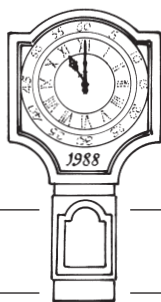


# THE CHAPELS SOCIETY



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Newsletter 48

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September 2011

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*The interior of Trinity Methodist Church, Douglas which was a  
highlight of the visit to the Isle of Man in May  
(photograph copyright Sara Crofts)*

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# ADDRESS BOOK

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# NOTICEBOARD

## CHAPELS SOCIETY VISITS

1 October 2011

Reading and Henley (Chris Skidmore)

# EDITORIAL

Plans are still proceeding for a conference in spring 2012 on the subject of ‘seating in chapels’. Unfortunately, as we go to press, there is as yet no confirmed date for this, or for the first visit of 2012, which is likely to be to chapels in Kidderminster and Bewdley.

Our visits this year have continued to be well attended and successful, as witness the lively reports in this edition of the *Newsletter*. If members have suggestions for future visits or, even better, offers to organise visits, our Visits Secretary, Tim Grass, will be very happy to hear from them.

Our members have a wide range of interests among chapels and related buildings. There has been increasing interest recently in cemetery chapels, many of which are now approaching a ruinous condition, because of closure or disuse of the cemeteries themselves. In a similar vein is the article on war memorials — an almost invariable element of the church furnishings in chapels as well as churches — in this issue. We hope that members will be moved to become involved in this work too.

# PROCEEDINGS

## VISIT TO ISLE OF MAN, 29 APRIL – 2 MAY 2011

There was a sense of eager anticipation as members began to meet over dinner at the ‘conference hotel’ — the Welbeck, Douglas — on Friday for the first evening of the Society’s visit to the Isle of Man. A brisk after-dinner walk along the breezy promenade, beneath the dancing lights of Douglas, and past a statue of former Island resident Norman Wisdom, took us to the Promenade Methodist Church. It was built to replace two chapels — a Primitive Methodist on the site, and an 1820s Wesleyan chapel demolished in 1977. In its way as striking as its predecessor, whose tower was a landmark for ferry passengers, the church’s well-equipped premises are used extensively by local organisations. They were to provide an excellent and hospitable venue for the evening lectures and the Sunday lunch at which members joined the church’s congregation.

The Friday evening meeting brought together all the participants and introduced them to Frank Cowin. He was to act as guide for our visit. This not only provided rich fare in terms of the places that were visited, but his encyclopaedic local knowledge enabled him to fit their particular histories into the wider context of Manx history. Similarly, the Friday evening lecture by Frances Coakley on ‘The Growth of Manx Nonconformity’ provided an excellent framework for the visit. Her website [www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook](http://www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook) is a remarkable resource for the study of the history of the Isle of Man, and the distinctive historical development of its religious life. It will continue to serve as a reminder of the visit, as well as providing material for further study and this account is much indebted to it.

With a third of the population speaking only Manx in 1809, and the other two-thirds said to read, speak and understand Manx better than English, even after allowing for an element of hyperbole, the Isle presented particular problems to ministers of all denominations. The strong links between Methodism and the established church, with evidence for double attendance at church and chapel, provided an environment in which Wesleyan Methodism flourished as an integral part of the island’s social and political life. In 1781 John Wesley noted the absence of ‘Papists or Dissenters of any kind, no Calvinists, no disputers’ and the lack of opposition from ‘the Governor (a mild humane man), from the bishop (a good man) or from the bulk of the clergy’. Wesley’s assessment of the Isle of Man as a place open to his influence was well founded. Dissent remains to the present day predominantly Methodist in character, especially among the Manx-born section of the population and in rural areas. Even now, there are thirty-four chapels open for a population of about 85,000.

Wesley’s account ignored the Presbyterian churches established by expatriate Scots in the eighteenth century, although these did not develop fully until the next century. But their origins among groups of people moving from other parts of the British Isles were also typical of the development of nonconformity and Roman Catholicism in the Isle. Tourism was another distinctive influence on religious life as steam packets brought large numbers of visitors from the industrial

north-west. Many of them did not appear to allow holidaymaking to interfere with their religious duties. Large numbers of visitors continued to arrive until after the Second World War, and the number in 1948 was close to the peak of 663,000 reached in 1913.

St Anthony's Roman Catholic Church, Onchan, at the north-east edge of Douglas Bay, was the first church that was visited on Saturday morning, and the group was surprised to be greeted by a photographer from the local newspaper. It reflected the importance of tourism in local religious life, as well as other distinctive aspects of island history. In the holiday season, it was not unknown for thousands to be waiting in queues in the street to attend mass at St Mary of the Isle, the main Roman Catholic Church in Douglas, and St Anthony's developed as an overflow. The original temporary building had been a second-hand hut from a First World War internment camp at Knockaloe, near Peel. It served from 1923 until 1986, when it was replaced by the present church through the generosity of Albert Gubay, Catholic philanthropist and (among other business ventures) founder of the Kwik Save supermarket chain.

