

A Guide to Talbot Lane Methodist Church

The Crofts, Rotherham

Welcome to our church. When you stand outside Rotherham Town Hall and look across the square, it is not easy to imagine that on the site of Talbot Lane Methodist Church, with its 140-foot spire, there have been three places of worship in around two and a half centuries. Each of those places of worship has been distinctive in its architectural style.



In 1761, local Christians built a chapel octagonal in shape of a design much praised by John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of Methodism. Indeed, the great man came several times to the chapel in Bunting Croft to preach and was always generous in his praise of its design and impressed by the kindly folk who worshipped there. His visits are mentioned in his journal and are well worth a little research about his work in the area.

The octagonal chapel served its purpose efficiently until it became too small to accommodate the growing group of followers of Wesley's kind of worship. By the early years of the nineteenth century, changes were deemed necessary and the octagonal chapel was replaced on the same site by a much larger chapel in a classical Greek style - rectangular in plan, some 4000 square feet in area and with huge columns and pediment facing the lane in front. This robust building was constructed in red sandstone from a nearby quarry, probably near where Wilfrid Street now runs downhill to the left of the present day church. More red sandstone was perhaps brought from the Quarry Hill area behind the site of the Town Hall.

In its new chapel, the congregation continued to grow apace and extensions to the building took place in 1832 to allow seating for 1500 worshippers. There was a gallery inside the chapel that boosted the number of seats. Further changes in 1856 led to a reputation that the chapel had 'the most comfortable seats in the area'.

During the nineteenth century, the site was more than just a Methodist chapel. It was also a centre of education, for many of the townsfolk learned their reading, writing and arithmetic in the schoolroom attached to the large chapel. Talbot Lane was indeed a vital cog in the wheels of Rotherham's development in Victorian times.

More architectural change came soon after the death of Queen Victoria, though this time it was not actually planned by the congregation. On Friday 15th November 1901, an organ tuner named Lowe was at his work in the chapel when, accidentally, his lighted candle fell among the 'stickers' connecting the organ to its blowers and started a fire. So fierce was the blaze that the entire building was completely destroyed within an hour, despite frantic attempts to extinguish the flames. Many activities were taking place on that evening and, fortunately, everyone was safely evacuated from the building. It must have been a truly heart-breaking experience for Edward Nightingale, who had been the organist for 53 years. The minister, the Reverend W. Slack, managed to save a few documents and the chapel Bible which, though slightly fire-damaged, is still kept at Talbot Lane today.

A new place of worship was needed and here comes the amazing story of what people can achieve when they have need and when they seek God's help. Funds were raised, tenders sought, architects commissioned and building started. So well co-ordinated was all the activity that the new church, which you see today, was opened for its first service in just three days less than two years after the fire!

The new church of 1903 had seating for 850, including its gallery, and nearly all that seating exists today, making Talbot Lane the largest meeting place in Rotherham.

The church is built in Neo-Gothic style and has been justifiably described as 'a gem of Methodist architecture'. The interior features much beautiful oak and pitch pine woodwork and some of the most colourfully attractive ecclesiastical stained glass in South Yorkshire.

Talbot Lane Methodist Church has plenty to offer to the visitor. Take time to admire the sheer size and shape of this acoustically excellent church. Also notice the attractive chandeliers. Wonder for a while at the carved wood Lord's Prayer, the colourful hangings and banners and the model of the original octagonal chapel on the site.

The Nave

Make sure you climb one of the two staircases at the rear of the church in order to view the nave from the large gallery.

Woodwork

Look carefully at the woodwork around you, in all its variety. The pulpit and font are fine examples of early twentieth century oak workmanship and there is also much pitch pine in this church.

Stained Glass Windows

The fine windows show the skill of the stained glass artist of the 1900s. The main window shows Jesus welcoming the children (Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 19:16). The two smaller windows alongside show the Crucifixion and the Ascension.



Organ

The Harrison & Harrison organ dates from 1904, when it was first played on 8th March. Its rich sound fills the church with wonderful music up to its vaulted roof.

Recent alterations on the site have led to the demolition of the old building known as Friendship House and in its place is a car park to the left of the church. The porch from the car park gives access to the Talbot Lane Centre, a community resource in regular use after major refurbishment in 2004-5. The nearby Rotherham Minster has a similar but smaller resource centre and, as an excellent example of co-operation between the two denominations, both are jointly administered under the name of The Spires Project.

Goodbye

We hope you have enjoyed your visit to Talbot Lane which, incidentally, retains its old name from a street in front of the church that no longer exists. The street may have gone but Christian worship on this historic site lives on.

Hours of Worship

Sundays 11.15am
(followed by coffee)

Thursdays 12.30pm
(followed by light lunches)

Talbot Lane Contact Number: 01709 835037

This guide has been produced by Talbot Lane Methodist Church with support from Rotherham Churches Tourism Initiative (RCTI).

Text and Research: Ted Ring
Design: RCTI



Rotherham
Churches
Tourism
Initiative

© Talbot Lane Methodist Church

Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund

