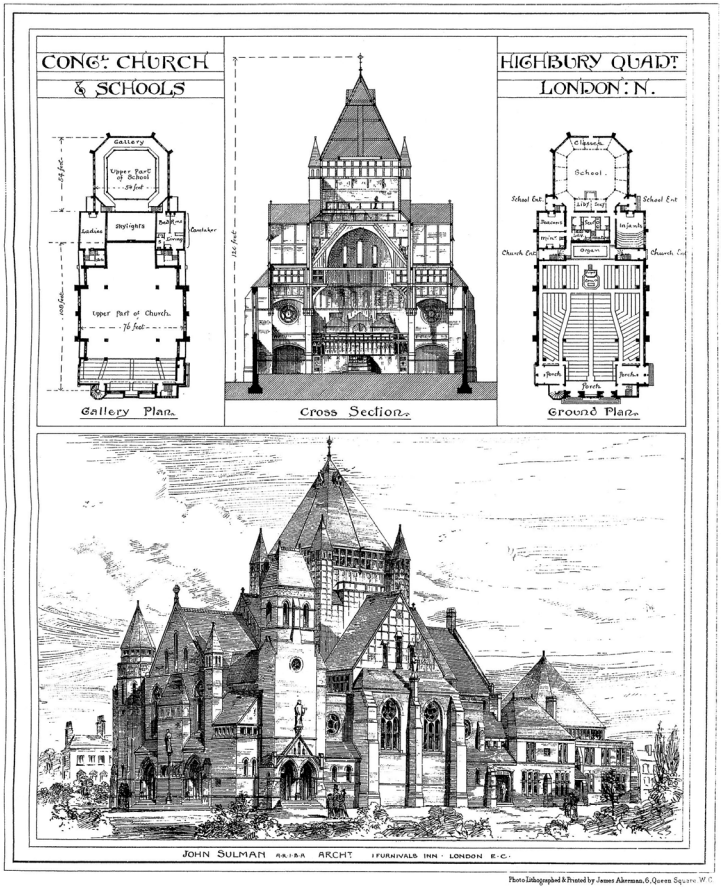
THE CHAPELS SOCIETY

Newsletter 71 May 2019



John Sulman's designs for Highbury Quadrant Congregational Church of 1880 (see book review)

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NOTICEBOARD

CHAPELS SOCIETY EVENTS

6 July 2019	Visit to Bethesda Chapel, Hanley and the Museum of Primitive Methodism, Englesea Brook with AGM and Stell lecture (John Anderson and Peter Ackers)
28 September 2019	Visit to Norwich and Waveney Valley (John Clements)

EDITORIAL

This issue of the Newsletter will be accompanied by a number of important papers, including the Annual Report for 2018 and the agenda for our AGM, which takes place in Stoke-on-Trent on Saturday 6 July. This is a significant occasion and we hope to see you there: we shall be electing both a new President and a new Secretary and, because of retirements and changes of position, there are a record number of vacancies on Council. Please think hard about whether you can offer your services to the Society as a member of Council and help develop the vision for the Society going forward into its fourth decade. Your name and that of a proposer and seconder need to reach the Secretary by 29 June.

DAVID MERTON BUTLER (1930-2019)

David Butler, who died, aged 89, on April 6th was best known as the author of the two-volume *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, published in 1999, an extensive account of some 1300 meeting houses past and present. Expanding on the limited amount of space which Stell* could give to Quaker meeting houses, David Butler used the extensive body of material in Quaker records to add to his own primary research into the buildings themselves to provide an unequalled compendium of information about this important building type. What adds both to the delight and the value of his publication are David Butler's own plans and line drawings of both existing buildings and the conjectured appearance of demolished ones.

David Butler was born in January 1930 in Cheadle, Cheshire, into a long-standing Quaker family. He was brought up in Stockport and Kidderminster and educated at Sidcot School, a Quaker boarding school in the Mendips dating back to 1699. Having known since an early age that he wished to be an architect, he went to Dundee College of Art to study Architecture and was elected ARIBA in 1951. On qualification he worked for a time in London for Hubert Lidbetter, the architect of Friend's House, Euston Road, living in the Penn Club, the Quaker boarding house in Bloomsbury. There he met his future wife, Rosemary Sutherland, daughter of Quaker educationalist, G.A. Sutherland: they were married at Mount Street Friends Meeting House, Manchester in 1958, a daughter, Christine, was born in 1960. Setting up home in Red Lion Square, Holborn, he continued to work in London before moving to Kendal in 1963 as a member of the Westmorland County Council Architects Department (from 1974 Cumbria Council Architects Department). Much of his work related to schools and old peoples' homes but he also did some work in the National Park and prided himself on using local materials and producing buildings that blended with their surroundings. These are certainly a feature of two of his buildings in Ambleside – the Ambleside Library and the octagonal lecture block that he designed for Charlotte Mason College, now part of the University of Cumbria.