The church was designed by Clayton and Massey and local architect John Cryer was responsible for its interior. Its remarkable south-east window was engraved by Christopher Spittall and included in the building at Gubay's suggestion. He had seen a similar window in New Zealand at St Faith's church,



*St Anthony's Roman Catholic Church, Onchan (above) with its striking south east window of Christ walking on the waters (right) (photograph copyright Sarah Crofts)*



Ohinemutu, alongside Lake Rotorua. Looking out on to Douglas Bay, it depicts Christ walking on the waters and is viewed against the vista of the actual bay. Only a few features of the original church remain, including seats adapted from the older building. Peter Kelly, who was also guide to St Mary of the Isle in Douglas on the Monday of our visit, pointed out that the seats were part of a set of fittings designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott in 1936 that also included the high altar and pietà, although both were surplus to the requirements of the 1980s building. We were to encounter the pietà later in the day on our visit to Our Lady Star of the Sea and St Maughold, in Ramsey.

The contribution of St Anthony's to Manx tourism went beyond the provision of overflow services. Under the ministry of Father James McGrath from 1939 to his death in 1982, the church was the base for a series of bold initiatives embracing missionary enterprise and religious tourism. Calvary Glen, across the road from the church, was opened in 1952, and marked by an illuminated cross visible from across the Douglas seafront. The lifesize Stations of the Cross were moved when the glen was closed and laid out on the ground between the church and another of Father McGrath's projects: a replica of the grotto at Lourdes. This construction of railway metal and concrete built in 1951 provided the setting for outdoor services in the summer when the church could hardly accommodate the throng of visitors. The group were only able to see the outside of this remarkable construction: operations to tidy vegetation from the roof in 1985 had led to its partial collapse.

On the way to Laxey, and embracing a wider timespan than is customary on Society visits, the group stopped to examine the Gretch Noa Neolithic long barrow. Standing among the houses and gardens of a small settlement, its stones blended into their surroundings in a way that typified the island's landscape, in which the phases of its religious life were integrated into a richly textured pattern of artefacts and history.

This was also true of Maughold to the north-east, which was visited later, with its beautiful churchyard overlooking the sea, and the parish church dedicated to St Maughold, said to be an associate of St Patrick. Favoured by the fine but blustery weather that was a feature of the whole of the visit, the group were able to examine the sites of three keeills or chapels that predated the introduction of the parish system into the island. Surrounded by the graves and associated memorials of Manx notables of a much later period, they were another reminder of the depth of the island's religious culture. The contents of a specially designed cross-house, built in 1907 near the church, contained about a third of the cross slabs found in the Isle, the earliest from the seventh century with the inscription 'I have made in Christ's name an image of the cross of Christ'.

The history of Methodism in Laxey illustrates the importance of groups of outsiders to the development of the religious life of the island. A Primitive Methodist preacher had visited in 1823, but Cumberland miners who came to the Laxey mines helped to consolidate the position of this branch of Methodism on the island. The visit to Laxey gave the group an external view of its chapels, with an insight into their role in the life of what had been a workaday place, somewhat removed from its picture postcard image today. This was nowhere more

apparent than in the use by the Wesleyan Methodists of the old lead store by the harbour until their Glen Road chapel was built. Worshippers, with more regard for their spiritual than physical wellbeing, are said to have sat on the sacks of lead ore that were stored there pending shipment.

Glen Road was rebuilt and enlarged in 1850 in what can best be described as an eclectic style. It closed in 1966 and has become a dwelling known as Palladian House — an indicative rather than accurate architectural description. The Sunday school continued until 1996, in a building across the road that was opened in 1869. The original Primitive Methodist building, still in use as a play school, ceased to be used when Laxey Minorca chapel opened in 1870. Its Sunday school building of 1898, situated (like Glen Road) opposite the chapel, was used by the combined congregations of Glen Road and Minorca from 1966, when for a time Minorca became a Salvation Army Hall.

Lunch was taken in the schoolroom of the Wesleyan Methodist chapel at Bride. This is a two-level structure, built into a slope with the schoolroom accessed by a door at the lower level or a precipitous internal stairway. The body of the chapel, built in 1877 to replace an earlier building of 1801, has no gallery, and was fitted out with locally produced woodwork — a characteristic feature of many of the country chapels visited. The schoolroom also retained enough of its original woodwork and decoration to provide a distinctively unaffected atmosphere. The quality of the meal provided by chapel members accounted for the popularity of Bride as a venue for local coach excursions.

As we moved to Ramsey, the group turned to urban church buildings and visited Waterloo Road Wesleyan Methodist chapel, the third Wesleyan chapel in the town, the first being built around 1794. Built by James Callow senior, who along with members of his family also associated with the building trade was one of the original trustees, the chapel was extended in 1882 to provide a further 300 sittings, and was reseated in 1906. Like many seen on Society visits, it had been divided into two floors. This was done in 1973 and, with some fittings from the chapel's Strand St Mission — built by James Callow and Son, opened 1889 and closed in 1969 — provided a pleasant worship area with an apparently well-used social space below.

The ubiquitous James Callow was also responsible for the externally idiosyncratic former Primitive Methodist chapel in Chapel Lane, which the group passed on its way to Our Lady Star of the Sea and St Maughold Roman Catholic Church. The chapel was built by the Primitives in 1835, but was replaced by a new building in Parliament Street in 1892, now demolished. The move to Parliament Street split the congregation, and Chapel Lane became an Independent Methodist cause, still functioning as such today.

