

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

The legislation controlling Conservation Areas is found in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

The important points to remember are:

- New development must accord with the area's special identity and visual qualities.
- A high standard of design for new development or extensions to existing buildings is expected, in regard to matters such as scale, proportion, materials and colour.
- The demolition, in whole or part, of unlisted buildings in Conservation Areas, requires special consent.
- Special care should be taken to ensure that views into and out of the Conservation Area remain unspoilt.
- Advertisement displays are subject to strict control.
- Anyone wishing to fell top, lop, etc. a tree within a Conservation Area must give the Local Planning Authority six weeks advance notice in writing.

GRANTS

In certain approved cases, grants for enhancement or repairs in the Conservation Area may be available through the District Council or other sources.



For further information please contact:

Senior Conservation Officer
South Gloucestershire Council
Planning, Transportation & Environmental Services,
Civic Centre, High Street, Kingswood,
South Gloucestershire BD15 2TR
Tel: 01454 868686

RESTORATION - WHITFIELD TABERNACLE



SETTING

Whitfield Tabernacle, at Kingswood near Bristol, was commissioned by George Whitfield in 1741. Its history mirrors the development of the Evangelical revival of the mid 18th Century. The building is now empty and verging on dereliction.

This prospectus describes:-

the evangelical revival in Kingswood, the development of the Tabernacle, proposals for its refurbishment, and information on how you can help to give the building new life.



The Evangelical revival - Field Preaching

Local people were renowned:-

"for neither fearing God nor regarding man, so ignorant of the things of God that they seemed but one removed from the beasts that perish, and therefore utterly without desire of instruction as well as means of it"

John Wesley

In the mid 18th Century Kingswood was a coal mining and industrial area. Local people had a reputation for lawlessness.

During the 1730s George Whitfield, John and Charles Wesley were together at Oxford University training to be Anglican Priests. They became increasingly influenced by new non-conformist ideas spreading from various parts of main land Europe.

In 1739 George Whitfield came to Bristol but was banned from preaching in Anglican churches because of his ideas. On the 17th February 1739 he preached for the first time in the open fields at Rose Green near Kingswood. Over the next few weeks he preached at various sites in and around Kingswood and the response from the previously ungodly people was immediate and dramatic.

Whitfield was due to visit America, so invited John Wesley to take over his work in the Bristol Area. Wesley arrived on 31st March and the next day saw Whitfield preach in the open. He wrote in his journal "I could scarce reconcile myself to this strange way of preaching in the fields". But Wesley himself preached in the open air for the first time on 8th April 1739 at Hanham Mount, Kingswood.



Open air preaching brought the non conformist message of Whitfield and Wesley to huge numbers of people with crowds of between 200 and 10,000 recorded.

The Meeting Rooms

"not to build too large or too handsome as we may be required to move our tents".

George Whitfield

Before leaving for America, Whitfield handed to John Wesley a sum of £20 collected from the local miners to build a schoolroom. The Wesleys built the Collier's Schoolroom for the purpose of educating the children of the labouring poor, in an area known as Two Mile Hill, and engaged John Cennick, a devotee of Whitfield, as a schoolmaster. The building was also soon to serve as the centre from which the Wesleys were to carry out their evangelical mission in the Kingswood area.

Whitfield, Cennick and the Wesleys were to come into conflict over differing theological views. The former favoured the continental influences of Calvinism, whilst the Wesleys Armenian stance was that of the Established Church. Cennick was later ejected by John Wesley from the emerging Methodist Society in Whitfield's absence, for preaching Calvinistic predestination.

On his return from America, Whitfield was to concede his claims to the Collier's Schoolroom, and instructed John Cennick to build a new meeting room for their Calvinistic followers. His instructions were "not to build too large or too handsome as we may be required to move our tents". This alludes to the moveable places of worship known as the Tabernacle used by the Israelites in the Wilderness which God had intended to build. Exodus chapter 25-27.

This act resulted in the first building phase of the Whitfield Tabernacle which opened early in 1742.

John Cennick was to become increasingly under



the influence of the United Brethren, and in 1745 resigned as a Calvinistic Minister to join the Moravian Church. He had attempted to bring the Tabernacle under the control of the Brethren, but Whitfield's followers resisted and maintained possession of the building.

Cennick was to spend the last few days of his short life in Ireland, but had sown the seeds of Moravianism, in Kingswood before his departure. They were to open a meeting house here two years after his death in 1757.

The original Collier's school room built and run by the Wesleys developed into Kingswood School, which after educating many young people in the Kingswood area moved to Lansdown in Bath. The original Schoolroom has been demolished.

Cennick's Moravian church building of 1757 has also been demolished. It is therefore particularly important that Whitfield's tabernacle be retained so that future generations will have a tangible reminder of the central role Kingswood played in the development of the non-conformist movement.

The Tabernacle Site

The original Tabernacle building of 1741 was extended in 1802 and 1830. However by the mid 19th Century the old meeting room was too small and outdated to accommodate the growing congregation and a new church was built nearby. This was designed to Henry Masters and was completed in 1851. This served until 16th October 1983 when the Church was finally closed due to falling attendances.

The Tabernacle, Masters Church, Chapel House and associated Graveyard remain unused and are falling into disrepair. They are currently owned by the United Reformed Church.

The Tabernacle is Listed as a Grade 1 building and the Chapel House Grade II. This means that it is very important that they be retained for their architectural interest and also for their part in the Religious Revolution that changed the world.

The Whitfield Building Preservation Trust

In 1995 a group of people supported by the local Council came together with a view to finding new uses for the buildings. This group has now become a preservation trust and is developing plans which will not only conserve the buildings and graveyard but which also help with the wider regeneration of Kingswood Town Centre. No firm use has been found for the buildings but it seems likely that the Tabernacle will be used as a meeting room for use by community groups and local residents.

The aim will also be to protect graves and tidy the graveyard.



You can help by:

Joining the Trust
Sending a Donation
Identifying a New Use for the Building
Contact Details

For the Trust:
Heather Goddard
Trustee and Chair of the Whitfield Building
Preservation Trust
39 Mount Hill Road
Hanham
South Gloucestershire BS15 8QT
Tel: 0117 967 2634

For the Council:
Ian Washbrook
Team Leader: Built Environment
South Gloucestershire Council
Kingswood Civic Centre
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South Gloucestershire BS15 9TR
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The Council has prepared a development brief which sets out aspirations of the site and is available from Ian Washbrook.

Further Reading:

Whitfield Tabernacle and the United Reformed Church, Kingswood: Ron Martindale (available from Heather Goddard - Price £2.50 p/p 50p).

The Whitfield Building Preservation Trust includes:

Heather Goddard (Trustee & Chairman):
Local resident and former Chairman of Kingswood Borough Council

John Lewis (Trustee & Treasurer):
Local principal in accountancy practice and former mayor of Kingswood

Alan Bryant (Trustee Project Manager):
Local Historian and Trustee of Kingswood

Heritage Museum Trust

Michael Harris (Trustee):
Whitfield Building Preservation Trust

Will Harris (Trustee):
Trustee of Avon Industrial Building Trust

Alan Britton:
Chairman of Kingswood Heritage Museum Trust

Ron Martindale:
Retired Quantity Surveyor

Barbara Tuttiett: