

**GEORGE WOLFF¹ (1736–1828): NORWEGIAN-BORN MERCHANT,
CONSUL, BENEVOLENT METHODIST LAYMAN,
CLOSE FRIEND OF JOHN WESLEY**

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There is an extensive body of historical sources related to George Wolff's career in London as a merchant and as Consul of Denmark-Norway.² In her doctoral thesis *Wolffs & Dorville. Et norsk-engelsk handelshus i London under Napoleonskrigene (A Norwegian-English Company in London during the Napoleonic Wars)*, Ada Polak gives a thorough presentation of the history of the firm Geo. & Ernst Wolff, which in 1792 was changed into Wolffs & Dorville.³ Ada Polak also includes some information about Wolff's work as Consul and mentions his relation to Methodism. Brief surveys of aspects of his activities are given in other books and journals.⁴ With regard to his engagement as a Christian layman and leader among Methodists, in the British and Foreign Bible Society and in the Danish-Norwegian Church in London a fair number of sources are preserved, but they are scattered in different places and not easily accessible. Also from Wolff's contributions in these areas glimpses are given in some publications.⁵ The only special treatment of his involvement in the Methodist movement is published in Norwegian by the author. Parts of this study together with some additional material serve as basis for the study written in English.⁶

Wolff's role among Methodists will be in the center of the investigation, and in particular his close friendship with John Wesley. Thus, the essay will mainly deal with the years from the late 1770s to the time immediately after John Wesley's death in 1791. It would go beyond the length of an essay also to include a presentation of Wolff's role as Methodist in the subsequent period,

¹The name is spelled differently in the various sources. In this essay the spelling *George Wolff* is used, except in quotation where the form found in the text cited is followed.

²As for Swedes who were influenced by John Wesley, see Ole E. Borgen, "John Wesley and Early Swedish Pietism: Carl Magnus Wrangel and Johan Hinric Liden," *Methodist History*, 38 (2000) 82–103.

³(Oslo, 1968).

⁴See H. Faber, *Danske og Norske i London og deres Kirker* (Copenhagen, 1915) 108–137; "Wolff, George," in C. F. Bricka (ed.), *Dansk Biografisk Lexicon* (Copenhagen, 1902); L. Daae, *Nordmænds Udvandringer til Holland og England i nyere Tid* (Christiania, 1880) 114–115 and 125; G. Poel (ed.) *J. G. Rists Lebenserinnerungen*, 1 (Gotha, 1880) 386, etc.; L. Daae, *Det gamle Christiania 1624–1814* (Christiania, 1891) 268–269.

⁵Odd Hagen, *Preludes to Methodism in Northern Europe* (Oslo, 1961) 18–19; P. Borgen, "Metodismen og Norge. Kirkebevegelse og foreningsbevegelse," in Per Øverland (ed.), *Norske frikirker—framvekst og konfesjonell egenart i brytning med statskirkeligheten* (Trondheim, 1981) 9–11; B. Eide Johnsen, *Han sad i Prisonen. Sjøfolk i engelsk fangenskap 1807–1814* (Oslo, 1993); Åge Holter, *Det Norske Bibelselskap gjennom 150 år, 1: 1816–1904* (Oslo, 1966) XV og 33; Ole E. Borgen, "John Wesley and Early Swedish Pietism," 82.

⁶P. Borgen, "Den dansk-norske konsul Georg Wolff (1736–1828). Religion, handel og politikk i dansk-norsk og engelsk miljø i London," in H. With Andersen (ed.), *Clio's tro tjener*. FS Per Fuglum (Trondheim, 1994) 45–75.

especially his work as one of the members of The Committee of Privileges. Other important areas are his role as one of the founders and pioneers of The British and Foreign Bible Society, and his activity relative to Danish and Norwegian prisoners in England during the Napoleonic wars of 1807–1814. Methodist work among those prisoners reached out also to some Danish and Norwegian sailors.

Among the many sources gathered in England, Denmark, and Norway it is of particular interest that in a handwritten diary by a Dane, Frederik Stoud, I have found an hitherto unknown account of a dinner party in George and Sarah Wolff's home, where two Danish and one Norwegian guests dined with John Wesley. This entry in Stoud's diary supplements John Wesley's own brief entry in his diary of February 16, 1790. A quotation of this section in Mr. Stoud's diary is given below in Danish together with an English translation.

It should be added that in the diary of autumn 1792 by another Dane, Johan Bartholin Eichel, there are glimpses given of his visit to a Sunday afternoon service in Wesley Chapel and of his stay at George Wolff's country house in Balham. Some points of information given by Eichel about Wolff's farm in Balham, are referred to in the present study, but his report on the visit to Wesley Chapel must be left for a later study.

I

In 1779 George Wolff appears in the leading circles of Methodism. He was then appointed as one of the trustees of John Wesley's City Road Chapel.⁷ This new center of Methodism had been inaugurated the previous year.

