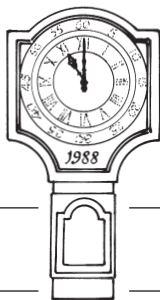


THE CHAPELS SOCIETY



Newsletter 56

May 2014



*Holden Chapel, Bolton-by-Bowland, which will be
one of those visited during our September visit
(photograph copyright Chris Skidmore)*

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NOTICEBOARD

CHAPELS SOCIETY EVENTS

12 July 2014	AGM and London (Islington) visit (Andrew Worth)
13 September 2014	Visit to Pendle and Bowland area on Lancashire/ Yorkshire border (Chris Skidmore/Roger Holden)
8 November 2014	Conference on 20th century chapels, Birmingham
2 May 2015	Visit to Edinburgh (Tim Grass/Sara Crofts)

EDITORIAL

This issue of the *Newsletter* is accompanied by flyers for the three remaining Chapels Society events this year. We hope that you think that they offer variety and interest and that you will be able to take advantage of these opportunities. Next year a visit is planned a little further afield than usual to Edinburgh, a place where even Episcopalianism counts as 'Nonconformist'! Although there will be the usual Saturday visit, which will focus on the churches in the New Town, the organisers will, if there is sufficient interest, also offer a visit to places of worship around the Royal Mile on the following Monday.

The Council is looking into the possibility of making this *Newsletter* available electronically as a pdf file. We would be interested to know whether there would be any demand from members for such a development.

Please send comments on these or any other matters to the Editor.

CHRISTOPHER FYSON STELL (1929–2014)



(photograph copyright John Snell)

Christopher Stell, a founder member of The Chapels Society and one of the prime movers in its establishment (and that of the Historic Chapels Trust) died on 26 January 2014. What follows are a number of recollections of Christopher and, in particular, of his role in the Society and its forerunners.

CHRISTOPHER STELL AND THE ‘MUTTON CHOPS’ AFFAIR

Christopher Stell will be known to future generations for the four volumes of his *Inventory*, which have long been referred to simply as ‘Stell’. They are a definitive source of information and a testament to his schol-

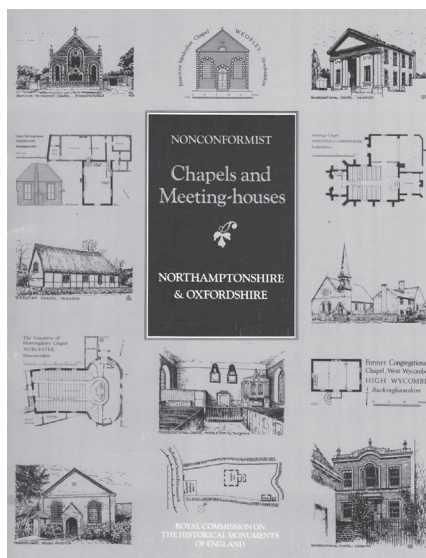
arship. Since the first volume appeared in 1986 the series has been indispensable, and year by year its value will only increase as the roll call of historic Nonconformist buildings grows smaller. The project grew out of a survey which Christopher — as a committed Baptist and a keen historian of vernacular architecture — had undertaken privately. For his employer and initial publisher (the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England) the project’s scope was increased to include a selection of Victorian and Edwardian chapels, although his heart was evidently with the examples — mostly early ones — that showed a ‘modest lack of ostentation . . . coupled with traditional building materials’. CFS’s charming freehand drawings give some sense of his fondness for small country chapels, and nicely complement the more usual photographs and measured drawings which illustrate the text. Getting the four volumes into print was far from straightforward, however, and a book could probably be written about the struggle between the author and his publishers. Eventually, the catalogue of communion plate, prepared alongside the survey of buildings, was issued by this Society six years ago.

Christopher’s other papers on Nonconformist topics provide more extended accounts than was possible in the confines of the *Inventory*, and have a little more colour — metaphorically — than the generally impersonal voice of the Royal Commission’s publications allowed. ‘Architects of Dissent’ (Dr Williams’s Library, 1976) explores the topic of chapel patronage, while ‘Wesley’s Chapel, City Road’ (*Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society*, 1994) is an essential source on that most loved of Methodist buildings. The essay on ‘Great Meeting Houses’ (in Chapels Society *Miscellany I*, 1998) gives a flavour of the

site visits, and, along with ‘Puritan and Nonconformist Meetinghouses’ (in P. C. Finney, ed., *Seeing beyond the Word*, 1999) develops themes arising from the early buildings. By way of contrast, ‘Nonconformist Architecture and the Cambridge Camden Society’ (in C. Webster and J. Elliott, eds, *A Church as it Should Be*, 2000) ventures fully into the Gothic revival. Meanwhile, as part of the useful commentary on ‘Nonconformist Chapels in East Anglia’ (in N. Virgoe and T. Williamson, eds, *Religious Dissent in East Anglia*, 1993) there is a glimpse of the author’s affinity for what might be called post-Victorian architecture: Lutyens’s dinky chapel at Overstrand is judged to be ‘a masterpiece which proves that size is not everything’.

The research and passion which underpins all of these writings was put to good use in many directions. As others recall in this issue of the *Newsletter*, Christopher was a key figure in establishing the Chapels Society in 1988, and the drawing of a parliamentary clock that serves as our logo is his tangible legacy. And he was deeply involved in the wider politics of conserving places of worship. In a world which too often assumed that only Anglican buildings counted, he helped to change attitudes. During the 1970s he joined the churches sub-committee of the Historic Buildings Commission, and subsequently became a member of the equivalent committee at English Heritage. In such circles his knowledge of Nonconformist buildings was greatly respected, although committee work was not his forte. And when the Historic Chapels Trust was founded in 1993, it was natural that he should become a trustee, a role which he continued to play until just a few months before his death. More intriguing is his part in the crisis of confidence that affected the conservation movement at that time.

