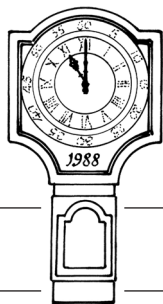


THE CHAPELS SOCIETY



Newsletter 79

January 2022



The first of many: St Bede's Roman Catholic Church (1847), Appleton Village, Widnes, Cheshire. Designed by J.G. Weightman and M.E. Hadfield, it occupies the site of the town's original Catholic mission. This small town subsequently gained a remarkable range of additional Catholic churches, but retrenchment has followed more recently.

See the article on page 8 (photograph copyright Matt Davis)

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NOTICEBOARD

CHAPELS SOCIETY EVENTS

31 March 2022

Copy deadline for May 2022 *Newsletter*

30 April 2022

Communities of Dissent Conference, Harris Manchester College, Oxford (**booking deadline 9 April 2022**)

21 May 2022

Visit to Congleton and south-east Cheshire led by John Anderson (**booking deadline 23 April 2022**)

EDITORIAL

The Society's first 'day out' for two years, to Sale and Altrincham, was a tremendous success, as will be seen from the visit report in this edition. It is to be hoped that the post-pandemic era will allow us to enjoy again more regular visits, with all the incidental benefits they bring – exchanging information, broadening knowledge, and forming and renewing friendships – as well as the pleasure of discovering fascinating buildings and the stories behind them. This *Newsletter* has details of, and a flyer for, our spring visit to south-east Cheshire; and I am hoping to lead a trip to the south coast in the autumn. Watch this space!

This edition stays in the northwest at first, for a wander around Widnes, but then roams around all over England – including to Westminster Abbey, where an intriguing possible nonconformist connection has been identified. Meanwhile, the 'desecularisation digest' visits towns across the country and features a wide range of religious groups, all with one thing in common: the unusual former use of their meeting places.

PROCEEDINGS

VISIT TO SALE AND ALTRINCHAM, SATURDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2021

The long awaited and much anticipated first Chapels Society visit for two years was a day of variety – both of weather, which ranged from decidedly damp to surprisingly warm, and in the chapels visited in the packed itinerary splendidly arranged by our guide Roger Holden. Roger also provided some very comprehensive notes, well worth reading even, or perhaps especially, by those who weren't able to make it on the day.

Most of our party having assembled at Manchester Piccadilly station – others joined later, having made their own separate ways to Sale – we made our way into the basement to the Metrolink platforms and boarded the tram. The trams were to be busy, our visit coinciding with both a Manchester United match and a large concert at the Old Trafford cricket ground, but there is something very civilised about travelling by light rail rather than road. Alighting, a walk through Sale town centre took us to the **Quaker Meeting House and Burial Ground**. Refreshed by some very welcome tea and biscuits we were able to look round the pleasantly spacious burial ground, the reason for the presence of the meeting house here, as explained by John Booth, the clerk of the meeting. Closure of urban burial grounds under the sanitary legislation of the mid-nineteenth century had obliged the Friends to seek a site outside of central Manchester for interments; the meeting house was built to serve it. Originally the meeting room



*The Friends Meeting House and attached cottage, Park Road, Sale
(photograph copyright Stuart Leadley)*

was upstairs, the ground floor being stables, hence the large arches converted to windows when the meeting moved downstairs early in the twentieth century. As might be expected, the burial ground is tidy and well maintained, with the usual smart but uniform Quaker headstones neatly laid out with numbered stones to assist with locating graves.

Back to the tram, and on to Altrincham. Our first call was to **Dunham Road Unitarian Chapel**, up the hill from the station. A small brick-built chapel in Gothic style on a corner site – much less extravagant than some of its better known Unitarian contemporaries in the Manchester/Cheshire area – it was designed by Thomas Worthington and opened in 1872. As is usually the case, the best spot for photographing the exterior was in the middle of a busy road. Inside, it is largely unaltered, with ‘churchy’ pews, pulpit, stained-glass, and organ. Lunch was taken in the ‘Small School’ adjacent – there also being a ‘Large School’ and a manse – before we moved on.

Next was the (Roman) **Catholic Church of St Vincent de Paul**, also Gothic, on a corner site, and without a tower, but in a rather more fiery red brick and considerably larger than the Unitarian building. Not as large as originally planned though: a shortage of funds meant that it had to be shortened from the original design of Edmund Kirby, who was responsible for several other churches in the diocese but who died during construction. The altar was brought forward in the reordering that followed the Second Vatican Council, but most of the original fittings, including stained glass by Hardman & Co., remain.

A change in the style of housing – larger and featuring yellow rather than red brick – heralded our transition from Altrincham proper to Bowdon. As we walked, there was some debate between Roger and Stephen Birchall, historian of Dissent in Altrincham, about which of the large houses may have been occupied by the Rev. Alexander Mackennal and other local non-conformist worthies: the conclusion seemed to be that Rev. Mackennal probably lived in several different houses at different times! We paused to view the **Bowdon Shul of the South Manchester Synagogue**: definitely not nineteenth-century Gothic, instead twenty-first-century brick and glass, opened by the Prince of Wales in 2003, as recorded on a plaque which could be read through the (locked) gates.

The **Bowdon Downs Church** is now in the keeping of the non-denominational Upper Room Christian Fellowship, having opened in 1849 as a larger replacement for the Bowdon Downs Chapel down the hill. The aforementioned Alexander Mackennal was minister here at the end of the nineteenth century. By the 1960s, the congregation had withered away, and when the Christian Fellowship acquired the building in 1979 considerable renovation was required, carried out largely by members of the church. The pews were removed, and other such changes as necessary for the current occupants’ style of worship made, but the large and elaborate central pulpit, the extraordinary ‘Singing Boys’ panel on the wall behind, and many memorials remain.



*Interior of the former Bowdon Downs [Congregational] Church, Bowdon,
near Altrincham – now home to the Upper Room Christian Fellowship
(photograph copyright Stuart Leadley)*

Another short walk took us to the former **Trinity Presbyterian Church**, now converted to residential use. More Victorian Gothic, this time in stone and with a tower, which features some fearsome dragon gargoyles and a strangely truncated spire (it's not the photographer's fault).

Now the sun came out properly and sunglasses replaced umbrellas for our exterior viewing of the **Eglwys Bresbyteraidd Cymru (Presbyterian Church of Wales)** chapel, a red-brick (back in Altrincham rather than Bowdon) box opened in 1903 on a constrained site. It is small and unpretentious, but with some cut-brick detailing to frame the arched windows.

The final proper call of the day was to the **Altrincham Baptist Church**. The history of the chapel and its relationship to the other churches in the area was outlined in an illustrated talk by Stephen Birchall, historian and member of the congregation, who had accompanied us throughout the day. Fitted into a long and narrow site, the chapel was built upwards, with school accommodation in the basement, now refurbished as multi-purpose rooms, and the main worship space above. It opened in 1879, and has since been through a series of extensions, alterations, and refurbishments, including the installation and later removal of an organ, the demolition of the tower which adorned the frontage, and most recently the creation of a glazed entrance foyer making the building fully accessible.

