THE CHAPELS SOCIETY

Newsletter 45 September 2010

Hampstead Garden Suburb Free Church by Lutyens, which celebrates its centenary this year

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NOTICEBOARD

CHAPELS SOCIETY VISITS

2 October 2010	Rugby area (John Anderson)
29 April–2 May 2011	Isle of Man trip (Tim Grass)
9 July 2011	Exeter (Roger Thorne) and AGM

PERSONALIA

Our new Treasurer introduces himself:

Dave Watts BA (Hons), MPhil, MIED is a management consultant based in Stourbridge with a professional training and long experience in urban planning and economic development. For 11 years he has worked with churches, Christian organisations and community groups on business plans, funding and evaluations not least involving new building projects. He is a member of an independent Charismatic Church but for many years was involved in Baptist churches in Hertfordshire (his home county), Scotland and locally as a lay preacher and leader. He is a long standing member of the Baptist Historical Society, has written occasionally in their journal, written histories of Hertfordshire (1978) and Black Country Baptists (1994) and contributed to the national history of Scottish Baptists published in 1989. His current project is a history of Black Country Nonconformist Churches focusing on the big picture of growth and change.

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 SOUTH BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, 17 APRIL 2010

Although only 17th April, the day was hot and sunny, once traditional weather for a Chapels Society field day, though not always realised of late. We were said to be the best attended visit ever as we fitted (just) into our large coach outside Amersham Free Church, many still enjoying reunions with old friends from the early days of the Society.

Chenies Baptist Church (photograph copyright Colin Baxter)

Our first stop after a short rural drive was Chenies Baptist Chapel. We wondered if this was the only chapel in the country with a duck pond and (topically) a duck-house. The red brick chapel itself, dating from 1773 with a front extension of 1779 and a front porch of 1850, was impressively well maintained. An interesting feature we noted was a number of bricks here and there bearing initials and dates, modest acknowledgements of funding in years gone by, we assumed. Inside, we found galleries on three sides, supported on wooden columns, and a peaceful, well-lit, conventional worship space. A modern extension to the rear allows the congregation after service to enjoy the rolling meadows and pastures beyond the small burial ground.

We continued our country jaunt to the famous Quaker Meeting House at Jordans. We noted with particular pleasure how well restored it was after the devastating fire of 2005, which had destroyed the roof and the rear of the building but, thanks to the skill of the fire brigade, not the wooden panelling and

benches of the meeting house itself, whose quiet sense of dignified worship remained. The measured brick building across the the burial ground looked quite unchanged, but burnt timbers on the grass recorded the near-tragedy. Those who walked round the burial ground remarked on the circular lay-out of the graves. It was the purchase of this burial ground in 1671 which prompted the society to erect a meeting house on an adjacent plot after the Act of Toleration of 1689.

Our next call was Beaconsfield United Reformed Church, originally Congregational, a Victorian gothic building of 1875, confidently facing the street and now welcoming visitors through new glass doors. Concealed behind the church, and a sunny garden, was the original square chapel of 1800, which had been hidden from this Tory Anglican town by a row of shops. Like the Quakers of Penn, this congregation also traced its seventeenth-century origins to nearby Coleshill, in their case to the preaching of a Presbyterian minister, William Butler, who settled there after having been ejected from Beaconsfield. (The quiet, ordered, galleried interior was, for this writer, a reminder of 1947 when, as a soldier on a month's course nearby, he had worshipped there.)

We were then driven to visit two buildings in West Wycombe — in two separate parties because each was so small. The first, a former Congregational chapel of 1808 has been the home of West Wycombe Band Club since 1975. Inside, only the original gallery survives, but the exterior is redolent of its simple vernacular origins. It is approached through a narrow entry from the street, a long garden and curved steps, again well concealed from trouble. The other was a former Wesleyan Methodist chapel of 1815, but since the 1950s, after a period in commercial use, occupied by a Christadelphian ecclesia, whose style of worship was explained to us. All its interior fittings had disappeared and there was little in the exterior, well integrated with other buildings either side, to proclaim its history, beyond perhaps its windows and the just discernable stone date recording its erection.

High Wycombe Christadelphian Ecclesia, the former West Wycombe Methodist Chapel of 1815 (photograph copyright Julian Hunt)

Chesham Baptist Church of 1897 brought us to a large, prospering town chapel, with its unchanged Victorian interior, polished pews, a gallery, pulpit and baptistery, the whole bespeaking a confident past and hope for the future. It had been built on the site of a public house — which must have given the members a special lift. Its predecessor of 1718 which had been concealed from the street, had been demolished and was now a car park, though several bricks inscribed with names and dates from this chapel were reset in the back wall of the present building. Of particular interest to the architects among us was the way in which, through a mainly glass extension, the chapel has been linked to the Sunday School next door on two levels. The historians in the party enjoyed an account of Chesham's past devotion to General, Particular and Strict Baptists, far outstriding the Establishment, and underlining the place of historic Dissent in this area of Buckinghamshire which the whole visit had demonstrated.

