

St. Oswald's Church Methley with Mickletown

A GUIDE THROUGH CENTURIES OF HERITAGE

Welcome to our parish church which is of exceptional historical and architectural interest – Grade I listed. As you discover its features, we hope you will experience a spiritual peace on a site which has long been dedicated to the worship of God through His Son Jesus Christ.

When was the church built?

It was built in stages down the ages. Each stage can be seen **from the crossing between the doors.**

By 1050 AD a church already stood on this site. The foundations of a stone wall under the modern floor to the left of the North Door are belied to date from this period and can be seen on request.

By 1086 William the Conqueror's tax collectors found that Anglo-Saxon church in the village of Medelai and recorded it in the Domesday Book.

By 1250 the new church had been built. It's naïve and choir were of the same length as today, an impressive size for a relatively small village. The nave was still a single storey building with only the bare stone walls dating from this period. You can make the outline of the original roof on the right-hand side of the stonework above the main arch, just above the angel supporting the roof.

By 1350 the roof had been raised to its current height and the celestory window had made the nave lighter and airier. The tower had been erected in later centuries. It also featured a spire until it was finally demolished in the 1930s.

By 1400 the South aisle had been added, giving a more spacious ambiance to the church which

previously would have felt long but narrow. Much more recently, the impressive memorial to the first generation of the Savile family was placed in this aisle, just inside the main South door.



Now walk forward up the nave, passing a sculpted figure in a niche, a pulpit dated 1708. **Up two steps and into the choir.** This space has been much modified, but look up and you will see the original Gothic grotesque

examples of the stonemason's art from the 15th century. These corbels are there to support the roof but the carver's imagination gives us devils, monsters and lifelike faces, probably of local characters such as the priest.



To your left the organ case and the vestry were added on in the Victorian era, but the simple wooden screen leading into the vestry dates from the seventeenth century.

In the 1920s the chancel was extended and so the space between the communion rail and the altar with its carved reredos behind is relatively modern. The magnificent East window, with our patron St Oswald standing to the left of the cross was installed then, replacing a previous window of three panels. Much of the colourful stained glass from that earlier window is preserved in the vestry.



On your right you will find the truly exceptional features of the church. The wall has been opened up to make space for a magnificent monument, set under an elaborate arch. The alabaster effigies are of Sir Robert Waterton and his wife Cecily. Sir Robert died in 1425, leaving a bequest in his will for the chapel to be built and a priest to say masses for his soul. The chapel was built in around 1484.

Enter the Waterton Chapel through the narrow wooden gate and take a closer look at the figures. Sir Robert wears full armour and an elaborate headdress. His feet rest on a symbol of valour, the lion (although the sculptor had clearly never seen one.) Lady Cecily's head is supported by angels and her feet rest on lapdogs of fidelity. Monuments like this are not unique but this is rare that the heraldic shields on the chest are still brightly coloured with original paint.



On the other side of the Chapel stands another alabaster monument to the daughter of Sir Robert, Lady Cecily and her husband, Lionel Lord Welles. Lionel's suit or armour is an exceptional example of English workmanship with a jousting helmet under his head and fine details of his weapons and chain mail. One of Cecily's lapdogs is tugging at her robe, as if to wake her.

This monument was later modified to fit into the window niche, making room for the new owners of the Methley estate, the Savile. The vast monument to the first and second generations, now by the main door, originally stood in the chapel where the altar now stands. Above the altar is a window made up of panels and fragments of Medieval stained glass, probably from an even earlier East window. It's

structure of figures of saints with angels above is echoed in the Victorian design of the adjacent window.



Now look up to see the glorious ceiling with its gilded angels. High up on the wall hang various helmets, which were carried at funerals, not worn in combat, and several of the heraldic owls which feature in the Savile coat of arms.

The two splendid eighteenth-century memorial are to later members of the Savile family. On the inside wall are the monument to the fifth generation, Charles and Alethia. The sculptor, Peter Scheemakers, was Flemish but worked in London. Most of his work can be found in Westminster Abbey. Here he portrays the widowed Alethia mourning her husband, both fashionably dressed in Roman togas. The text engraved below them gives a potted history of their noble and learned ancestors.



On the outside wall stands the even grander memorial to their son John Savile in all the regalia and pomp of his elevation to Earl of Mexborough. His raised finger with its lace cuff points towards heaven. Lead scrolls on either end of the chest are engraved with every word of the proclamation which



Gave him his title. The sculptor here is Joseph Wilton, the finest sculptor of his generation and a founder member of the Royal Society. The son outdid the father, both in his title and in the grandeur of his memorial.

As you leave the Chapel, take a closer look at the carvings on the fifteenth century screen. A grotesque imagination is again seen at

work with Green Men and strange creatures, part man part beast, and a goat with a face on its behind, often used to represent the devil or a demon.

High up above the lectern sits a carving of St. Oswald, originally an exterior feature of the South porch. In a niche in the South aisle is a second medieval effigy forming a pair with the one mentioned earlier. They are memorials to two brothers, one a lawyer and the other a priest, dating from the fourteenth century.



Now to the massive Jacobean monument to Sir John Savile, his son Henry and daughter in law Elizabeth Wentworth. The couple suffered the loss of three children, the son kneeling at their feet and a baby son and daughter at

the base on the left. Owls feature prominently, both at the feet of Sir John and among the heraldic carvings on the front of the chest.

At the other side of the South door stands a simple front with an elaborately carved cover, donated in 1585 by Richard Webster of Methley, painter. A counterbalance pulley system means that it can be lifted easily for baptism.



The screen separating the tower from the nave is the work of woodcarver Robert Thompson. Examples of his trademark mouse can be found on the base of the screen and on many other items of furniture. On the upper walls of the tower are hung two boards, one with details of bequests to the church and on the other the Ten Commandments. High up in

the tower hang three bells dating from 1812, only one of which can now be rung.

Methley village was never large. How did it come to have such a distinguished church?

The land which William the Conqueror first granted to the de Methley family lay on the flood plain between the rivers Aire and Calder and were always fertile. In later centuries coal mining will have increased their revenues greatly. With the lords of the manor being major figures at court, the artists and craftsmen whom they employed were first rate. Other members of the nobility had their grand houses in this part of Yorkshire and there is no doubt that their rivalries can be seen in the churches which their wealth built and furnished to the greater glory of God.

Successive generations have restored the outside walls. This shows plainly on the tower with much patching of different stones. The view from the road is of the early twentieth century extension and the stonework has not yet weathered to the same degree. By contrast the interior walls of the nave are relatively unrestored.

We hope you have found much to interest you in the heritage of our church. Please ask the stewards for more information.

Feel free to stay a while in the peace of the building. Meditate, light a candle, say a prayer.

Donations towards the upkeep of the church and its work in the community are welcome in cash or by card.

May God's blessing go with you as you leave His house.