



THE CHAPELS SOCIETY

BRIGHTON VISIT

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‘London-by-the-Sea’; ‘The Queen of Watering Places’; ‘Skidrow-on-Sea’: Brighton has gone by many epithets during its 250 years as one of Britain’s premier seaside resorts. When city status was sought following the merger with Hove, the council used the slogan ‘The Place to Be’. More recently, tourist and council literature has proclaimed it ‘Never Normal’. Apart from the unfortunate suggestion that Brighton is in some unspecified way abnormal, this slogan overlooks one aspect of its development which is entirely consistent with many other towns and cities throughout Britain: the foundation, growth, decline and intermittent reinvigoration of religious life outside the aegis of the Established Church. Brighton has chapels representing each century from the 17th to the 21st: some humble and self-effacing, others swaggering and grand. Some chapels have changed hands between denominations, being adapted accordingly. Others have fallen out of use for various reasons: many have been secularised, others demolished (often in favour of the worst type of identikit could-be-anywhere residential or commercial block). Other religious groups have adapted buildings of various types as worship spaces. Entirely normal so far!

Brighton’s differences and unique features are easy to find though. Certain denominations and groups have found particular success here over long periods of time: Roman Catholics (in a county where anti-Catholic hostility had a long history), Jews, Strict and Particular Baptists and Quakers, among others. French Protestants stopped meeting in their chapel – the only one outside London – only in 2008. Wesleyan Methodists thrived and built many chapels; Primitive Methodists, under the direction of an energetic minister, opened, moved and closed down chapels with confusing regularity; but Bible Christian Methodists barely got a look-in at first until a new minister of their own turned things round.¹ The Anglicans built a church on an outlying estate, soon realised it was no longer needed, and sold it to Roman Catholics – then repeated the process a few years later on another estate. There are large populations of adherents of all the major world religions, but not a single purpose-built mosque, gurdwara, or Hindu or Buddhist temple – but all of the synagogues, vastly different in style, are worth a close look. There is even a very early example of the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ now common practice of self-building their Kingdom Halls in a matter of hours using volunteer labour!

This tour takes in many of the chapels and meeting-houses of Brighton’s historic central and eastern inner suburban areas, anchored around the main northward, north-eastward and eastward roads in and out of town. Five chapels will be visited, and the stories of buildings both old and very new, and both conventional and esoteric, will be told as we pass them. Have a camera ready!

¹ A Bible Christian Society struggled along for a few decades of the 19th century in rented rooms and, eventually, a second-hand chapel; but reinvigorated by their new minister, handsome chapels were built in Brighton (Bristol Road, 1873–1989, and Stanford Avenue, opened 1898) and Hove (1905–1936).

THE PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BRIGHTON

Brighton (Bristelmestone; Brighthelmston[e]) was a parish in the post-Domesday Hundred of Whalesbone in the Rape of Lewes, one of six subdivisions of the historic county of Sussex. The parish was on the southern slopes of the chalk South Downs and was bounded by the English Channel to the south – and fishing was the main ‘industry’ for centuries, farming of the low-quality downland being difficult (although sheep-farming was prominent). The Wellesbourne, an intermittent river, flowed north–south through the parish in a very deep valley, emptying into the sea at what is now Pool Valley near the Palace Pier. The immediate hinterland – now the Old Steine, more or less the heart of Brighton – was a boggy, poorly drained wasteland. Another steep-sided valley ran from northeast to southwest and met the Wellesbourne valley a little north of this. Major transport links developed along these valleys: the London road and railway line, and the Lewes road and railway line respectively. The parish church of St Nicholas lay on higher ground to the northwest. Medieval Brighton was not a significant place, but its neighbour Hove was even tinier, being effectively a one-street village until the early 19th century. Brighton’s subsequent growth stimulated Hove, the two merged – on the map, if not culturally, socially or architecturally – both achieved borough status, and the two boroughs were united in 1997. City status for ‘Brighton and Hove’ followed three years later. Their separate identities are still clearly identifiable, though – similar, perhaps, to the relationship between Bournemouth and Poole – and this tour looks solely at the ‘Brighton side of the divide’ and will therefore refer to Brighton as a town or as a separate entity even though this is no longer geographically or politically accurate.

The old town of Brighton, a group of narrow streets bounded by roads named after the compass points, lay on the cliffs above the sea and west of the Wellesbourne valley. Before the late 18th century there was only limited expansion, mostly eastwards towards Old Steine: although the town was not nearly as economically stagnant as popular belief would suggest, and was in fact a minor centre of commerce, tourism was essentially unknown until Lewes native Dr Richard Russell² started to use Brighton as a test-bed for his theories of the medicinal benefits of seawater. His 1750 dissertation *De Tabie Glandulari* was translated from Latin into English in 1752, and his ideas were acclaimed – so much so that he moved his medical practice to Brighton and built the largest house the town had yet seen,³ with direct access to the beach and sea. This house formed the link to Brighton’s other major ‘boost’ of the 18th century: its royal patronage. After Russell’s death, by which time a modest resort had developed, the house became what would now be considered a high-class holiday let, and the Duke of Cumberland was among the long-term visitors. The Prince of Wales – later the Prince Regent and King George IV – visited the Duke there in 1783, found Brighton to his taste, set up home in a small house at Old Steine, had it transformed into the fantastical Royal Pavilion ... and Brighton became, and was for ever more, not just a fishing village or a small-scale commercial centre but the archetypal seaside resort with a unique character: all at once dissolute, ultra-tolerant, seamy, trendsetting and defiant of convention.

