

Baptist Sites & Sights in London walk

The main walk starts at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, and finishes at Bunhill Fields. It is 3.5 miles along relatively flat city streets, and stops at a number of sites/sights which are of relevance to the Baptist and Nonconformist story.

After food / drinks to The Masque Haunt, Bentima House, 168-172 Old St, London EC1V 9BP there is an optional addition to the walk of another 1.5 miles.

Summary of the walk

Main walk: 3.5 miles (allow 2 hours)

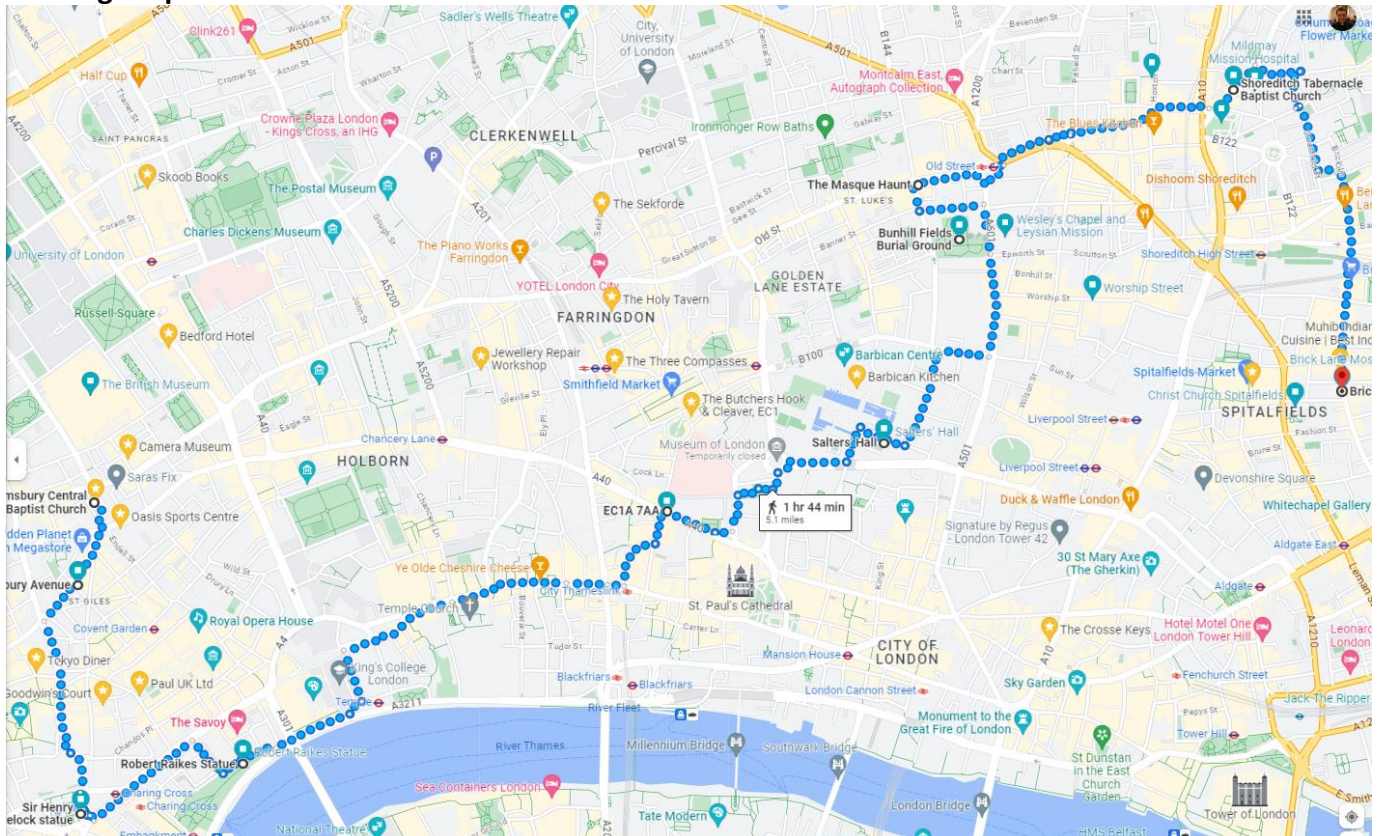
- Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church / Bedford Square
- Strict Baptist Chapel Shaftesbury Avenue
- Sir Henry Havelock statue, Trafalgar Square
- Robert Raikes Statue, embankment gardens (open to 9pm)
- Looking to the South Bank where many early Baptists lived and worshipped
- Newgate Prison
- Salters' Hall
- Bunhill Fields / Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Mission

