

# Walk into History

A series of walks curated by

## Swaledale Museum

The Green

Reeth

DL11 6TX

01748 884118

[www.swaledalemuseum.org](http://www.swaledalemuseum.org)

**Walk 6**

### Melbecks

**Total Distance: 4.25 miles / 6.8 km**

**Total Ascent: 610 ft / 185m**

**Approx Time: 2.5 – 3 hrs**

**Grade: Easy/Moderate**

## **Melbecks (easy/moderate)**

Glorious views of Swaledale, historic woodland, classic 'barns and walls' scenery, unspoilt riverside and insights into Swaledale's religious past combine into a varied and deeply satisfying walk.

An uphill stretch across two fields, plus an uneven path through Rowleth Wood and short road section which require care.

### **Start**

Large parking bay on S side of main road between Low Row and Isles Bridge.

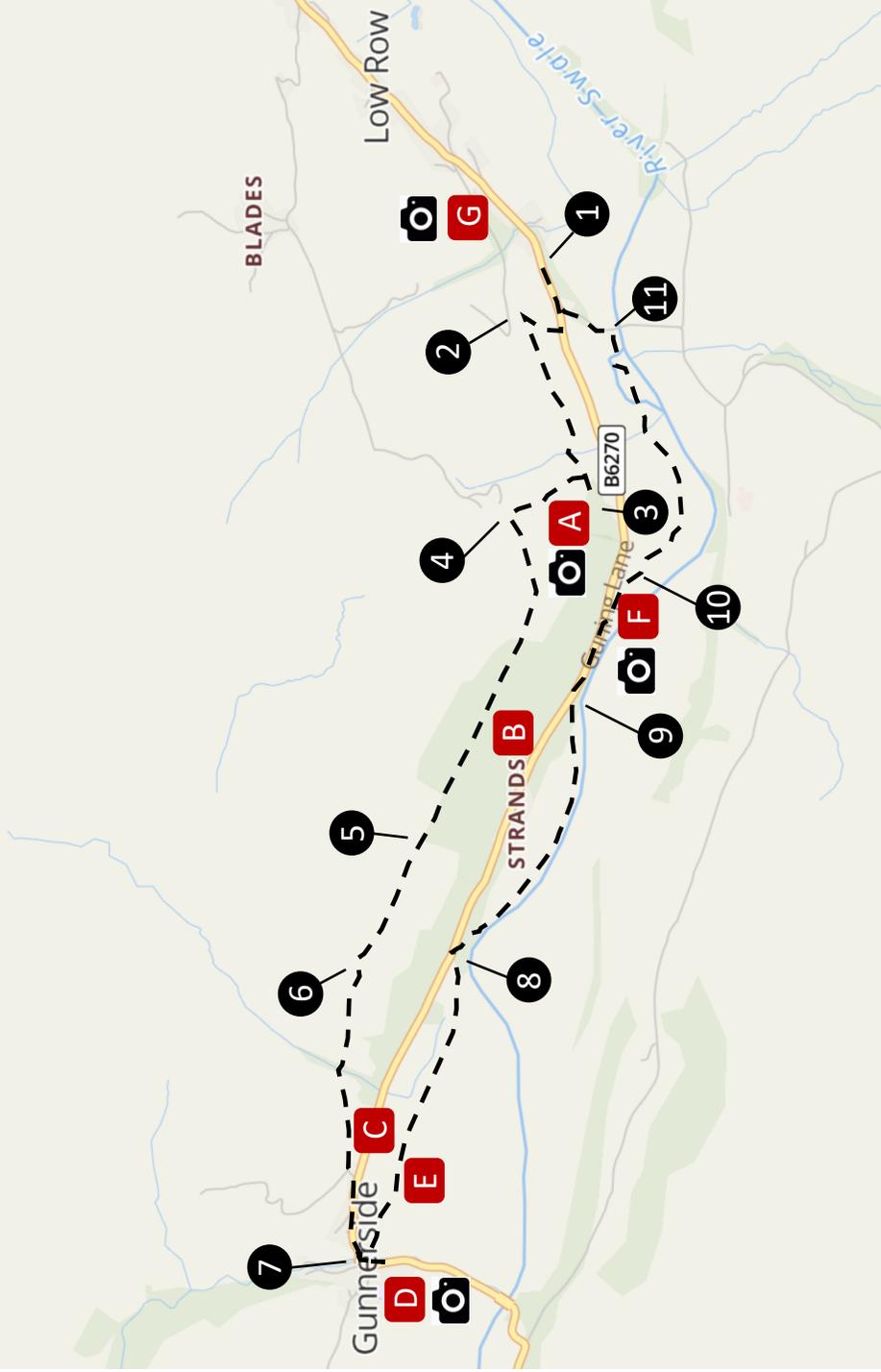
Grid Reference: SD 97899 97688

### **Refreshments**

Pub in Low Row. Pub and cafes in Gunnerside

### **Historical Photos**

Chapels, Gunnerside, Rowleth Bottom



- 1 From the parking bay, head up dale along the road. 50m after the turning to Crackpot, take a stepped path on the R, leading up via a gate to emerge from trees.
- 2 Once clear of trees, turn sharp L and then, always keeping on a level, pass through a gate and across a large field to another gate. Continue, soon with a wall on your R, just beyond a barn to the adjoining remains of Smarber Chapel.
- 3 Retrace your steps from the Chapel. Immediately after the barn take gate (now on L) and climb straight up through two fields and a gate to farm buildings.
- 4 Turn L just before the farm and follow path, passing through a gate then four fields to enter Rowleth Wood. The path through the wood is level but uneven and at times, slippery.
- 5 Leaving the wood, cross a field, then with a wall on your L three further fields to a tall stone-stepped stile that leads to a grassy track heading down hill.
- 6 Descend on this track until it joins a steep road beside a house. Go down this road to join the main road into Gunnerside and continue to the bridge.
- 7 Turn L after the bridge, shortly reaching Gunnerside Chapel on R. Then retrace your steps back to the bridge. Turn R passing in front of pub.

Before the public loos, take gate on L. Pass through ten delightful fields of Gunnerside Bottoms before climbing a clear, stony track leading to the road.