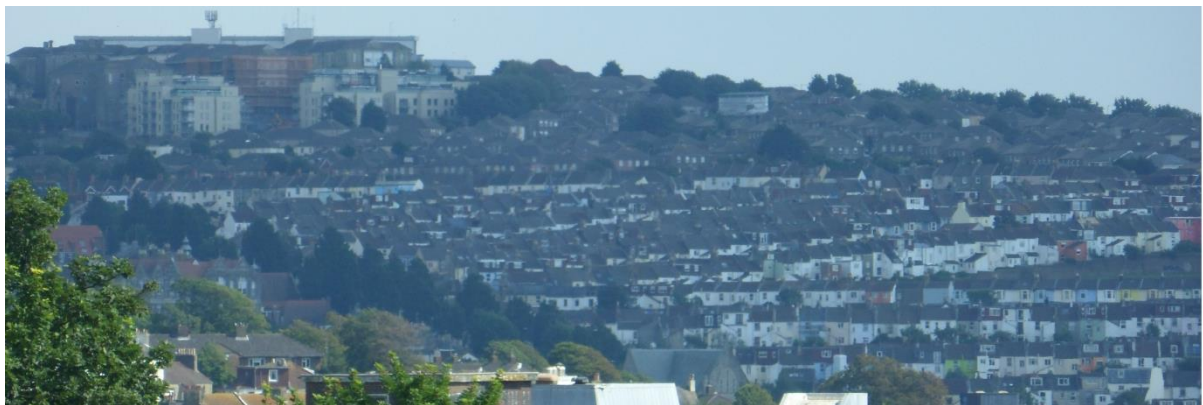
Brighton’s pattern of development in the 19th century, as it expanded beyond the boundaries of the old town, was entirely influenced by locally specific land ownership patterns. Large parts of inner suburban Brighton, particularly the Hanover and North Laine areas which we will walk through, preserve the exact layout of ‘laines’, ‘furlongs’, ‘paul-pieces’ and

² The fortunes of Brighton and Lewes, the historic county town of Sussex less than 8 miles to the northeast, have been interlinked for centuries.

³ Demolished in 1823 and replaced by the Amon Henry Wilds-designed Royal Albion Hotel.

‘leakways’ which were peculiar to Sussex downland parishes. All the downland within Brighton parish and beyond the old town’s boundaries was farmland. Some areas furthest from the town were sheep pasture held in common; most, though, formed part of one of five ‘laines’ (large fields) named, clockwise from the west, West, North, Hilly, Little and East Laine. Each was formed of smaller fields called furlongs, the boundaries between which were rough tracks – typically 16 feet wide – which later became major roads,⁴ often running steeply uphill. The furlongs were in turn divided into long, mostly narrow strips (albeit of variable width) called paul-pieces, which tended to run across the slopes to make them easier to cultivate. Paul-pieces, of which there were about 7,000, were separated by narrow tracks (typically 8 feet wide) called leakways, which ran perpendicular to the furlong boundary tracks and which have been preserved today as the minor roads. Two long back-to-back terraces of housing typically occupy one paul-piece.

(‘Laine’ is etymologically unrelated to ‘lane’. The old town now being known universally as ‘The Lanes’ causes no end of confusion to outsiders. Brightonians particularly dislike North Laine, now a much-loved ‘arty’ quarter, being called ‘The North Lanes’ and The Lanes being known as ‘The South Lanes’ – or, even worse, ‘The South Laines’!)



An eastward view across Hilly Laine (now the Hanover area). Elm Grove, lined with trees, runs steeply from centre-bottom (where the roof of St Joseph's Church can be seen) to centre-left. The ranks of terraced housing to the right stretch south-eastwards along the paul-pieces.

Growth in the 19th century was rapid but uneven: there were few major landowners, and paul-pieces or larger tracts of land came up for sale in a haphazard way. Nevertheless, by the interwar period Brighton had become like many large towns, with declining inner-city areas and demand for outward expansion. County borough status was awarded in 1928, and soon afterwards came the formation of ‘Greater Brighton’ after the annexation of vast amounts of land from surrounding parishes. This was largely the initiative of Sir Herbert Carden, a local solicitor, alderman, councillor and sometime Mayor. By 1936 the Borough had bought over 12,000 acres of land to the north and east of the historic town (see map), and yet more was added in 1952. Some was reserved as green belt; the rest was used to develop council estates such as Whitehawk, Moulsecomb and Coldean. Carden famously said on one occasion ‘I went up to London to buy a few acres of Hollingbury, and when I got there I bought the lot’. He even bought Devil’s Dyke, one of southeast England’s most popular beauty spots, with his own money to prevent it being developed. (Happily, his intentions to demolish the Royal Pavilion and replace it with a conference centre, and to demolish Brighton seafront’s entire stock of Regency housing in favour of blocks of flats, were resisted.)

⁴ Examples we will cross or walk along include Elm Grove, Islingword Road, Southover Street, Albion Hill, Church Street, North Road and Gloucester Road.

Brighton has a number of distinctive architectural features. Stucco and Regency architecture are inseparable, and much of Brighton's seafront is made up of spectacular Regency-style buildings clad in rendered stucco, along with the set-piece residential squares and crescents. Stucco tends to hide poorly built walls of 'bungaroosh', a curious building material composed of random materials (bits of brick, flints, cobbles, wood and even solid rubbish) set into a mixture of hydraulic lime. It has poor water resistance and is susceptible to structural failure. Elsewhere, glazed mathematical tiles give the illusion of brickwork on timber-framed buildings; many buildings have walls of knapped or plain flints or (less commonly) tarred cobblestones; and stone buildings are relatively uncommon. Also surprisingly rare is the Gothic Revival style in general, although what examples there are tend to be churches and chapels (and likewise for the use of stone as a building material).



The growth of 'Greater Brighton' in the 20th century. The thick boundary shows the extent of the Borough of Brighton immediately before its amalgamation with Hove (to the west) in 1997. The English Channel is at the bottom. The old town ('The Lanes') is indicated by the red star.

- 1 = the extent of the Borough of Brighton to 1923.
- 2 = land annexed from the parish of Patcham in 1923 to build the Moulsecoomb estate.
- 3 = land annexed in 1928 from the parishes of West Blatchington, Patcham, Falmer, Rottingdean and Ovingdean.
- 4 = land annexed in 1952 from the parishes of Falmer and Stanmer.

THE RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT OF BRIGHTON

Brighton was an early centre of Nonconformity, behind only Lewes and Rye of the East Sussex towns, and Roman Catholicism and Judaism have also been well supported since the early years. The 1676 religious census found that 8 per cent of the population held Nonconformist views; and although Brighton had barely expanded beyond its historic four-street boundaries by 1700, it already had two Dissenting meeting-houses. Union Chapel (c. 1683; Presbyterians, Independents and others; now secularised) and the Friends Meeting House (1690; active, but on a new site) provided alternatives to the Anglican parish church. By 1824, when the powerful and famously awkward Henry Michell Wagner became Vicar of Brighton and sought to tip the balance in favour of the Established Church, there were also places of worship for Unitarians, Wesleyan Methodists, the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, Strict Baptists, Roman Catholics and Jews – and still only three non-propietary Anglican churches. (By his death in 1870 there were 27, six⁵ of which he founded himself – principally in the poorer areas of town, which may have affected the penetration of Nonconformist denominations in these areas, as was no doubt intended. The relative lack of chapels of any type, either now or in the past, in the densely populated Hanover area is particularly remarkable.)

