A Brief History of Worship in Sandwell

**Historical Sites**
- Sandwell Priory and Holy Well

**Buddhism**
- Jangchub Ling Buddhist Meditation Centre

**Christianity**
- All Saints Church
- Church of St. Bartholomew
- St. Mark’s Church
- Our Lady & St. Hubert’s Roman Catholic Church
- Oldbury New Testament Church of God

**Hinduism**
- Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple

**Islam**
- Jami Masjid & Bangladeshi Islamic Centre

**Sikhism**
- Guru Nanak Gurdwara

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Sandwell has a wealth of Faith Heritage Buildings and Communities. This Faith Trail is designed to be an introduction to the history, beliefs and locations of the main faith groups in Sandwell. There are of course many other places of worship and many other religious and spiritual groups in Sandwell. By opening the doors of Faith Buildings, we are assisting communities to deepen their understanding of each other and celebrate their identity and achievements together. Some faiths do not have venues in Sandwell and therefore could not be included in the trail. It is important to note that the following brief statements are merely an introduction to each religion.

The Faith Trail has been produced jointly in partnership with the Sandwell Multi-Faith Network and Tourism Officer, Cultural Services. The Sandwell Multi-Faith Network provides a focus for faith communities working together… for more information: www.sandwellmultifaith.org

All Faith Buildings are sacred spaces for those that are there to worship, so before visiting, it is important to dress appropriately and avoid showing too much uncovered body and to remain sedate and respectful inside the building, avoiding loud conversation. Alcohol and cigarettes are not allowed on the premises, nor is anyone under the influence of intoxicants.

These sites are spread over a large area. Visits are best prearranged, particularly group visits. Careful planning of journeys will be necessary.

A Brief History of Worship in Sandwell

The name Sandwell came from one of the first holy sites in the area, the Holy Well or Sand Well which is located in Sandwell Valley and was a key reason for the building of the Benedictine Priory in c1160.

Sandwell’s religious character and diversity has since been formed through successive waves of immigration, each wave of new inhabitants bringing their own faiths, beliefs and religious practices.

Fierce Anglo-Saxon Gods were worshipped at Wednesbury over 1500 years ago. The oldest surviving relics of Sandwell’s Christian parish churches date from the 11th and 12th centuries. In the 7th century St. Augustine is reputed to have visited the Holy Well in Sandwell Valley from which the borough derives its name.

Following religious reformation most of the Borough followed the establishment Church of England line. There remained a strong sense of independent spirit and in 1667 there were disturbances in Oldbury as part of the political and wider Protestant/Catholic tensions. In 1743 riots took place in Wednesbury and West Bromwich around Methodist founder John Wesley’s preaching. Encouraged by Wesley, Francis Asbury took Methodism across to America, becoming its first Methodist Bishop. In the Late 19th Century missions to Irish workers and their families re-planted Roman Catholicism in the borough.

The second half of the 20th century has brought an even greater diversity of peoples and religious practise to Sandwell: the colourful Baisakhi processions of the Sikhs, the many symbols and deities of the Hindus, the Islamic call to prayer and the gentle hum of meditation by Buddhists, each a reflection of humanity’s exploration of spiritual life.
Sandwell Priory and Holy Well
Near the spring or sand well, which gives its name to the present Borough, are the remains of a Benedictine Priory founded by William Fitz-Anscull in the 1100s. The small monastic community at Sandwell Priory was in existence from around 1160 to 1526. Sandwell Park Farm, the home farm of the estate, contains collections of old agricultural machinery and displays illustrating human activity in Sandwell Valley from prehistoric times.

Access via Sandwell Valley
Salters Lane
West Bromwich
West Midlands B71 4BG

Opening Hours
Sandwell Park Farm
Monday – Sunday 10.00am – 4.30pm
The Priory can be visited during daylight hours
Disabled access is available
To arrange a visit telephone: 0121 553 0220
E-mail: enquiries@sandwellvalley.com
Web: www.sandwellvalley.com
Bishop Asbury Cottage was the boyhood home of Francis Asbury, who became the first Bishop of the American Methodist Church. Francis Asbury was born in the village of Hamstead in 1745. Soon afterwards his parents moved to this cottage on Newton Road. The cottage is believed to date from the early 18th century. It is a simple labourer's dwelling, constructed of brick, tile and timber. When built, it was part of a short terrace, but the other cottages were demolished when the Newton Road was widened. The restored cottage contains furniture on loan from the Victoria and Albert Museum. The sideboard is a gift of the Foundry Methodist Church, Washington, USA which was dedicated by Francis Asbury in 1814, two years before his death.

