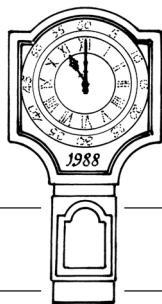


# THE CHAPELS SOCIETY



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Newsletter 76

January 2021

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*Freshwater Methodist Church, Brookside Road, Freshwater of 2014  
by Macaire Associates (photograph copyright Matt Davis) – see the article on page 15.*

# ADDRESS BOOK

The Chapels Society: registered charity number 1014207

Website: <http://www.chapelsociety.org.uk>

President: Bill Jacob, 4 St Mary's Walk, London SE11 4UA; e-mail: [wmjacob15@gmail.com](mailto:wmjacob15@gmail.com)

Secretary: Martin Wellings, 31 Long Lane, Finchley, London, N3 2PS; e-mail: [ChapelsSociety@googlemail.com](mailto:ChapelsSociety@googlemail.com); phone: 020 8346 1700 (for general correspondence and website)

Treasurer: John Ellis, 24 Shrublands Court, Mill Crescent, Tonbridge, Kent TN9 1PH; e-mail: [john.ellis@urc.org.uk](mailto:john.ellis@urc.org.uk); phone: 01732 353914

Visits Secretary: John Anderson, 3 The Vale, Congleton, Cheshire CW12 4AG; e-mail: [andersonhillside@btinternet.com](mailto:andersonhillside@btinternet.com); phone: 01260 276177

Membership Secretary: Stuart Leadley, 52 Southwood Avenue, Cottingham, East Yorks HU16 5AD; e-mail: [sjleadley@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:sjleadley@hotmail.co.uk)

Casework Officer: vacant

Editor: Chris Skidmore, 46 Princes Drive, Skipton BD23 1HL; e-mail: [chrisskidmore@waitrose.com](mailto:chrisskidmore@waitrose.com); phone: 01756 790056 (correspondence *re* the *Newsletter* and other Society publications). **Copy for the next (May 2021) *Newsletter* needs to reach the Editor by 31 March 2021, please.**

## NOTICEBOARD

### CHAPELS SOCIETY EVENTS

Summer 2021	AGM and chapel visits, London
September 2021	Visit to Altrincham [Roger Holden]
30 October 2021	Conference – <i>Communities of dissent</i> – Manchester College, Oxford

## EDITORIAL

As we all look forward to the New Year in the hope that it will see us better able to carry on the usual activities of the Society, we look back again in this issue to the work done by our predecessors of what Clyde Binfield chooses to call the Society's 'Heroic Age'. The passing of yet another of my predecessors as Hon. Editor causes me to remind you all that I intend not to offer myself for reappointment at the 2021 AGM. Anyone wanting to enquire about taking on the post, in whole or in part, is welcome to contact me to discuss the possibility.

A happy 2021 to one and all!

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

# PROCEEDINGS

## CHAPELS SOCIETY AGM

Our 2020 AGM had at least three unusual features. First, it took place in December, rather than June/July; second, there was no stimulating visit to local chapels or learned lecture to accompany the business meeting; and third, it was conducted on Zoom, rather than face-to-face. All three features, of course, were unwelcome necessities of the Covid-19 pandemic, and we hope very much that they will not be repeated in 2021!

Zoom enabled seventeen members of the Society to attend the AGM and to participate fully in the deliberations. Members scrutinised one another's bookshelves and interior décor, while welcoming the opportunity to see familiar faces and to exchange news.

Although Covid-19 has forced the postponement of the year's programme of visits, the Hon. Editor has been able to sustain publication of the Society's *Newsletter*, and this has been much appreciated. Visits planned for 2020 have been moved forward to 2021-22, in the hope that we will be able to gather in London for next year's AGM and visit Altrincham in September.

The Annual Report for 2019, circulated with *Newsletter 74*, was presented, and adopted by the meeting. The Hon. Treasurer explained that the Society has a healthy balance in hand, in preparation for the next edition of the *Journal*, scheduled for Autumn 2021. It was agreed that subscription rates for the ensuing year would remain unchanged, at £15 for individuals, £20 for joint, overseas, and corporate subscribers, and £8 for students.

The Hon. Officers were re-elected en bloc, and there were no changes in the membership of Council for the coming year.

The meeting recorded its grateful thanks to Michael Atkinson, stepping down as our Casework Officer. We would like to appoint a successor, and details of the role appear elsewhere in the *Newsletter*.

Members were delighted to hear of plans for a day conference to be held at Harris Manchester College, Oxford, on Saturday 30 October 2021. The conference, co-hosted by the Principal, The Revd Professor Jane Shaw, will build on the 'Communities of Dissent 1850-1914' project, and will include three substantial papers, on the English experience, the Welsh experience, and family and kinship. It is anticipated that these will form the basis of a double issue of the *Journal*, to be published next year. It is hoped that the afternoon session of the conference will take the form of a round-table discussion, and that this may further the possibility of establishing a 'Chapels Alliance', to draw together groups and individuals with an interest in the history, heritage, conservation, and contribution of chapels.

The meeting was also glad to receive encouraging news about the work of the

Historic Chapels Trust, following on from an article in our last *Newsletter* by Chris Smith, the new Chair of HCT.

In concluding the meeting our President, Dr Bill Jacob, looked forward to the New Year, and to the resumption of our normal activities. We will proceed with due caution, but we hope that by Summer 2021 we will be able to meet again in the usual way.

Martin Wellings  
Hon. Secretary

## THE IMPACT OF AN EDITOR – JOY ROWE, FSA (1926-2020)

The Chapels Society celebrated its tenth birthday with a lecture and a *Miscellany*. The former, on Great Meeting Houses, was delivered in Leicester's Great Meeting, 4 July 1998, by the Society's doughtiest founder member, Christopher Stell, and was printed in the latter. That *Miscellany* bears revisiting as an earnest of the still new society's scholarly intent and as a measure of time's passing.