Our Lady Star of the Sea and St Maughold, with its adjoining Arts and Crafts presbytery, stands on Ramsey sea front. Giles Gilbert Scott's building lives up to its position. A commanding composition with its simple, sheer external surfaces with high, decorative features, including a crucifix on the west gable end, it was completed in 1910, to replace a chapel on the site. This converted warehouse, opened in 1863, had become decrepit, and Fr Richard Barton, who came to the parish in 1900 and was also responsible for building church schools, set about



raising funds for the new church, '[t]he strain of which', according to his memorial in the church, 'ended his life' in 1908 at the age of 42. Another memorial in the Lady Chapel commemorates two stonemasons employed on the building work, who were lost when the steam packet *Ellan Vannin* foundered near the entrance to the Mersey Channel in December 1909.

The site of the former chapel is the presbytery garden and the presbytery adjoins the present church, making a pleasing composition as the visitor approaches the church's main entrance through the base of the imposing tower. This arrangement means that the liturgical east end is at the west, with the Lady Chapel and baptistery on the north side of the building. After emerging from the entrance porch into the church the visitor's attention is drawn to the imposing high altar with its coloured and gilded triptych. The church is lit entirely from the south, but the tracery of the three windows is obscured externally by protective material. They were glazed by James Hogan in 1932 and portray the life of Christ. Scott's *pietà* from Onchan was observed on the east wall of the church.

Ebenezer Primitive Methodist Chapel in Kirk Michael took the group back to Manx Methodism. The present chapel, largely self-built, was opened in 1868 and replaced an earlier building of 1824, which became a Sunday school and survives as an engineering workshop. It reflected the dominance of the Primitive Methodists in a village where, according to the 1851 Census of Religious Worship, there were 240 worshippers at their evening service and just 40 at that of the Wesleyans. The plain windows of Ebenezer light a tiered interior — a feature encountered in other country chapels during the visit — with a fine set of wooden pews and high-quality wooden furnishings. These were the product of the Kelly Brothers' workshop that had been located on the site of the village's first Wesleyan chapel of 1798; that chapel was largely demolished in the 1960s.

The final chapel visited on Saturday, Crosby Wesleyan Methodist, was the product of the idiosyncratic ministry and architectural pretensions of the Revd Robert Aitken (1799/1800–1873). A noted revivalist preacher of his time, his methods led to Edmund Grindrod refusing him accommodation in any of the Salford Wesleyan chapels when Aitken visited Manchester in 1833, although



*Contrasting Primitive Methodist Chapels — Ebenezer at Kirk Michael (left) and Glen Maye (right) (photographs copyright Sara Crofts)*

Warren welcomed him in the Oldham St circuit. Aitken had been ordained priest in the Church of England in 1824 in the diocese of Durham, where he was a schoolmaster. After his marriage to the daughter of a Warrington soap manufacturer, he went to the Isle of Man, where his irregular preaching brought him into conflict with the bishop. There were local problems relating to his position on the Wesleyan preachers' plan, while his applications to the Wesleyan conference in 1834 and 1835 for recognition as a minister were unsuccessful.

Crosby chapel, a battlemented building with 'pointed' windows, was built on land bought by Aitken's mother-in-law, who probably (with Aitken) made a substantial contribution to its cost. Aitken's ambivalent clerical status was reflected in the local tradition that the chapel was an Anglican chapel of ease, while, preaching at the opening services, Aitken made the point that he was a clergyman of the Church of England. Nonetheless, the Douglas circuit Local Preachers' Minute Book of the time notes 'that Crosby Chapel be inset (sic) in plan and receive appointments'.

A Sunday school building to the side of the chapel was completed in 1904, but has been sold recently. The group was able to examine plans by which the sale proceeds are to be applied to a remodelling of the chapel. At present the entrance porch on the front of the building gives access to a single-storey set of rooms, including a vestry, and then into the body of the chapel under a gallery. It is this area that is to be redeveloped. A fine bust of John Wesley on display in the chapel was pronounced as an authentic late eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century product of Enoch Wood of Birley.

A full and memorable day concluded after dinner, with an equally full and characteristically well-informed lecture by Frank Cowin. His professional commitments had taken him into many buildings on the island, while service to Methodism as a property steward meant that he had a detailed knowledge of chapel and associated buildings. It provided a richly detailed context for what had gone before, and an exciting prospect of things to come.

The chapels visited during the second part of the tour offered much that was of interest and gave ample opportunity to compare how similar building types were handled. Sunday afternoon's tour began at the Cooil Wesleyan Methodist, just outside Douglas. A good example of a simple chapel, opened in 1871, its opening was made infamous by 'fisticuffs' among the thousands of people who turned up, many (maybe most) of whom were unable to obtain a cup of tea. The design by John Douglas includes raked seating and gothic details. An otherwise simple design is enlivened by carved supporters to the roof beams, a friezework ventilation panel in the ceiling, and a decorated pulpit, with inlaid dark wood and applied decoration in a lighter colour giving a pleasing effect. Vernacular building styles in the smaller chapels are found in the boundary walls — a quartz topped wall at the Cooil and rubble-walling elsewhere.

On the west of the island, Glen Maye Primitive Methodist was built in 1876 and is typical of a simple chapel, retaining original features (including pewing, pulpit and communion rail), but without raked seating and with less decorative relief. Much interest was awakened by the posting of signs around the building indicating a proposed reordering. The signage included 'screen installed here to



hide worship area when not in use' and others indicated that original windows that remained were not valued as highly as a proposed modern replacement unit. The church had a three-manual reed organ, a rarity both on the island and, for that matter, in the UK. It bore the message 'by faith all things are possible'.

Peel Methodist Church was the first of several galleried churches we visited. Built in 1839 with a confident porticoed entrance, its galleries and their decorated fronts retain their original form, enlivened by a contemporary painting scheme that extends to the pulpit and prayer desk. On the ground floor chairs have replaced the pews, and the floor has been carpeted. The fine organ by Alexander Young & Sons is in the traditional position at gallery level behind the pulpit.

The Royal Chapel of St John the Baptist is on Tynwald Hill at St John's, the ceremonial home of Manx government. It was designed by Richard Lane of Manchester and built in 1849. The church reflects the concerns of the Ecclesiologists, most notably in the provision of an English altar, with surviving riddle posts. The ordering of the church is interrupted by the provision of seating for the members of the lower chamber of Tynwald at the crossing and for the upper chamber in the chancel. The church has a fine collection of stained glass that includes representations of all the parish-church saints of the island.

On Sunday evening, a lecture on Manx chapel music by Dr Fenella Bazin was read, in her absence, by Dr Tim Grass. The lecture recounted a lively and traditional musical scene with itinerant musicians travelling to teach the rudiments of music around the island and a healthy tradition of vernacular music writing and performing. The musical examples used had much in common with the west gallery tradition in England, both in style and harmonic language.

Monday morning began at St Mary of the Isle Roman Catholic Church, Douglas, built in 1859 to designs by Henry Clutton in Early Continental Gothic style. The high altar and Lady Chapel altar were designed by Giles Gilbert Scott and first used on Christmas Eve 1909. The church is distinguished by its size, and, in the heyday of the Manx tourist industry holidaymakers from England filled the capacious building many times over each Sunday. When the church opened anti-Catholic feeling was running high on the island. The unusually strong arrangements of beams and metal brackets to hold the doors shut serve as a reminder of this.

After a break for coffee at the Sound, overlooking the Calf of Man, we visited the Wesleyan Methodist chapel at The Howe. This was built in 1850 and has a fine position overlooking Port St Mary. It is another simple chapel, with traditional raked seating and gothick arches applied to the exterior above rectangular windows. The original oil lamps have survived in part, converted to shade electric lamps.

Living Hope Community Church (Baptist) at Port St Mary (2005) was the most recent chapel on the tour. A stained glass window spanned by a cross, facing the bay, is the only furnishing that gives any indication of the ordering of the building. A stage in front of this is apparently used by a music group whilst the Perspex lectern which serves as a pulpit has surprisingly little presence in a church that gives considerable emphasis to preaching and the centrality of

scripture. The simple interior was decorated with translucent banners bearing scriptural texts. Carpeting and padded chairs completed the furnishings.

Port Erin Primitive Methodist (W. C. Williams, 1903) is a development of the mid nineteenth-century simple chapel on a larger scale, with gently raked seating, the pulpit central to an ensemble of communion table and choir seating, with quatrefoil decoration and gothic arches. The organ, housed within a central arch was by M. Morgan (1911).

St Mary's Roman Catholic Church, Castletown (1826), is essentially a non-conformist box, but with a central altar instead of a pulpit, and with gallery seating, and level seating on the ground floor. The church is distinguished by fine stained glass by Henry Clarke of Dublin, showing the annunciation and the resurrection.

The chapel of King William's College, Castletown (James Cowle, 1879) was the only school chapel on the tour. It has bench seating in collegiate arrangement, with the places for senior staff distinguished with canopies. The east wall is decorated with a series of marouflage paintings of the Te Deum painted by C. G. Gray in 1900, the same artist provided a second series of scenes from the life of our Lord on tin sheets for the north and south walls of the chancel. The whole ensemble, with an open scissor-braced timber roof, is pleasing.

The final chapel visited on the tour was Trinity Methodist, Rosemount, Douglas. For sheer scale and completeness this was possibly the most exciting chapel we visited. It is the largest Methodist chapel on the island, 125 years old, with 100-year-old spire. It retains complete its pews and galleries, pulpit, choirstalls, communion table and organ. Little details reveal particular thought given to the furnishing, for example in the gallery the umbrella stands are inside each pew, rather than forming a trip hazard on the stairs. The organ by Forster and Andrews (1889) is splendid, full in tone and quite adequate to fill this capacious interior without sounding aggressively loud. The chapel has serious building issues with damp and dry rot and is considered far too large for contemporary Methodist worship. The high of the last visit was mixed with the challenge of the future – it would be so exciting to see the interior preserved, but at what cost?

The Society is indebted to Tim Grass for his considerable efforts in bringing what was an eagerly awaited programme to fruition. This account owes much to his excellent visit notes, and members of the group will take away from their stay in the Isle of Man images and insights that will long resonate in their chapel studies, as well as in other concerns. One of the writers found himself tuning in to television coverage of the Manx TT motorcycle races, something well outside his normal range of interests, an indication of the extent to which the visit opened up so many varied aspects of island life beyond those of immediate concern to members of the Society. The Welbeck Hotel catered excellently to the material needs of the group, while the excellent lectures in the hospitable atmosphere of the Promenade church all contributed to an experience that exposes the phrase 'truly memorable' as an inadequate cliché.

*Rod Ambler and David S. Knight*

## VISIT TO EXETER, 9 JULY 2011

Our day in Exeter promised much and we were rewarded greatly with the churches and chapels visited, the weather, the company and an excellent tour arranged splendidly by Roger Thorne, assisted on the day by his wife, Roslyn and Peter Daniel. All of this work was all the more remarkable as Roger has been unwell for some time. From a personal viewpoint, I thought that his idea of splitting information about the places of worship to be visited from the more domestic arrangements was an excellent one and one which I will replicate on a future Society visit to Kent.