Stop for Food/drinks at The Masque Haunt, Bentima House, 168-172 Old St, London EC1V 9BP

Optional additions: 1.5 miles (allow 45 min)

- Shoreditch Tabernacle / Mildmay Mission Hospital
- Brick Lane Mosque / Christ Church Spitalfields

Walking Map of Route:



<https://tinyurl.com/34vhnwt2>

Details of the walk

Main walk: 3.5 miles (allow 2 hrs)

Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church

Bloomsbury Chapel opened on 5 December 1848, the first Baptist chapel to stand proudly on a London street, visibly an 'ecclesiastical edifice'. Because of earlier restrictions on non-Anglican churches, and for reasons of economy, meeting-houses had formerly been hidden down back alleys and in upper rooms, but as their civil rights and social standing improved, Victorian Baptists, along with other Free Churches, wanted to be seen.

The chapel was built 'on spec' by Sir Samuel Morton Peto MP, one of the great railway contractors. Wanting to see a new Baptist witness in central London, he chose his site with care, where Oxford Street was being extended eastwards, between the smart Bloomsbury squares and the appalling slums of St Giles. The story goes that, when the Crown Commissioner was reluctant to lease the land to nonconformists with their dull, spireless architecture, Peto exclaimed, 'A spire, my Lord? We shall have two!' Twin spires graced the towers until 1951, when they were removed because no longer safe.



Peto invited the Revd William Brock from Norwich to initiate the cause. His preaching quickly drew a congregation and 62 founder members formally constituted the church on 25 July 1849. Brock, a man 'gifted with commonsense', served until 1872. In those days it was unusual to refer to current events from the pulpit but Brock insisted that 'the Bible and The Times newspaper are the best materials for the preacher', for the God of the Bible is also the God of everyday life.

The church grew rapidly, with nearly 900 members in the mid-1860s, even though within a decade of opening Brock was lamenting the loss of members who moved to the suburbs. Brock, who had himself served a difficult commercial apprenticeship, was particularly good at drawing young men working in London's business houses. The church only practised believer's baptism but both communion and membership were open to professing Christians from other traditions.

<https://www.bloomsbury.org.uk/about-us/history/>

Bedford Square

If you have time, detour to the picturesque Bedford Square, just to the north of Bloomsbury Baptist Church. The door dressings and keystone heads are of [Coade Stone](#) – an 'artificial stone' developed and marketed by [Eleanor Coade](#) in the late 18th Century. The most [famous example](#) is the lion that stands at the south end of Westminster Bridge. Eleanor was from a Baptist family in Exeter, and *The Baptist Magazine* for 1822 tells us that, for the last thirty or so years of her life, she had been a 'most useful, benevolent member' of James Upton's Blackfriars congregation. At her death Lyme Regis Baptist Church was remembered with a bequest in her will. Sir Cyril Black offered to buy a shared building here for the Baptist Union and the Baptist Missionary Society, but they could not agree.

Strict Baptist Chapel Shaftesbury Avenue



There is a former Strict Baptist chapel near Bloomsbury Baptist Chapel, which has sometimes caused confusion. It is at 166a Shaftesbury Avenue, and is quite a tall building.

Opened in 1888, built to a design by the architect William Gillbee Scott, for a Strict Baptist church that had been formed in 1791, then sold to another such in 1917 as Gower St Memorial Chapel. That church eventually migrated to North Finchley. The building is now home to the Chinese Church in London Soho Outreach Centre.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soho_Baptist_Chapel

Sir Henry Havelock statue, Trafalgar Square



A Baptist soldier known for his piety - his abstemious soldiers were dubbed 'Havelock's saints'. Havelock is a controversial figure today due to his role in the violent suppression of rebellion against British rule in India.

He had connections with the [Serampore Trio](#). Lady Havelock was the daughter of Joshua and Hannah Marshman of Serampore.

