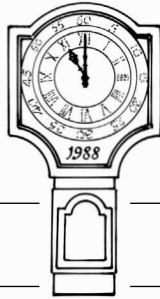


THE  
CHAPELS SOCIETY



Newsletter 46

January 2011



*The fine eighteenth-century frontage of Daventry URC seen from the courtyard  
(photograph copyright Colin Baxter)*

# ADDRESS BOOK

The Chapels Society: registered charity number 1014207

*Website:* <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/chapelsoc/index.shtml>

*President:* Dr Christopher Wakeling, BA, PhD, 22 Gladstone Street, Basford, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 6JF; phone: 01782 621 440

*Secretary:* Sara Crofts, 47 Salisbury Drive, Midway, Swadlincote DE11 7LD; e-mail: [ChapelsSociety@goolemail.com](mailto:ChapelsSociety@goolemail.com) (for general correspondence and case work)

*Visits Secretary:* Tim Grass, 21 Laughton Road, Horsham, West Sussex, RH12 4EJ; e-mail: [grass.family@tesco.net](mailto:grass.family@tesco.net) (correspondence *re* visits)

*Membership Secretary:* Robin Phillips, 1 Newcastle Avenue, Beeston, Notts. NG9 1BT; e-mail: [robin-phillips@talktalk.net](mailto:robin-phillips@talktalk.net) (for membership and website)

*Treasurer:* David Watts, 24 Sandhurst Avenue, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 0XL; e-mail: [david@drwatts.co.uk](mailto:david@drwatts.co.uk); phone: 01384 829580

*Editor:* Chris Skidmore, 31 Melrose Avenue, Reading RG6 7BN; e-mail: [chrisskidmore@waitrose.com](mailto:chrisskidmore@waitrose.com); phone: 0118 966 3452 (correspondence *re* the *Newsletter* and other Society publications). **Copy for the next (May 2011) *Newsletter* needs to reach the Editor by 31 March 2011, please.**

# NOTICEBOARD

## CHAPELS SOCIETY VISITS

29 April–2 May 2011	Isle of Man trip (Tim Grass)
9 July 2011	Exeter (Roger Thorne) and AGM
1 October 2011	Reading and Henley (Chris Skidmore)

# EDITORIAL

Our Visits secretary, Tim Grass, asks me to let members know that there is still time to book for the May 2011 trip to the Isle of Man on which there are yet some places. He suggests that it will now provide an excellent excuse to escape the coverage of the royal wedding!

Council is giving some thought at present to the direction in which the Society might take its scholarly work in publishing and holding conferences, particularly in the light of last year's successful conference at Dr Williams's Library. Members thinking of changing their wills might consider making a legacy to the Society particularly to support this element of the Society's activities.

*All statements and views published in this newsletter are those of the contributor alone. Neither the editor nor the Society may be held responsible.*

# PROCEEDINGS

## VISIT TO RUGBY AND NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, 2 OCTOBER 2010

The day was bright and crisp after a week of heavy rain in the midlands. We met at the modern Rugby United Reformed Church for tea and coffee, while the Seventh Day Adventists gathered in the main church. A full coachload then left Rugby for a morning country tour, stopping for lunch in Daventry and then returning to Rugby for an afternoon ‘chapel’ tour on foot. Whether by design or not, there seemed to be a clear ecclesiastical structure to the day: we began with a poor, simple, plain village Congregational chapel and ended in sumptuous Rugby school ‘chapel’ — giving a very different meaning to the same word. In between, we seemed to proceed, step-by-step, from ‘low church’ puritan simplicity to ever more high church decoration. We also moved up the social scale, as local farmers gave way to aristocratic benefactors and ‘West End’ congregations — though the Irish names on the gravestones of the grand Catholic church suggested a more humble immigrant congregation.

Passing an ‘Independent Street’ in the same village, our first stop was Kilsby Congregational Chapel (URC) of 1763, whose dissenting congregation could trace themselves to the late seventeenth century ejections. This is a pretty, once agricultural village and the chapel is of that honey-coloured stone you find right across the south midlands. We were told that the congregation had grown steadily until Victorian agricultural depression led to a movement off the land. This is a simple preaching house, an austere square box with pink-washed walls (the balcony had been filled in). The main feature is an impressive central pulpit and sounding board and there is a small graveyard out the front.

Next, we passed through more pleasant pastures of sheep and cows — zig-zagging around the M1 and the main railway lines — until we reached the industrial village of Long Buckby; a former shoemaking community of the type you find all across Leicestershire and Northants. This Congregational chapel was a step-up in both size and style. Built in 1771 for a congregation that had existed since 1709, there is a gallery round three sides, and a recent colour-scheme of light blue shades makes for a handsome late nineteenth-century interior. This includes some elegant, understated art deco type stained glass windows. There is a large, interesting graveyard behind the chapel and a schoolhouse next door — all this tucked away off the main street.