Two more chapels were seen in passing on the way back to the station: the **Primitive Methodist Chapel**, opened 1875 and now the Altrincham Little Theatre, and **The Downs Chapel**, built in 1838 and seemingly used successively by nearly every non-conformist congregation in the area but now incorporated into shops.

At the station, we were greeted by news of delays to trams caused by ASB – not, apparently, some Anglican plot* but anti-social behaviour in the centre of Manchester. A slightly frustrating end to a fascinating and varied day, not only visiting chapels but also enjoying the social side of the Society and finally being able to catch up with friends long unseen.

* ASB = Alternative Service Book, a now superseded prayer book of the Church of England

Stuart Leadley

VISIT TO CONGLETON AND SOUTH-EAST CHESHIRE, 21 MAY 2022

Details of the Society's spring visit and how to book are given on the enclosed flyer. We will visit six chapels of widely differing dates and styles in a mostly rural part of Cheshire, centred on Congleton. If you wish to attend, please ensure you have returned your booking form by Saturday 23 April 2022.

CASEWORK OFFICER – NEW EMAIL ADDRESS

The Society now has a dedicated email address for casework, which can be used to contact our Casework Officer Ian Serjeant about chapels at risk, assistance with listing or planning matters and similar: *chapelsocietycasework@gmail.com*.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Sad news

Long-time member of the Society, and former member of Council, Roger Thorne of Exeter, passed away in November 2021. A fuller appreciation of Roger's life and contributions to the Society and Methodism by Chris Skidmore appears below.

Good news

We are pleased to be able to welcome as new members of the Society Peter Knowles of London and Jonathan Rodell of Petworth in West Sussex. Dr Rodell is interested in Methodism, Bedfordshire and West Sussex, and is currently working on the 1851 census for London.

Stuart Leadley

ROGER THORNE (1940–2021)

Roger Thorne, who died on 21st November 2021, was one of the founder members of the Chapels Society and a member of its Council in the early days (1989–1991) as well as returning for a further period in 2007. Indeed, as he recalled in a piece in *Newsletter* 56, he was also a member of the immediate predecessor body – the ‘Nonconformist Working Party’ of the Council for British Archaeology – which led to the publication of *Hallelujah!: Recording chapels and meeting houses* (1985).

With typical modesty, Roger described himself in the same article as ‘having expertise only in the minor chapels of the South-West’ when he was the leading expert on the chapels of the Bible Christians, the smallest of the five Methodist denominations into which the Wesleyans splintered in the early nineteenth century. Their heartland was Devon and Cornwall and Roger was a Devon man, born in Barnstaple, where the Bible Christian chapel was once ‘Thorne Memorial’, in tribute to James Thorne of Shebbear (1795–1872), the leading evangelist of the first generation.

Roger had a much wider range of knowledge than this ‘specialism’ might suggest. His publications were numerous, although usually modest in size, and included a number of bibliographies, articles in this *Newsletter*, in the national and regional proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, and in the Proceedings of the Devonshire Association, of which he was President in 2010–11. He was one of the co-authors of *A Methodist Guide to Bristol and the South-West* (1991) and contributed 26 articles to *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (2000), now online. His extensive photographic archive was donated to the Historic England library.

A chartered engineer by training, a long-time Methodist lay-preacher and a local magistrate, Roger led a busy life. He was a generous companion, often seen with an open smile on his face. The chapel crawl he led in July 2011 in Exeter, his home in retirement, was characterised by an eclectic selection of chapels including a Free Church of England and an evangelical congregation worshipping in a warehouse, and was prefaced with a comprehensive history of nonconformity in Exeter delivered by Roger without notes! His many friends in the Chapels Society will, as I do, remember him with affection. We offer our sincere condolences to his wife, Roslyn, and the family.

Chris Skidmore



CATHOLIC CONSOLIDATION IN WIDNES

AN ARTICLE BY MATT DAVIS

How many Catholic churches typically serve a town of 60,000 people in 21st-century Britain? ‘Par’ seems to be set at two, as at Dewsbury, Loughborough, Maidenhead, Margate, Taunton and various others. A few settlements of this size, such as Andover and Walton-on-Thames, have only one church. Particular demographic features and an energetic programme of post-war church-building in the Cheshire town of Widnes (2011 population 61,464), though, led to a situation where for much of the late 20th century as many as nine churches were in regular use. Even ten years ago there were eight. As congregations and available priests declined in number this position became unsustainable, and in 2015 eight parishes were consolidated into one and four churches closed. The media may sometimes exaggerate, but the local newspaper was surely right this time with its headline ‘Catholic Church in Widnes embarks on its biggest ever transformation’.

The Widnes area was historically part of the parish of Prescott. In the 12th century Farnworth – now a suburb, and not to be confused with the larger place near Bolton – was the principal settlement, and a chapel of ease to Prescott was built there and dedicated to St Wilfrid. (This is now St Luke’s Anglican church, having been rededicated in 1853.) After the Reformation Mass was held in secret at various locations: in particular, Edmund Arrowsmith (one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales) ministered locally and may have celebrated Mass at the home of the Catholic Hawarden family at Appleton. Three Hawardens went on to become priests during the penal years. In 1748 a formal mission was established at Appleton, and in 1750 or 1760 the first chapel was opened for public worship. It was dedicated to St Bede.

The first railway connection arrived in 1833, supplementing the Sankey Canal, and Widnes began to industrialise. The founding of the first chemicals factory in 1847 was the real spur for growth, and it was in that year that the old mission chapel was replaced by a much larger church. The new St Bede’s Church cost £3,000 or £4,000 (sources vary) and opened on 22 September 1847. Appleton, still nominally a separate village, was effectively a northern suburb of Widnes by now, and St Bede was soon unable to serve the growing population by itself. The town’s rapid industrialisation encouraged inward migration, and three predominantly Catholic nations were strongly represented: Ireland, Poland and Lithuania. There were said to be 2,000 Catholics in the town in 1862, 7,000 in 1876 and 8,300 by 1887.

Accordingly, in the mid-1850s a Mass Centre was founded at Ditton Hall in the village of Ditton, which was also beginning to join up with Widnes; and in 1862 outreach began in the Newtown area of dense, newly built terraced



The former St Marie's Church, Newtown, Widnes, photographed in September 2021

housing. A room was hired, then on 30 October 1864 work started on the 500-capacity St Marie's Church (also known at first as St Mary's Chapel). It cost £2,700; the chancel, built later, added another £400 or so. The first Mass at St Marie was held in September 1865. It was enlarged in 1876; Dr O'Reilly, Bishop of Liverpool, visited the town for the first time when he officiated at the reopening Mass. The mission at Ditton Hall was superseded in 1879 by St Michael's Church, founded by German Jesuits (which may explain its somewhat Germanic appearance) and built at a cost of £16,000; and the largest church yet, St Patrick, opened in the West Bank area on the riverfront on 24 June 1888, construction having taken 13 months.