Finally, we returned to Amersham Free Church, a united church of Baptists and Congregationalists. In the morning, we had been asked not to visit the chapel itself but to hold that back until our return. It was good advice. The exterior of the building (1962) is self effacing — to the passer-by a clinic perhaps or a public library — and the meeting rooms are similarly business-like. The chapel, however, is startlingly different — not in any sense ornate or elaborate, but in the dramatically simple and unadorned way the space is presented. The chapel is rectangular and is constructed of laminated timber, with a series of parabolic arches supporting the roof, a row of clerestory windows on one wall, and a large wooden cross on an otherwise unadorned east wall. It succeeded a gothic building of 1911 in a part of Amersham 'on the Hill' — which developed late, following the arrival of the Metropolitan Line. But the other, older, Amersham fully lives up to the history of Dissent we had been tracing earlier, with its memorial to the Lollard martyrs of the 1520s, five men and one woman, burnt for reading the Bible, an ejected minister in 1662, the first Baptist meeting in 1677 and the first Quaker meeting in 1689.

To say the day ended with a fine chapel tea is on this occasion almost an anticlimax, but it was a specially good one and the chairman's thanks to the ladies of Amersham Free Church and to Julian Hunt and Alan Petford who had put together and guided us through a stimulating day of history and buildings was loudly applauded. How will Andrew Worth compete in July? Well, we know he will!

John Thompson

VISIT TO NOTTING HILL, 3 JULY 2010

Three tiers of assorted gothic features proclaim the facade of Our Lady Queen of Heaven in busy Queensway. We entered via a narrow tunnel off Inverness Place, through a tiny court hemmed in by tall tenements and up a fire escape into the world of nineteenth-century nonconformity. It was easy to imagine some pulpit prince of suburban Methodism preaching to the vertiginous galleries packed with those who served the well to do of this prosperous and expanding area of London in the later nineteenth century. Bought from the Methodists in 1909 by

the enterprising Dr Coit of the West London Ethical Society, the building became an Ethical church. After the Second World War, as the fortunes of the ethical movement waned, the building was leased briefly to a Unitarian congregation before being bought by the Society of the Oblates of St Charles. The changing fortunes of the building are indicative of the rapidly shifting religious landscape in this interesting part of London. As such it was an appropriate place to begin our day in Notting Hill.

Interior of Our Lady Queen of Heaven, Queensway
(photograph copyright Colin Baxter)

A packed day included the inspection of no less than eighteen buildings, all well within the compass of a single square mile. Andrew Worth's meticulously planned itinerary ensured that hardly a street corner was turned without us encountering a building presently or formerly in religious use. And what variety there was! To move from the Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Moscow Road, to the Swedenborgian church, Pembridge Villas, is to be transported from Byzantine magnificence to eighteenth-century mysticism in a quarter of a mile. The Greek Orthodox Cathedral was financed by wealthy Greek merchants inhabiting Bayswater and built by John Oldrid Scott. We were able to inspect the rich interior and appreciate its difficult acoustic. Incense hanging heavy in the air, rich upright oak pews with misericords, a glimpse through the splendid Iconostasis, Christ in majesty looking down from the central dome; this is a little bit of the Levant in London. By contrast, Lewis Soloman's chapel built for the Swedenborgians in 1925 is a very passable imitation of a minor Wren building, utterly at home in the capital. Many of the interior fittings were reused. The pews, complete with their lignum vitae cappings, came from New College, Islington, while the east end had been ingeniously furnished with panelling from the Mauretania.

St Paul's Presbyterian Church House provided a comfortable place to eat our lunches as well as generous supplies of tea and coffee. It was also the venue for the brief Annual General Meeting. After lunch and the AGM our perambulation took us to the catholic church of St Mary of the Angels, Bayswater. A church of considerable presence, begun by Thomas Meyer in 1851 and extended by J. F. Bentley later in the century, the building manages to look as if it has grown naturally and organically. Since it has passed out of the hands of the Oblates of St Charles into the care of secular priests the church has played an important part in the social as well as religious work of the district. Our way then took us past no less than nine buildings of religious interest. These included Westbourne Grove Baptist church where, after a drastic restoration of the building, a congregation of twenty-three worship in a basement under a fashionable clothes boutique, the erstwhile Talbot Tabernacle, an example of evangelical entrepreneurism, and the Notting Hill Community Church, the doors of which were encouragingly wide open.

Notting Hill Methodist Church (photograph copyright Colin Baxter)

The Serbian Orthodox Church of St Sava in Lancaster Road is one of Hodgson Fowler's rare essays in Romanesque, not that it makes much impression from Lancaster Road, where the narrow street frontage allows only a view of the west end, which has been rather altered in recent years. Inside, however, the size of Hodgson Fowler's church is immediately evident, as is his ability to handle, rather successfully, buildings on this scale. Since its purchase from the Church of England in 1952 the church has been used by a Serbian Orthodox congregation and is now equipped with all the requirements for their liturgy. Here, as at many of the buildings we visited, a priest spoke about the church, its history and present mission, which gave us a valuable glimpse of the contemporary context of the building.

Our day ended in the hospitable hands of the Notting Hill Methodists who made us very welcome in their church that has been successfully converted by the familiar expedient of dividing the church at gallery level. One incidental advantage of this arrangement that immediately became apparent is that it allows eager ecclesiologists to inspect more closely the roof structure. Upstairs is the worship

space where the minister told us a little about the church, and played the organ, challenging members to sing the Doxology. On the floor below we were served a splendid chapel tea in the best traditions of the Society.

Days like this are among the highlights of the Society calendar. We owe Andrew Worth a considerable debt of gratitude, not only for his carefully planned itinerary but also for obtaining entry into such a fascinating variety of buildings. His detailed, informative and copious notes sent out in advance of the visit raised anticipations which were not disappointed. And, of course, Andrew arranged, as he always does, that the sun should shine.

