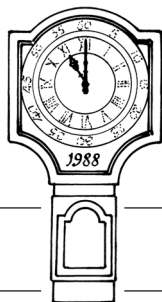


THE CHAPELS SOCIETY



Newsletter 84

May 2023



The Church of Our Lady, Help of Christians, Kingston Road, Portsmouth – formerly the Kingston Road, Fratton branch of Lloyds Bank – seen in November 2017 about four years before it closed. The ornate exterior of this dainty building seemed somehow to suit the congregation which used it for 33 years until 2021 – the Society of Saint Pius X, the traditionalist Catholic group. See the ‘Desecularisation Digest’ feature on page 12 (photograph copyright Matt Davis)

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NOTICEBOARD

CHAPELS SOCIETY EVENTS

3 May 2023	Publication of <i>Journal</i> volume 4
30 June 2023	Copy deadline for August 2023 <i>Newsletter</i>
8 July 2023	Chapels Society Annual General Meeting, Andrew Worth Lecture and half-day visit to Dewsbury and Batley, led by Gerard Charmley (booking deadline 24 June 2023)
October 2023	Possible autumn visit: more details in August <i>Newsletter</i>

EDITORIAL

The end of April saw the Society's visit to Banbury and its rural environs – a very successful day, ably arranged and led by John Anderson – and a review of the trip will appear in August *Newsletter*. At the same time, volume 4 of the Society's *Journal* series, with the lectures and research from the 'Communities of Dissent' project and its conference (see *Newsletter* 80), was being printed; all members should receive their free copy around the time this *Newsletter* arrives. Details of the Annual General Meeting, Andrew Worth Lecture and visit to the chapels of Dewsbury and Batley, West Yorkshire, are enclosed; and preparations are underway for an autumn visit to Salisbury as well.

I must also apologise for the late receipt of *Newsletter* 83: a combination of illness and holiday caused some delays in production!

PROCEEDINGS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 8 JULY 2023

The Society's Annual General Meeting will take place at Dewsbury Baptist Church, Manor Street, Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, from 12.15pm on Saturday 8 July 2023. It will be followed by the annual Andrew Worth Lecture. In *From meeting in private houses to the building of meeting-houses: religious Dissent and the early buildings used for worship, 1662–1710*, David Wykes will speak about the earliest meeting-places used by Dissenters for worship after 1662. He will consider the whole range of meeting-places from private houses to barns, open fields, woods, and even caves, and their eventual replacement by purpose-built meeting-houses. There is a general assumption that Dissenters didn't build their own meeting-houses until after the 1689 Toleration Act. While it is true the decades after 1689 were a major period of growth and expansion, particularly by the English Presbyterians, Dissenters were building meeting-houses before Toleration. Evidence on the buildings used by Dissenters in the fifty years after 1662 also provides important information about the history of Dissent for the period.

The meeting will take place during a half-day tour of chapels in Dewsbury and neighbouring Batley, where the visit will start. Full details of the trip will be found in the flier included with this *Newsletter*.

Martin Wellings

‘FAITH, FORCE AND FIBRE’ – AND THE FITTLEWORTH FORGE

AN ARTICLE BY MATT DAVIS

Fittleworth is a large, thinly populated parish near the geographic centre of West Sussex. Its name, derived from ‘Fitela’s enclosure’, indicates the nature of the landscape thereabouts. Edward Elgar lived in the area for a few years, and Turner and Constable both painted the watermill; but little else has brought fame to this peaceful backwater. For much of its existence Fittleworth’s spiritual needs were met by the centrally placed parish church. The hamlets of Coates, Egdean and Stopham, to the south, west and east respectively, had (and still have) ancient churches of their own; and even the remote upland hamlet of Bedham to the north had for many years an Anglican school-chapel which was served from the parish church. Its hauntingly derelict shell and the dramatic natural setting have made it popular with church crawlers, Instagrammers and photographers. (Chapels Society member Stella Bond paid a visit, describing

it as ‘now fading away ... so deep in its valley that the top of its bellcote was nearly level with the roadway; the ethereal pinkish stone remains, roofless and empty, were quite small. There was no way of reaching it on foot – but there is a good view from above.’) With so few residents and so many Anglican churches around – even if one is now sliding into photo-friendly dereliction – what room is there for Nonconformity? Enough, as it turns out, because for nearly 120 years a chapel has occupied a site in the very centre of Fittleworth village. School Lane Evangelical Church has changed its affiliation, its building and (several times) its name, but helped by support in its early years from two different chapels in Worthing, it has developed into a successful independent cause which during the recent pandemic undertook some innovative work which has strengthened its ties with other similar churches in northwest Sussex and south Surrey.

The story starts, indirectly, 201 years ago and 16 miles to the southeast, on Marine Place in Worthing. Now the largest seaside resort and the second largest town in West Sussex, Worthing barely existed in 1822: it was merely a distant farming-and-fishing outpost of the parish of Broadwater. Nevertheless, Wesleyan Methodists opened a chapel there in that year – just the second Nonconformist chapel in the area, and the oldest survivor (the Independent, later Congregational, chapel of 1804 having been demolished in 1978 after many years of secular use). The Methodist cause found success, so a larger chapel was built nearby in 1840. The Marine Place building, which was called Providence Chapel, was sold in 1852 and may well have passed to the Primitive Methodists, who were known to have had a chapel on that street in 1865. In any case, later in the century it was taken over by the Old Baptist Union, who registered it for their use (retaining the name Providence) on 4 July 1896. This makes it a relatively early place of Old Baptist worship, the Union having been founded in 1880. The church then moved twice in quick succession – to Clifton Road in 1906 and then to Bedford Row two years later.