A minor piece of information might be added at this point. In the same year, 1779, Wolff's name occurs on a list of subscribers to a concert given by Charles Wesley on January 25.⁸

Wolff soon became a close friend of John Wesley. When Wesley stayed in London he often paid a visit to his home. According to John Wesley's Journal and Diary he visited Wolff in February, June, and December 1783, in February 1784, August 1785, January 1786, January and December 1787, January, February and November 1788, January and December 1789, January, February, October, November and December 1790, and finally in January and in February before he died on March 2, 1791.⁹

⁷George T. Stevenson, *City Road Chapel London and its Associations* (London, 1872) 250.

⁸Charles Wesley's notebook, *Concerts*, p. 5. The notebook is kept in the Methodist Archives, John Rylands University Library, DDCW 7/21. The notes in the book continue up to 1784, and several concert programs and lists of subscribers are given. Wolff was often present, occasionally accompanied by his daughter and son of his first marriage. For example, see p. 15.

⁹In John Wesley's Journal and Diary the dates for John Wesley's visits are: in 1783: 02/28, 06/04, 12/17; in 1784: 02/18; in 1785: 08/04 (Balham); in 1786: 01/04; in 1787: 01/03, 12/12 (Balham) (Testament); in 1788: 01/14 (Bal[h]am. sermon), 01/18 (Mrs Wolff), 02/21 (Bal[h]am (sermon), 11/13; in 1789: 01/20 (letters), 12/01 (Bal[h]am); in 1790: 01/20, 02/16 (Tues. I retired to Balham for a few days, in order to finish my sermons and put all my things in order), 02/18 (Thurs. 3 with Mrs Wolff, Wandsworth, 8 Balham, supper), 10/02, 11/06 (at Mr. Wolff's, christened), 12/29; in 1791: 01/31. See N. Curnock (ed.), *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, Vols. 6-8 (London, 1938).

What do we know about George Wolff's life up to this point? In her doctoral thesis on "Wolffs & Dorville" Ada Polak gives a thorough presentation of the history of the company. Some biographical information about George Wolff is given as part of that history. George Wolff was born in Christiania in 1736. His father, Frantz Christoffer Wolff (1699–1740) came from Schmalkalden, Germany, and settled in Christiania (now Oslo, Norway) as merchant. He was a dealer of imported drapery goods, fancy articles, and hardware.

In 1729 Frantz Wolff married Inger Bruun, daughter of a bookbinder, bookseller, and publisher by the name of Frederik Bruun. George was born in 1736. In 1740 his father died. Some time later his mother married again. George had a difficult relationship with his step-father. He did not thrive at home and left for London.¹⁰ He was employed as a clerk at the ship broker firm Pohlman, which had a Norwegian-born manager, Jens Pedersen. It was indicated to him that he was to have a share in the business after a certain time. Due to these promises he accepted moderate wages. George married an eighteen-year-old girl, Elizabeth Gorham, in 1760.¹¹

Wolff was not given any promotion by Pedersen, and his wife encouraged him to leave and start his own business as a broker. He did and was quite successful in his work. By an act of Parliament, signed subsequently by King George III on May 20, 1767, Wolff became a British citizen.¹² This status enabled him to buy and own British property. He asked his two-year older brother Ernst to come from Christiania and join him, and together they formed the firm Geo. & Ernst Wolff.

Elizabeth and George had three children, a daughter Elizabeth, a son Jens (b. 1767) and another daughter, Martha Ann. His wife died on June 30, 1770, only 28 years old.¹³

The firm of the two brothers Wolff grew rapidly.¹⁴ They worked both in broker business and banking, and organized trade to and from Norway. They organized the export of English goods for the Norwegian market, such as hardware from Birmingham, Sheffield, and Newcastle, textiles and drapery from Lancashire and Yorkshire, and china from Staffordshire and Leeds. Likewise they mediated the import of Norwegian goods to England, such as iron from "Bærums Værk," copper from Røros, fish and pigment from Stavanger and

⁹In her account of John Wesley's last days Elizabeth Ritchie tells that he also visited the Wolffs at Balham on 2/24–25/1791. Elizabeth Ritchie, *An Authentic Account of the Last Moments of that Great and Good Man, The Rev. John Wesley, M.A., who Died on Wednesday Morning March 2nd, 1791* (Leeds, 1791) 7; N. Curnock (ed.), *The Journal*, 8, 134–135.

¹⁰In John Rylands Library, Methodist Archives, PLP.114.7.3, there is a sketch of Wolff's life up to the time after he married (Elizabeth Gorham).

¹¹The wedding took place in London on October 15, 1760, as can be seen in the "International Genealogical Index," "Greater London Record Office and Library."

¹²Public Record Office, *Index to Denizations and Naturalizations, Years 1701–1800*, 170, State Papers George III: "7 Geo III no 170. (Royal assent May 20, 1767). George Wolff (Wolfe), son of Franz Wolff and Juger [Inger] his wife, born at Christiania in Norway."

