of the Moravian Church, in 1992 the two congregations decided to amalgamate. The Whitfield Building Preservation Trust was formed in 1995 with the aim of repairing and preserving the Tabernacle for further community use.



United Church, formerly the Moravian Church, Kingswood

With the creation of the **United Church, Kingswood (Moravian/Whitfield United Reformed Church) [26]** at the Moravian Church further west off Regent Street, the wheel had turned full circle. In December 1745, John Cennick resigned from the Calvinist Methodists to join the Church of the United Brethren, better known as the Moravians. For a while Cennick's followers contended ownership of the Tabernacle but quickly moved to establish their own chapel and burial ground on the present site. This was consecrated in 1758. The present church was designed and built in 1856-1857 by Foster & Wood of Bristol, just north of the original chapel which was then demolished.

The Moravians, following the practice of their mother church at Herrnhut in Saxony, tended to found settlements with their chapel as the focal point. Cennick's settlement at East Tytherton in Wiltshire is a good example. It is doubtful whether such a settlement was ever planned or built at Kingswood beyond the 'single sisters house' for their education and industry. It opened in 1792 and the infant school in 1838. Note that the graveyard also contains markers brought here when the Bristol Moravian Church and burial ground were cleared in the 1970s.

Whitfield Tabernacle
ST649739



Former Whitfield Congregational
Church ST648739



United Church, Kingswood
ST649738





Kingswood Methodist Church

Walk west along Regent Street and turn left into Blackhorse Road.

Here stands the burnt-out shell of **Wesley Chapel [29]**, the magnificent mother church of the Wesleyan Methodist Kingswood Circuit and successor to the Colliers' School and Chapel. It rises in the greenery of its own extensive burial ground. The main school building of the 1850s remains boarded up but reasonably intact. It was with

great reluctance but under irresistible pressure that the Kingswood Society agreed to build and open this grand new church in 1844. The church closed in 1978 when the Methodists decided to combine at Zion.

Further west at the beginning of Two Mile Hill is **Kingswood Methodist Church [25]**, formerly Zion United Methodist Free Church, built in 1854 as mother church of its own circuit to outshine the magnificence of Wesley Chapel. It and similar rival 'twin' chapels were built between 1850 and 1870 as a result of a disastrous quarrel at the Methodist Conference of 1849. The two branches were not reunited until 1932 and the two Kingswood Congregations not until 1978. Such lavish building by the United Methodist Free church was due to the patronage of local industrialists like the bootmakers, the Flocks, and the colliery-owners, the Brains.

Further west again is the third huge chapel, now **Bristol Community Church [4]**. It was built in 1873 as Bourne Chapel named after Hugh Bourne, one of the founders of the Primitive Methodist movement. Their first chapel of 1841 still stands further west down the hill, now used as the **Salvation Army Corps Hall [27]**.

Wesley Chapel
ST644738



Kingswood Methodist Church
ST644739



Bristol Community Church
ST642739



Salvation Army Corps Hall
ST641738



Whit walk in Kingswood

From the very beginning chapels and meeting houses were the focal point of the social lives of their communities, not solely meeting places for worship. Any chapel has numerous regular meetings. Education was a particular concern. It was not until the Education Act of 1870 that a nation-wide network of School Boards was created to levy rates, to provide schools and compel children under the age of 13

years to attend.

Nonconformists understood that the ability to read, write and interpret the Bible was the core to providing a basic education. From the 17th century, free day classes for adult study and for children's education were an essential part of chapel life. Some of these day schools for children, such as that at



Banner of the Hanham Free Methodist Adult Temperance Society

Whitfield Tabernacle [30], became affiliated to the non-sectarian British and Foreign Schools Society which had been founded in 1814. These are different from Sunday Schools – a concept credited to Robert Raikes of Gloucester in 1750 – which blossomed in the late 18th century.

By the late 19th century, the Temperance movement, which by the 1840s had come to mean total abstinence from alcohol, was strong in most nonconformist churches. Most chapels had their Temperance Society for adults and after 1847 their Band of Hope for children.