David was warmly remembered at a recent Memorial Meeting in Penrith Friends Meeting House as a quiet, generous man with a sometimes anarchic

sense of humour and by no means a defender of all old buildings. A Friend told of an occasion when he fiercely resisted the listing of the walls of a disused Quaker burial ground which would have entailed large expenditure but which had no great architectural merit, saying that if the Council prosecuted he would be prepared to go to prison rather than spend the money unnecessarily!

David did some early research, in collaboration with Edward H. Milligan, on the dates of settlement, building and laying down of Quaker meetings in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, concentrating on early meetings in Yorkshire. Sometime around 1955 he came across the then recently-listed Farfield Meeting House in Wharfedale, built in 1689, out of regular use since the early-nineteenth century and thus in close to its original state, which the local Quaker Trustees had decided to sell off. He, together with a group of three other Friends, succeeded in outbidding a local purchaser who was aiming to convert it for her own use: they bought the property for £220. This building became his special care for the next 40 years, let as a painter's studio and used for camping holidays and occasional Quaker meetings, until it became the first property of the newly-formed Historic Chapels Trust in 1993.

It was from Kendal that he published his first two monographs – *Quaker Meeting Houses of the Lake Counties* (1978) [the precursor to the later national work] and *Summer houses of Kendal* (1982). He also did further archival research on the circulating Yearly Meeting for the Northern Counties (1970) and on the Sufferings of early Friends (1988) which were published in the *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, of which he was President in 1999. An active member of his local Quaker meeting, David was a long-term member of the Yearly Meeting Meeting Houses Fund and advised many Quaker meetings around the country on their buildings.

Earlier, in the 1980s, David had become a member of the Nonconformist Working Party of the Council for British Archaeology and was one of the contributors to the ensuing publication – *Hallelujah! Recording chapels and meeting houses* (1985). And when the Chapels Society was formed in 1989 he was a founder member and, for most of the first year, our Treasurer.

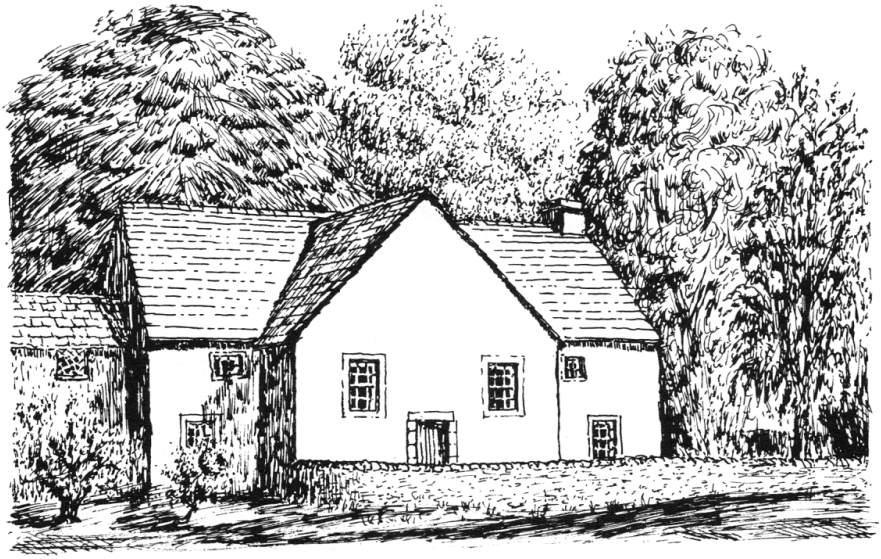
David took little further active part in the affairs of the Chapels Society, aside from the occasional report or review for the *Newsletter* and a paper for the first volume of the *Journal* on seating in Quaker Meeting Houses. Referring to his own extensive researches as merely 'amateur', David was always willing to share his conclusions with other researchers including, in earlier days, with Christopher Stell. This association led to his election as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, a distinction of which he was rightly proud.

Following the publication of *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain,* he published *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Ireland* (2004) and was working on the proofs of *Quaker Buildings Abroad*, the third of his major books, when his final illness no longer permitted him to concentrate sufficiently. They will

long stand as a monument to the life and work of a talented and hard-working architectural historian.

Chris Skidmore

*C.F. Stell, An inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-houses in England, 4 vols. RCHM (1986-2002)



Penrith Friends Meeting House, a drawing by David Butler from Quaker Meeting Houses of the Lake Counties, *Friends Historical Society, 1978*

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

New Members

We are pleased to be able to welcome Alan Walker of London, Philip Thornborow of Leicestershire, Michael Hardy of Buckinghamshire, and Christopher Jewell of Kent as newly confirmed members of the Society since the last *Newsletter.*

Changes and Corrections to Contact Details

Please inform the Membership Secretary if your contact details change or if we have incorrect details – the address we have is that on the envelope in which your *Newsletter* arrived – by email to sjleadley@hotmail.co.uk or by post to Membership Secretary, The Chapels Society, 52 Southwood Avenue, Cottingham, HU16 5AD.

Stuart Leadley

NONCONFORMITY IN VICTORIAN LONDON

AN ARTICLE BY BILL JACOB

Contemporaries were agreed that Nonconformity was different in London compared with the great provincial cities, and in this article I want to consider how London was distinctive from a Nonconformist point of view, why Nonconformity was successful in London; how much Nonconformity changed between *c*.1837 and 1901, and why by 1900 people were expressing concerns that a chill wind was blowing round Nonconformity.