The earliest chapels were in the old town (now The Lanes) or close to it in the area north of North Street now described as North Laine. Union Chapel, Salem and Providence Chapels (Strict Baptist/Independent Calvinistic), the first buildings of the Quakers and Roman Catholics, and the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion Chapel (the first in Britain, built next to the Countess's house) were all here by the early 19th century, and the Unitarian church followed in 1820. The first permanent Wesleyan Methodist and Roman Catholic churches were built to the east on the open land of the East Cliff, now the Kemptown area. Methodist chapels were then planted at suitable geographic intervals on a regular basis until the 1950s, while new Roman Catholic churches spread steadily westwards from St John the Baptist's at Kemptown – St Joseph's on Elm Grove being the first. The Salvation Army, Primitive Methodists and Baptists found success in the poorer areas northeast and east of town; Congregational chapels, and to a lesser extent those of the Presbyterians, took a while to get going but were widespread by 1900 (sadly many impressive examples have been lost to demolition). In the 20th century, Brighton – as the most important town in Sussex – was able to support a wide range of chapels, meeting-houses and buildings of the smaller, more 'exotic' groups and denominations. For example, Spiritualists and Christian Scientists have been meeting continuously for more than 100 years, and both groups have unusually interesting church buildings.

To a greater extent here than in most towns, local architects – invariably talented but little-known – were responsible for designing Brighton's churches and chapels (and, indeed, its secular buildings). Some 'big names' such as Baines, Wills and Hansom do occur, but the likes of Amon and Amon Henry Wilds, Thomas Simpson, E.J. Hamilton, Clayton & Black and John Leopold Denman and Son crop up time and again. Good post-war chapels by the likes of Overton and Partners, John Wells-Thorpe and Henry Bingham Towner show that this trend continues to the present day.

⁵ Four have been demolished, one is now Greek Orthodox, and only St Paul (West Street) is still Anglican.

THE TOUR

(Chapels under separate 'boxed' headings will be visited. Chapels in bold inline text will be seen externally, or for those marked with an asterisk, the site of the demolished building will be seen.)

From the station we walk through the New England Quarter, a recent mixed-use development on old railway land. We cannot miss the stark bulk of St Bartholomew's Church⁶ – one of the most remarkable Victorian Anglican churches in the country, with an interior as rich as the exterior is sparing – but directly opposite stood our first lost chapel of the day. **ANN STREET CHAPEL*** was built in 1830 for the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion – their second chapel in the town – but passed to the Congregational church in 1881. Until its closure in 1958 it was known as London Road Congregational Church. It was then pressed into service as a warehouse before demolition came in 1976 as part of a pre-New England Quarter redevelopment scheme. The 1876 OS 1:1500 map gives the capacity as 950; it had been extended 20 years earlier by architect Thomas Simpson (of whom more later!). It was a stylish Neoclassical building with an incongruously Venetian Gothic doorway.

Across London Road now to a scruffy side street with an attractive chapel. **OXFORD STREET CHAPEL**, whose name and origin date are clearly marked in the unusual circular tympanum, was built in 1890 for the Church of Christ – or rather adapted, as the two houses which stood on the site were knocked through, converted into a chapel and given the Renaissance-style façade which the building retains today. The church was founded in 1868 and worshipped in houses, then in other buildings elsewhere in Brighton for the first 22 years of its existence. It decided to remain independent when most of its fellow Churches of Christ joined the United Reformed Church in 1980. Around this time an evangelist from Tunbridge Wells revived the church somewhat: attendances grew noticeably after a period when worshippers usually amounted to single figures.⁷



Parker Anscombe (1829–1900) designed the chapel. Anscombe is a local surname and he was a local man, born nearby in Cuckfield and mostly resident in Brighton – although he was listed in the 1871 census as the postmaster in a nearby village. Surprising, because at all other times he was recorded as a carpenter, builder, surveyor or architect! Information about his other works has proved elusive, although he is known to have designed a mansion in Lindfield in 1872. Oxford Street Chapel is a locally listed building.

- *London Road was a high-class residential area in the mid-19th century. Fragments of the attractive old houses can be seen above the shopfronts on the left-hand side.*

Further up London Road on the right, we come to a square three-storey building, boldly painted in dark blue and white. Only the arched windows are a slight clue to the religious origins of what is now the 'Dice Saloon (Card Games, Board Games, War Games)'. Behind the façade is James Weir's Primitive Methodist chapel of 1894, which remained in use as **LONDON ROAD METHODIST CHURCH** until 2006. Its origins lie in the 1876

⁶ 135 feet tall. It was surrounded on all sides by terraced houses until the 1960s, lessening its impact.

⁷ It is interesting to note that Tunbridge Wells still has one independent Church of Christ; until recently there were two, but a visit in 2021 suggests the more central of the two appears to have closed.

chapel on Viaduct Road which comes up later on the walk. Viaduct Road was one of seven Primitive Methodist chapels founded locally by Rev. William Dinnick,⁸ who moved from Ramsgate and became the town's Superintendent Minister – a post he held until 1901. When the vicar of St Bartholomew's Church heard that a Methodist chapel was to be built next door to his vicarage, he threatened to take legal action, but Dinnick saw him off.

The Dice Saloon is a long-established local business catering for tabletop game, miniature wargame, strategy and fantasy card game enthusiasts. It sells the products and provides tables for players to book and play with their friends. It moved to the chapel in 2019 from premises opposite the Emmanuel Church (see below) which had been compulsorily purchased. The building has been refitted to provide a state-of-the-art gaming space, but the stained glass windows at the back of the chapel have been retained. After the chapel closed it was planned to demolish it for flats, but instead it became a theatre for about 10 years, as shown in this picture dating from 2016.



