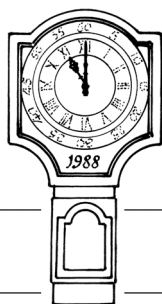


THE CHAPELS SOCIETY



Newsletter 86

November 2023



Partly hidden behind a stone wall on a residential street between Upper Gornal and Sedgley, West Midlands, Moden Hill Strict and Particular Baptist Chapel 'might easily be taken for a workshop or large garden shed'. It housed a congregation formed by one of several secessions from Robert Street Chapel, Upper Gornal, and was used from the 1930s until its closure in early 2022. Its story is told in the article on page xx

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ISSN 1357-3276

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NOTICEBOARD

CHAPELS SOCIETY EVENTS

31 December 2023	Copy deadline for February 2024 <i>Newsletter</i>
27 April 2024	Visit to the Wirral led by Roger Holden

EDITORIAL

At this time of year, thoughts of chapel-crawling and photographic odysseys may well take a back seat – although the long evenings may well give a chance to sort out backlogs of accumulated chapel photos! There is much to look forward to on the Society's spring 2024 visit to the Wirral, though: a booking form will be available in February. Meanwhile, the opportunity to nominate chapels for inclusion in The Victorian Society's new 'Endangered Buildings' should not be missed: why not spend some time this autumn making a submission and raising awareness of the important position Nonconformist buildings hold in our built environment? See the 'News and Notes' section below for details.

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

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

New Members

We are pleased to be able to welcome as new members of the Society Geoffrey and Christine Grime, of Middleton, near Manchester.

Lost Members

Since the Membership Report in the last *Newsletter* we have received the sad news of the death of several of our long-time members: Lilian Wildman of Bedford, Hilda Unwin of Milton Keynes, and past President of the Society Dr Christopher Wakeling of Stoke-on-Trent.

Stuart Leadley

CHRISTOPHER WAKELING

Dr Christopher Wakeling, a learned and inspiring enthusiast of all things chapel-related and a stalwart of the Society, died on 30 September 2023. An obituary will be published in February 2024 *Newsletter*. Chris was a member of the Society's Council between 2006 and 2007 and then served as President for two three-year terms until 2013. His most visible legacies will be the magisterial book *Chapels of England: Buildings of Protestant Nonconformity*, published in conjunction with Historic England in 2017, and his forthcoming new edition of Pevsner's *Staffordshire*; but his service to the Chapels Society, and his passionate advocacy of the importance of Nonconformist buildings, deserve equal remembrance.

NEWSLETTERS AVAILABLE

A member has kindly offered a nearly full set of past *Newsletters* to anybody who would like them. The set is complete apart from the first and second editions. Would anybody interested in these please contact Secretary *Martin Wellings* in the first instance.

VISIT TO THE WIRRAL, 27 APRIL 2024

The Society's spring visit in 2024 will be to the Wirral peninsula, led by *Roger Holden* and taking in a wide range of churches and chapels of the 19th and 20th centuries – from the magnificent Christ Church at Port Sunlight to one of the largest of Francis Xavier Velarde's many Catholic churches, English Martyrs at Wallasey. A coach will be used. More details and a booking form will be in *Newsletter* 87.

VISIT TO BATLEY AND DEWSBURY, 8 JULY 2023

For our summer visit, members of the Chapels Society visited the twin towns of Batley and Dewsbury, in West Yorkshire. Though today they form a single conurbation, historically they were separate market towns with fields between, and to this day each has its own town hall. This was a cloth manufacturing area, and the chapels that we were to visit were built either by the mill owners or their workers.

We met at Batley Central Methodist Church, originally Zion Chapel of the Methodist New Connexion, but now the sole surviving Methodist chapel in the town. The memory of the other chapels is made known primarily through their War Memorials, at the front of the chapel. Built in 1870, Zion is a magnificent representative of the larger urban chapels of the era, in Neoclassical style, with a full gallery and a massive pulpit. Its impressive collection of stained glass windows bear witness to its importance in the Victorian era and the early 20th century. The architect, Michael Sheard, was a member of a prominent local family of woollen manufacturers. Zion was known historically as the ‘Shoddy Temple’ – not a derogatory term, but rather a reference to the fact that many of the leaders of the town’s shoddy cloth manufacturers worshipped there and, at least if local tradition is to be believed, business deals in the industry were struck on the chapel steps.

We then boarded a service bus to Dewsbury, alighting outside the former Friends’ Meeting House, built in 1831 and closed in 1968. The building is now a theatre, and as we observed, well cared for. Next door is the wonderfully named Glory Band Tabernacle, dating from 1868. Built for a revivalist sect, it went through a period of secularisation before being taken over by its current



The galleried interior of Batley Central Methodist Church (1870; formerly Zion Methodist New Connexion Chapel)



*Detail of the former Salem Methodist New Connexion Chapel (1863),
Northgate, Dewsbury*

occupants, a Pentecostal/Charismatic group called Anchor Ministries. We noted in fairly distant view the former Unitarian chapel of 1866, now used by a Muslim group, and the old Pentecostal chapel just below it. Reaching the centre of Dewsbury, we passed the former Salem New Connexion chapel with its bust of John Wesley. Although the building sports signage from an Islamic organisation, it is unmistakably derelict.¹

Our next stop was Dewsbury Baptist Church, an old General Baptist cause founded in 1864. The chapel, a magnificent example of Victorian Gothic, dates from 1870–71, the opening sermon having been preached by Dr Maclaren of Manchester. The interior illustrates the tendency towards a more Anglican style, with a side pulpit and a shallow chancel that once accommodated an organ, but which is now oddly empty. Here the 2023 Annual General Meeting was held, and the Annual Lecture delivered by Dr David Wykes, who spoke about Nonconformist meeting places in the transitional period between 1662 and the Toleration Act of 1689.



Interior detail of Longcauseway Chapel (1884), Dewsbury

Having eaten our packed lunches at the Baptist Church, we moved on to Longcauseway Chapel, right in the centre of Dewsbury, a rich example of Nonconformist Gothic that bears comparison with such other chapels as St Andrew's Baptist Church, Cambridge. Built for the Congregationalists in 1884, today the church is a united URC/Methodist cause.