When in London, the family worshipped at Bloomsbury Baptist Chapel, and the Minister William Brock's colleague George M'Cree berated Brock for allowing this - they were both members of the Peace Society, and Baptists were not known for military enthusiasm.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statue_of_Henry_Havelock,_Trafalgar_Square

Robert Raikes Statue, embankment gardens (open to 9pm)

A statue of [Robert Raikes](#), often regarded as being the founder of [Sunday schools](#), executed by the sculptor [Thomas Brock](#), stands in [Victoria Embankment Gardens](#). It was unveiled by the [Earl of Shaftesbury](#) on 3 July 1880 and marked the centenary of the opening of the first Sunday school. The critic [Edmund Gosse](#) considered the statue to be "as good as anything of the kind we possess in England".

The front of the plinth reads:

ROBERT RAIKES/ FOUNDER OF SUNDAY SCHOOLS/ 1780/ THIS STATUE WAS ERECTED/ UNDER THE DIRECTION/ OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL UNION/ BY CONTRIBUTIONS/ FROM TEACHERS AND SCHOLARS/ OF SUNDAY SCHOOLS IN GREAT BRITAIN/ JULY 1880. An inscription below the figure's right foot reads: THOS BROCK SCULPT/ LONDON. 1880.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statue_of_Robert_Raikes,_London



Looking to the South Bank where many early Baptists lived and worshipped

There are a number of Baptist sights south of the River Thames in Southwark, home to some distinguished Baptist causes, not least the Maze Pond Church (now under Guy's Hospital) which was founded in 1672 and worshipped on the site until 1877; and the [Carter Lane church](#) remembered for John Rippon's ministry, but with a line of distinguished forbears in various sites around that area.

Thomas Guy, the founder and benefactor of Guy's Hospital, seems to have Baptist connections. He is controversial today as much of his (vast) wealth came from dealings in the South Sea Company, whose business included supporting the transportation of Africans to the West Indies. There is a statue of him in the central courtyard of the hospital. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/students/update-on-thomas-guy-statue>

Newgate Prison

Newgate Prison was a prison at the corner of Newgate Street and Old Bailey Street just inside the City of London, originally at the site of Newgate, a gate in the Roman London Wall. Built in the 12th century and demolished in 1904, the prison was extended and rebuilt many times, and remained in use for over 700 years, from 1188 to 1902. For much of its history, a succession of criminal courtrooms were attached to the prison, commonly referred to as the "Old Bailey". The present Old Bailey (officially, Central Criminal Court) now occupies much of the site of the prison.

Thomas Helwys, one of the founders of the Baptist movement, died in [Newgate Prison](#) in 1616 at about the age of forty. He formulated the earliest Baptist confession of faith in 1611, and wrote the first English book to defend the principle of religious liberty for all. In 1612 he and twelve other Baptists returned to England from the Netherlands to found the first Baptist congregation on English soil in Spitalfields (see later in the walk). Many other early Baptists were also imprisoned in Newgate Prison.

As you walk down Aldersgate, look for the plaque commemorating the probable site, where, on May 24, 1738 John Wesley "felt his heart strangely warmed". This experience of grace was the beginning of Methodism. <https://www.londonremembers.com/memorials/john-wesley-aldersgate-street>

Salters' Hall



Many of the London C17th congregations met in the area that is now office tower blocks just outside the City (Coleman Street for example). Salters Hall is now a modern glass & metal building (again war damage I think) but the garden has a large chunk of London Wall next to it. In 1719, a hundred or so Dissenting ministers met in the Presbyterian Salters' Hall Chapel in London, to address speculation about the nature of the Trinity

The subsequent meetings were termed "the Salters' Hall debates". Discussion was not about Trinitarian doctrine itself so much as whether any Dissenting body had the authority to make others agree a form of words that did not appear in scripture, in particular how much could theological statements like historic creeds – human constructs only as some saw them – be used.

https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/542042/The_Salters_Hall.aspx

Bunhill Fields



John Bunyan

Bunhill Fields is a former burial ground first in use from 1665 until 1854, in which period approximately 123,000 interments were estimated to have taken place. It was particularly favoured by nonconformists including Baptists.