Alan Petford

REPORT OF THE 22ND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 22nd Annual General Meeting of the Chapels Society took place at Bayswater United Reformed Church, London on 3 July 2010. The President, Christopher Wakeling, chaired the meeting at which 36 members were present. After welcoming everyone to the AGM, the President began by noting that he felt that few societies operated as effectively as the Chapels Society, which was a credit to council members past and present. He also reminded those present that the membership subscription rate was something of a bargain, especially in relation to the many and varied activities of the Society. For this reason he felt that the more or less static membership figure was a concern and encouraged existing members to work hard to recruit new members to help ensure a secure future for the Society. The Society's Officers were then asked to give their reports.

The Hon Secretary, Sara Crofts, noted that it had once again been a busy year in terms of casework and also that she had dealt with a number of requests for information and advice. The Hon Treasurer, Andrew Worth, outlined the Society's financial position and noted that the finances were in good shape generally, although the reserves were currently a little depleted as a result of the production costs of *Miscellany 2*. The Hon Editor, Chris Skidmore, remarked that he hoped that members welcomed the additional *Newsletter* but noted that this means that more articles and stories are required to fill the pages. He therefore encouraged those present to consider contributing items in the future. He also displayed a copy of the recently printed *Miscellany 2* and commended it to members.

The Hon Visits Secretary, Tim Grass, summarised the visits held during the year and expressed warm thanks to all those who had given their time and expertise in organising what was generally felt to be an excellent programme of study days. He also looked ahead to the autumn visit to Rugby, noting that places were filling quickly and also to the 2011 visit to the Isle of Man. He concluded by reminding those present that anyone was welcome to propose and prepare a visit and that he would be very pleased to receive suggestions.

The adoption of the *Annual Report and Accounts 2009* was agreed unanimously.

Turning to the election of trustees, the President explained that John Anderson and Celia Gibbs had reached the end of their second terms of office

Retiring Treasurer, Andrew Worth, who was thanked for his outstanding contribution at the AGM, consults his notes during the Notting Hill visit (photograph copyright Sara Crofts)

this year and would be standing down. The Hon Treasurer, Andrew Worth, would also be standing down. The President expressed his deep gratitude to all three council members and hoped that it was a farewell rather than a goodbye. He also noted the outstanding contribution made by Andrew Worth. He had proved to be a remarkable Treasurer, working quietly and diligently to look after the Society's finances. Cards were presented to John Anderson and to Andrew Worth and the President noted that a card would be passed to Celia Gibbs at a later date. David Watts was elected to the post of Hon Treasurer and Alan Rose was elected as a council member. The President was also re-elected for a second term as were council members Paul Gardner and Roger Thorne. Sara Crofts, Chris Skidmore and Tim Grass were also re-elected to their posts.

In his concluding remarks the President drew members' attention to two important initiatives. The first was the publication of Options for the Disposal of Redundant Churches and Other Places of Worship, an extremely useful document that would be of great help to congregations facing the issue of giving up a building and who were not presently being alerted to options other than disposal at the highest price. The second initiative was the recent launch of the Places of Worship at Risk Campaign. All listed places of worship will be receiving a copy of Caring for Places of Worship in the coming weeks. This is a new English Heritage publication that contains examples of good practice and also signposts to further advice and guidance. The President brought the meeting to a close by thanking everyone for attending and also thanking the Society's hosts at Bayswater URC.

Sara Crofts

THE BAPTIST LIGHTS OF SHREWTON

AN ARTICLE BY ALISON LIGHT

The village of Shrewton lies in the valley of the River Till, overshadowed by chalk escarpments, about four miles from Stonehenge. One of my ancestors, Charles Light, was the pastor of the Zion Chapel, a Baptist church there, in the second half of the nineteenth century. Charles's younger brother, Henry, was also a Baptist minister, preaching in Chitterne, the next village. His son, another Henry, my father's grandfather, took their trade — bricklaying — and their religion south to Portsmouth.

Shrewton is halfway between Salisbury and Devizes, on the old road between London and Warminster, a position that made it less dependent on the sheep and corn farming from which most local people derived a living. Tradesmen and artisans set up shop there; carters delivered goods and made purchases en route to the more isolated villages on Salisbury Plain; inns catered for travellers and, more recently, for visitors to Stonehenge. I left my car near the less hospitable accommodation provided by the Blind House, the old parish lock-up, a windowless brick cell in the shape of a pepper-pot, into which prisoners were crammed for the night before being moved to Salisbury's Fisherton Gaol.

I'm an old hand at family history so I knew that there had been Lights in Shrewton, but their faith was a surprise. A few months after my father's death I chanced on the Portsmouth Nonconformist registers and found his immediate forebears: all roads led to Zion. My father often mentioned that his father had left home because his family were 'strict Salvationists', but that didn't mean much to either of us. He half-hoped they were in the Salvation Army, recalling with admiration the girls in bonnets who'd braved the pubs of his youth selling copies of their magazine. My father never went to church himself, but he was a great believer in what he called 'the fifth dimension': a mix of moral philosophy, humility in the face of the unknown, Wellsian science and hedging his bets. I went to Shrewton because I miss him and it was one way of carrying on our talks, but I was also prompted by reading the *Victoria County History of Wiltshire*, which reveals that on Census Sunday 1851, 350 people, more than half the population of Shrewton, attended Zion Chapel's services. In this village the Baptists were not a minority sect.