From Longcauseway we proceeded up the hill to Westtown. On the way we passed the Neoclassical former Wesleyan Centenary Chapel, now used by the Elim Pentecostal Church, followed by the building of Dewsbury Evangelical Church, a former commercial building acquired in the last decade as the congregation outgrew their former home, an old Primitive Methodist chapel.

Our final destination on the visit was Providence Independent Methodist Church, Thornton Street. This is the last surviving church of the denomination in Yorkshire, though once there was a fairly extensive circuit. There was a display about the closed chapels in the locality in the schoolroom at the back. Here we were welcomed by the minister, who spoke of the history of the chapel, and then by one of the members, who spoke of her 70-year experience of the church. As befits a denomination that began with the dissent of working people from what they saw as an elitist ministry, the chapel is relatively small and simple. We saw the former Men's Institute on the top floor, a Working Men's Club in miniature with a full-sized billiard table, and were treated to a proper Yorkshire Methodist chapel tea. On a personal note, I was moved that the chapel plates were made by Weatherby's of Hanley, a now defunct firm whose derelict factory looms over



Providence Independent Methodist Chapel (1873), Westtown, Dewsbury: superbly preserved in a wholly redeveloped area, and the last surviving chapel of its denomination in Yorkshire

the ring road of the town where my own chapel is located.² So our tour went from a chapel noted for the mill owners to one built by and for mill workers.

Finally, we must thank the several chapels that we visited for their hospitality, and Dr Gerard Charmley for organising and leading the day.

Gervase Charmley

All photographs in this section copyright Matt Davis.

¹ Subsequent research indicates that one of Dewsbury's longest established Muslim groups still own and use it as Madni Masjid, and a major renovation programme started in 2016. The interior is being worked on first, and the current entrance is at the rear.

² See the article 'Rebuilding Hope: the building of Bethel Evangelical Free Church, Hanley' in *Newsletter* 85.

FROM SACRED TO SECULAR TO SACRED ... A DOUBLE BILL

AN ARTICLE BY MATT DAVIS

Newsletter 79 featured a chapel in Oakengates, Shropshire, which returned to religious use after 39 years as a community centre and nightclub. In Gloucester, an example of an even greater length of time between secularisation and desecularisation has turned up: more than 50 years after Wesley Hall, a large Methodist mission church, closed, it is back in use by a thriving Evangelical congregation. Not to be outdone, Oxford has come along with an example of its own: a Methodist chapel which closed in 1933 is now home to a new congregation exactly 80 years later.

To Gloucester first. George Whitefield introduced Methodism to his native city in the 1730s, and it has been strong locally ever since. By the late 19th century, all the main Nonconformist denominations were reaching out into the southern suburbs around the Bristol and Stroud Roads by building mission chapels. Open-air Wesleyan services started in this area in 1891 and were successful enough to justify the opening of, in very quick succession, a wooden chapel, a brick-built school-chapel, a tin tabernacle (to provide more room for the school-chapel) and, in 1909, a proper chapel and Sunday School building of some distinction. John Fletcher Trew, a prolific local architect and builder, provided the congregation with a large, square, brick-and-stone chapel with a gabled east-facing front elevation (facing Seymour Road) featuring flanking stair-towers and an arched doorway set in a large Portland stone surround with a long keystone, a very wide Diocletian window above and small windows alongside. The south-facing side elevation is similar. The tower at the southeast corner has a large octagonal stone turret. The north and west façades also have gables; the north has a Diocletian window too.

With all the main Methodist groups having a significant presence in Gloucester, there was an oversupply of chapels after the Union of 1932. Wesley Hall, as it was latterly called, was no longer needed by the 1960s: St Luke's Methodist Church (1903; originally Bible Christian) was just round the corner and was planning an extension. The chapel closed in 1965, its 67 members moved to St Luke's and the building was sold to the city's education committee in 1966 and converted into a youth club called 'Star 66'. This continued to serve young people in this part of Gloucester well into the 21st century.

Meanwhile, City Church Gloucester came into existence in, or by, 2002 when it was registered as a charity. By 2009 it was meeting in the George Whitefield Centre next to Gloucester railway station. This aptly named community centre later housed its offices when services moved in the autumn of 2014 to another hired venue: the former St Stephen's Anglican Church on Bristol Road (built 1898–1900), which had closed in 2010. City Church sought premises of its own, though, and by this stage Star 66 had already closed down (it was up for sale in October 2012, boarded up and looking sorry for itself). It is believed City Church bought the building around the time it moved to St Stephen's, presumably with the aim of moving in as quickly as possible. Services were certainly being held there by March 2018, although it was stated around that time that an extensive programme of renovations would be starting in May 2019. The building is now in excellent condition, proclaiming its return to religious use with small banners which advertise its name as 'City Church – The Chapel', and the last formalities were completed in June 2022 when it was registered for marriages. It is associated with the Newfrontiers Evangelical movement and is also now part of a related worldwide network called 'Regions Beyond', which has 37 churches in the United Kingdom. ('Regions Beyond' refers to a quote from St Paul: see 2 Cor. 10:16.)

A heartening story accompanies the sale of the building to the church. A boy who regularly attended Star 66 died in 2012 in tragic circumstances, and his friends commemorated him with graffiti on the Portland stone façade and the doors. This was cleaned off when the church took ownership, and the rather flimsy doors had to be replaced anyway; so instead the church's pastor offered to commission a memorial plaque which would be placed on the front of the chapel. It was unveiled on what would have been his 18th birthday in 2018, with family and friends in attendance, and was originally lit at night by an illuminated star.

Now along the A40 to Oxford for a look at North Gate Hall (also known as Northgate Hall). This striking building dates from 1870–71, although it looks older with its Classical styling, and was built in a prominent position in the city centre north of the High Street for a congregation of the United Methodist Free Church which had been meeting in the 'Old Quaker's Chapel' (as *Jackson's Oxford Journal* called it: presumably this was the former meeting house in St Giles which was demolished in the mid-20th century). A large congregation must



The main (east) elevation of the chapel in November 2022, showing the Portland stone door surround (photograph copyright Ian Serjeant)

have been anticipated: the new chapel had seats for 500 on the upper level with schoolrooms below. J.C. Curtis was the architect; the cost was put at £1,500.

