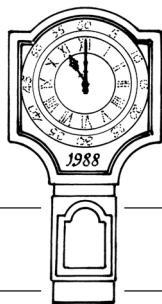


# THE CHAPELS SOCIETY



Newsletter 77

May 2021



*Richard Fletcher, whose continuing adventures are found on page 6, visited Manchester too early to admire the new meeting house in Mount Street for the Society of Friends, built in 1830 to a Greek Revival design by Richard Lane and shown here in the engraving published in Lancashire Illustrated of 1831 (from the editor's collection)*

## ADDRESS BOOK

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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 (September 2021) Newsletter needs to reach the Editor by 31 July 2021, please.

## NOTICEBOARD

### CHAPELS SOCIETY EVENTS

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| 1 July 2021       | AGM held by Zoom, 7.00 pm.   |
| 25 September 2021 | Visit to Altrincham [Roger Holden]   |
| 30 October 2021   | Conference – <i>Communities of dissent</i> – Harris Manchester College, Oxford |

## EDITORIAL

This will be my final editorial for the *Newsletter*. A run of nearly 14 years and 41 issues is not a bad record – all I can say is that I had not intended to continue for so long but that I have continued to enjoy the work involved. I usually try to make it a rule to follow modern Quaker practice and never to carry on with a job for longer than two triennia, but clearly something has kept me in the editor's chair!

As you will see from the agenda enclosed with this issue, a willing volunteer has been found to take my place, if the AGM agrees, and I trust that you will continue to support him with articles, notes and other material, as you have me.

The Chapels Society is, I believe, in good heart and never more needed as an advocate for our historic religious buildings. One of the outcomes of this year's conference will, it is hoped, be some form of alliance to keep these buildings in the public eye as an important part of our heritage. Let us hope that we can, with others, continue to keep the clock on our logo getting past the 11th hour.

# PROCEEDINGS

## COMMUNICATING WITH MEMBERS BY EMAIL

At the meeting of the Society's Council in February 2021 it was agreed to explore the possibility of making more use of email to communicate with members of the Society. We hope to be able to send out occasional emails with carefully selected material likely to be of interest to members so that they receive in a timely fashion. This will supplement the printed *Newsletter* and is in no way intended to replace it. Participation in the email list is entirely voluntary, and members are free to opt in or out at any time. All messages will be sent 'blind' and your email address will not be shared with other members of the Society.

We have email addresses for around 75% of our members. Please inform the Membership Secretary, Stuart Leadley, by email to [sjleadley@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:sjleadley@hotmail.co.uk) if:

- you have an email address and would like to be included in the emails, but think that we do not have your address, or that the one we have may be incorrect
- you believe that we have your email address but do not wish to receive these emails from the Society.

[We hope to send out the first email by 14 June 2021. If you have not received an email from the Society by that date but wish to be included in the emails, please inform the Membership Secretary, Stuart Leadley, by email to [sjleadley@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:sjleadley@hotmail.co.uk)]

## MEMBERSHIP REPORT

### New members

We are pleased to be able to welcome no fewer than six new members to the Society since the last Newsletter: Tim Richardson of Birmingham, Valerie Jackson of Skipton in Yorkshire, Kenny McLean of Berwickshire, Vivienne Cooling of East Yorkshire, Lynn Jones of London and Ruth Summers of Suffolk.

### News of deaths

Unfortunately we also have to report the sad loss of more of our members:

Christine Belton of High Peak, Michael Pluck of Colchester, Revd John Semper of Stowmarket in Suffolk and Jean West, of Bishops Stortford in Hertfordshire.

*Stuart Leadley*

## JEAN WEST (1943-2021)

Jean West died on the 15 February 2021 of heart failure due to an underlying heart condition. Jean was a Congregationalist and member of Water Lane church, Bishops Stortford even before the amalgamation into the URC. She served the church as an elder for 30 years and was Church Secretary for six years.

Jean married her husband, Peter, in 1963 and they had three children, two girls and a boy. It was through Peter that she was drawn into an interest in Nonconformist buildings as he undertook the role as Convenor of the URC Listed Buildings Advisory Group as well as being the denomination's national representative in connection with the Ecclesiastical Exemption. During this time Jean accompanied Peter on many of his visits to churches throughout the country. Having joined the Chapels Society and attended a number of visits, Jean felt that she would like to get more involved. Jean served as our Treasurer from 2012 to 2018, joining us at a point where we had lost two treasurers in as many years. Jean gave the Society some sense of stability in its financial affairs and went on to be the second longest serving Treasurer in the Society's history.

As a colleague on Council, Jean was reliable, quietly spoken but always with a sensible suggestion to make on matters under discussion and with a ready smile available for the eccentricities of others. Her light touch with the accounts was appreciated by those of us who find finances daunting. Peter reports that Jean, herself, really valued and enjoyed the time she spent as a trustee and was pleased that she was able to serve in that capacity. We give thanks for her life and service.

*Chris Skidmore*

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Again this year, the Council at its last meeting agreed that it would not be practical to hold the 2021 AGM in person under the current timetable. We will hold a virtual AGM using the Zoom platform – this is set for Thursday 1 July at 7 pm – for the purpose of electing officers and agreeing the Annual Report, which is included, together with the agenda, with this issue of the *Newsletter*. As always nominations should be sent to the Secretary at least one week before the meeting. Details of the Zoom link will be made available to those who notify the Secretary of their interest in attending, preferably by e-mail to [ChapelsSociety@googlemail.com](mailto:ChapelsSociety@googlemail.com).