It was the first of the Society's Occasional Publications and the forerunner of a series of increasingly ambitious volumes, more regular than occasional, represented today by the *Journal*, each an accompaniment to the unfailingly regular *Newsletter*. Its elegant austerity set the pace for what has followed. Its contents were exemplary: three essays, their almost nationwide coverage ranging from the last decades of the seventeenth century to the first of the twentieth and embracing the totality of the Society's interests. The first and longest was on a Catholic cathedral; the second allowed for a Presbyterian/Unitarian focus without excluding Baptists or Independents; the third brought in Methodists, with a weather eye on some Congregationalists.

The volume was forward looking: N.D. Wilson's '*Sane if Unheroic*': *The Work of William John Hale (1862-1929)*, celebrating a Sheffield Wesleyan architect, originated as an undergraduate dissertation. The other two essays bring home the passing of time. Anthony Rossi's *Norwich Roman Catholic Cathedral: A Building History* is magisterial in the best and most enviable sense. Rossi, who like Stell was a founder member, died in 2020. Christopher Stell's *Great Meeting Houses* presented a challenge: which of his lecture's many slides could be included as illustrations? The answer was none. Its sole illustration was a drawing by Godwin Arnold, the Society's first President, of Taunton's Unitarian Chapel. That, however, was enough. The lecturer's voice and style leap out at the reader as few illustrations could. Christopher Stell died in 2014; his wife Jean, his constant companion at each of our meetings and on each chapel crawl, silently taking everything in with a degree of healthily detached amusement, died in March 2020.



And the Editor? There is no obvious sign of an editor beyond a name and an address but anybody who has edited such a volume as this will know at once how much care has gone into this pioneering publication.

Joy Rowe was that editor. She too died on 7 September this year, some three weeks before her ninety-fourth birthday. Her life encompassed to a remarkable degree the Chapels Society's interests.

She stood for its Heroic Age, active from the first on its committee, every bit as doughty in her way as Christopher Stell and like him a pace-setting historian. He collected chapels and insisted on their architectural relevance. She represented that too often unsung and therefore underestimated breed, the true local historian, the scholar who, wearing much learning lightly, sets the local in full context, unencumbered by antiquarianism.

Her background helped. Margaret Joyce Martin (she hated the names Margaret Joyce and for all who knew her she was never other than Joy) was born in St Leonard's-on-Sea of mixed Anglican and Baptist stock, Evangelical on both counts. The Martin background was medical as well as Evangelical. It incorporated service with the China Inland Mission but Joy's father, an orthopaedic surgeon and general practitioner, had charge of the West Suffolk General Hospital from 1948 and the family moved to Ixworth, which has remained a family home. For a while it looked as if Joy might follow in his footsteps. She read Medicine at King's College London – but switched to Theology. She was not, however, to escape from the medical world because in 1950 Joy Martin married Alan Rowe – and he was in general practice. Like Joy, Alan had demanding interests; he would combine his work as a Suffolk G.P. with work for Europe, ensuring parity among the European Union's varied medical professions. The Rows struck deep local roots but there was nothing provincial about them.

In 1959 Joy and Alan converted to Roman Catholicism. By then she had become immersed in local history, especially local Catholic history, but she was ready to take on radical sectarian history as well. In these years she taught, she joined, she organised, she lectured, she wrote, she collaborated, and she edited.

She taught: in the 1950s Joy taught History at Hengrave Hall, then a convent school run by the Sisters of the Assumption, and in Hengrave's reincarnation as an ecumenical centre she remained a Trustee. It was there that the Rows celebrated their golden wedding with a host of friends in memorable style.

She joined, she organised, and she lectured: the Catholic Record Society, the Suffolk Records Society, the London Library, the Friends of Dr Williams's

Library, the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust (from 1979), the Chapels Society (from 1988), and the Society of Antiquaries (from 2002) can testify to her active membership. The Suffolk Historic Churches Trust, one of the most successful of such county trusts, might be selected to illustrate her organisational skills: she was a founder Trustee and eventual Vice-President, she chaired its Grants Committee for six years and sat on it for much longer, she initiated and ran its annual Field and Study Days. It almost goes without saying that she lectured, not least for NADFAS (now the Arts Society) in its earlier days: she had some rueful tales to tell of its more cut-glass moments.

Her writing and editing underlay all this, and vice versa, for hers was a most integrated activity. In the words of Dr Francis Young, writing about her for the Antiquaries, Joy Rowe ‘revolutionised our historical understanding of the place of religious minorities in early modern East Anglia’. Unusually for that time her work on its Catholics embraced the whole Catholic community and not just its martyrs and its gentry: ‘every article she wrote was pioneering and extraordinary’. Her publications ranged from the medieval monastic hospitals of Bury St Edmunds (in *Medical History*, 1958) to *Protestant Sectaries and Separatists in Suffolk 1594-1630* (in the *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 2004). They included a booklet, *The Story of Catholic Bury St Edmunds* (1959, expanded 1980, 1981) and eight entries for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004). She was also an invaluable collaborator: with Patrick McGrath for four articles in *Recusant History* and with Francis Young for *The Gages of Hengrave and Suffolk Catholicism 1640-1727*. All converged in 2016 when her ninetieth birthday and the Catholic Diocese of East Anglia’s fortieth anniversary were celebrated by a chapter in *Catholic East Anglia*, a paper prepared for the Catholic East Anglia Conference in May and the presentation of the diocesan medal at her birthday party in September.

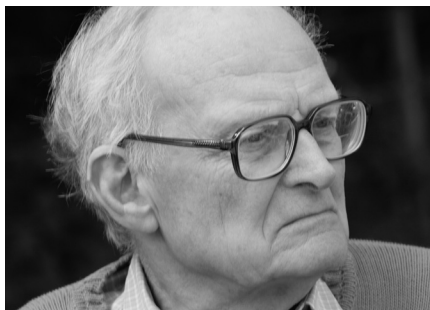
That was held at Ixworth Abbey, which had become her home in 1962 although by 2016 she had lived for many years at Haughley Grange. Both houses had character. The Abbey was a twelfth-century foundation, with a thirteenth-century undercroft, remodelled to suit seventeenth and eighteenth-century tastes. The Rowes opened it to the public and it has an entry in the East Anglian volume of *Burke’s and Savills Guide to Country Houses* (1981). The Grange was smaller, suited to ‘retirement’, partly moated and as comfy as a favourite pair of slippers. If only James Lees-Milne had thought to visit, with his diaries in mind.

