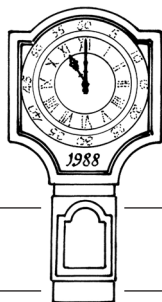


THE CHAPELS SOCIETY



Newsletter 89

August 2024



The former Eastwood Road Evangelical Church (1923), Rayleigh, Essex, pictured in May 2024 when in use as the Celestial Church of Christ Rehoboth Parish.

*This large chapel, headquarters of the Union of Evangelical Churches (formerly The Peculiar People) until 2019, is now in use by a rapidly growing church of African origin which is profiled in the article on page 14
(photograph copyright Matt Davis)*

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NOTICEBOARD

CHAPELS SOCIETY EVENTS

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 28 September 2024 | Ecclesiological Society and Chapels Society full-day joint Conference: 'Competing Churches and Chapels, 1829–1939' at the St Albans Centre, London EC1 |
| 30 September 2024 | Copy deadline for November 2024 <i>Newsletter</i> |
| 12 October 2024 | Autumn Visit to Barnsley (walking tour), led by Gerard Charmley (booking deadline 14 September 2024) |

EDITORIAL

The two visits undertaken by the Society so far this year have been especially enjoyable and informative experiences; the first, to the Wirral, is reviewed in this edition. Attention now turns to what should be a similarly excellent visit to the South Yorkshire market town of Barnsley in October. Perhaps best known for its significant industrial heritage and the vitality of its traditional brass bands, the town also offers a rich variety of churches and chapels to explore. Your booking form is enclosed; I hope to see you there!

PROCEEDINGS

CHAPELS SOCIETY AGM, 29 JUNE 2024

The Society met at The Free Church, Hampstead Garden Suburb for its AGM, as part of a tour of chapels in Hampstead Garden Suburb and Golders Green. The Andrew Worth Lecture, given by the Hon. Secretary, outlined the career of Charles Bell (1846–99), a prolific Wesleyan architect of the late 19th century.

Our President, Dr Bill Jacob, thanked the Council and officers and paid tribute to two distinguished members of the Society who have died during the year, Dr Christopher Wakeling and Dr Kate Tiller.

The Annual Report for 2023, circulated with *Newsletter* 88, was presented, and adopted by the meeting. It was agreed that subscription rates for the ensuing year would remain unchanged, at £15 for individuals, £20 for joint, overseas, and corporate subscribers, and £8 for students.

The Hon. Officers were re-elected. Ian Serjeant and Peter Ackers were elected to the Council.

Martin Wellings, Hon. Secretary

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Sad news

We are very sorry to announce that since the last Membership Update in the *Newsletter* we have lost two distinguished members of the Society. Life member Dr Kate Tiller OBE, of Oxford, who served on Council 2018–2024 and co-edited the most recent volume of the Society's *Journal*, died at the end of May 2024; a fuller tribute to Kate will appear in *Newsletter* 90. We have also lost Revd Tony Coates, of Bideford in Devon, a member for more than twenty years. This appreciation comes from *John Ellis*, who knew him well: 'Tony Coates was a lively man of wide interests and much charm. A prominent minister of the United Reformed Church, he served Emmanuel Church in Cambridge 1974–82, based in the grand chapel of James Cubitt which was discussed in detail in the Society's 2001 publication by Tony's lifelong friend and Society member Professor Clyde Binfield. An international ecumenist and competent linguist, he next served the World Council of Churches in Geneva. His later pastorates also used notable chapels at Redland Park in Bristol and Hutton and Shenfield Union Church in Essex. After retiring to his wife's native Devonshire, he often joined Chapels Society visits if travel within the day was feasible. He died in July during the same weekend in which the URC General Assembly commemorated the 60th anniversary of his ordination.'

Stuart Leadley, Membership Secretary

VISIT TO THE WIRRAL, 27 APRIL 2024

Our spring trip was not a conventional ‘chapel’ crawl. Of the remarkable total of seven buildings we visited – a testament to *Roger Holden*’s careful planning, assisted by *Chris Skidmore* in a ‘scouting’ role – only one was characteristically chapel-like in form, with a gallery and typically Nonconformist fittings and layout. Also visited were two Quaker meeting houses, of markedly different form but both reflecting that denomination’s restraint and simplicity; two of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury’s finest post-war buildings; and two grand Congregational churches associated with W.H. Lever (later Lord Leverhulme) and astonishing in their assertive, wealthy ‘churchiness’. Such good buildings and the comfort of a mini-coach also provided, to this writer, an antidote to the chapel fatigue which could have set in after the non-stop eight-day pavement-pounding tour of Liverpool’s places of worship which preceded the trip.

Proximity to that great port city encouraged urban growth on the Wirral in the 19th century. Good transport links encouraged the wealthiest merchants to build their mansions in Birkenhead and its immediate surroundings. W.H. Lever developed the Port Sunlight model village for his workers, and later a smaller version at Thornton Hough; and in the 20th century the haphazard collection of villages, perched on rocky elevations above the marshy land, coalesced into a suburbanised landscape with big council estates – notably Woodchurch, something of a budget Port Sunlight in conception if not execution. Some pleasant rural spots survive too, but the peninsula is now largely urbanised – and that means plenty of chapels.