We look forward to seeing you there.

## CONFERENCE

We are still planning on holding our conference – *Communities of Dissent 1850-1914* – in October at Harris Manchester College, Oxford. There is more information in the flyer which accompanies this issue of the *Newsletter*. The day will start at 9.45 am and the morning will contain two lectures, from our own Kate Tiller [who gave the Stell lecture in Oxford in 2017] with an overview of the subject and from Frances Richardson on chapel culture in north-west Wales. This will be followed by a tour of the college and lunch.

The afternoon will commence with a lecture from Gary Crossley on the Cornish experience and then after tea we shall convene a panel and audience

discussion of what more we can do now to record, make known, save, conserve, and repurpose chapels and their wider history. We are planning for the panel to include both those involved in heritage and preservation as well as those from the denominations.

The cost is a modest £50 for Chapels Society members, to include lunch, and we hope that many of you will want to register using the flyer and be able to join us on the day.

## PERSONALIA

*Ian Serjeant introduces himself...*

I am very much looking forward to taking up the role of Casework Officer for the Chapels Society. Some of you with Methodist connections may remember me (fondly I hope) from my sixteen years as Connexional Conservation Officer. I have been a member of the Chapels Society for some years and contributed to the publication *Sitting in Chapel*. My particular interest is in the Leeds architect James Simpson who, in my opinion, is unequalled in terms of both quantity and quality. My interest in chapel and church architecture is, however, much broader. So much so that I am currently a member of the Bristol Diocesan Advisory Committee for church buildings, having previously served on the equivalent Diocesan Committees in Blackburn and Gloucester. I hope you keep me busy!



*Central Methodist Church, St Saviourgate, York (Grade II\*) by James Simpson (1840)  
(reproduced from Wikimedia under a Creative Commons licence)*

# SKETCH OF A JOURNEY: PART TWO

AN ARTICLE BY GILL FITZPATRICK

Part one of this article focussed on Richard Fletcher's observations and experiences in Darwen, Lancashire as related in his *Sketch of a journey to Lancaster, Preston, Darwen, Manchester and Liverpool taken in September 1823*. This second part concentrates on the observations he made in Liverpool and Manchester.

As a builder he was extremely interested in all structures and frequently referred to methods of building different from those in his home of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, especially when he thought them more advanced or useful.

Although this article will primarily concentrate on Nonconformist chapels, Richard, himself a Nonconformist, was completely ecumenical in his interest, describing both churches and chapels. Writing in 1823, he saw the beginnings of the building of the Commissioners' Churches, some of which no longer stand and others which have been considerably altered since.

Having set off from Newcastle on 12th September 1823, Richard and his brother-in-law, William Greaves, also a builder, first arrived in Manchester in the late afternoon of the 15th. Their reason for going there was that his son, soon to be the Reverend Richard Fletcher, was attending the Missionary Services being held at Grosvenor Street Independent Chapel, their minister at the time being the renowned Reverend William Roby:

The approach to Manchester by Salford conveys irresistably the idea of entering a large, populous & commercial town, not only from the number of steeples in view before crossing the river but more particularly from such a great quantity of cotton manufactories seen in every direction & which are easily known by their extraordinary high chimnies. The coach stopped at the Star Inn in Deansgate after taking some refreshment went to the anniversary of the London auxiliary Missionary Society held at Mr Roby's Chapel, Grosvenor Street Piccadilly. Joseph Trueman Esqr. In the Chair. The speakers were Dr Stewart of Liverpool, Mr Arundel of London, Mr McAll of Macclesfield, Mr Townly from India & Mr Fletcher one of Mr Roby's people. The different speakers exhibited much talent & zeal for the Missionary cause. The crowded audience felt very much interested by Mr Townly's forcible appeal in his recital of various facts connected with the idolatrous worship of India which he had witnessed. After prayer and a verse or two being sung to the old 100 psalm tune, the meeting broke up about ½ past 9. It is a large & commodious chapel. The collection this evening amounted to 90£ the whole of the money collected within Roby's chapel for the missionary cause after the different services was 350£. The aggregate collected in Manchester on this interesting occasion amounted to 670£.

Unfortunately, Richard gave no further description of the chapel apart from it being 'large & commodious' and the time spent in Manchester was shorter than he expected. He did manage a visit to the Collegiate Church (now Manchester Cathedral) where he was interested in the work going on to install a new boiler in order to heat the church by steam.