Daventry URC, our lunchtime location, has a very unprepossessing Victorian red-brick entrance, more like a factory than a church and with very utilitarian, though informative notices, sitting opposite the back of a shopping mall covered with air-conditioning boxes. Once inside, however, a surprise awaits: the church has been turned round and you are entering through the back door. You then pass through a pretty garden, where we ate our lunch — with a generous supply of tea and biscuits — into the impressive Presbyterian (then Congregational) chapel of 1732, once the home of the Northampton Dissenting Academy attended by



*The interior of Long Buckby URC (photograph copyright Colin Baxter)*

Dr Joseph Priestley. Again, there is a central pulpit and this time a rather ornate balcony. You walk out of the old front door into an interesting yard and turn round to see an early meeting house whose exterior could easily be mistaken for a large domestic home. A notice informs you that this is oldest extant church in Daventry, but it must also be one of the town's best kept secrets. Some months ago I strolled around the town, noted the red-brick 'front' and passed on, thinking that was that.

In the afternoon, back in Rugby, things got a lot grander and posher and we entered the world of the Victorian Arts and Crafts movement, Pugin and the Pre-Raphaelites. I'm not qualified to distinguish between these, but the sense of direction was clear after the morning's meeting houses. As the football commentators say, this was 'a game of two halves'. The New Baptist Church, Rugby of 1906 has a tower and schoolroom of equal stature to the main 'chapel'. The building symbolises a congregation that had arrived at full social respectability and perhaps claimed social parity with the Anglicans, in a smart part of town. Designed by George Baines & Son, opened by Lady Leigh, the notes described the style as 'freely expressed Perp with hints of Art Nouveau' — recalling the society's London seminar earlier in the summer. The stained glass is marvellous, if overbearing as it covers almost every window. Inside, the Baptists stay truer to their religious aesthetic by eschewing figurative glass (as had Long Buckby URC) and by the beautiful, curved natural wood pews that are even comfortable to sit in.

St Marie's Roman Catholic church of 1846–7 and 1864–7 was designed by Pugin and extended by his son. Set in the middle of a large graveyard with an imposing spire (added in 1872 by Whelan), the Church appears to the architecturally untutored eye like an Anglican Parish Church with the angels and saints put back in. The former are particularly impressive, with huge wings, but wasted so high up. Inside is a riot of visual stimulation, from stained glass, to statues — including a hanging, crucified Christ — wall paintings and a great deal of fine decoration. Even so, I still had a feeling that Pugin's reinvention of a medieval church misses the original, didactic religious point of all that visual imagery. This was even more true of the next building.

Just when I thought nothing can beat that for high church ornateness or 'shock and awe', we arrived in Rugby School Chapel of 1872, a product — the notes tell me — of William Butterfield. Here is stained glass as rich as chocolate cake, and so filling you have to sit down after a while because you can't take any more. Ironically, the best piece for me, by Burne-Jones, was hidden in a dusty corner. St Marie had saints galore, but here they are replaced by headmasters, whose huge life-size statues line the wall, all following in the footsteps of the great Thomas Arnold. Then there are the numerous memorial tablets to eminent old boys, mostly models of Christian manliness. I hold a high view of the Victorians from the comfortable distance of the twenty-first century. Closer-up, their constant trumpeting of such high ideals, on numerous unctuous plaques — did they never do anything out of self-interest? — must have seemed very irritating.



*An impressive angel from the tower of  
St Marie's Roman Catholic church, Rugby  
(photograph copyright Moira Ackers)*

All in all, this was a fascinating day with helpful comments from local ministers, priests, teachers, archivists and ordinary church members. The schedule, planned down to each minor detail by our guide, John Anderson, was itself a work of art. As an amateur enjoyer of art and building I found every church of great interest and the contrast between them even more so. As a labour historian, I would like to have known more about the social context of each church, above all what sort of people attended. It also occurs to me that, as we focus on the grand buildings of the middle classes in our visits and conservation work, we may be losing the world of the nonconformist (and other) working classes.

*Peter Ackers*

## OBITUARY

### JONATHAN CHRISTOPHER MORGAN (1943–2010)

Jonathan Morgan, a life member of the Society and a Council member from 1994 to 1997, died on Saturday 30 October from injuries received in a road traffic accident two weeks earlier.

Jonathan was educated at the grammar school in Hastings and then read history at Goldsmith's College. After an abortive attempt at a teaching career, he moved to University College, London and trained as an archivist. He subsequently worked in Hertfordshire, at Westminster City Council, and at the House of Lords Record Office before moving to Dr Williams's Library in 1997.

Jonathan's immense sense of duty meant that he would go not simply the extra mile, but even further, often at some personal cost. Despite his shyness, often hidden behind his cultivated mask of old fogeyness, he really liked people and he enjoyed helping them. He was a man of wide and diverse interests including not only chapels but also the railways.