Meanwhile, in Fittleworth the village forge found a new use. In 1904 a Baptist chapel was ‘established in [the] old forge by Worthing evangelist Mr Archer’, as Sussex church historian D. Robert Elleray tantalisingly states. Who was Mr Archer? – He must have been connected with the Old Baptist Union chapel at Worthing, as subsequent events prove, but he was not in charge of it: the pastor was one Rev. John Gibson. Perhaps Gibson asked Archer to go out to Fittleworth and evangelise there (but if so, why Fittleworth – a place with no obvious natural connection with Worthing?); perhaps Mr Archer lived in Fittleworth but had attended Providence Chapel; or perhaps he had family connections there. Whatever the situation, the cause at Fittleworth was initially very informal: it was not registered for worship until 22 December 1926. By this time Rev. William Powell was the pastor at the ‘Old Baptist Assembly Hall’, as the chapel on Bedford Row in Worthing was then called, and two pieces of evidence confirm that it was the mother church of the Fittleworth cause: Powell submitted

Fittleworth's Worship Registration certificate, calling himself 'Minister of the Place of Meeting above described'; and a newspaper report about Fittleworth's first annual Convention, which took place in August 1926, noted that 'Pastor W. Powell, of the Bedford Row Baptist Church, who is also in charge of the Fittleworth Chapel, was Convenor'.

Three years later came a change in direction, away from the Old Baptist Union and towards non-denominational Evangelicalism. Two factors seem to have prompted this: first, the closure of the chapel in Bedford Row in 1928 without replacement, leaving Fittleworth with no 'mother church'; and second, the influence of the Bentall family of Worthing. One member of this family, a relative of Frank Bentall of Bentall's Kingston-upon-Thames department store fame, had opened a department store of his own in Worthing in 1875. (Latterly operated by the Beales chain, it closed as recently as 2020.) Several other family members supported the chapel at Fittleworth, and one, Leonard Bentall, was also an Elder of a chapel called Worthing Tabernacle. Rev. William Powell had recently retired – perhaps this is what prompted the closure of the Bedford Row chapel – and had recommended that Fittleworth chapel seek union with Worthing Tabernacle, even though this was not a Baptist cause. (Indeed, the Tabernacle's entire existence was attributable to a secession from the General Baptists in Worthing. It was founded by one of the early pastors (1886–1895) of Worthing [General] Baptist Church, C. Douglas Crouch. He was influenced by Charles Spurgeon's views on the 'Down Grade Controversy' of the 1880s and 1890s; and having become convinced that Baptist theology was deviating from its core truths, he left the Baptist Union in 1895 in order to strike out on his own and lead a new non-denominational evangelical church which he called Worthing Tabernacle. It moved to its present impressive purpose-built chapel in 1908 and remains in use.) Accordingly, at Fittleworth's fourth annual Convention in early September 1929, it was decided to seek formal affiliation with Worthing Tabernacle, to 'accept their constitution and methods of work', and to adopt their non-denominational position, becoming 'evangelical, Biblical and unsectarian'. The church's name was also changed to Fittleworth Tabernacle to match Worthing and also that of another church in Lancing, the next town east of Worthing, which upon its opening in 1927 had similarly affiliated itself with the Worthing Tabernacle. Rev. G. J. Attwood, the pastor of Worthing Tabernacle, offered the new daughter church a fulsome welcome, expressed delight that the Worthing church was, in his words, 'reaching out to the west' (the northwest, strictly speaking!), and finished by stressing the importance of three 'F's – faith, force and fibre – which all members, and indeed all Christians, needed to show.

Part of the 1929 meeting at which all this was decided was held 'on the Common outside the picturesque chapel'. (An expansive chapel tea followed, unsurprisingly.) Picturesque it may have been, but a converted blacksmith's



*Fittleworth Evangelical Free Church (now School Lane Evangelical Church) in May 2012
(photograph copyright Matt Davis)*

forge was not an ideal place to meet for worship. On 11 July 1938 a replacement building was registered in its place. Apart from the details of the building itself there are two points of interest. First, it was registered with the name 'Fittleworth Mission Hall': evidently the Fittleworth Tabernacle name had been dropped. (At some point after this, believed to have been in the 1970s, the name was changed again to 'Fittleworth Evangelical Free Church'.) Second, the Worship Registration certificate, which was submitted by yet another member of the Bentall family – Arthur Bentall, describing himself as the chapel's lay pastor – described the congregation as 'Baptists (affiliated to the Worthing Tabernacle)'. It is curious that the church still formally identified itself as Baptist. When the name Fittleworth Evangelical Free Church was adopted, the description on the certificate was changed to show that the church was a member of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC; for more on the Fellowship see the article in *Newsletter* 82). Much more recently – certainly after 2012 – the name was changed once more to School Lane Evangelical Church, reflecting the name of the road it stands on. The chapel appears no longer to be affiliated with the FIEC.

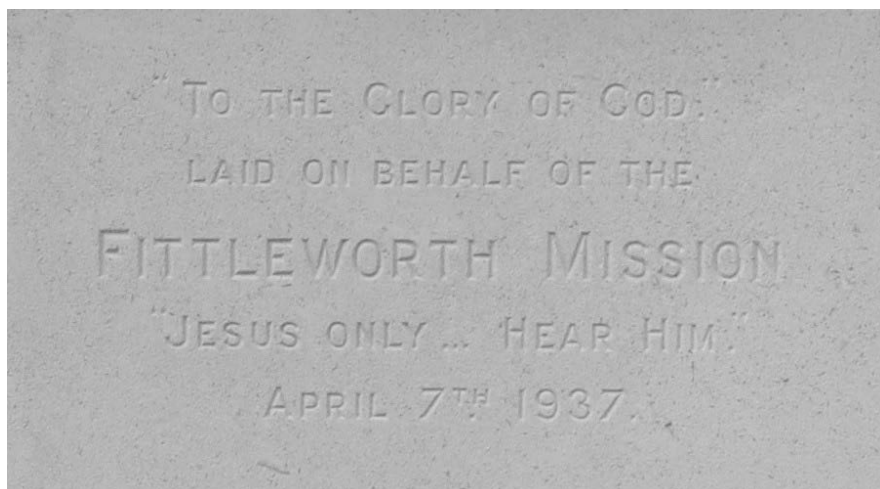
The building which replaced the old forge is set well back behind the road, but its zebra-striped façade is eye-catching. It is a simple hall, with rendered walls standing on a concrete plinth. The roof is gabled and has ventilators, and an entrance porch with a similar gable projects from the front. Between the porch and roof gables is an arched window set very close to the eaves; the side elevations