Richard had wanted to stay longer at the Missionary Meetings, but:

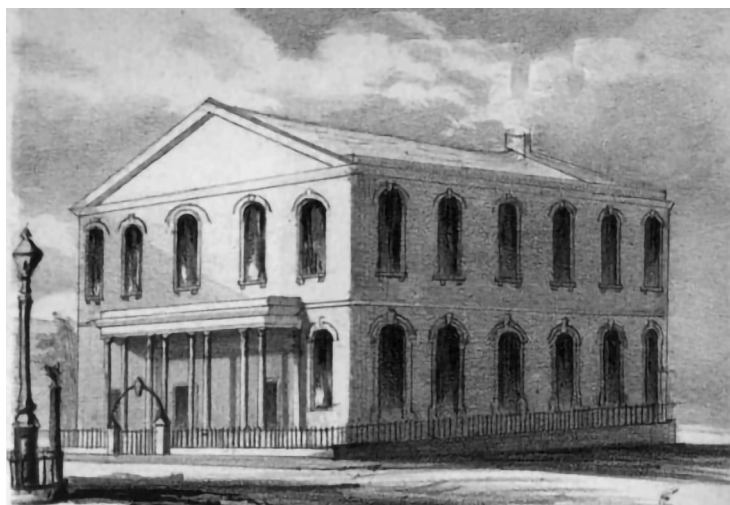
My Brother William having a strong desire to visit Liverpool while in this quarter requested me to accompany him to this I as strongly objected wishing rather to stop and sit down at the publick Missionary Communion Table in the evening at Mr. Roby's Chapel, however my objections were overruled by both Richard & my Brother, and I had reluctantly to consent to the proposition.

It soon became clear though that Richard enjoyed the visit immensely.

They were fascinated by the docks, huge in comparison with those of Newcastle. Whilst in the dock area:

Standing on the upper extremity of the piers and looking up the river most likely we were within sight of the place where the lamented Spencer came to a Premature death while bathing, but as there was no one to direct us to the spot it passed over unnoticed.

The Reverend Thomas Spencer was an extremely popular young preacher who came to Liverpool in 1811 to take up a pastorate at the Newington Chapel. Only



*Great George Street Chapel as Richard Fletcher would have seen it.  
This building was destroyed by fire in 1840.*



six months later he was drowned in a swimming accident, although his memory was to live on.

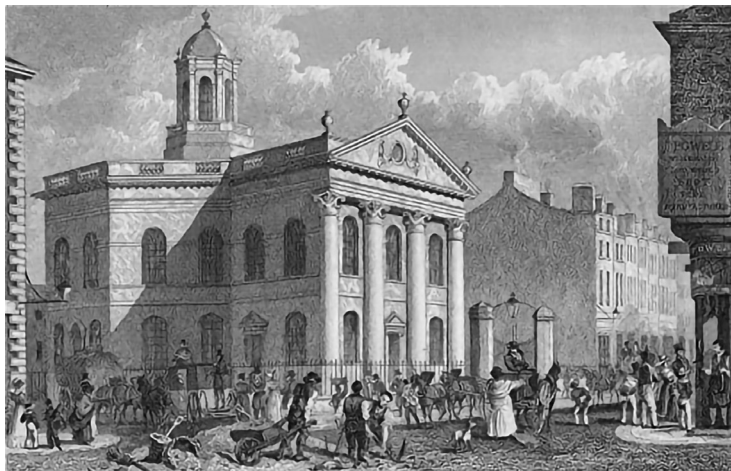
Still on the docks, Richard ‘Observed a fine steam vessel and a large floating chapel in the docks.’ This is likely to have been the non-denominational, floating chapel on the ex-whaling ship, *William*, which had been purchased jointly by the Liverpool Seamen’s Friend Society and the Bethel Union in 1821. This was the first floating chapel in Liverpool and was formally opened in 1822.

Richard and William soon realised that they were not going to be able to see everything they wanted to as they had to be in Darwen the following day, but:

We wished to see Dr Raffles’ Chapel at any rate. On enquiring we were directed up Duke Street and found it at the head of Great George Street. It is a large chapel built with bricks 100 feet long by 63 feet broad. It was built for Revd. Thomas Spencer who six months after his ordination was drowned in the river at the premature age of 20. Dr Raffles\* succeeded him and is the present minister. The Chapel being isolated, we walked round it. It has a portico in front of stone. There is a range of 4 couplets of columns 8 in all.

Not far from this they:

Saw a very handsome edifice the front of which is stone richly ornamented.  
Was informed it is a Chapel belonging to the Unitarians, it is the handsomest



*The Unitarian Chapel, Paradise Street, Liverpool in 1829.  
From an engraving by J Smith after G and C Payne.*

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\* By a pleasing coincidence, the owner of Richard Fletcher’s manuscript is also the great, great, great, great granddaughter of Dr Thomas Raffles.



dissenting Chapel I ever met with, the Roman Catholic Chapel in Edinburgh excepted. At the same time it may be noticed that while the Unitarian Chapel Liverpool is of excellent modern architecture that of Edinburgh is a sumptuous rich Gothic structure.

‘It was not without a degree of reluctance that we left Liverpool so early as 6 o’clock in the morning, after so short a visit.’ It was at this point that they returned to Darwen to be present at his son’s ordination as described in the first part of this article. After this had taken place, they started their journey home to Newcastle.

Richard Fletcher died in February 1832 and thus would have known that his son, the Reverend Richard Fletcher, succeeded William Roby as minister of the Grosvenor Street Chapel in June 1831.