As at Gloucester, and in so many other places, the reunion of Methodism's separate strands in 1932 made the chapel redundant. Charles Bell's Wesley Memorial Church was a few steps away, and that became – and remains today – the focus of Methodist worship in Oxford city centre. Services in the former United Methodist Free Church chapel ceased in 1933, and the building passed to the Oxford Intercollegiate Christian Union. It remained in their ownership until 1989 and housed, among other things, their library – where a recent edition of *The Banner of Truth* notes 'the recently-converted J.I. Packer first discovered the works of John Owen which went on to have such a formative influence on his life and theology'.

It may have appealed to the building's present congregation for such a key figure in the evangelical and Reformed tradition to be associated with it – but let us not get ahead of ourselves, because in 1989 Oxford City Council acquired the former chapel and wholly secularised it. It was used as a community centre and as the base of a charity for homeless people, but only the latter remained in 2011 when the council announced it was selling the building. The charity moved elsewhere the following year, and in 2013 the old chapel took on a new life as



The chapel's south elevation in November 2022. The plaque commemorating the local boy can be seen at the base of the tower below the 'City Church' banner (photograph copyright Ian Serjeant)

a restaurant. This closed at the start of the pandemic and stood empty for a while: but in 2022, the 50th anniversary of the building's Grade II listing (NHLE reference 1369447), Oxford Evangelical Presbyterian Church entered the picture. This church was planted in the city in 2018 and had been meeting at St Luke's Chapel and at the present Oxford Friends Meeting House (a neat coincidence!). The congregation outgrew these locations – much outreach work is done among university students, which may have prompted this growth – and in November 2022 the church was able to get planning permission to take over North Gate Hall, alter the interior and restore it to religious use. The congregation should have moved in by the time you read this article. No half-measures are being taken in the reconversion: Quinlan Terry Architects, known for their exacting adoption of the principles of traditional architecture (and Classical forms in particular), have been commissioned. Terry himself is a man of evangelical faith in the Reformed tradition, and so is a natural choice for a Presbyterian church (but see *Newsletter* 81 for his work at the Catholic Cathedral in Brentwood).

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW) is a small, fairly new denomination which seeks to re-establish the Presbyterian tradition. A conference was held in 1986, 14 years after the Presbyterian Church

of England became part of the United Reformed Church, and from that the necessary structures emerged to allow a new denomination to form – initially with three congregations. In 1991, by which time there were five (Blackburn, Cambridge, Chelmsford, Durham and Hull), a Presbytery was formed; and five years later the position was formalised and the present name was adopted. At the time of writing (October 2023) there are 24 congregations: 17 in England, four in Wales and three affiliated churches in continental Europe. Numbers are rising steadily: seven of these congregations have been established since 2015. Many are plants from existing churches – but while Oxford Evangelical Presbyterian Church is one such, it is not clear where it was planted from: the geographical distribution of churches is very uneven, and the most likely candidate seems to be Nauntun Lane Church in Cheltenham. This was established in 2002 and later planted a second congregation in Cheltenham which in turn – appropriately to finish this article – went on to found one in Gloucester.



North Gate Hall, Oxford, in October 2022 (photograph copyright 'Stephanie (Oxford)', from Wikimedia Commons: licensed for reuse under Creative Commons licence CC-BY-SA-4.0)

I am grateful to Roger Holden for alerting me to the Oxford church and for providing a useful report from The Banner of Truth, and to Ian Serjeant for taking the Gloucester pictures. St Luke's Methodist Church in Gloucester is, coincidentally, now also occupied and used by an Evangelical congregation – Gloucester Community Church.

MODEN HILL BAPTIST CHAPEL, SEDGLEY

AN ARTICLE BY GERARD CHARMLEY

The death in early 2022 of Mr Billy Wheeler, deacon and one of only two remaining members of the congregation of Moden Hill Strict and Particular Baptist Chapel, Sedgley, prompted the closure of this small and unobtrusive chapel. One of two small prefabricated chapels in the West Midlands town of



Moden Hill Chapel in July 2015, showing the proximity of what used to be the deacon's house to the left (photograph copyright Gerard Charmley)

Sedgley associated with the Gospel Standard Baptists, Moden Hill Chapel is a striking example of the simplicity of mid-20th-century chapel architecture.

The Strict Baptist church worshipping at Moden Hill Chapel owed its origins, in common with several other congregations, to dissension among the worshippers at Robert Street Strict Baptist Chapel, Upper Gornal, in the 1920s, when that chapel suffered no fewer than five secessions (remarkably, it is still open). These began in 1922, when the then minister, Joseph Field, left together with a section of congregation and began worshipping initially at Jews' Lane. That congregation split further, and in 1934 Joseph Field established a church at Sedgley, for which a tin chapel was erected in Arcal Street (since replaced by a modern brick building). The remaining congregation at Robert Street divided later in the decade, with a section meeting in the homes of their members before a prefabricated building was erected on land adjoining the house of one of the deacons. (A similar arrangement may be seen at Providence, Irthlingborough and Salem, Carshalton.) The chapel remained private property until the 1960s, when it was placed in trust for the church and congregation.

By way of contrast to the former Arcal Street building, Moden Hill chapel was built of wood, standing on a brick plinth. The site slopes steeply down from the road, rendering the chapel still more unobtrusive. Painted white with black detailing, it is simple and elegant, although it might easily be taken for a workshop or large garden shed. When first built it had two ventilators protruding from the roof, and an open porch; today the ventilators have vanished and the porch has been enclosed with double doors. In a concession to health and safety regulations, a steel fire-escape was provided leading down from the rear of the chapel. Just below the chapel on the strip of land owned by the church is a

chemical toilet. The chapel has no running water; when the next-door house was owned by one of the deacons this was no issue, as water could be fetched from there, but in later years this meant that water had to be brought specially, so that unexpected visitors had to do without.