have plain domestic-style windows. Intriguingly, one source states that the building is in fact the original Lancing Tabernacle, which was dismantled and re-erected here. The dates fit: the present brick-built chapel at Lancing opened on 18 August 1937, having been built for an ever-growing congregation who could no longer fit in their temporary wooden building. That original chapel closely resembles School Lane Evangelical Church, if the surviving photograph is anything to go by: the proportions are correct, the vertical bands and little finial are clearly visible on the gable, the porch is identical, and the side windows are of the correct size. Presumably the exterior, which was made up of close-boarded horizontal timbers, was given a cement or similar coating and then painted once it got to Fittleworth, and the building was erected on a firm base to give an air of permanence.

There are a number of independent Evangelical churches in villages in this part of northwest Sussex, and relations between them were strengthened during the Covid-19 pandemic when the ‘Chapel Channel’ online initiative was launched. This scheme involves the chapels at Fittleworth, Kirdford, Rudgwick and Alfold (just across the Surrey border) and the Ifold Christian Fellowship which has no building of its own. Two joint services per week are held on Zoom, then each chapel opens its own informal online chatroom to allow its members to maintain social connections. There is also a Wednesday Bible study group which is recorded and uploaded to YouTube. Members can access the online services by mobile phone, Apple Watch or any other suitable technology. The initiative has been very successful in reaching churchgoers who would otherwise be left isolated by the loss of face-to-face worship in the chapels.

(Back in Worthing, both Providence Chapel and the chapel on Bedford Row still stand – the latter only just, as it has been derelict for over 10 years. Providence is now a council-owned youth centre; architecturally its origins as a chapel are obvious. Bedford Row became a Gospel hall in 1928, immediately after the Old Baptist Union stopped using it, but it closed in 2009 and has been empty and boarded up ever since.)

The Worthing Gazette and Worthing Herald newspapers provide useful information about the formation and growth of the Fittleworth cause. Basic details of the chapels described here are found in Volume 6, Part 1 of the Victoria County History of Sussex (1980) and D. Robert Elleray (2004), Sussex Places of Worship. The same author’s Millennium Encyclopaedia of Worthing History (1998) is a good source of information about the town and its chapels. A brief history of Lancing Tabernacle, including the old building apparently being reused at Fittleworth, is at https://lancingtab.org/Articles/628805/History_2.aspx. The ‘Chapel Channel’ initiative is profiled at <https://fiec.org.uk/resources/the-chapel-channel>. Chapel registration details are sourced from the writer’s database.



*When Lancing Tabernacle was rebuilt in 1937, the Fittleworth Mission (as it was then called) laid one of the foundation stones. There is strong evidence that the original Lancing Tabernacle was sent to Fittleworth and re-erected there
(photograph copyright Matt Davis)*

KIRKLAND STRICT BAPTIST CHAPEL

AN ARTICLE BY GERARD CHARMLEY

The Baptist chapel at Kirkland or Nateby, a hamlet just outside the town of Garstang, halfway between Preston and Lancaster, stands close to a bend in the road and in the midst of a well-kept graveyard. Its size is a reminder that this area once boasted a larger population than it does today. This is dairy farming country, and the chapel stands amidst pasture and a little arable. It is a country chapel, and the service times of 10.15am and 2.15pm were set in order to allow those members of the church and congregation associated with dairying to see to their herds, as well as to ensure that artificial light was not needed – for the chapel did not acquire electric light until after the Second World War.

Kirkland Baptist Church was founded in 1828 when the pastor at Islington Baptist Chapel, John Worrall, baptised four people in Nateby pond. One of their number, John Shaw, began to preach and became the first pastor of the cause, which initially met in his home. After eleven years the infant cause had outgrown this domestic setting, and thought was given to building a chapel. The Lord of the Manor refused to sell any land, but when one of the few plots of land bordering Nateby not in his possession came on the market, John Shaw was able to buy it as the Squire's steward allegedly paused at the Cathouse Inn for

refreshment whilst the more abstemious Baptist minister did not. This land was exchanged for a plot closer to Mr Shaw's farm, the Squire paying a further £100 to ensure the transaction went through smoothly, and a small chapel was erected by the members themselves – the Squire's money being used to purchase the materials. It was opened by William Gadsby of Manchester on 8 August 1839, free from debt. Mr Shaw died the following year, and it seems that without his strong personality the church began to fall apart, members engaging in personal and doctrinal strife until the trustees intervened and forced the deacons to resign. New ones were elected, and a number of members left and formed a new church of their own, although this seems to have soon ceased to meet. One of the new deacons, William Dunderdale, invited his friend Thomas Walsh, a minister at Preston, to preach regularly for the church, and the decline was reversed.



*The Strict Baptist chapel (1877) at Nateby, Lancashire, seen in April 2018
(photograph copyright Gerard Charmley)*

By the 1870s the congregation had become too great for the old chapel, and the present chapel was built, incorporating the stones of the original building. Seating about 230, it was opened on 6 April 1877, when Alexander Barrie Taylor, successor to William Gadsby at Manchester, and Thomas Walsh preached the opening sermons. The collections at the opening services were sufficient to clear the debt on the chapel. Soon after the Lord of the Manor presented further land to extend the chapel grounds. He also offered to provide a minister 'but', S. F. Paul notes, 'as he was not a Baptist the offer was declined.' (S. F. Paul, *Further History of the Gospel Standard Baptists*, volume 4, p. 173.) It seems that the deacons usually took the services and preached when there was no minister,

where in most Strict Baptist causes a sermon preached by another minister would have been read. These men are buried in the chapel yard, which is full of interesting graves.