It contains the graves of many notable people, including [John Bunyan](#) (died 1688). Bunyan was the minister of a congregation of



Daniel Defoe

Baptists and Independents in Bedford in the 1605s. In 1660 he was arrested and spent 12 years in prison. He seems to have spent the entire time writing. Released in 1672, he became a licensed preacher, but was imprisoned again in 1673. During this shorter stay of six months he began of [The Pilgrim's Progress](#), his

most famous work, written in two parts. Bunyan died in 1688 in the house

of John Strudwick on Snow Hill, and was buried in his vault at Bunhill Fields. Others buried there

include [Daniel Defoe](#) (died 1731), author of [Robinson Crusoe](#); [William Blake](#) (died 1827), artist, poet, and

mystic; [Susanna Wesley](#) (died 1742), known as the "Mother of Methodism" through her education of

sons [John](#) and [Charles](#); [Thomas Bayes](#) (died 1761), statistician and

philosopher; [Isaac Watts](#) (died 1748), the "Father of English [Hymnody](#)", and [Daniel Williams](#) founder of the Dr Williams's Library formerly located in



William Blake



Daniel Williams

Gordon Square, Bloomsbury.

Nearby, on the west side of [Bunhill Row](#) and behind the residential tower Braithwaite House, is a former [Quaker](#) burial ground, in use from 1661 to 1855, at times also known as Bunhill Fields. [George Fox](#) (died 1691), one of the founders of the movement, is among those buried there.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bunhill_Fields

Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Mission



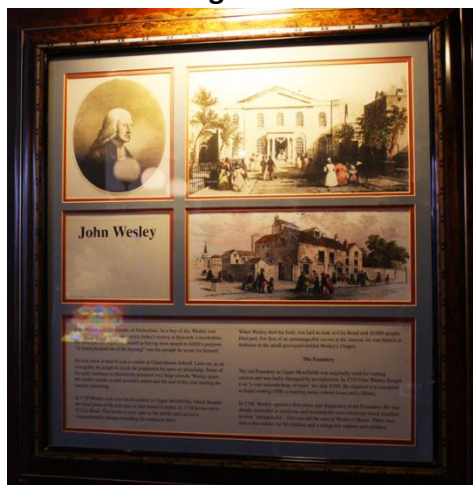
In 1776 Methodist leader [John Wesley](#) applied to the City of London for a site to build his new chapel and was granted an area of land on City Road. John Wesley's House, a mid-Georgian townhouse, was built in 1779 at the same time as the chapel. It was Wesley's residence for the last eleven years of his life. The site also houses one of the few surviving examples of a gentleman's convenience built by the sanitary engineer [Thomas Crapper](#) in 1891. The Museum of Methodism, housed in the chapel's crypt, contains artefacts and relics relating to Methodism, including several of Wesley's speeches and essays on theology, the "warmed heart" "contemplative space", [Thomas Coke](#)'s writing slope or desk and [Donald Soper](#)'s portable preaching stand.

Stop for Food/drinks at The Masque Haunt, Bentima House, 168-172 Old St, EC1V 9BP

This pub has a number of historical displays, including one commemorating Charles Wesley, another John Bunyan, and another Daniel Defoe.

<https://www.jdwetherspoon.com/pub-histories/england/london/the-masque-haunt-old-street>

Framed drawings and text about John Wesley.



The text reads:

John Wesley was the founder of Methodism. As a boy of six, Wesley was rescued from conflagration at his father's rectory at Epworth, Lincolnshire. He subsequently regarded himself as having been spared to fulfil a purpose. "A brand plucked out of the burning" was the epitaph he wrote for himself.

He first came to this area as a scholar at Charterhouse School. Later On, as an evangelist, he sought to reach the population by open air preaching. Some of the winter months in and around London and the rest of the year touring the country preaching.

In 1739 Wesley took over the Foundery in Upper Moorfields, which became the focal point of his activities in and around London. In 1778

he moved to 47 City Road. This house is now open to the public and carries a commemorative plaque recording his residence there.

When Wesley Died his body was laid in state at City Road and 10,000 people filed past. For fear of an unmanageable crowd at the funeral, he was buried in darkness in the small graveyard behind Wesley's Chapel.

The old Foundery in Upper Moorfields was originally used for casting cannon and was badly damaged by an explosion. In 1739 John Wesley bought it as "a vast uncouth heap of ruins" for only £100. He repaired it to comprise a chapel seating 1500, a meeting room, schoolroom and a library.

In 1746, Wesley opened a free clinic and dispensary at the Foundery. He was deeply interested in medicine and invented his own electrical shock machine to treat "melancholia". This can still be seen at Wesley's House. There was also a free school for 60 children and a refuge for widows and children.

A framed drawing and text about John Bunyan, who is generally considered to have been a Baptist.