These early developments were followed by a settled period when no more churches were opened – somewhat echoing the post-Emancipation pattern of church growth across the country. The next stage in that general pattern – a 25- to 30-year post-war period of sustained church-building – was certainly realised in Widnes. First, as the town expanded eastwards towards Warrington, another church was needed to serve several new estates of council and private housing. St John Fisher Church was built in 1951, parished immediately and registered in August 1952. This was followed in 1959 by a surge of church-building unusual even for that expansionist period. Two were built on the main Liverpool Road just one mile apart: Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, the more westerly church, served the modern housing of Ditton southeast of Hough Green railway station, while St Raphael catered for a similar post-war estate near Wigan Vikings R.L.F.C.'s

Halton Stadium. St Raphael was established by St Bede's Church, as was the third church – St Pius X, founded on 21 November 1959 as a chapel of ease to serve the Farnworth district (although by the time it was registered in May 1961 a separate parish had been erected). The priest occupied an older house behind the church which was bought for a presbytery. The final church to be founded was St Basil in Hough Green at the far west of town, where a large estate was built in the 1960s and 1970s principally to house people from redeveloped slums in Liverpool – many of whom were Catholics. A site was bought in 1968, and the following year the first Masses were celebrated at a newly built school. In 1971 a parish hall was built and registered; but by 1980 there was a desire to work closely with the estate's Anglican mission – which also had no permanent building – and on 30 May 1982 the first stone of the joint Church of St Basil and All Saints was laid after being blessed by Pope John Paul II during that year's famous Papal Visit. The first service was held on 9 February 1983. St Basil was the Catholic part of the dedication; the Anglicans chose All Saints.



St Basil and All Saints Church, Hough Green, photographed in September 2021

Such was the position by the late 20th century. A town of modest size, facing up to industrial change and decay, was supporting nine churches for its Catholic residents. The heyday of population growth had gone, and Mass attendance was no longer as high. The Diocese of Liverpool, home to an unusually great concentration of churches (partly because of the large proportion of Catholics in the city of Liverpool itself), had an ever smaller number of priests to allocate across its parishes. Four of the churches in Widnes were Victorian buildings in

various states of repair. Their geographical distribution was not ideal: a 1½-mile walk west from St Bede would pass two other churches, and St Marie and St Patrick were in areas where retail and industry had largely replaced housing. Closures were inevitable.

Some rationalisation took place before 2015. West Bank, directly across the Mersey from Runcorn and hemmed in between railways, a canal and the Silver Jubilee Bridge, declined into a slum district and was redeveloped from the 1960s. Several chapels and mission rooms of various denominations were demolished, but St Patrick hung on longer than most: the last Mass was celebrated on 23 November 1997. Demolition followed in February–March 1998, and the modern housing of St Patrick's Close, hard by a slip road, replaced it. St Marie was formally closed on 6 January 2007, but its worshippers moved across the road to a converted classroom within the neighbouring Catholic school and regular Masses were still celebrated. Latterly the old church sat within a small lawned area screened off from its industrial surroundings by an ugly low wall. Its closure resulted in a short period of disuse, and the Victorian Society considered it a building at risk, but in the event the fabric was well maintained. In 2013 or 2014 the building was acquired by Halton and St Helens Voluntary and Community Action, which provides advice and support to all manner of voluntary and community groups across the two boroughs. It is now one of their main bases. The grassed area was replaced by a new car park surrounded by an elegant new wall matching the red-and-dark-blue brickwork of the church, and the interior retains many of its rich features.



The former Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Ditton, photographed in September 2021: note the exceptionally steep gabled windows on the side elevation

The reorganisation of 2015, several years in the planning, involved combining the town's eight parishes into one, served by a team of priests, and closing the 'new' St Marie's church-in-the-classroom and the three 1959 buildings. Parishioners were asked to suggest a new name for the parish; St Wilfrid was chosen in view of its historical associations with the area. On 22 February 2015 a series of Masses took place across all eight churches to mark the 're-founding' of the Church in the town. After this, St Pius X, St Raphael, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and the 'classroom' church of St Marie all closed; they were formally deregistered in March 2016.

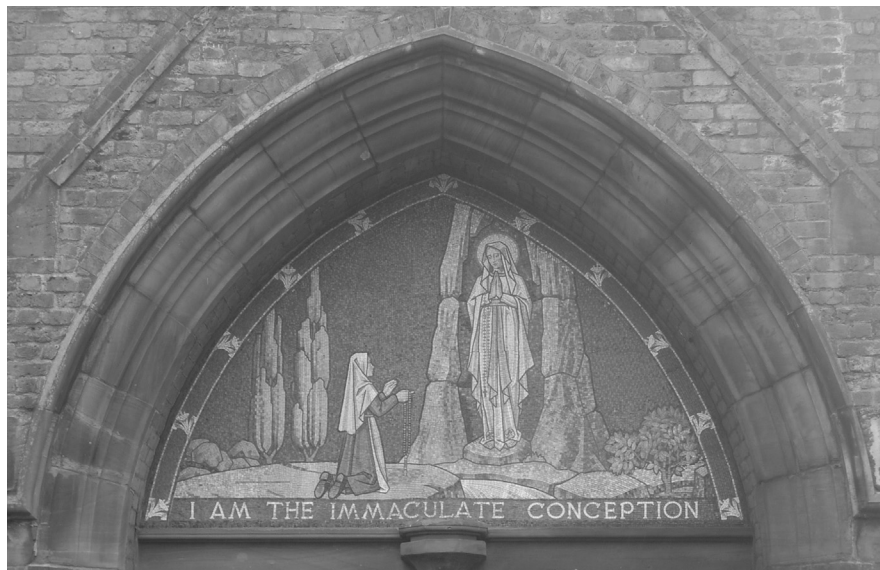
St Pius X stood empty for a time, then in September 2017 planning permission was sought to demolish it and replace it with seven houses, retaining the presbytery which would be converted into a nursery school. Meanwhile, the building was being assessed for Grade II listed status, and Historic England granted this in November 2018. The planning application was withdrawn and the church itself was instead turned into a nursery school, part of the local Dunky's Day Nursery chain. No doubt the interesting interior has been greatly altered; by the time it was listed some features were said to have been stripped out, and the nursery has since installed a series of 'learning pods'. Our Lady of Perpetual Succour has been retained by the parish and is now Our Lady's Parish Centre, a venue for social events. It is also hired out for parties, charity events and the like. Little structural change is apparent. St Raphael also still stands and the former presbytery, attached to the front, is occupied; the current use of the church itself is unclear, but it looked empty in September 2021.