Dr. Ruth Paley at PRO informed the present author that the Royal assent followed after the vote taken in the Parliament.

¹³Ada Polak, *Wolffs & Dorville*, 10–11; H. Faber, *Danske og norske i London og deres kirker*, 112.

¹⁴For the following, see A. Polak, *Wolffs & Dorville*, 22–39.

Farsund, and, in particular, timber from a large number of Norwegian towns. England had a period of extensive growth because of its industrialization and its many colonies in different parts of the world. At the same time it was involved in wars, such as the War of Independence in North America (1776–1783) and the Napoleonic wars (1793–1815). Thus, there was a great need for timber, especially for ship-building. Wolff's firm grew financially strong and could offer short-term credit and long-term loans to its customers. Norway was the main country for England's import of timber until Denmark-Norway in 1807 joined the Napoleonic side in war.

Wolff's firm built up a broad network of business contacts both in England and Norway. One of their main customers in Norway was the family Anker and their large business enterprises. The Norwegian shipowner, owner of mines, and timber-merchant Bernt Anker referred to this in the following way: "Jeg veed, hvilke uhyre Summer Georg Wolff har vundet ved de danske Staters Commis-sioner, de Ankerske Consignationer og ved Jess Anker. (I know the immense sums of money Georg Wolff has gained from commission business with the Danish State, the 'Ankerian' consignments and from Jess Anker)."¹⁵

The active and successful businessman George Wolff was an active and engaged Christian person. From 1778 and to his death he was an administrative leader of the Danish-Norwegian Church in London. He donated to the church an altar picture depicting Jesus in Gethsemane.¹⁶ In this church Wolff worked together with other leading persons in the Danish-Norwegian colony in London, among them the General Consul, colonel Peter Anker.

At the same time George Wolff was active in the Methodist movement. As already mentioned, in 1779 he became one of the trustees of Wesley's City Road Chapel.¹⁷ Some of the other Methodists connected with the City Road Chapel were persons with whom George Wolff was to cooperate closely during the years that followed. A close friend was James Love who also served as trustee of the City Road Chapel. Love paid frequent visits to George Wolff's country house in London's suburb Balham. James Love was a jeweler and hardwareman. Through Wolff's firm he did some business with companies in Norway, such as the firm Kielland in Stavanger and Niels Aall at Ulefos. Love died in 1795, only 47 years old.¹⁸ Of special importance was Wolff's relationship with Christopher Sundius, John Horton, and William Marriott. Sundius came from a Swedish family. He went to England, became a merchant and worked as translator for the English admiralty. In 1777 he heard John Wesley preaching in Foundery Chapel, London, and became an active layman in City Road Chapel.¹⁹ John Horton had a dyery and was a member of the City Council of London. He was a close friend of

¹⁵L. Daae, *Nordmænds Udvandringer til Holland og England i nyere Tid* (Christiania, 1880) 114, n. 1.

¹⁶Ada Polak, *Wolffs & Dorville*, 12.

¹⁷George T. Stevenson, *City Road Chapel*, 250.

¹⁸George T. Stevenson, *City Road Chapel*, 532-533; Ada Polak, *Wolffs & Dorville*, 12 and 166.

¹⁹John Telford, *Wesley Chapel and Wesley's House* (London, 1906) 63-64; Svend Evander, *Londonsvenskarnas kyrka genom 250 år* (London/Lund, 1960) 144. Evander tells that Sundius was the son of a well known Moravian minister in the Swedish State Church in Allerum, Skaane.

John Wesley and George Wolff.²⁰ William Marriott (1753–1815) was a wealthy stockbroker and was, just as his father, a leading Methodist.²¹

Wolff contributed generously to many activities in Methodism, often in the form of donations to societies. One such society which grew up was the Strangers Friend Society. It was organized in 1785. The initiative was taken by a former soldier, the Methodist John Gardner. He persuaded some of his friends to send in a weekly amount to support persons and groups who worked for the poor, the sick, and lonely people. Gardner met resistance, wrote John Wesley, and received an answer in a letter dated 21.12.1785: Wesley gave his support and pledged a weekly donation. The Society grew and was more formally organized in 1789–90, when John Wesley wrote its by laws.

The first printed Annual Report of this Society which survives, dates from 1803. G. Wolff, Esq., America Square, is recorded as giving £20 and appears in every subsequent Annual Report as a donor until 1824, just four years before he died. He was a member of the General Committee of the Society. Joseph Butterworth, William Marriott, and Christopher Sundius were also members of the Committee.²² Similar benevolent societies for social work were formed in many cities in England and Ireland.²³

In his book *History of the Origin and First Ten Years of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Volume 1, 407), published in London in 1816, John Owen wrote that Wolff took part in the founding of another society: “The author cannot take leave of Denmark, without adverting with respect and affection to George Wolff, Esq. a native of his Danish Majesty’s former dominions, and for many years his Consul in this country. This gentleman, to whom in connection with some other friends, the Naval and Military Society owes its origin” Owen here probably refers to “the Naval and Military Bible Society,” a society

²⁰J. Telford, *Wesley Chapel*, 57–58. N. Curnock (ed.), *The Journal*, Vol. 6, 295.

²¹G. Ernest Long, “Marriott, William,” in Nolan B. Harmon (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, 2 (Nashville, Tennessee, 1974) 1521.

²²The present author has examined the material preserved in the British Museum Library. The annual reports preserved were dated from 1803 and later, and had the title *Benevolent, or Strangers’ Friend Society* (London: Printed for J. Butterworth, 43, Fleet Street). The report published in 1803 carried the shelf mark B.680.(4) in the British Museum Library. A handwritten protocol is kept in “Greater London Record Office,” Acc 2330/6, containing a list of contributors back to 1795. The name of Georg Wolff occurs on the list. Furthermore, Tim Macquiban, Tutor in Church History at Wesley College, Bristol, wrote the present author in a letter of 06/19/1993: “The first printed Annual Report surviving dates from 1803. G. Wolff, Esq., America Square, is recorded as giving £20 and appears in every subsequent Annual Report as a donor until that of 1825–26. He was a member of the General Committee of the Strangers’ Friend Society.” (Dr. Tim Macquiban is now Director of Wesley and Methodist Study Centre, Westminster Institute of Education, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, England). Cf. Tim Macquiban, “Soup and Salvation: Social Service as an Emerging Motif for the British Methodist Response to Poverty in the late 19th Century,” *Methodist History*, 39:1 (2000) 28–43.

²³With regard to the ‘Strangers’ Friend Society,’ see N. Curnock (ed.), *The Journal*, 8, 49; Eric McCoy North, *Early Methodist Philanthropy* (London, 1914) 47–52; 143–144; W. Myles, *Chronological History of the People called Methodists* (London, 1913) 180–181; G. T. Stevenson, *City Road Chapel*, 448–449. In a letter to the author of 05/05/1993 Tim Macquiban, wrote: “The visitors, as far as I can ascertain were all Methodists, though many of the subscribers were evangelical Anglicans, and increasingly well-placed in society. I am interested to learn of the link of George Wolff with other charitable organizations. He was one of the most generous of subscriber to the SFS with an annual gift of £20” Concerning the later work of the Society, see Sampson Low, Jr, *The Charities of London in 1861* (London, 1862) 89–90.

which under the name of *The Bible Society* was organized in 1779. Two Methodists, George Cussons and John Davies, took the initiative and with the support of a group of philanthropists, including, as it seems, George Wolff, this society began the distribution of Bibles among naval and military personnel. The work of this society prepared the ground for the seamen's mission. When the *British and Foreign Bible Society* was established, the former Bible Society was given the more specific name of the Naval and Military Bible Society.²⁴

In 1799 Joseph Butterworth and others organized a society for the support of Methodist preachers. George Wolff, William Marriott, and Christopher Sundius were among the contributors from the beginning. The secretary for this "Preachers' Friend Society" was Joseph Butterworth. He had become a leading person in the Methodist movement and belonged to the same circles as did George Wolff.²⁵ Butterworth (1770–1826) was a bookseller in Fleet Street, with literature on law as his field of specialty. His home was a meeting place for Christian philanthropists, among them the well known member of the Parliament, the Anglican William Wilberforce. Both John Wesley and George Wolff knew Wilberforce well.²⁶

George Wolff was, as were Butterworth and Sundius, appointed Guardian of the Sunday Schools in and around City Road Chapel. The Guardians were organized as a group of persons who committed themselves to contribute at least 1 guinea yearly.²⁷

In 1803 the Methodist Missionary Society was organized, and soon missionaries were at work in Africa, Asia, America (in the West Indian Islands and Canada), and also in Europe. Up to the year 1824 George Wolff was one of the generous annual contributors to this work.²⁸

The merchant George Wolff thus supported generously the evangelistic and social work of the Methodist movement. In the necrology at George Wolff's death in the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* (3rd Ser. Vol 7 [Vol. LI from the

²⁴Roald Kverndal, *Seamen's missions: Their Origin and early growth. A Contribution to the History of Church Maritime* (Seattle, Washington, 1983) 52–56; J. Telford, *Two West-End Chapels or Sketches of London Methodism* (London, 1886) 448–449; L. Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists*, 3 (6th ed.; London, 1890) 314–315; G. T. Stevenson, *City Road Chapel*, 448–449.

²⁵See *Methodist Magazine*, 24 (1801) 369; 25 (1802) 341–342. In "Greater London Record Office," Acc 2330/5, there is a handwritten protocol with a list of donors in 1809. "Mr. Wolfe, American Square" was listed with the amount of £5-5-0.