The chapel itself is an imposing Gothic-style structure of stone (by way of contrast the chapels at Fairhaven and Blackpool were both brick and Classical in style). The windows are Early English in style, with trefoil heads. The central bay of the gable end projects slightly, and three windows are clustered above the wide single doorway, with a Gothic arch above them. Heavy buttresses add an air of strength to the building, but the unknown architect omitted anything of the order of towers, spires or crockets. The roof is of slate, and whilst the façade's stone is more clearly defined, the style of the building remains the same at the rear, being carried onto the projecting vestry. A Sunday School block (incorporating toilets) stands at one corner of the chapel yard, and beyond that a field which was at one time used as a car park. The Sunday School is currently let as workshops, generating important rental income.



*Two interior views of Kirkland Strict Baptist Chapel, Nateby, taken in April 2018
(photographs copyright Gerard Charmley)*

On entering through the heavy main doors, the visitor finds themselves in an internal porch which retains its frosted-glass windows, and bears coat and hat pegs (of which more can be found in the large vestry), with doors on either side leading into the aisles. The chapel interior is delightful; it has been largely unaltered since the opening of the chapel, with three blocks of wide, varnished pews facing a high pitch-pine pulpit. The pews still retain their brass umbrella holders and drip trays. At the front the communion table stands on a stone dais which conceals the baptistery. The pulpit stairs give access to the one door leading into the vestries at the rear. High up, two windows light the preacher, whilst stencilling on the end wall rises behind the preacher to relieve the monotony of the white wall. Pulpit and table have a definite rustic air about them, whilst the wooden roof is in keeping with the Gothic style of the exterior. It is a wide building, without galleries and, at the front, the seats

gather around the pulpit. The pulpit itself is of panelled pitch-pine with a fine cushion, large bible and a step provided for preachers not quite tall enough for it.

Today the congregation usually meets in the vestry behind the chapel, which has been fitted up as a neat meeting-room with a table, lectern and one row of comfortable chairs. Bibles and hymnbooks are provided on a set of shelves at the rear, whilst a small library rests on the shelf above what was once a large kitchen range, on which were prepared chapel teas and refreshments for those who stayed between the services. During the pastorate of Mr George Rose (1941–52) a part of this space was partitioned off to provide a minister's vestry. This is itself a reminder that modifications to chapel buildings may arise from the changing needs of the church: since the death of Mr Shaw in 1839 the church had not had a stated pastor, so the new chapel had been erected with the needs of the congregation (in this case a large enough space for chapel teas), rather than the minister, in mind.

Today, the congregation is much diminished, and services down to one on a Sunday (excepting special occasions), but the witness is continued and the chapel well-cared for. Descendants of some of the original members still attend, and visitors can be assured of a warm welcome.



The side and rear elevations of the chapel in April 2021, also showing part of the graveyard (photograph copyright Gerard Charmley)

NATIONAL HERITAGE LIST FOR ENGLAND: NEWLY LISTED PLACES OF WORSHIP

Just one new listing, again a Catholic church, from the first three months of this year:

Minster Church of St Benet, St Mary's Road, Beccles, Suffolk (Grade II*; NHLE reference 1478482; designed in 1898–1908 by Francis E. Banham)

A very large cruciform Romanesque church with a monastic air: it was planned as a monastery associated with Downside Abbey, the senior Benedictine community in England. The monastery plan did not come to fruition and it now serves just the parishioners of this market town and its locality; what a fine building they enjoy. The stained glass is uniformly excellent, and the stonework is of high quality. Note that it has been listed directly at Grade II*: a rare honour!

DESECULARISATION DIGEST: CHURCH OF OUR LADY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS, PORTSMOUTH (1988–2021)

Bank branch closures are a perennial point of discussion in the media, with good reason: they bring out strong feelings in people and occur increasingly frequently (nearly 3,000, or about half of all branches in existence in 2015, had closed by the end of 2021). Given that many bank buildings were – and are – well designed, architecturally advanced and opulent landmarks in the street scene, even those who never set foot in a branch may well be concerned about the ever increasing trend towards closures, if it potentially means the loss of fine buildings. Although most do in fact get converted, it is usually for retail or leisure purposes – certain pub and restaurant chains seem to specialise in it – but a couple of chapels in former bank branches have also been identified. *Newsletter* 87 (February 2024) will cover one building which celebrates its centenary that year; this 'Digest' looks at another, used until very recently by the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX) whose former chapel in Brighton was featured in the last *Newsletter*.

Kingston Road is the centremost of the three main south–north routes running up Portsea Island. It winds gently and has a mixture of buildings of all styles, ages and types – although not much in the way of religious buildings,¹ being largely commercial with some residential infilling. As one of the expanding city's main commercial arteries at the start of the 20th century, it made sense for banks to become established there, and Lloyds built a sub-branch at the southeast end (closest to the city centre). Portsmouth City Council's Local List of Buildings,

published in 2011, dates it to around 1900, and looking at the architecture and the rate of development of this part of Portsea Island that date feels about right. It was a remarkably small building, so can never have been particularly important or remunerative; and as the character of the road and its surroundings changed in the late 20th century – its residents and businesses generally becoming poorer and more transient – it inevitably closed. At that time (1987), the SSPX were seeking accommodation in the Portsmouth area for people wishing to continue worshipping in accordance with the Traditional Latin (Tridentine) Rite. The bank branch fitted their requirements, and after minimal conversion it opened on 27 February 1988, being formally registered nine months later.