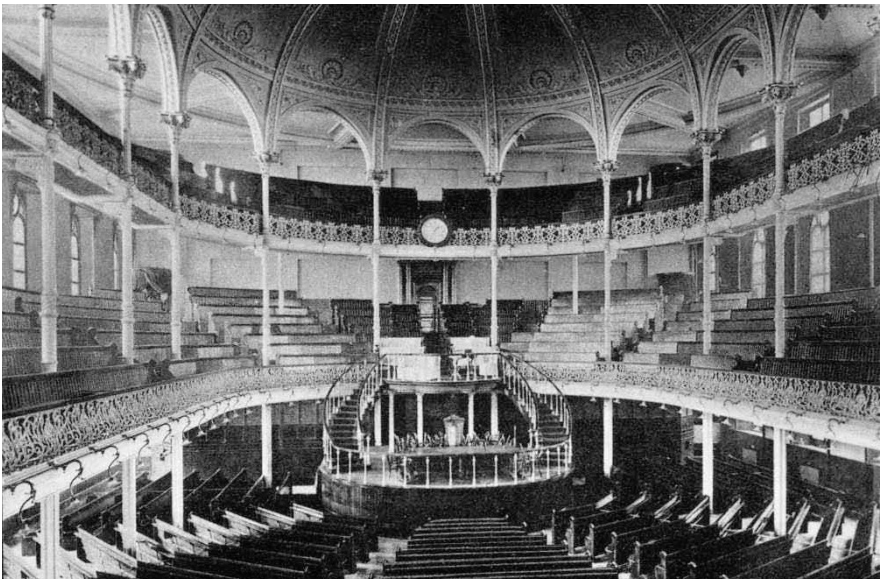
In this article I am using 'Nonconformity' to cover, chiefly Congregationalists, Baptists, and Wesleyan Methodists, although Wesleyans did not necessarily regard themselves as dissenters, especially in relation to disestablishment and schools, however badly some Anglicans treated them. I will be discussing these matters at greater length and including the numerous other smaller denominations and the large numbers of independent congregations and missions in a forthcoming book on 'Religion in Victorian London'. 'London' for this purpose means 'metropolitan London', essentially what is now within the M25.

Religion was all pervasive in Victorian London. There were numerous chapels and churches on every high street, and in poor areas there was a chapel or church, or mission hall, or tin tabernacle on pretty well alternate streets, and sometimes several on a street. While the religious censuses of 1851, 1886 and 1902/3 show significant numbers did not attend chapel or church on a particular Sunday, that did not mean people ceased to think religion was important. People wanted their children to be baptised, to go to Sunday school, to be married in church or chapel, and to be buried by a minister. With, for most of the century, a high death rate (especially amongst women in childbirth and children and young people), death, and questions of heaven and hell stared people in the face. Oral history research done thirty or forty years ago amongst elderly women suggests although their working-class mothers were not regular church goers, they thought religion important.

Britain, and especially London, prospered in the nineteenth century as a result of a free market economy. Competition enabled the fittest and the best to prosper. Many Nonconformist leaders had themselves prospered from free trade, and considered it the best model for church growth, and, seeking a level playing field for all churches, they constantly protested against the protected position of the Church of England as the established Church, receiving state subsidies for its schools, and privileged positions for its clergy. There was also an internal market within Nonconformity – Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, Quakers, Presbyterians, Unitarians, Brethren, the Catholic Apostolic Church,

and the Salvation Army, and numerous independent chapels and mission halls competed with one another. They may have agreed in affirming the Bible's authority, and regarding the establishment of a church as unscriptural, and in fearing Roman Catholicism, and what they considered its fifth column in the Church of England, Tractarianism and Anglo-Catholicism, but they differed, even within denominations, about interpretation of Scripture, theology, ecclesiology, and governance. There were divisions within denominations, most obviously Methodism, which comprised six denominations. Congregationalists and Baptists had Unions of churches from the 1830s, but significant numbers of churches with Baptist or Congregationalist polities were not members of their respective Unions. There were also fallings-out within denominations and churches resulting in new churches.

How was London distinctive? Although the Baptist and Congregational Unions and the Methodist connexions had their headquarters and annual major meetings in London, Nonconformity's strength was not in the capital, but in the great provincial cities – Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. R.W. Dale dominated Birmingham for a generation, and many provincial cities were ruled by oligarchies of Nonconformist merchant princes. No London minister, not even the Baptist Charles Spurgeon with his congregation of over 6,000 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle at the Elephant and Castle, or J.C. Clifford, at Westbourne Park Baptist Chapel nor rich laymen, like the ribbon manufacturers Thomas and Joshua Wilson, George Williams, the founder of



The interior of the Metropolitan Tabernacle

the YMCA, Samuel Morley, the greatest hosier in Europe, or the Spicers, the paper manufacturers, had high profiles among the civic elite, for London's governance was complex and fragmented, and, I suspect, too closely related to the Establishment. Nor did they marry into the civic elite, nor dominate London newspapers, as the Baines did in Leeds. The Congregationalist W.T. Stead's *Pall Mall Gazette*, was only one among many, and a national paper. Only with the establishment of the London County Council in 1888 did Nonconformists under Sir John Benn and the Progressive Party, become prominent in London's governance.