He was well-known in Strict Baptist circles and had been a member at Maryport Street Baptist Chapel in Devizes and Chadwell Street Baptist Chapel, London before his move back to East Sussex, to an old house in Rye overlooking Dungeness, a great personal blessing, not least because of his involvement with Bethel Chapel there, but also with his growing relationship with the fellowship in Tenterden.

Jonathan was often to be seen on Chapel Society visits and was instrumental in our gaining access to the Strict Baptist Chapel in the walls at Canterbury in 2008. He was at the visit to Rugby only a month before his death.

*The editor is grateful to Alan Argent and David Wykes for allowing him to use parts of their appreciations of Jonathan to construct this obituary.*

# COKELERS — THE GENTLE SECT

AN ARTICLE BY STELLA BOND

Of all the quaint religious sects who set up their chapels or meeting houses in the nineteenth century, surely one of the strangest was the ‘Society of Dependents’ or ‘Cokelers’ as they were often called. Believing themselves to be totally dependent on Jesus, no one knows why or how they came across their nickname. Some say it was because they once met in a field called ‘Cokkeg’ or something similar, or because — being teetotal — they were said to drink cocoa at their meetings. But they were a gentle people and did not complain.

John Sirgood, born Avening, Gloucestershire about 1820 and described as a ‘humble shoemaker’, had come under the influence of James Bridges, a preacher in the South London area, notably Clapham. Their mutual belief was what is known as antinomian, in other words that an adherent can, by faith, be released from any moral law and can do no wrong. These views are summed up in a verse of one of the Cokeler hymns:

Though in this world we take our place  
As other mortals do  
We’re imbued by Him with grace  
And He will see us through.

Sirgood, a married man, felt the strength this gave him was falling on deaf ears in the London outskirts so, in 1850, moved by prayer, he set off for rural Sussex pushing, or being pushed by, his wife in a wheelbarrow. They fetched up at Loxwood, a downland village (west of the A24) near Billingshurst. Very soon, by his preaching, he acquired a following, a small group of people who met in cottages, woods or fields — and promptly upset the locals, especially churchgoers, landowners, and that element that likes to cause trouble. Sirgood stood his ground, and his Society of Dependents took root.

Most of the followers were humble folk such as farm labourers and domestic servants. No doubt their daily lives were so poor that the hope and joy that Sirgood propounded was a great attraction and doubtless, too, they easily accepted the qualities required of them — they had nothing and expected nothing.

Taken from the antinomian pattern, Sirgood’s principles were built upon a number of biblical texts which, taken out of context, were rendered capable of any interpretation. They recognized no minister, but were led by Sirgood and Elders or Stalwarts, chosen from the congregation, who sat upon a platform at services, in which everyone took part. Prayers were extempore and, singularly, excluded the Lord’s Prayer which was believed only to have been set as a pattern for others. They memorized portions of scriptures; wrote their own hymns to favourite tunes; and testified to their faith.

An intriguing aspect of the Cokelers was their attitude to marriage. Sirgood was a married man, whose wife was as devoted as he was, but he decreed that men and women were the better for remaining single: those whose desire for the



*The Cokeler chapel at Loxwood (photograph copyright the author)*

higher life was strong would need no such earthly institution. They had no marriage service, but celibacy was not demanded, nor were those already married barred from the congregation. It was a short-term view which, of course, would eventually lead to the demise of the Society, and in time accommodation had to be made for the natural needs of the people. Indeed, a sort of trial marriage existed in which, after two years and with the agreement of the Elders, a couple could marry.

Despite their humble occupations, the Cokelers had few needs in life and, encouraged to save, were by 1860 able to contribute to the building of a chapel in Spy Lane, Loxwood, a building which still stands, now used by the Emmanuel Fellowship. It is in a vernacular style, of multi-coloured brick with its porch, and a large burying ground behind. Adherents were expected to attend services occupying the morning, afternoon, and evening every Sunday, and sometimes mid-week evenings as well. Employers could, and did, make it difficult for their workers to be free at all these times and soon Sirgood's mind turned to alleviating these problems.

The Society spread to communities at Northchapel, Warnham, Chichester and Hove (all Sussex), Lord's Hill at Shamley Green just over the border into Surrey, and one in Upper Norwood, South London, where Sirgood's beliefs had begun.

**Northchapel** is in local stone with red-brick dressings, and a large wheel-window on its west side: it was built in 1870 and is now a home. **Warnham**, situated in Byfleet Lane, is a red-brick building with segmental-headed windows,



built about 1876 and closed around 100 years later, becoming a home. Only part of a wall remains of the chapel at **Chichester**, as a section of a house in Joy's Close. Described as vernacular in style, and rendered, it was built in 1891 but by 1975 had been closed. The chapel of red-brick and rendering with round-headed windows in **Payne Avenue, Hove**, was late on the scene in 1906, when adjoining houses were also going up. Now known as Payne Hall Cottages its name suggests it had a life as a hall between closure in 1978 and conversion into 2 houses. Nothing remains of the chapel built in the 1860s in **Shamley Green (Lords Hill)** and sold, later demolished, in 1968. Little is now known about the chapel and stores at **Upper Norwood**, except that it was 'tucked away behind a shop' — probably the sect's own store, as at Northchapel. Always taken to mean the one in London, there is in fact an Upper Norwood in Sussex, south of Petworth, where can be found a Chapel Lane!