- 8 A gate on R avoids the road, and leads down through woodland to riverside. Continue beside river, eventually crossing a small (sometimes dry) stream to arrive back at the road.
- 9 Here turn R and continue with care along road for 200m, taking a footpath (signposted Isles Bridge) on R beside a metal gate into a field. The path across the field leads to a green chalet ahead.
- 10 Just before the chalet, pass through a stile and then a metal gate leading to a boardwalk. Take the boardwalk, turn R and then continue around field boundary. Let yellow waymarkers lead you across a wooden footbridge and then a stone one. Then head across the 'beach' towards Isles Bridge.
- 11 Climb the stone steps up to the bridge, turn L and walk up to join the main road leading back to the parking bay.

150m beyond the parking bay is Low Row United Reform Church. A quick (but careful) detour along the road completes a trio of Melbecks Nonconformist chapels.

**A**  The 'Five Mile Act' of 1665 (repealed 1828) required nonconformist chapels to be at least five miles from churches. Lord Wharton established Smarber Chapel, (Swaledale's first independent chapel) suitably distanced from Grinton and Muker, in 1690 in a former shooting lodge. It closed in 1809 and fell into disrepair, after a new chapel was built at Low Row.

**B** Rich in biodiversity, Rowleth Wood is also of historic interest, still displaying its origins as 'wood pasture' (agroforestry), providing both wood and grazing to medieval commoners and containing ancient elm pollards.

**C** Look out for the information board for Lane Foot, the ruins of two miner's houses. Fourteen people lived here in mining's hayday. They were both abandoned by 1891.

**D**  Built in 1866, Gunnerside Chapel is the only functioning Methodist Chapel in Swaledale. There is an old poster for its 'Shortest Day' Celebration in Swaledale Museum.

**E** You are in the heart of the largest conservation area in England. Gunnerside Bottoms is classic 'barns and walls' meadow landscape, the stonework mostly dating back to the decades either side of 1800.

**F** An annual Sports Day is still held here in Rowleth Bottoms. The pictures date from 1905 and 1925.

**G** A chapel was built here in 1809 to replace Smarber Chapel. A major rebuild in 1874 created the present day structure. The picture of the sewing meeting is dated 1898.