After we had all exchanged greetings over tea and coffee at the **Wesleyan Methodist Chapel** in Sidwell Street, we were greeted with another innovation by Roger, in that the worship area had a slide show of former Bible Christian Chapels from the West Country showing on two screens — an excellent idea! I was pleased to see pictures of Shebbear and Hallsands, Stokenham in particular, the former because of its connection with the movement founder, William O'Bryan and the latter because, as the caption read, most of the building had now fallen into the sea. We began with an illustrated and very comprehensive talk by Roger, giving us a detailed account of Exeter chapel history and how this linked to the places being visited that day — the fact that Roger did this without notes was a measure of his knowledge and interest in this subject. He turned then to the Methodist chapel itself and entertained us by pointing out the class distinction illustrated by artisans walking up the concrete stairs from the vestibule to the gallery and being presented with a large mat upon which to wipe their feet. Roger pointed out that the aforementioned gallery had no obvious means of support but its strength had been tested scientifically when it was full of volunteers. He pointed out that the church at ground level was a square with one corner cut



*Sidwell Street Methodist Church, showing the grand Sidwell Street frontage (left) with its gallery entrance (for the lower orders!) and (above) the carved memorial to William Henry Reed in the hall complex (photographs copyright Colin Baxter)*

off but as the building rose more corners were cut off so that it became an octagon. The highest visible point of the interior was a circle!

This building was opened in May 1905 but it was preceded by a hall-church of January 1897, at the rear of the site, which we saw by going outside and up a side alley. It was at the back of the site and originally behind some shops. This was now used as a hall and it led to a further building that was named after (but not paid for by) the paper magnate William Henry Reed. The interior of the latter, which was built in 1925, reminded me of St Peter's Anglican Church in Aylesham, a model mining village laid out in Kent in 1927. We went out to the splendid garden, from which we obtained our best view of the roof and cupola of the 1905 building, as well as being able to see how the various buildings had been joined together. It was then time for a well-earned lunch and to prepare ourselves for our afternoon walking tour of the City.

We began our afternoon tour at **Christ Church**, a Free Church of England Church, in Grosvenor Place. Here John Eustice gave us a comprehensive talk about the Free Church of England and the building itself. Similarities with the Anglican Church were in the font being placed inside the front door and the Ten Commandments and Biblical quotations such as John 3.16 on the walls. It was during John's talk that one of the posters began to fall down — its legend said that 'This Church does believe in God'. However, the interior walls of this 1957 building were of unfinished brick, to reflect its Theology — a Cross was now permitted, to show that this was indeed a Christian Church, although this had been installed after some discussion. There was no altar underneath the Cross, only a Communion table. Those of a curious nature were allowed to visit the Crypt of the former Church, one of Exeter's casualties of World War II bombing.

A short walk took us to **Belmont Evangelical Church** in Western Way, a place of worship that had a very long street frontage, thanks to its purchase of the adjacent W. H. Smith warehouse in 2000. Here we had a talk by Ian White, who told us that the original building was also built after the Second World War and was opened in March 1956 by the Brethren. The warehouse had been converted into the main Worship area and had been linked to the original building via an atrium — the standard of the decor of the old and new buildings had been harmonised also. Ian told us that this Church was popular with Christian students and now had attendances of over 600 on a Sunday! Following a short talk on the history of the buildings, we were given a comprehensive tour, beginning with the splendid new auditorium, which included a control panel on a mezzanine. Our tour went past a cross woven into the atrium carpet and then into the 1956 building.

A short climb past the modern bus station (and an example of the worst excesses of modern driving) took us to **Southernhay Congregational Chapel** (now URC) in Dix's Field. Here our look around the worship area was restricted, thanks to a rehearsal by the Exeter Symphony Orchestra, who were playing an extract from Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. This situation has happened to me before, when a visit to St Sepulchre in the City of London occurred during a student orchestra rehearsal of Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. In a side room, Ian McDonald told us another story

of World War II destruction (in May 1942), although the imposing tower and spire survived and was incorporated into the new building in 1957. The church building had stained glass and many surviving pews, although the overall effect looked rather Anglican, with a Chancel and High Altar.

It was whilst passing the splendid and imposing Cathedral of St Peter that a small discussion on the merits (or otherwise) of the post-War rebuilding (to replace bomb-damaged buildings) occurred and the conclusion was that the City Fathers in Exeter, like those at Coventry and Plymouth, had allowed some incongruous and near-Brutalist examples to detract from the splendid surviving historical buildings around the Cathedral Green and even from the acceptable and functional Modernist buildings in the nearby High Street. Roger, however, kept our minds focused on the subject for the day and again displayed his local ecclesiastical knowledge by making reference to Anglican Churches that we passed.

And so on to South Street, which Roger dubbed accurately as ‘A Street of Churches’. We managed to look around **Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church**, although this was restricted somewhat, thanks to it being time for confession. Here, and in contrast with Southernhay Congregational Chapel, the tower of 1926 was younger than the remainder of the Church building, which had been opened in 1884.