Contemporaneous with the establishment of a chapel was the building of a village store, the joint property of the members, who were thus provided with work as well as accommodation over the shop. It may be that Sirgood was by these means providing for his flock: he also advocated local sourcing from nearby farms and setting up their own bread bakeries. Although he did not live to see it, his 'Combination Stores' continued into the modern age, providing car and coach hire, selling cars and petrol, and acting as agent for many other goods and services.



*Payne Hall Cottages Hove, formerly a Cokeler chapel (photograph copyright the author)*



*The Cokeler Stores at Warnham c. 1904*

They sang:

But let us to each other prove  
All by each other aiding  
'Tis love that do each other move  
For all to gain by trading.

Under the Elders, the chapels and stores carried on into the twentieth century. For various reasons (probably taxes) the stores were given company names, those of members: Brown, Durant & Co., were at Northchapel; Bradshaw, Foster, Street & Co., later Smith & Croucher, at Lords Hill; Lindfield Luff at Warnham; and Randall, Slade & Co. at South Norwood. Chapel china to their own pattern bore these company names underneath.

In the 1930s an association was struck up with a sect of similar views at Schobdach near Wassertrudingen in South Germany and exchange visits were made for over forty years. However, by 1916 membership had dwindled down to about 600.

In 1885 John Sirgood had died and was buried at Loxwood. His followers did not advocate tombstones and his grave is unmarked. At this time there were said to be 2,000 people who had come under his influence; instead of being jeered at, they were now owners of property and respected by all.

The Cokelers were pacifists, and although only one was ever imprisoned for his views during World War II numbers had declined by 1942 to only 200. Chapels had closed down, and by the 1980s there were only thirty members — indeed there was evidence of a congregation of one at Lords Hill towards the end. The last known Dependent was an Elsie Piper who lived until 2002, nearly 70 years after the last chapel closed.

# SEARCHING FOR LOLLARDS AND THE GREEN CHAPEL — LUDCHURCH IN NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE

AN ARTICLE BY ANDREW WORTH

Part of the delight in exploring old chapels is in being transported back to earlier times and the opportunity to share the prayers of generations of faithful folk who sought to worship in their own chosen manner. For me that frisson of excitement was probably first cultivated with the Chapel Youth Group as we explored Ludchurch (or Lud's Church), hidden in the Back Forest overlooking the Dane Valley at Gradbach on the Cheshire/Staffordshire borders. Recently featured on the BBC's Secret Britain but still very hard to find even when one is almost upon it, it is to be hoped that publicity will not threaten its unique atmosphere.

Ludchurch is unlikely any other place of worship that I know, in that it is not man-made at all. A mighty post-glacial slippage in the Millstone Grit bedrock has provided a narrow cave-like cleft, some 100 m long and 18 m deep but never



*Ludchurch, from a postcard in the author's collection*

more than a few metres wide, which could be hidden by a covering of branches and bracken, and reputedly provided a haven for Lollards in the fourteenth century. Mossy and cool on even the warmest day, the sunlight penetrates it only at Midsummer and has led to legends of earlier pagan rites in this spiritual corridor through the earth, but it is most associated with the followers of John Wycliffe, and particularly with Walter de Lud-Auk (or Ludank) who was supposedly captured here and taken to gaol in London.

Facts and legends can easily fuse. Ludchurch was certainly visited and recorded in Robert Plot's *Natural History of Staffordshire* (1686), but the 1874 guide book to the area, *Swythamley and its Neighbourhood, Past and Present*, tells the less substantiated tale of one Sir William de Lacy who supposedly came upon the cavern in 1546 and within it an old man 'engrossed in the perusal of a worn Bible'. Displaying a remarkable memory of events of two centuries earlier, the old man tells Sir William of how the Lollards had held religious services here, away from the observances of the authorities and led by the zealous Walter de Lud-Auk and his beautiful daughter or grand-daughter Alice, until they were discovered and arrested, except for the eighteen year-old Alice who is killed in the scuffle. Sir William is left by the old man with a moral at the end of the tale:

My son, if thou are of the Protestant religion and are called upon by the despotic rulers of this land, to abjure thy faith, remember the Lollards of Lud Church and stand firm.

