

A Guide to

West Melton United Reformed Church

Melton High Street, Wath-upon-Dearne, Rotherham, S63 6RG
www.urcbarnsleygroup.org.uk



Welcome to West Melton United Reformed Church. The church was founded in 1796 and is an attractive Grade II listing building. Situated in a semi-rural area between Rotherham and Barnsley, in the village of West Melton, it enjoys an area of green land which many churches would envy. The church also has an interesting graveyard, which is well worth a visit.

History

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, a group of Presbyterians opted out of the Church of England. They believed that Christians should join together and that congregations should organise themselves independent of state interference. They became known as Congregationalists and Independents.

The church became part of the United Reformed Church in 1972 and the denomination was formed by the Union of the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England. In 1981 it entered into union with the Reformed Churches of Christ and in the year 2000 with the Congregational Union of Scotland. The United Reformed Church comprises 150,000 adults and 100,000 children and young people in 1750 congregations spread throughout England, Scotland and Wales. These congregations are served by some 1100 ministers, both men and women.

Dissention in West Melton

The origins of non-conformism and dissention from the Church of England are not very well documented. Research by the late Revd Robert Robson mentions the distinguished preacher Oliver Haywood as having connections with the district. The diary extracts show:

1665 *'stayed with Mr Coates, a non-conformist minister in the pretty little village of Wath'*

1696 *'stayed with George Ellis of Brampton (founder of the Ellis School at Brampton)'*

The first record of a Dissenters Meeting House in West Melton was in 1762, at the house of Joseph Bingley the younger. The second record of a Dissenters Meeting House was in 1796, registered at the house of William Linfitt. It was from this gathering that the Independent Chapel, worshipping in the Congregational manner, was founded in 1799.

The Early Church at West Melton

The present church was founded 1796 and built in 1799. A few years before the building was erected, the gospel had been preached by several wandering preachers. A Congregational Church was thought of as a regular meeting place for worshippers and it removed the inconvenience for the people who had been journeying to Masborough to worship. The Congregational Church at Masborough was, without doubt, the driving force for Congregationalism in the area. It's college for the training of ministers was significant in the early years at West Melton and beyond. The Masborough records show that as many as 18 people and their families from West Melton and the surrounding district were enrolled as members in the 1790s.

A letter dated January 3rd 1799 registering the building as a place of worship for dissenting Protestants was lodged with the Archbishops Court in York. This letter contained the names of John Carnley and Thomas Briggs. These two men were the main pillars at the beginning of this church. The deeds show that they purchased the land for £30 and loaned £300 to finance the building, which along with the generous donation of the Walker family of Masborough, accounted for the majority of the £800 cost of the original building. Both served Deacons until their deaths. See the display board for copies of the early records.

The Carnley family continued to be influential at West Melton until the 1880s. Daniel Carnley (son of John) was the founder of the Carnley Trust for the Poor of West Melton. The name Carnley Street at West Melton remains as a testament to the importance of the family.

Building Interior

The church interior was based on the original puritan thinking i.e. no stained glass or statues and little or no decoration. They were intended as Preaching Houses. The large gallery was installed shortly after the opening of the church. The school room buildings were erected in 1885 during the ministry of Revd Cooksley. The church was re-pewed between 1855 and 1881 during the ministry of Revd Boyd. The alcove at the front of the church housed a large pipe organ. This organ was removed in recent years because of the cost of repairs.

The Manse was built in 1843 but was sold after the retirement of the Revd Robson and is now a private dwelling. The church is licensed for weddings and the first couple to be married by license on January 23rd 1839 was Mr Joseph Carnley and Miss Ellen Jackson.

The marble tablet on the left hand side of the wall refers to a Mr Isaac Whitehouse who held shares in Cortonwood Colliery.



The Graveyard

The oldest graves are to the west of the graveyard and date back to the 1820s. The church has a file containing an inventory including photographs of the gravestones. The graveyard is still in use today, mainly for the internment of ashes.

Minsters at West Melton Congregational Church and (from 1972) at West Melton United Reformed Church

Revd William Moorhouse	1804-1807
Revd Mark Docker	1838-1847
Revd Thomas Gallsworthy	1849-1855
Revd Joseph Boyd	1855-1881
Revd W. Cooksley	1882-1895
Revd H. Wheale	1897-1903
Mr Clarke	1903-1905
Revd R. Brotherton	1905-1910
Revd William Hutton	1911-1913
Revd W. Clarke	1914-1918
Revd R. Brotherton	1919-1926
Revd R. Millar	1926-1933
Revd Robert Robson	1946-1965
Mr White (student)	1965-1969
Revd Lionel Anderson	1971-1992
Revd Richard West	1994-1998
Revd Nick Percival	2004-present

Goodbye

We hope you have enjoyed your visit. Please sign the visitors book before you leave and we hope that you will visit again soon.

Sunday Services

(please see church notice board for full details)

1st & 4th Sundays of month	10:30am
2nd & 3rd Sundays of month	3:00pm

This guide has been produced by West Melton United Reformed Church
with support from Rotherham Churches Tourism Initiative (RCTI).

Text and Research: Margaret Swallow and Les Peace
Design: RCTI



Rotherham
Churches
Tourism
Initiative

© West Melton URC

Supported by the
Heritage Lottery Fund