²⁶N. Curnock (ed.), *The Journal*, 7, 471. C. J. Anker (ed.), *Christian Frederik og Carsten Ankers Brevveksling 1814* (Christiania, 1901) 263: George Wolff was to introduce Carsten Anker to Wilberforce, and Anker received a breakfast invitation accordingly: "Den gamle Mr. George Wolff skulde introducere mig, og efter to forgjæves Visiter fik jeg den forbindtligste Seddel fra ham [Hr. Wilberforce], indbydende mig at frokostere hos sig, naar jeg selv fandt for godt."

²⁷Greater London Record Office. The City Road Chapel Archives: *Sunday School. General Meeting Minute Book* (from 1798): "Meeting. New Chapel January 13, 1802. . . . Moved and Carried: That no Person shall be eligible to be a Guardian who is not a subscriber of a Guinea pr. Annum or upwards. . . . The following persons were appointed Guardians: . . . Mr. Butterworth, Joseph . . . Mr Sundius, Christopher . . . Mr Wolf."

²⁸See *A Statement of the Receipts and Disbursements of the Methodist Missions in the Years 1803 and 1804* (London: R. Lomas, New Chapel, 1804) 11; *An Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Methodist Missions*, by the Rev. Dr. Coke, General Superintendent of these Missions (London, the Conference Office, 1805): List of Contributors; and then the yearly reports up to 1824.

Commencement], 1828, 286) the following characterization was given: “He was a man of great humility, and ardent piety; and one of the most liberal contributors to the funds of the Methodist Charities in London.”

For activities outside the Methodist movement George Wolff was also a major donor. Among these The Society of Friends of Foreigners in Distress should be mentioned. On the model of other societies, especially The Society of Universal Good Will in Norwich, the foreign Protestant ministers in London founded this organization on June 30, 1806.²⁹ The minister of the Danish-Norwegian Church, Ulrik Rosing, and the minister of the Swedish Church, Gustav Brunmark, were among the founders.³⁰ George Wolff was one of the donors who contributed an amount annually to this Society of Friends of Foreigners in Distress. It should also be mentioned that George Wolff was “Governor,” that is, a great donor to London Hospital.³¹ Moreover, in 1783 Wolff gave 500 Rdlr. (Riksdaler) to “Waisenhuset” (an orphanage) in Christiania.³²

The name of another person among the first trustees of City Road Chapel in 1779 should be added, that of captain John Cheesement (1731–1783). He had left his profession as a sailor, and had later built up a fortune. His wife’s name was Sarah. John Cheesement died in 1783, and some time later his widow married George Wolff.³³

New tasks were waiting for George Wolff when in 1786, at 50 years of age, he became acting Danish-Norwegian Consul after Peter Anker.³⁴ On February 20, 1787 Kommercekollegiet (The Danish Board of Commerce) in Copenhagen appointed him as regular Consul.³⁵ His office became a center for Danes and Norwegians who came to London. He was in regular and close contact with the governmental offices in Copenhagen, and had an extensive network of contacts in London and in Great Britain in general. Now he was not only a successful

²⁹British Museum Library 1030 e28: *Account of The Society of Friends of Foreigners in Distress, with the Nature and Views of the Institution: also the Plan and Regulations, a list of Subscribers, and an Appendix, containing some of the most interesting Cases* (London, 1814) 4–5, and 67, note *. See also British Museum Library, 08282.h.37.(1.): *An Account of the Scots Society in Norwich. From its Rise in 1775, until it received the additional name of the Society of Universal Good-Will, in 1784*, 2nd ed. (Norwich, 1784). There was also a branch of this Society in London. See further the Annual report of 1787, British Museum Library, T. 261. (2.).

³⁰Hedevig Rosing, *Erindringer om Livet paa de engelske fangeskibe 1807–14* (Copenhagen, 1875) 15. Sven Evander, *Londonsvenskarnas Kyrka Genom 250 År* (London/Lund, 1960) 118.

³¹Frederik Sneedorff, *Samlede Skrifter*, Volume 1, (Copenhagen, 1794) 500–502 gives the following description of the hospital: “London-Hospitalet er den mærkelige Omstændighed, at det er bygt og underholdes ved blot frivillige Subscriptioner; enhver, som giver 5 Guiner om Aaret, eller 30 Guineer paa eengang, er Interessent, eller som det her kaldes, Governor af Hospitalet. Han har Ret til at indlægge een Syg paa Gangen, som har fri Seng, fri Lægemedler, fri Mad og vask. . . . Herr Wolf, som er een af Gouverneurene, var saa god og fulgte mig derhen . . . Ingen optages i Hospitalet uden Fattige, ingen frugtsommelige Fruentimmer, eller Børn under . . . 7 Aar, med mindre de pludselig ere komne til Ulykke; alle saadanne optages i Hospitalet uden videre, uden Recommendation, til hvad tid det er, Dag eller Nat.” See further H. Faber, *Danske og Norske*, 111.

³²It should be added that in 1805 George Wolff donated £2000 to the Norwegian Military School. See H. Faber, *Danske og Norske*, 111.