Most chapel organisations had their banners. Some are still occasionally paraded. The annual Whit Walk in Kingswood was, and hopefully will continue to be, a cheerful colourful event.



Bethesda, Hawkesbury Upton

This trail follows parts of regional cycle route 10 and national cycle route 41. It crosses South Gloucestershire from east to west and is, mostly, downhill. Both routes are clearly way-marked. The trail takes you to a series of chapels which are typical in their scale and style of this area.

Start at Hawkesbury Upton. The village still has two chapels but the parish church is 1km. away at the bottom of the hill.

Bethesda Chapel [22] was founded to serve an Independent congregation in 1844. It stands in its own burial ground entered through a pretty wrought iron lantern arch. The **Methodist Church [23]** was originally built by the Primitive Methodists in 1860. These two persuasions together with the Baptists had great success in founding churches among the rural communities in South Gloucestershire.

Take the Wickwar road which shortly joins cycle route 10. Follow the route down the steep escarpment of the Cotswolds and across the broken country to Wickwar. In the centre, leave the cycle route by following the B4060 (to Chipping Sodbury) up into the High Street. On the left is **Wickwar Congregational Church [62]**, built, according to the stone set in the gable, in 1817 and restored in 1919.



Oldbury-on-Severn Methodist Church

Rejoin cycle route 10 to cross the northern tip of the South Gloucestershire and North Somerset Coalfield. Follow the route through Cromhall to Townwell and **Cromhall Chapel [12]**. This is another example of a simple early 19th century Independent chapel with chapel and minister's house under one roof line and set in its own burial ground.

Follow cycle route 10 to Tytherington. Just under the railway bridge is **Tytherington Baptist Church [52]**, a modest building of 1884 in stone and brick.

From here it is quickest to take the direct road up over the ridge across the A38 and down to the centre of Thornbury. Here you can enjoy the trail round the town chapels (see page 15).

From the centre of Thornbury, take national cycle route 41 across the flatlands to **Oldbury-on-Severn Methodist Church [40]**. The present building declares itself to date from 1835.

- Hawkesbury Upton Bethesda ST781869    
- Hawkesbury Upton Methodist Church ST780870    
- Wickwar Congregational Church ST725885     
- Cromhall Chapel ST698908    
- Tytherington Baptist Church ST668880    
- Thornbury  
- Oldbury-on-Severn Methodist Church ST610925    



Ebenezer, former Bridgegate Methodist Church

Two relatively short walks are suggested to give a flavour of the area and its chapels – one around Warmley and the second around Winterbourne. Start at Bridgegate Common with **Ebenezer** [3], originally built for the Wesleyan Methodists in 1810 and purchased by the United Free Methodists in 1855. A walk down Bath Road, bearing right into Poplar Road and right again into Mill Lane brings you to **Mill Lane Independent Methodist Church** [55] established here in 1899 by a breakaway temperance group. At the top of the rise is the former **Wesleyan Chapel** [57] of 1833, now converted into housing. A little further north in Tower Road is another **Ebenezer** [56], until recently Warmley Tower United Church, a grand Italianate church built for the Free Methodists in 1868. Along past the brassworks of William Champion, a Quaker, and to the end of Tower Road and bearing right across into Chapel Lane brings you to **Warmley Congregational Church** [54] built in 1846. The London Road takes you over the railway and past the site of the Crown Colliery back to the start.

A diversion to two other chapels can be made. **Cock Road Methodist Church** [11] occupies its former school building of 1859 and is just up the road from one of the last remaining colliery Cornish engine houses. **Made-for-Ever Methodist Church** [34] built in 1896 takes its name from an unsuccessful attempt to work coal nearby.