Internally the chapel betrayed the same simplicity and care as externally. A curtained-off area at the front to the right functioned as a vestry, balanced by the harmonium. The walls were white, except for the exposed rafters which might have been intended to support a ceiling that was never introduced. Open backed benches of stained wood and cast iron faced a lectern-style pulpit of the same shiny wooden consistency as the benches, harmonium and desk. On the desk rested a gentle reading slope for the use of the deacon, which could be removed to transform the desk into a communion table. When I visited the chapel in 2015, the chair behind the desk was one specially adapted to enable Mr Wheeler (who was then 91 years of age) to conduct services in the absence of a minister whilst remaining seated. The chapel was heated by radiators and an electric heater stood at the front, trained on the desk. Not that any heating was needed on the day of my visit, which was a very warm Friday evening. The chapel was a little stuffy and the congregation sparse. Nevertheless, the welcome was warm, the preacher eloquent, and the singing hearty. The little chapel was a joy to visit, and it is to be hoped that closure will not be the prelude to demolition or conversion to some unsympathetic use.

[Editor's note: the chapel was formally registered for worship on 10 July 1961, presumably when the trust was formed and the building ceased to be private property. Arthur Fellows, signing himself 'Corresponding Deacon and Trustee' and resident at the time in the adjacent house, submitted the certificate.]



The interior of Moden Hill Chapel in July 2015, showing the pulpit and, in front of it, the desk-cum-Communion table (photograph copyright Gerard Charmley)

FROM MOUNT PISGAH TO GURDWARA SRI GURU NANAK

AN ARTICLE BY D. COLIN DEWS

The short feature 'A Brief History of Gurdwaras in England' in *Newsletter* 83 (February 2023) points to an area for further research, namely that of Christian places of worship passing to other faiths and the factors that led to this. The article briefly noted one such example was Mount Pisgah Methodist Chapel, Tong Road, Leeds, where I was a member of the youth club in the 1960s.

The opening of Benjamin Gott's Bean Ing Mills on the banks of the Aire and to the west of the town led to the surrounding fields being developed for a mix of industrial premises and working-class housing, which by the beginning of the 20th century became a slum clearance area. The growing population and an increasing demand for workers at Gott's textile mill led to the opening of the adjacent Wellington Bridge in 1819, so fuelling further development on the meadow land on the far bank in New Wortley, followed by a gradual expansion up the valley side towards Armley.

Meanwhile, in 1811 the Wesleyan societies in the townships to the southwest of the town formed the Bramley circuit, only to be decimated by the Wesleyan Reform agitation from 1849. When the Reform circuit finally joined the United Methodist Free Churches (UMFC) in 1861, all its societies had originated in the secession. However, continued development up Tong Road, which had originated as a turnpike, brought together a group of Free Methodists meeting in a house in Cheltenham Street in 1868 and which led to the purchase of a site across Tong Road where a school-chapel to the rear of the site was opened on 27 September 1870. This was followed on 1 May 1878 by the opening of an ambitiously large, galleried, 700-seater chapel with a large central pulpit-rostrum with its iron balustrade sweeping down to the ground floor, as if to imprison the communion table. A caretaker's house was also built on the site. The name chosen was Mount Pisgah, not an over common one, and suggesting early optimism as it was from Mount Pisgah that Moses saw the Promised Land.

For most of its existence Pisgah was surely far too large for its congregation but between 1937 and 1939, during the ministry of the Rev. John Mayne (1901–1986), a popular, charismatic preacher, full congregations were reported. It was probably about this time that there was a large Brotherhood, but when they decided to go to the coast on the Sabbath they suffered the wrath of the officials; what needs to be appreciated that Saturday morning was a working day and so a full day out was only possible on a Sunday. Another conflict within the society was caused by placing a cross on the communion table, seen as a symbol of Popery. In the 1960s there was still vigorous youth work with a Boys Brigade and

Girls Life Brigade. Its Sunday school saw a temporary increase with the closure of Skilbeck Street Central Hall in the Leeds Mission. The church membership stayed at about 100 but its future was increasingly uncertain.

Like most chapels it depended on a few wealthier families for support. One such family in earlier years was that of the Tempests, Bentley & Tempest from about 1907 being cloth makers of Armley Mills. Another family that emerged was that of the Wilbys, builders and monumental masons. John F. Wilby both ran the place and controlled the finances, as well as being the Boys Brigade captain and Sunday school activist. No doubt his support kept the society afloat but not without tensions within the church. In the 1960s slum clearance of mainly back-to-back housing left the church isolated and impacted on its work. This resulted in the community it had served being dispersed to new estates in other areas; later when new houses were built, many came from east Leeds and did not identify with this part of Armley.



Sri Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, Tong Road, Leeds (formerly Mount Pisgah Methodist Chapel), seen in April 2023; its origins as a United Methodist Free Church are clear from the lettering below the pediment. Note also the Sikhs' traditional orange flagpole (photograph copyright D. Colin Dews)

Close to Pisgah was the manse and between there and the church was a row of garages. One, probably originally a workshop, was the Institute which became youth club premises. However, a falling membership with a now vastly large premises, led to the congregation retreating to the Institute. The closure of New Wortley Salvation Army Barracks created a secession which for a time joined the Pisgah congregation. In the end closure was inevitable and in due course the Institute and manse were demolished.

Unable to sell the large chapel, it went to the City Council – the rear Sunday school might have been retained – but it was then discovered that the land surrounding the chapel was still Methodist property, resulting in council access being denied. When the Sikh community enquired about purchasing the chapel, the council's problems were resolved by handing it back to the Methodists who promptly sold it. Over time the premises were altered so that a floor was created at gallery level: this is now the area for worship. Nevertheless, below the pediment in bold capital letters it still proclaims 'United Methodist Free Church'. On a number of occasions I have visited this gurdwara and have always felt at home. One of their websites states that Christians are welcome but the barrier to active participation in their worship is that it is conducted in Punjabi.

It is now over a hundred and fifty years since Mount Pisgah was opened. There was no way those pioneering Free Methodists could ever envisage what in the future would become of their chapel. Another example locally of a Nonconformist chapel which became a gurdwara was Newton Park Union Chapel (Baptist-Congregational), Chapeltown Road, built in 1887. Subsequently it was replaced by new premises. Newton Park Union's fame was that Gordon Stowell centred his *The History of Button Hill* (1930) on the rise and fall of its congregation.

