

ALBION STREET, HANLEY
STOKE-ON-TRENT
ST1 1QF

BETHESDA METHODIST CHAPEL

HISTORIC CHAPELS TRUST

TRADITION: METHODIST

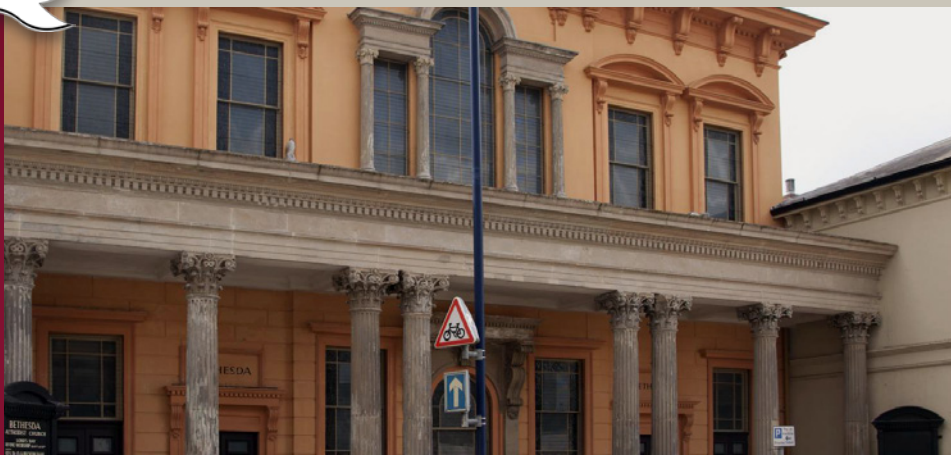
BUILT: 1819

CONGREGATION ACTIVE
UNTIL: 1985

LISTING: GRADE II*

OS GRID REFERENCE:
SJ882473

METHODIST 'CATHEDRAL' OF
THE POTTERIES



TRANSPORT

The chapel stands about 30m from the junction of Albion Street and Bethesda Street. The nearest railway station is Stoke-on-Trent, about 2 miles away.

There is also a frequent bus service to Hanley Town Centre and Stoke Bus Station is a 2 minute walk away.

VISIT US

To find out about regular Open Days or arrange a visit contact bethsdahanley@hotmail.com

There are no toilet facilities on site. WCs are available in The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery adjacent, during museum opening hours.



THE LARGEST CAPACITY
BUILDING OWNED BY THE
HISTORIC CHAPELS TRUST,
BETHESDA METHODIST CHAPEL
STANDS TESTAMENT TO THE
POWER AND INFLUENCE OF
THE METHODIST CHURCH
IN THE 19TH CENTURY, AND
TO THE PROSPERITY OF
'THE POTTERIES'.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

Bethesda Methodist Chapel was one of the first built after the New Methodist Connexion was formed following a dispute with the Wesleyan Methodists surrounding lay participation in church government in 1797. Dispossessed from their chapel in Hanley, the local Methodists first met at a house in Shelton, and then obtained a coach-house, as the popularity of the services required larger premises. However, this too was soon found to be inadequate. Job Ridgway, a wealthy local potter and co-founder of the chapel, wrote in his memoir that 'It was precisely one year and ten months after the division that our temporary place of worship was taken down in order to make way for the building of a chapel. The first brick was laid on the 5th of June, 1798; and it was opened on the Michaelmas of the year following'. The new chapel seated 600, although by 1811 this too was expanded to seat 1,000, in order to cater for the ever growing congregation.