Promoting the legend further, a wooden statue of Lady Lud was placed *c.* 1862 on a ledge in Ludchurch by the landowner, Philip Brocklehurst of Swythamley Park, it being the figurehead rescued from the recently wrecked ship *Swythamley*. The statue has now unfortunately rotted away in the dank conditions but there are photographs of it in place in the 1930s. The Brocklehurst family were the dominant silk manufacturers and MPs of Macclesfield but also firm Unitarians and not adverse to legends of earlier generations of free-thinking precursors of the Reformation; the late Georgian mansion at Swythamley Park had unapologetically replaced a mediaeval grange of Dieulacres Abbey. Brocklehurst was undoubtedly trying to promote the area for tourism, and visitors in the 1870s included Queen Mary's parents, the Duke and Duchess of Teck. In latter years the Brocklehursts put even more of their energies into such pleasure activities, with the last squire Sir Philip Brocklehurst (1887–1975) being Assistant Geologist on Shackleton's expedition to the Antarctic 1907–9 and shooting a Giant Panda for the family's museum in Macclesfield.

Yet even the Brocklehursts could not invent legends to match the mediaeval 2,530 line epic poem of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where it is now suggested that the final scene was at Ludchurch. This mystical fourteenth-century work was certainly written in a north-west midland dialect of Middle English such as would be spoken around Ludchurch, and might have been the work of a monk at Dieulacres. It tells the chivalric tale of how the Green Knight challenges Gawain to chop off his head, which he does without it killing the giant, and then Gawain is pledged to find him a year later in the Green Chapel to submit to a return blow. As the date approaches for the rematch, Gawain spends weeks

searching for the Green Chapel before accepting hospitality over Christmas at the castle of Sir Bertilak, who assures him that his destination is near by.

Gawain duly sets out on 'Newe Yeres morn' when he is directed to ride into a wild and remote valley:

Thenne loke a littel on the launde, on thi lyfte honde,  
And thou schal se in that slade the self chapel,

As with the modern visitor, Ludchurch is not immediately seen but Gawain eventually finds it:

                                  aboute hit he walkez,  
Debatande with hymself quat hit be myght.  
Hit hade a hole on the ende and on ayther syde,  
And overgrowen with gresse in glodes aywhere,  
And al watz holgh inwith, nobot an olde cave,  
Or a crevisse of an olde cragge. . .

'We! Lorde,' quoth the gentyle knyght,  
'Whether this be the grene chapelle?  
Here myght aboute mydnyght  
The dele his matynnes telle!'

'Now iwysse,' quoth Gawayn, 'wysty is here;  
This oritore is ugly, with erbez overgrowen. . .

This is a chapel of meschaunce, that chekke hit bytyde!  
Hit is the corsesdest kyrk that ever I com inne!''\*

And then as he hears the terrible sound of his opponent sharpening his axe ready for battle, Gawain knows that he has found the right place — and I shall leave you to find out the rest of the story or discover the magic of the Green Chapel and Ludchurch for yourself.

\*[*chekke* = ill-luck; *dele* = devil; *iwysse* = I think; *wysty* = wizardry; a modern prose translation is available at <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/CAMELOT/sggk.htm> — the section quoted is in the fourth and last part of the poem]

## CASEWORK REPORT

The last few months have been really rather quiet at least in casework terms. The only major new case to come to the Society's attention is the possible demolition of **Stowmarket URC, Ipswich Street, Stowmarket** (*Unlisted, 1953–5, Alan D. Cooke*). The local authority, Mid-Suffolk District Council, has proposed purchasing the church via a Compulsory Purchase Order as they plan to redevelop the site as part of a wider regeneration of the centre of Stowmarket. As part of the deal, the congregation would be provided with a new church elsewhere.

We were alerted to the threat to the church by the caseworker for the British Institute of Organ Studies (BIOS) who was concerned about the fate of the organ and also felt that the church may be of listable quality. The Society sought assistance from The Twentieth Century Society and also from Save Britain's Heritage

but in the end The Twentieth Century Society took the view that the church was probably not worthy of listing. Although the Chapels Society's Council had some sympathy with the local authority's desire to improve the town centre it did seem a shame to lose a decent example of mid twentieth-century ecclesiastical architecture as part of that process. However, without the support of our fellow amenity societies, it is unlikely that a proposal to list the church would be successful and Council members did not therefore feel minded to pursue the matter further. To end on a positive note, as the organ is the work of Henry Willis III it has subsequently been listed at Grade II\* by BIOS which should hopefully secure its survival.

*Sara Crofts*

## NEWS

### **Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme to continue**

The Department for Culture Media and Sport recently announced that this scheme will continue for a further four years from April 2011, although with an fixed annual budget of £12 million. Professional fees and repairs to clocks, pews, bells and organs will be ineligible from 4th January 2011. This decision represents a success for the recent campaign for the continuation of the scheme.

### **Biographies of Unitarian MPs**

Professor David Bebbington's Catalogue of Unitarian MPs in the nineteenth century is now available for download from the Unitarian Historical Society website at <http://www.unitarianhistory.org.uk/hsarchives.html> where it joins a number of other valuable research tools.