The pattern seen in Widnes is being repeated less dramatically across the country's Dioceses. The formation of new priests continues to be a challenge, exemplified for example by the closure in September 2021 of Arundel and Brighton's seminary at Wonersh (with its impressive Romanesque Revival chapel of 1896) after 130 years of service. Migration to Britain still occurs, but less so from traditionally Catholic countries. Most significantly, the Covid-19 pandemic – which closed churches for extended periods and shifted worship online (anecdotally, with general success) – may exacerbate the decline in Mass attendance. Similar radical measures as happened in Widnes might be undertaken elsewhere in the future. The churches closed in Widnes were mostly the newer ones; but 'newer' does not necessarily have to mean 'of lesser architectural interest', and St Pius X in particular was a fine, imaginative building. At the very least, the three 'Class of 1959' churches reflect the architectural ideals of their time. It is pleasing that all the four churches closed in recent years still stand and have mostly found new uses; will the same be true of the churches we may lose in the future?

So to the architecture of the churches. The 'Taking Stock' programme undertaken in recent years by English Heritage in conjunction with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales recorded the seven

churches still open at the time (i.e. not St Marie or St Patrick), and its reports (at <https://taking-stock.org.uk/>) provide an in-depth summary – as do the listing particulars of the four listed churches. The following notes are a brief summary.

St Bede (1847, by John Grey Weightman and Matthew Hadfield; Grade II) is Gothic Revival in style with a buttressed and battlemented tower, a prominent side porch and an attached presbytery of 1892. The walls are of the familiar local red sandstone. Surrounded by suburbia, the church and its adjacent school retain a faint village-like atmosphere. **St Marie** (1864, by Edward Welby Pugin; Grade II) is an aisled red-brick building with an apse. Bands of very dark blue brick add visual interest to the exterior, as does a lantern-like stone bell-cot and a splendid, well preserved mosaic above the doorway to the north aisle. The interior is tall and dignified. **St Michael** (1876–79, by Henry Clutton; Grade II*) is a long cruciform church of red sandstone with a bell-tower topped by a distinctive saddleback roof rising to a sharp point. Lancet windows predominate, and the Gothic Revival style continues inside. Modern housing now surrounds it, Ditton Hall having long gone, and as elsewhere in Widnes industrial buildings are not far away. A contemporary report of the foundation stone-laying ceremony in August 1876 described an 800-capacity church with a 120-foot tower, 152 feet long, 83 feet wide to the transepts, and Romanesque in style. Plans evidently changed between 1876 and 1879: the church is shorter and narrower than this, and only has a faint touch of the Romanesque. The demolished **St Patrick** (1887–



*Mosaic dated 1931 at St Marie's Church, Newtown, Widnes,
photographed in September 2021*

88; J. and B. Synott) was Early English Gothic Revival and large (there were seats for 700), although not especially a landmark building: it was long and fairly low, with aisles stepping up alongside the walls and a tall, very thin bell-cot perched on the gable end. Red brick and local stone were used. **St John Fisher** (1951, by F.C. Farrell) is the simplest of brick halls, nine bays in length with modest pointed-arched windows. **Our Lady of Perpetual Succour** (1958–59, by L.A.G. Prichard & Sons) is plain at the front but idiosyncratic at the sides, where five exceptionally steep fully glazed gabled projections light the interior. Other windows resemble elongated pentagons. The decoration above the entrance is unusual: vivid blue panelling, echoed in the panelling below the side windows. **St Raphael** (1959, by R.C. Blair) consists of an interlinked group of presbytery, church and church hall, all blocky and uncompromising with classic features of the era: dark brickwork with contrasting render, small square windows, low metal fences and a functional air. A stubby tower forms the link between church and presbytery. **St Pius X** (1959, by Felix A. Jones; Grade II) looks like a standard pale stone hall at first, but its distinctive features soon become apparent. Partly hidden at the back, so as to be prominent on the nearby main road, is a tall, unadorned campanile set at an angle to the church. Extensive use is made of concrete, from the frames of the unusual triangular windows to the louvres in the campanile. The interior as originally designed is delineated by a satisfying series of brick-built pointed-arched curves. Similar arches mark the sanctuary. Finally, **St Basil and All Saints** (1982, by R. O'Mahony and Partners) is a low, restrained building with the characteristic dark brickwork, roof tiles and window frames of many public buildings of that era – it could just as easily be a doctors' surgery. A short, thin, fin-like feature (it cannot really be called a tower) has a circular piercing which holds a bell. Inside, the small sanctuary, merely a slightly raised space, is surrounded on three sides by attractive benches. Pale brickwork and timber predominates; the windows are just below roof level.

For completeness, one more church should be described here. Just 2½ miles north of Widnes, but across the border in Merseyside in the farming-turned-mining village of Cronton, is the Church of the Holy Family, designed by Alfred Gilbertson in 1910. It has never been connected to any of the Widnes churches, and it remains in use with one Sunday service and has its own parish. Like so many village Catholic churches of that era, it was funded by wealthy benefactors: Frederick Annesley and Isabella Stapleton-Bretherton of nearby Rainhill House. It commemorated two of their deceased children. One, Mary, had herself founded many Catholic churches – notably St Michael at Ditton; she was extremely wealthy, such that the *Liverpool Mercury* observed after her death that her will ran to 75 pages. Holy Family is more modest than some of the churches Mary paid for: it is a plain, slightly severe Gothic Revival building of weathered sandstone with a battlemented corner tower and a simple galleried interior (although the plaster reredos is richly detailed).

Research for this article was prompted by the discovery of the simultaneous deregistration in 2016 of the four churches which closed the year before. Information was gathered from newspaper reports (notably 'Catholic Church in Widnes embarks on its biggest ever transformation' in the Runcorn and Widnes World, 28 February 2015, but also various reports in the Widnes Examiner from the 1870s); the Parish of St Wilfrid website and that of St Basil and All Saints Church; Bernard W. Kelly (1907), Historical Notes on English Catholic Missions; John Geraghty, Peter McCann and John Tully (2005), St. Patrick's Stained Glass Window Project (actually a comprehensive history of that church); Peter McCann (2005), St Bede's Organ Restoration Project (again, a full history of the church and its fixtures); English Heritage 'Taking Stock' reports; listed building reports from Historic England; Halton Borough Council planning applications; and Ordnance Survey maps of various dates. Most of the churches were inspected externally by the author in September 2021. All photographs are copyright the author.

WERE JOHN AND CHARLES WESLEY AT GEORGE HASTINGS' FUNERAL?