Even without the pictures I'd downloaded from the internet, the chapel would have been unmistakeable. Positioned aslant the road with its entrance facing up the High Street, it dominates one end of the village, about as far from the Anglican church, St Mary's, as could be. It's an imposing, undecorated brick structure with the date 1816 over its lintel, quite elegant in its simplicity, its windows symmetrically arranged. Now called Zion House, it has the introverted, shifty look of a public building converted into a private residence. There's no mention of the Baptists. Perhaps Zion's memorials are still inside. Guiltily checking I was not being observed I peered through the windows, catching sight of a modern kitchen. Ministers were often buried under the pulpit and I wondered whether Charles Light's ashes were now beneath the fridge or cooker and whether I should care.

Shrewton's first Baptist chapel, Bethesda, was built 20 years before Zion and was a good deal more discreet. Tucked away at the top of Chapel Lane, which runs uphill from the High Street, it was, *VCH* tells me, a mud-walled house built in the garden of a tinker convert. Bethesda is long gone, as are the next-door Bethesda Buildings, where Charles and Henry's parents, Thomas and Christian, lived.

The doors of St Mary's church were also shut. The current incumbent, Sue Armitage, is a team vicar who serves four parishes. St Mary's has a long history of hard-pressed or absent clergy. In the 1780s, when the evangelical revival stirred the Baptists back into action, Shrewton's vicar, John Skinner, lived in Salisbury, where he was master of the cathedral choristers; he left the parish to an underling who served three livings on low pay and celebrated communion three times a year. Most of the labouring poor avoided church and resented church tithes. The Church of England was the church of the gentry, who expected them to stand at the back, go up last for communion and be buried in the worst corner of the churchyard. Before they became Baptists, the Lights relied heavily on parish handouts; then as now the building trade was unsteady work, dependent on the vicissitudes of the weather and the amount of money around. In 1793 Thomas Light's grandmother Mary was buried courtesy of the parish in a shroud costing three shillings and a coffin costing eight.

Between 1800 and 1850 nearly 1200 places in Wiltshire, some tiny cottages, were registered for dissenting worship. Rejecting infant baptism was more than a doctrinal difference; it made the members of the sect separatists, outside the parish, which was an administrative unit of the state. The Baptists were on equal terms with their pastors; Charles and Henry Light were chosen by fellow church members. The ministry was not a sinecure; pastors could be ejected if unpopular and congregations could vote with their feet: in 1861 one schismatic group left the Zion Chapel and set up a Wesleyan Methodist church which is still in business on the High Street in Shrewton. From the 1820s the village's Baptists ran Sunday schools and evening study groups for around 200 adults and children, the only education most of them would get. Farm workers, washerwomen, thatchers, hedgers, carriers, carpenters, shopwomen, servants — these were among Zion's congregation.

I wanted to quiz the locals in the pub but I was too shy. I nervously raised the question of Baptists with the woman serving me in the local Londis, but she looked blank until I mentioned Zion House: she said it had been bought by architects but was now rented out. There were no local history pamphlets in the shop and all the postcards were of St Mary's, Salisbury Cathedral or Stonehenge. I bought a tea towel for £4.50 which shows all the local pubs and churches, the Londis shop itself, the garage, the lock-up and several other buildings, but not Zion Chapel. I'm surprised that there isn't a picture of the saddle and harness-maker's shop where Cecil Chubb was born. Chubb got a scholarship to grammar school in Salisbury and a double first at Cambridge. He bought Stonehenge for £6600 in 1915 when a local family auctioned off their estate and he gave it to the nation three years later; Shrewtonians still have free admission. There's a plaque on the side of Chubb's old house, but it's covered with foliage. Wandering back

to Zion I plucked up the courage to knock on the door, framing my unlikely introduction — 'Excuse me but my great-great-grandfather's brother was pastor here' — but no one answered.

I'd like to see a plaque on Zion's walls. I feel tender towards those who refused to conform, who walked up Shrewton's High Street in the opposite direction from St Mary's, cocking a snook, I like to think, at pastor and squire. What matters to me is politics, what mattered to them was salvation; the misery and poverty the congregation suffered in this life is easier for me to appreciate than the joy they may have felt about the next. I should have contacted the nearest surviving Baptist church a couple of miles off at Tilshead, but their website put me off: 'We believe the Bible to be totally reliable and true, written by men inspired by God.'

Genealogy used to belong only to the wealthy, with their 'line' of ancestors ratifying their claim to land and property, entitling them to a stake in the past. The history of the poor, by contrast, is usually one of temporary tenancies, expropriations, evictions and migrations. This may be one reason family history websites are so popular: family history constitutes a narrative; it resettles. Genealogy is now largely an obsession for those, middle-aged or older, who are alert to time passing and want to make peace with the recently dead. It's flourishing at a time when family members are far-flung and fewer of us actually live in families. Discovering long-lost ancestors online is a happily mournful activity, but they're easier to deal with than living relatives; they don't need looking after or ringing up.

The next day in the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre in Chippenham I read Zion's Church Book, which records its meetings. The language is familiar: committees and minutes, mutual responsibility and moral policing, 'brothers' and 'sisters' who are 'excluded' or 'erased' from the sect for wrongdoing. Nothing survives from Charles Light's 34-year pastorate. In 1889, when the church membership had shrunk to 50, revisionists destroyed the old records and church rolls, in which there was 'much to sadden': 'unscriptural marriages of members with the ungodly; slander; immorality; drunkenness; bad language'. The Rev. Light had belonged to an older dispensation. By the end of the nineteenth century Baptist ministers were usually college-trained, the temperance movement was in full swing, and being a dissenter was socially acceptable. The Lights became master builders and employers; their sons solicitors and architects.