Situated on a street corner next to a three-storey building, the single-storey bank-turned-chapel looks very unassuming, but it packs a fair amount of architectural detail into a small space. The tall but very narrow entrance, with double doors recessed into an arched surround, is in a chamfered corner which connects a two-bay frontage to Kingston Road with a long five-bay frontage facing the adjacent side road, Little George Street. The building then extends further to the rear with a windowless painted section. Each bay has a wide arched window with foliage decoration above the arch and a curvaceous keystone. The windows are separated by tapering pilasters with rather fanciful Ionic capitals. A dentil cornice runs below the roofline, and above the parapet are slightly bulbous projections, in a darker grey stone than the rest of the pale stone building, and laid out in a strange 2–1–2–1–1 pattern. Above the doorway is a semi-circular pediment-type feature with elaborate decoration and the initials ‘LLB’ representing Lloyds Bank. At the time of your Editor’s visit in 2017 the only concessions to the building’s religious use were a crucifix above the entrance and a tiny laminated sign on the door.

From bank closures to chapel closures (and to correct the suggestion in the previous *Newsletter* that it remains open) ... Our Lady, Help of Christians went out of use in 2021 when the SSPX vacated the building. Whether the pandemic made it unviable is unknown, but reference to it was removed from the SSPX’s website between 21 and 27 July 2021 and the laminated sign had gone by the following month, although the little crucifix above the door survived a little longer.

¹ Buckland United Reformed Church is the only purpose-built chapel on Kingston Road. Apart from the SSPX chapel, an Evangelical congregation took over a social club in 2012 and called it the ‘Empower Centre (Family Church)’; and some members of the local Islamic community are, at the time of writing, trying to purchase the disused former cinema they currently hire. It will become Masjid-al-Noor, the city’s fourth mosque. If the quirky former Majestic Cinema (designed in 1921 by Arthur Cogswell, Portsmouth’s most exciting architect) gets restored to anything like its original condition, it will look stunning – and the Desecularisation Digest might have to pay another visit to Kingston Road!

CHAPEL CLOSURES

This column is an unwelcome addition to *Newsletter*, but sadly may become a regular feature. News of church and chapel closures seems to come in more and more often in this post-pandemic era; and whereas researchers or others interested in the subject could for much of the 20th century rely on timely notifications of church and chapel deregistrations (and, therefore, closures) in *The London Gazette*, such notifications are now published in bulk very intermittently, sometimes years apart, and often years or decades after actual closure. Having a brief record of known closures and their dates in one place, therefore, is intended to be useful in the future as well as of interest now.

Members' contributions will be of great help: if you know of any church or chapel which has closed or is about to, please let the Editor have details. (Local newspaper articles are a valuable source of information.) Photos are particularly welcome. Also, chapels of particular historic interest can be brought to the attention of the Society's Casework Officer (see page 2). Future reports will mostly be brief 'sketches', but we start with a longer report on a short-lived church in the Forest of Dean.

Church of the Sacred Heart, Sedbury, Gloucestershire

Chepstow is the first or last town in Wales, depending on one's direction of travel; like most border towns with a river it has a twin on the opposite bank, in the form of Sedbury in the far west of Gloucestershire. Its most notable feature is the southernmost point of the Offa's Dyke Path, an internationally famous long-distance footpath which stretches the length of Wales. Sedbury is a 20th-century place: specifically a product of World War I, when a big prisoner of war camp was set up and huts were built for Royal Engineers working on the National Shipyards wartime effort. Suburban growth followed, but Catholics in the village had at first to cross the border and worship at the little chapel of 1827 in the centre of Chepstow (a town with a strong Catholic history throughout the post-Reformation period). That changed in 1939, just 12 days after World War II started, when one of the huts was formally dedicated and opened as a church; the *Taking Stock* heritage project notes that 'German prisoners of war did much to beautify the church', and Italian prisoners apparently carved the figure of Christ on the Cross in the porch using their penknives. A square, pyramid-roofed purpose-built church, attractive internally and externally, superseded the hut in 1988. Low, modern and entirely post-Vatican II in layout, with an open interior and seating angled so as to embrace the central altar (placed at one of the corners), the Church of the Sacred Heart was built of the orange brick which was so fashionable in the 1980s, with equally modish brown-framed windows. Together with Cinderford, Coleford, Lydney and Newent, it was one of five Catholic churches to serve the Forest of Dean, which were latterly grouped in one parish served from St Margaret Mary, Coleford.

With the retirement of two of the priests in the parish, this provision of churches could not be sustained. The Sacred Heart was the newest building, but the proximity of Chepstow and its large new church (St Mary, built in 1975) presumably influenced the decision to close it rather than one of the others. A final Mass was celebrated in September 2018, and local newspapers reported in December 2020 that the ‘prisoner of war church’, as it was affectionately known, would potentially be converted into six flats, with three terraced houses occupying part of the car park. Permission for this was granted four months later. Fitting six flats into the small interior will have been an interesting logistical challenge: the plans show creative use of mezzanine space, lit by wide two-storey glazed blocks cut into two sides of the square. These alterations will have affected the appearance of the former church, but at least demolition has been avoided: late-1980s church and chapel architecture may not be exciting, for the most part, but it is important to have some representative examples.

The original hut survives: a very long, plain building, much bigger than ‘hut’ suggests. It is now in commercial use; ‘completist’ church photographers visiting Sedbury must remember to take a picture! A nearby hut of identical design is, coincidentally, in religious use as Sedbury Evangelical Church, formed in 1951 and FIEC-affiliated since 2017.



Church for sale: the former Church of the Sacred Heart (1988–2018), Sedbury, Gloucestershire, in December 2021, by which time planning permission had already been granted to convert the interior into flats. The wartime hut in the background was the original church, dedicated in 1939
(photograph by Alan Hughes, adapted from geograph.org.uk/photo/7042626; licensed for reuse under Creative Commons licence CC BY-SA 2.0)

LOST CHAPELS: CLEGG'S LANE METHODIST CHURCH, LITTLE HULTON (1878–2020)

Members of Walkden Wesleyan Chapel near Salford founded a mission serving Little Hulton in 1875. The first premises were above a shop in a room which, curiously, had earlier been used by Primitive Methodists, who had left behind some useful items – a set of Bibles among them! A combined school and chapel opened on Clegg's Lane, then somewhat rural, in 1878. It cost £700 and was apparently designed by a Joseph Pennington. A separate school was built alongside in 1886 and the original building became a chapel exclusively. The field next to the chapel was acquired in 1921 for recreational purposes, but it was to become very important a century later.