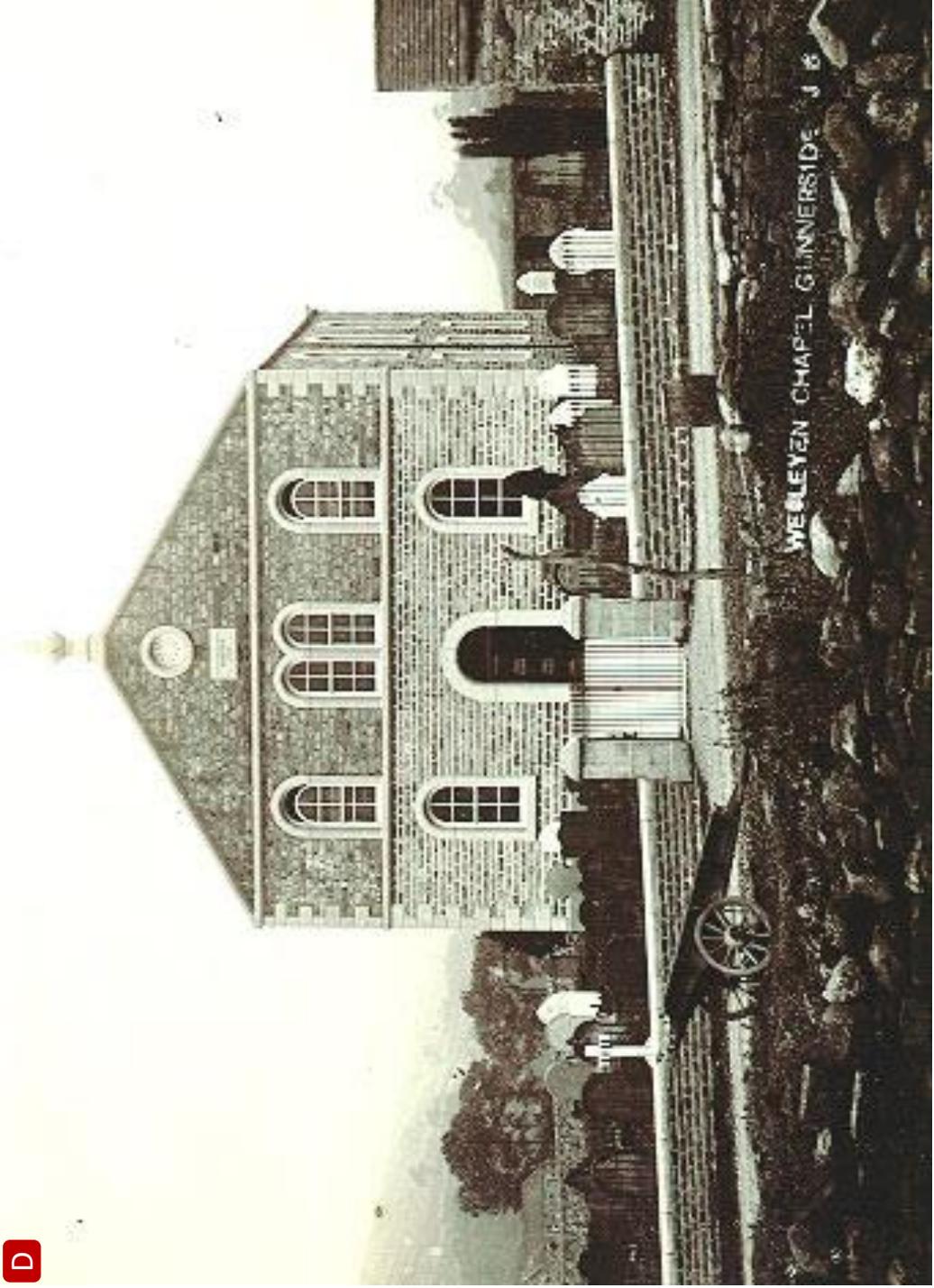




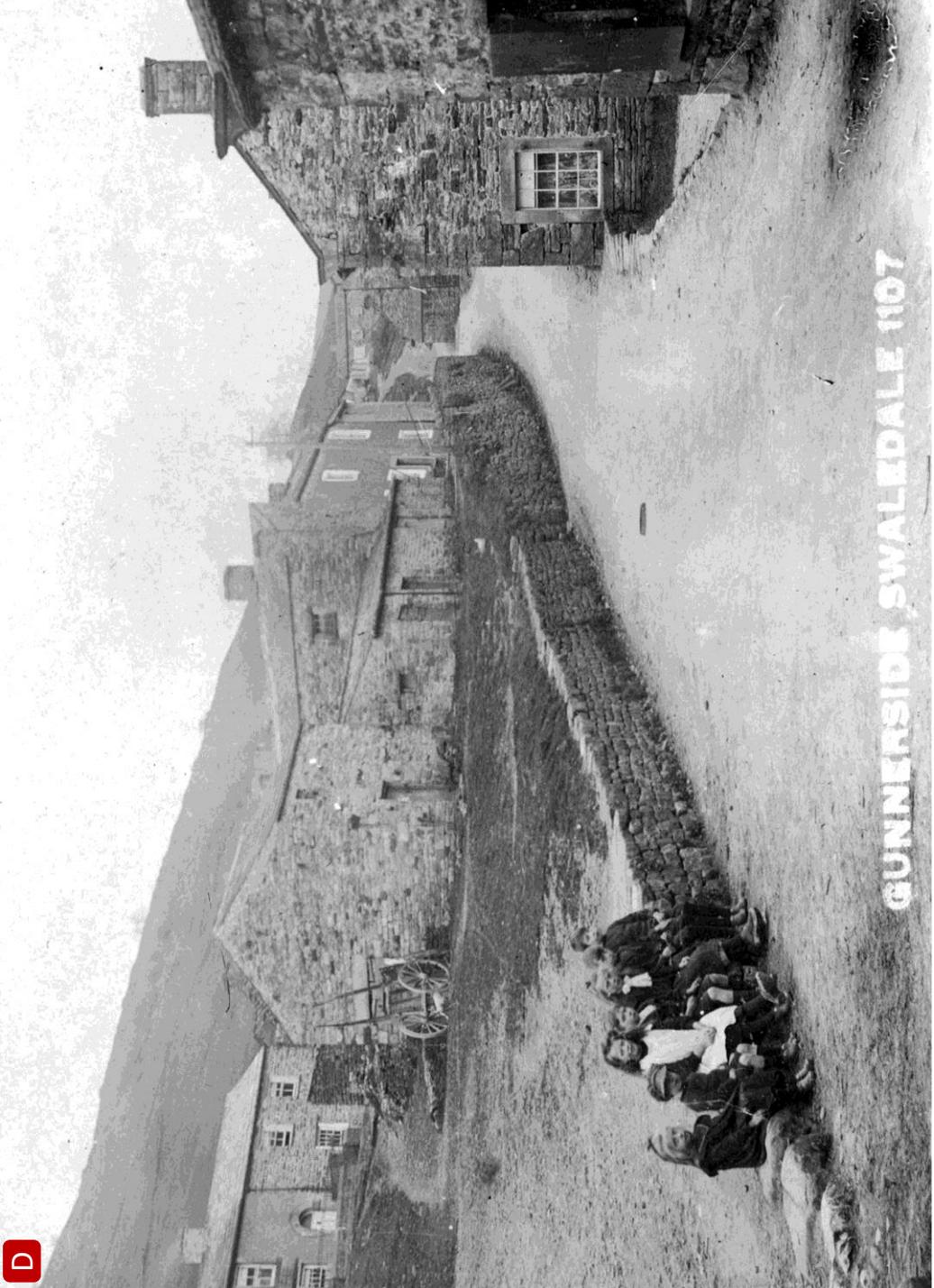
Smarber Hall Congregational Church  
Gunnerville

242nd Year of Nonconformism in Swaledale  
Commemoration Service  
14th August 1932