The Chapels Society’s *Newsletter* 7 (of December 1992) encapsulates the crisis. Following a legal judgment in 1975, it seemed that ecclesiastical exemption allowed places of worship to be altered without control on aesthetic or conservation grounds, and the case of Great Gidding Baptist chapel (listed grade II*) became a cause célèbre in 1992. Its pulpit, pews and other fittings were hacked out and burned by the minister and his congregation. As editor of the *Newsletter*, Christopher Stell pulled no punches. ‘MUTTON CHOPS!’ cried the front page. This pun — for Mutton was the minister’s name — was no laughing matter, as the follow-up article made clear. Christopher wrote of ‘the passing whims



Examples of Christopher's chapel drawings on the cover of one of the fascicules into which the first volume of the Inventory was divided

and fancies of ... transitory tenants: of ministers who come, make their mark, and pass on to further acts of pious profanity', and claimed that this was 'not even a case of selling the family silver, but of throwing it into the bottomless pit!'. The article concluded with a call to the 'beneficiaries of the outdated Ecclesiastical Exemption ... [to] honourably desist from further aiding and abetting the continuous and inexorable butchery of these few precious survivors from an age of faith which was the precursor of this age of folly'. The article was written with passion, and probably attracted more attention than the following three-page defence of ecclesiastical exemption, written by Kenneth Street. Parliament was already on the case, however, and *Newsletter* 8 was able to report the government's intention to remove ecclesiastical exemption except where denominations were able to establish suitable monitoring procedures. Some two years later, Christopher agreed to join the listed buildings advisory committees set up for that purpose by the Methodist Church and the Baptist Union. For such a critic of ecclesiastical exemption to become one of its policemen was at least paradoxical. In practice he was sceptical both of local authorities and of denominational regimes when it came to conservation, and may have judged that it was easier to influence the latter than the former.

What is certain is that Christopher Stell greatly enriched the world. His scholarship has given us a far fuller and more systematic understanding of Nonconformist buildings than existed a generation ago, and because of his influence many fine buildings remain that would otherwise have been lost or altered beyond recognition. This Society will miss him greatly, but so should society at large.

Christopher Wakeling

REMEMBERING CHRISTOPHER

In January 1975 I began a new job, working for the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) as its Churches Officer. At first there were two main strands to the work. One was to ensure that every Anglican diocese and cathedral had access to a source of archaeological advice. The other was to promote research.

In those years our main focus was on churches in late antiquity and the middle ages. For historical reasons the majority of these in England and Wales were in Anglican hands and it was to them that much of our energy was first directed. However, the CBA's Churches Committee to which I reported had from the start agreed not to define 'church' narrowly. This was already reflected in one of the Committee's first publications, a booklet by Jeremy Jones called *How to record graveyards*. It was also reflected in the fact that Christopher Stell was one of the Committee's founder members.

By the early 1980s our work with the established church and the Church in Wales had prospered, and our volume on *The Church in British Archaeology* had been published. It was time to widen our horizons. We did so in a number of ways. One was to form a Working Party on Nonconformist Places of Worship. The Working Party was chaired by Christopher. Its members included Godwin Arnold, Roger Thorne, David Butler, Clyde Binfield, and George McHardy, who between them covered a spread of regional, thematic and period interests.

This was a propitious time. SAVE Britain's Heritage campaigning exhibition and book *The Fall of Zion* (1980) had raised the subject's profile, while the accelerated resurvey of listed buildings reminded us of the ubiquity and diversity of chapels and meeting-houses, and their place in our cultural surroundings.

Under Christopher's energetic leadership we set out to promote these things. The Churches Committee published a *Bulletin* on current research and practitioner topics. This was a home-made affair which at first was sent free to diocesan archaeological consultants and later circulated more widely. In it Christopher had already set out his manifesto. This was followed by a series of small conferences and tours in different parts of the country, and by *Hallelujah! Recording Chapels and Meeting Houses* (1985), a booklet in the CBA's series of practical handbooks.

Christopher's contributions to these events were notable not only for their erudition but also for their presentational style. His talks were carefully prepared but given with verve. In his speaking Christopher made use of different kinds of emphasis — some words and phrases being drawn out or savoured, others accented or rapid. At key moments Christopher would often go out of his way to find an arresting phrase, or use alliteration or a change of pace to highlight his point.

Although the CBA was then based in London my office was in Leeds — handy for Nonconformist buildings in the conurbations of the West Riding and Lancashire, and handy too for remote Pennine chapels. One of the conferences we held was at Manchester in the mid-1980s. The places we visited included Fairfield Moravian settlement, the Baptist chapel at Goodshaw, Crawshawbooth meeting-house, and Dukinfield Old Chapel (wherein Christopher's abrupt and theatrical appearance in the elevated central pulpit via its revolving back, as if by magic, is an abiding memory). Looking back, these were obvious places to go. At the time, for someone new to the subject (like me) they were a revelation.

The formation of the Society was preceded by careful foundation-laying in which Christopher's role was again central. Preparations included the drafting of a constitution, the identification and contacting of potential founder members, a scoping event in the Roman Catholic cathedral of St Chad in Birmingham, and the enlistment of key supporters like Asa Briggs and Alan Beith MP who contributed to the inaugural meeting in September 1988. The event at St Chad's reminds me that for practical reasons the Working Party defined 'Nonconformist' as 'anything not Anglican'. In scope it thus embraced groupings as far apart as, say, Primitive Methodism and Roman Catholicism. We did our best to reflect this in programmes for events.