NATIONAL HERITAGE LIST FOR ENGLAND: NEWLY LISTED PLACES OF WORSHIP

New and upgraded listings between July and September 2023:

Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Howard Way, Harlow, Essex (Grade II*; NHLE reference 1246733; designed in 1953–54 (built 1958–60) by Gerald Goalen)

An upgrade from Grade II status. By far the most significant of the four new Catholic churches in Harlow's 'New Town' era, this soaring modernist church, with its abundant continental European influence, anticipated the Second Vatican Council's reforms and stands as a landmark of the Liturgical Movement. One of the earliest and largest sets of dalle de verre glazing in the country is to be found here.

St Mary's Church, Douai Abbey, Upper Woolhampton, Berkshire (II; 1482847; 1848 by George J. Wigley)

Occupying a site of historic importance for Catholics – the manor of Woolhampton was held by a recusant family – this little Gothic chapel was Wigley's only known work in England. (He was better known for founding *The Universe*, the Catholic newspaper). It has been reordered internally, but some historic fittings remain.

St Clement's Congregational Church, Back Hamlet, Ipswich, Suffolk (II; 1486564; 1887 by William Eade)

This chapel, which stayed Congregational when the United Reformed Church was formed in 1972, replaced Ipswich's original Congregational chapel of 1869. It occupies a prominent corner site, and its stumpy, offset little tower and attached porch are distinctive. All the original fittings are said to survive despite the chapel's closure in 2017 and sale to a new owner in 2021.



The former St Clement's Congregational Church, Ipswich, seen in May 2022.

It was still boarded up when surveyed by Historic England in August 2023

(photograph copyright Jonathan Thacker, adapted from geograph.org.uk/photo/7176045; licensed for reuse under Creative Commons licence CC BY-SA 2.0)

DESECULARISATION DIGEST: KING'S CHRISTIAN CENTRE, BISHOP'S WALTHAM

Oddfellows, usually known as Odd Fellows outside Britain, is a fraternal society with old but obscure origins. The Independent Order of Oddfellows Manchester Unity Friendly Society, also known simply as Manchester Unity, was founded in

1810 and was one of the earliest orders of Oddfellows in England. By the 1850s lodges affiliated with Manchester Unity had spread across the country, including to Hampshire where there were 27, all organised within the 'Southampton District'. At that time most lodges met in pubs, but over time purpose-built halls – often designed with some care and architectural pretension – became more common. This was the case in the small market town of Bishop's Waltham, whose 'Bud of Friendship' lodge initially met in the King's Arms pub. In 1895 £1,500 was spent on the design and construction of the Oddfellows Hall in a prime spot on the High Street. It had a capacity of 500 and, as the largest meeting place in the town, was also used as a venue for public entertainment, meetings and similar. (The Oddfellows only used it for meetings once a fortnight.) The whole town turned out on 30 December 1895 to celebrate its opening: a half-day holiday was granted, a parade was held, a huge feast was laid on, and in the evening an even bigger concert took place. The 4 January 1896 edition of the *Hampshire Chronicle* devoted nearly a page to the events, and usefully gave an extensive description of the building. In the early 1920s the building followed the fashion of the time and became a cinema, which went through a couple of name changes and eventually closed in the 1960s. For most of the rest of the 20th century it was used as a showroom, a shopfront having been inserted at ground-floor level accordingly.

For such a small town, Bishop's Waltham has always had a lively religious life. As well as the Anglican parish church, a Congregational chapel was built in 1862;¹ the present United Free Church (Methodist and URC) opened in 1910 for Primitive Methodists; a Gospel hall for Open Brethren has existed since 1915; one for Exclusive Brethren opened c. 1925 and continued until 1959, when meetings moved to Durley; and Roman Catholics have met since 1906 (their present church, a superb blend of traditional and modern, is a 1997 rebuild and extension of a church opened 20 years earlier). In the mid-1990s, yet another congregation became established and its members were able to acquire, alter and move into the Oddfellows Hall. King's Church, a non-denominational Evangelical church affiliated with the Newfrontiers movement and the Evangelical Alliance, converted the ground-floor showroom section into a café and community space and the first floor into a meeting hall. It was registered as King's Christian Centre in March 1995.

Everything above the modernised ground floor of this splendid building is original. Local men designed and constructed it: the architect was W. Gilbert, the builders the firm of Messrs. Hale. The internal dimensions are 62 x 31 x 24 ft; as originally designed there was a ground-floor hall of 45 x 31 ft, a large balcony and an upstairs hall of 31 x 15 ft with a moveable stage. Intricately moulded decoration covered the ceilings. Externally, red brick (manufactured in the town by Blanchard and Co.) dominates. The two storeys are separated by a thick string-course of stone with a projecting gable-like triangular element in the

middle. Above this are three pairs of tall windows recessed into stone surrounds and capped off by another stone string-course which suddenly loops up into the trapezium-shaped gable. Inside this 'loop' is a lot of intricate decoration, including a great deal of terracotta, and with the words ODDFELLOWS HALL 1895 in the centre. (This terracotta panel was by Paultons of Reading; the other terracotta mouldings were supplied by T. Brown of London.). The gable itself has bands of whitish-yellow and red brickwork with yet another complicated pattern. The symmetrical appearance is only affected by a corner chimneystack. The array of square and circular decorative elements, colours and materials combine to produce something architecturally satisfying; and the building, which has adapted well to a variety of secular uses, has settled successfully into its present role as a place of worship.

¹ *Faith and Good Works: Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire 1901–1914*, a thesis by Roger Ottewill published in 2015, gives 1836 as the year in which Congregational worship began in the town.



King's Christian Centre (formerly the Oddfellows Hall), Bishop's Waltham, Hampshire in 2019 (photograph copyright Matt Davis)

CHAPEL CLOSURES

Bransgore Methodist Church, Hampshire

This former Wesleyan chapel, founded in the 1860s, closed quite suddenly in April 2022. It is in a relatively large New Forest village and was refurbished and given a distinctive apse-like extension at the front in 1983. *(Pictured right in June 2022; photograph copyright Matt Davis)*



Drayton Parslow Baptist Chapel, Buckinghamshire

This village just outside the Milton Keynes urban area lost its Methodist chapel (formerly Primitive Methodist) in 1984, and now the Baptist (originally Particular Baptist) chapel has gone too – put up for sale in February 2022. It opened in 1830 and was rebuilt in a very modest style in 1883: two round-arched windows flanking a gabled porch. The adjacent Sunday School building, of similar age and slightly agricultural looking, was later linked to the chapel and became the church hall.

