

Extracts from *The Journal of John Wesley*, describing his visits to Aberdeen

Sat. 2 (**May, 1761**). — We then rode on through Montrose to Stonehaven. Here Mr. Memis met us; and on Saturday morning brought us to his house at Aberdeen. In the afternoon I sent to the Principal and Regent, to desire leave to preach in the College-Close. This was readily granted; but as it began to rain, I was desired to go into the Hall. I suppose this is full an hundred feet long, and seated all around. The congregation was large, notwithstanding the rain, and full as large at five in the morning.

Sun. 3. — I heard two useful sermons at the kirk, one; preached by the Principal of the College, the other by the Divinity Professor. A huge multitude afterwards gathered together in the College-Close; and all that could hear seemed to receive the truth in love. I then added about twenty to the little society. Fair blossoms! But how many of these will bring forth fruit?

Mon. 4. — We had another large congregation at five. Before noon twenty more came to me, desiring to cast in their lot with us, and appearing to be cut to the heart. About noon I took a walk to the King's College, in Old Aberdeen. It has three sides of a square, handsomely built, not unlike Queen's College in Oxford. Going up to see the Hall, we found a large company of ladies, with several gentlemen. They looked, and spoke to one another, after which one of the gentlemen took courage and came to me. He said, "We came last night to the College-Close, but could not hear, and should be extremely obliged if you would give us a short discourse here." I knew not what God might have to do; and so began without delay, on, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." I believe the word was not lost: It fell as dew on the tender grass. In the afternoon I was walking in the library of the Marischal College, when the Principal and the Divinity Professor came to me and the latter invited me to his lodgings, where I spent an hour very agreeably. In the evening, the eagerness of the people made them ready to trample each other under foot. It was some time before they were still enough to hear; but then they devoured every word. After preaching, Sir Archibald Grant (whom business had called to town) sent and desired to speak to me. I could not then, but promised to wait upon him, with God's leave, in my return to Edinburgh.

Tues. 5. — I accepted the Principal's invitation, and spent an hour with him at his house. I observed no stiffness at all, but the easy good breeding of a man of sense and learning. I suppose both he and all the Professors, with some of the Magistrates, attended in the evening. I set all the windows open; but the Hall, notwithstanding, was as hot as a bagnio. But this did not hinder either the attention of the people, or the blessing of God.

Wed. 6. — We dined at Mr. Ogilvy's, one of the Ministers, between whom the city is divided. A more open-hearted, friendly man, I know not that I ever saw. And indeed I have scarce seen such a set of Ministers in any town of Great Britain or Ireland. At half-hour after six I stood in the College-Close, and proclaimed Christ crucified. My voice was so strengthened that all could hear; and all were earnestly attentive. I have now "cast" my "bread upon the waters:" May I "find it again after many days!"

Thurs. 7. — Leaving near ninety members in the Society, I rode over to Sir A. Grant's, near Monymusk, about twenty miles northwest from Aberdeen. It lies in a fruitful and pleasant valley, much of which is owing to Sir Archibald's improvements, who has ploughed up abundance of waste ground, and planted some millions of trees. His stately old house is surrounded by gardens, and rows of trees, with a clear river on one side. And about a mile from his house he has laid out a small valley into walks and gardens, on one side of which the river runs. On each side rises a steep mountain; one rocky and bare, the other covered with trees, row above row, to the very top. About six we went to the church. It was pretty well filled with such persons as we did not look for so near the Highlands. But if we were surprised at their appearance, we were much more so at their singing. Thirty or forty sung an anthem after sermon, with such voices as well as judgment, that I doubt whether they could have been excelled at any cathedral in England.

Mon. 23 (**May, 1763**). — I rode to Forfar; and on Tues. 24, rode on to Aberdeen.

Wed. 25. — I inquired into the state of things here. Surely never was there a more open door. The four Ministers of Aberdeen, the Minister of the adjoining town, and the three Ministers of Old-Aberdeen, hitherto seem to have no dislike, but rather to wish us "good luck in the name of the Lord." Most of the town's people as yet seem to wish us well; so that there is no open opposition of any kind. O what spirit ought a Preacher to be of, that he may be able to bear all this sunshine. About noon I went to Gordon's Hospital, built near the town for poor children. It is an exceeding handsome building, and (what is not common) kept exceeding clean. The gardens are pleasant, well laid out, and in extremely good order; but the old bachelor who founded it has expressly provided that no woman should ever be there. At seven, the evening being fair and mild, I preached to a multitude of people, in the College-Close, on, "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths." But the next evening, the weather being raw and cold, I preached in the College-Hall. What an amazing willingness to hear runs through this whole kingdom! There want only a few zealous, active laborers, who desire nothing but God; and they might soon carry the Gospel through all this country, even as high as the Orkneys.