London was unlike most other great cities, in that religious censuses of 1851, 1886 and 1902/3 suggest Anglican attendances were significantly ahead of Nonconformist attendances, although Nonconformists began to catch up later in the century. Exceptionally among great cities in London Congregationalists were the majority Nonconformist group, not Wesleyans, although by the end of the century Baptists had overtaken Congregationalists. The distribution of chapels was patchy, partly reflecting the distribution of dissent in adjoining counties, for most people migrated relatively short distances. There were relatively few chapels south of the Thames, reflecting dissent in Kent and Surrey, but more in the north-eastern suburbs like Islington and Hackney, reflecting the higher levels of dissent in Essex. There were few chapels in rich areas like Bayswater, Kensington, and Chelsea. Mega-chapels, I suspect, proliferated at transport nodes, notably around the Elephant and Castle – with Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle, the Baptist Christ Church Westminster Bridge Road and Upton Chapel in Lambeth Road, Crossway Congregational Chapel, and New Surrey Baptist Tabernacle – where, interestingly, there were also numerous music halls and places of popular entertainment, for example Sanger's Circus.

Why was Nonconformity successful in London? Chapels offered experiences to suit most tastes: large, prosperous chapels offered intellectual stimulation, liveliness, perhaps progressive politics, educational opportunities, and useful contacts for the aspiring, and attracted many visitors; small chapels offered a cosier, comfortable experience. All offered possibilities of friendship and support, and opportunities of meeting suitable members of the opposite sex. Small chapels may have represented regional migrations. The minister of Percy Road Kilburn Primitive Methodist chapel in 1899 noted most of his congregation were 'West Country folk, and very clannish', and the minister of Sutherland Avenue, Paddington Wesleyan chapel noted that 'country people' were the backbone of his congregation. Nonconformity grew with the development of suburbs. About fifteen chapels were built in North Kensington after it began to be developed from the 1840s. Some chapels were entirely private enterprises, like the West London Tabernacle in Penzance Place, in poor north Kensington, built in 1863 by Henry Varley, a successful butcher and member of Bayswater Baptist Chapel, who was invited to start a Sunday school among the pig-keepers in Notting

The West London Tabernacle as 'beautified' to designs by Habershon and Pite. It has found a new religious use, as an Iranian Shia Mosque and the headquarters of the Islamic Universal Association.

Dale. He began preaching there, attracted large congregations, instituted a communion service, and began acting as the minister, and was expelled from Bayswater chapel. In 1872-3 he enlarged and beautified his Tabernacle.

There was much about Nonconformity to appeal to aspiring young migrants to the rapidly expanding metropolis, and its increasing range of new middle-class occupations. Within the previous generation or so, Nonconformity had been revitalised by the evangelical revival and numbers had grown significantly prior to 1837. During the 1820s and '30s most civil disabilities had been lifted from Nonconformists. Nonconformity offered new Londoners security from ever-present fears of death and hell-fire. Chapel congregations, as communities gathered out of the world, provided a complete environment to protect people from the loneliness and temptations of Victorian London. Congregations included people who demonstrated that fruits of evangelical conversion and faith – temperance, thrift, frugality – enabled one to hold one's own and succeed. New men of the age, Thomas Wilson, Samuel Morley, the Spicers, Morton Peto, the railway pioneer, were all chapel members. London was a centre for celebrity preachers. Energetic campaigning Nonconformists limbered up to demonstrate that the true church, modelled on the New Testament, was the local

congregation, independent of external temporal and ecclesiastical authority, and that the Church of England needed freeing from the shackles of establishment.

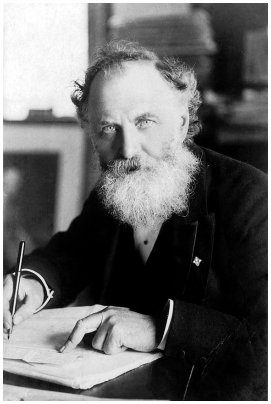
Attendance at a chapel, offered newly-arrived people membership of a community of like-minded people, and experiences useful in other spheres, access to useful networks, and the supreme Victorian virtue, respectability. Chapels offered numerous roles for coming-men – as church meeting members, tract distributors, Sunday school and Bible class teachers, perhaps stewards, elders, deacons, lay-preachers, building committee members, treasurers – demonstrating respectability and probity, and offering valuable experience for developing careers. Self-help was emphasised: poverty could be overcome by conversion from sins of sloth, drunkenness and improvidence, to industry, temperance and thrift. Sermons might be intellectually stimulating, and, engaging and encouraging. In expanding suburbs new chapels were built for new neighbourhoods, providing a focus for new people of similar socio-economic backgrounds and aspirations. It was a religion for the entrepreneurial middle class caught up in a laissez-faire economy. Prosperous middle-class suburbs like Islington and Hackney had numerous chapels: Islington had fifty-nine chapels of the major denominations by 1900, and Hackney fifty-two. Rich business men established chapel building funds, acquired prominent sites in new suburbs, and made grants and loans to chapel committees for building new chapels. Great cathedrals of Nonconformity were built and rebuilt at enormous expense in central London, for example Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle, the New Surrey Tabernacle, Bloomsbury Chapel, the City Temple, King's Weigh House (twice). The façade of the rebuilt Wesleyan Hinde Street chapel was modelled on St Paul's cathedral, and the triumphalist Wesleyan Central Hall rivalled Westminster Abbey.