Joy’s affection for Ixworth, Haughley, and Hengrave, her delight in gadding about (a favourite phrase of hers), her enthusiasm always about to break bounds, her learning so lightly worn – all combined to make her the best of companions, one whom it was, quite simply, a joy to know.

Clyde Binfield



## ANTHONY ROSSI, CBE (1932-2020)



Anthony Rossi, who died on October 9 at his Norwich home was a well-known conservation architect and had worked for more than 35 years preserving and enhancing heritage in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Derbyshire. He had previously lived in Little Walsingham, near Wells where he designed the Roman Catholic Church of the Annunciation in Friday Market Place.

Born in Birmingham on October 7, 1932, Anthony Rossi came from a long line of Norwich silversmiths founded by Italian immigrant, Giacinto Rossi, who arrived in England during the 19th century. He was educated at Norwich School and, after qualification worked with several Norwich practices before completing a newly-established postgraduate diploma in Conservation at the University of York. During the mid-1970s he was appointed historic buildings adviser with Derbyshire County Council and then Conservation Group leader with Norwich City Council. After another period in Derbyshire he returned to private practice in Norwich.

During the next 22 years, he went on to work on projects including repairing the near-derelict Thorpe Hall, in Norwich, and the severely damaged Waxham Barn, for Norfolk County Council. He advised on the repair of the great barn at Paston, the care and maintenance of Blickling Hall and Flatford for the National Trust, as well as working for several preservation trusts, local authorities and historic churches, frequently in cooperation with English Heritage. He also became deputy chairman of the Ancient Monuments Society, as well as chairman of its technical committee. He was a trustee and then consulting architect to the Historic Chapels Trust from its foundation in 1993.

A devout member of the Catholic Church, Anthony also undertook work for the Diocese of East Anglia and was architect to the Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Norwich for 11 years.

According to his family: '[He] adopted a low-key, even ascetic way of life with the air of a slightly eccentric Oxford don. With a bone dry, subversive sense



*The Roman Catholic Church of the Annunciation, Little Walsingham, Norfolk*

of humour, he was profoundly pleased to have been once lampooned by the magazine, *Private Eye*, a publication of which he thoroughly approved. Apart from his devotion to his work, the church and his family, his simple pleasures included his books, the Norfolk countryside and a lifelong passion for both Sherlock Holmes and Gilbert and Sullivan.'

*The above is taken largely from the obituary published by the Eastern Daily Press. What follows offers a more personal appreciation:*

Anthony Rossi, who died recently, will be remembered both as a principled, kindly man and outstanding conservation architect from an era when fewer architects took a strong stance on this issue. He was consultant architect to the Historic Chapels Trust for some 17 years, providing us always with sage advice on appointments and on possible approaches to seemingly intractable regeneration issues. Famously he managed to reuse every scrap of a chapel's historic fabric to best advantage and could readily detect the history of a chapel by careful examination of its fabric, notably at Salem Chapel, Devon.

Anthony was reluctant to expend scarce funding where money might be saved and even more stubborn in his refusals to claim his own fees and expenses! This caused HCT a number of headaches when requests for his invoices elicited nil responses, despite numerous letters and phone calls. Urgings to claim funds, even from our Chairmen, were completely disregarded. Anthony preferred to wait awhile, often into a new financial year, when he thought he could be sure of receiving the modest amounts he listed – monies that were ready and waiting for him weeks before. His frugality was legendary.

I knew him as a church and chapel architect and learned much from his approach to building conservation. He had a deep knowledge that extended to the building crafts and craftsmen. When HCT took on the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in Blackpool he was deeply appreciative of Velarde's great architecture but also of the significant contribution of David John, sculptor, whom he contacted to invite him to work elsewhere.

After he completed his own RC Church of the Annunciation in Little Walsingham, Norfolk in 2006, he commented as I praised his design that, 'It is all about the craftsmen really'. It wasn't. There was much more, manifested in his own innovative uses of the Norfolk vernacular and forward-looking use of carbon-neutral heating methods.

Anthony was a deeply devout and practising Roman Catholic but his sympathies and understanding of other denominations made him an ideal champion for HCT. We were delighted when he was, most worthily, appointed a CBE in 2008. His decencies and sensitivities are already greatly missed in the Churches and Architectural world.

*Jenny Freeman*



## ARE YOU A CREATIVE CHAPEL LOVER?

You might be just the person we are looking for! The Chapels Society has made a constructive contribution to the stories of many chapels through our Casework Officer. We now need a new person to take on this role.

The Society receives requests to get involved in local debates about chapels. The Casework Officer is the key person for co-ordinating our response to such requests. We are not automatically against all change because we understand the mission purpose of a chapel as well as the potential historic importance of its structure. We are keen to promote proposals that honour the past and serve the future.

The Casework Officer also has scope to watch out for chapels that need friends to highlight important features that may be at risk. If time permits, the Officer can link into various useful networks.

Our Casework Officer is invited to attend meetings of the Council when that would be useful to them. Expenses are reimbursed. Architectural expertise is a bonus but not essential as there is expertise within the Society's membership that can be drawn upon.

If you would be interested in volunteering for this position, please contact the Secretary, Martin Wellings, whose contact details are at the front of the *Newsletter*.

## HISTORIC CHAPELS TRUST (HCT)

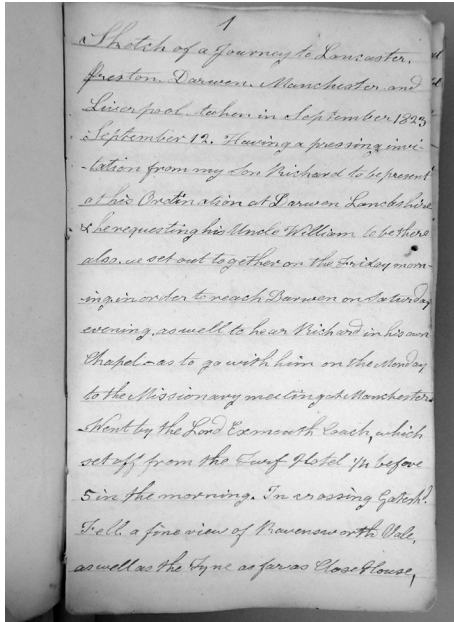
Following the article by Chris Smith in *Newsletter* 75, Chapels Society has been sent details of the call for new trustees which the Historic Chapels Trust intends to launch this year. In his recruitment letter, Chris Smith, now the chair of Trustees, says: 'We have recently undertaken a board review to identify the skills we need to give us the best outcomes for the future. We are now looking for experienced board members who can bring strong financial acumen and skills alongside a passion and commitment to our chapels and the organisation. We are also looking for Trustees who can bring expertise in property development and management, volunteering, community engagement and fundraising.'

