

THE CHAPELS SOCIETY

VISIT TO MID-SOMERSET 28th SEPTEMBER 2013

Travel Guidance

The tour starts and finishes in TAUNTON. The coach is due to leave the downside (south) forecourt of the railway station at 10.30am. It will drop us at Rowbarton Methodist Church near to the railway station for tea at about 5pm.

By train *Services direct or connecting with those from Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Cardiff, Bristol, London, Southampton, Exeter and Penzance are normally due into Taunton by 10.20am. Taunton is a closed station. Please use the exit barrier at the east end of platform 2 (the downside, not the one in the subway). Returning connections leave after our anticipated return to Taunton at 5.30pm.*

By coach and 'bus *Taunton bus station is a hub in the local, regional and national network. There are regular local bus services from there to the railway station (25 and 29 stopping in Station Road under the railway bridge and 28 for Minehead stopping in the downside railway station forecourt), local buses 1 & 2 run from the Parade to Station Road bridge and there is an adjacent taxi rank. Allow 15/20 minutes to walk between the two stations.*

By car *There is a long stay car park (Kilkenny) run by the Borough Council (day fee £5.10) on the north side of the railway station and a smaller one (Station Car Park) to the south by the downside station forecourt. Taunton is a regional hub in the road network on the A38 and with access from the M5 (exit 25). Follow signs for the railway station. Be prepared for delays in the town associated with the renewal of water mains.*

Please bring your own packed lunch. *Teas and coffees will be provided during the tour.*

CHAPEL NOTES

by Peter Daniel, David Dawson and Roger Thorne.

Mid-Somerset is a landscape of escarpments dividing large areas of very low-lying land, much susceptible to flooding in the winter. The agricultural prosperity of the area gave rise to a rich industrial heritage which is manifest in the towns and villages through which we will be passing. Woollens were particularly important in the 15th to 19th centuries as well as leather trades (gloving, shoe-making) and later in the 19th century to the present, engineering. Somerset retains its reputation for cheese and cider (the Cheddar and Caerphilly brands were invented here). The magnificence of many 15th-16th century parish church towers is one manifestation of this wealth; the tradition of radicalism and dissent is another.

The coach will take us south-east of Taunton up onto the ridge for our first stop where tea/coffee will be provided.

North Curry Independent Baptist Church (Stell 114, p.186; listed grade II) stands isolated in its own burying ground on Windmill Hill on the north side of the road.



The dedication stone reads I SAM VII.XII EBENEZER CHAPEL 1825. The chapel has been recently repaired and partially refurbished by the also recently independent Baptist congregation. A smaller version of a similar design of building with almost identical porch can be seen at another former Baptist chapel, Ebenezer at Burrowbridge, of 1836 (Stell 105, p.185).

North Curry Methodist Church (former Wesleyan) (Stell 115, p.186; listed grade II) stands near the centre of the village.



The original building dates from 1833 with a later extension of about 1900 for school rooms added to the frontage.



*We drive through Curry Rivel to the town of Langport, passing **Langport Congregational now United Reformed Church** (Stell 95, p.183).*

The main building dates from 1828-29 but was refronted in 1876 in a Gothic manner.

*Continuing, note the very fine 16th-century tower of **Huish Episcopi St Mary the Virgin** on the right as we pass and as we approach Long Sutton, the former chapel of the **Brethren** on the right.*

Long Sutton Friends' Meeting (Stell 99, p.183-4; listed grade II)

George Fox came to Somerset in 1656 and a number of large meetings were held near Podimore where he was staying. One of the local Friends was Thomas Budd, who had been vicar at Montacute and at Kingsbury Episcopi. By 1655 he had settled at Ash and become a Quaker (note that there is another Thomas Budd, a Presbyterian preacher, who we shall meet later at Middle Lambrook, and who was probably the son of the Quaker Budd). In 1657 Thomas Budd organised two meetings in his orchard at Ash which initiated the local Quaker presence and local Quakers began meeting in their own homes. In 1670 they purchased a cottage opposite the present Long Sutton meeting house to serve both as a dwelling house and a meeting house.