Not my grandfather. In the one photograph I have of him, he is on a building site, a man in his fifties or sixties: cap and Norfolk jacket, V-neck pullover, shirt and tie. He faces the camera with a cryptic smile, the tips of his fingers resting lightly, perhaps in a mildly proprietorial way, on a pile of bricks. I inherited his *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary* (1932) with his name and initials, H. H. (Henry Herbert) Light, inked on a spine held together with the masking tape decorators use. He tried to escape his fate, left the church, abandoned his apprenticeship and joined the navy as a cook's mate at some point before the First World War. Twenty years later, in the midst of the Depression, a widower with four children, he came back to Portsmouth, according to my dad, 'with his tail between his legs', and begged work from his Salvationist father. He never returned to the fold and was always too fond of a drink.

The records for the sale of Zion Chapel are preserved in Chippenham. I found a letter from an elderly member who had 'borne witness' for 40 years, and wrote to thank the minister after the service held for the church's decommissioning. His sermon was 'so nicely put over that we could feel it was only the bricks and mortar to give up'. For Baptists the church is the visible church of the congregation or it is nothing. Even so I wish they had been a little more worldly. The Baptists sold for £65,000 in 1999; in 2006 Zion was on the market with Savills for half a million more than this, advertised as 'a modernist heaven' with a floor 'of poured concrete which is heated to blood temperature and studded with lights', a 'kitchen-zone, two enclosed pods (for television snug and study)' and five bedrooms. Riders attached to the original contract veto the property being used for the sale of alcohol, for the purposes of gambling or 'any other illegal or immoral purpose' and forbid any direct reference to the 'Baptist Chapel'.

Shrewton's first Baptist chapel owed its existence to Thomas Wastfield and John Saffery, itinerant preachers supported by the Baptist Missionary Society who travelled the plain, gathering converts 'amidst great opposition'. An accounts book from 1796 details every subscription from local Baptists and every item of expenditure on the new chapel: ten quarters of lime (£1 12s), flints, chalk stones and the cost of wheeling the dirt for the walls (£1 2s); 1000 laths with nails (1s), 500 bricks and their carriage from Warminster and Salisbury (16s); 23 bushels of hair (13s 5d), and 1700 pantiles for the roof (£4 16s 4d). A Mr Light was paid £17 14s 6d for building the walls of the Bethesda meeting house, tiling and plastering. Two women, who worked for more than three weeks digging and drawing earth, earned 12 shillings each. Their names are not recorded.

This article, somewhat edited, is reprinted with permission from The London Review of Books. *Zion Chapel is briefly recorded in Stell* Wiltshire *(129).*

A CONSERVATIVE TAKE ON CONSERVATION

AN ARTICLE BY CLYDE BINFIELD

Mine is a conservative take on conservation, and to show how conservative it is I go back to early last century. It is 1927. Failing congregations, economic hardship, and the demands of modem life have convinced the powers that be that two historic Lincoln parish churches, St. Peter's and St. Benedict's, should go. For five years the forces of reaction fight to save the churches. In June 1931 one of the keenest of those conservatives, stressing how they have 'taken account of the *intangible side of religion, which any religious person knows is the most important part of it*', writes: 'If no service is ever held in St Peter's and all its endowments are used elsewhere, the church as a place of private prayer and a religious monument is not without its religious value, to say nothing of its architectural value.' The battle is drawn. St Benedict's is saved but St Peter's is lost. As a result 1930s Lincoln had wider roads and brand new premises for the Fifty Shilling Tailors.

I begin with that story, which I have used on many occasions, for two reasons. First, it seems to me to offer one of the best reasons for conservation that I have yet encountered. And secondly, it proves to me that nothing is ever quite what it seems.

Take, for instance, that keen conservative, Bernard Lord Manning. He was typical. He did not worship at St Peter's, he did not live in Lincoln, he was an academic. It gets worse. He was a Cambridge don and a medieval historian. Oddly enough, the one thing that he did know about was money and property. Although he was still quite a young man — late thirties — he was a markedly shrewd and successful college bursar, at a time when life was hard for the managers of old estates. He was a perfect chairman for a property committee.

But I focus on this upholder of the intangible in religion and the all too tangible structures which so often contain it, because he was not an Anglican at all. He was a Congregationalist. Today he would be United Reformed. He called himself an 'Orthodox Dissenter', a phrase that he made his own. He came from a tradition which announced at every opportunity that the Church was people, not buildings. His witness eighty years ago encourages me to turn from Lincoln's St. Benedict and St. Peter to Oxfordshire's Cote Baptist Chapel and the West Riding's Hopton United Reformed Church.

Cote is a hamlet in the constituency of Witney. Witney is the sort of area where it would be unthinkable to have an MP who was not a Conservative. Therefore, in the past thirty years it has had some unusual MPs — Douglas Hurd, most mandarin of civilised Europhiles; Shaun Woodward, a Sainsbury son-in-law turned New Labour government minister; and now David Cameron, of whom I need say no more, save that he has taken considerable interest in Cote's Baptist Chapel: he has even spoken from its pulpit.