AN ARTICLE BY IAN SCRUTON

I am a member of a group of volunteers researching the history of St Helen's Parish Church in Ashby de la Zouch, Leicestershire. The present church was built in the 1470s by the 1st Lord Hastings. The church incorporates a family chapel and members of the family are buried in the vaults which are beneath the Hastings Chapel and the chancel.

The Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC) has published transcripts of selected documents from the Hastings family archives. Looking through the HMC's transcripts for items relevant to St Helen's, I came across a bill dated 24th December 1744 for expenses relating to the funeral of George Hastings. A footnote in the HMC Report explains that: 'George and Ferdinando, sons of Theophilus, ninth Earl of Huntingdon, both died of smallpox while at school in London'.

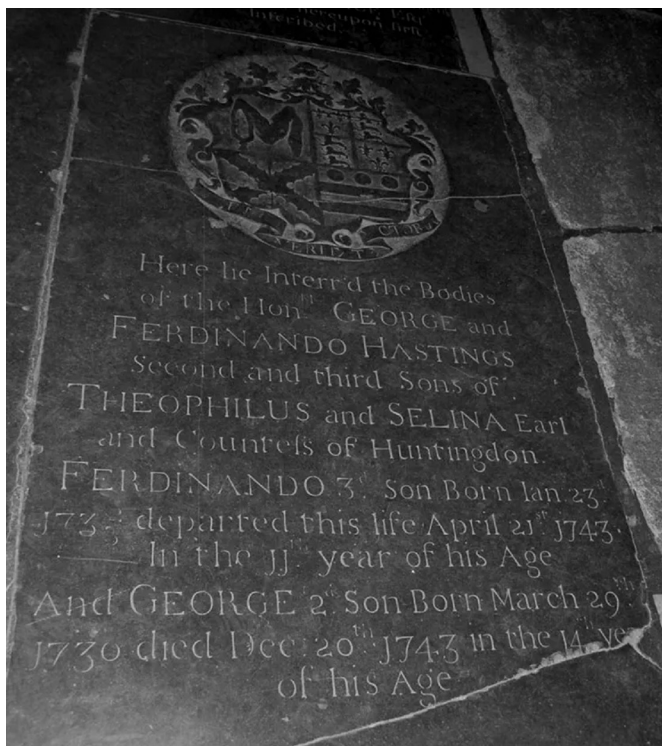
The two brothers were buried in Westminster Abbey. They have a single gravestone which states that Ferdinando died on 21st April 1743 and George on 20th December 1743. Because they died of smallpox their bodies could not be taken to St Helen's, as was the family's usual practice. The Hastings' London home was in Downing Street so Westminster Abbey would have been convenient for the burials. Ferdinando was buried on 25th April and George on 24th December.

Amongst the funeral expenses were the following items:

For 2 rich silk scarves for the Rev Dr Westleys, 2*l.* 8*s.*

For 2 pair of looped 'Shamey' gloves and 2 alamode hatbands for ditto, 1l. 5s.

Theophilus' wife, Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon, was at this time a close friend of John and Charles Wesley. (The following year John Wesley was to dedicate his 'Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems from the most celebrated English Authors' to her).



*The grave of George and Ferdinando Hastings
(photograph copyright Ian Scruton)*

Could the 'Rev Dr Westleys' be John and Charles Wesley? Charles Wesley's Journal for 19th December 1743 states that:

'I was mostly employed for some days past in comforting an afflicted friend, whose son lay dying of the smallpox.'

Since George Hastings died the following day, it seems reasonable to assume that it was John and Charles who were the 'Rev Dr Westleys' at the funeral.

The funeral bill also included the following item:

For 4 yards of rich ducape for a scarf for the Bishop of Rochester, 1l. 14s.

The Bishop of Rochester was also the Dean of Westminster at the time so he would have officiated at the funeral.

Ten years later, in December 1753, Selina Hastings was to nurse Charles Wesley's wife, Sarah, when Sarah contracted smallpox while Charles was away on a preaching tour.

Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, was a leading figure in the Evangelical Revival of the 18th century and was initially very close to the Wesleys. However, she split with them over the issue of predestination. She believed in the doctrine whereas the Wesleys did not. She went on to found her own chapels and in 1768 opened a College at Trevecca in South Wales to train preachers for the chapels. She wanted to operate her chapels within the Church of England but this was to prove impossible. At the time of her death in 1791 there were over 60 of her chapels in England and Wales and over 200 preachers had been trained at Trevecca. The movement continued to grow after her death and at the time of the 1851 Religious Census there were 109 Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion chapels. This compares with over 6,500 Wesleyan chapels and 4,000 other Methodist chapels. [Editor's note: there are now 22 Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion chapels in Britain, mainly in southeast England with a particular concentration in Sussex.]

NATIONAL HERITAGE LIST FOR ENGLAND: NEWLY LISTED PLACES OF WORSHIP

New and upgraded listings between August and December 2021:

Former Holly Mount United Reformed Church, Great Malvern, Worcestershire (II; 1476983; 1875; James Tait)

This former Congregational church, which closed in 2020, was described by Edward Peters in *Newsletter* 28. James Tait – who also has a Grade II-listed chapel in Leicester to his name – made good use of a difficult, steep site to provide a large chapel and the various subsidiary rooms required by a thriving congregation which had already outgrown one building. High quality local stone is used throughout, and the tall steeple forms a landmark. (The congregation has not disbanded: it now meets in 'The Cube', a community centre.)

St Saviour's Church, Totland, Isle of Wight (Grade II; NHLE reference 1474686; designed in 1923 by Wilfred and James Mangan)

Wilfred Mangan was prolific in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth in the interwar period, often working (as here) with his brother James. Carefully



St Saviour's Church, Totland, seen in May 2016 (photograph copyright Matt Davis)

detailed, vivid red-brick exteriors and Romanesque arches characterise their work. At the corner of this long, low building is a distinctive and memorable bell tower: modest in height, it catches the eye because of its shallow pyramidal roof with very big eaves projecting outwards on brackets.

Former Trinity Methodist Church, East India Dock Road, London (II*; 1376625; 1951; Cecil Handisyde and D. Rogers Stark)

Now Calvary Charismatic Baptist Church. Not a new listing but an upgrade to Grade II* – reflecting the era-defining importance of this stridently Modernist church, which featured as part of an architecture exhibition at the Festival of Britain. It is a portal-framed building of concrete panels, copper panelling and dark brickwork, simple but innovative in its plan and use of materials. Its religious purpose is clearly articulated by a nearly detached bell tower. The design was extremely influential: debased versions appeared on post-war estates across the country in the 1950s and 1960s.