- *Next to the chapel, look out for the Grade II-listed former vicarage – an excellent Regency-style villa of the 1820s, attributed to Amon Wilds and Charles Busby. When the chapel was built it would not have dominated the villa as much as it does now: the chapel's original façade was lower and set further back.*

The next building to the north is now an upmarket bar – a sign of the gradual gentrification of London Road. Between 1994 and 2011, though, the upper floor was occupied by **CITY GATE CHURCH** – an Evangelical congregation associated with the Pioneer Network. Between 1981 and 1994 they had met in houses. The church now meets for worship at the Brighelm Community Church building [URC], which we see later in the walk, and they also own a community centre on the Hollingdean estate and hold some activities there.

Crossing back into the New England Quarter briefly, a curved-roofed, metal-clad building appears ahead. **EMMANUEL CHURCH AT THE CLARENDON CENTRE**, to give it its full title, is one of the largest churches in Sussex, and a remarkable success story for its Charismatic Evangelical congregation. Clarendon Church was established by Terry Virgo, founder of the Newfrontiers movement, in 1978 in a former non-denominational mission hall in Hove (the Clarendon Mission – an attractive mission hall designed in 1885 by the aforementioned Thomas Simpson). By the early 1990s it had grown so much that it moved into, extended and completely revamped a warehouse previously used by the retailer Comet. It was registered for worship in 1995, and a change of name to the Church of Christ the King followed. Now known as Emmanuel Church, it has recently planted three other congregations: one further along the coast at Shoreham-by-Sea, one at the former Hangleton Valley Free Church (Baptist) on the Hangleton estate in Hove, and another back at the old Clarendon Mission Hall. Virgo's son now leads the church. The multipurpose building may not look like a conventional chapel, but its range of activities and vigorous outreach would be familiar to past generations of Nonconformist Christians.

As we walk down to the major road junction at Preston Circus, glance at the yellow-brick block of flats on the north side of the road. A chapel with a chequered history stood here until 1997. Prolific local architect John George Gibbins designed **CHRIST CHURCH**

⁸Five of his brothers were also Primitive Methodist ministers.

CHAPEL* in 1874 for an independent group of Christians – although a contemporary map identified it as a ‘Congregational Chapel (seats for 497)’. When its energetic founder died in 1902 the church struggled and eventually closed. Briefly re-registered as a non-denominational mission church (1918–1920), it was then taken over by St Saviour’s Anglican Church⁹ as a mission hall. This closed in 1961, but in 1964 it was re-registered as the Elim Free Church by members of the Elim Pentecostal denomination. Later renamed ‘Christ Church Evangelistic Centre’ and re-designated as an Evangelical Free Church, it remained in use until 1988.

CALVARY EVANGELICAL CHURCH

72 VIADUCT ROAD, BRIGHTON BN1 4ND

This opened in 1876 as the first Primitive Methodist chapel in this part of Brighton. It was built in a convenient gap next to the houses of Viaduct Road – classic Brighton terraces which date from the middle of the 19th century. The chapel’s neighbour on the west side may have been less welcome to the congregation, though: it was the Amber Ale brewery! This was swept away in favour of the borough fire station in 1901, but by this stage the new Primitive Methodist chapel on London Road (now the Dice Saloon) had already opened and the Railway Mission had taken over the Viaduct Road premises. This happened in 1894, and some alterations were made around that time, including the addition of the prominent ‘RAILWAY MISSION’ wording below the windows. The building to the rear was bought and converted into a Sunday School in 1902. The church took its present name in 1984. Coincidentally, the railway mission itself had been founded in 1876.



The chapel is an elegant Early English Gothic Revival building of yellowish brick and painted stone dressings, with a symmetrical façade (including twin porches) and some unusual diamond openings. It is on the City Council’s Local List of Heritage Assets.

- *Viaduct Road ran along the northern boundary of the historic parish of Brighton and formed the limit of the urban area for several decades of the 19th century. As we proceed along the road, look at the slightly taller terrace on the south side. These locally listed houses look older than their 1850s date, with their Classical styling, rustication, pilasters and blank windows. Near the junction with Ditchling Road, the flint Gothic Revival building was the Anglican Diocese of Chichester’s Teacher Training College. It is one of very few secular Gothic Revival buildings in Brighton.*

We walk round towards Park Crescent, developed between 1849 and 1854 by Amon Henry Wilds as a showpiece high-class residential composition. The land immediately to the west was a nursery until 1883, when the town’s first Salvation Army hall was built there to the design of E.J. Hamilton (whose other works in Sussex were discussed in *Newsletter* 78). His design incorporated familiar architectural features: battlements, short towers on each side and terracotta dressings to go with the grey brick and stonework. The hall was opened by Catherine Booth herself, co-founder of the Salvation Army, and was used for the next 117

⁹ This church served the Ditchling Road area. It closed in 1981 and was demolished in 1983, but a flint and brick archway incongruously survives in a gap between two houses.

years until it was demolished and rebuilt in its present octagonal form in 2000 to the design of David Greenwood of the Salvation Army Architects Department. The rebuilt **SALVATION ARMY CONGRESS HALL** cost £2.5 million. The complex consists of two interlinked buildings – the 240-capacity worship space itself and a community hall – and a coffee shop and charity shop are housed in an annexe of similar design within the curtilage. Elsewhere in Brighton, a second, similarly battlemented, citadel opened in 1884 on Edward Street near Dorset Gardens Methodist Church but was lost when the road was widened in 1965. In 1970 the Army took over a former Evangelical church on the Bevendean estate. Bevendean Community Church, as it is now known, provides important outreach work on this isolated estate. (As a further nod to the interconnectedness of the personalities and locations on this tour, E.J. Hamilton was articled to Thomas Simpson during his architectural career. He was also the Chairman of the Sussex Congregational Union (Incorporated), on whose behalf he was responsible for submitting registration certificates for at least one local chapel; and his father was a minister at the Countess of Huntingdon's chapel on Ann Street.)