In 1940 Clegg's Lane Methodist Church was recorded as being one of six chapels (and the smallest) in the Walkden and Worsley Circuit. Declining membership led to thoughts of closure in the early 21st century; but instead a congregation with a much longer history but a much newer building came into the picture. Wharton United Reformed Church traces its origins back to that well-known year, 1662, when services of a Presbyterian character began to be held at Wharton Hall (a manor within the parish of Little Hulton) with the permission of its owner, a dissenter. A chapel was built in 1723, two years after Chowbent Chapel (now Unitarian) in nearby Atherton, with which it maintained a close connection for some years. A new chapel opened in 1867 but was affected by mining subsidence, as was its replacement – a Gothic Revival building of 1900 with some neat terracotta detailing. The National Coal Board paid sufficient compensation to allow Wharton Presbyterian Church, as it was then, to close and demolish the latter building and relocate to new premises on the nearby Greenheys council estate.

Close links developed in the present century between Clegg's Lane Methodist Church and Wharton United Reformed Church, reflecting a pattern seen across the country. In 2014 the decision to unite on one site was taken; the following year the Methodist church changed its name to Wharton and Clegg's Lane Church and Community Centre; and the original (1878) Clegg's Lane Methodist Church building was demolished in February 2020. Construction of the new chapel, which is fairly traditional in form and much larger than its predecessor – taking up the site of the former recreational field bought by the Wesleyans in 1921 – finished in 2021. It looks like two churches in one, joined by a large lobby which can be used as a café. The right-hand section can be used for community activities, meetings and subsidiary church activities, while the 100-capacity worship hall on the left is a simply furnished, well-lit room with an attractive modern group of wooden fixtures: altar, pulpit and font. The splendid, intricately

detailed Little Hulton War Memorial has been moved here and installed on one wall. The United Reformed and Methodist Churches jointly invested £1.5 million in the building.

What about the 1969 premises of Wharton United Reformed Church? The low brown-brick building, characteristic of its era, seems to have been acquired by members of the Knanaya community from Kerala, India, who are affiliated with the Syriac Orthodox Church (the Knanaya belong, in the main, either to this church or to the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church). The name 'St George Knanaya Church Manchester' was adopted, the brickwork has been painted red and a car park formed on disused land at the rear. Meanwhile, the churchyard of the original (1723) Presbyterian chapel survives and is regularly maintained. An annual outdoor church service takes place in the churchyard, preserving the 300-year continuity of worship on the site.

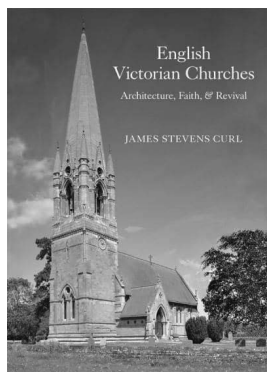


*The former Clegg's Lane Methodist Church, Little Hulton,
Greater Manchester, seen in 2010.*

*The new church stands to its right, and its car park occupies the site of the old chapel
(photograph copyright David Dixon, adapted from geograph.org.uk/photo/1871538:
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BOOK REVIEWS

English Victorian Churches: Architecture, Faith and Revival by James Stevens Curl. London: John Hudson Publishing, 2022. 222pp, hardback. ISBN 978-1-7398229-3-4. £50



James Stevens Curl is in his element with this beautifully produced book. He has already published extensively on this subject – churches in England in the Victorian era – notably in the first half of his *Victorian Architecture* (1990) and in *Victorian Churches* (1995). In several ways, duly acknowledged in the Preface, the present volume should be regarded as a revised edition of the latter which the author rightly feels was prevented by constraints imposed by his publisher from being a book worthy of its subject. Now, with the generous encouragement of John Hudson, he is able to deliver a book to be proud of.

The same themes are present as in the earlier work, and much of the subject matter is the same, but there is more of it, particularly for the late-Victorian period. For the most part the same churches are illustrated, but there are also others and, above all, they are in glorious colour. In the original work of 1995 a dull black and white obscured much detail that needed to be seen and experienced. That is no longer the case. There are 140 illustrations, almost all in colour – and this is important, for ‘colour’ is one of the major themes of the book. This is a work in praise of colour – the visual response to the enrichment of Anglican worship in the 19th century. As previously, there is also a very helpful Glossary of architectural terms, and a longer Bibliography and Index, but again no footnotes.

The author is a man of decided opinions, well-informed and honed over the years and now delivered with the confidence of a man who knows what he thinks: architectural innovation is driven forward by archaeologists and scholars, not architects; and the judgement of critics from Pugin to Pevsner should not be accepted slavishly without question – all good advice. His assumptions and preferences are also clear: the finest expression of Christianity is to be found in the theatre and drama of the High Church tradition, in particular the processions, rituals, vestments and actions involved in the Eucharist, celebrated in the splendour and colour of an aesthetically and scholarly true and well-crafted setting. Strangely there is only one reference to music, for which the west gallery organ and choir, or Nonconformist ‘oratorio’ chapel, provided more appropriate settings than the secluded spaces beyond the screen in the distant chancel to which organ and choir had been banished (or elevated) in the Victorian church. Professor Curl’s lyrical description of churches fit for the highest and purest

forms of worship in the Catholic tradition (both Anglo and Roman) becomes at times elegiac, even melancholic, as he deplores the barbarians of the modern age (both Churchmen and secularists) who do not understand religion, do not appreciate churches and what they were built for, and are happy to tear down, neglect or – even worse – modernise our heritage out of existence. His mission is declaredly to persuade us to value our Victorian religious heritage, especially when expressed in its Gothic form.