### **Capel May Meeting — change of venue**

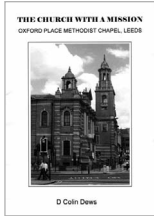
Our colleagues in Capel have asked us to let members know that their meeting scheduled for 11 May 2011 is now to take place in Lampeter not in Ammanford. A visit to Ammanford is now being planned for 2013.

### **New uses for former places of worship**

English Heritage have recently published a well illustrated and informative guide which provides advice on the conversion to new use of historic former places of worship. It is primarily intended to be of benefit to new or potential new owners or occupiers of such buildings. It is also intended to provide clarity for local authorities on the approach taken by English Heritage when advising on proposals for re-use. There are a number of well chosen case studies. The document can be downloaded from <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/new-uses-former-places-of-worship/> or can be ordered in hard copy by e-mailing [customers@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:customers@english-heritage.org.uk).

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Church with a Mission: Oxford Place Methodist Chapel, Leeds* by D. Colin Dews. 2010. 68 pp, paperback. Locally published and available from Oxford Place Methodist Church and Centre, Oxford Place, Leeds, LS1 3AX. £4.00 (including postage and packing).



The author has written much about the life of Methodism within the city of Leeds (his 'Two Hundred and fifty years of Methodism in Woodhouse, Leeds' was reviewed in *Newsletter* 36, June 2007) and this latest book traces the history of one of the city's finest and most influential chapels. In so-doing he also considers the rise of Methodism in the centre of a rapidly growing industrial city that mirrors the onset and blossoming of the industrial revolution throughout the country.

Early stirrings of the Methodist Revival in Leeds were established and developed by men like the Revd Benjamin Ingham (a member of the so-called 'Holy Club' at Oxford) and John Nelson (a stonemason from nearby Birstall) who helped to form a society in Armley, a village on the outskirts of Leeds. This was in 1742 and within a few months Charles Wesley was preaching in the town centre. The first 'purpose-built' Wesleyan chapel was erected in the town about 1766 but congregations gathered in a variety of other buildings including a chapel built around the former house of Matthew Chippendale. This meeting house, situated in the east of the town centre, was completed in 1751 and was known as the Old Boggart. Following John Wesley's direction, Methodists continued to attend their local parish church to receive the sacraments, but met for their own worship outside 'church hours'. Gradually however there emerged reformers who argued that Methodists should follow the 'providential way' and form an independent church, meeting in 'church hours' and celebrating the sacraments administered by their own ministers. This movement led to the 'providential way' proponents forming a separate society, breaking away from the Old Boggart in 1794 and meeting in premises in The Headrow, known as Bethel.

Despite the divisions, the Methodist Society in Leeds grew dramatically throughout the last decade of the eighteenth century and many new chapels were constructed. Among them was a building in Albion Street which was opened in 1802. This chapel was built by the Old Connexion (later known as Wesleyan) Methodists who had formerly met at the Old Boggart but who were now developing their mission in the west of the town. They also took over Bethel meeting house after the reformers (now seen as the New Connexion) had moved to larger premises. The congregations at Bethel and Albion Street were the predecessors of those who eventually bought the site and developed Oxford Place in 1835.

Colin Dews adds much to his central story about the influence of nonconformists in the political and public life of this growing town and, in the case of a few notable men, at a national level. Wealthy businessmen, merchants enjoying the success of new forms of industry, became prominent in the development of prestigious chapels in and around the growing residential areas of the wider township. From 1835, with the passing of the Municipal Corporation Reform

Act, the stranglehold of political power held by the Anglican/Tory borough council was broken. Wesleyans began to seek office and the Liberals became prominent. Oxford Place became associated with the emerging Liberal generation whilst Brunswick Chapel, situated more to the east of the centre, was traditionally a Tory stronghold. Many of the Trustees sought elected office and, in the early life of Oxford Place, seven of the original eighteen Trustees were to stand in the borough elections. The author describes Wesleyan Methodism, at the time of its centenary celebrations in 1839, as 'affluent, influential and comfortable'.

The site of Oxford Place grew in civic stature when the borough council decided to erect their new town hall on adjacent land. This was completed in 1858 and opened by Queen Victoria. The nature of the town centre was changing however, with much commercial building replacing the streets of workers' houses. Colin Dews describes the numerical and monetary effect of these changes on the life and wealth of Methodist societies. There was a further pressure as the Anglican community began to prosper under the direction of the Revd Dr Walter Hook who had become Vicar of Leeds in 1837. By 1859, when Hook left to become Dean of Chichester, the Anglican Church had regained its dominance in the town. Added to this were the demographic changes to the town's population that saw many Irish and Jewish immigrants arrive in Leeds and a marked decline in nonconformist membership.

Into this declining situation arrived the recently ordained Samuel Chadwick. His ministry at Oxford Place, over two periods, was to transform both the ministry and the building in a revolutionary way. Between 1896 and 1902 the building was dramatically reconstructed and extended. School premises were added as were an office suite and church parlour. The chapel was fully refurbished. Here was the real start of the Leeds Mission Circuit. Chadwick moved on to Cliff College in 1907 leaving Oxford Place 'revitalised... and the Leeds Mission firmly established'.