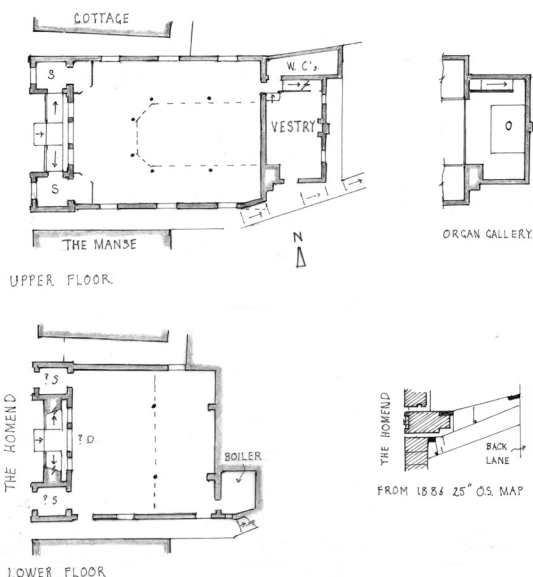
*With many thanks to the owner of the manuscript, Karen Philbin, who is keen to share the work of her four times great grandfather and has photographed the pages and produced the transcription used above. **References and further reading:** The Sketch of a Journey covers many interesting observations which Richard Fletcher made on his journey, including chapels and churches, factories and mills, the Liverpool docks and Exchange buildings, bridges and some early infrastructure of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, as well as some of the people he met. If anyone one would like to see the entire transcript, please contact the Hon. Editor who has a copy.*

***Sources:** Nightingale, B. ‘Lancashire Non-conformity’ (J. Heywood, [1890-1893]) is available at <https://archive.org/details/lancashirenoncon04nighuoft/page/n1/mode/2up> Shaw, J.G. ‘History and traditions of Darwen and its people’ (J. & G. Toulmin, 1889).*

## THE WESLEYAN METHODIST CHAPEL, THE HOMEND, LEDBURY, HEREFORDSHIRE

AN ARTICLE BY J. EDWARD C. PETERS

The present Wesleyan Methodist chapel in Ledbury dates from 1849 but was much altered in 1885. Wesley had passed through the town in 1782 but did not preach there. The cause seems to have begun in about 1811, when a mission station was recorded. This was probably the building registered for services the following year, being the first entry in the Bishop’s Register for Nonconformists in the town. It was briefly the head of a circuit in 1811, which position was reinstated in 1813. The first chapel recorded was a converted cottage on the south side of New Street, near the Upper Cross. In 1831 a new chapel was built in Union Lane, near the north end of the town, on the west side of The Homend. It was registered the following year. From the Tithe Map the chapel appears to have been a square building. It was sold after the present chapel had been opened,



*A plan of the layout of the Chapel showing (inset)  
its position in relation to the Homend*

which had been paid off by 1855. The building is of plain brick, the chapel at first-floor level, originally approached by external steps directly from the road. They were of stone, and were described in 1871 as steep and awkward, with narrow treads. The side windows had semi-circular heads and cast-iron frames; there were three lancets in the gable to the road. The body of the chapel had high, square pews, supplemented by benches: the pulpit was described as an elevated box. A gallery ran round three sides. At the rear was a slightly narrower section, cut into the slope, for the vestry, with a gallery over for the orchestra. This was later used for the organ. Below the chapel there were two rooms at the front, being the front half of what became the Sunday School: these rooms were accommodation for the caretaker. From the rough finish to the brickwork in the north wall at the front, the chapel must have been built against an earlier building there. The present passage must relate to the rebuilding of the cottage in the later 19th century.

At the Religious Census of 1851 the chapel was returned as containing 450 seats, pew rents being paid on 300 of them (pew rents were still being paid for the lower part of the chapel in 1876). On the relevant Sunday the congregation was 189 in the morning, 327 in the evening. At some stage in the next thirty years the caretaker's accommodation was combined into one room for the Sunday School. Improvements to the seating were proposed in 1871, the pews in the lower part of the chapel being considered too deep, and the free

and was converted into two cottages, reported as still standing in 1886.

A new chapel having been decided on, a cottage and related plot on the east side of The Homend was purchased from John Bethel of Castle Frome: it was further south, and so nearer the town centre. The plot extended to the back lane, now Homend Crescent; the ground rose steeply from The Homend, the chapel having in consequence to be partly cut into the slope. It was built very rapidly by John Brewer of Walsall in Staffordshire, at least partly financed by a mortgage,



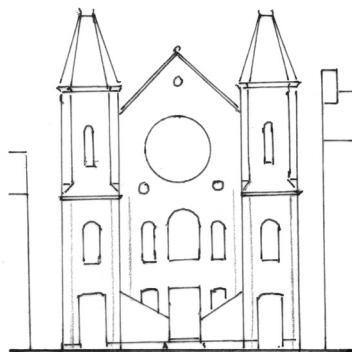
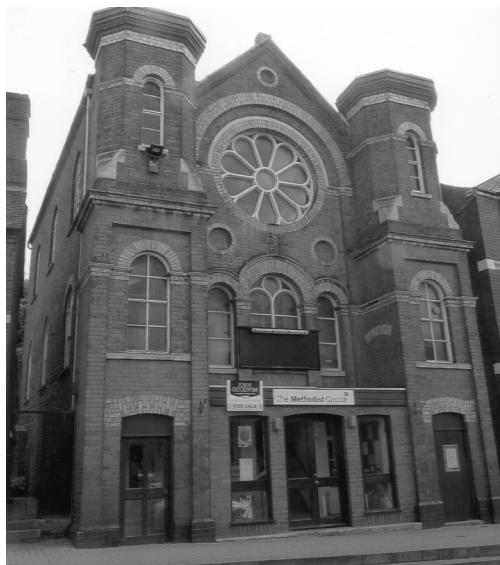
*The interior of the Chapel (photograph copyright the author)*

benches were then still without backs. It is not clear, however, whether any improvements were made: financing depended on subscriptions. Lighting, by then, was by gas.