Christopher's approach to geography was similarly pragmatic. The Working Party had been set up under the auspices of the CBA, a UK-wide body. However, the formation in Wales of Capel in 1986, different structures in Northern Ireland, and the concurrent devolution of much of the CBA's role in Scotland to the Council for Scottish Archaeology (now Archaeology Scotland) meant that for much of the time we were concentrating on England.

Christopher's combination of leadership, scholarship and enthusiasm were instrumental in bringing the Society into being. It was a privilege to have been a

servant of the process and in thereby to have had the opportunity to come upon so much that was new, and to learn so much.

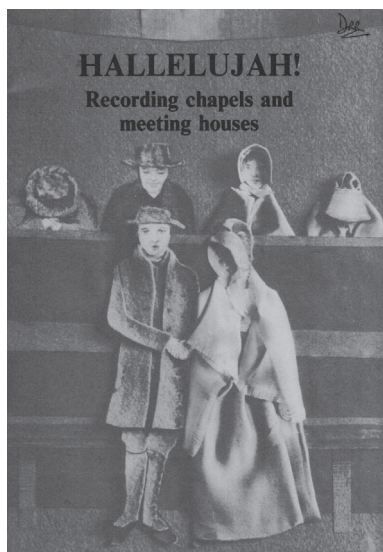
Richard Morris

THE ORIGINS OF THE CHAPEL SOCIETY

When we moved to a modest retirement flat, a gallon of books, papers and files had to be fitted into a pint of shelves. Much had to be let go and these recollections are largely from memory. However the most abiding memory is that Chris Stell was the mainspring of all that happened and I regard it as a great privilege that we were friends for nearly forty years. It might have been around 1977, at the time of the 'Change and Decay' Exhibition (curated by Marcus Binney and Peter Burman), that the CBA (Council for British Archaeology) arranged a day conference at the Victoria and Albert Museum. I was invited to be a speaker and suggested for my topic 'Where was Zion?' — how to identify, locate and study the minor chapels, found in such profusion across the countryside. Asa Briggs, no less, chaired the day and it was well-attended. Clearly this set wheels in motion and later I was invited to form part of a new 'Nonconformist Working Party' of the CBA, to be concerned of course with chapels. It was very London based and we mostly had our meetings in an upstairs room at the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, although I do remember one meeting south of the river at the offices of the CBA.

As I remember, with apologies for omissions, the working party comprised Chris Stell, David Butler, Clyde Binfield, George McHardy, John Brandon-Jones, Godwin Arnold and Roger Thorne. In alphabetical order, their individual religious affiliations were Baptist, Methodist, Quaker (two), Roman, Unitarian and URC. As an investment in what it hoped would be the future the CBA provided a convenor in Richard Morris, now Professor Morris, and met expenses. It was quite a heady experience for me, having expertise only in the minor chapels of the South-West. More than once after a meeting, Chris invited us for tea at the Athenaeum, where he was a member.

I cannot now recall exact times and seasons but I have notes of four visits we arranged. In May 1983 we had a remarkable day in Bristol, when we were able to see the inside of Whitefield's Tabernacle. In June 1984 we were at Norwich for a day. More ambitiously, in September 1987 we had a two day conference based at



The first fruits of the 'Nonconformist Working Party' of the CBA — whose title was contributed by Christopher Stell

St Anselm's Hall, Manchester. Then in September 1987 we had a residential conference sponsored by Bristol University but organised by the Working Party. We began what has proved to be a distinguished publishing record with a substantial booklet — *Hallelujah!* — about recording chapels. The title of course was Chris Stell's.

Clearly our progress had been followed with interest and in 1988 Richard Morris told us that the CBA felt that our Working Party was now well established and should become independent. To Chris Stell this was meat and drink and before we knew it we were 'The Chapels Society' with a logo of a dated chapel clock, drawn by Chris. The first newsletter appeared in January 1989, listing some 110 members and an explanatory note about the Society's genesis, which was planned to come to full fruition at the following first AGM, at which point the CBA would 'disengage'.

I was privileged to be a founder member of the new Chapels Society Council and served for some years and later was invited back for a further term. Thus I have been part of the inner workings of our Society for well over thirty-five years and I would not have missed one moment of it. One little fluttering was occasioned by our name, as 'Chapel' means different things regionally and in one view did not do justice to the Roman Church's inclusion. In retrospect I am convinced that our Society and its predecessor have been fortunate indeed in its officers but if all philosophy is footnotes to Plato, then all our contributions to the inspiration, formation and existence of our Society are footnotes to Chris Stell — without him there would have been no Society. We shall not see his like again.

Roger Thorne

OTHER RECOLLECTIONS

On the whole I got on with Christopher very well: his knowledge was encyclopaedic, his judgments were shrewd, there could be no doubt about his commitment to the Chapel-building cause. There was a sense he gave of being a pretty powerful dynamo — perhaps kept in check by the fact that he was a good civil servant and, as an architect, had always to keep in mind (and apparently defer to) the vagaries of clients. But his knowledge, his sharply enjoyable humour, and his pertinacity won through. I am particularly indebted to him in one regard — he organised the very ambitious visits each year of the Royal Archaeological Institute (for how long, I don't know) — and he did so impeccably — they were informative, varied, demanding, satisfying. He always ensured that there was somewhere a **chapel** focus, and on two or three occasions he invited me to provide its 'travelogue'. That was, for me, rather an encouragement from so 'stern' an organiser as Christopher. He was also unfailingly helpful in providing slides and information: he was a first port of call, and when the Dissenting Studies Centre held a few years back its Architectural History Day at Dr Williams's Library, Christopher was the obvious choice to start things off. Alas, he declined: at last he found lecturing tiring, his health told on him, and he was concerned at that point for Jean. So we missed his robust, comprehensive, approach and style — **and we could find no adequate substitute for him:** he already left a gap.