Queens Park Congregational Church and Institute in the Harrow Road

Victoria's reign was a period of dramatic change, and this is reflected in chapel life and culture. Activities were diversified, especially providing opportunities for aspiring young men. Thomas Binney established an institute for City clerks and warehouse workers at King's Weigh House chapel. Spurgeon's Tabernacle, F.B. Meyer's Christ Church Westminster Bridge Road, J.C. Clifford's Westbourne Park Baptist Chapel, and many others developed extensive activities. In 1899 Queen's Park Congregational chapel was described as 'a veritable hive of industry and a maze of buildings', including a chapel seating 1,500, and

Queen's Park Institute. On Sundays there was an Early Prayer Meeting at 10.15, Public worship at 11 and 7, Sunday school at 9.45 and 2.45, Bible Classes for young men and young women, separately, at 2.45, and Pleasant Sunday Afternoon for about 200 men at 3pm. The morning congregation of c.545 (of whom about a third were children) and evening congregation of 1,232 was, described as mostly working and middle class, including a 'very large' number of young people, mostly from the local area. There were at least 150 voluntary workers and forty-seven Sunday school teachers with 750 children on the books, with 183 attending in the morning and 545 in the afternoon. Activities included a temperance society, literary society, benefit slate club with c.500 members, a medical society with c.600 members, football, cricket and swimming clubs, and a young men's club with eighty members, mostly clerks, 'shopmen', mechanics and builders. Two deaconesses and a nurse were employed. The membership was 680, but there were continual changes, as a result of people moving. The Institute provided a large hall, class rooms, chemical laboratory, a house for a young men's club and a caretaker's cottage. Across the road the 'Day College' provided 'technical classes' for 'lads and lasses' of twelve to fifteen to learn writing, English, French, science, woodwork, shorthand, typewriting, book-keeping and drawing, and prepared people for Civil Service examinations and for admission to teacher training colleges. There were about 220 'scholars' of whom 120 paid fees, and the rest were on London County Council scholarships. There was also a preparatory school for entering the College, featuring 'bright and breezy' lessons, with 'intervals between lessons sufficiently long to prevent children becoming weary', and 'very short' homework. Fees were £1.1s a quarter for under twelves and £1.11s for over twelves. There were evening classes in science, art, 'commercial subjects' 'modelling' and wood carving, typewriting and shorthand. The headmaster was a deacon in the church. Such ranges of activities must have attracted aspiring young people seeking to get on, and parents seeking the best for their children.

Nonconformity's profile advanced significantly during the century. Nonconformists engaged enthusiastically with modernity. Chapels were built on prominent sites, and emulated churches in gothic design and developed more elaborate liturgies, demonstrating their claim to be authentic expressions of English Christianity. With gas-lighting, evening services were introduced, and some denominations held outreach services in theatres. Leading chapels, pioneered at Stockwell Congregational chapel, and then by Thomas Binney at King's Weigh House chapel, Newman Hall at Christ Church Westminster Bridge and Henry Allon at Union Chapel, used set liturgies, with chanting, and anthems, organs and robed choirs. Hugh Price Hughes held choral evening services at Blackheath Wesleyan chapel. Such services with intellectually stimulating sermons must have been grand aesthetic experiences, matching the equipage of the upper-middle class attenders. Worship in 1901 in most chapels was very different from what it had been in 1837.



W.T. Stead in 1905

With the assistance of W.T. Stead, the Congregationalist pioneer of investigative and sensational journalism, Nonconformist concerns about the moral state of London were raised and prompted some government intervention. The Congregationalist Andrew Mearns's *Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, would not have achieved such a profile about the appalling housing conditions of the poor, without Stead, nor would concerns about sexual purity and prostitution have achieved such prominence without his campaign about the 'maiden tribute of modern Babylon', and he ghosted the Salvation Army General William Booth's *In darkest England and the Way Out* to raise consciousness about depths of poverty.

Nonconformity's much increased profile and prominence led Nonconformists to think that it could bring about the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of England and achieve a level religious playing field, especially in relation to education, and initiate the moral reform of society. Unfortunately its political and social strength was more apparent than real. Attendance figures were not necessarily good indicators of commitment, and the political scene was changing, and political allies, even Liberals, were fickle.