If any member wishes to have further information, please contact the Secretary or the Editor in the first instance.

# SKETCH OF A JOURNEY: PART ONE

AN ARTICLE BY GILL FITZPATRICK

It is an exciting experience to come across an unpublished and unknown manuscript account of a journey taken in 1823. When the purpose of that journey was to attend the ordination of the writer's son as an Independent Minister and includes his many observations en route, it becomes an invaluable record.



First page of 'Sketch of a Journey'  
(Photograph courtesy of Karen Philbin)

The author of the account, entitled *Sketch of a journey to Lancaster, Preston, Darwen, Manchester and Liverpool taken in September 1823*, was Richard Fletcher (1769-1832), a builder from Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Richard Fletcher was clearly educated and his interest in buildings is evident. The Fletcher family were Nonconformist and members of Silver Street Chapel in Newcastle. In 1819, his son, also named Richard, entered the Rotherham Independent College as a student. His ordination took place on 18th September 1823 at the Ebenezer Chapel in Darwen, near Blackburn, Lancashire. He invited his father and an uncle, William Greaves, to attend. The *Sketch* was written up later and is presumably a 'fair copy' of notes taken along the way. It takes up 91 pages of a small

notebook, describing various aspects of the journey including the towns and buildings they saw and the people they met.

The purpose of this first article is to extract sections of the *Sketch* which relate to Darwen. A second article will focus on other Nonconformist chapels he described during his journey, specifically those in Manchester and Liverpool.

He was at his most confident when describing the buildings themselves, but there are also glimpses as to how they were used, which in turn of course, informed their design.

The original spelling, grammar and punctuation have been retained in the transcription.

Richard and William set off from Newcastle on 12th September 1823, their journey subject to the availability of passenger-carrying coaches. Initially, at

least, it followed a route which can be still be traced today, using main roads from Newcastle to Darwen and thence to Manchester, for the annual Missionary Meetings. From there they returned to Darwen for the ordination, with a diversion to Liverpool.

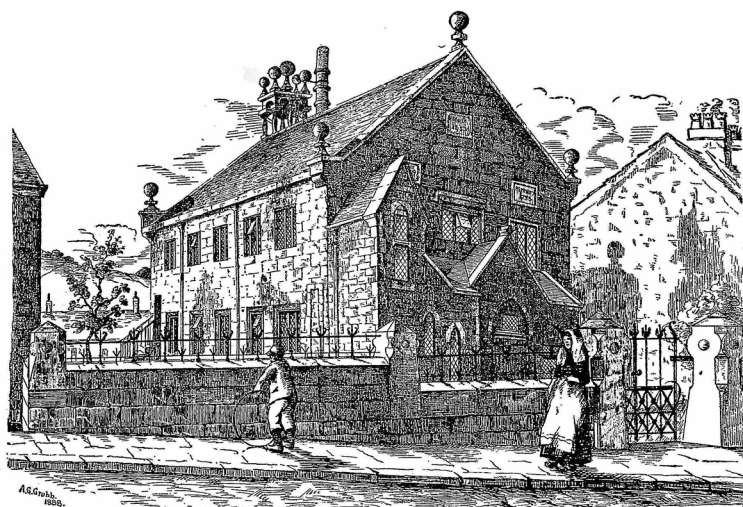
It took two days to reach Darwen for the first visit:

‘Reached Darwen at 8 o’clock in safety through God’s Mercy. – Richd. & Mr Smally his Host were waiting for us at the Inn.’

The Smalley family was of long standing in Darwen, and the Reverend Robert Smalley, had been Minister of the Lower Chapel from 1751-1791.

For those readers unfamiliar with Darwen in 1823, Richard provided a short description:

*Darwen is a Chapelry to the parish of Blackburn from which it is distant 4 miles. The aspect of the place is no way interesting. The village itself is small and lies in a bottom by the side of the small river Darwen. It has nothing to recommend it to notice. The township contains a population of 7,000 people, a number no one would suppose in passing through it. The whole township comprehends an area of three square miles. The population is collected into a few Houses together called Folds. These Folds are widely dispersed among or upon the hills and in the vallies. Some of them are placed in very bleak and unsheltered situations ... The principal inn or indeed the only one in Darwen is near the Chapel. Not far from this is another public house.*



LOWER CHAPEL, DARWEN, A.D. 1719.

*Lower Chapel Darwin in 1889, after damage from subsidence had been corrected in 1852/3 and the entire front wall rebuilt (image from J G Shaw, Darwen and its people)*

The following day: ‘Sept 14th being Sabbath Day attended public worship at Richard’s Chapel. ... The chapel is very commodious & will seat 750 people – not less than 600 attends regularly. – Sat in Mr Smally’s pew front of the Gallery.’