In 1884 it was decided to reconstruct the front of the chapel and thoroughly remodel the interior. The work was designed by W. Jones of Gloucester who, four years earlier, had designed the manse: this adjoins the chapel on the south. The builder employed was George Hill of Ledbury. The front was rebuilt in red brick with yellow dressings: a large, circular window improved the light inside. There are two projecting turrets, one each side, originally with conical, lead-covered caps. Access to the lower floor was by lobbies in the bases of the turrets, entered direct from the road. The upper, chapel floor was reached by steps rising steeply from a central landing to the sides of the turrets; the steps must have continued a little further inside to reach the chapel floor level. Above, the turrets contained stairs to the gallery: whether there were also stairs from the Sunday School level below is not clear. The Sunday School was doubled in size by cutting back into the slope, with a small room beyond for the central heating boiler.

The floor to the chapel was raised 20 inches to improve headroom below, and presumably also ventilation. The galleries were extended six inches at the front; the main body repewed in pitch pine. The organ gallery was lowered somewhat, so that the vestry floor had also to be lowered, and is now a few steps down from the chapel. The organ was reported as having been reconstructed by Nicholsons of Worcester: it had been installed in 1864 or '5 to replace the orchestra. During the building work services had been held in the town hall, the chapel being reopened in March 1886.

Repairs were needed to the turrets and central heating as early as 1895. Additional W.C. accommodation was built adjoining the vestry in 1925,



TO THE HOMEND, c. 1904.

*The exterior of the Chapel in its present form with alongside an artist's impression of the front in c1906 (copyright the author)*

replacing an earlier timber building. In 1931 the manse was let, a new one having been purchased elsewhere in the town. The old one was later sold. At some stage the conical roofs to the turrets were replaced by flat ones.

In 1970 the chapel interior was refitted, from when date the present pulpit and communion enclosure, also the organ front. The pews in the main part of the chapel were replaced by chairs, but those in the gallery retained. The railing on top of the gallery front was presumably to meet safety requirements. Twelve years later the entrance was remodelled: the external steps were replaced by a single, internal flight rising from a new lobby infilling the space between the turrets. A single, easier stair to the gallery replaced those in the turrets. The font seen in 2018 was a miniature, pottery one, with a lid and Perpendicular tracery to the sides of the bowl. It probably dates from the third quarter of the 19th century.

There is a narrow, open passage on the south between the chapel and the old manse. This provided access to the rear of the Sunday School room, and to the vestry, and beyond to the rear of the plot running back to Homend Crescent. This route seems to have been used by some members of the congregation who lived off the Crescent.

By 2018 it had been decided to find smaller accommodation, but use of the old chapel was continued, pending its sale. The writer saw over the building in 2011, and again in 2018, on the latter occasion through the kindness of

Goodwins, estate agents. The description was written whilst the chapel was still in use, before the sale was completed in 2020. The congregation now meets in Bye Street.

*Documentary and other sources were consulted at the Herefordshire Archive and Record Centre, including minute books and other papers relating to the chapel, and the Bishop's Register, licensing places of worship, 1772-1852. Also consulted were 'Ledbury' by T. Ward (Tempus Publishing, 1996), 'Herefordshire' by A. Brooks and N. Pevsner (Yale, 2012) and, C.F. Stell on miniature fonts in 'A Church as it should be' (Shaun Tyas, 2000).*

## EBENEZER STRICT & PARTICULAR BAPTIST CHAPEL, HEADINGLEY

AN ARTICLE BY GERARD CHARMLEY

Ebenezer Particular Baptist Chapel stands in a garden, set back from Grove Lane which, despite its name, is a busy road connecting the Leeds suburbs of Meanwood and Headingley, screened behind trees and scrub. The trees which screen the chapel from the road, and have led to some ignoring its existence, also serve to muffle some of the traffic noise during meetings. The setting is almost stereotypical leafy suburbia, being located in what was once the grounds of a villa of the edge of Leeds. The chapel's bold, modernistic lines announce that it is a product of the 1960s.

Although the chapel opened in 1967, the Strict Baptist church at Leeds dates back to the 1850s, when a group influenced by the preaching of William Gadsby of Manchester and John Kershaw of Rochdale began to meet in a rented room on Rockingham Street, Leeds, close to where the Merrion Centre stands today. By 1860 this little group was confident enough to call a pastor in the form of Thomas Clough, a former coal-miner and Primitive Methodist preacher from County Durham, and to consider erecting a chapel of their own. This first chapel was built at the junctions of St. James' Street and Sunny-Bank Street, not far from the old room, and opened in January 1862. It was designed by Thomas Ambler, a Leeds architect who later became known for his work on the rebuilding of Boar Lane. In 1913 this chapel was subject to a compulsory purchase order by Leeds Corporation, who required the site in order to build a new civic centre. Land was acquired at Mount Preston, close to the university, and a second chapel planned. The architect chosen was another local man, W. Peel Schofield, who also designed the striking Christian Science church on Headingley Hill (erected 1912). This second chapel was in turn purchased by the University of Leeds, which was eager to round out its estate, in 1966.