In 1704 a London Quaker named William Steele left land and £200 to build a new meeting house. The bequest for the meeting house was conditional on the Friends paying the whole cost of carrying the necessary materials. The new meeting house was completed in 1717 and William Steele's corpse was interred in the burial ground. The meeting house is built of Lias Limestone from local quarries with mouldings in Hamstone from the famous quarries about 5 miles away. The hipped roof is of Hamstone tiles and slate. The windows are sash windows with original glazing bars and blown glass.



The interior of the building is plain and simple and typical of eighteenth century Quaker meeting houses. It is a single large room sub-divided with a partition at one end which encloses a gallery and staircase/entrance hall. The gallery would originally have been for women's meetings and could be opened into the main meeting space by removable shutters. At the far end is the 'Minister's' stand or gallery. Quakers have never

had Ministers as such but at one time they did 'record' those Friends who had a particular gift for spoken ministry. These Friends were invited to travel in the ministry and when attending a local meeting occupied the 'Minister's' stand. They had no particular authority, others could and did speak at the meeting, and the meeting continued to be run by the Elders who sat on the benches in front. The practise of 'recording' gradually fell away at the end of the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. The ceiling is a plastered vault, coved on all four sides. The old benches are all elm and face inwards and are supplemented by some more modern seating. There are also some candle sconces and brackets for oil lamps indicating previous lighting methods.

In the later eighteenth century numbers of Friends locally declined and in 1793 the building was closed. It was re-opened in 1795 by William Palmer, whose son later went on to found the famous biscuit making of Huntley and Palmer. Towards the end of the nineteenth century a further decline took place and it was decided to look for someone to live in the cottage and re-vitalise the life of the meeting. Anne Warner, a widow with three children was chosen. She founded a school, a nursing association, and a Band of Hope. The school soon became too large for the cottage and a new building was erected, in 1898, on the north side of the road west of the cottage. This was used a school until 1939 and is now a bungalow.

The adjacent Court House, which is part medieval, was in ruins in the 1930s and was bought and restored by the Clark family and given to Long Sutton meeting. It is still Quaker property and has an upstairs room, the Spigurnal Room, reputedly used 6 times a year by Friends. The most recent development has been the addition of the Children's Room, added in 1985/6, as a freestanding building in the same style and materials.

Continuing southwards through Long Sutton then Long Load we pass on the right the former Wesleyan Chapel, now a private house.

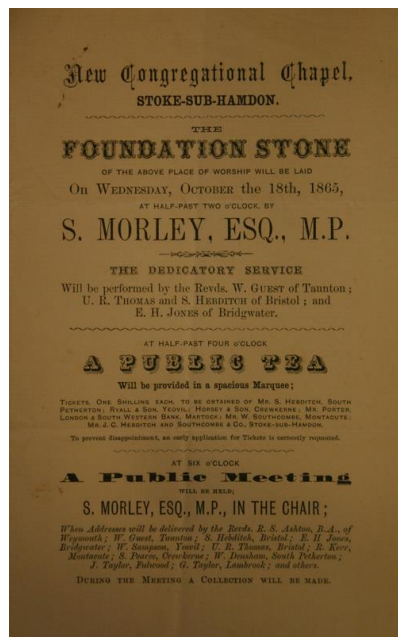
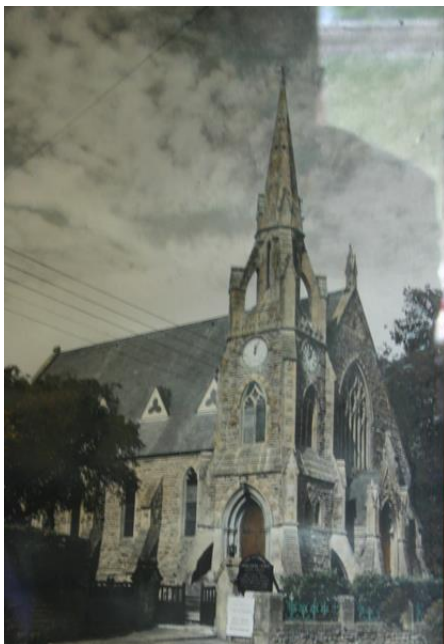
In Martock, we pass first the Wesleyan Church (listed Grade II – 1886 by Alexander Lauder of Barnstaple – now disused) on the right

Brethren

Site of Pound Lane Chapel on the right

We arrive at our next stop where we will have lunch – tea and coffee will be provided.

