George Whitefield

George Whitefield was passionate about inspiring people about God in creative ways. He was born in 1714 at Gloucester's Bell Inn in Southgate Street, just down the road from St Mary de Crypt. He was baptised and confirmed in St Mary de Crypt and went to the Crypt School, next door.

When he was young he realised that he loved acting and was very good at it. As an adult, he would act out Bible stories in his sermons in exciting ways and would become one of the greatest preachers of all time.

Whitefield was a clever man and obtained a place at Oxford University. In order to pay the costs of being at university Whitefield became a 'servitor' or servant to wealthier students. Whilst he was there he began a lifelong friendship with brothers Charles and John Wesley. Later, the three would work together, establishing Methodism.

Ordained in Gloucester Cathedral, Whitefield preached his first sermon in St Mary de Crypt Church on 27th June 1736. He was committed to communicating the word of God in lively and imaginative ways. He adopted the practice of preaching in the open-air and encouraged John Wesley to do so for the first time. On one occasion in 1739 on Minchinhampton Common more than 20,000 people came to listen to Whitefield.

In an age when crossing the Atlantic Ocean was a long and hazardous journey, he visited America seven times and had a key role in the evangelical revivals known as the Great Awakening of 1740. He preached outdoors nearly every day for months to large crowds as he travelled through the colonies, especially New England.

It is estimated that throughout his life, he preached more than 18,000 sermons, to perhaps 10 million hearers. He portrayed the lives of biblical characters with a realism no one had seen before. He cried, he danced, he screamed. Among the enthralled was David Garrick, then the most famous actor in Britain. "I would give a hundred guineas," he said, "if I could say 'Oh' like Mr. Whitefield."

His charisma, his voice (which could allegedly be heard over five miles), his small stature, and even his cross-eyed appearance all served to help make him one of the first celebrities in the American colonies. Throughout his life he raised funds to establish the Bethesda Orphanage - the oldest extant charity in North America. Whitefield died in the parsonage of Old South Presbyterian Church, Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1770.