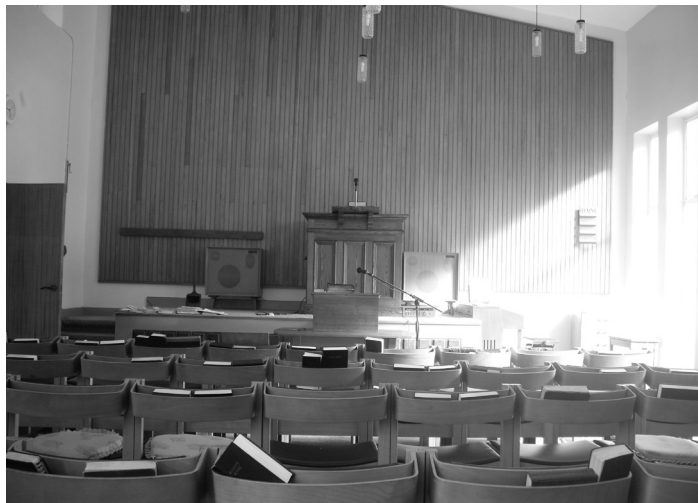
The university offered to buy the congregation a plot similar in size to that in which this second chapel stood, and build them a chapel of the same size. The current site was discovered by the late deacon, Gerald Asquith, when driving back from a holiday. The chapel was designed by H. Waddington of Braithwaite and Jackson (coincidentally then based at Templar House, a former United Methodist Free Churches chapel). Waddington, architect for Leeds Corporation, had never designed a place of worship before, and determined to create a striking building which would also have low maintenance costs, the congregation being neither large nor wealthy, and the two deacons being aware of the difficulties of looking after a building which did require extensive maintenance. Since it was built on a greenfield site which had previously been a market garden, and was significantly larger than the planned chapel (the council having agreed to the purchase of a similar amount of land to that surrounding the old chapel, with the addition of six hundred square yards to reflect the difference in land values between the old and new sites). Waddington possessed considerable freedom as regarded the layout of the chapel, which was to have a kitchen, toilets and a schoolroom in addition to the main sanctuary. The chapel was also built with a car park designed to hold sufficient cars for the congregation, a recognition that a number of the members of the church and congregation did not come from the immediate area.

A number of economies had to be made during the construction of the chapel. The planned stone cladding to at least the façade was dropped on grounds of cost at an early stage. This was no loss, as the contrast between grey and yellow brick adds to the striking appearance of the chapel. The discovery of a land drain under the site during construction meant that more had to be spent on the foundations than envisaged, preventing the installation of under-floor heating.

Waddington's plans originally envisaged a platform-style pulpit with a central lectern, of a type popular at the time, but these had to be altered after the church insisted on retaining the pulpit from the second chapel. This had been constructed by one of the church members, whose family were still members of the congregation. The result was that the old pulpit was cut down and placed on the platform, creating a rather higher pulpit than was initially envisaged, but also retaining a fine wooden pulpit which is the sole surviving item of furniture from a previous chapel. This is offset by a background of wooden panelling which has been bleached by the sunshine of more than fifty years. The original organ, by Wood Wordsworth, has since been replaced by an electric organ.

The height of the chapel is often remarked on, especially given the relatively small size of the sanctuary area. This height does mean that changing the light bulbs is a serious undertaking, but since the installation of energy-saving bulbs this task has not had to be attempted in recent times. The slope of the roof permits for high-level windows on the side adjoining the corridor which leads to





*The interior of Ebenezer Chapel, Headingley  
(photograph copyright the author)*

the kitchen and toilets, adding to the excellent illumination of the chapel, and occasionally producing the effect of a ray of light shining down directly onto the pulpit. Although curtains were originally provided for the chapel, these have since been removed as they quickly became dirty – they were not bought for the chapel, but supplied by a member of the congregation after he moved house.

The chapel seating was originally supposed to consist of oak pews, but these were ultimately rejected on grounds of cost. An attempt was made to purchase pews from a recently closed chapel at Siddal, near Halifax, but those that were left there were found unsuitable. One of the members attended a trade union meeting and found the interlocking chairs with upholstered seats and backs there comfortable, so decided to order these for the chapel, which has had the unintended effect of making the sanctuary more of a flexible space than originally envisaged. The schoolroom/vestry to the rear of the chapel contains similar seating, in addition to a large table which is intended for use by those members of the congregation who remain for lunch between the services: this was originally a work bench.

A burglary saw the theft of a number of antique items from the chapel, including the original Communion table, which was replaced by the current table, a gift from the late deacon, Gerald Asquith, who varnished it, having bought it from a second-hand shop. The chair behind the table was formerly owned by Mr Leslie Faulkner, who was briefly pastor at the chapel. The lectern was constructed by one of the congregation, most likely Gerald Asquith. The carpets, which cover original tiled floors, were added at a later date, and were



*The striking modernist exterior of Ebenezer Chapel, Headingley  
(photograph copyright the author)*

supplied by a former organist, Mr Bernard Mitcham, who worked for a carpet firm and was able to get them at a significantly discounted rate.

The exterior of the chapel is brick, the main sanctuary grey brick, and the porch, kitchen and vestry of yellow brick, with a concrete slab roof thick enough to be walked on, and covered originally with mineral felt. The sanctuary windows are set in concrete panels, with aluminium frames, rising almost to the full height of the building. The main entrance doors are of wood, and kitchen and vestry have Crittall windows. Blue and pink floor tiles distinguish gentlemen's and ladies' toilets, the fittings of which (with those of the kitchen) are original.

