

**Archaeological Recording  
of  
former Wesleyan Chapel  
West Hall  
Brampton, Cumbria**



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**April 2004**

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## **West Hall Chapel**

### **Introduction**

West Hall is a hamlet in the old ecclesiastical parish of Lanercost in north east Cumbria and the modern civil parish of Kingwater; it lies a little to the north of the B6318 Gilsland to Langholm road, on the north side of the valley of Mil Beck, a tributary of the Irthing, 8 km north-east of Brampton.

The former Wesleyan (Methodist) chapel lies on the east side of the single street of the hamlet, set back a little from the road. It has been disused for c15 years and a domestic conversion is planned.

### **Historical Notes**

There appear to be few published references to the chapel. Date stones indicate that it was initially constructed in 1835; the chapel at Nickie's Hill, 3km to the south west, was constructed in 1838. The chapel was enlarged and remodelled in 1883 (Bulmer's Directory of Cumberland 1901, 249); some surviving correspondence (Brampton Methodist Records, Carlisle Record Office ref DCFM 11/53) includes a letter from a Robert B. Lyon of 6 Sandhill, Newcastle, regarding a dispute over ownership of the land adjacent to the building, and refusing permission for the enlarged chapel to have any windows in its east gable end. The chapel was last used 'about fifteen years ago' and has stood unused since.

### **Description**

The chapel is a simple rectangle c 9.2 by 8.5 m externally over walls 0.48 m thick. It is constructed of coursed and roughly-squared stone; the northern third of the building, the 1883 extension, is of slightly larger and more regularly-tooled stones. The grey sandstone dressings show a typical 19<sup>th</sup>-century parallel tooling; at the angles are large alternating roughly-tooled and margined quoins. The roof is of Welsh slates, with a ridge of shaped and pierced terracotta tiles; the gables have plain bargeboards, with central finials, the eastern of which has lost its moulded finial and pendant. There is a small chimney just to the north of the ridge close to the west end.

The gabled west front has a chamfered plinth, largely buried over its northern half; there is a clear break between the 1835 and 1883 parts to the north of the door, and also a disturbed area above the door which might indicate the position of a window in the 183 building. The doorway has a two-centred arch and a chamfered surround, with alternating block jambs; its head, like those of the windows, is formed from two blocks. It contains a pair of boarded doors. On either side are broad lancet windows, each with its jambs formed from an upright block with a horizontal one above. The glazing of these, and all the windows to the chapel, plain fixed casements with opaque ribbed glass, is probably no older than the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and of no aesthetic merit. Above the door is a plain rectangular stone tablet with a sunk panel with the incised inscription 'WESLEYAN METHODIST CHAPEL 1835'; despite the date the style of the lettering suggests that this only dates from the 1883 remodelling, a conclusion aided by the fact that the earlier datestone (a block with a sunk panel simply containing the incised date '1835') has been re-used as the northern of the two gate piers of the forecourt.

The south side of the chapel has a neat chamfered plinth set around 1m above ground level, and a further pair of lancet windows, this time only having a single upright block in each jamb; above and between them is a cruciform iron plate marking the end of a tie-bar. The north side of the building (of 1883) is very similar, except for a slight change in character of the masonry; there is no plinth, and the ground level has been recently lowered. The western window has a horizontal block at the head of each jamb, but the eastern only a single upright block; between them is the cruciform iron plate at the end of the tie-bar.

The east end of the chapel, partly covered by a modern shed, has no openings. The break between the 1835 and 1883 fabric is quite clear, the neatly-chamfered plinth of the earlier period giving way to a taller and rougher one. Central to the 1835 building is a roughly rectangular patch of masonry which presumably indicates a former window position.

## **The Interior**

The doorway opens into a small entrance lobby with a stone slab floor; the rear wall is boarded, with stop-chamfered rails and uprights, and on either side are 4-

panel doors, with narrow stopped chamfers to the panels, opening into the main body of the chapel.

The walls of the chapel are plastered and washed pale green, with darker green borders; the ceiling is underdrawn at mid-height; there is a small trapdoor to the attic against the west wall. Above the entrance lobby is a box-like structure with panelled sides, with no access other than by ladder; its only purpose would appear to be to take a further ladder for access to the roof space via the trapdoor above. The roof structure is thus not readily accessible.

