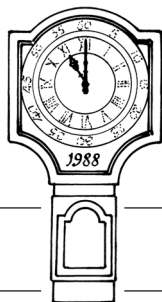


THE CHAPELS SOCIETY



Newsletter 81

August 2022



The Leicestershire village of Hathern had chapels for Wesleyans, Primitive Methodists and, from 1846, a Wesleyan Methodist Association congregation. This chapel, illustrated above, is listed in the Free Methodist manual of 1898, and would have become a United Methodist chapel in 1907. Unusually it then passed to Roman Catholics; it has since been secularised. An ever-growing source of information like this can be found in a suite of community archive websites covering all branches of Methodism, as described in the article on page 7 (photograph copyright Philip Thornborow)

ADDRESS BOOK

The Chapels Society: registered charity number 1014207

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

President: Bill Jacob, 4 St Mary's Walk, London SE11 4UA; email: wmjacob20@gmail.com

Secretary: Martin Wellings, 31 Long Lane, Finchley, London, N3 2PS; email: ChapelsSociety@googlegmail.com; phone: 020 8346 1700 (for general correspondence and website)

Treasurer: John Ellis, 24 Shrublands Court, Mill Crescent, Tonbridge, Kent TN9 1PH; email: john.ellis@urc.org.uk; phone: 01732 353914

Visits Secretary: John Anderson, 3 The Vale, Congleton, Cheshire CW12 4AG; email: andersonhillside@btinternet.com; phone: 01260 276177

Membership Secretary: Stuart Leadley, 52 Southwood Avenue, Cottingham, East Yorks HU16 5AD; email: sjleadley@hotmail.co.uk

Casework Officer: Ian Serjeant, 5 Blackberry Hill, Fishponds, Bristol BS16 1DB; email: chapelsocietycasework@gmail.com

Editor: Matt Davis, 3 Valentine Court, Eaton Gardens, Hove, East Sussex BN3 3TQ; email: trainticketmatt@hotmail.com; phone: 07708 187587 (correspondence *re* the *Newsletter* and other Society publications)

NOTICEBOARD

CHAPELS SOCIETY EVENTS

30 September 2022

15 October 2022

Copy deadline for November 2022 *Newsletter*

Autumn visit to Brighton led by Matt Davis (**booking deadline 17 September 2022**)

EDITORIAL

With the publication of this edition, we move to a schedule of four *Newsletters* per year, which immediately allows a more in-depth look at a major topic introduced last time: the 50th anniversary of the United Reformed Church. Thank you for your contributions on this subject: more will feature in our November *Newsletter*, which will also look at another significant denominational anniversary – a centenary this time. No, I haven't miscalculated when the Methodist Union took place: what happened in 1922 is not widely known but has proved significant for hundreds of chapels of all sizes and styles across the United Kingdom ever since.

A summary of the Society's excellent visit to rural Cheshire in May is also featured here. Our next visit, the Brighton trip on 15th October, is coming up: don't forget to return your form to me if you are planning to come and have not already done so.

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

PROCEEDINGS

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

Our first visit of 2022 was to the same county of Cheshire as the previous visit in September 2021. But that was in the north of the county, now absorbed into suburban Greater Manchester, whereas we now visited the rural south-east, commencing in the pleasant small town of Congleton. It lies within the valley of the River Dane, the canal and railway by-passing the town centre keeping to the higher ground to the east. Although Congleton received a charter in 1272, the fact that the Grade I-listed 18th-century church of St Peter stands in Chapel Street draws attention to the fact that it was a township within the parish of Astbury, not becoming a parish in its own right until the 19th century. Timber framing of the 17th century can be seen in a number of buildings but many Georgian houses attest to expansion with the arrival of the silk industry in the later 18th century. Many of these mills were later turned over to the process of fustian and velvet cutting, effectively making Congleton an outpost of the Lancashire cotton industry. The rather grand Town Hall of 1864 by E. W. Goodwin attests to the considerable wealth generated by these industrial activities – which can also be seen in the Antrobus Street Congregational chapel, now Congleton United Reformed Church, where we assembled at 10.30am.

Nonconformity in Congleton dates to 1662 with the ejection from their livings of George Moxon and Thomas Brook, ministers of Astbury parish church and the chapel-of-ease at Congleton respectively. The resulting congregation took the not uncommon path to Unitarianism in the following century, but some who were dissatisfied left and built a new chapel in Cross Street in 1790, moving to the present building in Antrobus Street in 1877. This is large, Gothic and evidently built to impress, the architect being William Sugden of Leek. As originally built it had a spire on the south-east corner, but this has gone leaving a somewhat truncated looking tower. Built on a sloping site, the main entrance is approached by steps up from street level while the basement school room is at ground level to the rear. A visit to the basement shows how the floor above is supported by cast-iron columns and timber beams. The interior still has its pews with a central rostrum pulpit and organ behind. There is a gallery over the entrance lobby. We were supplied with tea, coffee and biscuits, then welcomed by the minister who told us sadly, but perhaps not unexpectedly, that this may have been a last opportunity to visit the chapel: the congregation, although active, now finds this Grade II-listed building too large and costly and so are considering options for the future.