Expanded for the last time in 1819, the work was undertaken by architect, and headmaster of the British School in Hanley, J. H. Perkins. Interestingly, many of the trustees of the chapel were also trustees of the school. The 1819 expansion also led to the construction of a Sunday school, large enough to seat 1,000, and other outbuildings for lectures and concerts, placing the chapel at the centre of community life. The total cost was around £8,000, equivalent to £500,000 today. As Hanley was the commercial and banking centre for the Pottery towns, so Bethesda was the centre of nonconformist religious life, especially amongst the middle classes, who were often Methodists and not members of the established church. Worshippers included pottery manufacturers such as the Ridgways, and department store owners such as Michael Huntbach, who was also mayor of Hanley. Bethesda drew notable preachers including in 1855 William Booth, who would later found the Salvation Army. In 1856 the pulpit and communion rail were added, while in 1859 the frontage was remodelled by the architect Robert Scrivener, who also designed Hanley Town Hall. The death of Job Ridgway's son John in 1860, a leading figure in the community who had been potter to Queen Victoria, combined with the more general trend that saw the middle classes move out of industrial centres, led to a slow decline at the chapel. The burial ground was closed in 1912, and by 1935 plans were afoot to convert the church into a 'mission centre' for Methodism. By the 1940s there were only 150 regular worshippers. A brief revival followed in the 1950s under the ministry of Bill Basham, but by the 1970s the chapel was in a state of disrepair, and on 29th December 1985, the chapel was closed for worship.

ENQUIRE & HIRE

THE CHAPEL IS PART RESTORED BUT LACKS HEATING. IT IS AVAILABLE FOR COMMUNITY USES EXHIBITIONS AND CONCERTS

To find out more visit www.hct.org.uk or contact chapels@hct.org.uk

THE HISTORIC CHAPELS TRUST | ST. GEORGE'S GERMAN LUTHERAN CHURCH,
55 ALIE STREET, ALDGATE, LONDON E1 8EB, UK | REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 1017321



THE EXTERIOR

Bethesda possesses a striking frontage on Albion Street, in an Italianate style with eight Corinthian columns, looking like Roman stone but in fact made of patent cement. From the Bethesda Street side, the old vestry building can be seen to the right of the metal gates. The entrance door on this side of the chapel leads down in to the crypt, which stretches half the width of the chapel. It contains the remains of prominent church members, including the Ridgway family. The burial ground situated to the rear of the building was taken over by Stoke City Council in 1978 who, having moved the headstones to one side, laid it out as a public garden.

THE INTERIOR

Unusually, the main entrance to the chapel is next to the octagonal pulpit. Designed by Scrivener, the pulpit is made of mahogany, and has a double flight of steps leading up to it, surrounded by a communion rail. To the left is the Bethesda Roll of Honour. The originals had been destroyed, but the rolls were remade through funds provided by the Friends of Bethesda, and they were rededicated in 2009. The glass memorial, above the door, is to the fallen of World War One who had links to Bethesda. It too was damaged but it was restored and replaced in 2012.

There is a memorial to William Smith, who was a business partner of Job Ridway, and a lay preacher to John Wesley. He preached at Bethesda just before he died, and he is supposed to have pointed to the spot in the chapel where he wished to be buried. It is thought that he was laid to rest between the pulpit and the vestry.

At the end of the east aisle is a fine version of the 'Light of the World', the design for which is taken from the painting by William Holman Hunt. The image shows Christ knocking at the door to a human soul, which is choked with weeds.

A dividing wall at the south of the chapel is made from three rows of pews. The pews were removed in order to create a room where the Sunday school could meet in the early years of WWII, the school building being used by the army for medical examinations. After the war it was decided to continue using these rooms for teaching purposes and community use.

The gallery has eight tiers of seats, which are supported on twenty-four cast-iron columns. The front of the gallery is decorated with raised panels painted in blue and white.

The organ, by Kirtland & Jardine, is originally from St Paul's, Kersal Heath, and was installed in the repairs conducted between 2010-11.

SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

Bethesda was transferred to the care of the Historic Chapels Trust in 2002, and gained wider prominence after featuring in the 2003 BBC programme *Restoration*. Bethesda is HCT's most ambitious project to date and so far two phases of repairs have been completed, costing more than £2m. The local committee, Friends of Bethesda and HCT are fundraising for a third to complete the restoration and bring the building back into a wide variety of uses.

Above: a school group visiting as part of the Palace project by ReStoke

Below: a choral concert in the spacious interior.