He did have a difficult side (for which Jean was a very helpful antidote). He would not — I am glad to say — let the RCHM and English Heritage off the hook over completing, to his standards, the *Inventory* (and I have some copied correspondance of him at his most Stell-like).

I wished that he had extended his interest to the context of chapels more than he allowed himself and that his *Inventory* had been more open to late nineteenth-century and to early to mid-twentieth century work (there are some surprising omissions). But to say that is also to recognise the extent, the foundational extent, of his contribution. The Chapels Society and the Historic Chapels Trust really would have been significantly different, and might not have existed at all, without him.

Clyde Binfield

My introduction to Christopher Stell came out of the blue, when I knew nothing of him, little of the Royal Commission, and not all that much about our shared interest in Quaker Meeting Houses. It became the start of a long and rewarding connection between the professional investigator with the resources of the Royal Commission behind him, and the amateur working on his own. His suggestion that I share my researches with him was perhaps a bit of a cheek, but was rewarded at once by his generous encouragement and a sharing of information, and upon each publication by the gift of that copy. I never had to buy a single copy of his *Inventory*: for three years he gave me one as it came out, the fourth one I reviewed, and I suspect that he steered that offer in my direction. He very generously acknowledged that my contribution was serviceable to him. It has been remarked that the predominance of Quaker buildings which he included compared with other denominations was rather unbalanced, but this was not wholly due to the quantity of available information, but more the result of the decision on choice for inclusion: everything before 1800, only a selection after.

It surprised me when he told me that he often carried a ladder in his car. I knew of the value of inspecting roofs and attics, but never with such forethought, although the thought. Perhaps the risk became justified when he showed me the result: a Quaker meeting house with an octagonal gallery high up in the roof-space [Earls Colne, Essex]. This was a rare and precious example of how he shared his knowledge which I was not equipped to get for myself. Travelling with him was a treat.

One recollection of Christopher in the various committees was the problem of finding a right, true and complete name for the Society. Several were moved to complain of its inadequacy; few promoted a better name; all, I believe, were firmly and tactfully managed.

It was a great pleasure when he nominated me for election to the Society of Antiquaries, opening up to me that great library, where I got access to resources which I never expected to find. He conducted our whole acquaintanceship with great courtesy, generosity and good humour. It was certainly a valuable acquaintanceship for me, and a great pleasure to sit on the CBA committee with him, which was an interesting experience for me at that time in my backwoods career.

David Butler

CHANGES AT LONG CRENDON BAPTIST CHURCH

The church was originally founded in 1799. After several moves around the village to larger chapels, the current site was purchased in the early 1850s, to accommodate increased numbers in the congregation. From the Church's archives we found that, in the nineteenth century, a village farmer related to members of the congregation 'exchanged one of his cottages for a piece of land belonging to Lord Churchill, in the middle of the High Street, and in 1853 the new chapel was completed. It is a dignified building of considerable charm and fortunately escaped the worst excesses of Victorian architecture.'



Bicentenary celebrations in 1999 sparked serious discussion about how to deal with the ongoing issue of a lack of space, one of the exciting challenges arising from a steadily growing church. As a result, two congregations were planted over the next ten years, in a nearby town, Thame. These are both now independent, with their own pastoral teams. However, with regular attendance continuing to grow we still needed to provide extra capacity for Sunday services and for the many Church and community activities during the week.

The rear hall, the result of several building projects over the previous half-century, was single storey and poorly insulated, with a flat roof leaking in several places. The older people at the village day centre, who used the rear hall two days a week, would often be sitting around a paddling pool to catch the dripping rain-water in wet weather.

The challenge for the Church membership and leadership was how we could make this Victorian chapel suitable for worship and community use in the twenty-first century. Although not listed, the chapel sits within a conservation area on the busy High Street of this lively Buckinghamshire village, just over a mile from the river Thame and the Oxfordshire border.

Gradually plans came together for the building project, which has been carefully prayed over and developed over the past five years. The first design for a new rear extension with a sweeping glazed roof was objected to by neighbours and planners, and not taken further. The revised plans approved in 2012 have an extension with a three-section slate roof mirroring the pitch of the original chapel. The hall has a squared-off footprint with two storeys, giving upper and lower halls, meeting rooms, offices, a new kitchen and improved toilet facilities. The main entrance has moved to the left side of the chapel, through a central concourse between the chapel and rear hall, meaning different activities can be run at the same time. The main chapel space has been enlarged by removing partition walls to incorporate the entrance vestibule, and the layout rotated through ninety degrees, with a new U-shaped balcony around three sides, to seat an additional sixty people.

The project finally got underway in early April 2013. Over 85% of the £1.5m needed has been contributed by the sacrificial giving of the Church's congregation past and present. The rest has been provided in grants and interest-free loans.

Delays with the glazing meant that the building was not watertight until mid-December 2013. A members' work party was held on 18 January 2014 to clean the building and bring back chairs, furniture and other equipment. An official reopening and rededication was held on 1 February, with thanksgiving services on 2 February. The building was full on both days.