Revd Reginald Rooke and *David Dawson* have drawn my attention to some significant recent closures of United Reformed church buildings. Details in the next *Newsletter*.

LOST CHAPELS: ZOAR CHAPEL, READING (1869–2016)

Zoar was mentioned in Genesis 19 as the place where Lot took shelter as God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. (His wife was turned into a pillar of salt *en route* when she looked back.) The name, which has various spellings, translates as ‘small’ or ‘insignificant’ – a good visual description of this unassuming little chapel, for many years hidden away in Reading’s busy town centre. Insignificant perhaps, but its loss is regrettable – both as an attractive, well-built, characteristic 19th-century chapel whose site remains derelict seven years after its demolition, and as an important witness to the Strict Baptist cause for about 150 years.

By the mid-19th century there was a Particular Baptist chapel in London Street, and W.E. Bond and his wife (formerly of the Old Baptist Chapel in Chippenham, Wiltshire) began to attend in 1857 when he moved to Reading for work. Things were not to their taste, though, and after an incident in which a visiting preacher ‘was so frivolous and nonsensical’ that laughter erupted during the service, they left and began to worship together at their home. A small group

of like-minded hearers soon gathered, and in due course bigger premises were rented – first in Oxford Street, then from 1860 at the New Hall. Meanwhile, more people left London Street and joined the Bonds' embryonic congregation, and on 14 December 1862 a Gospel Standard church was formally founded.¹ A move to Queen's Road took place in 1866 – apparently to a room in a pub – but W.E. Bond was already thinking about building a chapel for the growing congregation. 'In my own mind I saw the chapel, windows, seats, &c., exactly as it now stands in South Street, Reading (with the exception of the schoolroom and vestries underneath), years before the ground on which it stands was purchased', he wrote later, and he made drawings to this effect. Funds were duly raised, and the little chapel opened in October 1869 on a site secured by prominent church member W. Watkins. Sadly for W.E. Bond, personal circumstances forced him to leave the church before this.

Only two pastors were ever called. Mr Philip E.S. Hope, the second (after a Mr Freeman), died in 1995, and afterwards ministers travelled from elsewhere to supply the chapel. Eventually numbers declined until just one man – Deacon R.G. Wiltshire – and his wife attended. The life of the church had come full circle, having started with a husband and wife worshipping together. Closure came on 25 October 2015 following Mr Wiltshire's death, and the Gospel Standard Trust (which handles the administration and practical business of Gospel Standard-aligned Baptist chapels) sold the site, getting planning permission for redevelopment beforehand in order to realise the best price. Money from the sale was used to support other chapels.

Zoar Chapel was a neat little building of brick, as unobtrusive in the street scene as Moden Hill (described earlier) but of a decent size because of the slope of the land, which allowed schoolrooms to be built underneath (W.E. Bond envisaged a 200-capacity building). In a large town of limited architectural and historical interest, its loss – while understandable – is particularly unfortunate. A very interesting modernist building has recently appeared next door on another spare plot redeveloped a little earlier: let us hope for something of similar quality on the site where Zoar Chapel stood for 147 years.

...and a 'lost' neighbour

South Street could be termed a 'street of lost causes', because it was here – in a building at number 29, three doors down from Zoar – that Reading's Exclusive Brethren community had a long-term home. Reading was an important location for the Exclusives as it was home to the influential Clarence Esme Stuart, who from the time he went into fellowship with the Brethren in 1860 was an ally of John Nelson Darby (as well as a prolific writer and pamphleteer). Stuart, though, would not have attended South Street as he died just before the meeting moved there in about 1905. It remained in its modest premises until a new, much larger meeting room opened in the south of town in 1986, and was demolished



Zoar Strict Baptist Chapel, South Street, Reading, in August 2013.

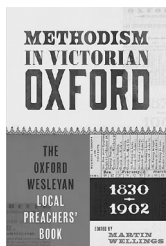
*The schoolrooms below the body of the chapel are just visible
(photograph copyright 'Fernweh', adapted from geograph.org.uk/photo/3628660:
licensed for reuse under Creative Commons licence CC BY-SA 2.0)*

for offices soon afterwards. Had it survived, it would have been just out of shot on the right of the picture. (The continued growth of what is now the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church – the most exclusive of the Exclusives – in the Reading area has meant that in the last 20 years, the 1986 meeting room has been superseded by an even more vast facility in the countryside south of town, and five local meeting rooms have opened in the surrounding towns and villages.)

I am grateful to Gerard Charmley for providing extensive notes on the history of Zoar Chapel.

¹ This refers to a Strict Baptist chapel associated with the *Gospel Standard* magazine. At the time, the London Street chapel was similarly associated with the *Earthen Vessel* publication. Gospel Standard chapels survive to this day: Galeed in Brighton, visited by the Chapels Society in 2022, is one such.

BOOK REVIEWS



Methodism in Victorian Oxford: The Oxford Wesleyan Local Preachers' Book 1830–1902, ed. Martin Wellings. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2023. xvii+343pp, 1 figure and 2 maps, hardback. ISBN 978-0-912509-78-5. £35

Following the publication of the Society's *Communities of Dissent 1850–1914* this volume is an excellent complement, for it throws much light on the communities of Wesleyan Methodism in 19th-century Oxfordshire, with particular reference to Local

Preachers. Martin Wellings' pithily written fifteen-page account of 19th-century Methodism is a *tour de force* and could profitably be on the reading list of every Methodist minister and local preacher in training. It clarifies the development of Methodism and its distinctiveness as Arminian rather than Calvinist among English Nonconformist denominations, and highlights the tensions inherent in Wesley's connexion, reflecting his powerful personality, leading to ferocious disputes and divisions.

Preaching was the pre-eminent mode of communicating the saving message of the gospel until well into the 20th century and there was an apparently insatiable public appetite for hearing and reading sermons. Pulpits for their delivery were the central feature of chapels. It is therefore helpful to have an account of the distinctiveness of Wesleyan preaching, following John Wesley, in plainness of style and clarity of language, evangelical in emphasis and extempore in delivery, for which Wesley's four volumes of *Sermons on Several Occasions* provided models for Local Preachers as well as stipendiary itinerant Travelling Preachers.

