

# Charles & John Wesley

Norah Anderson

It is sometimes thought that the Wesley brothers were poor itinerant men who tramped the countryside hoping to scratch a living from the hymns they sang as they went.

Nothing could be further from the truth. They were country gentlemen, highly respected in their home county of Devon. They rode well-trained horses, wore tailored clothes with their hair powdered and tied back in a periwig. Both had extensive private education.

Their father, Samuel, was an Anglican clergyman and poet, himself the son of a clergyman. Their mother, Susanna, was the daughter of a famous dissenter and highly-educated. They lived in the rectory of St Andrew's, Epworth with its rambling garden. There were nineteen children, and Charles and John romped with their siblings, getting up to all the usual pranks that small boys do – one favourite activity was to turn the garden hose on at the family cat!



Charles Wesley

It was a godly household with prayers said morning and evening. Their mother taught them Latin and Greek and wrote commentaries on the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles Creed and the Ten Commandments. Poor callers were provided with enough food to last them many days. Penniless beggars got to know the house well and forelocks were pulled as they stumped off with the welcome food.

The two brothers rode round the countryside. As they went, they composed

hymn texts and set them to music. These great compositions have survived with us down the ages. "Lo, He comes with clouds descending" will be sung throughout the world in the next few weeks along with "Come, thou long expected Jesus" and many more throughout the Church Year:

"Hark, the herald-angels sing",  
 "Love's redeeming work is done",  
 "Jesu, lover of my soul",  
 "O for a thousand tongues to sing",  
 "Love divine",  
 "Rejoice! The Lord is King",  
 "Forth in Thy name",  
 "O thou who camest from above"

and many more.



John Wesley

Charles and John were blessed with precious talents. As instructed in scripture they did not bury them in the ground but used them to the glory of God.

It is strange to think that their Methodism, that stronghold of non-conformism, had its roots in Anglicanism. But then, God works in mysterious ways!

We give thanks for the memory of Charles and John Wesley and their truly wonderful gifts.

*Editors note:* The Wesleys wrote nearly 6,000 hymns. We have 30 in our hymn book, of which we sing 20. Impressive as this is, it means that only 1 Wesley hymn in 300 has withstood the test of the years; perhaps something to remember when we compare these great 'survivors' with the efforts of other hymn writers and composers!