<p>ST JOSEPH'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH ELM GROVE/WELLINGTON ROAD, BRIGHTON BN2 3AA</p>

Elm Grove is steep and suspiciously straight: sure enough, it lies on the course of a Roman route from Chichester to Lewes. The road itself was laid out in the 18th century with Brighton Racecourse as its destination; the superb elm trees were planted in 1852 by Amon Henry Wilds.¹⁰ Many sources state that the church dates from 1869 and was rebuilt or redesigned from 1880, but in fact the first (temporary) church was not on the present site: the 1876 OS 1:1500 map shows a 200-capacity 'R.C. Chapel' diagonally opposite, on the northeast corner of Hamilton Road (the building now there has a different footprint), with a tiny school behind it. A local resident left money for the present church to be built, and William Kedo Broder – a young and obscure but clearly talented architect – drew up plans for a tremendously ambitious building: a nave, polygonal chancel with transepts, side chapels with apses and a huge tower and spire facing the Lewes Road junction. Work started in 1879, but on 8 January 1881 Broder fell from a moving train and died aged just 34. What could this architect have achieved had he lived to build a long career? Two prolific architects of Catholic churches, Joseph Stanislaus Hansom and Frederick Walters, took over and gave the church its present appearance over a 25-year period to 1906. The church is of rag-stone with Bath stone dressings. The rather sheer west front, lacking any sort of tower or spire, is by Walters and dates from 1901. It rears up dramatically from the V-shaped road junction when seen from the west; from the southeast and northeast the tall apsidal chapels dominate.

St Joseph's was for most of its existence a parish church in its own right. After World War II it gained responsibility for St Francis of Assisi's Church on the outlying Moulsecoomb estate; this was one of the former Anglican churches mentioned in the introduction to these notes. About five years ago it was decided to merge the parish with that of St John the Baptist's Church, the mother church of Brighton's Catholics, built soon after the Emancipation. A new parish of East Brighton was formed, and the attractively domestic little chapel at Moulsecoomb closed and has been demolished.

¹⁰ Brighton and Hove's elm trees are of national importance, and the city is home to the National Elm Collection.

- *While looking at the southeast aspect of St Joseph's, glance across the road to number 11 Elm Grove; Parker Anscombe, designer of Oxford Street Chapel, lived here in 1873 – the year he was first recorded as an 'architect and surveyor'.*

Our walk to Dorset Gardens Methodist Church takes us through the heart of Hanover, a steeply sloping, fairly homogeneous residential area whose terraced streets nevertheless developed gradually in the 19th century as the arable land, worked mostly by tenant farmers, was sold off. It is now affectionately stereotyped as a haven of wealthy socialists and militant eco-rebels, hence its popular nickname of 'Muesli Mountain' (another nickname, 'Hangover', refers to the large number of pubs), but it was originally a poor artisan quarter. After passing the Anglican parish church, the Annunciation (built in 1864, and initially controversial for its extreme High Church orientation and 'ritualist' practices), we see



Hanover's earliest place of worship: the former **BELGRAVE STREET CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL**. The schoolrooms on the south side opened in 1859 and were also used for worship until the chapel itself was built in 1863. It was the first of three new chapels designed by Thomas Simpson, following his redesign of Ann Street Chapel in 1857 and Salem Strict Baptist Chapel (described below) in 1861. Belgrave Street is a stuccoed, gabled building in a vaguely Gothic style. It closed in about 1939 – certainly by 1942 – and was bought by Brighton Technical College (now Brighton University) before being converted into flats around 2000. Other Nonconformist missions in this area (not seen on the tour) include Islingword Road Baptist Mission (later Evangelical Free Church), Bentham Road Mission and a little brick chapel built for Primitive Methodists in 1881 and destroyed by fire in 2003 when the non-denominational Immanuel Community Church were using it.

Beyond Albion Hill, built along one of the steeply sloping furlong boundaries, we enter the substantially redeveloped Carlton Hill district. Developed earlier than Hanover and historically a very poor area, it had declined irretrievably by the 1930s when the first slum clearances took place. More followed after World War II, and the old street pattern has been partly obliterated. At the point where Richmond Street now stops in front of several tower blocks stands the newly built **EBENEZER REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH** (2010–11) by Roger Molyneux. It is integrated into an ugly block of flats which swamps and hides it. Two buildings preceded it: most recently, the congregation had used a flat, low, typically 1960s chapel on the present site, which in 1967 had replaced a much bigger chapel and Sunday School diagonally opposite. This dated from 1825 but was not a major loss: it was a strange-looking, rather uncouth building known to locals as the 'Lemon Squeezer'. Surprisingly, this colourful nickname does not really give a clue as to its appearance!

To reach the Methodist church we cross Edward Street, whose northern side was cleared in the 1960s so the carriageway could be dualled. Some chapels and mission halls were lost, but the street gained one of the most distinctive 1960s churches to be found anywhere: the bizarre, Brutalist set piece that is **BRIGHTON AND HOVE NATIONAL SPIRITUALIST CHURCH** (1965). The congregation had been displaced from a nearby building, a former Strict Baptist chapel, which had been compulsorily purchased by the Council. This chapel had been founded and was run by the minister at Bethel Chapel in nearby Wivelsfield, of which more later.