Stoke-sub-Hamdon United Reformed Church (Stell 151, p.192-3; listed grade II*).



The village of Stoke-sub-Hamdon is dominated by the hill whose quarries are still the source of the golden yellow Hamstone. The parish church lies isolated about a mile east of the settlement. From the late eighteenth century the village grew into a major centre of the gloving industry and the principal manufacturer was with his brothers, Richard Southcombe (the company still makes fine leather gloves and other wares in the village). By mid-century he had expanded into linens, woollens and silks. At that time the only places of worship in the village were 'the Wesleyan chapel, a small room on the Hill [Bible Christian], a place called the Barn in the High Street' and a room in Southcombes' factory. The room he had made available in the factory proved entirely unsuitable so on 1 June 1865 he arranged a public meeting presided over by that indefatigable sponsor of Congregational chapels, Henry Overton Wills (of WD & HO Wills) of Bristol, started a subscription headed by Samuel Morley MP, Wills and himself and elected a committee. Land was leased from the Duchy of Cornwall for 99 years at 15/- a year, the architect and surveyor, Robert C. Bennett of Weymouth (where he was a deacon and designer of the Congregational church – now sadly demolished) was engaged to produce plans and the tender of Mr Reynolds of Weymouth for

£1,595 for building the chapel and schoolroom [below the chapel] was accepted. The foundation stone was laid by Samuel Morley on 18 October 1865 ‘in the most unpropitious weather.’ As an aside, apart from his extensive patronage of the Congregational and general dissenting cause, it is clear from his correspondence that Morley had strong connections with Southcombe through his hosiery business.

The building designed by Bennett has been extended with rooms at the rear and the interior enriched by a gallery to the design of the Yeovil architect, C. Benson, in 1908. A relatively recent alteration to the design has been the removal of the triangular trifoliate roof lights that can be seen in the photograph above.

The church is now part of the United Reformed Church South Somerset group.

*We drive through Stoke-sub-Hamdon, passing the **Methodist (former Wesleyan) Church** (Stell 103, p.184; listed grade II) on our right; through Bower Hinton passing **Martock United Reformed Church** (Stell 102, p.184) on our right;*

To our next stop at Middle Lambrook.



Middle Lambrook United Reformed Church (Stell 92, p.181-2; listed grade II*)

We have already, at Long Sutton, met Thomas Budd (d. 1670) who had been vicar at Kingsbury Episcopi, and this parish includes the hamlet of Middle Lambrook. Another Thomas Budd, probably the son of the Quaker, became a Presbyterian preacher, and ministered in the surrounding parishes including Martock and Kingsbury Episcopi. The first register at Middle Lambrook starts in

1681 although the congregation is reputed to date from 1668, and this is the date that was used for the tercentenary in 1968. Thomas Budd's entries cease in 1697 when he is presumed to have died. There was a meeting house at Middle Lambrook by 1688 although it is possible that this earlier building burnt down.

A new 'Presbyterian Meeting House' was being built in 1727 when the land was purchased for that purpose. It was registered in 1729 and this is the date on the datestone. Chapel cottage, the orchard, and 9 acres of land were left to the Meeting House in 1732 and are still owned. The meeting probably became Unitarian for a time in the eighteenth century but then Independent and later Congregational from the end of the eighteenth century. It is now part of the United Reformed Church and forms a South Somerset Group with Stoke-sub-Hamdon and Bower Hinton (both of which we have seen), and Yeovil and Templecombe.

The building is rectangular with the long wall to the roadside and two entrance doors symmetrically placed. The walls are squared local rubble with an ashlar front in the same stone. The end walls are gabled, and the roof, which was originally thatched, has been slate since 1888. The interior retains its original layout with the pulpit against the front (east) wall and a gallery around the other three sides. Stell suggests the gallery may have been built in

two stages with the west gallery being constructed first. The pulpit is from 1729 but has been reduced in height. The ground floor box pews are early nineteenth century and the gallery seating is from the eighteenth century. The clock was donated in 1734 and is by Reuben Lamude of Chard, a pupil of Tomplion.