The next two days were spent in Manchester and Liverpool and these will be described in Part 2. Returning to Darwen on the 17th, they found preparations had begun for the ordination:

*Mr. Bennett of Rotherham, late Richard’s tutor, arrived this afternoon at Mr Smally’s. Previous to the ordination a party consisting of Mr Bennett, Mr Smally, Mr Littler, Richard, Brother William, & myself took a turn thro’ part of the village, crossed the small river Darwen, and ascended the hill to what is called the old chapel, but more commonly Lower Chapel. Mr Littler the minister having the key we went in and viewed the interior. The Chapel was built about 100 yrs ago, and will seat 800 people, it is well attended, Mr. Littler is an excellent young man. The Chapel yard is full of tombstones like the burying ground of a parish church in a populous town. ... At Mr Bennett’s request went a little farther up along the hill to see the remains of the ancient Chapel of Darwen which has been laid by as a place of worship upwards of 100 years. ... This ancient edifice is a low thatched building and does not seem to be high enough to have had a gallery – this was the original place of dissent in this part of Lancashire, and existed in Charles 2d.’s time when the puritans or Nonconformists suffered so much persecution. It is related that when the minister was in danger of being laid hold on by legal authority or rather by the enemies of the Cross of Christ, a trap door on which he stood in the pulpit was suddenly let down, and he was either concealed below, or made a retreat some other way to avoid his pursuers, so much was the Gospel of Christ prized at Darwen in those days. ... Mr Roby of Manchester arrived at Darwen this afternoon.*

Perhaps not surprisingly, Richard described in detail his son’s ordination which followed the normal format of prayer, discourse, the answering of questions and a sermon. It was clearly a quite stressful experience for his son:

*Thursday September 18 through God’s goodness permitted to see the dawn of this eventful day so anxiously & tremblingly anticipated by my son Richard. ... The service commenced at ½ past ten, my son William came in the morning from Preston and joined us before the service, he, his Uncle & myself got into a pew near the door in the north isle to be out of the way where no one knew us. The Chapel was crowded to excess, it was calculated that not less than 1000 people were present ... After this Mr. Payne asked the usual questions which were answered by Richard in writing, with an agitated mind. This lasted near an hour so that he almost fainted during this trial, however God in his goodness mercifully supported him & when he was half through he gained courage and got*

*through tolerably well. Mr Roby of Manchester offered up the Ordination prayer during which Richd. was solemnly inducted into & set apart for the ministry of the Gospel of Christ. Mr. Littler of Lower Chapel gave out the hymns from the pulpit stairs the whole of the service, for they have no clerk's desk in the Independant Chapels in Lancashire. Richard stood in the singing pew before the Pulpit ... Thus closed the solemn services of this eventful day.*

This was (of course) all followed by 'A sumptuous cold table'.

The next afternoon Richard:

*went to over the Darwen to Pole Lane in company with Mr. Smally, Br.Wm. & Richd. Here is the chapel where Richd.'s congregation formerly worshipped. Nothing but the shell remains, the pews both of the Galleries and below have been worked up in the present Chapel. There are a great number of tombstones in the burying ground.*

Richard decided to stay for a few days as he wanted to be there for his son's first Sunday as Minister. 'Richard's first sermon after his ordination was in the afternoon. He preached from 2 Chron. 6.40.41 ... He spake 45 minutes.' During the time he was there his son also performed a burial and a baptism: 'Thus by stopping two days longer I had the pleasure to see my son perform the sacred rites of burial & baptism.'

The history of Nonconformity in Darwen is complicated and seemingly ridden by factions. For further details, Benjamin Nightingale's *Lancashire Nonconformity*, although dated, is a good place to start. For the purposes of this article, suffice to say that the Ebenezer Chapel had been formed out of two congregations, one from Pole Lane Chapel and the other from the Townsend Chapel opened in 1808, described by Nightingale as a 'small square building without galleries'. The two congregations united in 1822 and rebuilt the Townsend Chapel naming it the Ebenezer Chapel. Although it only served until 1847, what he saw in 1823 was the newly enlarged Chapel and described it thus:

*Ebenezer Chapel has been altered and enlarged. The entrance from being in the centre is now near one end. It opens into a lobby – on the right hand are two doors into the Chapel, on the left hand is a door into the lower schoolroom. At the farther end is the vestry which is very small. On one side of the vestry is the staircase to the gallery. Halfway up is a door into the higher schoolroom. Opposite this staircase at the other end of the lobby is another staircase for the other side of the gallery which goes over the front entrance. The two large rooms attached to the Chapel are for the Sunday School and keeps the Chapel quite disencumbered. In the upper schoolroom the church meetings and prayer meetings are held and occasional weekday addresses are given. There is a narrow space of*

*ground surrounds three sides of the Chapel which is the burying ground. The nature of dissent is carried so high here, that great numbers consider themselves belonging to the Chapel by baptisms, & internments who pay very little respect to religion or the maintenance of the minister. The front of the Chapel faces the turnpike, close by the village. A dwarf wall is built next the road on which is to be an iron paling. The Doorcase consists of two circular columns 9 or 10 feet high of one stone each. These support a plain pediment. The front gallery of the Chapel extends over the lobby & has 10 seats in depth. The Independents here have no clerk's desk. The Minister gives out the psalms & hymns, then those who conduct the sacred harmony in the singing pew at the foot of the pulpit stairs raise the tune & carry it through without repeating the line. They had a large bass viol when we were there. Most of the congregation join in this solemn act of devotion. They have no collections here, either at the doors or from seat to seat – except once a quarter, when the seat-holders come forward with their subscriptions for the Minister & the support of the Chapel.*

Unfortunately, he gave no dimensions, but earlier in the *Sketch* he had said the chapel held 750 people and had been 'crowded to excess' at his son's ordination with 1,000 people. Given Nightingale's description, the alterations not only included the change of entrance but also the building of the galleries. There is no known illustration of this chapel – is this description full enough for an attempt to draw a plan?

Richard Fletcher returned to Newcastle on 22nd September and by dint of travelling overnight arrived home at 7pm the following day.

His son, the Reverend Richard Fletcher, remained at Darwen until 1831 when he succeeded the Reverend William Roby at Grosvenor Street, Manchester. He stayed there until called by the London Missionary Society to go to Victoria, Australia which he did, with his family, in November 1853. He died in St Kilda, Melbourne in December 1861.

*With many thanks to the owner of the manuscript, Karen Philbin, who is keen to share the work of her four times great grandfather and has photographed the pages and produced the transcription used above.*



# SOME TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY CHURCHES ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT

AN ARTICLE BY MATT DAVIS

I spent a week church-crawling on ‘The Garden Isle’ in 2016. A packed itinerary covered more than 170 places of worship past and present, including over 110 non-Anglican buildings. The island’s remaining churches were covered on a subsequent trip. While many interesting old chapels survive – often converted into holiday accommodation if no longer in religious use – I was surprised to find several fine modern Nonconformist churches and chapels. I have chosen four in particular to research.