³³N. Curnock (ed.), *Journal*, 6, 395; G. T. Stevenson, *City Road Chapel*, 522–523; J. Telford, *Wesley’s Chapel*, 54–56.

³⁴*Kommercekollegiet, Journalsager 1786*, N 407: “Inkommet 22. August, datert 11. august: George Wolf i London beretter at han etter ‘Kongi. Befaling af General Consul Anker er overdraget Consulat-Embedet og alle Papierer som vedkommer samme.’”

³⁵A. Polak, *Wolffs & Dorville*, 8–10.

merchant, but also an official and the leading person among Danes and Norwegians in London. At the same time he had a central position in the circle around John Wesley.

II

As stated above John Wesley paid frequent visits to George and Sarah Wolff in their country house in Balham, seven miles outside of London. On Tuesday, February 16, 1790 John Wesley wrote the following entry in his Journal: "I retired to Balham for a few days, in order to finish my sermons and put all my little things in order."³⁶ According to his diary, the schedule for Wednesday, February 17 was: "4.45 Prayed, society; 8 tea, conversed, sermon; 1 garden; 2 dinner, conversed, sermon; 5 prayed, garden, tea, conversed; 6 read; 8 prayer, supper, prayer; 9.30."³⁷

The handwritten diary of a Dane, Frederik Stoud, provides us with supplementary information about the dinner and the conversation on Wednesday, February 17, 1790. His entry was written into the diary on the following day, February 18:³⁸

18 Febr. Igaar Formiddags kl 12 kjørte jeg ned til Etatsraad [Bernt] Anker & med ham ud at spise hos vor Consul Wulff, som har en Lystgaard i Ballam et Sted 7 Miile herfra. Det Merkværdigste i dette Selskab var den berömte Wesley's Nærværelse. Denne Olding er Hovedet for Herrenhuterne eller som de her kaldes: Methodister. Wendeborns 3, 166 & sequ giver en udførlig Efterretning om denne Mand & hans Sect.³⁹ Wesley ere en af de smukkeste gamle Mænd jeg har seet, der blev kun lidet eller intet talt om Religionen, saa jeg ikke hørte ham udvikle sine Meeninger, de ere da ogsaa desuden bekjendte nok. Talen løb meest paa det latinske Sprogs Litteratur, hvori han viiste sig at være af udbredt Lærdom, & jeg maae især beundre hans stupende Hukommelse. De personer, hvoraf Selskabet bestod, gav mig Anledning til mange Betragtninger. Etatsraad Ankers livlige Vittighed & sterke Sprog contrasterede forunderlig med Wesley's Alder, Sindighed & Lærdom. Consul Wulff & hans kone ere Methodister. Han sad ved min Side med foldede Hænder *pendens ab ore loquentis*. Undertiden vendte han sig til mig med et afbrudt Suk, naar Wesley havde udtalt x udbrød: hvilken Lærdom, hvilken Hukommelse hos den rare gl. Mand! Hans Kone, et af de vellystigste Fruentimmer jeg har seet, sad s[om] sædvanlig i bestandig Bevægelse & med et Smiil i Ansigtet, hendes Øine spillede til alle Sider, Gud veed hvordan Menigheedens Brødre kan opbygges ved denne Søster. Consul Wulffs Broder & hans Søn af første Ægteskab vare de 2 følgende Contraster. Hiin, en god ærlig

³⁶N. Curnock (ed.), *The Journal*, Vol. 8, 43.

³⁷Curnock, Vol. 8, 43.

³⁸*Dagbog over en Udenlands Reise fra 1ste Oct. 1788 til 1791 Jan 9, 1791*, by Frederik Stoud, (Kgl. Bibl. Kbn. Nye Kgl Saml., 132.t, fol) 170.

Apart from this entry Stoud states briefly that he had at various occasions had a meal with Consul Wolff. Fr. Stoud, *Dagbog*, entry on 2/2/1790. "Spiste i gaar Middags hos Consul Wulff." See also Fr. Stoud, *Dagbog over sin Udenlandsreise fra 16de April 1792 til 17de August 1795* (Kgl. Bibl. Kbh. Nye Kgl. Saml. 144 I-IV 8) entry on 11/23/1794: "... dined at Consul Wolf's . . ."; 6/30/1795: "Dined at Consul Wolff's today," etc.

³⁹Gebhardt Friedrich Angus Wendeborn, *Der Zustand der Staat, der Religion, der Gelehrsamkeit und der Kunst in Grossbritannien gegen der Ende des 18ten Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1785-1788).

Bogholder paa Contoiret, var endnu mer devot end Consulen om muligt, da denne yderst ennuyed med de forefaldende Discourser vendte sig halvt om & saae bestandig ud af Vinduet til Landeveien. Den unge Wulff er aldeles en Mand af the gay World, som ere hver Aften paa Bal & og holder sin Maitresse oppe i denne Ende af Byen. De to eeneste som ikke contrasterede, vare, troer jeg, jeg selv & Hr. Viborg. Vi mønstrede Selskabet, Mad, Wulffs Miiner, Wesley's Taler & gjorde eens Bemærkninger. Jeg kørte tilbage med Anker & hjem med ham, da han havde lovet at introducere mig i Royal Society, hvoraf han ær Medlem.

