

MINUTES OF MEMBERS' MEETING HELD AT WESLEY'S CHAPEL, CITY ROAD,  
ON SATURDAY 9<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2008.

Chairman: Mrs Christine Rees.

Speaker: Dr Jane Steen.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Brian Rees, and Ms Stephanie Pickford.

Notices:

1. In March Ms Karen Fernauld will be giving a performance, entitled:  
"DANCING ON LIFE'S PRECIPICE': MRS PIOZZI IN BATH."
2. Members are reminded that the Annual General Meeting will be on March 8<sup>th</sup> at 1.30pm, before the usual meetings.
3. Information leaflets of interest to Members are displayed on the side as usual.
4. Tea and biscuits are available after the meeting at the modest price of 50p a cup.
5. Minutes of the meeting held on Saturday, January 12<sup>th</sup> 2008 were read and signed by the Chairman, after approval.
6. Introduction of the speaker: Dr Jane Steen grew up in South London and first encountered Dr Johnson as an undergraduate in Cambridge. She studied the *"Dictionary"* and its use of seventeenth century Anglican divines for her PhD before training for ordination. Dr Steen served her curacy in High Bampton and was subsequently chaplain to the Bishop of Southwark, based in Streatham. She was appointed to her present post in 2005, thus continuing to work in an area once known and frequented by Johnson. Dr Steen began by saying that the Church of England, as Johnson knew it was rooted in translation. Its founding fathers drew heavily on its own medieval past, both literally and metaphorically. For them and for Johnson there was no separation between the duties of the Christian and the duties of the social being. Dr Steen began with the Book of Common Prayer, in its own formation and in Johnson's use of it.  
Thomas Cranmer and Samuel Johnson were great translators. In Cranmer translation implies radical transformation of that which is being translated, in Johnson the impetus is on translating, transforming effect. Where Johnson puts the language and ideas of the Prayer Book to new effect, Cranmer creates it, drawing on the tradition of Western Catholic Christendom, the structure of the late

sixth century Gregorian litany and the "*Pia Consultatio*" of Archbishop Hermann. This three-directional creative translation informs almost all the Prayer Book as Johnson has it.

Johnson held the Prayer Book in high esteem, He attended church more frequently when there were prayers only, than when there was also a sermon. His indebtedness to the Prayer Book shows in his sermons and his prayers. What is interesting about the use Johnson makes of Cranmer's work is both his fidelity to the public dimension of faith in his sermons and his personal translation of Cranmer's public language back into the sphere of private devotion. Johnson drew on Reformation liturgies and their use of their predecessors as he composed prayers and sermons.

Where Cranmer directly translates in order to create a liturgy which is both old and new, Johnson takes the old forms in use in his day and translates them into his own religious language, giving speech and language to laity of the Church of England of the eighteenth century; a public language reinforced by Johnson's going to church deliberately to set an example, and based on precisely the foundational attempts of the Church of England to get religion into public. He creates a private devotional language out of the public prayers of the Reformed Church. His perception that the private language is contiguous with and in some sense the foundation of the public runs through "*The Dictionary*".

Johnson was overtly frank about the religious purposes of "*The Dictionary*" in the Preface he wrote, "*I was desirous that every quotation should be useful to some other end than the illustration of the word.*" He offers "*The Dictionary*" as a work by which the devotional and theological riches of a past age are translated for the benefit of his own. We see in "*The Dictionary*" the transposition of matters of faith not only from one language and one generation to another, but also from one realm to another.

This move between spheres is most pronounced in "*Rasselas*," which has long been seen as a moral fable intended to urge humanity to the consideration of eternity by pointing out the vanity of temporality. In the Happy Valley, as in Eden, it is impossible to be certain that one has escaped scrutiny. For the Christian and for Rasselas expulsion from the Garden is necessary if human life is to progress: translation is not about remaining the same. At the end, Rasselas and Nekayah realise that happiness is not to be had in this life. If we parallel the Valley with Paradise and allude to the comparable flow of the Biblical narrative from Adam's expulsion to Christ's triumphant re-entry and opening of the gates for humanity, then once our heroes have realised that happiness is not to be had in the Valley, without leaving it, nor in the world without returning, then they are once more ready for Paradise.

Paradise is the hope of all major religions and Christian denominations, but what seems to be distinctive about Johnson's Anglican heritage and his own transmission of that heritage is the necessity for change. One language must be translated into another, one age must yield its wisdom for the next, one arena of life must be left for another; without the possibility of change there is no hope. As "*The Rambler*" reminds us, "*Hope is the chief blessing of man and that hope only is rational, of which we are certain that it cannot deceive us.*" In the final analysis, concluded Ms Steen, what needs to be translated is not language but humanity.

After a lively discussion, Ms Steen was warmly thanked by Mr Bundock for her thought-provoking and stimulating analysis Of Johnson's art of translation.