DORSET GARDENS METHODIST CHURCH

DORSET GARDENS, KEMPTOWN, BRIGHTON BN2 1SA

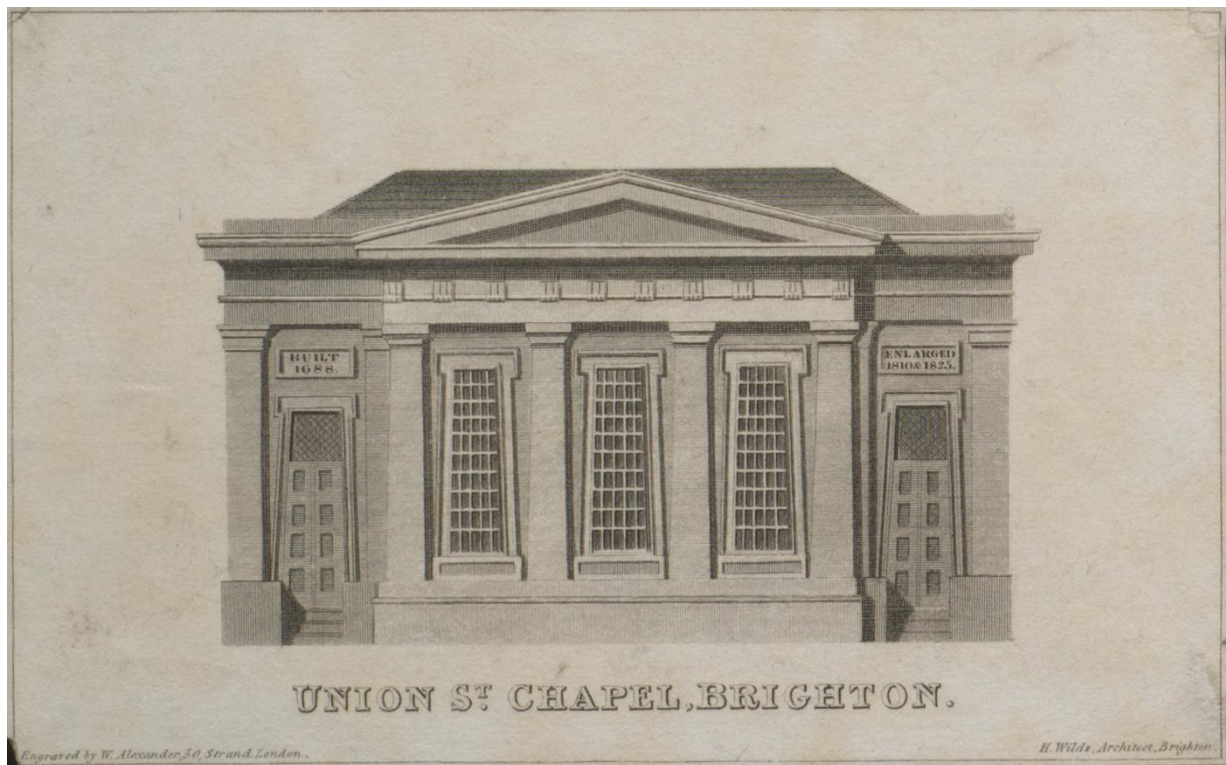
The west side of Dorset Gardens is the spiritual home of Wesleyan Methodism in Brighton. The first chapel on the site opened in August 1808 – a brick building with arched windows. In 1823, similar to what happened at Union Chapel, it was given a Classical frontage with tall pilasters of the Corinthian order. Although there was a three-sided gallery the building was soon too small, and a replacement chapel – larger, and with a prominent tower – opened in 1884 and was extended 45 years later. Attractive terracotta decoration complemented the red brickwork. A southern extension built in the 1920s, which turned the church into a Methodist Central Hall in all but name, is where the present church stands. The old chapel, Italianate in style, was demolished in 2000 and the excellent modern replacement opened three years later. Saville Jones Architects of Worthing were responsible for the Modernist design, which has large areas of glazing and red tiles (somewhat reminiscent of the local speciality, glazed mathematical tiles) and some traditional flintwork at ground-floor level. A shark's-fin tower on the roof is glazed at the top to let in even more light.



Neither John nor Charles Wesley ever came to Brighton, and before 1800 there was no local Methodist presence to speak of other than of the Calvinistic type preached by George Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon. Some early arrivals from outside Brighton were unable to find a chapel suited to their Wesleyan Methodist outlook, so they took it upon themselves to hold informal meetings. Soldiers stationed locally swelled the numbers, and a Society was formed in 1804. It was looked after by the Sevenoaks Circuit until a more local one, nominally for Brighton and Lewes but in reality covering most of Sussex, was formed in 1807. The chapel opened the following year, and a Brighton Circuit was created in 1825.

The short walk along St James's Street (past an almost invisible passageway leading to a hidden-away Spiritualist church) takes us to Old Steine, the end of the A23 London Road. This was 'fashionable' Brighton's epicentre, especially in the 18th and early 19th centuries, having been transformed from a pig-infested marsh after 1760. The Royal Pavilion is inevitably the main draw, but superb examples of vernacular architecture are all around. Beyond is the old town, now marketed as 'The Lanes', contained within the limits of North, East and West Streets and the sea (the original South Street was lost to coastal erosion, but a back-street perpetuates its name).

Another short walk across Old Steine Gardens and along the simply named 'Avenue' takes us into Prince Albert Street and the **FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE**. It replaced their original (1690) meeting house on what is now New Road, and was built in 1805 – but its present appearance is attributable to Clayton & Black's thorough overhaul of 1850. The oldest surviving part is the three-storey cottage to the right, with bricked-up windows above the entrance; the meeting house itself projects forward underneath a gable and has a twin-arched porch and three arched windows. Backtracking slightly to walk up Meeting House Lane we see, among the jewellery shops which occupy some of Brighton's oldest secular buildings, the modest rear entrance to the meeting house.



From here it is a few yards further to **UNION CHAPEL**, whose stuccoed façade contrasts with the wholly vernacular side elevation of cobblestones and brick window-surrounds. The original foundation stone is difficult to read, leading to disagreement over the church's date of origin: 1683, 1688 and 1698 have been claimed. It was certainly in use by Presbyterians by 1698. The name 'Union Chapel' reflects that, over time, the congregation developed into a 'union' of Presbyterians, Independents and other Dissenters. Although it was extended in 1810, the chapel was completely rebuilt in 1825. Classical architecture had become very fashionable in the interim, and perhaps the Sussex vernacular style was no longer considered good enough. The partnership of Amon Wilds, Amon Henry Wilds and Charles Busby were responsible for the rebuild, which combines elements of Greek and Egyptian Revival architecture with pure Classical. Untangling who did what in this partnership is always difficult; most sources conclude that Amon Wilds (senior) was the sole or principal architect, but the listing particulars (it is Grade II-listed) note subsequent research which suggests Busby may have been responsible and Wilds took the credit after the partnership split up. To add further confusion, the engraving of the post-rebuild chapel shown above, by William Alexander and dating from c. 1830, is signed 'H. Wilds, Architect, Brighton', implying Amon Henry Wilds! In 1898 the congregation (which had by now lost its Presbyterian element) merged with that of a Congregational chapel nearby. Seven years later they moved into the latter chapel, and Union Chapel was sold to the Glynn Vivian Miners' [Evangelical] Mission, which had several chapels in coalmining areas. Brighton is certainly not known for its mining, but Richard Glynn Vivian's conversion to Christianity happened here at Union Chapel, so it had a symbolic importance. About 20 years later an Elim Pentecostal congregation moved in, but they sold up in 1988 and the rapidly growing Firkin Brewery and pub chain bought it and converted it into the Font and Firkin pub. Now under different ownership, it continues in use as The Font – but its chapel origins are obvious, even on this exceptionally narrow street.

