

ST GEORGE'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

St George's Church has stood at the end of the Telford Bridge since 1860. At that time it was a Presbyterian Church, becoming part of the United Reformed Church in 1972 when the Presbyterian Church in England and the Congregational Church came together, later joined by the Churches of Christ.

However, there has been a Presbyterian congregation in Morpeth since 1693, originally meeting in various houses in the town, and then in a chapel in Cottingwood Lane (to the north of the town centre). There is a plaque on the outside wall to the right of the main door to John Horsley, the minister when the Cottingwood Lane chapel was built in 1721.

St George's is built on the site of a mill, and the remains of the mill race can be accessed through a trapdoor in the floor of the church. On account of this, and the fact that the church is close to the Wansbeck River, the cellar is prone to flooding.

Vestibule

Entering through the porch, you come to the vestibule. In front of you are two small stained glass windows. These were a gift from Morpeth Methodist Church in 2006, when they worshipped at St George's for six months while their church was undergoing a major refurbishment. These were designed by Jill Le Grice, a member at St George's. In the upper window, you can see the letters URC and MMC intertwined.

To your right in the glass case, there is a display of communion vessels, collection plates and other items used at various times during the history of the congregation.

Sanctuary

Enter the sanctuary through the doors to the right of the vestibule. This originally extended up to the roof of the building. However, in 1963, the church was divided horizontally creating a church hall, three meeting rooms and a kitchen as an upper floor.

South side of Sanctuary

The first window you come to is in memory of two church members, Kay Storrar and John Wallace, and was designed in 1997 by Jill Le Grice. It depicts the church and the River Wansbeck, which flows past this side of the building.

The second window is in memory of Dr James Anderson, minister at St George's from 1843 to 1882. He was the incumbent when this church was erected, and the driving force behind the project.

Next to this window you will see a plaque in memory of Dr William Trotter, placed in the church by Mary Hollon, his niece. Mary and her husband Richard played important roles in the history of Morpeth. Mary presented the clock in the church tower in memory of her uncle and grandfather Rev William Trotter who was minister for nearly 50 years at the end of the 18th Century. When Mary died in 1880, Richard set up the Mary Hollon Annuity and Coal Fund, which still continues to this day (now known as the Hollon Tea). The Hollon Fountain, to be found by the Clock Tower on the edge of the Market Place, was erected by the town as a memorial to Richard.

Further along, in the south transept, you will see a beautiful window installed in 1994 to celebrate the tercentenary of the congregation in Morpeth. The four roundels, depicting the parable of the sower and the seed, were designed by Jill Le Grice. Beneath it is an embroidery produced by a group of church members illustrating 300 years of Presbyterianism in Morpeth.

To your left is a plaque in memory of Dr Alexander Drysdale, minister from 1883 to 1920. He was also an authority on the history of Presbyterianism in England on which he wrote extensively. His portrait can be seen in the opposite corner of the church.

Near to this plaque are two pictures showing St George's as it was when first built in 1860.

North side of Sanctuary

Between the pulpit and the organ is a door leading to a staircase and the Anderson Room on the top floor. Here you can see the beautiful rose window (which can no longer be seen from the sanctuary as a result of the 1963 refurbishment). The room also has a photograph of the interior of the sanctuary before the refurbishment, showing the rose window and the gallery where the Anderson Room now is. Above this photograph is a portrait of Dr. James Anderson. The door at the side of the pulpit may be locked. However, if you ask a church member they will be happy to show you to the Anderson Room.

The two-manual organ was built in the 1880s by Harrison & Harrison of Durham, who supplied countless organs to churches in the area in the late 19th century. The organ was originally positioned at right angles to its present location and was moved during the 1963 refurbishment. The organ is well maintained and in regular use.

On the side of the organ case there is a display of Royal Maundy Money presented to John Wallace, a former Elder in the church, in 1990.

At the rear of the sanctuary there are two portraits. The first shows Rev Matthew Brown, who was the minister from 1829 to 1843; the second is of Dr. Alexander Drysdale.

The church spire

In 2006, it was discovered that the top of the spire had come loose due to corrosion of the internal tie-bars, and was in danger of falling off in a high wind! As part of the fundraising for the repairs, individuals were asked to sponsor stones with their names inscribed on their sponsored block. Many people from Morpeth and beyond contributed to this, illustrating the large number of people who value the building as a local landmark and icon for the town.

The great Morpeth flood of 12th September 2008

Like many houses, shops and businesses in the centre of Morpeth, St George's was flooded on 12th September 2008. Although the flood water only rose to a height of about 12 inches in the sanctuary, there was significant damage caused (for example, the whole of the wood panelling around the walls of the sanctuary needed replacing). The sanctuary was unavailable for a period of 6 months whilst repairs were carried out, and church services took place in the hall above.

However, the flood did have some positive outcomes as, whilst this work was being carried out, it was decided to make a number of changes, including:

- Modifications to the pew seating arrangements to allow better movement
- Installation of a downstairs kitchen

This year the decision was made to remove the pews and replace them with chairs and the new chairs have been in use since June 2017.

St George's United Reformed Church has been at the centre of life in Morpeth for over 150 years, and will continue to be a welcoming sight to visitors entering the town from the south for many years to come.