18 Febr. Yesterday morning at 12 o'clock I drove down to Departmental Counsellor Anker. Together with him I was to dine at our Consul Wulff, who has a country-house at Ballam, a place 7 miles from here. The most remarkable thing at this party was the presence of the famous Wesley. This old man is the head of the Herrnhutians [the Moravians] or as they are called here: Methodists. Wendeborn's 3,166 & ff. gives an extensive account of this man & his sect. Wesley is one of the most handsome old men I have seen. It was spoken very little or nothing about religion. Thus I did not hear him develop his views, they are after all also sufficiently known. The conversation dealt for the most part with the literature in the Latin language, in which he demonstrated extensive learning. I must especially admire his stupendous memory.

The persons, of whom the party consisted, gave me the opportunity to make many observations. The Departmental Counsellor Anker's animated humour and powerful language contrasted remarkably with Wesley's age, temper and learning. Consul Wulff & his wife are Methodists. He sat next to me with folded hands *pendens ab ore loquentis* [hanging on to the mouth of the one speaking]. Occasionally he turned to me with a sigh cut short when Wesley had expressed X, exclaiming: what a learning, what a memory of the remarkable old man. His wife, one of the most attractive women I have seen, sat usually in continuous motion & with a smile on her face, her eyes beamed in all directions. God knows how the brethren of the congregation can be edified with this sister. Consul Wulff's brother and his son of his first marriage were the two subsequent contrasts. That one, a good and honest book-keeper at the office, was, if possible, even more devout than the Consul, since he, when extremely annoyed with the conversation which took place, turned half away and constantly looked out of the window onto the country road. The young Wulff is completely a man of the gay world, who every evening goes to a ball and keeps his mistress up in this part of the city. The only two who did not form a contrast were, I believe, myself and Mr. Viborg. We observed the party, food, Wulff's looks, Wesley's speeches, and made the same comments. I drove back with Anker to his residence, because he had promised to introduce me in the Royal Society of which he is a member.

A brief presentation of the persons present should be given at this point. The Dane Frederik Stoud (1759–1823), Deputy member of the Board of Commerce, travelled with nobilities as a butler and wrote detailed diaries, one for the period of 1788–1791 and another for the years 1792–1795. After his return home from the last journey, in 1797 he was appointed a leading clerk in the West Indian–Guinean Chamber of Finance and Customs and became in 1798 the Head of its Secretariat. In 1799 he was also committed to its Board. In 1812 he became a deputy and from 1816 to his death, May 30, 1823, occupied the deputy office in

the General Board of Customs and Commerce. In 1808 he was granted the title Juridical Counsellor and in 1818 the title of Departmental Councillor.⁴⁰ Erik Nissen Viborg (1759–1822) was a Danish veterinarian and botanist.⁴¹

It is of interest to note that another Dane, Departmental Counsellor Johan Bartholin Eichel, in his diary entries on October 16 and 17, 1792 gives some glimpses from Wolff's country house at Balham. Eichel had a special interest in agriculture. Thus he only mentioned in passing that there were several buildings on the farm. The main building was standing apart, two storeys high. The garden consisted of two parts. One section had trees and flowers, just for pleasure, and the other section was a kitchen garden for growing vegetables. Beyond the garden was the farming area itself. In a corner a house served as shelter for the cattle. Eichel was present when a tutor came and gave Mrs. Sarah Wolff's son of her first marriage lessons in Latin and Greek.⁴²

In January 1789 John Wesley wrote his will and appointed George Wolff, John Horton, and William Marriott to serve as its executors. All three had close contact with Wesley during the last months before he died on March 2, 1791. On December 28, 1790 Wesley had dinner in Marriott's home, and the dyer John Horton was present at John Wesley's deathbed.⁴³

John Wesley, together with the superintendent of the Methodist work in London District, James Rogers, visited George and Sarah Wolff on February 24 and 25, 1791.⁴⁴ Elizabeth Ritchie gave the following glimpses of this visit: "On Thursday he payed his last visit to that lovely place and family Mr Wolff's, at Balaam, which I have often heard him speak of with pleasure and much affection. Here Mr. Rogers says he was cheerful, and seemed nearly as well as usual, till Friday, about breakfast time, when he seemed very heavy. About eleven o'clock Mrs. Wolff brought him home."⁴⁵

During this visit at the Wolff's in Balham Wesley wrote the following letter to William Wilberforce, whom both Wesley and Wolff knew well:⁴⁶

Balam, February 24, 1791. DEAR SIR,—Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as *Athanasius contra mundum*, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villany, which is the scandal of

⁴⁰C. F. Bricka (ed.), *Dansk Biografisk Lexikon*, 16, (Copenhagen, 1902) 473. "Efter sin Hjemkomst fra den sidste Reise udnævntes han 1797 til Fuldmægtig i det vestindiskguineiske Rente- og Generaltoldkammer, blev i 1798 Chef for dettes Sekretariat, 1799 tillige Kommitteret i Kollegiet, 1812 Deputeret og beklede fra 1816 til sin død, 30. Maj 1823, Stillingen som Deputeret i Generaltoldkammer- og Kommercekollegiet. 1808 fik han Titel af Justitsraad, 1812 af Etatsraad." Departmental Councillor Bernt Anker was a leading Norwegian in industry, political life and also in cultural life.

