

Building the Church

Church formation, the gathering of a group of like-minded worshippers, has normally been, for Nonconformists, the prelude to the erection of a dedicated building. Thus *Building the Church*, this second volume of *The Chapels Society Journal*, encompasses both processes. In the nineteenth century, and particularly during the chapel building boom of the 1880s, there was also a good deal of enlargement of chapel premises to provide for additional functions, including schools, and of building grander chapels often on new sites and in the Gothic style. Here the chapel builder of old gave way to the professional architect, often after the formalities of an open competition.

The study by **Alan Brooks** study presents the story of one such who, largely for the Methodists, built both Gothic and Classical chapels and, in the new century was responsible for two of the London Central Halls. Although the Methodist architect, James Weir, was not a leading practitioner, Brooks, by mapping the personal and connexional influences which led to his success and by noting the wide range of other buildings he was involved with, makes a strong argument for the importance of his subject.

The campaign to combat the influence of the established church in Oxford by building a church, a Methodist memorial to the Wesley brothers within the university where they underwent their spiritual formation, is the subject of the contribution by **Martin Wellings**. The national perspective and the inevitable competition with Cambridge Methodists adds an extra dimension but the study demonstrates amply the importance of an effective champion (George Maunder), as well as a skilled architect (Charles Bell), for the success of any chapel building project.

Kenneth C. Jackson contains a longer historical perspective in his essay on the rise of Nonconformity in Skipton, which is part of his wider study of the growth of the town. He concentrates on three case studies of different causes, using a model which recognises four phases in the development of a permanent church – diffusion, opposition, support and establishment. The paper pays particular attention to the social composition of the various denominations and the extent to which the various classes contributed to the lay leadership of each cause.

Finally **Clyde Binfield** addresses both church formation and church building in his contribution on the Free Churches of the first two Garden Cities. As ever he brings to life the personalities involved as well as their wider relationships within Nonconformity. The Free Churches came from very similar beginnings, their communities growing as their cities grew, but gave rise to different denominational allegiances and different architectural outcomes. The sources used give intriguing views of these two interesting causes from both within and without, building a rounded picture of Garden City Religion.

Compared with the first volume of the *Journal – Sitting in Chapel* – we here expose a much wider canvas. By presenting the history of an architect and of a building as well as describing the development of churches in both the industrial North and the suburban South, our contributors have succeeded in addressing the variety of factors – social, religious, denominational and financial – that influenced church and chapel building over the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth.

Chris Skidmore

Chapels Society members will receive a copy of this volume, the second in The Chapels Society Journal series, as part of their membership. Non-members can obtain a copy for £15 including postage and packing by using this form. To order a copy please complete this form and return it to Chris Skidmore, 46 Princes Drive, Skipton BD23 1HL together with a cheque for £15 made payable to The Chapels Society.

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