- *The 1954 OS 1:2500 map extract below shows the area around North Street and New Road, with Union Chapel bottom left (as 'Elim Free Church'), the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion Chapel bottom centre, the former Salem Baptist Chapel in the centre and the Unitarian chapel (then called 'Christ Church') top right.*

Following the lane to the end brings us to the busy North Street. Before entering North Laine by way of New Road, it is worth looking back to the narrow office entrance called Huntingdon House next to 'Watches of Switzerland': it stands on the site of a significant early chapel. Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, was one of the earliest visitors to Brighton to have taken Dr Richard Russell's advice: in 1755, just two years after the English translation of *De Tabie Glandulari* was published, she brought her young son here to 'take the seawater cure' and feel the benefits of the sea air. She rented a house on approximately this site, and the death of her son in 1757 did not stop her putting down roots. In 1760 George Whitefield, who was her personal chaplain at the time, held a series of successful outdoor meetings near her house, and a congregation soon built up. Although the Countess was in financial difficulties at the time, seemingly having overreached herself in her recent charitable giving, she



she sold her jewellery to raise money for the construction of a chapel behind her house. It opened in 1761 and was home to her particular brand of Evangelical-cum-Calvinistic Methodist doctrine, becoming the first **COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON'S CONNEXION CHAPEL*** in the country. Many rounds of enlargement and beautification took place, and the chapel took its final grand form in 1870; but this Early English flint and stone chapel, designed by John Wimble, just failed to see its century, closing in 1969. Its landmark spire was removed in that year, and the whole building was demolished in 1972. The replacement building may be of little merit, but at least the Countess's name has been preserved in it.

North of North Street as far as Trafalgar Street and the railway station is the charming bohemian quarter of North Laine, very nearly lost to a brainless road scheme in the 1970s: a lorry park and a partly elevated road would have occupied most of the land. Our last two chapel visits are in this area, but some notable chapels have been lost, especially **SALEM CHAPEL*** whose site can be seen a little way up Bond Street. It was built in 1787 for a congregation founded in 1766, took its final form in 1861 (to the design of Thomas Simpson) and survived until 1974. We will walk up the parallel New Road, though. It is far from new: the Prince Regent paid for its construction because he was constantly being disturbed by the 18th-century version of heavy commuter traffic on East Street, which ran right past the Royal Pavilion and which was then part of the main north-south route in and out of Brighton. This allowed the northern part of East Street to be abandoned; it now lies beneath the Pavilion

Gardens. The Theatre Royal on the west side stands on the site of the original Friends Meeting House.

BRIGHTON UNITARIAN CHURCH

NEW ROAD, NORTH LAINE, BRIGHTON BN1 1UF

Of the many important buildings on New Road, this early and well-preserved example of Amon Henry Wilds' Classical style is the most visually prominent. Looking like a miniature Greek temple, it has four big Doric columns and a shallow pediment. It has stood here since 1820, when it was opened for a congregation who had earlier seceded from Salem Chapel and who were offered support by the Unitarian minister at Ditchling. Short-lived meeting places nearby were replaced by the present magnificent building after the Prince Regent sold the land to the church for £650.



It is worth looking more closely at the connections between Ditchling, Wivelsfield and Brighton at this point. Ditchling, a few miles north of Brighton, was another early local centre of Nonconformity, and a General Baptist congregation existed there by the 1690s. A chapel was built c. 1734, at which point a move towards Unitarianism was already taking place. This was essentially complete by 1762, when prominent member Henry Booker heard George Whitefield preaching at the Countess of Huntingdon's house on North Street, experienced something of a Calvinistic conversion, stated that he would 'tear the church to pieces' (the Ditchling chapel, that is!) and along with other disaffected members went to Wivelsfield and founded Bethel Strict Baptist Chapel there in 1763 (the present building dates from 1780). Some members were duly sent forth to Brighton to found Salem Chapel there ... and the circle was closed by the secession from Salem and the founding of the Unitarian church with help from Ditchling.

We next head towards Queen's Road, the western boundary of North Laine, by walking up Church Street. This eventually reaches St Nicholas' Church after getting steadily steeper; the slope here is gentle though. At the corner of Tichborne Street, the large office block called Sovereign House stands on the side of **PROVIDENCE CHAPEL***, which is described below. This chapel was altered a lot over its 160-year life but would have been quite a good-looking building. Before reaching Queen's Road we walk through a small area of green space to see **HANOVER CHAPEL**. This Classical building of pleasing proportions opened in 1825 as an Independent chapel and became Brighton's main Presbyterian church in 1847. It stood in its own burial ground: in the late 20th century the graves were moved to the boundary walls (look out for them on the west side) and this much-needed area of grassy open space was formed. Worshippers from a nearby Congregational church moved here when that closed in 1972, and in 1987 a large Brutalist concrete and orange brick church and community centre designed by John Wells-Thorpe was grafted on to the rear, where the chapel's hall stood previously. (Look out for the loaves-and-fishes sculpture.) The new building is a late and decent example of the Brutalist style, and is locally listed; Hanover Chapel itself is Grade II-listed. **BRIGHTHELM COMMUNITY CHURCH** now represents the United Reformed Church in this prominent central location and plays host to other church congregations which lack their own buildings.

<p style="text-align: center;">GALEED STRICT BAPTIST CHAPEL 80 GLOUCESTER ROAD, NORTH LAINE, BRIGHTON BN1 4AQ</p>

We will approach Galeed by walking along Frederick Street, a typical North Laine residential street with tiny terraced cottages and bits of infill development where small-scale industry would have existed in the past. The corner of the chapel can be seen from quite a long way back, peering around the terrace on the east side. An old-fashioned gas lamp is clearly visible on the exterior.