Sat. 2 (**June, 1764**). — I rode to Aberdeen, and preached in the evening in the College-Hall, and at seven in the morning.

Sun. 3. — At four in the afternoon I preached to a crowded audience in the College kirk, at Old-Aberdeen. At seven I preached in the College close, at New-Aberdeen. But the congregation was so exceeding large, that many were not able to hear. However, many did hear, and I think feel, the application of, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." We want nothing here but a larger House. And the foundation of one is laid already. It is true, we have little money, and the society is poor; but we know in whom we have believed.

Thurs. 7. — I rode over to Sir Archibald Grant's, twelve computed miles from Aberdeen. It is surprising to see how the country between is improved even within these three years. On every side the wild dreary moors are ploughed up, and covered with rising corn. All the ground near Sir Archibald's, in particular, is as well cultivated as most in England. About seven I preached. The kirk was pretty well filled, though upon short notice. Certainly this is a nation "swift to hear and slow to speak," though not "slow to wrath."

Wed. 13. — We reached Aberdeen about one. Between six and seven, both this evening and the next, I preached in the shell of the new House, and found it a time of much consolation.

Fri. 6 (**June, 1766**). — We went on to Aberdeen, about seventy measured miles. The congregation in the evening was larger than the usual one at Edinburgh. And the number of those who attended in the morning showed they were not all curious hearers.

Sun. 8. — Knowing no reason why we should make God's day the shortest of the seven, I desired Joseph Thompson to preach at five. At eight I preached myself. In the afternoon I heard a strong, close sermon, at Old-Aberdeen; and afterward preached in the College kirk, to a very genteel, and yet serious congregation. I then opened and enforced the way of holiness, at New-Aberdeen, on a numerous congregation.

Mon. 9. — I kept a watch-night, and explained to abundance of genteel people, "One thing is needful;" a great number of whom would not go away, till after the noon of night.

Tues. 10. — I rode over to Sir Archibald Grant's. The church was pretty well filled, and I spoke exceeding plain; yet the hearers did not appear to be any more affected than the stone walls.

Wed. 11. — I returned to Aberdeen, where many of the people were much alive to God. With these our labor has not been in vain; and they are worth all the pains we have taken in Scotland.

Tues. 26 (**April, 1768**). — I came to Aberdeen. Here I found a society truly alive, knit together in peace and love. The congregations were large both morning and evening, and, as usual, deeply attentive. But a company of strolling players, who have at length found place here also, stole away the gay part of the hearers. Poor Scotland! Poor Aberdeen! This only was wanting to make them as completely irreligious as England.

Sun. 1 (May). — I preached at seven in the new Room; in the afternoon at the College kirk, in Old-Aberdeen. At six, knowing our House could not contain the congregation, I preached in the Castle-gate, on the paved stones. A large number of people were all attention; but there were many rude, stupid creatures round about them, who knew as little of reason as of religion: I never saw such brutes in Scotland before. One of them threw a potato, which fell on my arm: I turned to them; and some were ashamed.

Tues. 1 (**May, 1770**). — I rode on to Aberdeen, and spent the rest of the week there. It fell out well, for the weather was uncommon: We had storms of snow or rain every day. And it seems the weather was the same as far as London. So general a storm has scarce been in the memory of man.

Sun. 6. — I preached in the College Kirk, at Old-Aberdeen, to a very serious (though mostly genteel) congregation. In the evening I preached at our own Room, and early in the morning took my leave of this loving people.

Fri. 1 and Sat. 2 (**May, 1772**). — I rested at Aberdeen.

Sun. 3. — I went in the morning to the English Church. Here, likewise, I could not but admire the exemplary decency of the congregation. This was the more remarkable, because so miserable a reader I never heard before. Listening with all attention, I understood but one single word, Balak, in the First Lesson; and one more, begat, was all I could possibly distinguish in the Second. Is there no man of spirit belonging to this congregation? Why is such a burlesque upon public worship suffered? Would it not be far better to pay this gentleman for doing nothing, than for doing mischief; for bringing a scandal upon religion? About three I preached at the College kirk in the Old-Town, to a large congregation, rich and poor; at six in our own House, on the narrow way. I spoke exceeding plain, both this evening and the next; yet none were offended. That encouragement has every Preacher in this country, “by manifestation of the truth,” to “commend” himself “to every man’s conscience in the sight of God!”

Tues. 5. — I read over in my journey Dr. Beattie’s ingenious “Inquiry after Truth.” He is a writer quite equal to his subject, and far above the match of all the minute philosophers, David Hume in particular; the most insolent despiser of truth and virtue that ever appeared in the world. And yet it seems some complain of this Doctor’s using him with too great severity! I cannot understand how that can be, unless he treated him with rudeness, (which he does not,) since he is an avowed enemy to God and man, and to all that is sacred and valuable upon earth.