After a chance to explore the chapel, we emerged to find that sunshine had dispelled the earlier cloud as we boarded our coach which was to transport us for

the remainder of the day. Passing the notable timber-framed church at Marton, we reached the Methodist Chapel at Lower Withington. This was Wesleyan Methodist in origin and dates from 1808. From the road this can be seen to have been a long-wall chapel, with the central section clearly extended at each end. As it stands today, the interior has been turned round to give a gable-end layout. The box-pews were removed in a major renovation in 1893. A gallery at the west end, with raked seating and supported by cast iron columns, faces the rostrum pulpit opposite. Behind the pulpit, in the eastern extension of 1829, there was a raked Singers' Gallery but this was levelled off in 1893 and enclosed off with moveable glass and wood panelling. The area beneath the gallery was used as a school room. Lower Withington is not a village, and there are only a few houses near the chapel: it was historically a township within the vast parish of Prestbury. This is typical rural Cheshire – a landscape of dispersed settlement, not nucleated villages – so chapel-goers would always have travelled some distance and the western extension of 1816 included a stable block for their horses together with school rooms. A large graveyard behind attests to the size of the congregation over the years and today it continues with an active congregation. Surprisingly, perhaps, this building is not listed.

We took our lunch at Lower Withington before re-boarding our coach to take us to Brook Street Chapel in the town of Knutsford: also a long-wall chapel, but here the layout is retained and this Grade I-listed building is much



*The interior of Brook Street [Unitarian] Chapel, Knutsford
(photograph copyright Roger Holden)*

older, dating from 1694. Although there had been a Presbyterian presence in Knutsford, the development of nonconformity was delayed by a continuing evangelical ministry at the parochial chapel; at that time Knutsford was a township within the parish of Rostherne. However, appointment of a man less sympathetic led to dissatisfaction, resulting in the house of Isaac Antrobus being registered for meetings and the current chapel then being erected in an adjoining field. As in Congleton, from the 18th century the ministry became increasingly heterodox and eventually Unitarian, which it remains. The writer Elizabeth Gaskell attended here as a child and is buried in the graveyard. The frontage is of somewhat domestic appearance with external staircases at each end for accessing the gallery. The galleries on three sides facing the pulpit in the centre of the north wall are supported on timber columns, although only one of these is believed to be original. The pulpit and lower seating were renewed in 1859, the straight-backed pews in the gallery presumably being earlier. The layout here is the same as the chapels of similar date at King Edward Street in Macclesfield and Dean Row, near Wilmslow, although here the interior has been turned through ninety degrees.

We set out from Knutsford back in the direction we had arrived from but then turned off at Marthall along lanes to the Baptist chapel in the hamlet of Great Warford. This was also a journey to the opposite end of the theological spectrum: the congregation here, supporting a biblically-based ministry, is affiliated to the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches rather than the Baptist Union. The claim that this is the oldest building in continuous use for Baptist worship in England may well be correct since they have worshipped here since 1712. The building in fact is older because it was previously a barn and the original timber framing can still be seen to the rear. Nobody seems to be sure how old, but it has been stated to be 16th-century. The remaining walls have been rebuilt in brick at various times. From the front this also appears as a long-wall chapel and the pulpit was indeed originally centrally placed on the north wall. In 1813 the building was divided and the western half became a house for the minister or caretaker. The eastern half forms a tiny chapel with the pulpit now central on the dividing wall, with the box pews facing and also a west gallery. The recently extended western half now has a kitchen and other facilities. Originally another cottage, partly timber framed, stood here but this was demolished in 1979. The various alterations over the years probably explain why the building warrants only Grade II* rather than Grade I listing. As at Lower Withington, the congregation no doubt travelled from considerable distances and indeed still do; but members now being increasingly elderly, the chapel would seem to have a limited lifespan. Destruction of such a building or even loss of the interior by conversion to other uses is not to be contemplated.

From Great Warford we returned to Congleton, first for our Roman Catholic visit of the day, St Mary's Church. Some may wonder why the Society includes



*The front elevation of Great Warford Baptist Chapel
(photograph copyright Roger Holden)*

Roman Catholic buildings in its field of study, but if you removed the statue of Mary and the cross from the frontage of this building of 1825 you would think this was a building of Protestant nonconformity. And of course when it was built it was a ‘chapel’, as were all Roman Catholic buildings in this country until the re-establishment of their parochial structure in 1852. The building was designed by the priest Fr John Hall who had been appointed to Macclesfield in 1821 and found that there were a number of Catholics in Congleton who were not provided for. Rather like the chapel in Antrobus Street where we started at, here the chapel itself is above a basement school room. The simple interior is surprisingly light, with the sunlight coming through clear glass windows. The church and adjacent presbytery built in 1830 are now Grade II- listed.

From here it was a short walk along West Street to our final call of the day at the Methodist Church in Wagg Street, which is Wesleyan in origin. The current building, the third on this site, dates from 1968 and its dramatic frontage with four diamond-shaped windows produced varying reactions among the group. Some may consider that it looks more like a machine for underwater or space exploration than a church! You might think these windows would make the interior very light but this is not the case because they are full of dark coloured glass and there are no other windows. The church is built on a frame of concrete beams which are pierced by irregular openings again filled with coloured glass but light over the east end is provided by two funnel-like openings through the ceiling. There seems to have been some inspiration here from Le Corbusier. But whatever one may think about its appearance, the building does have good acoustics enabling it to be used for concerts, as was happening that evening. To

conclude the day, we retired to the Wesleyan School building of 1869, now used as the church hall, for a splendid tea before dispersing.