Longton Methodist Central Hall, Longton, Staffordshire (II; 1472087; 1842/1933; architect not recorded)

Methodism has always been the dominant Nonconformist denomination in the 'Six Towns' of present-day Stoke-on-Trent, with a continuous history going back to the opening of the first permanent chapel in 1766 at Burslem. A Wesleyan chapel followed in Longton in 1783; bigger replacements were built in 1804 and 1842. Parts of the 1842 Greek Revival-inspired building remain behind the interesting three-storey brick and stone Classical-style façade put up in 1933 when the chapel became the Longton Methodist Central Hall. (Central it is –

occupying a prominent place in the heart of town.) The ornate interior dates from an 1877 remodelling but seems to retain the 1842 floorplan. Like other Central Halls it combines its religious function with other features: there is a schoolroom and caretaker's flat, and two shop units flank the entrance.



The exterior and interior of Longton Methodist Central Hall – the latter was taken on the Chapels Society visit of July 2019 (photographs copyright Roger Holden)

DESECULARISATION DIGEST: PUBS AS PLACES OF WORSHIP

The reuse of secular buildings for religious purposes is a growing trend, and therefore worthy of attention. Any sort of building can in theory become a place of worship, and examples can be found somewhere in Britain for almost every conceivable type, from barns to bingo halls; but in recent years a surprising number of ex-pubs have been registered for worship for a wide variety of congregations. A brief survey follows, and further examples are welcomed if members are aware of any. Pubs have been in serious decline for a few decades – especially in cities, where new churches are most likely to be founded – and the exigencies they have faced during the pandemic have been well documented. This little list is likely to expand in the coming years.

On the face of it, disused pubs are not obvious candidates to be converted for worship, but in fact they have several advantages. They are usually in good locations (either on a main transport route or at the heart of a village, estate or suburb) and often have ample car parking; many closed pubs are affordable as they are simply no longer viable as a pub and may have been marketed unsuccessfully for a long time; they may need little internal alteration, especially for denominations or groups which have informal liturgical requirements; and few are listed buildings, so planning permission is easier to acquire. They also tend to be solidly built and structurally sound.

In **Plumstead**, southeast London, the Park End Tavern was built in the late 19th century (certainly before 1881) and is one of the oldest buildings surviving in a heavily redeveloped area. It was a classic Victorian London pub: a tall, square, street-corner building with living accommodation above. In 1998, though, a Buddhist group acquired it and relaunched it as the ‘London Lei Zang Si Temple’. A vibrant colour scheme has enhanced the exterior. In **Portsmouth**, Cosham Baptist Church built a chapel and hall in 1904. From 1941 worship took place in the hall – presumably because the chapel itself suffered war damage. In the 1960s the local Gale’s Brewery opened a small pub, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, next to it. This closed in the 1990s and was sold to the church, which no doubt appreciated the extra space. The two buildings were initially linked by a rudimentary passageway, but in 2010 they were connected properly by a large extension. The join is hidden by a big glazed entrance porch reached by a paved pathway through a well-planted garden. The whole thing fits together harmoniously – an impressive achievement given the quirky appearance of the pub, a chalet-style structure with a disproportionately deep roof. The London Apprentice, a 1960s ‘estate pub’ in **Smethwick**, West Midlands, lost its licence in March 2010 after a ‘trouble-plagued’ period, as the local newspaper euphemistically described it. In 2011 it was acquired by the Bethel United Church of Jesus Christ Apostolic, a Pentecostal group, and reopened under the name ‘Bethel Apostolic Church of

Praise (Smethwick)'. The decorative freestanding pub sign facing the A457 has been turned into a church sign – a charming feature. Just two miles away in **Ladywood**, on the edge of Birmingham city centre, the same thing happened in the same year, right down to the reuse of the roadside pub sign. The Welcome Inn, a classic 1960s pub owned by Courage Brewery, closed in that year after being damaged in an accidental fire and was converted with minimal alteration into the Bethel Apostolic Church of Excellence. This Apostolic congregation had been meeting in a tin tabernacle in nearby Edgbaston for the previous 25 years. As well as the roadside sign, an original signboard reading 'The Welcome' is still on the side wall: quite appropriate for a church! Meanwhile the nearly identical Colwyn pub a mile or so further east on the edge of **Digbeth** was registered in 2017 as the Exousia Community Church and Outreach Centre. The Greek word 'Exousia' appears many times in the New Testament but has proved difficult to translate: most English translations go for 'authority'. Use of this name for a chapel suggests a Pentecostal or Charismatic worship style, and indeed this church describes itself as Pentecostal. Still in the West Midlands, the Jalalabad Mosque was registered in 1996 in the former Freemasons' Tavern (1848–1991), built as the Freehold Tavern on Freehold Street in inner-city **Coventry** by the Freehold Land Society, a Victorian property development company. The ground floor of the gabled two-storey building was faced with traditional dark green glazed tiles until 2015 or later; unfortunately the building has since been modernised with marble-effect beige tiles. The Seven Trees was a street-corner pub in the north of **Blackburn**. The pale stone-clad ground floor, pilasters, carved corbels, prominent lintel and timber-framed gables gave a touch of elegance – and they still do, as all these features were retained when the building became a combined madrassah (Islamic school) and mosque in 2009. The same year saw the closure of the Lynton Tavern (formerly the Crossbow), a low, modernised brick building dating from 1961 at the heart of the post-war Weeping Cross estate in **Stafford**. The Plymouth Brethren Christian Church immediately bought it: the local Gospel Hall Trust was seeking a site in the area for a meeting room and needed temporary premises until land became available. The converted pub was used for five years until a proper meeting room could be built half a mile away. Demolition followed in early 2015 and a supermarket now stands on the site. In the Hampshire village of **Denmead**, an attractive one- and two-storey pub called the Mead End closed in 2014 and was bought by Denmead Baptist Church, whose Victorian chapel had been sold and demolished. They converted it into 'The Cornerstone', a mixed-use church and community facility. Sadly the venture was not successful and the venue closed in mid-2019. (Its name, and that of other 'Cornerstone' churches, was no doubt inspired by Psalm 118 verse 22: *'the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'*.) Most recently, the ornate Plume of Feathers pub in central **Southampton** has been converted into the Southampton Buddhist Centre, registered in early 2018.

The 1930s building is, amazingly, loosely Scots Baronial in style, all gables, chimneys and ball finials, and is built of coursed rubble. The pub sign depicting the Prince of Wales's heraldic badge has been wittily retouched: instead of a crown, Buddha sits cross-legged below the feathers, and 'Ich dien' has been replaced by 'Buddhist Centre'!

Surprisingly, this is not a modern phenomenon. Between 1917 and 1947 a nondenominational Christian mission in Troed-y-Rhiw, south Wales, had as its registered place of worship 'The Old Crown Inn'; and from 1927 a Salvation Army company in central Cardiff used a former pub called the Wheatsheaf as their meeting place until new premises were obtained nearby in 1953. There may well be other examples yet to be discovered.