The floor of the main body of the building is boarded, a typical board being c14cm wide, except for a flagged area, contiguous with that of the entrance lobby, at the south-west corner where the stove formerly stood; the exit pipe for the stove is in the adjacent wall, a little to the south of the southern of the two western windows. All the windows have moulded labels of plaster, with turned-back ends; the terminal of this label is missing, perhaps damaged when the pipe was inserted. There is a boarded dado; the section around the position of the stove appears to have been renewed, perhaps in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

There have been three blocks of benches, with open aisles 0.75m wide between them. The northern block has had nine benches, the central six (the front one probably removed when the chapel was still in use, as its feet have been neatly sawn off rather than simply prized out of their sockets) and the southern, allowing space for the stove at the rear, seven. At the time of the survey the rear four benches of the northern block and three of the southern benches remained, but the positions of the others were traceable from evidence in the flooring. The benches have solid shaped ends, with minimal 'gothic' detail; the rear of the seats have narrow shelves on small brackets.

The dais, set centrally at the east end of the building, consists of a raised platform 3m wide and 0.9 m deep, with an elliptical arc of communion rails in front; the only access to the dais is by a central hinged gate in the communion rail. Access to the platform itself is on either side of the central reading desk, with steps up between square posts with moulded finials. The communion rail has balusters of diabolo type (ie with mouldings symmetrical around a centre point); the platform front and sides have open panels with smaller balustrading

of the same form; at the rear of the platform is a continuous bench seat, and behind it the boarded dado is stepped up to a higher level.

To the north of the platform is the harmonium, now in poor condition, by the Estey Organ Company of Brattleboro. Vt (Vermont) USA, with an importers' plate by B Scott and Sons of 48 Devonshire Street Carlisle. This was a fairly humble instrument, with only six stops, and is now in need of extensive repair,

To the south of the platform is a simple low fitted cupboard, with sliding doors, probably of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century date. On the wall above this is a marble tablet, a grey outer block with a white inner, with lugged corners, bearing the inscription:

IN MEMORY OF  
JOHN POTTS  
ROBERT BULMAN  
WHO WERE CHIEFLY INSTRUMENTAL  
IN FOUNDING THIS HOUSE OF WORSHIP

A small square of unpainted plaster between the two windows in the south wall shows the position of a monument, or perhaps more likely a clock. Above it is an opening with an inset piece of wood, rectangular except for a curved sill; might this be an earlier stove flue outlet? There is no sign of it externally.

An iron tie-bar spans the building, linking the two plates on the side walls, and has been taken advantage of to hang the most recent phase of lighting, two electric light globes; two more similar globes are fixed to the internal angles of the entrance lobby. Evidence of earlier lighting is seen in the form of two metal brackets or holders, perhaps for oil lamps, near the west end of each side wall. There are four suspended electric heaters.

### **The Forecourt**

The forecourt, the full width of the chapel and 2.6 m deep, has a wall 1.5m high on each side, with a rough arched coping, and a lower front wall; this formerly had railings, its arched coping having a central groove and individual railing sockets. There are a central pair of monolithic gate piers with segmental tops;

the southern is cracked, and held together by an iron strap. The northern, as already mentioned, is the re-used date tablet from the original chapel.

Lying against the external face of the south wall of the forecourt are a number of large blocks, obviously from former windows, cut with rebates for frames, and with sockets for window bars. It would seem reasonable to see these as coming from the windows of the 1835 chapel, which were probably plain square-headed openings.

## Analysis

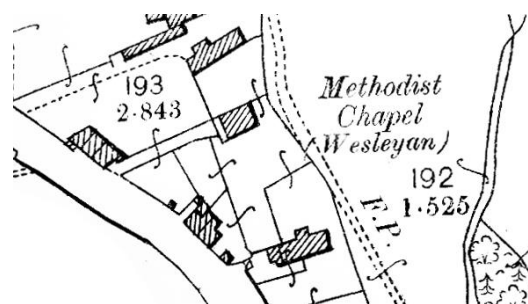
West Hall is a typical example of a small rural Methodist chapel, erected in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when both Primitive and Wesleyan Methodism were thriving in the area. As built the chapel was a simple rectangle in plan c 9/2 by m externally, entered either by a doorway on the west or perhaps, like Nickie's



Hill Chapel, one at the west end of the north wall. The remains of a window in the east gable suggest that the dais may have been set centrally on the south side, perhaps between two windows.

The 1862 Ordnance Survey 25":1 mile map (left) shows the original 1835 chapel, with a small outbuilding to the south-west.