The former **George’s Meeting House**, now a public house, was visited next. It was difficult to say who was the more surprised or uncomfortable here — the patrons or the incongruous members of the Chapels Society. The essential features of the meeting house had been preserved, as witnessed by the excellent pulpit and the superb stained glass. The bar had been placed underneath one gallery



*Two Exeter chapels — the eighteenth-century Georges Meeting House (below), currently a branch of Wetherspoons, and the twentieth-century rebuilding of Southernhay URC which retains the nineteenth-century tower (left) (photographs copyright Colin Baxter)*



and then the whole of the ground floor opened out to drinkers and diners — there was dining also in the gallery.

Our day finished at the **Baptist Chapel**, which had a worship area of ‘simple dignity’. The new chairs were practical, especially giving a fluid seating arrangement and each with a useful holder on its back, each of which held a Bible and a Baptist Praise and Worship book. Here Tony Lawrence told us that the original pews had been removed when the floor was lifted and it was found there were no remaining foundations for the columns that support the gallery! Over 30 groups were now based in the adjacent Outreach Centre, which used to be a wine merchant’s warehouse and where the vaults were viewed by those members of the Society who felt sufficiently adventurous and curious. There followed a Chapel tea and thanks, delivered by our President, Chris Wakeling, who expressed everyone’s thoughts over Roger’s ‘extraordinary efforts’ in planning this tour.

*Paul Gardner*

## 23RD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2011

The 23rd Annual General Meeting of the Chapels Society took place at Sidwell Street Methodist Church in Exeter on 9th July 2011. The Hon. President, Christopher Wakeling, chaired the meeting at which 32 members were present. After welcoming members to the meeting he began by sharing his view that most of the work carried out by the Society was handled by the Society’s Officers and that the role of President was a modest one. He then invited the Honorary Officers to speak about the Society’s activities during the year.

The Hon. Secretary (Sara Crofts) commented that there had been a variety of different types of casework which had come to the Society’s attention over the last year. She had provided guidance to a number of people with regard to funding and how to tackle repairs. She had also been involved in trying to ensure that a number of chapels at risk were not allowed to deteriorate further.

The Hon. Editor (Chris Skidmore) remarked that it had been a fairly quiet year in terms of publications. *Chapels and Chapel People: Miscellany 2* had been launched at Gee Cross Chapel, Hyde on 19th June and had sold steadily. Favourable reviews had been received from Dr Leonard Smith and the *Baptist Quarterly* magazine. He reminded members that the *Newsletter* belongs to the membership and encouraged members to send him snippets of news, articles and other items of interest.

The Hon. Visits Secretary (Tim Grass) gave a brief summary of the previous year’s visits. Members of the Society had ventured to Buckinghamshire in April, London’s Notting Hill in July and Rugby in October. All three visits had been very successful and hugely rewarding for all involved. Much of the success of these visits could be attributed to the dedication and enthusiasm of the visit leaders who deserved a great deal of thanks for all their hard work.

As the Hon. Treasurer (David Watts) was not able to be present due to his ongoing recovery from recent knee surgery the Hon. President presented the Society’s Accounts to the AGM. He explained that since the publication of the *Annual Report* there had been a few minor amendments to the Accounts as a



result of discussions between the Hon. Treasurer and the Independent Examiner. These essentially related to a slight difference in approach with regard to accounting periods and did not affect the overall balances. Copies of the updated Accounts were tabled at the meeting. The adoption of the *Annual Report and Accounts 2010* was agreed *nem. con.*: an updated copy will be made available on the website soon.

The Hon. President went on to introduce the main item of business — the proposal from the Hon. Treasurer and the Council that membership subscriptions should be subject to an increase from 1st January 2012. The Hon. President confirmed that the Society was not in imminent danger of bankruptcy but was certainly living beyond its means. A number of costs had risen in recent years and although the Council accepted that the present financial climate made the current proposal somewhat unpalatable, they felt that there was no viable alternative. Andrew Worth spoke in favour of the rise noting that the process of considering the subscription levels had started under his tenure as treasurer. He also commented that the logistical challenges of implementing a rise in subscriptions meant that it was not something to be taken lightly and was perhaps long overdue. No-one spoke against the motion and so the proposal to implement the suggested rise in subscription levels was proposed by Robin Phillips, seconded by Chris Skidmore and agreed unanimously.

The President also explained that the Society currently has five elected members of Council each serving three-year terms and that no members of Council were due to stand down in 2011. There was however one vacancy on the Council for which one nomination had been received. This was Jean West, who was proposed by Colin Baxter and seconded by John Turner. The meeting unanimously agreed to elect Jean West to the Council. All of the current Council members were willing to continue serving. The Society's Officers were also all willing to continue in their posts and the meeting unanimously agreed to re-elect all four officers en bloc.

The President drew the meeting to a close by thanking the membership for supporting the subscriptions rise. He was pleased to note that membership numbers appeared to be on the rise but commented that the Society could not be complacent as there was still a need to bring in new members. He was particularly keen to attract younger members and hoped that the introduction of a reduced membership fee for registered students and the move towards producing a regular journal would help in this respect. He extended sincere thanks to the Society's Officers for all their hard work during the year and reminded members of the importance of the work that the Society does before concluding the meeting by thanking everyone for attending the AGM and wishing them an enjoyable day of visits in Exeter.

*Sara Crofts*

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

# WAR MEMORIALS TRUST AND IN MEMORIAM 2014

War Memorials Trust works to protect and conserve war memorials across the UK. The charity provides advisory and advocacy services and its website has a wealth of information on a range of war memorial issues.