## Newport Congregational Church (2011)



Although its present building is barely ten years old, Newport Congregational Church is one of the island’s oldest Nonconformist churches. The first chapel was in use by 1704 – when trustees (described as ‘Protestant Dissenters called Presbyterians or Independents’) were appointed – and possibly as early as 1699. It stood near the junction of the High Street and Lower St James’s Street, and was rebuilt and extended to the west in 1777–78. A secession occurred in 1803, resulting in the establishment of Node Hill Chapel; Thomas Binney accepted the pastorate in 1824 and stayed for five years; and in 1848 a much larger chapel was built slightly further west to the design of Southwark architect Francis Pouget. ‘The Great Chapel’ was a large Gothic Revival edifice of grey stone with a buttressed façade and prominent pinnacles. The church, which was

now Congregational in character, reunited with the Node Hill Chapel in 1881. Members unanimously voted against joining the United Reformed Church in 1972, instead remaining independent.

Structural problems became a pressing concern around the turn of the millennium. Costly work was needed, and at the same time the owners of the adjacent nightclub offered to buy the church so they could expand. With nowhere to move to but a good price offered, the decision to sell was taken in July 2001. Nearby Holyrood Hall – a grade II-listed building originally erected for the Quaker community, later used by Plymouth Brethren and then converted into St Thomas of Canterbury’s Catholic Church Hall – was offered by the Catholic Church as a temporary place of worship; and shortly afterwards a building and its adjacent vacant site on Pyle Street came on the market. The trustees bought this in February 2002.

The site was very restricted, being a vacant plot between the grade II\*-listed Catholic church and the rear of a shop unit, and backing on to more shops on the High Street. A flexible two-storey multi-purpose space was required, consisting of a large hall with a smaller separate worship area; but the Church was determined to avoid the impression of ‘really [being a] hall into which a sacred function had been introduced’, which was the conclusion formed from visits to several modern churches on the mainland. The worship area was therefore intended to stand apart visually from the body of the building and to dominate the site.

Rejecting traditional Nonconformist chapel layouts, the architects (CAD Delta Architectural Services of Newport) proposed a large twelve-sided chapel at the southeast corner of the site. This would be linked by a shorter flat-roofed entrance area to another distinctive feature – a two-storey tower with a mono-pitch roof, large glazed opening and a dark blue tiled finish. This would contain the main staircase. The rear of the site would be occupied by the two-storey hall, whose ground floor would be hidden behind other three structures. Roofs would be laid with slate, and pale yellow bricks would be used on the chapel and the hall. Windows would consist of glazed multi-coloured blocks. The swept-in angle of the entrance area would allow important townscape views of the Catholic church’s east elevation to remain.

Isle of Wight Council had rejected two earlier applications, partly on design grounds, but were pleased with the new design which introduced a distinctive, unique element to the street scene and yet respected its neighbour – a very early (1791) Catholic church, claimed in some sources to be England’s first post-Reformation new-build. Permission was granted in 2006, construction was well underway in 2009 and the church opened in 2011.

The 2016 photograph suggests something seems to be missing, and indeed the chapel section has not been built yet! Worship takes place in the large upper hall in the main building at present, and the space earmarked for the chapel is

currently a landscaped area of hardstanding. A slightly amended design was approved in June 2020, though, so it is clearly still the intention to build the chapel in due course.

‘The Great Chapel’ of 1848 is now a J D Wetherspoon pub. Its interior has been sensitively converted, although many features have been lost (it is not a listed building). The former Node Hill Chapel also survives, clearly identifiable as a chapel; it was in commercial use for many years, but was empty and in poor condition when I visited in 2016. By late 2017 it had been fully restored and now combines a coffee roastery, café and flexible office space.

### **Cowes Spiritualist Church (2009)**

Spiritualists began to meet for worship in Cowes in 1925, and in August 1935 they registered a building on Market Hill as *Cowes National Spiritualist Church* – although it may have been in use slightly earlier. The origins of this building are obscure. Two sources suggest it was a Primitive Methodist chapel, and one claims it was in use by them from 1866 until the 1930s; but no record exists of such a chapel being either registered or deregistered on this street, and a Primitive Methodist chapel was built not far away in 1889 ‘to replace an earlier chapel that was too small for a growing congregation’. The building at Market Hill was certainly in secular use (as *Claremont Hall*) by the 1890s: it held a ‘social gathering’ of local Catholics in 1893, hosted meetings of the Primrose League’s local branch in 1892 and 1893, and was an Odd Fellows lodge by 1898. Perhaps Primitive Methodists had simply been hiring it until they built their own chapel. It was a sturdy brick building with a gabled façade lit by tall lancet windows with stone surrounds and simple Y-tracery.

In any case, Spiritualists made Market Hill their home until 1955, when they purchased an awkward triangular site on top of a railway embankment on the main Newport Road and erected a new church there. This was a two-storey building with an irregular footprint but a distinctive symmetrical façade: highly glazed, with wide, nearly full-height windows featuring a cross-and-circle motif which was repeated on the entrance gates. The roof was slightly curved, as were the tops of the windows and the projecting stone surround in which they were set. It had a passing similarity to the older Ventnor Spiritualist Church. The new premises were registered in August 1955.

All was well until spring 2003, when subsidence damage was noticed – initially affecting the porch and the northwest corner and later leading to cracks appearing in various places around the reinforced concrete walls. Structural engineers inspected the building in July 2003 and found ‘severe tree root ingress in several places, affected by the very damp clay of the site and the extensive surrounding tree growth on the now abandoned railway embankment. From that time, consideration was given to demolishing and rebuilding the church. Several planning applications were submitted, all of which involved moving the



church to the vacant piece of land to the north and building flats on the land thereby released. The flats (named Higginson House – possibly after Gordon Higginson, a past president of the Spiritualists’ National Union?) were quickly approved, but permission for a replacement church was harder to obtain.