This is done not only with a refreshing honesty but also with much learning, understanding and a genuine love of the subject. There is also much breadth, reaching beyond the narrow horizon of the Ecclesiologists in pursuit of their ideal in the Second Pointed period (Decorated Gothic) of the 14th century. Both Pugin (anti-Protestant) and Ruskin (anti-Catholic) are criticised for their bigotry and, while their importance is recognised, so also is the fact that neither was as original as he thought, nor as influential with his successors. Gothic as a style was pioneered at the end of the 18th century by John Carter and the Roman Catholic bishop, Dr John Milner. The fashion for polychromatic Gothic was spread by Ruskin but did not originate with him: polychromy was also favoured by the Ecclesiological Society and was first employed by Butterfield for their ‘perfect’ church, All Saints’, Margaret Street (1849 onwards). For Professor Curl, Butterfield’s church is ‘a glorious achievement, one of the finest works of architecture anywhere in England, of any period’ (p. 95). Other architects to attract such praise are George Gilbert Scott (‘Great’ Scott), William Burges, John Loughborough Pearson, George Edmund Street and George Frederick Bodley. And while there are good reasons why Gothic was widely adopted as the ‘English’ style for Victorian England, this study of Victorian churches casts its net far wider, to German, French and Italian influences and styles, both Protestant and Catholic. Byzantine and Romanesque styles are brought together in John Francis Bentley’s Westminster Cathedral to give us ‘one of London’s greatest ecclesiastical buildings’ (p. 60). While the Ecclesiologists regarded Middle Pointed (Decorated) Gothic as the ideal and Later Pointed (Perpendicular) Gothic as degenerate, the latter remained popular and indeed experienced a revival towards the end of the century. Beyond varieties of Gothic many other different influences and styles and concoctions of styles can be found throughout the Victorian period: Neo-Classical, Byzantine, Romanesque; basilicas and campaniles, apses and chancels; churches with architecturally distinct naves and chancels; churches with single halls divided only by a screen or low cancelli (balustrades). And from the 1860s the holiness of beauty was further enhanced by the Arts and Crafts movement. The point is well made that good and bad examples can be found among all sorts of churches in Victorian England, so each must be appreciated on its merits – not the reputation of the architect or the uncritical repetition of a fashionable view – and valued accordingly. Contrary to Sir Nikolaus Pevsner’s ‘sour’

misjudgement, Giles Gilbert Scott's Liverpool Cathedral (commenced in 1904) 'is the climax of one of the most creative periods in English architectural history' and 'contains one of the most impressive interior spaces ever conceived' (p. 167) – a subject for discussion if nothing else.

There is only a little in all this about the auditory church. Professor Curl has little time for Low Church Evangelicals, neglectful of tradition and ritual, reliant on charismatic preachers, 'much given to abstinence from alcohol' and 'keen to condemn worldliness and the study of secular matters, with the result that they relied on denunciations rather than intelligent analyses of important issues, and so were regarded by many as 'unclubbable' bores' (p. 34). Nevertheless for chapel-lovers there is a redeeming, short final chapter on 'Non-Anglican Buildings for Religious Observance', which sounds like a brief for the Chapels Society. Mention is made, among others, of the Greek Orthodox church of St Nicholas, Toxteth; the New West End Synagogue, Bayswater, and the Shah Jahan Mosque, Woking as well as a roll call of Chapels Society favourites. In Gothic there are Charles Barry's Upper Brook Street Unitarian Chapel, Manchester; Richard Tattersall's Unitarian Chapel, Dukinfield; Bowman and Crowther's Unitarian churches at Gee Cross (Hyde) and Mill Hill (Leeds); Joseph James's Square Chapel, Halifax; and John Gibson's Unitarian Church, Todmorden. There is no discussion as to why so many of the Gothic Nonconformist buildings were Unitarian. There is also an appreciation of other styles: the Neo-Classical in Lockwood and Mawson's chapel at Saltaire and Joseph Aloysius Hansom's Belvoir Street Baptist Chapel, Leicester. Moving on beyond the Gothic, there is commendation for John Gibson's Central Baptist Chapel, Bloomsbury, and James Cubitt's Union Chapel, Islington. But the highest praise is reserved for Paley, Austen and Paley's Christ Church, Port Sunlight – 'most delightful ... a successful, charming building' – but regrettably not illustrated here. This contrasts with the 'showy Wesleyan' Leysian Mission, Finsbury, about which Professor Curl prefers to say no more.

The book ends on a darker note than the 1995 edition, with a lament for our heritage – 'something that was wonderful, yet was lost through widespread indifference to the terminal decline of all that was once held to be of value, the finest architecture that England ever produced' (p. 186). And on that note, Professor Curl rests his case.

Ted Royle

NEWS AND NOTES

A fortunate find in Ferndown

While changing buses, and operating on the ‘photograph first, ask questions later’ principle, I took advantage of a rare gap in the traffic at Ferndown’s main road junction to photograph the gabled, ornately windowed fire station. It turned out to be one of the most short-lived Primitive Methodist churches in existence anywhere, and one which had eluded my prior research into this pleasant but sprawling East Dorset town. Although a chapel of some description was registered in 1909, replacing one opened in 1886 on a different site, the present building dates from the late 1920s, shortly before the postcard view was taken. The 1932 Methodist Union brought into proximity chapels which were originally Wesleyan in nearby places like Stapehill (2 miles away), Holtwood, Verwood and Kinson (Bournemouth), and there were in any case ex-Primitive Methodist chapels close by in Three Legged Cross and Colehill; so Ferndown was no longer required. It closed and was deregistered in 1940, not even being included as a ‘recently sold’ chapel in that year’s comprehensive *Methodist Statistical Returns*. It immediately became a fire station; and apart from the addition of fire appliance doors (and the consequent trimming of the window), the loss of the roof lantern, the fitting of a clock to the gable and the addition of an extension to the left side in the 1990s, it remains the same now as it was when built.