Finally we must record our thanks to John Anderson for organising and leading the day, also to the various people who opened up their chapels to welcome us and those who provided refreshments for an interesting day.

Roger Holden



*The dramatic façade of the present Trinity Methodist Church (1968),
Wagg Street, Congleton (photograph copyright Roger Holden)*

RESOURCES RELATING TO METHODIST CHAPELS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

AN ARTICLE BY PHILIP THORNBOROW

Those of us who attended the recent ‘Communities of Dissent’ conference (see *Newsletter* 80) were encouraged to research our local chapels, with particular reference to their place in the community. We were encouraged to seek evidence in a wide range of resources and to share our findings as widely as possible. For the historian of the various strands of Methodism a problem is that many of the published works on the various Methodist groups and their buildings are difficult to find outside a handful of specialist libraries. As with all organisations what tends to be published is the organisational view, which can sometimes lack local detail. Both these issues – of gathering evidence and of disseminating results – have been addressed since 2014 by a suite of community archives which I would like to bring to your attention.

The community archive websites have been created as spaces for the collection and sharing of photographs, memories and research resources about the various strands of the British Methodist movements. Users are positively encouraged

to add content, particularly about the activities of Methodist communities. They can do this either by adding a page of their own, or commenting on an existing page or on a comment from another user. The hope is that these sites will provide a grassroots view of the movement, and capture material that would not be otherwise preserved; but they are also being used to make available a range of resources.

My Primitive Methodists (<https://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk/>) was the first site to be developed, and is the most comprehensive in scope as the editors are based at Englesea Brook, the Museum of Primitive Methodism. They aim to create the definitive source for all aspects of Primitive Methodism. You will find a very comprehensive illustrated guide to many chapels, including full accounts of their opening, as well as guidance on sources for chapel history. The site is also strong on biographies of a wide range of local members, transcribed from the pages of the Primitive Methodist press. The returns for Primitive Methodist chapels from the religious census of 1851 are being provided, as is a transcription of the list of Primitive Methodist chapels registered for public worship in 1867. These have all been mapped.

My Wesleyan Methodists (<https://www.mywesleyanmethodists.org.uk>) covers the original, and largest, section of the movement. Some key resources have been made available through this site. Those most relevant to those interested in chapels are the list of chapels existing in 1812, compiled by William Myles, the Returns of Accommodation from 1873, and the Statistical Returns for 1940. A sense of the Wesleyan Methodist community in 1900 is provided by transcriptions of the various volumes of the Wesleyan Methodist Historical Roll.

My United Methodists (<https://www.myunitedmethodists.org.uk/>) covers the less well known groups, and includes pages explaining the particular features of each one. They all wanted to take back control, and were keen on local issues, and it is noticeable that the Bible Christians, Methodist New Connexion and United Methodist Free Churches each had their particular geographic areas of strength. For the Bible Christians, a list of their Devon and Cornwall chapels is provided. Details of all the Methodist New Connexion chapels in 1861 can be found in a digitised section of *A Digest of the Minutes, Institutions, Polity, Doctrines, Ordinances and Literature of the Methodist New Connexion*, by William Baggally. For the United Free Methodist Churches the key work is *The Free Methodist Manual* of 1898. It really is ‘everything you want to know about the Free Methodists, but were afraid to ask’. A digital copy is provided, which includes a list of all the chapels in 1898. There is also a transcription of the list of Bible Christian, Methodist New Connexion, Wesleyan Methodist Association and United Methodist Free Church chapels registered for public worship in 1867. These have all been mapped. Guidance on sources for chapel history is provided.

My Methodist History (<https://www.mymethodisthistory.org.uk/>) provides a platform for memories of the church since the Union of 1932. A wide range



*Chapels featured on the suite of Methodist community archive websites include the former Ebenezer Methodist New Connexion Chapel (1857–58) in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire. It is now in commercial use, as seen here in May 2022
(photograph copyright Matt Davis)*

of biographical reference works has been digitised, and linked to from this site. The Statistical Returns for 1940 have also been made available. This source is invaluable, in that as well as describing the building materials used, rooms available, with capacity for all Methodist chapels in 1940 it also tells us which branch of Methodism built them.

Wesleys Oxford (<https://www.wesleysoxford.org.uk/>) is intended to share stories of all flavours of Methodism in Oxfordshire. Stories of members of Wesley Memorial church, including in audio format, are a particular feature.

The Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History have done us all a great service by digitising *The Wesleyan Methodist Atlas of England and Wales* which complements the 1873 accommodation returns. It is available on the photo-sharing website Flickr at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ocmch/albums/72157719390958591/with/51233982418/>. They also host **British Methodist Buildings**, a collection of photographs of Methodist chapels taken over the last 40 years or so: see <https://www.flickr.com/photos/britishmethodistbuildings/albums/>.

I hope that has given you an idea of what can be found on the various Methodist community websites. The key message is that users are positively encouraged to add content, particularly about the activities of Methodist communities. If you can add to the sites, as well as make good use of them, the editors will be delighted to hear from you.