It is not known when the schoolrooms were added but they were originally more extensive; the top two classrooms were taken down in 1933. In 1944 the chapel joined with South Petherton and Merriott and the Manse was sold. In 1972 they joined the United Reformed Church and in 1975 the group was enlarged by Stoke-sub-Hamdon and Bower Hinton. In 1985 there was a major restoration and in 1989 the schoolroom was turned into a training centre and a car park built.

*We return to East Lambrook to South Petherton passing **Hayes End Manor**.*

South Petherton Coke Memorial Methodist Church (Stell 147, p.192; listed grade II)



Two designs (or one!) of Wesleyan chapel by Alexander Lauder of Barnstaple: left, South Petherton Coke Memorial (1881-82) and right, Martock (1886). Alexander Lauder (1836-1921) was a remarkable man. He was a committed Methodist and gifted preacher, head of Barnstaple School of Art and twice mayor of Barnstaple. Apart from the many designs for Wesleyan chapels built all over the south of England emanating from his architectural practice, he was co-founder of what became the Royal Devon Art Pottery. One of his pupils who he imbued with his passion for the Arts and Crafts movement was W R Lethaby.

A Wesleyan chapel was first built in the village in 1808 and was sited north of the present church in North Street. The present church was built in 1881-1882 with school rooms added in 1912. The arrangement of the interior is essentially that designed by Lauder with some relatively minor alterations.

The Thomas Coke commemorated was curate in the parish church in South Petherton from 1770 until 1777 when he was ejected for his evangelical preaching. John Wesley accepted his offer of his services as secretary and assistant, eventually leading to Coke's mission to America.

*We return to Taunton along the old main road through Iminster passing on our left, the former **Iminster Unitarian Meeting House** (Stell 87, p.179-180; listed grade II* - 1717-18 frontage altered 1851), now an arts centre and the recently disused **Iminster Methodist former Wesleyan Church** (listed grade II – 1887).*

For tea near the railway station at

Taunton Rowbarton Methodist Church (1893)

The history of the various denominations in Rowbarton is complicated and it is better to give a combined account.

John Wesley came to Taunton on 26 occasions between 1743 and 1789. The first Society was formed in 1743 and the first house licensed for Methodist worship in 1747. A purpose built meeting house was erected in 1776 and this was one of Wesley's Octagon Chapels and he preached at its opening. By 1812 this was too small and the Wesleyan Methodists removed to The Temple which had been erected by James Lackington, a London bookseller, in 1809. Both the Octagon and the Temple served the town centre but as Taunton grew in the nineteenth century additional Methodist premises were required.

There were two main areas of growth. The first was to the east of the town centre and this served by Victoria Wesleyan Methodist chapel opened in 1843. The other main area of growth was on the north side of the River Tone. This area had been virtually undeveloped prior to the arrival of the canal in 1827 and the railway in 1842 but it soon became a busy area of terraced streets and industry including Taunton's largest foundry, two glove works, a brewery, saw mills and timber yards, as well as all the facilities associated with the railway.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Anglican church was the first to serve this expanding area with a chapel-of-ease to St James situated on Kingston Road. This was used until 1881 when it was replaced by St Andrews. In 1869 the Congregationalists and Baptists combined to build a joint chapel further down Kingston Road. The Baptists later withdrew and used the old Anglican chapel-of-ease until 1888, when they concentrated on Albemarle Baptist chapel which is on the town side of the railway. The Congregationalists continued, with the chapel being under the joint control of two other Congregational churches in the town, and the building was extended in 1900 to give seats for 220. In 1910 a new Congregational Chapel was built on the opposite side of the road, with seats for 450 people, and the old chapel



became the schoolroom. The new chapel was demolished in 1972 although a plaque still marks the site. The old chapel is now the Callebaut Hall and is used by a theatre group.