However the very success of Nonconformity carried risks. The redevelopment of central areas of the City of London, and Holborn for offices, warehouses, and hotels forced out the poor from densely occupied tenements and courts. Landlords saw opportunities to increase returns by letting inner-surburban houses by the floor or room, leading to social decline in inner suburbs, as successful middle-class chapel-going tenants moved out. At Abbey Road chapel St John's Wood members of the congregation had formed a building society, so could afford to buy houses in more distant suburbs, and build a new more modish, better-equipped chapel for their suburb, thus avoiding travelling on the Sabbath. Sometimes churches moved en bloc, but sometimes congregations divided, a remnant remaining who, with much reduced pew rent income (the only source of income for maintaining the chapel and paying the minister), were unable to maintain the old building or keep a minister. At Abbey Road the minister became part-time, being paid as secretary of the Building Society, while his wife did the pastoral work. Those who built a new chapel, often needed to borrow money to complete it, and encumbered the church with debt, which proved difficult to pay off. Neither situation encouraged growth and mission.

After 1889 London County Council, with major grants from the City Parochial Charities, began to fund technical training, at a much higher standard than chapel institutes could achieve. Nonconformity had not invested in

elementary education for the poor after 1870, so there were no Nonconformist schools to perhaps feed working-class children into congregations. Nor did they invest in middle-class secondary education, so successful parents sent their children to new public schools, or the newly-reformed grammar schools, most of which had an Anglican ethos, usually being staffed by Anglican clergy. Rich Nonconformists sent their children on to Oxbridge, but not usually to the Congregational Mansfield College. Many were seduced by Anglicanism.

From the 1870s disposable incomes increased and working weeks shortened for the lower-middle classes and artisans. 'Successful' chapels gradually changed from a 'devotional' model, with week-night devotional meetings, Bible studies, etc, to a 'social' model with leisure and sporting activities – cricket, football, and swimming clubs, debating societies – to retain boys and young men beyond school age. Such activities, most obviously in the YMCA, came to dominate. Fascinatingly, George Williams, bought Exeter Hall, the iconic building of Victorian evangelicalism where all the great evangelical annual meetings had been held, in 1880, to rebuild it as gym for the YMCA [where the Strand Palace Hotel now stands]. However, even more significantly, commercial, and specialist voluntary groups entered the market, offering better facilities than chapels could afford. With new suburban houses and affluence, came gardens to cultivate, cheap public transport for excursions and visiting relations, American organs and cheap sheet music, for singing hymns and sacred songs in the parlour, rather than going to evening services. The better-off embraced 'rational recreation' which provided, especially for men, privatised hierarchical contexts, like suburban

Exeter Hall in the Strand before its transformation into the YMCA gym

The original buildings (converted shops) in Barking Road, Canning Town for the Mansfield House University Settlement

golf, rowing and tennis clubs, beyond the purview of the minister. They acquired places in the country, took up 'weekending', and wintered in Mentone or Cannes, so became less attached to their chapels, even if they continued paying a pew rent. Alexander Maclennan in his inaugural address at the Congregational Union's 1886 autumn meeting commented 'suburban living' separates the better off from the poor, for whom they 'have feelings like they have for the poor of Nice or Florence when they winter there'. He mocked the amount of time invested by middle-class young men honing their skills as billiard players, and families arranging visits to London or Paris to coincide with performances of a prima donna or a new play. He noted how difficult it was to touch the hearts of 'our young people'. The proportion of businessmen in London Congregationalist congregations apparently halved between the 1870s and the 1900s. In Lambeth the decline in Nonconformist attendance between 1886 and 1902 was in wealthier parts of the borough. Large donations for chapel building declined, and after the 1880s fewer chapels were built than were closed.

It was often difficult to replace distinguished ministers, especially after very long ministries: deacons or elders could get it wrong, and make unhappy appointments, for example John Hunter at King's Weigh House Chapel, or not make an appointment, and congregations evaporated. Surrey Tabernacle, a highly successful Strict Baptist chapel when James Wells died in 1872 did not replace him for fifteen years. In fact a high proportion of the Metropolitan Association of Strict Baptist Churches were pastorless. Spurgeon's brother and twin sons failed to maintain the numbers at his Tabernacle – they dropped from *c*.8,000 to *c*.3,000 in 1902-3.

Churches which were congregations tended to put their own needs first and were unenthusiastic about contributing funds to support missions in declining areas. They tended to think that people should, as they had, help themselves. Mostly only elite upper-middle-class Congregationalists invested in missions in poor areas, for example Lyndhurst Road Congregational Chapel Hampstead

supported a highly successful mission in Kentish Town, and in Mansfield House University Settlement in Canning Town and the Browning Settlement in Walworth, which most Congregationalists thought were too socialist. Unitarians sponsored missions in the East End. Wesleyans pioneered the Forward Movement, raising large amounts of money for mission in deprived areas, with places of worship like theatres or kinemas, and jolly services, providing outreach to the poor, and high-quality leisure activities, in East, Central, West and South London Missions. The Baptist Union initiated a short-lived Forward Movement under C.J. Clifford and F.B. Meyer at John Street Chapel Holborn. However Charles Masterman pointed out in 1903 that mega-chapels undermined neighbourhood chapels, noting that Woolwich's ten Baptist chapels together had fewer attenders than Woolwich Tabernacle, and Spurgeon's Tabernacle congregation was 3,008 while the seven neighbouring Baptist chapels had an average of 276 each, and the four neighbouring Congregational chapels an average of 156, and while the Wesleyan South London Mission had an evening attendance of 1,217, three neighbouring Wesleyan chapels had 12, 130 and 19 respectively.