Just possibly this strange stream of Toryism owes something to a Free Church tradition: Witney town used to heave with Methodists and there have been Baptists around Cote since the 1650s. Even thirty years ago its Baptist church had 120 members. But demography tells. Cote is tiny, its congregation was drawn from a wide area. In 1994 the Baptist Trust Corporation transferred this II* listed building to the Historic Chapels Trust.

If Cote still housed an active Baptist church, the pews would be replaced by chairs, a tasteful carpet would be on the floor, a screen for the projection of songs would overshadow the pulpit, which would never be used, and there would be generous provision for jungle drums. My choice of words might suggest distaste at such a prospect but you need not read too much into that. Because Cote no longer houses an active Baptist church, what you see remains apparently seamless: externally a limestone rubble box of 1756, with a stone-slated double-pitched roof. In fact, what you see is as it has been since 1859, a year of evangelistic revival. That was when the double pitched stone-slated roof was obscured by that flat topped gable with its scrolled stone panel — an engagingly baroque touch, reminding us that even Victorians could be in tune with the Georgians. And the interior reminds us yet more forcefully: for this too is 1859 — that is when the galleries were put in, that is when the chastely elegant pulpit was put in (previously the pulpit was in the centre of another wall), that is when

the side vestry was enlarged for tea meetings. Nonetheless the spirit of the building remains seamless; the pulpit, for the exposition of the Word, commands every sitting, each person, in the meeting house — for they are meeting, family by family from the cottages and farms of the area; the baptistery is in the heart of the building, surrounded by the family pews, but subordinate to the Word from the pulpit, and, when not in use, it is boarded over, for this was also the table pew, for the Lord's Supper, the bread and wine taken by the deacons to each church member. And is such conservation justified? In 1952 the chapel, still in use, spoke sufficiently to John Betjeman and John Piper for them to illustrate and describe it in that minor classic, *First and Last Loves*. It certainly fits my Cambridge don's criteria architecturally and religiously. It speaks clearly of a particular use, a particular community. It suggests a particular spirituality. It also allows the visitor to take account of the intangible side of religion, as a place of private prayer, the sun slanting on its pews whenever it shines, whatever the time of day.

And for those of us who still insist that the Church is *not* the building? This building, so strictly restored, *circa* 1859, spirit of 1759, is markedly apt for purpose. It is a building for community and fellowship. Its acoustics are good. Its supposedly inflexible box-pewed ambience is remarkably flexible for secular meetings, concerts, retreats, away days. Its vestry allows for full catering and if you go outside, perhaps to picnic among the tombs to gentleman farmers, and eighteenth-century ministers with degrees from Scottish Universities, you will find in the old stable block new lavatories, and even a useful committee room. Here is a place which still announces another world and far horizons — not least because the leading tombs are to the family of a man who became, not a Baptist but a Congregationalist, a pioneer missionary in the South Seas, John Williams, the martyr of Erromanga, whose name thrilled Sunday School children for generations, and reverberates still for some of us.

So to the West Riding. Yorkshire is not Oxfordshire. That said, and accepted, it is even so not such a very far cry from Witney and its blankets to the woollen mills of places like Mirfield. Like Witney, Mirfield proper has also been a Methodist sort of place, but here, half a mile to the south, on the other side of

The interiors of Cote chapel (left) and Hopton URC (right)
(photos copyright the author)

the Calder, at Lower Hopton, is what was built in 1829 as a Congregational church: a plainly spacious building in the Doric style, severely elegant in finely-dressed stone. It commands a slope, rising from the river bank: behind it are sturdily utilitarian halls and schools, most notably providing stabling for the carriages of far flung worshippers; and some of them were carriages rather than pony traps. In the 1850s the members included a manufacturer called Joseph Dixon Asquith. He was frail in health and not too robust in business but his wife was related to every West Riding millowning family of any standing, and his younger son became Prime Minister. That sort of thing would have surprised nobody in this sort of chapel.

This building's references are Georgian. There had been Congregationalists at Hopton since 1733 and they had followed on directly from Presbyterians who had been there since the 1650s. So the community is the same sort of age and is woven into the wider community's fabric in the same way as Cote's Baptists.

The interior is spacey, prosperous, and again surprisingly plain for such evident past prosperity. Like Cote it is grade II*, and the reason for that lies in the nature and completeness of its interior, essentially a survival of pews and galleries from 1829: such survivals are rare. It is not a complete survival because the interior was dignified in the early twentieth century by that organ — but the implications of such improvements were welded onto the existing fabric with a surprising sensitivity. It is as if past associations weighed with those who were then updating their old building to fit modern needs.

The cause was a lively concern into the 1960s, perhaps the 1970s. In November 2006 it closed, its church merged with a neighbouring United Reformed Church, and the future of its building has been a matter of concern ever since. Since May 2009 it has belonged to a developer who bought it at auction for £40,000, on a reserve price of £20,000: but that was peanuts compared to the £400,000 that had been floated in the air by another developer in the heady atmosphere of long ago 2007.

And here you come to the competing forces of Listed Building Legislation and contrasting views of mission. The original developer submitted an attractive proposal to convert the chapel into fourteen flats. But the force of the II* listing lay in the interior that he proposed to destroy. And further elephant traps lay in the capacious grounds which were, of course, a graveyard, and in the freehold, because some of it was in fact leasehold; and then there were the bats. No scheme, however attractive, could be taken for granted unless it confronted these issues head on: and this scheme fell at the first hurdle.