Classrooms, meeting rooms and offices are gradually being sorted out. Do come and visit, to see the new layout. We wait to see what opportunities God has planned for us in our new improved facilities, and how He will continue to use this building, which has been dedicated to His service for the past 160 years.

This is an edited version of an article by Sarah Rothwell which was first published in the Winter 2014 issue of the Conservation and Heritage Journal.



CHAPEL NOTICE BOARDS

Chapel notice boards, according to Kenneth Lindley, are 'seldom things of either beauty or interest' (*Chapels and Meeting Houses*, pp. 72–3). I beg to differ — as far as the interest part is concerned, at any rate. They have intrigued me for a long time. But not many other writers, evidently, as I could find very little written about them, although I have not been able to look at the catalogues of chapel furnishers. Yet they are, for many people, the first point of contact with a particular congregation, and can make or mar the experience. A few chapels are said to have chiselled the service times in stone, and readers may have examples of this.

Nonconformist chapels appear to have survived at least until the mid-nineteenth century without notice boards, and some Baptist chapels I have visited in Eastern Europe still do. In stable communities, they were probably unnecessary, since everyone knew when the services were. And when dissenters were liable to social opprobrium, it probably did not do to advertise. Was the introduction of notice boards as dissenters came out of the shadows a function of a growing sense of confidence and of the need to reach out to those who did not attend a place of worship?

Form and content of notice boards both call for attention. Some chapels sport notice boards of a vaguely Gothic shape; many more prefer a gently sloping top edge — although one Baptist chapel for which I was responsible had to saw this

off after the neighbours complained that it made a new board larger than its predecessor! I assume this ensures that rainwater runs off the board, but I may have missed some theological justification for the shape. A flight of fancy, perhaps, but do particular denominations prefer different colours for their boards? The Church in Wales, I am told, is endeavouring to standardize on a shade known as Teal. One member of this society expressed the belief to me that Methodist boards are often red, and a traditional Strict Baptist chapel will very probably use black.

As for content, when researching the Brethren, I soon found that the precise form of words used on a board was a reliable indicator of which stream of Brethren met in a particular hall. Thus 'Meeting place of the Church of God in X' denotes an assembly belonging to the so-called 'Needed Truth' group of Brethren, while 'You are invited to a preaching of the Word of God each Lord's Day at 6.30 pm' is a form used by a particular strand of Exclusive Brethren. More subtly, there is a discernible difference of outlook between those who observe the Lord's Supper and those who refer to it as the Remembrance Meeting. And the assembly whose board is pictured below would probably disown the designation 'Brethren' and claim to be what their notice board says.



Open Brethren, Kempston, Bedfordshire

Boards may include an exhortation to the reader, although these are not always worded carefully. I know of one chapel whose notice board bears the injunction:

Marriages solemnized
Come & see John Ch 1 Vs 39

For the uninitiated, information may be remarkably obscure for what is in effect a permanent advertisement. For instance 'Services G.W.' refers not to a particular pre-1948 railway company, but is an abbreviation for 'God Willing', the English equivalent of the more often seen 'D.V' (was D.V., for the Latin *Deo volente*, seen as 'Romish?'). Brethren and Christadelphians sometimes put 'all meetings are in the will of the Lord' or, more tentatively and in line with James 5, 'if the Lord wills'. And the name of a chapel — or the denomination to which it belongs — may itself require explanation. Below is an example, from Tillingham in Essex (the allusion is, as most of you will have guessed, to 1 Peter).



So, when did chapel notice boards originate? Was their appearance linked to the development of commercial advertising and/or regular evangelistic services? What makes for a helpful and effective notice board? And how can a notice board blend in — or contrast — with the architectural style of the chapel to which it is affixed? Answers on a postcard, please!

Tim Grass

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

It is with sadness that we report the death of the following members:

Jeffrey Spittall, Frenchay, Bristol (formerly honorary librarian of the New Room)
Christopher Stell, Chorleywood (see above)

We have pleasure in welcoming the following new personal members to the Society:

Dr Delia Garratt, Smethwick

Mark Kirby, Beckenham, Kent

Dr I Christopher Webster, Barwick in Elmet, Leeds

The Revd Roger Shambrook, Ottery St Mary, Devon

Can I ask that you get in touch with me if you have moved house or any of your contact details have changed recently. Many thanks.

Paul Gardner

NEWS AND NOTES

First floor chapels

Leamington Spa has many unused chapels, writes Mike Cullen, but two stand out as unusual, and possibly of a unique design. They are, as the title suggests, built on the first floor, above commercial properties. These chapels have had many users over the years, starting with religious groups, later being used by other organisations, mainly commercial in recent times. I cannot find any similar buildings on the internet, so are they peculiar to Leamington, or are there more to be discovered? Does anyone have similar chapels locally? If you can help with this query contact Mike by e-mail at Michael_cullen2@sky.com.