The High Victorian years marked the glory days of Nonconformity in London, but in the last two decades, the complexities of engaging so wholeheartedly with the modern world began to become apparent. This, however, did not mean people were becoming less religious or less Christian, but that the market place, and ranges of choice had become much more complex than anyone in 1837 could have imagined, and, of course, organised religion is still trying to come to terms with this.

This article is a slightly revised version of the Andrew Worth Lecture given to the Chapels Society on 7 July 2018. It was a great honour and pleasure to give the Andrew Worth Lecture, for Andrew knew so much about the chapel-world of London. A booklist for further information might include: Charles D. Cashdollar, A Spiritual Home: Life in British and American Reformed Congregations 1830-1915, *Pennsylvania State University, 2000; Jeffrey D. Cox,* The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870-1930, *Oxford University Press, New York, 1982; Kenneth Dix,* Strict and Particular: English Strict and Particular Baptists in the Nineteenth Century, *Baptist Historical Society, Didcot, 2001; W. Charles Johnson,* Encounter in London: The Story of the London Baptist Association 1865-1965, *Carey Kingsgate Press, London, 1965; Elaine Kaye,* A History of King's Weigh House Chapel, *George Allen & Unwin, 1968. James Munson,* The Nonconformists: in search of a lost culture, *SPCK, London, 1991; John H. Taylor,* The London Congregational Union Story 1872-1972, *London, 1972; John H. Taylor,* London Congregational Churches since 1850, Transactions of the Congregational History Society, *20, 1965-70, pp 22-42; Michael R. Watts,* The Dissenters, *Volume 2:* The expansion of Dissent, *Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995 and Volume 3:* The crisis and conscience of Nonconformity, *Clarendon Press, Oxford 2015.*

NEWS AND NOTES

British Methodist Buildings

As announced in the last *Newsletter*, the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History has now put up on the web its two large collections of photos of Methodist buildings, the labours of enthusiasts, Keith Guyler and Bill Smith. There is introductory matter at ocmch.wordpress.com/bmb/ but the photos themselves are at www.flickr.com/photos/britishmethodistbuildings/albums on Flickr as 39 geographically-themed albums for the Guyler collection and a further 36 albums for the Smith collection. The images, although constituting a valuable visual resource, are of variable quality. Low-resolution images can be downloaded free of charge from the website for personal use and high-resolution images are available on request.

From March 2019 they began accepting further user-contributed images to the project. For more information about joining the British Methodist Buildings community, contact the team at bmb.ocmch@brookes.ac.uk.

Providence Chapel

This intriguing Grade II* chapel at Charlwood in Surrey has recently been restored by The Providence Chapel Charlwood Trust Ltd with the help of a

grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The wooden chapel was originally built in 1797 as the guardhouse of a barracks in Horsham for troops assembled to repel an expected invasion of a French army under Emperor Napoleon. In 1815 it was dismantled and moved to Charlwood on horse-drawn wagons and opened on 15 November 1816 as Charlwood Union Chapel, serving a group of Calvinist Independents who had until that time been worshipping in each other's cottages. The main use of the chapel in future will be as a study centre for the nearby Charlwood primary school although it will also be available for hire at appropriate times.

Making your chapel better known

There are an increasing number of websites on which it is possible to put up information about churches and chapels in order to make them better known. As yet their coverage of Nonconformist sites is poor – why not add your local chapel?

The National Churches Trust has a site called Explore churches (www.explorechurches.org) which aims to 'develop a high quality resource for visitors and churches, supporting and promoting a beautiful collection of fascinating places to visit'. A very simple on-line form is available to add details of a place of worship which will be published as a webpage within two weeks.

Another similar but Europe-wide site is sponsored by Future for Religious Heritage at www.religiana.com. Again adding a place of worship is via a simple on-line form.

Another chapel disappeared

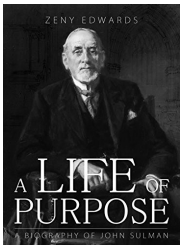
John Dearing writes from Reading that Zoar Strict Baptist Chapel in South Street, Reading [pictured] has been demolished to make way for a block of flats. The severely plain brick chapel was built in the late 1860s for between £600 and £700 by a local builder Mr Barnicoat. According to the Reading Mercury the chapel opened for worship on the 22 October 1869 with sermons from Mr Taylor of Manchester and a Mr Warburton. It had never been listed.

Baptist Summer School

The Baptist Historical Society is organising a Summer School on July 16-19, 2019 at Woodbrooke College in Selly Oak, Birmingham. The theme is 'Twentieth Century Baptists: people, places, principles'. For further details please go to baptisthistory.org.uk/events/.

BOOK REVIEW

A Life of Purpose: A Biography of John Sulman by Zeny Edwards. Longueville Media: Haberfield, New South Wales, 2017. 372 pages, many illustrations, hardback. Aus$ 59.95 ISBN 978-0-6481719-2-8. Also available as an ebook, ISBN 978-0-6481719-3-5.