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTH LEEDS, NESFIELD ROAD, BELLE ISLE

AN ARTICLE BY GERARD CHARMLEY

Since its creation from the merger of the Congregational and English Presbyterian Churches in 1972 the United Reformed Church has, in common with all of the historic Nonconformist churches, seen a serious contraction in the size and number of congregations. In spite of this a number of interesting new chapels have come into being, although mostly due to the rebuilding of existing structures – in the case of the chapel at Belle Isle, as a result of rationalisation and through a desire to re-energise a cause in a particularly challenging urban environment.

Laid out in the 1930s, the Belle Isle estate has been called ‘...a fine example of the new style council estate... It is windy and open, with none of the dead air that lurked in the courtyards of the old city.’ As originally planned the housing stock was mostly brick semi-detached houses, each with a substantial brick shed. The access roads are broad, roundabouts are many, and the area is quite pleasant, in spite of its reputation as one of the most deprived in the country. It contains two notable modernist churches erected at the same time that the estate was laid out. Yet the effect is quite bleak, and even the churches can look quite forbidding, being of dark red brick: St John & St Barnabas Anglican Church (1938) looks almost fortress-like from the outside. By way of contrast the chapel of the congregation now known as the United Reformed Church in South Leeds is low-lying and long, its offset tower lying behind the front block which, as at Headingley St Columba, contains meeting rooms, with the sanctuary behind.

The United Reformed Church in South Leeds was formed in 2002 from the merger of three URC congregations: Salem at Hunslet, Dewsbury Road, and Belle Isle. All three had originally belonged to the Congregational tradition, with Belle Isle’s chapel being the newest, having been erected in 1952. The churches all faced similar challenges – those of declining congregations, aging buildings and, at the time of the merger, ministerial vacancies. The largest of the chapels, Salem, was closed and sold. At one time it had possessed a congregation of over 800, but those days were long gone, and the church met in the former billiard room of the Institute. Dewsbury Road, whose sanctuary was built as



*Front view of the new United Reformed Church in South Leeds building, Belle Isle
(photograph copyright Gerard Charmley)*

the schoolroom of a chapel which never materialised, continued to meet in their premises. The money from the sale of the Salem premises to a technology company was used to pay for the rebuilding of the Belle Isle chapel. This began in 2006 and was completed in 2009. A hall to the right of the main building was retained, although it is now screened by planting.

The new building was designed by Calls Architecture Ltd. of Garforth, and stands in complete contrast to the red-brick council houses of the area, being mostly white in colour with light red brick detailing. The design, which includes a red-brick tower/spire bearing a metal cross, is designed to be a landmark, standing as it does at a point where it can be seen from the main road through the estate. The chapel is an energy-efficient design, of brick, concrete and wood, including parking for bicycles under a canopy at the front. Entry is into a double-height foyer with coffee bar for refreshments after the service or catering for other events and groups: when the new building was erected particular thought was given to the various uniformed youth organisations, such as Guides and Scouts, who had historically used the old building and required premises large enough to use. The design included a glazed partition which enables the foyer space to be expanded into the adjoining meeting room, which in turn opens into the chapel garden. This foyer is described by Calls as ‘the heart of the building’, rather than the worship space, which, along with the description of the church as ‘the social centre of the community’ suggests that, in design at least, the social

aspect of nonconformity has taken precedence over the sacred here. This is, perhaps, not wholly without reason – the uniformed youth groups which use the chapel during the week are more numerous than the congregation.

The main hall is furnished with upholstered moveable chairs and has more than enough space for the usual congregation of just over twenty, in part to cater for special services. The seating is focussed on the Lord's Table, which stands on a dais in front of a recess which is lit from the sides and of exposed brick, in contrast to the plastered walls of the rest of the sanctuary. A wooden cross is fixed to the back of this recess, and the walls bear a selection of banners sewn by members of the congregation. Other furnishings include a wooden lectern and portable font. To the rear there is light wood panelling. Overall, internally, as externally, the impression is one of light – even the red brick is a lighter shade than that of the surrounding houses.

The building can be illuminated at night, adding to its presence in the community. When compared to, for example, the inconspicuous multi-faith centre in nearby Beeston, which might be a doctor's surgery or day centre, the United Reformed Church in South Leeds is striking and ambitious, in addition to seeming welcoming – a fine addition to the chapel architecture of a city which boasts a rich nonconformist heritage.



Above: a three-quarter view of the new United Reformed Church in South Leeds building, Belle Isle (photograph copyright Gerard Charmley)

BEHIND THE TONBRIDGE DATES

AN ARTICLE BY JOHN ELLIS

The Editor's feature below the article 'The United Reformed Church at Fifty' (*Newsletter* 80 pp 11–16) included the 1970s building of Christ Church URC in Tonbridge, Kent. He clearly has good taste as the same building is featured on the official banner celebrating the denomination's Golden Jubilee. His accurate and admirably succinct history of the congregation's successive buildings reminded this former Tonbridge Church Secretary that none of the dates cited are coincidental. Each hides a story about the life of the church and town, a theme intertwined with the chapel's evolution. Here are four of them.