⁴¹Fr. Stoud's *Dagbog*, entry on 12/6/1789: "Hr. E. N. Wiborg, min Formand i Græv Moltkes Huus. Han reiser nu paa Veterinær - Videnskaben & Botanikken." Stoud sometimes spells his name as "Viborg." He was a Danish veterinarian and botanist. See "Viborg, Erik Nissen, 1759–1822, Veterinær og Botaniker," in C. F. Bricka (ed.), *Dansk Biografisk Lexikon*, 18, (Copenhagen, 1904) 514–521.

⁴²Carl Dumreicher, H. G. Olrik and H. Topsøe-Jensen (eds.), *Svundne Tider. Erindringer og Breve*, Vol. 6, *Johan Bartholin Eichel, "Reise fra Kiøbenhafn over Kiel og Hamborg til London Anno 1792"* (Copenhagen, 1947) 123–126.

⁴³V. E. Vine, "Horton, John," in N. Harmon (ed.), *The Encyclopedia*, 1, 1157.

⁴⁴W. L. Doughty, "Rogers, James," in N. B. Harmon (ed.), *The Encyclopedia*, 2, 2044.

⁴⁵E. Ritchie, *An Authentic Account*, 7; N. Curnock, *The Journal*, Vol. 8, 134–35.

⁴⁶John Telford (ed.), *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 (London, 1931) 265.

religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.

Reading this morning a tract wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by that circumstance, that a man who had black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no redress; it being a *law* in all our Colonies that the *oath* of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villany is this!

That He who has guided you from youth up may continue to strengthen you in this and all things is the prayer of, dear sir, Your affectionate servant.

Mrs. Sarah Wolff then brought John Wesley from Balham to his home on February 25, and on March 2, 1791 he died.

As one of the executors of John Wesley's will George Wolff played a central role in the difficult period of the Methodist movement after John Wesley's death. In the will, dated 25.02.1789, it was stated:⁴⁷ "I appoint John Horton, George Wolff, and William Marriott, aforesaid, to be the Executors of this my last Will and Testament, for which trouble they will receive no recompense till the Resurrection of the Just." The problem was that John Wesley later, on October 5, 1790, wrote a deed, which differed from the will at some points.⁴⁸ In a juridical declaration it was made clear that the deed of October 5, 1790, was a valid will and had precedence over the will of February 25th, 1789. In that way the matter was settled.

III

The present essay about George Wolff has covered the areas of Wolff as a Norwegian-born merchant in London, as the Danish-Norwegian Consul, as a benevolent Methodist layman, and as a close friend of John Wesley. The emphasis has been on his role in the Methodist movement and as a close friend of John Wesley. In this way we have followed George Wolff's life up to the beginnings of 1790s after John Wesley's death.

George Wolff lived a very active and eventful life during the subsequent period from the 1790s to his death in 1828, at the age of 92. There are sufficient sources available for another study to be written about these years, about George Wolff as a leading Methodist layman, as one of the pioneers in the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society and as an active supporter of Christian and social work among Danish and Norwegian prisoners in England during the Napoleonic wars, including the Methodist ministry on the prison hulks.

It seems fitting to close the present essay by citing a characterization of

⁴⁷N. Curnock (ed.), *The Journal*, 8, 343–344.

⁴⁸For the following, see William Myles, *A Chronological History of the People called Methodists, of the Connection of the late Rev. John Wesley* (London, 4th ed, enlarged, 1813) 191–196; George Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism*, 2 (London, 5th ed., 1872), 196–204.

Wolff by Ada Polak, who wrote about the firm Wolffs & Dorville and thus about George Wolff as a merchant. She maintained that Wolff's involvement in the Methodist movement was a key also to understanding his activities as a merchant. In her dissertation about the firm Ada Polak wrote: "Being capable, honest, unostentatious by nature, balanced and sociable he created sympathy, trust and respect from all who related to him. A main key for understanding his uncompounded personality is undoubtedly the fact that he was a believing Methodist."⁴⁹

⁴⁹Ada Polak, *Wolffs & Dorville*, 11. "Dyktig, hederlig, prunkløs av vesen, balansert og omgjengelig, skapte han sympati, tillit og respekt hos alle som fikk å gjøre med ham. En hovednøkkel til forståelsen av hans ikke svært kompliserte personlighet er utvilsomt det faktum at han var troende metodist."