Wed. 25 (**May, 1774**). — I set out early in the morning; but, not being able to ford the North-Esk, swollen with the late rains, was obliged to go round some miles. However, I reached Aberdeen in the evening. Here I met with another curious book, “Sketches of the History of Man.” Undoubtedly, the author is a man of strong understanding, lively imagination and considerable learning; and his book contains some useful truths. Yet some things in it gave me pain... I marvel if any but his brother Infidels will give two guineas for such a work as this!

Sun. 29. — At seven the congregation was large. In the evening the people were ready to tread upon each other. I scarce ever saw people so squeezed together. And they seemed to

be all ear, while I exhorted them, with strong and pointed words, not to receive “the grace of God in vain.”

Fri. 17 (**May, 1776**). — I reached Aberdeen in good time.

Sat. 18. I read over Dr. Johnson’s “Tour to the Western Isles.” It is a very curious book, wrote with admirable sense, and, I think, great fidelity; although, in some respects, he is thought to bear hard on the nation, which I am satisfied he never intended.

Sun. 19. — I attended the Morning Service at the kirk, full as formal as any in England; and no way calculated either to awaken sinners, or to stir up the gift of God in believers. In the afternoon I heard a useful sermon in the English chapel; and was again delighted with the exquisite decency both of the Minister and the whole congregation. The Methodist congregations come the nearest to this; but even these do not come up to it. Our House was sufficiently crowded in the evening; but some of the hearers did not behave like those at the chapel.

Wed. 22. — The wind turning north, we stepped at once from June to January. About one I preached at Inverury, to a plain, earnest, loving people, and before five came to Aberdeen. Thurs. 23. — I read over Mr. Pennant’s “Journey through Scotland;” a lively as well as judicious writer.

Thurs. 3 (**June, 1779**). — I preached at Aberdeen, to a people that can feel as well as hear.

Wed. 5 (**June, 1782**). — We set out early, but did not reach Aberdeen till between five and six in the evening. The congregations were large both morning and evening, and many of them much alive to God.

Fri. 7. — We received a pleasing account of the work of God in the north. The flame begins to kindle even at poor, dull Keith: But much more at a little town near Fraserburgh: And most of all at Newburgh, a small fishing town, fifteen miles from Aberdeen, where the society swiftly increases: And not only men and women, but a considerable number of children, are either rejoicing in God or panting after him.

Sun. 8. — I walked with a friend to Mr. Lesley’s seat, less than a mile from the city. It is one of the pleasantest places of the kind I ever saw, either in Britain or Ireland. He has laid his gardens out on the side of a hill, which gives a fine prospect both of sea and land: And the variety is beyond what could be expected within so small a compass. But still

Valeat possessor oportet,

Si comportatis rebue bene cogitat uti.

Unless a man have peace within, he can enjoy none of the things that are round about him.

Sun. 9. — We had a lovely congregation in the morning, many of whom were athirst for full salvation. In the evening God sent forth his voice, yea, and that a mighty voice. I think few of the congregation were unmoved: And we never had a more solemn parting.

Tues. 4 (**May, 1784**). — I reached Aberdeen between four and five in the afternoon.

Wed. 5. — I found the morning preaching had been long discontinued: Yet the bands and the select society were kept up. But many were faint and weak for want of morning preaching and prayer-meetings, of which I found scarce any traces in Scotland. In the evening I talked largely with the Preachers, and showed them the hurt it did both to them and the people, for any one Preacher to stay six or eight weeks together in one place. Neither can he find matter for preaching every morning and evening, nor will the people come to hear him. Hence he grows cold by lying in bed, and so do the people. Whereas, if he never stays more than a fortnight together in one place, he may find matter enough, and the people will gladly hear him. They immediately drew up such a plan for this Circuit, which they determined to pursue.

Thurs. 6. — We had the largest congregation at five which I have seen since I came into the kingdom. We set out immediately after preaching, and reached Old-Meldrum about ten.

Sat. 15. — We set out early, and dined at Aberdeen. On the road I read Ewen Cameron's Translation of Fingal. I think he has proved the authenticity of it beyond all reasonable contradiction...

Mon. 22 (**June, 1786**). — Having a long day's journey before us, we set out, at half-hour past three: So we came early to Aberdeen.

Wed. 24. — We had an exceeding solemn parting, as I reminded them that we could hardly expect to see each other's face any more, till we met in Abraham's bosom.

Tues. 25 (**June, 1790**). — We returned to Aberdeen; and I took a solemn farewell of a crowded audience. If I should be permitted to see them again, well; if not, I have delivered my own soul.