The Railway Town

Few United Reformed Churches cite a foundation date in the mid-18th century. However in 1751 Tonbridge was having a growth spurt as the River Medway had been made navigable for barges up to the town bridge. The 1791 chapel was ideally located at the heart of the town on the hill north of the river. After the congregation's Golden Jubilee its work was shaped by the railway arriving south of the river. Tonbridge soon became a major railway junction and depot, with many of the Victorian terraced houses occupied by railway workers. As the previous article noted, the move in 1875 to a site at the south end of the High Street was to move closer to them. Between the Wars the church offered special Sunday afternoon services aimed at railwaymen and sometimes led by respected engine drivers. In the 1980s there was still a regular member of the congregation who started his railway career with the South Eastern & Chatham Railway in 1915.

The Finances

The idea of building a more suitable chapel was far from new in 1875, but becoming a railway town did nothing to change the preference of the wealthy to stay nearer London in Sevenoaks or settle in the more elegant Tunbridge Wells. Tonbridge Congregationalists were chronically short of money. The change in the 1870s was the decision of Samuel Morley, the renowned Congregational industrialist and philanthropist, to make his retirement home in Leigh, the first village west of Tonbridge. After a century of offering pitiful stipends and no manse, Morley underwrote the minister's stipend so that the church could call the inspirational David Harding as minister. Morley then gave £500 to convince the church they could dare to embark on rebuilding. They still could not really afford it, so he underwrote the necessary £800 loan as well. The deaths of both Harding and Morley created many difficulties but the prime site and the large building were permanent assets.

The 1970s rebuild was also discussed for years after the 1968 flood: again, finance was the major stumbling block and the reason the hall rebuild was delayed for over a decade. Some ‘experts’ warned the Elders that the project was simply too big for them. There was no Samuel Morley this time, but another inspirational minister, Norman Smith, provided the spiritual leadership. Some of those involved spoke for the rest of their lives of that era as the highlight of their Christian pilgrimage as through patience, sustained prayer and sacrificial giving the miracle happened.

The Baptists

The original 1751 covenant had been carefully inclusive of those with believer’s baptism convictions while having infant baptism as the norm. A new Trust deed in 1801 made no such concession, which appeared to make little practical difference until the Rev. John McCrea announced in 1866 that in future new members ‘would be required to bring their infant children to be baptised’. This precipitated a split in the church: two leading deacons and others of a Baptist persuasion left, formed what was originally called the Tonbridge Baptist Congregational Church, and built a chapel in the High Street, opened in 1872. Human nature being what it is, it seems possible that an additional incentive for the Congregationalists to finally move into the High Street was that the breakaway Baptists were already there.

A century later, the Baptists left their High Street site to rebuild amongst the post-war housing estates to the north of the town. The church thrived and had the space to extend their facilities several times as membership grew to over 600 by early this century. The Baptist – and later Methodist – moves away to the suburbs were a key argument behind the URC decision to retain a High Street presence. Ironically, very soon after the URC opened their new building the denomination formally accepted both modes of baptism into its practice, and in Tonbridge that flexibility was gratefully used: the justification for the Baptist breakaway had entirely vanished but energy remained divided between two separate fellowships.

The Mission

The church records demonstrate the protracted debates about mission that preceded the building milestones. In the case of the 1970s rebuild, staying in the High Street was partly about sustaining a visible Christian presence. An adjacent bus stop on a bustling shopping street helped a coffee shop in the vestibule to be a weekday outreach, staffed by church members trained to provide pastoral support to all-comers. A flexible design allowed the church area to be configured for a variety of worship and other events.

When the complementary rebuilding of the halls was undertaken, there were very lively debates in the Church Meeting about whether all this smart extra

space should be available for commercial and secular use or only for specifically Christian work. A substantial proportion of the membership felt that their sacrificial giving had been to support God's work, not to provide a general community facility; others defined God's work more broadly.

Initially the large children's and youth work of the church used the halls every day of the week so the question of hiring out was less crucial. In subsequent decades, when that work faded away, the issue of how to justify and maintain large premises had a new urgency. At the end of the 20th century a vision for the High Street facilities to be a hub for all the churches in Tonbridge to use excited many members of Christ Church but received less response from ecumenical partners. Now a smaller URC congregation, like many others, relies on income from lettings to cover costs. The conundrum of how best a Nonconformist congregation makes large premises an asset and not a liability does not only apply to historic chapels.

We will continue the theme of the URC's Golden Jubilee in *Newsletter* 82 with a second article by *Michael Hopkins*. Meanwhile, *Martin Wellings* reports on the history and recent developments of the four-church community now known as **Trinity Church, Mill Hill**:



*The rebuilt Trinity Church [United Reformed and Methodist], Mill Hill, London
(photograph copyright Martin Wellings)*

Dissenters in this part of Middlesex (now the London Borough of Barnet) began to gather for organised worship in 1808 in a chapel at Mill Hill Grammar School, shortly after the school was opened by a group of Nonconformists. Mill Hill Congregational Church was formally constituted a century later and moved to a brick chapel on Mill Hill Broadway in 1936. Two years later this church founded a daughter chapel in Eversfield Gardens to the west, towards Edgware. Five years earlier and slightly further west again, the Presbyterian Church of England had opened St James's Church; and a Wesleyan Methodist chapel had also opened just off Mill Hill Broadway in 1914, succeeding a building of 1886 nearby. The three Congregational and Presbyterian chapels joined the URC in 1972 and became one congregation in 2001 under the name 'Trinity United Reformed Church'. Worship continued on all three sites until 2005. For a few years after this only the Eversfield Gardens site was used. In 2008, a Local Ecumenical Partnership was formed with Mill Hill Methodist Church, and four years later the 1936 Congregational chapel was comprehensively rebuilt within the original walls. The resulting building is an interesting amalgam of interwar and modern church architecture. It was designed by Roger Molyneux of Molyneux Architects, London S.E.1; this firm has undertaken various ecclesiastical projects, including the 2011 rebuild of Ebenezer Reformed Baptist Church in Brighton.

