

Port Isaac's Wesley Bell

It was rare for Methodist Chapels to have a bell and the first Chapel bell in Cornwall appears to be the Wesley Bell at Port Isaac which was hung in the belfry of the newly built Chapel in 1800. The brass bell was inscribed "W&H 1800, B".

W&H would have been the bellfounders and the letter 'B' most likely indicating their location at Bristol from where the bell would have been brought down the Channel to Port Isaac by a coasting vessel.

The trustees of the Wesley Chapel were headed by local merchant Richard Wood, a great supporter of John Wesley. Richard Wood would have known Bristol and its Portland Chapel which had used a bell from its opening in 1792.

Richard Wood

Displayed in Bristol Museum is a uniquely fine English Delftware Dish, inscribed "RICH^D WOOD/Port Isaac/1764" in the centre. The rest of the dish is decorated in *bianco-sopra-bianco* with four panels of trellis diaper and floral designs. The decoration is in blue and white on a pale blue glaze.

Richard Wood is described as a shopkeeper in Port Isaac, a village then consisting of just seventy or so houses. It was to his house that John Wesley went after he first preached in Port Isaac on the Platt in 1765 – and he later made several more visits.

In 1804 Richard Wood purchased, with Mariner William Billings, the Wesleyan Chapel in Port Isaac. They were clearly good friends as William was also witness to Richard's will made in 1794.

Cargo records show that these two gentlemen were the merchants of Port Isaac and they were involved in coastal trade with Bristol, including delftware and the raw materials involved in its manufacture. Many minerals were available from the locality including iron, cobalt, manganese and antimony and they were all refined locally. Calcining kilns were also operated and it is therefore probable that Richard Wood supplied the Bristol delftware potters with many of their materials including the particularly fine tin calx which characterised *bianco-sopra-bianco* decoration in Bristol at this time.

It is said that following the Methodist uprising in 1831, the Reformers took this bell with them for their new Roscarrock Hill Chapel. Here it summoned the congregation to services up until it was replaced by the **Bencoolen** Bell in 1862