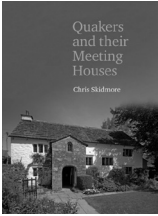
The Welcome pub at Ladywood, Birmingham, seen in 2021 as the Bethel Apostolic Church of Excellence (photograph copyright Matt Davis)



The former Mead End pub at Denmead, Hampshire, in its 2019 guise as The Cornerstone – home of Denmead Baptist Church (photograph copyright Matt Davis)

BOOK REVIEWS

Quakers and their Meeting Houses by Chris Skidmore. Published by Liverpool University Press on behalf of Historic England, 2021. x+163pp, hardback. ISBN 978-1-80085-720-9. £40 (30% discount for Chapels Society members: use code **QUAKERS30** when ordering online from www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/r/skidmore-quakers)



The focus of this new book by the long-serving former Hon. Editor of The Chapels Society is very much on the meeting houses rather than the Quakers. Given its origins in a joint Historic England and Society of Friends heritage project this is probably both inevitable and appropriate. Those seeking a history of Quakerism will need to go elsewhere. Skidmore does not set out to describe or even list every meeting house, instead explaining how the unique and evolving style of worship adopted by the Friends and changes in both the Society itself and society in general have shaped Quaker architecture. This is a complement to David Butler's monumental *Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, not a replacement, and also a sort of a companion volume to a previous Historic England book, Christopher Wakeling's general survey of non-conformist places of worship. Slightly disappointingly, the format is not as large as that for *Chapels of England* and there are fewer pages, but it is produced to the same high quality with plentiful and splendid illustrations, mostly in colour. Reference to Wakeling's book would be useful for those seeking more about the specifically non-conformist context of the Quaker meeting house; occasionally parallels and contrasts with the buildings of other denominations are drawn without elaboration.

The book opens with a foreword and a preface, followed by an introduction giving a brief overview of the historical and religious background of early Quakerism, before moving into a set of chapters for successive periods. Each chapter – there are two for the period to 1715, then one each for the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries – adopts a similar structure, with historical introduction, illustrated case studies of typical and notable buildings of each period, a digression or two (topics include American meeting houses, schools, and Quaker architects), and a recapitulation. The final chapter forms a recapitulation and summary for the book as a whole, outlining the development of a Quaker style and drawing together the themes sketched in preceding sections.

A clear conclusion is that whatever the uniqueness of Quakerism, it did not, and does not, exist in a vacuum. The changing external constraints on worship, finance, the influence of and rivalry with other denominations, and architectural fashion – arts and crafts seems somehow a natural fit with Quakerism, high Victorian Gothic rather less so, but there are examples of both included here – as much as the evolution and transformation of the Quaker way of worship, shaped

the development of the meeting house: from the early buildings, literally houses where meetings happened to take place, to the later purpose-built structures. The appearance and subsequent disappearance of the ministers' stands and separate women's meetings, the change from fixed benches to moveable chairs, the provision (or not!) of heating, the vital relationship of meeting houses with burial grounds: these topics are all covered and their influence on the design and furnishing of meeting houses explained and illustrated.

Abundant and useful reference material is provided in the end matter: a two-page bibliography, glossaries for architecture and Quaker subjects (though 'Warden' is missing from the roles described), and a gazetteer of Listed meeting houses. The separation by grade and chronological arrangement may make planning itineraries awkward, but there are only five pages, the layout is clear, and all entries are included in the index. A map showing the location of the sites in the gazetteer and those referred to in the text would perhaps have been a nice addition.

Reservations to recommendation are few: the price and the format meaning that some of the photographs are a touch on the small side. Quakers now have their Historic England volume to go with Christopher Martin's work on Roman Catholic churches – if every denomination had an up to date volume of this sort and quality the library of non-conformist buildings would be well endowed indeed.

References:

heritage.quaker.org.uk

Butler, David M; *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London, 1999)

Lidbetter, Hubert; *The Friends Meeting House* (second edition, York, 1979)

Martin, Christopher; *A Glimpse of Heaven* (London, 2009)

Southall, Kenneth H; *Our Quaker Heritage: Early Meeting Houses* (York, [1974])

Wakeling, Christopher; *Chapels of England Buildings of Protestant Nonconformity* (Swindon, 2017)

Stuart Leadley

Brethren and their Buildings by Tim Grass. Glasgow: Brethren Archivists & Historians Network, 2021. x+253pp, softback. ISBN 978-1-916013-06-3. £22



This lavishly illustrated work is the sixth volume in the 'Studies in Brethren History' series from the Brethren Archivists and Historians Network (BAHN). Other books cover aspects such as culture and spirituality; Brethren missionary endeavours; and theology and the place of the Bible. This volume is focused explicitly on the buildings where the Brethren worship and the conclusions which can be drawn about the distinctive features

of 'Brethrenism' in all its forms, both Open and Exclusive: from its origins as an early 19th-century evangelising movement to the present position, where groups ranging from the most outward-looking evangelicals to the determinedly separatist Plymouth Brethren Christian Church (PBCC) coexist, generally with little interaction. The tangled history of the Brethren movement's strands, separations and occasional reunions is told elsewhere:¹ but Dr Grass provides an excellent concise summary in the second chapter, which is useful to those unfamiliar with the movement as well as to readers who know it closely. (A separate diagram showing a simplified 'Brethren family tree' or timeline, which features as an appendix, is also helpful in this regard.)

Professor Roger Homan wrote in 1984² that Brethren have an 'attachment to makeshift premises' and a 'purposeful indifference to any form of pretension' in architecture. The introduction makes this point as well, but goes on to justify in a convincing way why such apparently unprepossessing buildings are worthy of study – describing the importance of 'seemingly insignificant or irrelevant details' in revealing useful information about practices and beliefs, and identifying reasons both spiritual and practical for the apparent rejection of architectural harmony and beauty in favour of simplicity and starkness. After this thought-provoking introduction and the historical scene-setting, the book proceeds in a logical fashion with chapters devoted to particular aspects of Brethren buildings, all featuring a representative range of high-quality recent photographs relevant to the topic. 'Some Practical Considerations' (which discusses financing, registration for worship, provision of burial grounds and similar matters) is followed by studies of temporary buildings; different architectural styles (the variety of which is greater than may be expected from a movement where function generally trumps aesthetics); a well-reasoned analysis of 20th-century trends; meeting rooms acquired from other religious groups or converted from secular use; a study of the frequently unconventional locations where meeting rooms can be found – a key theme is an apparent attachment to marginal sites where nobody else wants to build anything; architectural details and features (this chapter may have been better placed after 'Architectural Styles'); names and noticeboards, where the author draws out many illuminating observations about Brethren identity and self-expression; and some examples of halls which have passed out of Brethren use as the movement has contracted.