Galeed has stood unchanged on its site at the north end of North Laine since 1868, when it was built by Benjamin Nunn in a confident, slightly severe Neoclassical style. Most of central and eastern Sussex's Strict Baptist chapels are either (Neo-)Classical or humbly vernacular in style; other good examples of the former can be found at Burgess Hill, Hastings, Lower Dicker and Jarvis Brook (in dark brick). Baptist worship of the closed communion, Calvinistic type has a long history in Brighton, and the various meeting places which existed over the years can trace their roots back to either Salem Chapel on Bond Street, planted out of Bethel Chapel at Wivelsfield in 1766, or Providence Chapel on Church Street, founded as an independent Calvinistic cause in 1805 by a former curate from St Nicholas' Church with help from the famous Antinomian preacher William Huntington. Various secessions occurred over doctrinal differences: one caused Tabernacle Chapel (West Street) to be founded in 1834, and another resulted in the formation of Galeed. Various hired premises were used for the year or so it took the chapel to be built. The interior has seen little change over the last 150 years, so the atmosphere inside retains its 19th-century chapel ambience: a peaceful antidote to the busy streets outside. Galeed Chapel is a locally listed building.

Galeed is the only surviving Strict Baptist chapel in Brighton: Salem, Providence and Tabernacle have all been demolished. A direct successor to Tabernacle was built in 1967 in a Modernist style on Montpelier Place on the Brighton–Hove boundary, and latterly developed more of a Reformed (Grace) Baptist outlook¹¹ which it shared with Ebenezer Chapel on Richmond Street. Montpelier Place closed in 2012 and was demolished at the end of 2017.

A short walk up the north end of Queen's Road brings us back to the railway station. This road was built straight through a notorious slum district in 1845, and also went through the western part of Hanover Chapel's burial ground. It was built to give direct access from the station to central Brighton and West Street, the original route having been quite circuitous.

¹¹ Being part of the Association of Grace Baptist Churches (South East) rather than affiliated to the Gospel Standard magazine.

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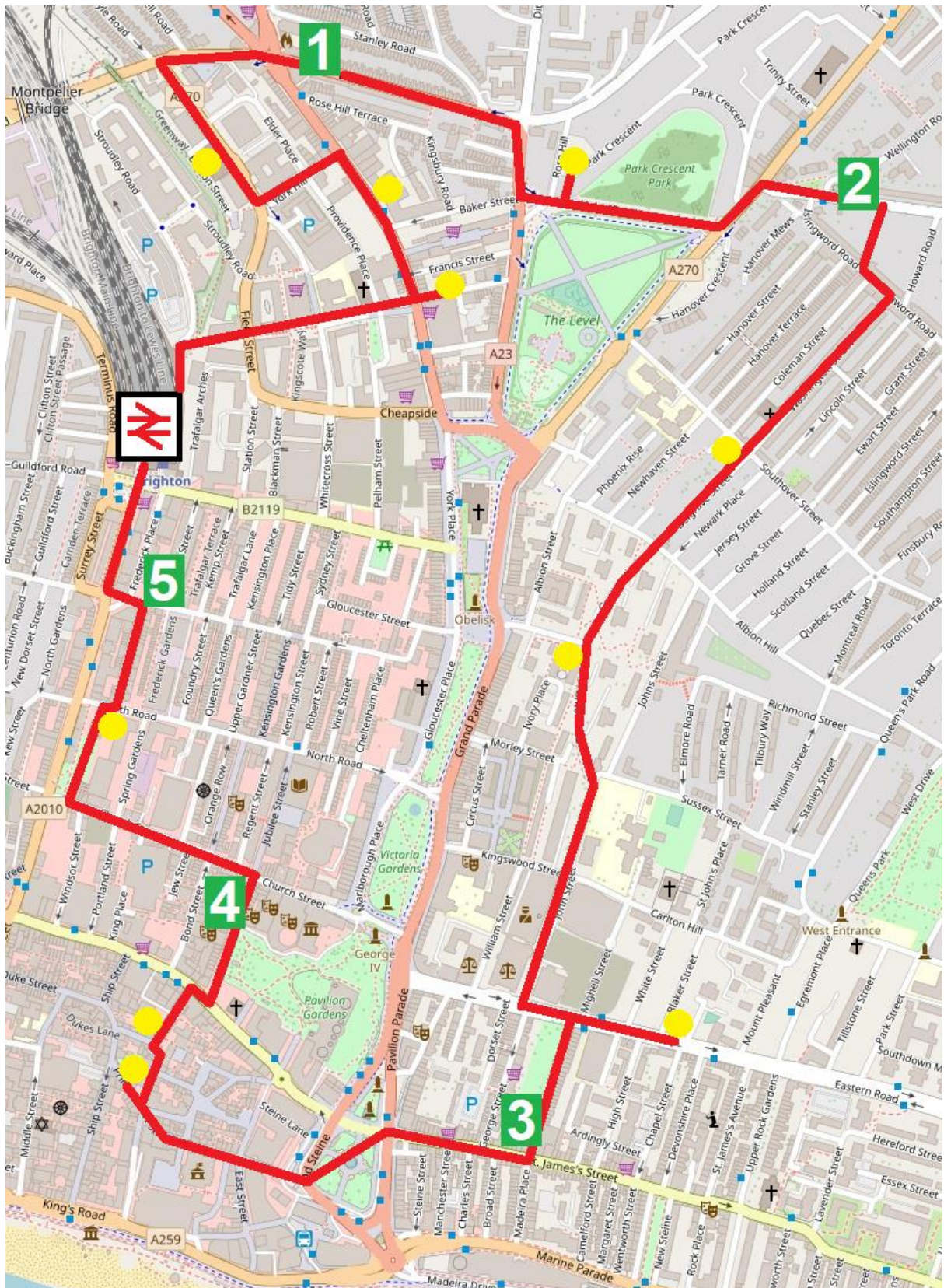
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The header images show (left) the coat of arms of the Borough of Brighton and (right) St Joseph’s Roman Catholic Church at Elm Grove. All photographs in these notes are by the author and have been released to the public domain, free of copyright.

Matt Davis, 25 September 2022



A map of the tour route. The walk goes clockwise from Brighton railway station (top left). Green numbers are the chapels we visit, in the order given in the text; yellow circles are the other extant chapels mentioned in the text. Sites of demolished chapels are not shown. (Derived from [openstreetmap.co.uk](https://openstreetmap.co.uk))