The initial design (2006) was substantially different from what was eventually built. It proposed an octagonal building featuring a large glazed arched entrance with a gabled overhang and surrounded by a fascia of powder-coated steel mimicking the colour of the glass. The other walls were to be of brick and largely windowless: most light was to be admitted through tall, narrow openings in a large pyramidal spire. This spire and the roof were to be of lead. Inside, there was to be a main hall on the ground floor, a subsidiary meeting room at first-floor level and other standard facilities such as a kitchen. The architect, Ken Hodson of Bournemouth, rightly noted that ‘Spiritualist churches are in essence simple buildings without adornment or unnecessary complications’, and sought to provide a distinctive but not overpowering building for what is a very prominent site. The computer-generated portrayal showed a perky little building of distinctly Modernist character, perhaps echoing some of the smaller Catholic chapels of ease of the early post-Vatican II era. Isle of Wight Council were not persuaded though: they stated it did not meet their design standards and would be ‘an intrusive development’.

In 2007 the same architect submitted a significantly revised proposal consisting of a simple rectangular building with a steep gable and a small entrance wing to

the northwest, housing a vestibule and lift. The most distinctive feature would be a nearly full-height (two-storey) arched and fully glazed opening in the west elevation – a motif specifically requested by the Church, who appreciated the large areas of glazing in their old building. (This requirement was met in the 2006 proposal by the tall glass entrance.) This window would incorporate a prominent ‘sunlight’ emblem; and the entrance wing would also be fully glazed. Otherwise, the building would be of plain red brick with stone quoins and a slate roof, thereby blending in better with the surrounding housing. The Council deemed the new design satisfactory and granted planning permission in May 2008. The old church was demolished that summer and the new building was completed in 2009. The sunburst emblem had disappeared some time between 2011 and my visit in May 2016, but otherwise the church remains unchanged. It is a neat, compact building, dominated by the adjacent flats, and could be mistaken (especially from the south) for a new-build detached house but for the giant arched opening on the west wall.

The old chapel on Market Hill was sold in the 1960s and demolished for housing. Elsewhere on the island, Spiritualist churches can be found in Ryde and Ventnor. Cowes Spiritualist Church is affiliated with the Spiritualists’ National Union.

#### **Freshwater Methodist Church (2014)**

Methodism found strong support on the Isle of Wight from the early 19th century onwards. At the time of writing there are 21 Methodist churches still in use on the island, compared to seven Baptist and just three United Reformed, and a further eight have closed without replacement since 2000 (at Apse Heath, Bowcombe, Chale, Merstone, Sandford, Totland, Ventnor and Wootton). The great majority of the chapels still in use are Victorian, and many are attractive essays in Gothic; but one of the most distinctive is the newly built and assertively modern Freshwater Methodist Church in the rural west of the island.

Freshwater and Totland are neighbouring villages, now connected by suburban housing. In the former, Providence Chapel was built for a Wesleyan congregation in 1824: this small building was replaced by a much larger chapel of a standard, conservative Gothic Revival design in 1861. In 1904 a tall, prominently sited chapel opened in Totland for Bible Christians. Both remained in use after the Methodist Union of 1932, but by the 1950s Providence Chapel was no longer suitable and was demolished. Its replacement, Wesley Hall, was built in 1959. This was modest in the extreme, built of (artificial?) stone blocks and with three tiny windows in the street-facing elevation. Long and narrow, with a corrugated metal roof and small side windows, it resembled the Brethren meeting rooms of that era.

By 2012, both buildings were unsuitable. Totland was too large for the congregation and required expensive maintenance: Freshwater was reaching the

end of its useful life. The community decided to consolidate worship on the Freshwater site, building a new church and community facility there. Various grants were provided, and more money was raised by selling the Totland chapel for conversion into flats (which was done very sensitively indeed). The church engaged a local firm of architects, Macaire Associates of Shalfleet, and submitted a planning application in September 2011. The Council granted approval five months later, and work was completed in 2014. An opening ceremony took place over a weekend in late September of that year. It was stated at that time that further design phases were planned in order to provide extra facilities.

The design specification sought deliberately to ‘provide a contemporary and modern approach’, not influenced by conventional church architecture but making reference to its religious function through specific elements. The Church’s requirements included a building large enough to seat 100 in the main worship space and a similar number in a hall behind it; smaller first-floor meeting rooms and offices, connected by a lift; and a clearly defined entrance area with large areas of glass, intended to welcome people in and bring in as much light as possible. (Wesley Hall’s entrance was hidden around the side.) The roofline is distinctive, prompted by the proximity of a small bungalow. The roof is treated as two separate mono-pitches, sharply angled and stepped on both sides, making the building appear less dominant despite its greater height and volume. Windows inserted in the stepped sections provide extra light. The walls are of render in contrasting colours, pale red and cream, and the tall windows flanking the entrance also contain coloured glass. A double doorway is set below a floating canopy, above which is a triangular window with the circle-and-cross emblem of the Methodist Church and then a large Cross below the roofline.

The new church certainly provides a distinctive focus in the centre of the village, contrasting with neighbouring buildings but not overwhelming them. 21st-century places of worship tend to require flexibility and often need to act as multi-purpose community facilities, and Freshwater Methodist Church appears to be a practical and effective building; but its main purpose as a place of worship is clearly articulated. In summary, it is a successful modern church.

### **Church of Our Lady and St Wilfrid, Ventnor (2014)**

Ventnor’s Roman Catholic church was designed in 1871 by Thomas Chatfield-Clarke (*sic*), an Island-born Unitarian also responsible for a few Unitarian, Particular Baptist and Anglican churches, mostly in London. (He is, incidentally, commemorated by a stained glass window in Newport Unitarian Church.) Pevsner misattributes Our Lady and St Wilfrid to ‘J. Clarke’: *The Builder* and the Portsmouth Diocesan archives confirm the correct attribution. The stone-built church was a plain gabled hall with a tall and wide north aisle. The main body of the church had a tall bell-cote. A school was built on part of the site





around 1900, partly hiding the church, and several extensions were made over the years.

This church was destroyed by fire on 3 December 2006, and it was quickly decided to start from scratch and build a new church rather than trying to salvage the old building. Although the walls and the aisle roof survived, much else was lost; furthermore, the church was not a listed building (although it was in a conservation area), it stood on soft ground and had been underpinned previously, and the school was due to close by 2012 and move to a new site. Building anew on a different part of the site was deemed appropriate.