Former Bridgegate (Ebenezer)
Methodist Church ST682732



Mill Lane Independent Methodist
Church ST670724



Former Wesley Chapel
ST668724



Former Warmley Tower United
Church ST699727



Warmley Congregational Church
ST669737



Cock Road Methodist Church
ST655727



Made-for-Ever Methodist Church
ST662744



Ebenezer Methodist Church, Watley's End Road

Coalpit Heath was one of the early areas of primitive coal mining and further down the valley is the site of the complex of Frog Lane Colliery, the last traditional deep pit to work the coalfield. Our trail takes the higher ground to the west starting just opposite the windmill in Frampton Cotterell at **Zion United Church** [16], a Gothic structure in the Decorated style built for the Congregationalists in 1873. From here follow Woodend Road down to its junction with Park Lane and bear left across to Harris Barton and follow the footpath across Nightingale's Bridge up to and turn left into Watley's End Road. Here is **Ebenezer** [58], a former United Methodist Church of 1868 built to rival Salem nearby at the other end of Factory Road (named after a hat factory that once worked here). The foundation stone of **Salem Methodist Church** [59] was laid by John Wesley himself in 1787.

It is a walk of about a mile from Watley's End to Winterbourne Down and our next chapel, **Winterbourne Down Methodist Church** [63], another chapel in the Decorated Gothic style, built in 1878. Follow the road down to the Frome and up Worrell's Lane to Whiteshill Common and **Whiteshill Evangelical Church** [60]. It proudly proclaims it was built in 1816.

Zion United Church,
Frampton Cotterell ST967813



Former Ebenezer Methodist Church,
Watley's End ST659814



Salem Methodist Church,
Watley's End ST658811



Winterbourne Down Methodist
Church ST651797



Whiteshill Evangelical Church
ST645793






Swineford Congregational Church

The idea of the Tabernacle, in Biblical terms a moveable structure, an 'itinerant temple' in which to keep the tablets of the Law, was a powerful one. Whitefield was concerned that the Kingswood Tabernacle be 'not too large or not too handsome lest we need move our tents.' Some churches deliberately built their chapels of temporary materials, particularly either of timber, or later of timber and corrugated iron. Should a more permanent structure be required, then the tabernacle could be moved to an entirely new site to further a new mission.

George Pocock of Bristol was instrumental in founding the Tent Methodist movement which flourished between 1814 and 1832. Tent preaching visited places such as Almondsbury, Iron Acton, Milbury Heath, Rangeworthy, Frampton Cotterell, Wickwar and Dursley. The present **Hanham United Reformed Church [21]**, the Hanham Tabernacle, was originally built for the Tent Methodists in 1829 and purchased by an Independent congregation 10 years later.

The invention of corrugated iron coincided with the evangelical revival of the late 19th century. Few of these tin tabernacles have survived. **Swineford Congregational Church [46]** of the late 1880s has closed but it is the most substantial example to have survived in the area. **Mount's Hill Peoples Mission [39]** of 1899 has received a new frontage but its side walls remain in corrugated iron.

A number of examples of more substantial missions of this period can also still be found, such as the **Longwell Green Mission [33]** built in 1904 for the Christian Brethren.

Hanham United Reformed Church ST640725 

Longwell Green Mission ST658712 

Mount's Hill Peoples Mission ST650726 

Former Swineford Congregational Church ST692689 



Hanham Baptist Church (1907, rebuilt in 1959, next to the site of the 1714 meeting house)

We hope that you have enjoyed the trail and have found something of the spirit of the early nonconformists in the buildings they commissioned.

New churches are still being built and old ones close. Sometimes the old ones will find new uses, perhaps providing a home to a church of another persuasion, particularly some of the newer nonconformist movements and some of the older world religions. **Bourne Chapel [4]**, once the pride of the Primitive Methodists, saw life as the home of Fantasia Foundations, a manufactory of ladies' corsetry, before its present lease of life as the Bristol Community Church.

It is not often realised that many individual chapels are in the hands of trustees and for many nonconformists the autonomy and decisions of an independent church community are paramount.

However decisions have ultimately to be made by the community at large whether buildings important to our common heritage are to be cared for and particular effort made to find new uses for them. The survival of **Whitfield Tabernacle [30]**, for example, is not just a decision for vandals (including adults who saw fit to 'borrow' tiles from the roof) but for us all.