The Wesleyan Methodists were last to serve this area and started by using the old St James chapel-of-ease after the Baptists vacated in 1888. In 1893 they built a new chapel on the corner of Greenway Road, with seats for about 220. It is built in red brick with slate roofs and a gable end

to the road; entirely typical of many inner suburban non-conformist chapels of the period. Additional accommodation and rooms have been added over the years and major

improvements and refitting were carried out in 1986. More recently the entrance area was rebuilt and re-ordered in 2012.

In the short distance from the coach stop at the station to Rowbarton Methodist for tea (about 200 yards) we shall therefore see:

Old Congregational/Baptist (1869) – now Callebaut Hall

Site of Congregational (1910) – demolished 1972

St Andrews Church of England (1881, extended 1890s) – in use

St James Chapel-of-ease (mid 19th century, later used by Baptists, then by Wesleyan Methodists) – later used as car showroom

Rowbarton Wesleyan Methodist (1893) – in use

Members have the option of dispersing or staying for an early evening walk to view some of the chapels in Taunton.

Taunton, Paul Street United Reformed Church (Stell 154, p.196; listed grade II)



George Newton, Vicar of St Mary Magdalene, and his assistant, Joseph Alleine, were ejected in 1662; many of the congregation left with them and set up a meeting in 'Paule's Lane', and later built a meeting house there in 1672. Newton had led a strongly Puritan congregation throughout the mid seventeenth century, part of the congregation leaving in 1636 for America to found Taunton in Massachusetts, and he himself took a leading role in the Presbyterian Taunton Classis. The congregation continued

to grow and became the most important Nonconformist meeting in the town. By the eighteenth century there were over 1500 people at services and it was necessary to arrive early to get a seat. Joseph Alleine and his father-in-law, Richard Alleine, were both highly regarded by Wesley and Richard is credited with the prayer used as the foundation of the Methodist Covenant service. The present building was erected in 1797 to replace the original meeting house. It still retains its Georgian interior with galleries on three sides. It had a central entrance until altered in the late nineteenth century. Sunday schools were erected to the rear and a hall was built alongside in 1862. Paul's Meeting started as Presbyterian but became Congregational by the early nineteenth century, and in 1972 became part of the United Reformed Church. In the 1670s its then pastor, Matthew Warren, established the Dissenting Academy in the town.

The church joined the Congregational Union in 1832 and the United Reformed Church in 1972.

Taunton, Mary Street Unitarian Church (Stell 153, p.193-6; listed grade II*)



Mary Street chapel can trace its roots back to a Baptist congregation which started in the seventeenth century and which erected their first building in 1670. The present building dates from 1721 and internally is virtually as built. It is one of the most important Nonconformist chapels in the County and is listed as Grade II*; it merits three pages in Stell. The remarkable interior has two great timber columns, a large brass chandelier, the original pulpit, and most of the original pews (although some were altered in the nineteenth

century). The exterior was re-fronted in 1850 and schoolrooms were added at the side in 1866; there is a graveyard at the rear. The 1886 Ordnance Survey map records 500 seats in 1886. Mary Street changed doctrine over time and later became Presbyterian, and then finally Unitarian.

Taunton, Temple Methodist Church (Stell 159, p.197; listed grade II)



John Wesley first came to Taunton in 1743 and a Methodist Society was formed soon after. The Octagon was built in 1776 but rapidly became too small and the congregation moved to the Temple permanently in 1812; a more visible main road location than the Octagon. The Temple had been built by London bookseller James Lackington and was originally a large, nearly square building with a gable end to the road. In 1846 this was extended to the road and given a new Gothic frontage and side windows. At this

stage it had galleries on the east, south and west sides with the pulpit on the north wall, and burial grounds on each side. In 1866 schoolrooms were built on the east side. In 1869 the whole chapel was rebuilt on an east-west axis and enlarged and improved to give a seating capacity of around 900. The 1846 gothic facade was kept in the centre but lengthened by re-using some of the previous side windows. There was also a spire which was later removed. The galleries were rebuilt against the south, east, and north walls; the pews in the south gallery re-used those from the 1809 building. Further improvements included the organ and minister's vestry in 1879, communion rails and tiling (1880s), electrical lighting (1897), and redecoration and cutting of central aisle (1909). Within the last eight years virtually the whole building has been refurbished and modernised although the galleries have been left intact.

Select bibliography

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