An account of the development of Methodism in Oxford and Oxfordshire makes clear Methodism's rudimentary nature in the city and county at Wesley's death, with one circuit across four counties, but only three travelling preachers, four chapels and twenty-three 'preaching places'. This illustrates the Wesleyan system's flexibility, for using a room in a house or other premises allowed preaching to be tried for a while to see whether a regular congregation might be achieved with a suitable chapel site or venue. Local Preachers' quarterly minute books' survival from 1830 illustrate Wesleyanism's fluctuating growth in the city and county, and the local impact of the wider Connexion's disputes and divisions from the appearance of Primitive Methodist preachers in Oxford in 1826 to the 'Forward Movement' of the 1880s and Hugh Price Hughes' mission outreach to villages, and Methodism's identification with the 'Nonconformist conscience'.

Local Preachers were central to Wesleyan Methodism. In 1883 seven out of eight Wesleyan preachers were lay rather than ordained. The burden of conducting services and preaching, especially in rural areas, was borne by Local Preachers rather than ordained ministers. The quarterly meeting minute books show how Wesleyanism worked at the local level and throw light on the culture of local chapels and illustrate changes over the decades. Minutes, along with the associated preaching plans, trace the penetration of Wesleyanism in the Oxford suburbs and rural Oxfordshire.

Victorian Local Preachers' commitment and dedication is impressive. Not only did they have to prepare and conduct Sunday services as well as preach, they had to get to often remote rural chapels, in all weathers. Before the invention of bicycles and cars this meant walking, after a six day working week, perhaps a twenty mile round trip, for services in perhaps three village chapels. All being

well someone provided a good dinner *en route*. From 1837 a ‘conveyance’ was hired to drop off and collect preachers in the direction of Woodstock, Wootton and Tackley. From 1850 ‘friends’ in ‘country places’ were invited to contribute towards travelling costs, and in the late 1860s a Horse Hire Fund was established, with, characteristically, a treasurer and committee. It is hardly surprising that preachers were fairly frequently reported to the meeting for not making it to chapels. Some defaulted frequently, and some chapels were frequently ‘neglected’, for example Beckley and Cuddesdon in the 1880s and 1890s. At Cuddesdon, the congregation often comprised just one faithful women. The village was infertile territory for Wesleyanism for there was the bishop’s palace and a rather high church Anglican theological college.

A picture of preachers emerges, for many preachers’ names can be identified in trade directories, newspapers, parish registers and censuses. In the 1830s they were mostly local men, but in the 1860s a smaller proportion were local, and in the 1890s only just over half were. In the 1830s most were Oxford shopkeepers and tradesmen. In the 1890s they included retail traders, six clerks, two schoolmasters, a solicitor, and – indicating a change in Wesleyanism and the University – thirteen undergraduates. Throughout the period most were aged between twenty and forty. Some began preaching in their teens or early twenties. Generally they represent a cross section of the city and county’s ‘middling sort’. A few represent dynasties of chapel families.

Training for Local Preachers involved gaining familiarity with Wesley’s *Sermons and Notes on the New Testament* and working with an experienced preacher. Accreditation required examination of their conversion, current Christian experience, and knowledge of Wesley’s Sermons, and conducting a service and preaching before the superintendent minister, and approval at the Local Preachers Quarterly Meeting. Problems were reported at the quarterly meetings, notably preachers’ failure to turn up for appointments, and complaints of failure to attend class meetings. There were infrequent allegations of drunkenness, sabbath-breaking, financial difficulties, and ‘immorality’. ‘Removal’ of preachers from accreditation was rare.

The introduction is extensively referenced providing information about primary sources and recent publications. The minutes are meticulously edited providing information about procedures, preachers and incidents mentioned. There is a useful select bibliography. The extensive index is exemplary, enabling one to identify every mention of a preacher and place, incidents reported, and Wesleyan connexional matters and incidents. This volume is a model of its kind, providing an illustration of a complex national body operating at the local level. For a picture of a denomination and chapel communities at work, it is to be highly commended.

Bill Jacob

NEWS AND NOTES

Free Christian (Unitarian) Church, Leicester

Members will have read Cynthia Brown's article on Revd Gertrude von Petzold, England's first female Dissenting minister, in the Society's recently published journal *Communities of Dissent 1850–1914*. Mike Drucquer reports that, by coincidence, some items Revd von Petzold would have used at the church were discovered in a shoebox in June 2023 at Leicester's Great Meeting chapel. In the box were a splendid inscribed silver and glass Communion jug and 24 small Communion glasses; the jug is inscribed 'From Ron Patterson, Easter 1905. In Remembrance of Christ. Free Christian Church, Leicester.' The jug and glasses were given to the Great Meeting for safekeeping.



Silver and metal Communion jug of 1905 from the Free Christian (Unitarian) Church, Leicester, and some of the two dozen metal-rimmed Communion glasses (photograph copyright Mike Drucquer)

'Before and after' in the Borough of Bexley

The use of redundant chapels as mosques was touched on briefly in recent *Newsletters*, particularly *Newsletter* 81 where a former Wesleyan chapel in Redhill, Surrey was illustrated. Other than signage and some new paintwork, little had changed under that building's new ownership since the days when it was part of the Redhill Methodist Circuit. In complete contrast, the transformation of the former Crayford Methodist Church, southeast London, into a mosque has been spectacular and dramatic – but the 1950s origins of the distinctive building are still legible.