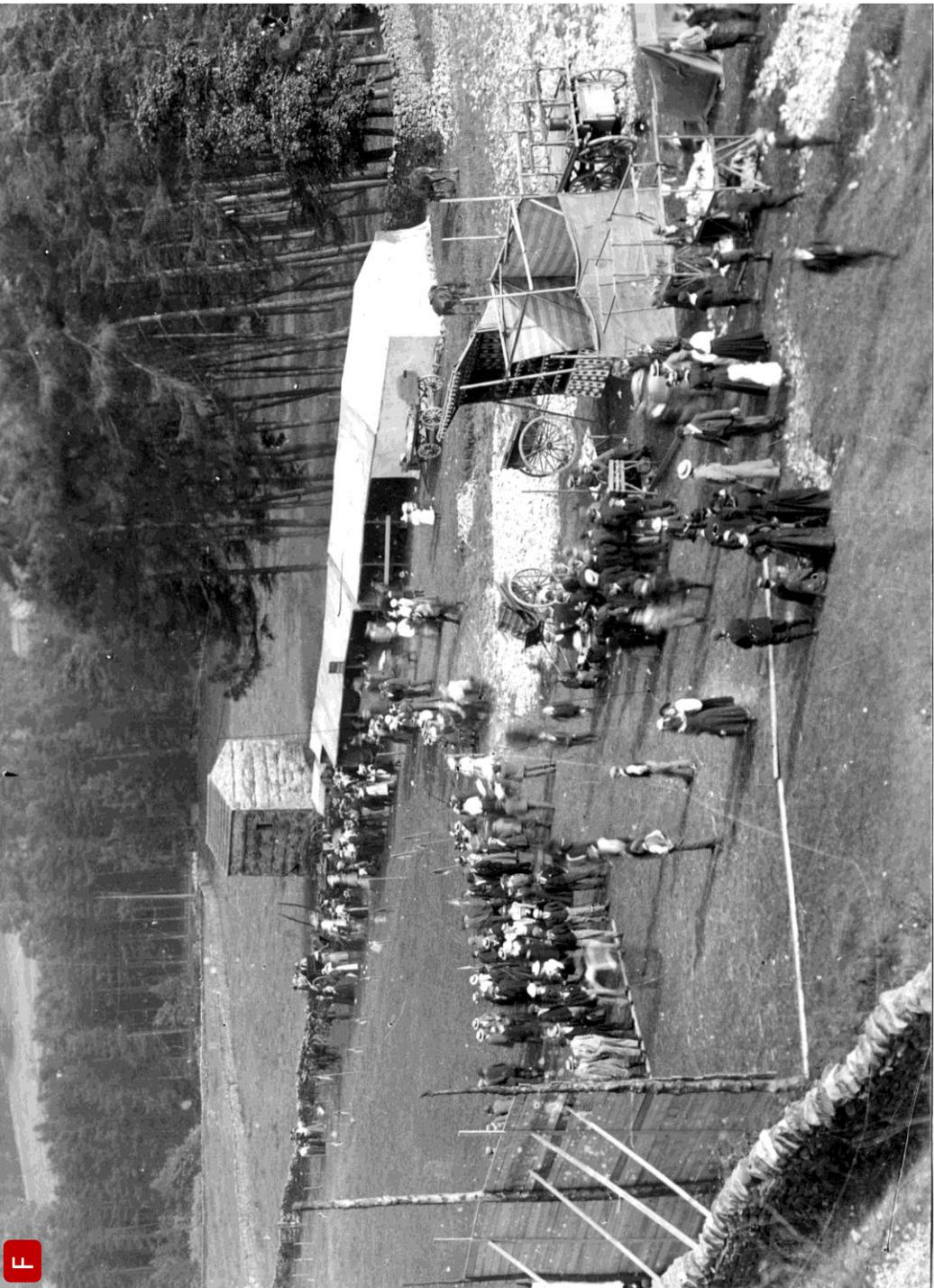




WESLEYAN CHAPEL GUNNERSIDE J 6

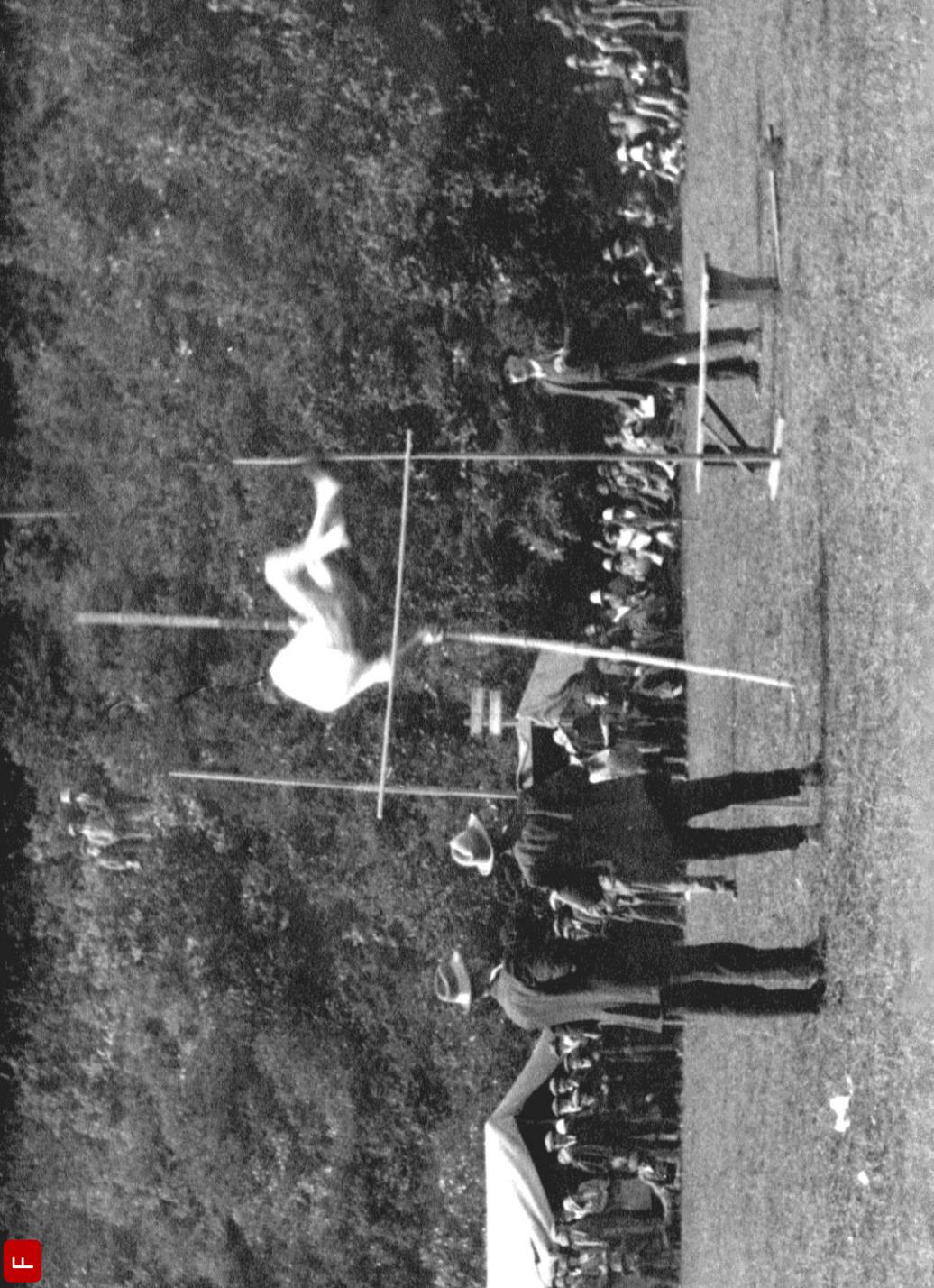


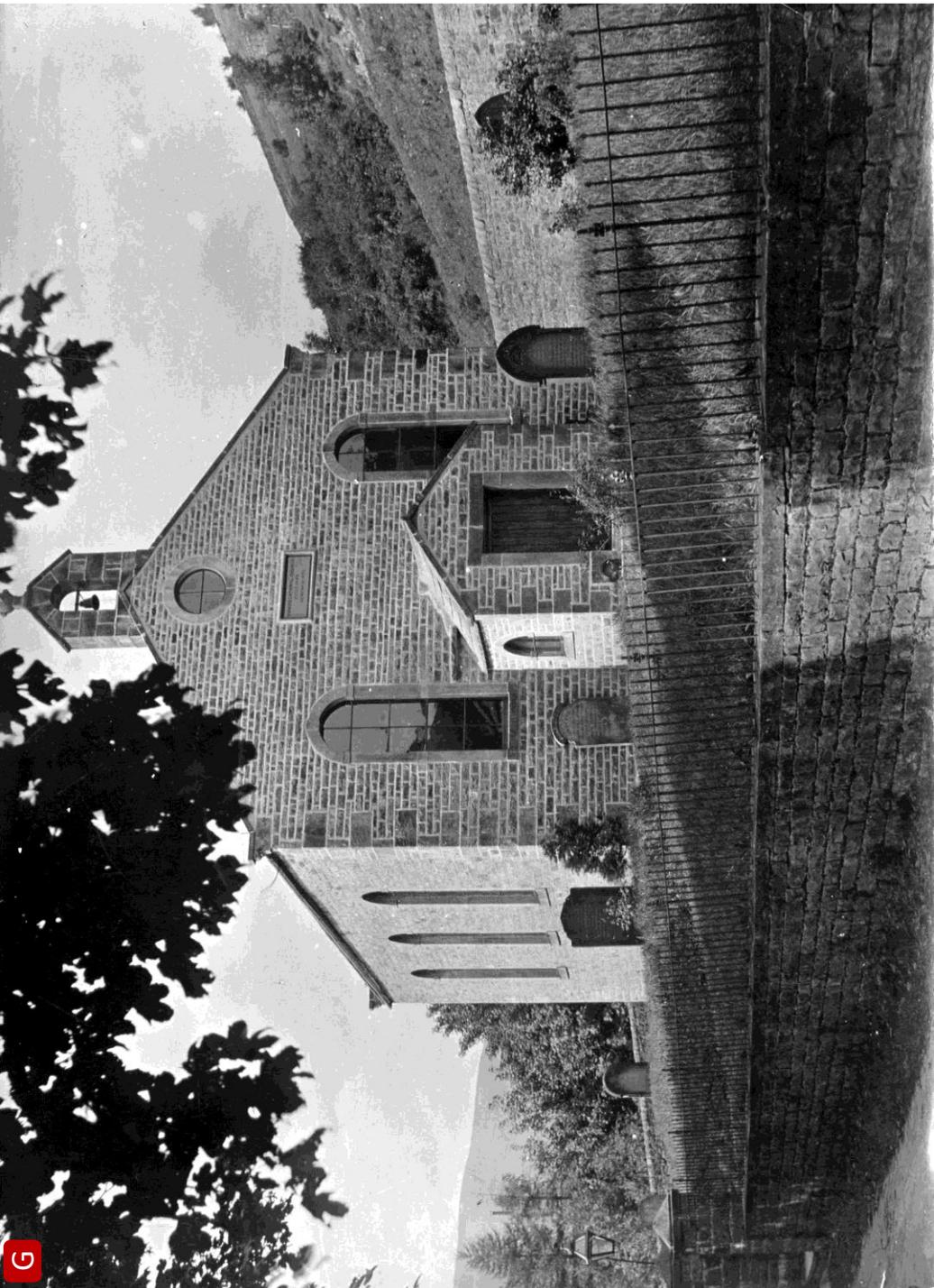
GUNNERSIDE SWALEDALE 1107





Randall - N. 5th St  
1915







## Credits

Gunnerside Chapel photo is from a postcard collection maintained at [www.gunnerside.info](http://www.gunnerside.info)

All other photos from 'A Pictorial Record of The Low Row Area Swaledale (Before 1999)' prepared by David N Bulman in 2000 using photos donated by residents.

Photos have been cropped for presentation.

## Further Reading

**Campbell, Jocelyn**, *The Flowers of Swaledale*, Hayloft, 2014<sup>1,3</sup>

(which includes the flowers that can be seen in the world famous hay meadows featured in this walk)

**Batty, Margaret**, *Gunnerside Chapel and Gunnerside Folk*, 1967 <sup>1,2,3</sup>

continued over page

## Further Reading (cont)

**Batty, Margaret**, *The Story of the Methodist Church Low Row in Swaledale*, 1993<sup>3</sup>

**Hardy, John**, *The Methodists of Swaledale & Arkengarthdale and their Chapels*, 2007<sup>3</sup>

**Fleming, Andrew**, *Swaledale. Valley of the Wild River*, Edinburgh University Press, 1998, and reprint of 1st edition by Windgather Press/Oxbow Books, 2010<sup>1,3</sup>

Copies of the posters for Gunnerside Methodist Sunday School (17), Methodist Chapel Low Row (9, 14, & 16) and Congregational church Low Row (6) can be seen and purchased from the Museum website.