William Huckvale (1848–1936), Architect

Tim Amsden of Tring, Hertfordshire (tim@timamsden.plus.com) is looking for help in his research into this architect who practised there from 1872. For most of his career he was retained by Sir Nathaniel (later Lord) Rothschild, for whom

he designed farms, cottages and a museum in Tring, plus a mansion and an entire village in Northamptonshire. However, he had private clients too, including several Nonconformist congregations. His designs included the following:

- Baptist chapel (United Reformed), High St, Tring, Herts (1889)
- Primitive Methodist chapel, North St, Leighton Buzzard, Beds (1890)
- Non-denominational chapel, Tring Cemetery (1894)
- Baptist chapel, Aston Clinton, Bucks (1897)
- (CoE) Chapel, Hastoe, Herts (1897)
- Baptist chapel, Northchurch, Herts (1898)
- Bunyan Baptist chapel, Basil's Road, Stevenage, Herts (1902)
- Baptist chapel, Wigginton, Herts (1904)

William Huckvale came from old Baptist stock in Oxfordshire, one ancestor having joined the Dissenters in 1670; another had his house licensed for worship in 1722 and helped to found the Chipping Norton Baptist Church. Early in the nineteenth century his grandfather Jonathan removed to Blackfriars Road in London. His father Harry and mother Elizabeth then moved to Woodhouse Lane, Leeds. In both places there are likely to have been Baptist connections: William's brother married at Headingley Hill Congregational Chapel and his brother-in-law is known to have been a practising Baptist. His son William Henry Huckvale (1884–1965) followed him into practice.

Huckvale's ecclesiastical buildings are mostly in a restrained domestic style, with the occasional touch of space-rocket Gothic. Tim is keen to know of places of worship in other parts of the country which may have been designed by Huckvale.

Forthcoming lectures

The Baptist Historical Society is holding its 2014 AGM with a lecture on Saturday 21 June at Highgate Baptist church in Birmingham. The speaker will be Andy Vail on 'Birmingham Baptists and the First World War'. Contact: Stephen Copson (stephen.bhs@dsl.pipex.com).

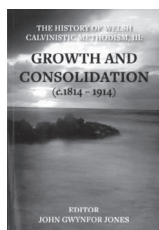
The URC History Society has its lecture on Saturday 28 June. The speaker is the Revd Dr John Parry on engagement in inter-faith relations. Contact: Mrs Margaret Thompson, c/o URC History Society, Westminster College, Cambridge CB3 0AA.

Launceston Congregational Chapel: an update

Our Casework Officer has been in touch with Cornwall County Council's Senior Conservation Officer about this listed chapel which suffered a collapse on 28 November (see *Newsletter* 55). She reports that prior to collapse the building had been monitored and engineers had advised that it was not at risk of collapse. However following the collapse much of the structure has had to be demolished for safety reasons: the collapsed walls were found to be very poorly constructed, having no binder in their joints and being less than 400mm thick with no lateral restraint.

BOOK REVIEWS

The History of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism, III: Growth and Consolidation (c. 1814–1914) edited by John Gwynfor Jones. Cardiff: Historical Society of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, 2013. 289 pp, illustrated paperback. ISBN 978-1-859947-62-3. £10 [available from www.gwales.com]



The story of the Calvinistic Methodist denomination deserves to be better known outside its native Wales. Springing out of the eighteenth-century Evangelical awakenings which affected much of Britain as well as the North American colonies, separation from the Church of England came only in 1811, once the movement decided to ordain its own ministers. Now known as the Presbyterian Church of Wales, it remains a prominent part of the Welsh religious landscape.

This volume is an abridged translation of the third volume in the Welsh series, which was published in 2011. The footnotes and references have been omitted — frustrating for the academic, but probably easier reading for many!

The book adopts a thematic approach, as other denominations have done in covering this period. Topics include the period of formal separation, worship and spiritual life, theology, printing and publishing activity, education and the Welsh language, hymns, visual culture (including architecture), involvement in society, and home and foreign mission, rounded off by an extensive statistical analysis. As in any multi-authored volume, styles and approaches vary widely; some are relatively generalized, while others pack an astonishing amount of detail into a coherent narrative. A number of the chapters are by well-known academic historians.

Surprisingly, there is no chapter devoted to the ministry, although this was an era when most Nonconformist denominations saw considerable and much-debated professionalization of their ministerial training and ranks. These churches saw a change in ministerial focus from evangelistic itineration to settled pastoring which, although illuminatingly touched on, deserves fuller exploration (and perhaps also comparison with what was happening in the Wesleyan Methodist traditions).

Discussion of the chapels highlights an intriguing problem. Many congregations founded during early nineteenth-century periods of revival were saddled with debt. It was decided that no further congregations should incur debt by erecting new chapels, but a fresh outbreak of revival around 1859 and the consequent influx of converts only served to make the problem worse. The financial impact and implications of revival would be a topic well worth studying across the denominations.

As one would expect, the role of the chapels as bearers of Welsh culture is well covered, and the beginnings of a ‘secularizing’ trend traced back to the introduction of singing classes in local chapels. As elsewhere, there was a transition during this period from the cultivation of piety to the promotion of ‘fellowship’, in the broadest sense of the word.

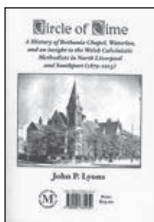
It may surprise some to learn that the denomination had not always been strongly opposed to the Anglican establishment. At the beginning of the period covered by the book, these Christians were of a profoundly conservative stamp, theologically, socially and ecclesiastically, with such influential leaders as Thomas Charles of Bala being reluctant to separate from Anglicanism. The writers document the thoroughgoing nature of the transformation during the next hundred years, which produced a Nonconformity which in many respects had become markedly radicalized.

A small section of illustrations is included, although these have not always been reproduced too well, and I was not sure why particular chapels had been chosen. The volume also includes a number of graphs and tables; among the statistics summarized in them are those for the number of Bible chapters learned by heart, which to my mind says a great deal about the ethos of these churches. Did any other denomination keep such statistics, I wonder?