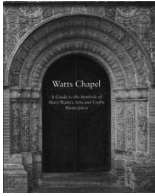
Colin Dews chronicles the continuing work of the Mission until the present day. He notes the effects of wartime austerity, the slow impact of Methodist union in 1932, the centenary celebrations in 1935 and the influence of many gifted and influential superintendent ministers. As twentieth-century society grew ever more distant from the church, the work of the Mission evolved and adapted. By the late 1970s the interior was gutted and reformed to meet the demands of a new vision and the 'gathered' membership. Oxford Place is today a significantly different church from that the founders could have envisaged but continues the mission to bring the gospel to our secular world and meet the challenges of a vibrant commercial city.

This is an excellent little book exemplifying a considerable depth of research and a broad understanding of the evolution of Methodism from the earliest days. In the context of Leeds it gives a flavour of the life and times in a large northern town through the huge changes wrought by the industrial revolution and the subsequent impact on the social order. Whilst the author's style is not always as flowing as one would like, and the proofreading leaves much to be desired, the book is extremely informative and well worth the acquisition.

*David A. Quick*



*Watts Chapel: A Guide to the Symbols of Mary Watts's Arts and Crafts Masterpiece* by Mark Bills. Philip Wilson Publishers Ltd, 2010. 64 pp, paperback. ISBN 978-0856676925. £14.95



The Cemetery Chapel at Compton in Surrey is a rather unusual building with a somewhat Marmite-like quality: it either elicits enthusiastic admiration or intense dislike but rarely indifference. Designed by architect George Tunstal Redmayne FRIBA (1840–1912) under the creative direction of Mary Seton Watts (1849–1938) between 1894 and 1904, it sits firmly within the Arts and Crafts Movement in terms of its aspiration and its architectural style. The Arts and Crafts ethos can also be seen in

the co-operative way in which the Chapel was built and decorated. Although the artistic vision came entirely from Mary Watts the Chapel's elaborate terracotta and gesso decoration was largely manufactured by the parishioners of Compton who attended weekly classes at the Watts family home. Indeed, many of the Chapel's decorative elements were displayed at the London exhibitions of the Home Arts and Industries Association — an organisation that followed John Ruskin's thinking and sought to revive traditional rural craft skills which were perceived to be under threat from mechanised methods of production.

This new guide, which focuses on the symbolism of the extensive decorative elements of the Chapel, is a companion piece, firstly to the well respected guidebook written by Veronica Franklin Gould entitled *Watts Chapel: An Arts and Crafts Memorial* and secondly to Mary Watts's own guide to the symbols she chose for the decoration written whilst the construction of the building was being carried out and first published as *The Word in the Pattern* in 1905. Essentially, Mark Bill's book is best viewed as a reference volume which sets out to illustrate and describe the various decorative elements employed in the Chapel in a logical and therefore usable manner. In this it succeeds excellently and for the most part the photographic illustrations of the external terracotta details are clearly printed at a workable size and helpfully annotated. The inclusion of a number of drawings taken from Mary Watts's source material, details of which are included in full in the bibliography, is a particularly welcome feature. This provides some sense of the artist's intellectual inspiration, which in turn provides a useful insight into the overall vision for this singular architectural creation.

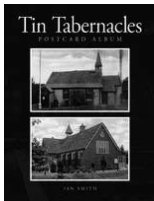
However, the small size of the photographs of elements of the internal gesso panels render them a considerably less successful and the reviewer found herself peering at the images in an attempt to discern the colours and forms. In fairness though, the rather low light levels of the Chapel's interior must make photography something of a challenge. I should also say that the inclusion of a small number of much larger full colour plates in addition to as a selection of early twentieth-century black and white photographs does compensate quite well.

In conclusion, I would suggest that this is a useful addition to the printed material already available on the Cemetery Chapel, its creators and its history though it is very much a visual reference work rather than a guidebook or

commentary. It is clear, concise, well designed and produced to a high quality although I think that if the Arts and Crafts enthusiast wishes to understand the meaning of the Chapel's symbolism in any depth they would be well advised to seek out a second-hand copy of *The Word in the Pattern* and consider the two books together.

Sara Crofts

*Tin Tabernacles: Postcard Album* by Ian Smith. Camrose Media, Pembroke, 2010. 154 pp, paperback. ISBN 978-0-9566132-0-2. £12.99.



Tin Tabernacles, often known formerly as ‘iron churches’ or ‘iron rooms’, are something of an acquired taste. But it is a taste which I for one have acquired, and so I was keen to examine this new book from the publisher of the fascinating album *Tin Tabernacles*. Its distinctive feature is that much of the material (not all, in spite of the title) comprises reproductions or enlargements of postcards of such buildings. I had never realized that they were deemed worthy of having postcards devoted to them.