The surviving church hall to the southwest of the church (a prefab with a small brick extension) was temporarily registered for worship in June 2007, and discussions with the planning authorities and conservation officers began. Initially (summer 2008), they asked for the ruined building to be retained to allow a closer analysis of its viability. Structural engineers duly assessed it and recommended demolition, which was accepted by the Council in June 2009. The remains were cleared shortly afterwards.

In June 2013, the Diocese and parish sought to build a new church on the footprint of the church hall, retaining its plinth and foundations, and commissioned Reading-based firm The AED Practice to design it. Permission was granted later that year, and the church opened in 2014. It is now one of three

churches in the parish of South Wight, together with Sandown and Shanklin. Congregations of 60-70 are standard, rising by 50% in the summer holidays; the new church is therefore more suitable to the parish's present needs than its much larger 250-capacity predecessor.

The new Church of Our Lady and St Wilfrid is a modest, simple building, aiming to express its interior layout clearly in its exterior form. The sanctuary, the most visible element from the street, is denoted by a gabled projection slightly lower than the nave, lit by a large cruciform window with multi-coloured glass in a mosaic tiled surround. The aisleless nave has extensions to the east accommodating a sacristy and meeting room, connected by a fully glazed entrance vestibule with a steeply pitched gabled roof perpendicular to the main roof. The walls are of pale cream rendered masonry; the roofs are of slate with stone copings; and the windows (also with multi-coloured glass) are timber with a grey finish. The subtle colours and traditional profile avoid excessive contrast with the surrounding Victorian villas but make clear the building's purpose as a church.

The application to demolish the 1871 building included a proposal to rescue the undamaged bell-cote and mount it in the grounds of the church hall as a 'feature'; regrettably, this does not seem to have happened. Part of the old school building has been retained and is now a nursery school: the rest of the site is a car park and playground, and there is also a prefabricated parish room which has been used by Ventnor's Methodist worshippers since the closure of Ventnor United Church earlier this century.

**Sources:** *Books consulted include Paul Hooper (2006), A History of Newport Congregational Church, John A. Vickers, ed. (1993), The Religious Census of Hampshire 1851, and the new (2006) Isle of Wight edition of The Buildings of England series. The Methodist Church Buildings Statistical Returns (1947) were also consulted for Freshwater. Also used were newspaper reports from the Isle of Wight County Press and South of England Reporter, Primrose League Gazette and Isle of Wight County Press; local directories; the description of Cowes West Hill Primitive Methodist Church at MyPrimitiveMethodists.org.uk; various church and denominational websites; and registration and deregistration details recorded on Worship Registration certificates lodged at the National Archives, Kew, and in The London Gazette. Of great importance were the various planning applications submitted to Isle of Wight Council for the new buildings: modern planning regulations require extremely detailed design statements and similar documentation, and these have proved to be a valuable resource.*

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# NEWS AND NOTES

## Avenue St Andrew's United Reformed Church, Southampton

Restoration work to this 1892 building by James Cubitt concluded in 2020 with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Out of that project has come a number of on-line activities, including a virtual open day at [asaunc.org.uk/open-day-2020/](http://asaunc.org.uk/open-day-2020/) and virtual tours of the church, which include several 360° views at [asaunc.org.uk/new-homepage/virtual-tour/](http://asaunc.org.uk/new-homepage/virtual-tour/)

These are well worth a visit.

## Arts & Crafts Gospel Halls

A stray comment about the possible existence of Arts & Crafts Gospel Halls in Gerard Charmley's review of two books on Arts & Crafts churches in the last issue of the *Newsletter* evoked correspondence from both the authors. Alec Hamilton, a member of the Society, pointed out the complexities of deciding what is or is not 'Arts & Crafts' and noted that, by 1900, Nonconformist denominations were often inclined to make things look a bit Artsy-Craftsy to show how up-to-the-minute they were. One that 'came close' for him was Rutland Gospel Hall in Hove and Roger Button offered the grade-II listed Claverton Down Gospel Hall in Bath by Silcock and Reay, now converted to a dwelling.

Matt Davis also offers these thoughts about a candidate in Croydon:



*Chiltern Church, Chiltern Road, Belmont  
(Photograph copyright Matt Davis)*

Gerard Charmley's book review in *Newsletter 75* questions the absence of coverage of Arts & Crafts Gospel Halls and touches upon the relative looseness of the term 'Arts & Crafts'. Chiltern Hall in Sutton, London (1935; now Chiltern Church), referred to in *Journal* volume 3, is a prominent candidate; but, using a broad definition, I can suggest a couple of little-known examples in nearby Croydon – a place where very many Gospel Halls and Brethren meeting rooms were founded in the 20th century (many have been secularised or demolished; others are now more Evangelical in character). In central Croydon, the building originally known as Sylverdale Hall was used for much of its life by Brethren, but I am yet to confirm whether it was originally built as a Gospel Hall: I believe it was, but it was certainly used briefly by the Croydon Freemasons in the early 1920s. In any case, it became Cranmer Hall in 1960 when the old meeting room of that name on Cranmer Road (bought from Methodists in 1908) was demolished for road widening. Still in use, latterly as Cranmer Christian Fellowship, until 2012 or 2013, the new Cranmer Hall was converted into a nursery school by 2014. In 1930, members of Cranmer Hall founded an assembly in South Croydon, and Montpelier Hall was registered the following year for Open Brethren. Although partly hidden behind fences and a modern porch, on stylistic grounds it was clearly built around then. The chapel is now called Montpelier Church. Subtly influenced by the Arts & Crafts movement, and neither elaborate nor as uncompromisingly stark as many Brethren buildings, both halls would look at home among the chapels of Letchworth or Welwyn (as described in the Society's *Journal* volume 2).

Perhaps members would like to offer other candidates?

### Welsh Religious Buildings Trust

As well as our sister society – Capel (the Welsh Chapels Heritage Society) – Wales also boasts its equivalent of the Historic Chapels Trust. This is Addoldai Cymru (the Welsh Religious Buildings Trust), which has in its care some eight redundant Welsh chapels. They also maintain an excellent website at <http://www.welshchapels.org/> in collaboration with Cadw. This not only covers their own chapels but has well-written historical material about Welsh Nonconformity and a chapels database which gives access to the information on Coflein, the online catalogue of the Welsh National Monument Record.