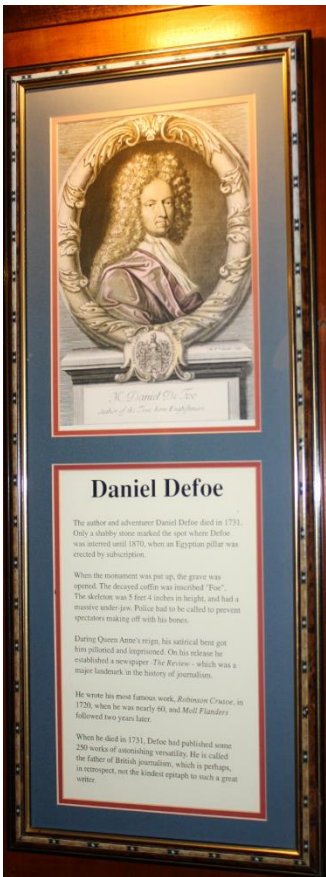


The text reads:

John Bunyan died in 1688 in the house of John Strudwick on Show Hill, and was buried in his vault at Bunhill. In 1660 he was arrested and spent 12 years in prison. He seems to have spent the entire time writing

Released in 1672, he became a licensed preacher, but was imprisoned again in 1673. During this shorter stay of six months he began Pilgrims Progress, His best riding from reading to London in the pouring rain.

A framed print and text about Daniel Defoe, who was brought up a Baptist.



The text reads:

The author and adventurer Daniel Defoe died in 1731. Only a Shabby stone marked the spot where Defoe was interred until 1870, when an Egyptian pillar was erected by subscription.

When the monument was put up, the grave was opened. The decayed coffin was inscribed "Foe". The skeleton was 5 feet 4 inches in height, and had a massive under-jaw. Police had to be called to stop spectators making off with his bones.

During Queen Anne's reign, his satirical bent got him pilloried and imprisoned. On his release he established a newspaper – The Review – which was a major landmark in the history of journalism.

He wrote his most famous work, Robinson Crusoe, in 1720, when he was nearly 60, and Moll Flanders followed two years later.

When he died in 1731, Defoe had published some 250 works of astonishing versatility. He is called the father of British journalism, which is perhaps, in retrospect, not the kindest epitaph to such a great writer.

Optional additions: 1.5 miles (allow 45 min)

[Shoreditch Tabernacle /](#)

[Shoreditch Tabernacle Baptist Church](#) began in 1829 as a humble children's Sunday School on nearby Curtain Road. In 1836, the congregation moved to Austin Street, and the church's current site, building "Providence Chapel".

The site was rebuilt in 1879 by William Cuff, a protégé of the renowned Baptist preacher and evangelist Charles Spurgeon, under whose leadership the Shoreditch Tabernacle flourished, being known for hosting the glory of God in a home for people of every class and background.

The building was bombed in the second world war, and rebuilt in 1963 and then again in 2015. In partnership with the neighbouring Mildmay hospital, the whole site was redeveloped to create a large church building on the main road that is integrated with new residential buildings. The Tab Centre has an interesting C19th school attached.



[Mildmay Mission Hospital](#)

[Mildmay Mission Hospital](#) has its origins in the work of The Rev. William Pennefather and his team of Christian women, later known as Deaconesses, who began their work of visiting the sick of the East End during the Cholera outbreak of 1866.

The Mildmay Medical Mission was opened in 1877 by William's widow Catherine Pennefather and eleven other women, in a converted warehouse behind Shoreditch Church, in Turville Square/Cabbage Court in the Old Nichol slums. Dedicated to the memory of William, who had died in 1873, it consisted of twenty-seven beds in three wards, one doctor, three nurses and five deaconesses in training. The Hospital was recognised for the training of nurses in 1883.

Although the hospital did not require letters of admission, like many other voluntary hospitals of the time, and it did not discriminate by religion, throughout its existence the Mildmay stressed its role as an evangelical Christian centre as well as a general hospital; prayers were held on the wards, and biblical quotations were painted on the walls.

Staff regarded their work as a religious as well as a medical vocation. Despite this, the hospital had a strong tradition for treating Jewish immigrants to the East End. Today, their mission is still to reach out to those in greatest need, providing love, care, and compassion to the sick and vulnerable.