Bishop Asbury Cottage
Newton Road, Great Barr
West Midlands B43 6HN
Access to the cottage is up a flight of steep steps. Disabled access is not available at present. To arrange a visit telephone: 0121 553 0759
E-mail: museumarts_tourism@sandwell.gov.uk
Web: www.museums.sandwell.gov.uk

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Buddhism

Buddhism in Sandwell

The Jangchub Ling Buddhist Meditation Centre has been open to the public since 2005 and is attended by members of all community groups in Sandwell and throughout the Midlands.

Buddhism

Although Buddhism is called a religion, it is different from other major world religions as there is not a Creator God to obey. At the heart of the Buddhists’ way of life is the practice of meditation. Meditation can be practiced by everyone and helps to develop calm, peaceful and centred minds, thus allowing good qualities of compassion and wisdom to grow. A Buddhist is someone who is seeking happiness from within their own mind through practising the Dharma (teachings) and relying on the community of practitioners (Sangha) and then wishing to share their experience with all living beings. Buddhists believe in the law of ‘Karma’ and that through actions of body, speech and mind they create who they become.

Jangchub Ling Buddhist Meditation Centre

Jangchub Ling Buddhist Meditation Centre is a member of the New Kadampa Tradition. The Centre provides a wealth of activity including classes in meditation and chanting prayers for all levels and abilities. A Peaceful Meditation Room is available for public use and the World Peace Café offers a welcome environment in which to relax and unwind.

Code of Conduct

Everyone is welcome to visit the centre.

Jangchub Ling Centre

1a Sydney Road, Cradley Heath
West Midlands, B64 5BA

Opening Hours

Monday – Saturday 9.00am – 5.00pm

Disabled Access is available

To arrange a visit – Tel: 01384 569956
Website: www.meditatejlc.org
Email: info@meditatejlc.org
All Saints Church

Christianity in Sandwell
The majority of the communities within Sandwell are of the Christian tradition and denominations include Catholic, Pentecostal, Apostolic, Anglican, Methodist and Baptist.

Christianity
Christian teaching has developed over 2000 years. Christianity, as its name implies is inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Christians believe in one God expressed as three, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit and recognise Jesus as the Son of God. The Christian Holy Book is The Bible.

All Saints Church
The present church of All Saints, often known as the old West Bromwich church, dates from 1871-2. The church was originally dedicated to St. Clement and was given to the Convent of Worcester by Henry I who later gave the building to the Priory of Sandwell. It consists of a chancel and nave with south aisle, organ chamber, south porch, and the original 12th century tower. The unusual wooden choir stalls are engraved with figures depicting scenes from church life. The font is a perpendicular work of the 15th century and the oak table dates back to 1626.

All Saints Church
All Saints Way, West Bromwich
West Midlands B71 3RU

Opening Hours:
Monday – Saturday 9.30am – 12.30pm
Sunday 8.00am: Sung Communion
10.30am: Sung Communion
6.30am: Sung Evening Service

Disabled access is available
To arrange a visit telephone: 0121 588 2647
Website: www.churches.lichfield.anglican.org/westbrom/allsaints

West Bromwich

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Church of St. Bartholomew
Crowning the highest point in Wednesbury, possibly on a site once sacred to the Saxon God Woden, stands this magnificent parish church. An ancient jewel, resplendent with fifteen stained glass windows crafted by Charles Eamer Kempe MA, (1857-1907), amongst its many treasures is the famous and unique 'fighting cock' lectern. Both Bishop Francis Asbury and the Rev. John Wesley attended prayers here, the latter recalling in his memoirs being mobbed by the town's anti-Methodist rioters on October 20th 1743.