But what have such matters to do with the mission of the Church? They are matters for developers, not the Church, and from one Church point of view, it was the conservationists, doggedly drawing attention to such issues, who were chiefly responsible for the dwindling of £400,000 to £40,000. No wonder the Historic Chapels Trust's eleventh-hour offer of the guide price, £20,000, if the chapel were withdrawn from auction, was ignored.

And yet several of the conservationists were motivated no less by their sense of the mission of the Church. In its heyday, the chapel faced across the Calder to mills that have now been regenerated. Within an easy radius of the site are resi-

dential areas ranging from sturdily viable artisan terraces to late twentieth-century executive to the hillside West Riding stockbroker belt of upper Hopton: exactly the sort of social confluence that Congregationalism once catered for. Here be those much derided citizens — Nimbies: the very sort who, if saved for lives of civic usefulness, could form committees, crowd into concerts, make surprising use of what the Church had found to be so coldly inflexible. The grounds would remain as a green space; the ancillary buildings would be perhaps residential, perhaps workshops; and there would be room behind it all for what current jargon mincingly calls 'social housing'. There would be no megabucks for developers, but a community would have been consolidated, and the United Reformed Church, relieved of its immediate responsibilities, might even have found scope for a renewed mission, twenty-first-century-style, where mission has been exercised for at least 350 years.

That might yet be, but I would not yet bet on it.

The original version of this article was an illustrated lecture given in Sheffield Cathedral in December 2009 to a joint meeting of the Friends of the Cathedral and the South Yorkshire area of the Historic Churches Trust.

NEWS

Top 300 chapels?

Our secretary was approached by someone creating a *Guide to Christian England* website who wanted our help to identify 30 or so chapels to be representative of nonconformity among the 3000 entries! We have tactfully suggested that this may be an under-representation and made some preliminary suggestions. Would members perhaps like to contribute their lists of top chapels to feed into a broader survey which could eventually appear on the Society's website?

Meetings of other Societies

The Strict Baptist Historical Society's 50th Anniversary and Open Day will take place at Dunstable Baptist Church, St Mary's Gate, Dunstable LU6 3SW on Saturday 25 September 2010. The library and displays will be open from 12 noon with a meeting with addresses at 3.00 pm.

Members are also reminded of the ADHSCL AGM on Thursday 21 October 2010 at 2.00 pm at Lumen United Reformed Church, 88 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RS when the lecture 'The Nonconformist Padre in the first world war: four accounts of what they did' will be given by Dr John H. Thompson.

First the bad news…

In the early hours of 12 June, St Mary-in-the-Wood United Reformed church in Morley [Stell, *Yorkshire (West Riding)* (300)], near Leeds, was gutted by fire. The building, by Lockwood and Mawson, 1876, had been closed in 2008 and was facing plans to be converted and incorporated into a larger hotel development.

The former Congregational church in Painswick, Gloucestershire [Stell *Gloucestershire* (120)], latterly Christ Church Baptist-United Reformed is to close and is likely to be sold. The current building dates from 1803, altered in

1892, and contains a window by Morris & Co. The final service will be on Sunday 26 September.

. . .and then the good

The Swedish Seaman's church, Liverpool by W. D. Caroe [*Newsletter* 38, May 2008] has better news. The mother church in Sweden is still intending to close the church but English Heritage have upgraded the building to grade II*, commenting that 'architecturally it is a very powerful composition, clearly expressive of the Scandinavian nature of the building'.

Rutland Chapels

The comprehensive list, with photographs, of all the chapels in Rutland together with a bibliography which Nigel Webb provided for our visit to Rutland in 2009 is now available on the web at http://www.rutlandhistory.org/pdf/rutlandchapels.pdf.

National survey of Methodist Chapels deposited in Oxford

The Wesley Historical Society library at the Westminster College campus of Oxford Brookes University has acquired the Keith Guyler collection. Keith Guyler travelled the country over the last 30 years taking photographs of existing and former Methodist chapels and otherwise documenting them. His collection is thought to provide the most extensive national record of past and present Methodist chapels.

Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme update

The Government have responded to the electronic petition to extend this scheme beyond 31 March 2011, which attracted some 9000 signatures. They acknowledge the success of the scheme but promise no action. Members are still encouraged to get involved by writing to their MP (a sample letter is at www.savetherefund.info).

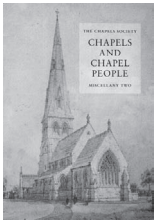
Pork-pie chapel renamed

The former sanctuary of the old 'pork-pie chapel' in Leicester (formerly Baptist, 1845) has been named 'Hansom Hall' in honour of the architect Joseph Aloysius Hansom (1803–1882). The Deputy Lord Mayor named the room at a small ceremony on 29 June 2010, the anniversary of Hansom's death.

The building, on Belvoir Street, has classical columns projecting from a distinctive semi-circular external façade: two projecting turrets contain disused spiral stairways. The main roof is domed. The building now forms part of the Leicester Adult Education College. The sanctuary interior remains intact though without pews, pulpit or other fittings, except the baptistery which is hidden beneath a dais: high above, the chapel's semi-circular gallery remains, complete with pews.