The main worship space or sanctuary is painted in light colours, and is calming and well-ventilated. The Baptistry however betrays the inexperience of the architect, being rather short but quite deep – apparently the architect thought candidates for baptism would stand in the water and have water poured on their heads!

Whilst the congregation has declined in recent years, Ebenezer Chapel remains used for regular worship, with two services on Sunday and a mid-week meeting on Thursday evenings. Over the past decade the sound system, roof, and heating have been renewed, without fundamentally altering the character of this fascinating little modernist building. Taken as a whole, the building and its fittings both express the confidence of the 1960s, given the bold lines of the building, but also the love of the congregation for the building, since many of the moveable fittings, and even the sound system have been supplied and even constructed, by the congregation, providing a link with the past.

# NEWS AND NOTES

## **The Association of Denominational Historical Societies and Cognate Libraries**

This clumsily named group – ADHSCL to its friends – of which we are founder members is holding its AGM on Zoom at 2.00 pm on Thursday 4 November. A lecture follows at 2.30 pm given by Prof. David Bebbington on 'Fin de Siecle Nonconformity: The Concerns of the Young at Brunswick Wesleyan Chapel, Leeds in the 1890s'. Our Secretary will be sent the Zoom link and can send it to members who contact him at [Chapelsociety@googlemail.com](mailto:Chapelsociety@googlemail.com)

## **Further news of Richard Fletcher**

*Frank Law writes:* Gill Fitzpatrick's article in the last *Newsletter* ended with Richard Fletcher the younger migrating to Australia. Further light is shed on his life as a Congregational minister by referring to the online Australian Dictionary of National Biography (ADNB). He doesn't have his own entry but his co-worker, the Revd John Legg Poore, does; in so doing there is much insight into Richard's life. There is also coverage of his third son, the Revd William Roby Fletcher (1833-94), who was named after William Roby who Richard had succeeded at Grosvenor St Chapel, Manchester. A daughter, Margaret, married the Revd John Jacob Halley (1834-1910) who is also covered in ADNB; he grew up in Manchester, where his father was pastor of the Mosley St Congregational Chapel, and migrated to Australia around 1855.

## **Photographs wanted**

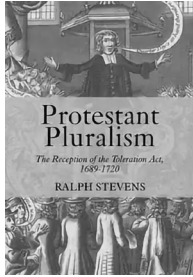
Prof. J S Curl has written that he is preparing a new edition of his *Book of Victorian churches* (1995) and is looking for good colour photographs of the following: the exterior of Union Chapel, Islington; Todmorden Unitarian church (inside and out); and the interiors of Mill Hill Unitarian chapel, Leeds; Unitarian church, Ullet Road, Liverpool; Dukinfield Unitarian chapel, Cheshire; and the former Catholic Apostolic church, Gordon Square. If any member has such available please contact the author at [jscurl@btinternet.com](mailto:jscurl@btinternet.com)

## **A notable hospital chapel – and a challenge**

Alec Hamilton in his recent book, *Arts & Crafts Churches*, drew attention to the Grade II\* Mount Vernon Hospital chapel of 1902-4 by Frederick Wheeler, describing it as a 'Voyseyan' church with the added, typically Hamiltonian, parenthesis – 'Voysey built no churches'. There are set of excellent photographs of the building on the recently completed website 'London Churches in photographs' at [londonchurchbuildings.com](http://londonchurchbuildings.com). This site is well worth a visit but has one disadvantage – it restricts itself to Anglican, Catholic and Orthodox buildings! My parting challenge to you is why is there not such a website for Nonconformist buildings in London?

## BOOK REVIEW

Ralph Stevens. *Protestant Pluralism: The Reception of the Toleration Act 1689-1720*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2018. 220 pages, hardback. ISBN 978-1-78327-329-4. £65.



The Toleration Act 1689 was a key moment in English religious history. The English reformation settlements and the restoration of the crown and episcopacy in 1660 assumed an identity between church and state: worshippers gathered in their parish church as the community gathered before God. However, the Church's nature, in terms of theology, ministry and worship, was disputed. Was it radically Reformed, or merely a reformed part of the Catholic Church? Its Thirty-Nine Articles and Prayer Book were ambiguous but held most people's views in tension. However, from the 1560s, stricter Reformers and Catholics struggled to impose their interpretation and to exclude other views. Some sought a Presbyterian establishment without bishops or an ordered liturgy. Others, Independents (later Congregationalists) denying the possibility of a national church, identified the church as congregations of the godly gathered out of the community, choosing their own minister. Others rejected infant baptism, requiring adult baptism for church membership. During the Civil Wars episcopacy and the Prayer Book were abolished, but otherwise religious uniformity was not imposed, and more radical groups emerged, of whom only Quakers, who denied any distinct ministerial order, significantly survived after 1660. At the Restoration, led by Presbyterians, in 1660 Charles II offered Presbyterians inclusion in the restored episcopal Church, but the House of Commons, dominated by episcopalian laymen, fearing radical millenarianist groups were seeking to overthrow the restored monarchy and Church, rejected it, and imposed strict oaths of conformity to the Prayer Book, with penalties on ministers not using it, and on people gathering to worship apart from the parish church. This was fitfully enforced and when in 1688 James II began moves to restore England to the papacy, dissenters and Anglicans united to invite his Dutch Calvinist son-in-law, William, to invade with his army and James fled to Catholic France. William sought to broaden the established Church to include moderate Presbyterians, beginning with legislation in 1689 granting trinitarian dissenters toleration to worship in licensed meeting houses, followed by further legislation modifying the Prayer Book to be acceptable to Presbyterians. The House of Commons rejected this, for episcopalians suspected William's Calvinism and his granting a presbyterian settlement in Scotland. England was protestant, but not exclusively Anglican. The tensions in the English Reformation were partially resolved by recognizing a degree of religious pluriformity, with an established Church, and toleration for dissenters

from the Church, permitting chapels to be built and the development of chapel cultures.