If John Sulman had died in 1885 he would be remembered as one of the most promising of Nonconformist architects. The gigantic chapel at Highbury Quadrant was merely the most conspicuous of his many important Congregational commissions in London and the south-east. Remarkably, it was one of no fewer than eight English and Welsh chapels he designed in 1880. He was a driven man, though periods of nervous collapse punctuated his busy career.

Thanks to Zeny Edwards, we now know a good deal about Sulman's professional background and his religious connections. His parents had migrated from Anglicanism (no less a church than Hawksmoor's St Alfege, Greenwich) via Presbyterianism to the Congregational chapel in Blackheath. Congregationalism suited the young Sulman, and through it he was to find not only a wife but a network of patrons. An introduction (via a client) to James Gallaway, secretary to the Congregational Chapel-building Society, was evidently used to good effect. In all his chapel work, Sulman proved himself to be a versatile interpreter of the ideas published in James Cubitt's *Church Design for Congregations* in 1870 – using Gothic architecture but rejecting the characteristic Victorian church plan of arcaded nave and side aisles in favour of plans in which everyone could see the pulpit and hear the preacher. Sulman also took great interest in the provision of Sunday schools. At Highbury Quadrant, for instance, there was an octagonal school with classrooms radiating from its galleried hall, while at Bromley the school and manse were grouped as foils to the tall chapel. No less noteworthy was the design for Teignmouth, involving a roughly semi-circular schoolroom attached like a limpet to the side of the chapel, and capable of opening into the main worship space.

Sulman's use of Gothic (at times favouring the transition from Romanesque to Gothic) generally took a lead from such architects as Cubitt and Waterhouse, with borrowings also from Street, Teulon and even Butterfield. Sulman was not a man who excluded other styles, however, and for the secular work – which was a small part of his pre-1885 practice – a range of classical, Renaissance and Queen Anne ideas was deployed. An interesting hybrid was the school complex of 1883 in Poplar, named for the Congregationalist shipbuilder, George Green. It had Gothic arches at lower levels, giving way to Old English motifs and a French pavilion roof or two; everything grouped with the same eye to composition that distinguished the Bromley chapel scheme.

Congregational Chapel, Petersfield, Hants, 1882 by John Sulman
(photograph copyright Christopher Wakeling)

Between 1885 and 1888 Sulman's name was retained in the title of the firm Potts, Sulman & Hennings, which mostly designed chapels and Sunday schools. But Sulman had gone, having emigrated to Australia in 1885 for the benefit of his wife's health. What became of him there occupies the greater part of *A Life of Purpose*, rightly so because Sulman spent almost half a century in Australia, latterly as a prominent figure in public life. The balance of the present review emphasises the earlier years of his career, not for parochial reasons, but because the *Newsletter*'s readers are likely to be interested primarily in Sulman's religious commissions. An early product of the move to Australia was Sulman's entry in competition for the Church of England cathedral at Ballarat, Victoria. His Transitional Gothic design, with twin steeples inspired by Pearson's Truro cathedral, won second prize in 1886. Within two years the Sulmans, having found their local Congregational church in Parramatta (near Sydney) sanctimonious and snobbish, had switched to Anglicanism. This probably led to his first church commissions in the new country, two small Anglican schemes of 1888 in the Blue Mountains, both of them with pointed-arch windows. Much more important, however, was a trio of Presbyterian churches of 1888-9, in which – striving for something other than the usual exported English designs – Sulman turned away from Gothic. For Manly, north of Sydney, he created a striking example of the Romanesque revival, its rugged details paralleling the American use of

Romanesque forms, while at Woollahra he used shallow roofs with deep eaves to create an Australian kind of prairie style. Randwick Presbyterian church gained most attention, both for its intended baroque towers and its un-Anglican plan – a horseshoe-shaped auditorium focused on a generous rostrum pulpit and a handsome organ. Other church work was to follow, but it was only a minor part of Sulman's Australian oeuvre. Initially banks and offices were his mainstay, to be augmented in due course by houses, hospitals and colleges. And by the time he was in his late fifties his focus had turned from architecture as such. He championed town planning, and influenced the development of Sydney and Canberra. He presided over the country's public monuments board, and for fifteen years 'ruled with an iron hand' the trustees of the New South Wales Art Gallery. Sulman was capable and versatile, but Zeny Edwards shows him also to have been headstrong and often devious in professional matters, inspiring admiration from those with whom he agreed, while alienating others.

A Life of Purpose is to be welcomed as the first full-length biography of this many-faceted man. As an architectural biography, however, it is less sure. The reader might have been better served, and the author's skills better displayed, had the main text worried less about architectural descriptions – perhaps providing instead a catalogue raisonné of Sulman's works in an appendix. For some British readers the interest in a 'local boy' who grew up to prosper in a distant land will be matched by speculation about what might have become of the promising Nonconformist architect had he remained in the country of his birth. In this respect it is poignant that so few of Sulman's major English chapels remain to remind us of that promise.

Christopher Wakeling

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