A Wesleyan chapel opened in Crayford in 1890 on a very prominent site on the steep High Street, facing Chapel Lane (which takes its name from the venerable Baptist chapel at the opposite end). The Victorian building was replaced in 1952 by a blocky dark-brick chapel of modern form, no doubt quite daring at the time. This served for over 50 years, but it closed and was put up for auction in late 2008. That December, the North West Kent Muslim Association announced they had acquired it and would turn it into the area's first mosque. The Association, representing 10,000 Muslims across the London Borough of Bexley, Dartford and surrounding areas, had been searching for suitable premises for 20 years, temporarily using office buildings and community centres in Dartford for their activities. At first, hardly any changes were made to the former chapel apart from the fixing of a few signs to the exterior: even the outline of a Cross remained



Before: Crayford Methodist Church seen in 1984. After: Masjid Abu Bakar Crayford NWK seen in 2023 (church photograph by Keith Guyler, taken from the ‘British Methodist Buildings’ project, and used with permission of the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History; mosque photograph copyright Matt Davis)

clearly visible above the entrance. But work took place throughout 2017 to re-clad the building and add domes above the entrance and at the corners, and in its new guise as the ‘Masjid Abu Bakar Crayford NWK’ (i.e. North West Kent) it looks like a typical 21st-century urban mosque – but the form and shape of the 1952 chapel is still clear even at a quick glance.

The chapel-to-mosque trend is likely to accelerate. The Muslim population of England and Wales rose from 2.7 million to 3.9 million between 2011 and 2021, and there are several branches or denominations whose varied practices require each to have their own premises: principally Shia, Ahmadiyya and Sunni (by far the most prevalent, and with sub-groups of its own such as Deobandi and Barelvi). In terms of planning law, chapels and other religious buildings can also be taken on by new congregations with no need to seek planning permission, saving the new owners time and money.

‘Before and after’ near the New Forest

Coincidentally, another blocky brick church of the mid-20th century – remarkably similar in style to the Crayford building – was transformed a few years ago by a distinctive re-clothing. (Has the cycle of fashion moved against stripped-down, unadorned brickwork?) The Church of the Sacred Heart and St Theresa of Lisieux, which serves Ringwood’s Catholics, was built in 1937 to the design of John Sterrett – an early design for him, as he was better known for post-war repairs and new churches in suburban London in the 1950s and 1960s. Philip Proctor of Proctor Watts Cole Rutter architects of Shaftesbury, Dorset, transformed it in 2012 with the addition of an elaborate Mediterranean-style porch, shallow tiled roofs to the aisles and a big pitched roof with a Classical-style pediment. The small Sacred Heart relief above the flat-roofed porch was moved to a new circular niche in the tympanum. The exterior is now painted



Before: The Church of the Sacred Heart and St Theresa of Lisieux, Ringwood, Hampshire, in September 2010. After: the same church in June 2022 (2010 photograph by Michael Ford, adapted from geograph.org.uk/photo/2082015; licensed for reuse under Creative Commons licence CC BY-SA 2.0; 2022 photograph copyright Matt Davis)

pure white, and the reputed local description of ‘a piece of Italy airlifted and dropped into Ringwood’ is apt. The redesign was aimed at improving energy efficiency as much as the aesthetic appeal. The same firm has undertaken similar schemes recently at the Quaker meeting houses in Taunton and Salisbury, combining refreshed layouts with sustainability improvements.

Chapels above shops

Following up on the question posed in *Newsletter* 85 about chapels built, or intended to be built, above shop units, *Stephen Copson* and *Stuart Leadley* offer the example of Broadmead Baptist Church in the centre of Bristol, visited by the Society in 2017. As the visit review in *Newsletter* 67 indicates, it was built in 1969 for a much older congregation which did not want to move from their site on Union Street when the area was being comprehensively redeveloped. A new first-floor chapel of Brutalist exterior form and with several shop units below was provided accordingly. Indeed, the signage on the modest entrance porch proclaims ‘Broadmead Baptist Church ... the church above the shops’!

Jim McCallum reports two others. St Andrew’s Methodist Church in Worcester city centre opened on 6 January 1968: an entertainingly eccentric Brutalist design by Norman Webster. In the church’s own words, ‘the Church ... cantilevers extensively over the shops below’: a sprawling effect which, aside from the use of dark brick and stone rather than concrete, perhaps recalls something of Portsmouth’s Tricorn Centre, opened a few months earlier. Also, the recently demolished Derby Central United Reformed Church in Derby city centre was built above shop units which were latterly used as supermarkets. It opened on 7 December 1963, superseding an earlier chapel of 1860 and the original Brookside Chapel (1784) on the site. The church and shops were demolished in early 2021 and the site redeveloped, and the church moved a short distance to Green Lane

where it now shares (with the Citizens' Advice Bureau and an employment agency) a modern office building whose arched windows and glass lantern-topped corner tower present a rather more conventional chapel-like appearance. (There never was a chapel on the site, so this was probably unintentional; or was the design inspired by the now secularised former Primitive Methodist chapel of 1878 at the end of the road?...)

John Ellis also suggests Emmanuel Church, a Methodist/URC ecumenical partnership in Redditch, Worcestershire. The church, at second-floor level, forms a major part of the outdoor section of the Kingfisher Shopping Centre. Unlike St Stephen's parish church on the other side of Market Place, it can easily be missed: indeed, the church's website states accurately '[t]he entrance is a large glass door, just hiding in the corner, between the Halifax and Ladbrokes betting shop'! It was registered in 1976, replacing a 400-capacity Congregational chapel which stood a little further south behind a small burial ground.

Holocaust memorial window under threat

Brighton and Hove Reform Synagogue, a striking modernist building in Hove, is under threat of demolition – and, according to local newspaper reports, its Holocaust memorial stained glass window could be lost. The foundation stone, which has dual Gregorian and Hebrew dates, was laid on 27 July 1966/29 Tammuz 5726 and the synagogue opened the following year. Concerns over the fabric and accessibility resulted in the community applying to demolish it and replace it with flats with an integral ground-floor synagogue in 2017. This was refused, but so was a proposal to Historic England to award Grade II listed status. (The synagogue is currently on Brighton and Hove City Council's Local List of Heritage Assets.) Now, the Twentieth Century Society has submitted a new listing bid following the worship community's majority vote to try again for a replacement building with flats above.

The memorial window was designed by R. John Petts, the London-born Welsh artist famous for the memorial window at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, bombed in a fatal racist attack in 1963. Of his window at the synagogue, art historian and curator of the National Portrait Gallery Alison Smith stated there is 'no comparable Holocaust memorial of this scale and quality in the U.K.' and it 'stand[s] as one of the great religious works of art of the 20th century'. Similar praise has come from other sources. The worship community states that if demolition goes ahead, all windows will be preserved and then reinstated prominently in the replacement building.