The chapel at Eversfield Gardens is still owned by Trinity Church and is used as a community centre. The 1914 Methodist chapel has been demolished. The former St James's Presbyterian Church has been acquired by the congregation of the Edgware Adath Yisroel Synagogue, which was founded in 1939 and which opened its first, very small, permanent building opposite the chapel in 1954.

NATIONAL HERITAGE LIST FOR ENGLAND: NEWLY LISTED PLACES OF WORSHIP

New listings in April, May and June 2022:

First Church of Christ, Scientist, Pinner, 6 Elm Park Road, Pinner, Greater London (Grade II; NHLE reference 1477954; designed in 1936–37 by A. Percival Starkey)

Arthur Percival Starkey was a Harrow architect better known for his design of suburban cinemas in a Moderne/Art Deco style, although the Christian Science church at Watford (c. 1929) was also by him. The roughly L-shaped complex of church, hall and reading room, a standard group for Christian Science buildings, is of dark brick with groups of small, vernacular-style casement windows contrasting with strongly arched entrances and a rounded-off triangular gable. Some original internal fixtures, including areas of parquet



*First Church of Christ, Scientist, Pinner, seen in December 2021
(photograph copyright Matt Davis)*

and terrazzo flooring, survive. The building is now shared by Biserica Apostolică Râul Sfânt, a Romanian Apostolic church; in the photograph, theirs is the left-hand noticeboard.

Cathedral of St Mary and St Helen, 28 Ingrave Road, Brentwood, Essex (II*; 1479422; 1860–61 by Gilbert Blount and 1989–91 by J. Quinlan Terry)

Straight in at Grade II* comes Brentwood's Catholic cathedral, a small Gothic Revival church of the 1860s which was raised to cathedral status in 1917 but which could not be expanded until relatively recently. A dramatically different modern interpretation of the Classical style was adopted, designed in accordance with post-Vatican II norms. Quinlan Terry, whose radical adoption of New Classical architecture for buildings of all types has polarised critics, was responsible for every external and internal detail, including the cathedra (bishop's throne) illustrated here (*photograph copyright Fr James Bradley, from Wikimedia Commons: licensed for reuse under Creative Commons licence CC-BY-2.0*).



Central Methodist Church, Killigrew Street, Falmouth, Cornwall (II; 1481824; 1874–76 by James Hicks and 1956 by Geoffrey B. Drewitt)

A chapel of 1791 was replaced in the mid-1870s by a large complex of chapel and associated rooms to a 'characterful', loosely Romanesque design by local architect James Hicks. The fairly traditional exterior, gabled and symmetrical,

contrasts greatly with the mid-1950s interior, rebuilt with some care using the latest materials: the chapel had been damaged by bombs during World War II and was closed until 1956. The church closed on 16 January 2022.

Also, Bill Jacob's book review of *Sent from Reading* in *Newsletter* 80 made reference to Castle Street Chapel, an Evangelical chapel founded by seceders from St Giles' Anglican church. The congregation became reconciled with the Church of England in the mid-1830s and the building became St Mary's Anglican Church. It has just been upgraded from Grade II to Grade II* status (NHLE reference 1113427).

DESECULARISATION DIGEST: 'THE OLD EXCHANGE', FARNHAM, SURREY

A notable example of this trend can be found in Farnham. There are two significant points of interest: like the chapel in nearby Normandy profiled in *Newsletter* 80, the building was formerly a telephone exchange – but an unusually large and gracious one, fitting in with the tasteful architecture of this prosperous Surrey town; and it has recently been acquired and converted by the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church (PBCC), a group for whom stark custom-built functionality predominates.

Brethren have been active locally for over a century. In 1979 a site was found at the west end of town for a large new 'city room' (the main meeting room for the area). Subsidiary 'local rooms' were established later. The 1979 building was a classic of its time and type: austere, windowless and severe, with a shallow dished layout of multiple benches laid out in a near-complete circle and rising gently from front row to back row as in an amphitheatre. This internal design is standard for PBCC meeting rooms worldwide, whatever the external architecture. After an even larger regional meeting room was built outside Guildford in 2008 the Farnham building was no longer needed – except as a local room, for which purpose it was far too large – and it was put up for sale in 2016. Very little interest was generated in the building itself, no doubt because of its rigid, inflexible layout and forbidding exterior; but the site was large and valuable. A developer bought it, demolished the meeting room and built a care home on the land.