The Toleration Act, however, was ambiguous. Trinitarian dissenters might meet in unlocked premises registered with the bishop or by magistrates, but to hold public office people had to be communicants in their parish church. That was not necessarily a problem, for numerous people attended both their parish church and a meeting house, enjoying sermons and comparing preachers' performances. Record of baptism in the parish baptism register remained the best legal evidence of birth and eligibility for poor relief; marriage in a parish church remained the only legal form of marriage. Schoolmasters required a bishop's license, but was teaching by unlicensed dissenting teachers legal? These and other matters were hotly disputed for the next thirty years. Although legislation had granted a degree of toleration to dissenters, not all Anglicans became tolerant.

Ralph Stevens provides an excellent accessible and lucid account of the working out of these ambiguities at the local level in parishes and towns. Anglicans were divided in their responses to the Toleration Act. Some conservatives wanted to return to 'Good King Charles's golden days' by restricting, or better, abolishing toleration, while others, whom they denounced as 'latudinarians' or 'low churchmen', more pragmatically sought to compete with dissenters by reforming and refurbishing their Church's pastoral ministry. It was a period of political and religious dissension, with occasional riots when Anglican mobs demolished or burnt meeting houses.

Dr Stevens examines these issues in chapters on holding public office, moral reform, education, and controversy over baptism in meeting houses. Chapter 6, on chapels, will be of particular interest to Chapels Society members for it explores controversies triggered by the Toleration Act over places of worship. Some dissenting congregations marked their new freedom to worship by building impressive new meeting houses, like in 1693 Norwich's Old Meeting House. Elsewhere, especially in the vast non-nucleated parishes of Staffordshire, Cheshire, Lancashire and West Yorkshire, subdivided into chapelries, like Whalley with sixteen chapelries and Halifax in the West Riding with twelve, chapels' status was unclear. As Christopher Stell pointed out, when chapels had been built and endowed by the congregation and the curate ministering to them was unsympathetic to the restored Prayer Book some continued in their old ways long after 1662.\* Sympathetic magistrates responsible for enforcing the legislation requiring conformity to the Prayer Book held back from prosecuting preachers like Oliver Heywood for occasionally preaching in a range of chapels on either side of the Pennines. At Chowbent chapel in Leigh in Lancashire, built by the landowner

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\* Christopher Stell, *Architects of Dissent: Some Nonconformist Patrons and their Architects*, Dr Williams Library, 1976.

and his tenants in 1645, the minister, failing to conform in 1662, remained until his death in 1695, when his son took over. At the vicar's visits the minister's supporters absented themselves, but tactfully put out the Prayer Book for him. Sometimes in the predominantly Presbyterian-sympathising diocese of Chester, comprising Cheshire and Lancashire, congregations with a dissenting majority, for example at Birch Chapel in Manchester, registered their chapels as meeting houses. At Over Darwen in Blackburn parish, dissenters took over the township chapel which only had a monthly service and no endowment. When, however, Anglicans recovered it, dissenters built their own meeting house. A survey in 1692 identified dissenters using twenty-two chapels which could reasonably be regarded as intended for Church of England worship. Congregations sought to register at least three such chapels in Cheshire and fourteen in Lancashire, as meeting houses. Nicholas Stratford, bishop of Chester from 1691, instructed his registrar to object to any applications to register chapels which had been consecrated or of longstanding Anglican use. When the curate of Hindley chapel in Wigan parish died in 1690 puritans in the congregation applied to register it as a meeting house, which the bishop successfully opposed. However, the chapel trustees retained the endowment, and the majority resolved to use it to pay the dissenting minister. After seven years of legal cases the minority of conforming trustees won, and the bishop consecrated it. The dissenting element withdrew and in 1700 opened a Presbyterian meeting house. Presbyterian gentry and magistrates sometimes supported such registrations and resisted Anglican attempts to recover them. At Ringway chapel in Bowden in Cheshire the earl of Warrington and the Crews of Crew Hall supported dissenters occupying the out-of-repair chapel. They retained it until the Crew heir in 1721 claimed it was his property and made it over to the parish, Thereupon the congregation built a meeting house. At Idle in Calverley in the West Riding, dissenters registered the chapel as a meeting house in 1689, but the parish recovered it in 1716, whereupon an Independent meeting house was opened there. Some chapels remained in dissenting hands, for example Elswick Chapel in St Michael-on-Wyre in Lancashire and Stannington in Yorkshire.

Dr Stevens' research throws important new light on this complex period of religious history and on the origins of some Independent and Presbyterian (often subsequently Unitarian) chapels.

*Bill Jacob.*

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