In 1883 the chapel was enlarged and remodelled, being widened to the north and almost certainly heightened as well; the 1890 Ordnance Survey map (right) shows it in its present state. The present doorway and windows, although in a basic Gothic style which would not have been out of place in the 1830s, all probably date from the remodelling. The present furnishings contemporary as well, but are not of any particular merit other than that the dais and communion rails are of decent quality later Victorian workmanship. The building seems to have remained more or less





unaltered since this time, except for the windows, which were probably either sashes or small-paned casements, being renewed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. It remains a good example of the simplest and most basic form of village chapel with the usual emphasis of a congregation meeting to hear the Word. Although the communion rails form a visible expression of the Sacrament, they also serve to enclose the dais and thus isolate and emphasis the positions of the minister or preacher who, in a slightly unusual manner, could only gain access to the dais through a gate in the rails. Unlike many other village chapel West Hall never received the addition of a schoolroom or kitchen, whilst the original lighting (oil?) was supplanted by electricity at some time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As quite often happened, the chapel never seems to have had a fitted organ, the simple late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century harmonium giving almost a century of use until the closure of the chapel.



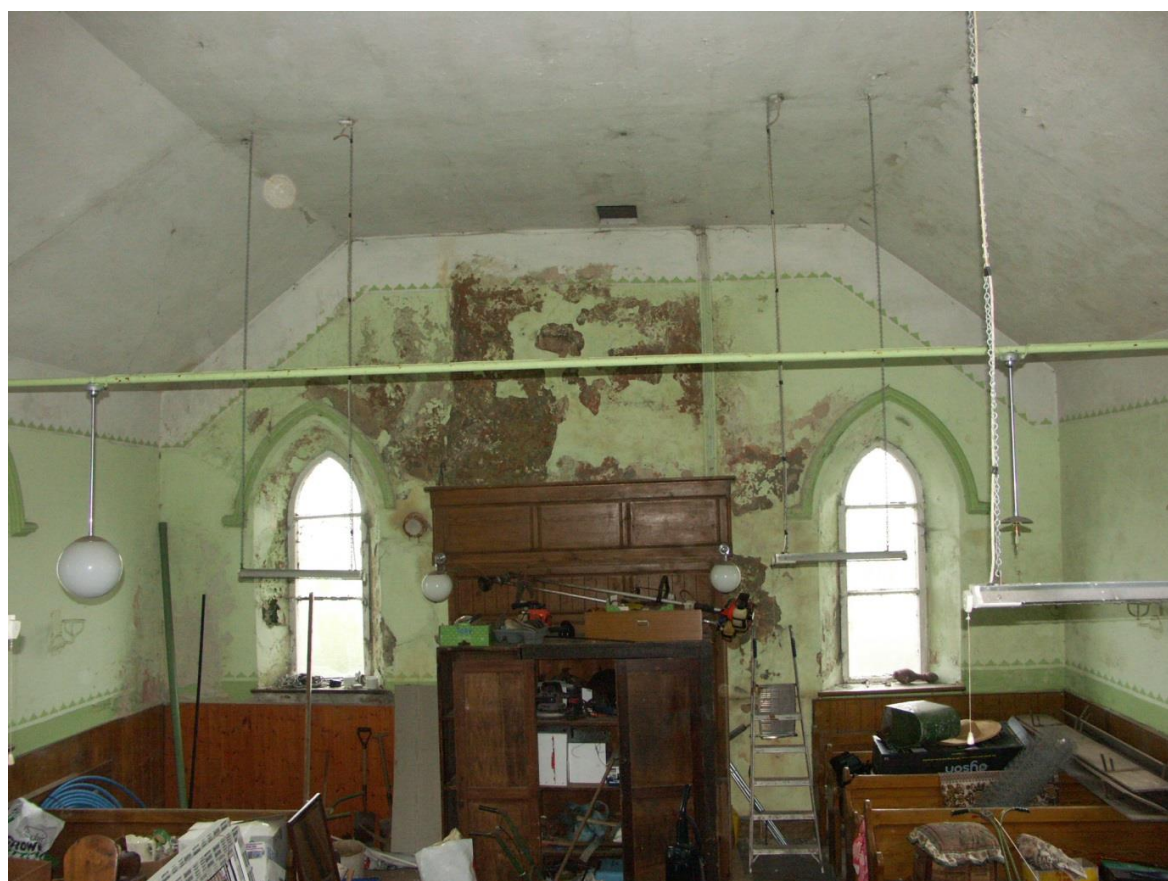
The Dais and Communion Rails; note central gate in rail