Inevitably the quality of some of the originals was not good, and the reproduction of others is too dark for some of the detail to be discernible, but the range of interiors and exteriors depicted was an eye-opener. Such buildings appear to have been erected in various parts of the British Commonwealth, too. A welcome inclusion was some reproductions of pages from manufacturers’ catalogues. One even has pictures of ‘tin tabs’ that bit the dust, whether through fire or the weight of snow on the roof.

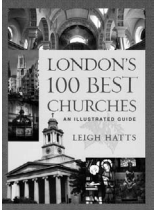
There are some historical and geographical inaccuracies, e.g. the description of ‘the free church’ on p.41 as ‘a movement away from the state run or “established” church (theocracy) and also a protest against the pew rents of the time’ (where would many free churches have been without income from pew rents?), and the location of Horsham in Surrey on p. 62. A sounder grasp of the historical context would have made the story of these buildings — whose permanence in many cases contrasts with the temporary nature of the biblical Tabernacle — all the more attractive and intriguing.

Many of the buildings featured are Anglican, perhaps because they utilized a more varied assortment of such buildings than nonconformists, most of whom would not have had too much use for tin apses and bell towers. Extensive use was made of iron buildings by the Brethren and ‘undenominational’ groups, but postcards might not have had much of a potential market in such circles, and a lack of extant material may explain why the selection is not fully representative of the range of denominations using these constructions.

Overall, this is an interesting selection which will appeal particularly to the market for books reproducing old postcards. I hope it will also stimulate further research into prefabricated religious buildings. And maybe one day someone will write a history of the tin tabernacle.

Tim Grass

*London's 100 Best Churches: An Illustrated Guide* by Leigh Hatts. Canterbury Press, Norwich, 2010. 214 pp, paperback. ISBN 978 1 85311 944 6. £14.99.



Following in the footsteps of Simon Jenkins's *England's Thousand Best Churches*, Mr Hatts sets himself the challenge of selecting the hundred best in the Metropolis after already producing a highly successful guide to *London City Churches*. In a very attractive and highly accessible format, each church is given two facing pages which includes at least one photograph, the opening times, exact address and web-site details, and space for a very readable broad-brush description including snippets of trivia and curios. This guidebook is not a scholarly work, but nor should it need to be when none of the six London volumes of Pevsner dates from before 1983.

Mr Hatts has also published two London walking guides, and his practical approach has led him to exclude churches that are closed all week apart from a service. His previous appointments as editor of *London Link*, the Diocese of London newspaper, and arts correspondent of *The Catholic Herald*, also tend to define the strengths and weaknesses of the book. He is able to broaden the Anglican selection from Simon Jenkins' forty, and thus to correct some major omissions such as All Souls, Langham Place; St Clement Danes; St Giles-in-the-Fields; St Marylebone; St Mary-le-Bow and Southwark Cathedral. He is also stronger in outer London by including parish churches such as Addington, Harrow, Isleworth, Monken Hadley, Putney and Ruislip, although one might regret his decision to ignore St Alfege, Greenwich; St Jude, Hampstead Garden Suburb and its Free Church neighbour; and the (admittedly rarely open) St Mary, Harefield.

Simon Jenkins included only five non-Anglican churches (The Brompton Oratory; The Immaculate Conception, Farm St.; St Etheldreda, Ely Place; St James's, Spanish Place; and Wesley's Chapel), all of which reappear in this volume. The Catholic choices are now augmented by ten more; the merits of one or two have escaped me but I was particularly glad to see The Assumption, Warwick St. (the Bavarian Embassy Chapel); Notre Dame de France, Leicester Square and St Mary Moorfields: St Peter's Italian Catholic church in Clerkenwell is a notable oversight. Rules have been bent in order also to include the rarely open Catholic Apostolic Christ the King, Gordon Square, but not its sister church in Maida Vale.

The disappointment has to be the continued under-representation of Nonconformity, miserably supplemented only by the addition of Bloomsbury Baptist Church and London's last proprietary chapel of St John, Downshire Hill. Of course many chapels have excluded themselves by not being open as regularly as their Anglican and Catholic counterparts, but spectacular omissions include Westminster Central Hall, Union Chapel Islington, Westminster Chapel, City Temple, and the King's Weigh House Chapel. The Chapels Society has of course visited them all, and also more esoteric delights such as St George's German Lutheran Church, St Sophia's Greek Orthodox Cathedral and the Agapemonite Ark of the Covenant, Stamford Hill.

*London's 100 Best Churches* will not therefore supplant the Chapels Society's regular London rambles, but for those members who occasionally dare to stray into a steeple-house, then this is a useful addition not just for the bookshelf but also in the rucksack. The publishers are to be congratulated on producing such a well-illustrated volume for the price.

*Andrew Worth*



*Fake chapel conversion? Andrew Worth photographed this office building in the 'village' of Poundbury, near Dorchester, Dorset, which is clearly designed to look like a converted chapel. Do members know of other 'fake' chapels?*