

WESTGATE  
UPPER WEARDALE  
CO. DURHAM DL13 1LQ

# WESTGATE PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHAPEL

HISTORIC CHAPELS TRUST

TRADITION: METHODIST

BUILT: 1871

CONGREGATION ACTIVE  
UNTIL: 2007

LISTING: GRADE II\*

OS GRID REFERENCE: NY 905 380

METHODIST CHAPEL FOR A  
MINING COMMUNITY WITH  
SCHOOL ATTACHED



## TRANSPORT

Westgate Methodist Chapel is located on the north side of the A689 travelling west at the Alston end of Westgate. Parking is available in a layby on the main road adjacent to the chapel.

The nearest rail station is 20 miles away at Durham. There is an occasional bus service along Weardale from Durham to Westgate. The chapel is on the Wesley Trail.

## VISIT US

Due to building work the chapel may not be accessible, please check with us before visiting: [chapels@hct.org.uk](mailto:chapels@hct.org.uk).

No facilities onsite.

## HISTORY & BACKGROUND

From its beginnings in the middle of the 18th century, Methodism had a strong presence in the Dales, with preachers first visiting the area in 1742, and a preaching circuit established in the Dales in 1757. As the movement gained popularity this circuit was split into a number of smaller ones, with Westgate becoming part of the Hull North-Western circuit.

The hub of Primitive Methodist activity in the area was undoubtedly Westgate. A camp meeting in 1823 was held in a local field (now known as the camp meeting allotment) and was attended by over 200 people. There was at the time a strong tradition of outdoor preaching by Wesleyans – in spite of the British weather.

The first Methodist chapel in Westgate was built the following year, in 1824. It was funded by local subscription, and built through the manual labour of miners in their spare time. The first chapel highlighted the popularity of the movement amongst the mining communities of Northumberland. A preacher on the Hull circuit, J. D. Muschamp, was instrumental in the construction of the chapel, spending 50 days helping to build it, and soliciting donations. When the trustees of the chapel were unable to pay for the building work owing to a lack of funds, Muschamp sold one of his cows and gave the chapel the proceeds.

It was not until 1871 that the chapel was rebuilt, with the old building converted into a schoolroom. The new building was large enough to accommodate 500 people, and cost £1,300. The principle architect, George Race, was from a prominent local Methodist family, and his father, also George, is commemorated in the chapel.



Far Left: the pulpit viewed from the gallery.  
Left: detail from the iron railings.

UNFORTUNATELY,  
WESTGATE  
CHAPEL IS NOT  
ACCESSIBLE TO  
THE PUBLIC AT  
PRESENT DUE  
TO ONGOING  
BUILDING WORK

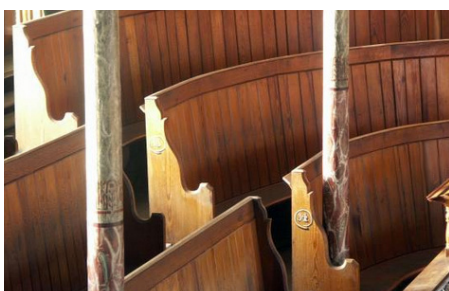
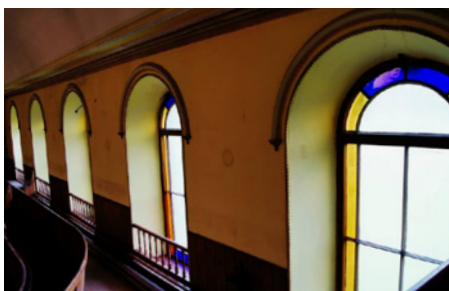
To find out more visit [www.hct.org.uk](http://www.hct.org.uk) or contact [chapels@hct.org.uk](mailto:chapels@hct.org.uk)

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55 ALIE STREET, ALDGATE, LONDON E1 8EB, UK | REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 1017321



## THE EXTERIOR

The plain exterior has simple classical details and does not prepare one for the riches within. A two-storied building constructed of sandstone, it is roofed with Welsh slate. Adjoining the chapel to the east end, and constructed in the same style, is the schoolroom, the original 1824 chapel.



Top: a decorated iron column and ceiling rose.

Middle/Bottom: Details of the windows and gallery pews.

## THE INTERIOR

On entering the building at the east end, a lobby allows you access to the gallery via a wooden staircase, and also to the main body of the chapel. Four columns of 19th century pine pews are divided by two aisles, and face a raised pulpit, enclosed by communion rails. The raised pulpit would have allowed the preacher to address those sitting on the ground floor and in the full gallery equally.

The gallery is supported by slim cast iron columns that are decorated to give the appearance of marble, and continue up through the base of the gallery to form arcades at balcony level.

Affixed to the gallery can be found a plaque commemorating those who fell in the First World War, while a roll of honour can be found in the schoolroom listing those who took part in the conflict.

Both the pulpit and gallery cast ironwork are highly decorated, indicating the pride this small community had in the construction and design of the chapel and the confidence of the Methodist church. The chapel is of more than special interest for the fact that it retains its Victorian form in its entirety – its complete interior displays high-quality artistic merit illustrated in the nature of its metal and plaster decorative detailing.

The organ, by Walker & Sons, which is not original, is situated above the pulpit at gallery level in the area formerly occupied by the chapel's band. To either side are curving doors with brass handles giving access from the chapel to a pair of small vestries with a store in-between. The vestries are panelled to half height, with wooden benches; one has a fireplace and the other an external door. Access to the gallery is via panelled doors with twisted brass handles. An original wooden staircase in the south-west corner to the first floor schoolroom, which is now a private apartment.

## FURTHER READING

H. B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church, volume II*

## SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

After 135 years of continuous service, Westgate Methodist Chapel closed in 2007, and was transferred to the care of the Historic Chapels Trust to secure its future in 2009. Following a fundraising programme, a first phase of urgent repairs to the chapel and school house was completed in October 2012. The organ has been inspected and tuned, and found to be in good order. Final sentence to read 'We are now raising funds for urgent repairs to the roof and the ceiling.'