BOOK REVIEW

Chapels and Chapel People: Miscellany Two. (ed. Chris Skidmore) Chapels Society, 2010. 108 pp, paperback. ISBN 978-0-9545061-3-1 £18



Chapel Society members should be pleased with this handsomely produced second *Miscellany*. The scholarship is stimulating and the front cover carries an attractive reproduction of Thomas Worthington's watercolour drawing of Hyde Chapel, Gee Cross.

With the exception of Kate Tiller's 'Chapel People in 1851: the example of Berkshire', the articles have a northern focus; though Clyde Binfield's 'The Prime of T. Lewis Banks' deals with an architect with Cumberland roots, undertaking nationwide commissions. Alan Petford's '*Horrible Dictu*: Unitarians and Ecclesiology in Northern England' and Sarah Hill's 'The Cross and the Crown: the First Church of Christ, Scientist, Manchester, by Edgar Wood' are primarily about chapel building in and around Manchester.

Kate Tiller's opening piece usefully sets the scene. The 1851 Religious Census confirmed Nonconformists in their growing confidence. Berkshire may not be a county that best illustrates the growth of chapel peoples' status in terms of industrial enterprise or personal wealth, but it suggests how in every location Nonconformist faith was made more visible in impressive new or reconstructed chapels.

Alan Petford begins with Charles Barry's Upper Brook Street Chapel erected in 1837, the very first example of Nonconformist Gothic, though not uncontroversial and only adopted after Classical designs were rejected as too expensive. Early replacement of the congregation's Moseley Street Chapel was possible only because it was founded specifically as a Unitarian cause in 1789.

The other chapels he deals with, Hyde Chapel at Gee Cross and Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds; Dukinfield Old Chapel and St Petersgate, Stockport; and Barry and Brown's Hope Street Church, Liverpool, were all intended to replace meeting houses stemming from the Old Dissent, and while the legal status of their trusts remained the subject of litigation, trustees were reluctant to incur expense until the matter was settled by the Dissenters' Chapels Act of 1844.

When the Act finally brought security, industrial and commercial wealth enabled congregations to adopt the fashionable new Gothic. Yet, as Petford explains, Unitarians had also shared culturally in the general philosophical and architectural trends of the Romantic Movement, when even the rationalism of eighteenth-century Unitarianism gave way to more intuitive and experiential styles of worship, under the leadership of James Martineau and J. J. Tayler, the Upper Brook Street minister.

The major breakthrough for Gothic occurred at Gee Cross, Hyde, in 1848, where the Dissenters' Chapels Act of 1844 provided the occasion for it, if not the reasons. Here, Bowman and Crowther's senior articled pupil, Thomas Worthington, was much involved with day-to-day building, and it was he who later became the denomination's principal architectural servant.

A Gothic exterior was not the only innovation. Internally the pulpit and lectern were separated to either side, and a centrally placed stone communion

table, looking exactly like an 'altar' has ever since been mistakenly referred to as such by those ignorant of the theological issues. In only a few respects did Hyde Chapel retain the ordering of an older Nonconformist building: there was no central aisle; the font was in the chancel; and the organ and choir still occupied the west end.

At nearby Old Chapel, Dukinfield, a severe storm in 1839 precipitated rebuilding that might otherwise have been delayed until legal security was established. Here, the architect, Richard Tattersall, built tall and provided a distinctive arrangement for a high central pulpit only reached by a stairway from the vestry, as was also the case, originally, at St Petersgate, Stockport. The preacher's seat is attached to the pulpit door, and when the minister has entered the chapel keeper closes the latch.

Sarah Hill's essay on Edgar Wood's 'arts and crafts' masterpiece at Daisy Bank Road is timely for this year, which marks the 150th anniversary of the architect's birth. Attempts are made, though not very successfully, to trace the influences upon Wood, and to supply reasons for the connections with his clients. Much of his work is in his birthplace at Middleton, Lancashire, where his father was a wealthy mill owner. While stressing his individualism, Hill surprisingly fails to refer to his family's Unitarianism. There is little evidence to suggest Wood actively held onto the religious associations of his childhood, or any others for that matter, but a late example of his work in 1911 was the Oliver Heywood Memorial Sunday School at Lydgate Unitarian Chapel, West Yorkshire. His second church commission, after Temple Street Baptist Chapel, Middleton, in 1889, was Middleton Unitarian Church, in 1892. Sadly, this was demolished in 1965, before his reputation received the recognition it enjoys today. Hill concludes that while one might expect that the Manchester Christian Science community, as followers of Mary Baker Eddy's strongly non-materialistic life, might have been indifferent to the physical environment of worship, they in fact showed themselves to be independent minded and artistically discerning.

There were no reasons why Congregational chapels should not have been regularly and adequately maintained throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Congregationalists had nonetheless prospered. Men who had become builders, engineers, mill owners and accountants now desired places of worship more imposing and comfortable. Professor Binfield traces developments from the appointment of T. Lewis Banks as architect for St James' Congregational Church, Newcastle upon Tyne, where there was a desire to 'place Congregationalism upon an adequate basis in the metropolis of the North', in a style that would reflect the changed social status of its promoters. Banks too had undergone a similar change and was at the peak of his career with a practice in London, where from being the son of a Cockermouth ironmonger he had married the daughter of Congregational minister John Curwen, also with Cumbrian ancestry, who from his Plaistow chapel had popularised the Tonic Sol-Fa method of singing. Binfield is particularly strong in reflecting the overall title of the *Miscellany*, intricately combining a study of Banks's commissions with the web of professional, family relationships and chapel people that lay behind them.

Leonard Smith

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