Brick Lane Mosque



The [Brick Lane Mosque](#) was first established in 1743 as a Huguenot Chapel ("La Neuve Eglise", i.e. "the New Church") - These were refugees who had left France after the [Revocation of the Edict of Nantes](#) in 1685, to escape persecution by the Catholics. Many Huguenots settled in Spitalfields, bringing with them their silk-weaving and textile skills. As they were [Protestant Dissenters](#), not members of the Church of England, they built their own chapels. and has housed range of 'outsiders' over the centuries.

In 1809 it became a [Wesleyan](#) chapel, bought by the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, an organisation now known as the [Church's Ministry Among Jewish People](#), but this phase of its history lasted only 10 years. From 1819, the building became a [Methodist](#) chapel.

In 1891, the building was adopted by yet another community: it became the [Machzike Hadath](#), the Spitalfields Great Synagogue. During this time, the area was home to many Jewish refugees from Russia and Central Europe. The population of Jews decreased over the years, with many moving to other parts of East London, to North London and elsewhere. The synagogue eventually moved to new premises in Golders Green.

During the 1970s, the area of [Spitalfields](#) and [Brick Lane](#) was populated mainly by Bangladeshis who had come to Britain from the [Sylhet region](#) looking for better work. Many found work in factories and the textile trade. That growing community required a place of worship, and the building at 59 Brick Lane was bought and refurbished. In 1976, it reopened as a mosque, the London Jamme Masjid. Today, although it has been renamed, it still serves the Bangladeshi community as a mosque.

Christ Church Spitalfields

Spitalfields is where Thomas Helwys' congregation met from 1611, but he did not leave an address!

Christchurch Spitalfields is a fine restored Hawksmoor building, designed by the architect [Nicholas Hawksmoor](#), and built during the reign of [Queen Anne](#) to demonstrate the power of the established church.



Additional Sites not included in this tour but worth visiting if you have more time:

British Museum and Andrew Gifford

Gifford was the son of Emanuel Gifford, and grandson of Andrew Gifford, both Baptist ministers at [Bristol](#). He was born on 17 August 1700, and was sent to the [dissenting academy](#) of [Samuel Jones](#) at [Tewkesbury](#). Gifford collected coins,^[4] and was a fellow of the [Society of Antiquaries of London](#). With influential friends including John Ward, one of the trustees, he was appointed assistant librarian in the [British Museum](#) in 1757. He held this office till his death on 19 June 1784. He was buried in [Bunhill Fields](#) burial ground. Gifford's collection of coins was purchased by George II for his private cabinet, but he left a collection of books, manuscripts, pictures, and curiosities to the Baptist academy at Bristol, including a first edition of the Tyndale New Testament, now in the British Library having lived for years in a Sainsbury's carrier bag in the safe at Bristol Baptist College.

University of London and F A Cox

Francis Augustus Cox (1783–1853) was a prominent English [Baptist](#) minister. When the [University of London](#) was founded in 1828, he briefly sat on its committee, this may have been due to his active support for the formation of the University. He was also the librarian at the University for a short while.

Grafton Street Baptist church (now University site)

Founded in 1713 as a Baptist place of worship

It was in Grafton Street, Soho, until the late eighteenth century, when its congregation decided they wanted a "more quiet and extensive place of worship" and moved to Keppel Street in Bloomsbury.

Samuel Palmer [RWS](#) Hon.RE (Hon. Fellow of the [Society of Painter-Etchers](#)) (27 January 1805 – 24 May 1881) was a British [landscape](#) painter, [etcher](#) and [printmaker](#). He was also a prolific writer. Palmer was a key figure in [Romanticism](#) in Britain and produced visionary pastoral paintings. He was the son of a bookseller and sometime [Baptist](#) minister, and was raised by a pious nurse. Palmer painted churches from around age twelve, and first exhibited [Turner](#)-inspired works at the [Royal Academy](#) at the age of fourteen. Influenced by William Blake, his most significant works were landscapes around [Shoreham](#), near Sevenoaks in the west of [Kent](#). He purchased a run-down cottage, nicknamed "Rat Abbey", and lived there from 1826 to 1835, depicting the area as a demi-paradise, mysterious and visionary, often shown in sepia shades under moon and star light.

[John Linnell](#) RA, Samuel Palmer's father-in-law was a member here for a time. He was an engraver, and portrait and landscape painter.

93 Gloucester Place, London, WIH 4AA - near Baker Street Station- this was a former headquarters for the Baptist Missionary Society.

Baptist Church House is in Southampton Row, and is now a hotel. A statue of John Bunyan can still be seen on the outside.