An interesting range of appendices follows. It is particularly pleasing to find a whole appendix devoted to the buildings of the PBCC, as copiously illustrated as the rest of the book. This strand of Brethrenism, established following a decisive split among the Exclusives in 1970, has noteworthy and idiosyncratic features of its own but has had minimal scholarly study until now – perhaps because of the difficulty in 'getting close to' this inward-looking group. The approach taken by the author – inspecting and documenting their 'local' and 'city' rooms, examining their characteristics and drawing conclusions linked to

their particular theological outlook and practices – is a useful contribution to our understanding. In the other appendices, comprehensive lists are provided of statutorily listed Brethren buildings; iron buildings and tin tabernacles, reflecting the growing interest in these; other denominations' chapels which were taken over by Brethren assemblies; and meeting rooms mentioned in Christopher Stell's *Inventories*. All of these will be invaluable for readers wishing to undertake more detailed study of the subject, as will the well laid-out geographical index, the footnotes to each chapter and the extensive 'Further Reading' list.

Any book which broadens our view on Nonconformist buildings, worship and the connection between them is to be welcomed. A delightfully presented, thoughtfully reasoned and fairly priced study of an often overlooked movement is a prize indeed. Dr Grass's work, the fruit of many years' study and photography, can rightly be considered definitive and comes wholly recommended.

References:

1 For example, in Dr Grass's *Gathering to His Name: The Story of the Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (2006; ISBN 0-95701-772-3)

2 In *The Victorian Churches of Kent* (ISBN 0-85033-466-7), but this observation is equally true anywhere.

Matt Davis

NEWS AND NOTES

Government funding for chapels

The government's Culture Recovery Fund programme has awarded funding to about 140 heritage sites across England. More than half of these are places of worship, including buildings of interest to the Chapels Society. Places of worship receiving funding include the famous Grade I-listed Saltaire United Reformed Church (1858); Friends Meeting Houses at Kendal and Marazion; the magnificent St Walburge's Catholic Church (1850–54) in Preston, with its needle-like spire; the distinctively domed St John the Baptist's Catholic Church (1927) in Rochdale; and the former Strict Baptist chapel (1792) at Waddesdon, which will be re-roofed and re-rendered.

The future of churches and chapels

The National Churches Trust has put together various resources intended to stimulate debate about the future of the United Kingdom's church and chapel buildings. Central to this is a thought-provoking set of essays by a range of heritage professionals, politicians, religious leaders and community leaders who between them cover all aspects of the importance of religious buildings. See www.nationalchurchestrust.org/futureofchurches, from where you can download the report and access other resources.

Coat of arms at Shrewsbury Unitarian Church

Chapels Society and Shrewsbury Unitarian Church member Marlies Cope has posed an interesting question about royal coats of arms in chapel buildings, which are understood to be rare. The church at Shrewsbury was rebuilt in 1718 at the expense of the government after Jacobite rioters destroyed the original building. The coat of arms of George I was installed inside the new church – said to be ‘a sign that the law did not permit the destruction of churches, whatever their persuasion’. This initiated a fruitful discussion which brought out the following observations (courtesy of Bill Jacob, Roger Holden, Gerard Charmley and Ted Royle): can other members offer any more comments or suggestions?

Mentions of royal coats of arms in Christopher Stell’s *Inventories* are as follows: Friar Gate Chapel, Derby; Mount Street Presbyterian Chapel, Stafford; Morley Old Chapel, West Yorkshire; Woolwich New Road Presbyterian Church, Greenwich (all of these chapels have been demolished or otherwise destroyed); the Great Meeting-House, Leicester (coat of arms believed to be no longer in situ); Presbyterian Chapel (later URC), Brampton, Cumbria (closed); Stainland Chapel, Elland, West Yorkshire (long since in Anglican use, as was the aforementioned chapel at Morley); and the following ‘foreign’ churches in London: the French Protestant Church, Soho Square; the Crown Court Church of Scotland; and St George’s Lutheran Church, Alie Street. Other than the last three named, all had Presbyterian origins; Derby and Leicester moved towards Unitarianism. The presence of royal coats of arms in buildings of Presbyterian origin may be linked to their historic perception of their relationship with the Church of England and their loyalty to the Crown.

From chapel to nightclub ... to chapel

The marriage registration notice of Peace Chapel International, a new Charismatic Pentecostal church, in Oakengates, Shropshire, on 9 November 2021 intriguingly gives its address as ‘The Old Chapel’. What was the history of this old chapel, and who did it belong to? It turns out to be an imposing brick edifice of 1848 which was used by Congregationalists (and latterly the United Reformed Church) until 1981, when a new joint United Reformed and Methodist chapel opened elsewhere in the town. The church was founded in 1843 by Congregationalists from nearby Wellington. The first part of the present building was the ground-floor schoolroom of 1847; the chapel itself – a tall, four-bay structure with somewhat severe detailing in a vaguely Classical style – was built above it the following year. A fifth bay was later added, and up to 500 worshippers could be accommodated. After it closed the chapel was used as a community centre at first before being converted into a nightclub in 1994. Numerous changes of name and ownership followed, with several periods of closure, until its new owners bought it and got permission to reconvert it

for religious use in April 2020. The building is not listed: extensive alterations have undoubtedly taken place over the years, and the windows are modern replacements. Three services a week and various other activities take place.

Hidden features revealed in Brighton

The demolition in 2018 of the former Astoria Theatre – an early ‘super-cinema’ – was the latest in a long list of architectural missteps in Brighton; but it offered one advantage to chapel enthusiasts. For the year or so when the site was empty, before the completion in 2019 of ‘ROX Brighton’ (a mixed-use building, and a weak pastiche), the side (south) elevation of Gloucester Place Baptist Church could be seen. This flint-and-brick Gothic Revival chapel by George Baines was built in 1904, squeezed in between Victorian houses which were themselves demolished to build the Astoria in 1933. With buildings close by at the rear as well, only the chapel’s front (east) elevation has ever been visible, therefore.

What was revealed when the site was cleared? – Most impressively, the big five-light arched window at first-floor level, almost identical to that above the entrance but lacking that window’s tiny ogee. At ground-floor level, a group of three windows, straight-headed but with the same flowing tracery, arranged in a 1–3–1 pattern. The three-light window at the centre has an arched band of red brickwork above, contrasting with the pale brown of the wall. In the hall behind, a tall, thin two-light arched window and a blank opening of the same size. None of these windows will ever have let in much light, being two feet away from the side wall of both the Astoria and its successor building!

The curious lopsided towers on the façade, visible in the photograph, were not Baines’s idea, incidentally: they had been identical, but the north tower was hit by a bomb during World War II and had to be cut down and given a new battlemented top. In 2010 the church went into partnership with Florence Road Baptist Church elsewhere in Brighton (also a Baines design) and now goes by the name ‘One Church Brighton’.



Gloucester Place Baptist Church, Brighton in June 2019, with the brown-brick south elevation temporarily visible (photograph copyright Matt Davis)

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