

St. Mark's

A Brief History



In 1818, following the Battle of Waterloo three years earlier, Parliament approved £1 million to build urban churches in newly industrialised areas. These churches were called 'Waterloo', 'Commissioners' or 'Million Act' churches. Initially around one hundred were built in England, with three in Leeds. Today, St Mark's is the only one that survives.

St Mark's was designed by Peter Atkinson and Richard Hey Sharp and built at a cost of £9,637. The first stone was laid on 23 April 1823, with completion in the autumn of 1825 and the consecration on 13 January 1826.

Since then there have been a series of alterations to the layout and appearance of the building. In the 1830s balconies were installed to provide additional seating. The cast iron front of the west gallery can still be seen, along with evidence of the south gallery.

The church was originally designed for hearing the preacher, as the main part of the service was the sermon. The original pulpit, where the preacher would have stood, was on the north side (your left as you look towards the front). In the 1870s, the building was re-ordered to provide a clear view of the altar (on the east side) as the service was by then centred around Holy Communion. Colourful ornamental patterns were painted on the walls and roof, with Biblical images around the altar.

St Mark's has a fine collection of stained glass windows. The large window on the east wall was installed in 1852.

This depicts the Ascension of Jesus above the four gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The most recent window is on the north wall and shows the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. This was created by Christopher Whall, a leading stained glass designer at the turn of the last century.

An organ, made by the prominent Leeds maker JJ Binns, was installed in 1889. It is now in Eye Parish Church, Suffolk. In the early 1900s there were further alterations to the building, including removal of the south gallery.

The large churchyard contains a number of imposing memorials reflecting the former prosperity of the area. There are also five World War 1 graves.

The altar from the side chapel is now in use at St Augustine's, Wrangthorn (Hyde Park). The war memorial on the south wall and the windows above it are from St Michael's Church, Buslingthorpe. They were moved in the 1960s when the building was demolished.

At its peak St Mark's had a church hall, school, soup kitchen, church institute, Scouts, Boys' Brigade and various other activities. Sadly, the congregation dwindled through the latter part of the 20th century and the last service was held on 15 July 2001.

The building remained empty for a number of years and was eventually bought by Gateway Church in 2008. Due to the amount of work and resources required it was not

until 2 March 2014 that the church held its first Sunday meeting in St Mark's.

The building is Grade II listed and the refurbishment was commended in The Historic England Angel Awards in 2016.

Gateway Church at St Mark's is now a lively and welcoming place again. Around 200 people regularly meet on a Sunday, with smaller group activities during the week. Gateway works with other churches and agencies aiming to share the Good News about Jesus, and to serve our neighbourhood and the wider community in Leeds, Yorkshire and the nations. Activities include a food bank, Gateway Tots, Alpha courses, CAP Life Skills courses, a youth group and social events. Gateway is partnered with Christ Central Churches, which is part of the New Frontiers family of churches.