Amazingly the original (1886) chapel, which closed in 1909, survived in secular use for another 103 years. It stood further north at what is now the busy junction of Wimborne Road East and Victoria Road. Its brickwork had been painted over and it had been extended to the west to form a post office and commercial offices, but it retained its unmistakable chapel-like appearance: two arched



Spot the difference: Ferndown Primitive Methodist Chapel when built in the late 1920s, and in its present use as a fire station in June 2022 (scan of postcard [by E.A. Nye of Bournemouth] copyright Alwyn Ladell, from Flickr (https://www.flickr.com/photos/alwyn_ladell/23815799475): licensed for reuse under Creative Commons licence CC BY-NC-ND 2.0; 2022 photograph copyright Matt Davis)

windows to the front and sides, a recessed arched doorway with an arched niche above, and a steep gable. The post office operated between 1952 and 2008. Flats now occupy the site: a shame, as it was one of the oldest surviving buildings in this very modern town. (Even the Anglican church, originally a chapel of ease to the medieval parish church of nearby Hampreston and designed as a slavish copy of it, was not started until 1933!)

Picket Piece United Reformed Church

Frank Law has found some valuable information about this little wooden chapel which was featured in *Newsletter* 83. In 2018 researcher Roger Ottewill contributed the article *History of the Chapel at Picket Piece, 1908–2001* to volume 3, issue 9 of *Lookback at Andover*, the journal of the Andover History and Archaeology Society. This is not available online, but its title at least confirms the chapel's dates. By the same author in volume 3, issue 2 (2011) is an article on Picket Piece's parent church, Andover United Reformed Church, which was featured in *Newsletter* 82: specifically an assessment of how the chapel fared during the Edwardian era, when it was known as East Street Congregational Church. Separately, Frank has also found this amusing comment on the *GENUKI* genealogy website: 'I have been told that [Picket Piece] chapel was built by a gentleman called Alfred King ... [h]e and his wife Sarah had pews at the front of the church and woe betide anyone who tried to sit there.'

Changes at Winchester Baptist Church

Staying in Hampshire: the elegant, wholly Classical exterior of Winchester Baptist Church, a landmark on the busy City Road, will soon be transformed by an ultramodern addition after the local planning committee overruled objections from planning officers at a meeting in October 2022. The open-pedimented entrance porch seen on the left of the photograph below, a slightly later addition to the 1864–65 chapel building, will be removed and a fully-glazed two-storey box, reaching to the top of the pilasters and flanked by narrow bands of metal cladding, will replace it, forming a new entrance porch of entirely different character. The chapel is not statutorily listed but is an important feature of the conservation area in which it stands. The building has already seen one recent change: in 2019 its hitherto white façade was partly repainted in an attractive light blue.

The contrasting gurdwaras of Gravesend

Newsletter 83 discussed gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship) and mentioned a few which occupy former chapels. *Tim Grass* has identified another in Gravesend, one of the locations mentioned, occupying a former Brethren meeting room. Gravesend's Sikh population is very substantial, being somewhere over 15,000 (15 per cent of the borough's residents), and includes adherents of both



*Winchester Baptist Church, City Road, Winchester, in May 2021.
The tunnel-like porch on the left is to be replaced by a striking glass box
(photograph copyright Matt Davis)*

mainstream Sikhism and the Ravidassia schism. In 1993 the Ravidassias took over and re-registered the former Brandon Hall, a long-established little meeting hall wedged into a Victorian terrace, and have been based there ever since. It is an interesting contrast both to the original gurdwara of the main, wholly separate, Sikh community – the substantial former Milton Congregational Chapel, which continues to deteriorate after 12 years of disuse – and, more particularly, to that community’s present home. The £14 million, 1,200-capacity Siri Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara is a building of vast scale and ambition, approached along the long, straight, richly decorated Khalsa Avenue (its name taken from a Punjabi word of great spiritual significance to Sikhs) through two sets of spectacularly elaborate double gates and a fabulous Orientalist pavilion. It has dining halls, a crèche, a library, and even its own sports pitches and football club. One source calls it the largest gurdwara in Europe, and this is plausible: the other contender, at Smethwick, is similarly ornate but much less monumental. Either way, the contrast between the two Gravesend gurdwaras, just half a mile apart, is remarkable – and could a parallel perhaps be drawn with the contrast between

the Victorian era's showpiece Anglican churches and the modest Nonconformist mission halls which were so often found nearby?...

The photograph of the former Brandon Hall can also be found in Tim's recent book *Brethren and their Buildings*, reviewed in *Newsletter* 79. It is rare for former Brethren meeting rooms to pass to non-Christian faith communities, but another which is briefly mentioned in the book will be profiled in a forthcoming *Newsletter*!



The extravagant Siri Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara (left), opened in November 2010 and seen here in 2018, has little in common architecturally with the Shri Guru Ravidass Gurdwara – a repurposed Brethren meeting room seen here in 2006. Note the flagpole outside the latter, a traditional feature of both communities' gurdwaras: Siri Guru Nanak Darbar's supersize one is out of shot to the left
(2018 photograph copyright 'Marathon', adapted from geograph.org.uk/photo/5690392 and licensed for reuse under Creative Commons licence CC BY-SA 2.0; 2006 photograph copyright Tim Grass)

'Ian Visits' ... churches and chapels

Ian Mansfield, self-branded as 'ianVisits', is a well-known blogger on London's transport, history and architecture whose writing has been cited extensively in the national media. Public transport is his main interest, but available at <https://www.ianvisits.co.uk/articles/category/churches/> is an ever-growing and superbly illustrated repository of blogs about places of worship in London. Anglican churches are the main focus, but in the last two years alone such delights as City Temple, Union Chapel, Our Lady of the Rosary at Marylebone (visited by the Chapels Society in July 2022: see *Newsletter* 82) and the Moravian burial ground in Chelsea have been featured as well.

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