The Trust administers grants which can assist with the repair and conservation of war memorials. An 'Expression of interest form' should be completed by anyone interested in obtaining help. Grants are offered at 50% of eligible costs and, depending on the scheme through which works are eligible, can be up to £20,000.

One project assisted recently was a bronze war memorial plaque in All Saints' Church West Dulwich, London. It carries the names of those killed in World War I. In 2010 War Memorials Trust gave a grant of £650 towards a project of very sensitive conservation and repair works following severe fire damage. The chemical structure of the bronze itself had been damaged and the plaque had warped. The warping of the plaque was straightened as much as possible. The plaque was cleaned and finished with microcrystalline wax to protect the surface. Any minor surface defects were filled with a hard wax. By employing appropriate methods considering the condition of the memorial all the inscriptions are once again clearly legible, but there are minor indications still remaining of the history of the memorial.

Damage to war memorials from incidents such as fire is not the only threat; vandalism and theft are serious issues facing custodians. In Memoriam 2014 is a partnership between War Memorials Trust and SmartWater. It seeks to offer greater protection to war memorials across the UK and prevent any more communities witnessing the desecration of their memorials. You will be aware of the problem of thieves and vandals attempting to steal metal from roofs and monuments. It is estimated that on average one war memorial a week is being targeted by thieves looking to illegally remove bronze, copper or other metals to sell on for scrap.



*The West Dulwich bronze plaque — before and after (photograph copyright All Saints West Dulwich)*

To combat the threat of theft In Memoriam 2014 is offering war memorial custodians the chance to forensically mark their memorial with SmartWater, assigning them with a state-of-the-art forensic signature that can only be seen under UV light. Once applied SmartWater is virtually impossible to remove. Furthermore if a thief attempts to remove SmartWater they risk inadvertently spreading forensic evidence onto their clothes and any tools they are using. This can be used by Police to link them directly to the crime scene. Anyone interested in applying for a SmartWater pack to protect their local war memorial should visit [www.inmemoriam2014.org](http://www.inmemoriam2014.org).

War Memorials Trust is an independent registered charity which relies upon voluntary income and support to undertake its work. It has members across the country many of whom take on a more active role as Regional Volunteers, acting as the Trust's 'eyes and ears' in their area. We welcome new members and donors who share with us a belief in the importance of preserving our war memorial heritage.

For further information please contact War Memorials Trust at 42a Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0RE, on 0300 123 0764, [info@warmemorials.org](mailto:info@warmemorials.org) or [www.warmemorials.org](http://www.warmemorials.org).

*Frances Moreton  
Director, War Memorials Trust*

## WEBSITE UPDATE

For the last few months the Council has been debating the future of the Society's website and considering options for its renewal. Recent developments in the world of IT have meant that the possibilities for amateurs to devise and maintain professional looking websites have increased enormously. With the encouragement of Council, the Hon Secretary has set up the basic structure of the new website using open source software and with the assistance of the Council for British Archaeology who are our web hosts.

The new domain name is [www.ChapelsSociety.org.uk](http://www.ChapelsSociety.org.uk) and the work of transferring the information contained in the current website to the new website began in August and should be complete by the end of September. Ideas for future developments include a mechanism to allow publications to be ordered and paid for online, a function that will allow people to donate to the Society online, and a frequently updated news page. Longer term possibilities include producing a regular e-bulletin and adding more information about the Society's visits to the website.

As many of you will know the current website has been under the diligent care of Robin Phillips for a number of years and so we would also like to take this opportunity to express our thanks and deep gratitude to him for all his hard work.

*Sara Crofts*

# NEWS

## Bats in the vestry

The Bible Christian Methodists were particularly strong in the South West and their chapels were spread all over the northwest half of Devon. However the former Dalwood circuit, in the extreme east, contained only four small rural chapels, only one remaining open. Churchill chapel in Chardstock parish (ST299022), near Axminster, was built in 1840 and closed in 1977. Subsequently it has been converted into a two-bedroomed holiday cottage which is now being offered for sale. The sale particulars diplomatically mention that due to a planning restriction the chapel cannot be occupied as a permanent home. The agents' advertisement in a local paper is more specific — *This property cannot be occupied as a permanent home except by the protected family of bats ...*

## Converted chapels

An increasing proportion of our chapel heritage is preserved in converted form, often as dwelling houses. Estate agents websites often provide advanced warning of such conversion and are frequently used in case-work by our Hon. Secretary. They also can give photographic evidence of the current state of chapel interiors — one such specialist site, which may be of interest to members, was reported by member Frank Law and is found at <http://www.property.org.uk/unique/ch.shtml>.

## Caistor Arts & Heritage Centre

Conversion of a Primitive Methodist chapel, previously a youth club, in Caistor, Lincolnshire by Jonathan Hendry Architects was highlighted in the BBC1 programme *Village SOS* on 24 August. Big Lottery grant funding of £433,840 allowed a group of local people from this rural market town to create a hub for a range of arts and heritage activities. Local artists will have a space in which to make, sell and exhibit their work while visitors can browse through a shop selling local produce and souvenirs, or visit a cafe for refreshments. Further information can be found at <http://www.villagesos.org.uk/>.