Interior of Chapel looking south-east

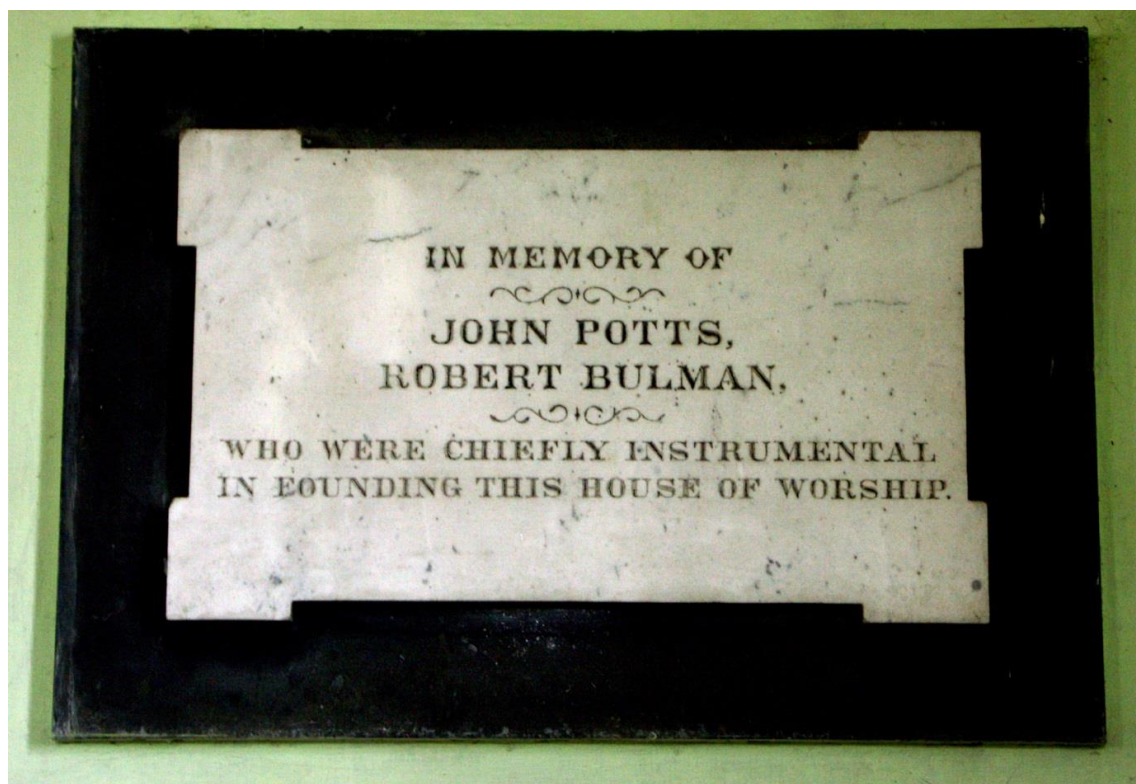
Interior of Chapel looking west





Lamp holder on north wall

Memorial tablet



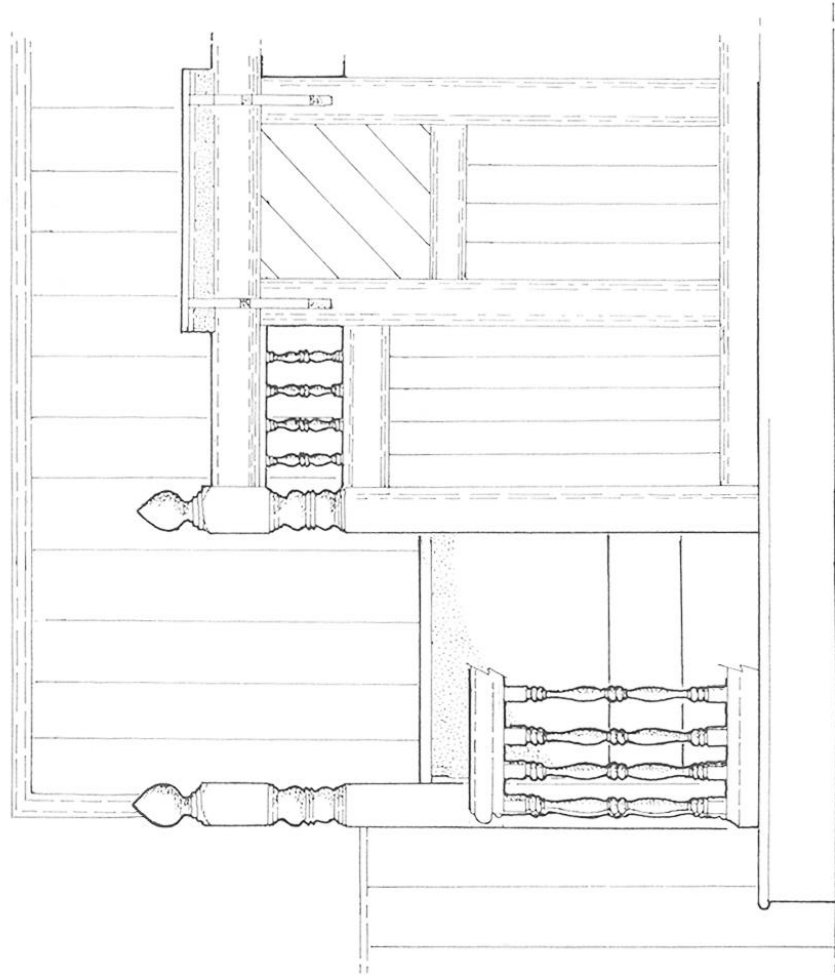
# WESLEYAN CHAPEL

## WEST HALL

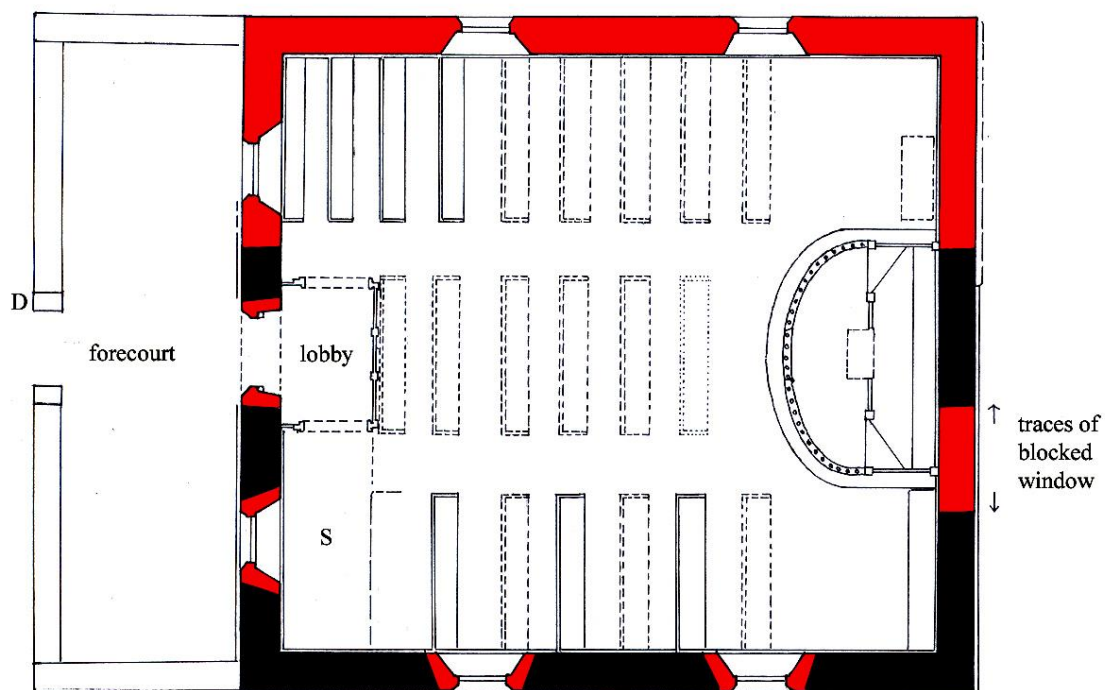
Lanercost, Cumbria

Part-Elevation of Dais and Communion Rail

Survey 21 4 04 P F Ryder







## WESLEYAN CHAPEL WEST HALL

Lanercost, Cumbria

Survey P F Ryder 21 4 04

1835 fabric

1883 reconstruction

S: site of stove (flagged area)

Benches shown in solid outline  
extant at time of survey

Benches shown in dashed outline  
removed since chapel fell out of use

Bench shown in dotted outline  
removed at an earlier date

D: Date stone '1835' reused as gate pier