The first two volumes of the series appeared in the 1970s; I hope that we shall not have to wait so long for a volume covering the twentieth century, as I for one look forward to learning how things turned out for this group of churches. The book is good value for the price and I commend it.

Tim Grass

Circle of Time: A History of Bethania Chapel, Waterloo, and an insight to the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists in North Liverpool and Southport (1879–2013) by John P. Lyons, Liverpool: Modern Welsh Publications Ltd., 2013. 100 pp (English), 96 pp (Welsh) + 20 plates, paperback. ISBN 978-0-901332-95-0. £15.00



At its height, between the wars, the Calvinistic Methodist church in Waterloo had more than 400 members and perhaps as many more who were attenders. Now, despite amalgamation with other congregations, there are barely twenty regular worshippers and the Victorian building has been given up. Such tales of growth and decline are sadly commonplace, but *Circle of Time* chronicles a not-quite-usual story. The church was formally constituted in 1879, drawing its congregations from the Welsh-speaking residents of Liverpool's northern suburbs. Of the 80 members who had enrolled by 1881, 71 were unmarried women in service. Despite this financially unpromising profile, a chapel was built in 1882. Yet it was not until 1897 that a minister was appointed, and protracted negotiations likewise attended the appointment of his successor in 1921. Internal dissension and a stubborn tendency to snub Liverpool's Welsh Presbytery gave the Waterloo church the reputation of being a difficult cause. Over time the proportion of domestic servants shrank and more Welsh-speaking families moved into the area. The cause prospered, and by 1938 had sufficiently redeemed itself to host the Presbytery's general assembly. It also played an important role in the local community and gave special support to missionary work in north-east India. Even in 1951 there were 323 members.

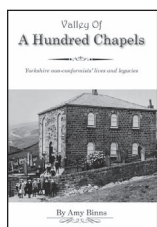
As a potent symbol of the extent to which Liverpool's Welsh chapels have come down in the world, one need look no further than Princes Road, where (as

Chapels Society members saw in July 2013) the ruin of the once noble ‘Cathedral of the Welsh’ stands not far from a Greek church and a synagogue. The late-twentieth-century decline in attendance that affected almost all denominations was exacerbated on Merseyside by the demise of the Welsh language among the second and third generations of immigrants. Against this background the later chapters of John Lyons’s book provide an illuminating case study from the northern suburbs. During the fifties the chapel in Waterloo endeavoured to sustain Welsh culture by encouraging participation in the local eisteddfod and arts events, and since then its ministers have edited a Welsh-language magazine for Merseyside. Despite these initiatives, the fall in membership gathered momentum, and in 1992 the Calvinistic Methodists of Waterloo united with those of nearby Bootle. The Waterloo chapel, renamed Bethania, became home to the combined congregation, and in 2000 welcomed another band of worshippers following the closure of the denomination’s Peniel chapel, Southport. Having been an awkward member a century before, Waterloo entered the new millennium as the Presbytery’s sole church in the northern part of greater Merseyside.

John Lyons focuses on the people who have shaped and given life to the cause in Waterloo. The building is never centre stage, although its erection in 1882 is recorded, and the additions of 1898 and 1907 are noted. In 2007 the shrinking congregation moved out to hold services in the neighbouring Anglican church. A good set of colour photographs shows the Gothic chapel and some of its treasures, as well as many of the members and their ministers. It is a sign of the times that the book, which was written in Welsh, is published in fully bi-lingual form and includes an English translation of the chapel’s first history (from 1910).

Christopher Wakeling

Valley of A Hundred Chapels: Yorkshire non-conformists’ lives and legacies by Amy Binns. Heptonstall: Grace Judson Press, 2013. 96 pp, illustrated paperback. ISBN 978-0-992756-70-3. £12.95



Valley of a Hundred Chapels is both a sad tale of historical amnesia and the destruction of a once vibrant popular movement and its remains; and an attempt to reconstruct the life of that movement from the documents in the archives, old photographs and the memories of those still living. The setting is the Calder valley, around Todmorden and Hebden Bridge, one of those Pennine industrial revolution regions where settlement outstripped the provisions of the established church and numerous Nonconformist sects poured in to fill the religious vacuum.

Hence the reference to a hundred chapels; most of them closed and very many demolished. This is an area already memorialised in Ted Hughes and Fay Godwin’s 1979 poetry and photography collection, *Remains of Elmet*. Within it lies the Heptonstall Methodist octagon, surrounded by its hill-top, millstone-grit industrial village, so redolent of E. P. Thompson’s, *The Making of the English Working Class*. Even now, the memory of impoverished hand-loom weavers seems to hang over these hills, where chapels like Slack, stand like black sentinels.

I recall attending another isolated Methodist outpost, Lumbutts — in the shadow of Stoodley Pike — one Sunday morning two decades ago, while staying at Mankinoles Youth Hostel with my kids. There was a male preacher, myself, quite a few women and lots of small children. Even then, the writing was on the wall and it was no surprise to see that this chapel had closed recently. There is an heroic feel to the area, with its dark moors and black buildings, but not the rustic charm of the limestone dales. Everything about these chapels and their close cousins, the woollen mills, speaks to modern people of a bygone age: harsh, cold, monochrome. In our era of much greater plenty and freedom, as Amy Binns recognises, they carry associations with religious fundamentalism, sexual repression and cruel discipline — however over-simplistic this may be. So, one of the strengths of this short book is to recognise that a renewed appreciation of the remaining buildings rests upon recapturing the sort of lives that went on within them. In this respect, an appreciation of chapels as buildings rests ultimately on an understanding of the way in which, as religious communities, they transformed the lives of their members and made possible the individual and social self-improvement we now enjoy and take for granted.