Fortunately for the local Brethren community, who still needed a small-scale local facility, 'The Old Exchange' diagonally opposite was empty and on the market at the time. Latterly used as offices, it had been the town's main telephone exchange for much of the 20th century. The Brethren registered it in May 2017, replacing the old meeting room. Little external alteration has



*Brethren Meeting Room, 'The Old Exchange', West Street, Farnham, seen in May 2021
(photograph copyright Matt Davis)*

taken place, happily, because it is a classy and well-detailed building with much more architectural pretension than a typical telephone exchange – or Brethren meeting room! Perhaps its early 20th-century architect wanted it to compete in this strongly Georgian town: it is Neo-Georgian with elements of the Surrey vernacular style, of pleasing symmetry and proportions, but with a large Classical-style porch.

Gerard Charmley has identified three more Nonconformist chapels in buildings originally constructed for the G.P.O.'s telephone services. Two of their stories will be told in *Newsletter* 82.

BOOK REVIEWS

Wiltshire Nonconformist Chapels and Meetings: a Guide and Gazetteer by James Holden. Gloucester: The Hobnob Press (for the *Wiltshire Buildings Record*), 2022. vii + 326pp, paperback. ISBN 978-1-914407-28-4. £20

To quote the words of the blurb on the rear cover of the book, 'Wiltshire is particularly lucky in the variety and quality of its nonconformist chapels, which range from tiny country meeting houses to large town churches'. Christopher Stell noted that Wiltshire is 'exceptionally rich in the number of early chapels and meeting houses which have survived'. A comprehensive guide and gazetteer, broader in scope than Stell, describing 'each of the almost 500 hundred chapels still standing, with details of their appearance and history', is to be welcomed. As in Stell's *Inventories*, James Holden includes all Protestant nonconformists as this term is generally and most widely accepted, i.e. including Methodists.

Following a short introductory chapter and ‘a note on terminology’ is a chapter on the history of nonconformity in Wiltshire. Much of this is sourced from the *Victoria County History of Wiltshire*, as acknowledged by the author, with some reference to relevant denominational histories. This is followed by a chapter headed ‘Chapel Design’ outlining the architectural evolution of chapels from the 17th century to the present day, the denominational similarities and differences, and the development of fixtures and furnishings. More detail could perhaps have been given to illustrate the evolution of chapel fixtures and fittings and interior layout, i.e. what might be described as the liturgical setting, linked to specific examples, as the buildings transitioned from meeting houses, or, in the case of early Methodists, from ‘preaching houses’, to chapels and full-blown Gothic churches.

The principal section of the book, the gazetteer itself, is divided into chapters headed ‘The Villages’ and ‘The Smaller Towns’, and a chapter each on the larger towns of Chippenham, Salisbury, Swindon, and Trowbridge. Clearly intended to be as comprehensive as possible, there are descriptions of every extant building, whether still in use as a chapel or closed and converted to other uses, as well as those now lost. There is also a chapter on ‘Chapel Architects’. Maps and/or O.S. map references would have been useful, and locating a reference to a particular chapel in the text would have been made easier if there had been an index.

The blurb on the cover makes the bold statement that ‘this book provides the definitive guide to the history and design of these fascinating buildings’. Whether or not this guide is ‘definitive’, and nit-pickers will no doubt form their own judgement on this, it is certainly a valuable resource for anyone with a general interest in nonconformist chapels and meeting houses and in those of Wiltshire in particular. As with all such books it also an important record at a particular moment in time of a rapidly disappearing part of our architectural heritage.

John Anderson

BOOK NOTICES

Places of Worship in Britain and Ireland 1829–1929, edited by P. S. Barnwell and Mark Smith, the seventh book in this series, is now available and will be reviewed in a forthcoming *Newsletter*. It is being offered to Chapels Society members for £35 (a £15 discount on the cover price) and with free postage. To take advantage of this please email the publisher, Shaun Tyas, directly (shaun@shauntyas.myzen.co.uk) and pay by cheque (made payable to Shaun Tyas), PayPal (directly to the above email address) or bank transfer (check the account details with Shaun). Alternatively write to Shaun Tyas, 1 High Street, DONINGTON, Lincolnshire PE11 4TA.

In addition to this, *Places of Worship in Britain and Ireland 1689–1829*, which was reviewed in *Newsletter* 80, is now being offered to Chapels Society members for £35 – a £10 discount on the cover price. Submit your orders as above.

NEWS AND NOTES

Breaking news: Chapels at risk

SAVE Britain's Heritage added 60 new entries to the 'Heritage at Risk' register at the end of June, including six former chapels. More details in *Newsletter* 82.

Hindley Chapel (1641–2022)

Tony Hilton reports on the recent closure of a long-established Unitarian chapel:

In 1641 the inhabitants of Hindley, a township in the parish of Wigan, in the county of Lancashire and the then diocese of Chester, decided to avoid the three-mile walk to Wigan parish church by erecting a chapel of ease. The bishop, who was also the rector of Wigan, approved this decision and appointed a curate to take the services in Hindley. A year later the Civil War broke out, during which the chapel became Presbyterian. In 1660 the Restoration of the monarchy involved the restoration of the episcopalian Church of England, which resulted in a dispute over the ownership of the chapel, settled in favour of the Church of England in 1698. Thereupon, the Presbyterian members of the congregation proceeded to worship in a private house until they built a new chapel in 1700 in what became called Chapel Fold (postcode WN2 2PA). By 1833, however, the minister and congregation had become Unitarian. By 2022, faced with a dwindling congregation, the chapel was closed and the building sold by auction for £160,000. It has been altered and extended since 1700 and is not listed. The chapel is set in a small graveyard with several graves in situ.