Church of St. Bartholomew
Church Hill, Wednesbury
West Midlands, WS10 9DJ

Opening Hours:
Saturday 10.00am – 12.00pm
Sunday 8.00am: Book of Common Prayer
10.30am: Sung Eucharist
6.00am: Bi-Monthly Memorial Service

Disabled access is available.
To arrange a visit telephone: 0121 556 0378
St. Mark’s Church
Ocker Hill Road, Tipton, West Midlands, DY4 0UT

Opening Hours
Sunday 9.00am – 11.30am (includes 60 minute Sung Mass)
Tuesday 9.30am – 11.00am (includes 30 minute Said Mass)

Disabled access is available
To arrange a visit telephone: 0121 556 0678

St. Mark’s Church

The parish of St Mark containing Ocker Hill and the northern part of Tipton was formed in 1845 and the church was completed in 1849. It is an unusual and historically important building and one of the first to be constructed in locally produced Staffordshire blue bricks which were then becoming popular with railway and canal engineers as a material of great load bearing capacity and durability. A proposed tower and spire for St Mark’s could not be afforded and was never built. In 1880 the building was severely damaged by subsidence caused by mining.

St. Mark’s Church
Ocker Hill Road, Tipton,
West Midlands, DY4 0UT

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Our Lady & St. Hubert’s
Roman Catholic Church

Fondly referred to as ‘The Great White Cross on the Hill’, St. Hubert’s Roman Catholic Church was opened on 3rd November 1934 to serve the growing Catholic populations of Oldbury and Smethwick. It was paid for by a bequest in the will of Major Hubert George Howard Galton, great grandson of the Birmingham Quaker gun manufacturer Samuel Galton.

The Church is built in the ‘Basilica’ style, derived from the Basilica (literally Hall of the King) built in Ancient Rome and adopted for Christian worship in the 2nd century. Four striking reliefs on the outside of the building represent the four evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the authors of the four Christian Gospels of Jesus Christ.

St Hubert’s Roman Catholic Church
Wolverhampton Road
West Midlands, B68 0TQ
Disabled access is available
To arrange a visit telephone: 0121 422 2388
or fax: 0121 421 8216
Oldbury New Testament Church of God
The earliest church on this site was built in 1708 for a community of Dissenter Christians by John Turton of the Brades. It was set on fire by an anti-Methodist mob from Birmingham in 1715 but quickly rebuilt. Growth in the Methodist communities in and around Oldbury resulted in the expansion and rebuilding in 1895, 1897 and 1889. The building was acquired in 1880 by members of The New Testament Church of God. The building retains its beautiful original stained glass windows and pipe organ structure and an extension and baptismal pool have been added.

Oldbury New Testament Church of God
Church Street, Oldbury
West Midlands B69 3AG

Opening Hours:
Sunday School: 10.00am – 10.45am
Sunday morning service: 11.00am – 1.00pm
Sunday evening service: 6.30pm – 8.30pm
Monday Fasting: 11.00am – 1.00pm
Tuesday evening: Bible Studies/Baptismal Classes: 7.30pm – 9.00pm
Disabled access is available
To arrange a visit telephone: 0121 544 4977
Hindus in Sandwell
Immigration from the Indian sub-continent to Sandwell took place during the 1950s and 1960s when industry was at its peak, the Hindu community brought with them a wide range of skills to fill the skill and workforce shortage of the time.

Hinduism
Hinduism is one of the oldest known religions. The word “Hindu” means a dweller in the Indus Valley, northern India. Its civilization dates back to 2950 BC and its sacred writings date as far back as 1500 BC. Although Hinduism is often misunderstood as being polytheistic, it is based on the concept of only one supreme God seen in his three main functional forms, BRAHMA the creator, VISHNU the protector and SHIVA the terminator. Hinduism does not have one specific scripture or a Holy Book, but has many sacred texts including the Four Vedas, the Bhagvad Gita and Dharma Shasthra (Code of ethics).

Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple
When opened in 2006, this was the largest Hindu Temple of its kind in Europe and the site is now one of the most sacred in the Hindu world. It is constructed in the style of the ancient and sacred temple of Shri Venkateswara in Tirupathi, South India. Boasting a distinctive architecture, this structure was built in stages with carved granite sculpted in India and shipped to Britain to be put together on site. The many intricate carvings that adorn the walls, ceilings and pillars were crafted by a team of over 20 highly skilled stonemasons and craftsmen brought over from India. The plan for the temple complex includes the provision of seven sacred hills dedicated to other faiths.

Code of Conduct
All are welcome to the temple. Before entering the temple worshipping areas, the visitors are expected to leave their shoes at the shoe-racks provided. Alcohol and cigarettes are not allowed on the premises, nor is anyone under the influence of intoxicants.

Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple
Dudley Road East
West Midlands B69 3DU

Opening Hours:
Weekdays: 8.30am – 12.30pm and 5.00pm – 9.00pm
Weekends: 8.30am – 2.30pm and 4.00pm – 9.00pm
Disabled access is available
To arrange a visit telephone: 0121 544 2256 or fax: 0121 544 2257
E-mail: temple@venkateswara.org.uk
Web: www.venkateswara.org.uk
Islam in Sandwell

Islam is practiced by many different ethnic groups ranging from British White to African Caribbean. Most Muslims in Sandwell are from the Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Yemeni communities, and settled here during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, bringing with them a wide range of skills to fill the skills and workforce shortage of the time.

Islam

Islam is a religion that started around 611 A.D. with the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) receiving prophethood from Almighty Allah. The message clearly states that there is no God but Allah and Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) is his messenger. The two main festivals celebrated are Eid al-Fitr after the fasting month of Ramadan and Eid al-Adha during the Hajj period. The Islamic Holy Book is The Qur'an.

Jami Masjid & Bangladeshi Islamic Association
Lewisham Road, Smethwick

The Mosque is run by the Bangladeshi Islamic Association and was formed in 1980 in a small terraced house to serve as a place of worship for Muslims. It is now located at its current site on Lewisham Road. A range of activity takes place at the Mosque including congregational prayers, educational visits, and open days for all faiths to learn about Islam.

Code of Conduct

All are welcome. Before entering the Mosque visitors are required to leave their shoes in the shoe-racks provided. Men and women are required to be physically clean when entering the Masjid (Prayer) Room.

Jami Masjid & Bangladeshi Islamic Association
10-11 Lewisham Road, Smethwick
West Midlands, B66 2BP

Opening Hours

Monday – Sunday 9:00am – 7:00pm (Summer) 9:00am – 11:00pm

Disabled Access is available
To arrange a visit telephone: 0121 558 8204/3791
Email: www.jms.org.uk or www.bicentre.org.uk
The fundamental concepts and philosophy of Sikhism have been expounded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji and elaborated by his successor Gurus. Sikhism is a monotheistic faith with a belief in one God and forbids the representation of God in images and in the worship of idols. Sikhism rejects all distinctions of race, caste, colour, creed, status or sex and believes in a casteless and classless egalitarian society, guaranteeing equal status to all. The Sikh Holy Book is The Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Nanak Gurdwara
Originally built in 1855 as a Congregational Church, the building was acquired in the early 1960s by the Sikh community and converted into the Guru Nanak Gurdwara. At the time of its opening it was the largest Sikh temple outside India.

Code of Conduct
All are welcome to the Gurdwara. When you are in the Gurdwara building it is important to cover your head as an uncovered head is considered disrespectful. Shoes are not allowed in the Congregation Hall and must be removed and put in the shoe-racks provided.

Guru Nanak Gurdwara
128-130 High Street, Smethwick
West Midlands B66 3AP

For opening hours or to arrange a visit telephone: 0121 558 2527
07984 269952

For group visits, write formally to the Guru Nanak Gurdwara

Disabled Access is available.
It has not been possible to include all places of worship at this time.

For more information visit:
www.visitwestbrom.com
www.sandwellmultifaith.org
www.sandwellchurcheslink.org

This Sandwell Faith Trail is available as a PDF file at www.visitwestbrom.com