Part One introduces Dissenters and Nonconformists to the untutored reader as an essential part of the process of democratization in nineteenth-century British society, explaining the religious persecution that preceded this and highlighting some pioneer local Baptists, Congregationalists and Methodists. Small groups come together in the hills and valleys; simple meeting houses are built, to be replaced, in time, by larger, more elaborate buildings. Historians and sociologists since Max Weber have been fascinated by the ‘associational culture’ of voluntary, protestant religion in the USA and Britain, and following chapters demonstrate the richness of this. The Chapel teas and choirs, the Sunday Schools and their annual treats, the links to radical working class movements like Chartism, ‘a Christian spirituality born and bred of the North’, some opportunities for women. This was a self-enclosed religious world that my father, now nearly 80, remembers from a few miles away in the Congregational and other chapels of Leyland and Wigan, Lancashire. There were still lingering elements during the late 1960s period of my own childhood, spent a few miles ‘over the tops’ in Barnoldswick (Barlick) — which the Chapel Society will visit this autumn. But, as Binns recognises, this dissenting tradition is losing contact with, and meaning for, the current generation.

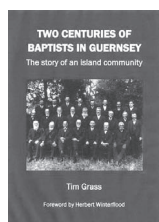
Thus the chapter, ‘The Fall of Zion’, is an elegy to a disappearing world. Here there is a tendency to foreshorten decline, as if everything came tumbling down after the First World War. But church attendance peaked later and some historians date the decline of Christian Britain from as late as the 1960s. Also, as Binns notes, big buildings, funded by socially competitive mill-owners, give an exaggerated picture of past attendance, substantial though this was. The mill-owners enter quietly and sideways to this heroic tale of a rising working-class movement; reminding us that Nonconformity, while almost always a movement of plebeian upward social mobility, was more complex socially and more politically contested than this account might suggest. Indeed, there was considerable ambiguity and tension about the relationship between chapels and the rising labour

movement, though perhaps less so in the poorer chapels and characteristic denominations of the industrial north. This said I share the author's implication that Nonconformity was far more central to the improvement of working people than many give credit. Chapels as collective and individual self-help institutions should be at the heart of British labour history, alongside the trade union and the co-operative store.

The shorter Part Two is a brief guide to the key chapels with photographs and maps. Sadly, few of these remain standing with their original form and function. Overall, this is a useful and evocative little book and a 'must have' for anyone interested in this area and its chapels. There are good photographs of chapels and chapel events, Band of Hope certificates and other documents from the archives. There are remarkable personal stories, like the Strict and Particular Baptist lady, Florrie Walton, who kept open Mount Zion chapel, Hebden Bridge, by herself until one day she found a Minister to revive the congregation. *Valley of a Hundred Chapels* is a bold plea to keep alive this the religious history of northern, former-industrial England, when chapels are still being demolished because no one cares about what they look like or what once went on there.

Peter Ackers

Two Centuries of Baptists in Guernsey — The story of an island community by Tim Grass. Ramsey, Isle of Man: Thornhill Media, 2013. 191 pp, black and white photographs, paperback. ISBN 978-0-957319-02-8. £13.00



In my review of Tim Grass's previous book (see *Newsletter* 53), I finished my article with the desire to see more books regarding the story of a particular denomination in a certain area. Well, here we are again! The prolific Dr Grass has seen and met a long-felt want for a detailed history of the Baptist causes on the island of Guernsey. Indeed, our President has produced an attractive and informative story and one which includes a very succinct and interesting foreword by the religious correspondent

of the *Guernsey Evening Press*.

The Channel Islands have a proud history of links to both France and Britain but I was unaware that English did not become the official language on Guernsey until after the First World War. The Islands were officially part of the Anglican Diocese of Winchester, although no Bishops visited them until the nineteenth century. Thus the field was clear for the Huguenots, fresh from persecution in mainland France, to arrive in the late sixteenth century and begin the preaching of a non-Anglican brand of Christianity.

Whereas Tim's previous book about the Strict Baptists of Norfolk and Suffolk mentioned the history of each individual Chapel in discrete sections, here we have the whole story of the Baptists on Guernsey in chronological order. There are a number of historical photographs, together with those that show existing and former Chapel buildings today. In addition, there is a brief summary chapter, which reviews some of the issues arising from this story. Many readers will find the listings of known Baptist causes and their pastors of real interest, together with the associated attendance or membership statistics.

One chapter which caught my interest was the story of the German occupation of Guernsey during the Second World War. I was surprised that, along with the well-known issues regarding restrictions on personal freedom and the severe rationing, there were some German soldiers who attended Dissenting services. There were aspects of ‘normality’ also, for example harvest services, although rationing affected the associated displays of fruit and flowers. There is also a sombre reference to the story of the pastor at the Spurgeon Memorial Chapel, Edwin Foley, who managed to obtain an exemption from the deportations ordered by Hitler and who, it seems, saw none of the violence used towards the conscripted *Todt* workers on Guernsey.

I was pleased with the style, information and content and once again, the energetic Dr Grass has managed to produce an excellent account that will be of interest to many Chapels Society’s members. Whether you want to learn more about the history of Baptists on one of these lovely islands, or perhaps you are planning a visit to Guernsey in the near future, then this book is a must for you. I, for one, cannot wait for Tim’s next book!

Paul Gardner



*The grand entrance to Barnoldswick Independent Methodist Chapel,
another destination for our Autumn visit
(photograph copyright Chris Skidmore)*

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