Further information can be found in Jones, J. J., *The Struggle between Conformists and Nonconformists in Hindley Chapel 1641–1698* (reprinted from *Transactions of the Unitarian History Society*), and Wickham, W. A., *Some Notes on Hindley Chappell*, in *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol. LXII (1912).

An inquiry from Tasmania

Scott Carlin, the Managing Director of The National Trust of Australia (Tasmania), writes:

'The Trust is the owner of the Penitentiary Chapel, built 1830–34 to the design of colonial architect and engineer John Lee Archer (1795–1853; in office 1826–36). Archer trained in the office of London architect Charles Beazley, followed by five years under engineer John Rennie (Snr). The Penitentiary Chapel was built as an extension to the Hobart Town Gaol. The T-shaped chapel is perhaps unusual as having 36 solitary confinement cells accommodated under the Penitentiary Chapel's raked floor. When did raked floors in chapels become common; and can anybody identify any British or Irish chapels (potentially associated with



The original part of Hindley Chapel, dated 1700. Note the Unitarian 'candle' logo to the left of the porch (photograph copyright Tony Hilton)

Beazley or Rennie) built before 1827 – the year Archer left for Australia – that may have informed Archer's Hobart design?'

National Church (or Chapel?...) Awards 2022

The National Churches Trust has consolidated its various awards into one event this year – and for the first time chapels, meeting-houses and other non-Anglican buildings can be entered. The closing date is 1 August 2022. Any victorious chapels will be reported in the next *Newsletter*!

Pubs as places of worship

The 'little list' in *Newsletter* 79 threatened to grow longer... The Old Five Bells on St Leonard's Road, Bromley-by-Bow, London was certainly in use as a pub by 1851, and possibly as early as 1835. It closed in 1923, and was registered as a Baptist church by a local Baptist and Medical Mission minister in February 1924, still with the name 'The Old Five Bells'! It appears to have combined its role as a chapel with that of a temperance hotel and 'refreshment room' run by the minister's wife. It was demolished after World War II. A photograph of the tall three-storey corner building when still in use as a pub shows a curious oversized gabled bellcot-like element on the corner of the roof, apparently with

five bells in it. Meanwhile, the Rising Sun existed by 1871 in Burton-upon-Trent, that famous brewing town. After it closed (at some point after 1940), the town's Jehovah's Witnesses used part of it as a Kingdom Hall for over 17 years from spring 1952. The town's modern police station now stands on the site. (Acknowledgements to *pubwiki.co.uk*, an exceptionally detailed compendium of pub-related material gleaned from primary sources.)

The Brudenell Road Mission, Leeds

This unusual, distinctive wooden chapel, a Grade II-listed building of the late 19th century, was described by D. Colin Dews in *Newsletter* 21. At that time



Both mosques in the Surrey town of Redhill are in buildings acquired from other religious groups. One is in a former Plymouth Brethren meeting room; and the Jamia Masjid al-Mustafa, seen here in 2012, occupies a former Wesleyan chapel built in 1900 (photograph copyright Matt Davis)

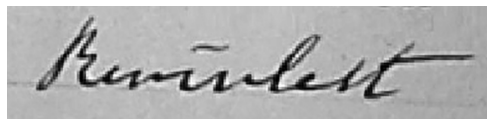
it was in very poor structural condition, having been disused for some years, and planning permission for a mosque on the site had been sought but turned down. The following year, though, a new application was approved, and the building was demolished. The new Makkah Mosque, a £1.5 million building with flamboyant brickwork and tiling, opened on 29th August 2003.

A Brief History of the English Mosque

Historic England has published an interesting blog article with this title, focused on the architectural history of mosques – or, more accurately, the buildings which house them: it is estimated that fewer than 20 per cent of Britain’s mosques are purpose-built, and many mosques are based in converted buildings (including chapels!). A wide range of mosques both purpose-built and adapted are profiled, accompanied by high-quality images from Historic England’s archives. See heritagecalling.com/2022/05/02/a-brief-history-of-the-british-mosque/.

Whose mission hall?...

Worship Registration certificates for non-Anglican places of worship are a valuable primary resource for the researcher, and your Editor’s



ongoing database project – combining the vast array of information from the certificates with other relevant data – has been alluded to in previous *Newsletters*. This task requires grappling with occasionally appalling handwriting. Can anybody decipher the illustrated word, which appears in the ‘denomination’ field on the certificate for Stoughton Street Mission Hall in Leicester, a short-lived place of worship registered in 1885? Neither maps nor directories provide any help as to the nature of the hall, which went out of use by 1895. The only clue is, remarkably, a crime report in the 25th December 1885 edition of *The Railway Review*, in which a sleep-deprived railwayman living nearby assaulted ‘the drummer in a band which had its headquarters in a mission hall in Stoughton Street, and was in no way connected with the Salvation Army’!