## The Diaries of Cornelius Ashworth

Members of the Chapels Society will be interested in these four diaries written during the years 1782–3, 1785, 1809 and 1815 by Cornelius Ashworth, and reprinted in full in an edition published by the Hebden Bridge Local History Society later this year. Ashworth was a member first of Titus Knight's congregation at Square Chapel, Halifax and later of the Baptist congregation at Pellon Lane in the same town. Almost certainly it was a religious motivation that made him keep his diaries. They are a strictly factual account of how Ashworth, a farmer, weaver, builder and hop dealer, spent his time. They record the Sunday services and week-day meetings he attended, what sermons were preached and who preached them. This information provides a fascinating glimpse into the world of West Riding Dissent in the aftermath of the Evangelical Revival. A flier with this issue allows members to order this book in advance.

## Grittleton Strict Baptist Chapel

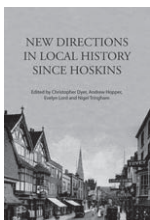
The Historic Chapels Trust has now completed the purchase of this 1721 meeting house in Wiltshire (Listed Grade II\*: Stell, *Wiltshire* 70), southwest of Malmesbury. Set back from the High Street along its own path, and surrounded by a burial ground, the chapel is a rectangular stone building with a hipped and tiled roof. The interior is particularly well preserved with a central pulpit, box pews either side of a central aisle and galleries facing each other at either end.

### and a farewell ...

Jennifer Freeman, director of the Historic Chapels Trust, has announced her retirement. The collaboration between the Trust and the Society has always been a fruitful one, not least because of Jennifer Freeman's commitment and enthusiasm. We wish her a long and happy retirement!

## BOOK REVIEW

E. Royle, *From Philistines to Goths: Nonconformist Chapel Styles in Victorian England* in C.Dyer, A. Hopper, E. Lord and N. Tringham (eds.) *New Directions in Local History Since Hoskins*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2011. paperback. ISBN 978-1-907396-12-0. £16.99



That the architecture of Nonconformity should be considered a significant enough source for local historians to merit a chapter in this book is a measure of the increase in the status of the subject in recent years. As interest in local history has burgeoned in recent decades it is inevitable that our understanding of English Dissent has been enhanced and that its architecture should now be seen as an important source for the student of the local community.

Edward Royle's interesting chapter concentrates on that formative period in the history of English Nonconformist architecture when many expanding Victorian congregations needed to build, and had to decide whether to build in classical or gothic style. The examples in this chapter are drawn primarily from the West Riding but the study is structured by denomination and this approach could usefully be applied in any part of the country.

As Professor Royle points out, when a distinctive dissenting architecture emerged after the Toleration Act of 1689 it was modest in scale and domestic in character. In the later half of the Eighteenth century when the nonconformist denominations were reinvigorated by the evangelical revival and required more ambitious chapels they were built in classical style simply because that was the prevailing fashion in domestic architecture.

With the revival of the gothic style from the late eighteenth century onwards it was inevitable that some congregations would choose to build in the newly fashionable idiom and Acorn Street Wesleyan chapel, Sheffield is instanced as an early example of this trend. However the Wesleyans were not, on the whole, notable as early exponents of gothic. Indeed, as this chapter makes clear, it was

the Unitarians who led the nonconformists into gothic. They were affluent enough to be fashionable and from 1844 onwards, with the Dissenters' Chapels Act behind them and their property secure, they sought to express their claim to be equal to the state church by aping its architecture. A source which throws much light on this process, although not mentioned in this chapter, is the *Christian Reformer* which was edited by the two Asplands, father and son, who both took a keen interest in the architecture of their denomination and reported fulsomely on the opening of many of the Unitarian chapels mentioned by Professor Royle.

The Independents followed the Unitarian lead and produced some significant gothic structures in the West Riding including John James' Square Chapel of 1855–7 in Halifax and Lockwood and Mawson's Lightcliffe Congregational Church of 1871. Perhaps the most impressive essay in Congregational gothic is the splendid Albion Congregational Church of 1890–5 in Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire where over £40,000 was spent on a refined Perpendicular structure. The thinking behind the Congregational move to gothic can be traced in the pages of the *Congregational Year Book*.

The Baptists were less persuaded of the merits of gothic and although there were notable experiments, such as Blenheim Chapel, Woodhouse, Leeds, of 1858, they produced large classical structures right to the end of the century. Similarly, as Edward Royle shows us, the Methodists 'sent out mixed messages in the battle of the styles'. Some of this apparent confusion can be resolved by analysing each branch of Methodism as a separate entity. This reveals, for example, a pretty faithful adherence to the classical on the part of the Primitive Methodist Church.

If a majority of Nonconformist chapels were being built in gothic by the end of Victoria's reign and many might have been mistaken for Anglican churches from the outside then the design and planning of the interior of these gothic structures still marked them out from the buildings of the Establishment.

Whatever the exterior dress, the Nonconformist chapel was still a building in which the preaching of the Word was paramount and as such the pulpit was the focus of the interior. True, the pulpit was joined by organ and choir seats to form a rostrum arrangement by the end of the nineteenth century but this development made the Nonconformist chapel less not more like an Anglican church.

Members of the Chapels Society will welcome Professor Royle's thoughtful and thought provoking essay on this significant period in the development of the architecture of dissent. They will find the sources discussed illuminating and the footnotes will provide a good guide to further reading on the subjects under discussion. The only disappointment is the illustrations. In the copy under review most were too dark and the illustrations of the exterior of Gee Cross Unitarian Chapel and the interior of Saltaire Congregational Church were so badly reproduced that the pixelation was strikingly visible. The publishers need to look again at their work in this area.

Alan Petford