The day started at Port Sunlight, where more than one member was spotted wielding the Cheshire ‘Pevsner’: there is much to see and admire architecturally in this spaciouly laid-out, carefully detailed village, although two incongruous semi-detached brown-brick houses between the station and **Christ Church** seemed to be interlopers from Wythenshawe. Christ Church (1904) is the village’s centrepiece, and looks like a particularly richly appointed Church of England parish church inside and out – but Lever intended it to be non-denominational and for all Christians. It is now part of the United Reformed Church. The building is cruciform with a short crossing tower, and there is a lychgate, a full peal of bells, an elaborate altar (*pictured right*) with





communion rails, and even a stand for votive candles: very ‘High Church’. Another distinctive feature is the Lever family vault, forming a loggia outside the west end and with high-quality bronze figures of the Lord and Lady. Lever was, above all, a marketing man, and the church can be seen as a marketing effort: for his architectural ideals, his faith, and his wealth.

Regular services continue to be offered at Christ Church as part of the United Reformed Church. Our next destination, **St George’s Church** at Thornton Hough (*pictured above*), was also used by that denomination until its closure in July 2021 but is now privately owned by Rob Patterson, to whom we must offer great thanks for letting us have what will probably be the final viewing of this excellent church in its present form. From Port Sunlight, the coach journey to St George’s took us south-westwards through Lower Bebington, where two interesting places of worship were seen in passing. Life Church Bebington, one outpost of a three-church Charismatic fellowship, sits above ‘The Madhouse’ (a children’s soft-play centre) – yet another incongruous combination – while another Evangelical church, Cornerstone Church Wirral, was until 2015 Bethesda Chapel, used by an Open Brethren assembly since 1927. Thornton Hough is beyond suburban Bebington in the rural inland part of the peninsula, and became another Lever village after he moved to the manor house: politely attractive housing was built for Lever Brothers employees and estate workers to rent, greatly expanding an existing model village started in the 1860s by mill-owner Joseph Hirst. He had provided the parish church, set back a little from the road; Lever’s response was another large set-piece church on a sloping site right in the centre, this time Congregational from the outset, duly erected in



1906–07 to the Neo-Norman design of J. Lomax-Simpson. (Christ Church is Gothic Revival and by William and Segar Owen, but both churches are of red sandstone.) Again, the design and layout are somewhat Anglican: Lever wanted to show that Congregationalism could stand alongside and compete with the Established Church. Chapels Society members particularly admired the highly detailed Saxon-style carving of the arches, executed by Edward Owen Griffith of Liverpool, and the other rich internal decoration. Mr Patterson plans to retain as many as possible of the interior features when converting the church into three apartments: the elaborately carved tub font near the entrance was noted to have potential as a side table for car keys and the like, for example. He has engaged well with the building's religious history and his conservation efforts should be applauded: the church was deteriorating structurally before its closure and much work is being done to 'make good'.

Across to Heswall next, a large village made slightly formless by suburban sprawl. Facing Our Lady and St John, a standard Romanesque interwar Catholic church, stands **Heswall Friends Meeting House** (1961), one of the best post-war meeting houses and unexpectedly full of Christian symbolism. Its architect, Dewi-Prys Thomas, had an advanced knowledge of Scripture and imbued the design with metaphor – most of which was much more subtle than the orientation of the first-floor worship space's tall windows, which not only throw ever-changing light on the congregation but, in facing directly across the Mersey to the peaks of the Mid-Cheshire Ridge, cause worshippers to 'lift up [their] eyes unto the hills', as Psalm 121 says. The multi-part building (*pictured above*) is strikingly modernist, as requested by the congregation, and is built

round a rocky outcrop bought for £908; it had been a builder's yard. Trees now soften the stark angular forms, as noted by *Chris Skidmore* in his description of the building in *Quakers and their Meeting Houses* (see *Newsletter* 79).

Construction of the Woodchurch council estate began straight after World War II for Birkenhead Corporation. Early houses were cottagey in the Port Sunlight tradition, but the original scheme was altered and the estate did not achieve Port Sunlight-style levels of micromanaged planning. An important feature is the axial road with churches at each end: the ancient parish church, and the spectacular **St Michael and All Angels Catholic Church** (1965) for a parish newly erected in 1952. The enthusiasm for this remarkable building from church members was clear to see as they told its story; and the inviting, spacious, raw brick-and-wood interior was a fascinating contrast to the severe Brutalist exterior. This is a fully post-Vatican II church with the altar as the centrepiece (and an impossibly high tent-like roof rising over it). The Blessed Sacrament Chapel is a clever feature: wholly hidden behind the altar, it provides an intimate space for prayer while allowing the tabernacle to be fully visible from all parts of the interior. F.X. Velarde, of whom more later, designed the silver tabernacle; the church itself was by Richard O'Mahony, a partner in his firm (Velarde died in 1960). An unaltered Victorian Wadsworth & Co. organ was an unexpected sight in one corner; *John Anderson* suggested it may originally have been in Butt Lane Primitive Methodist Chapel in Kidsgrove (Staffordshire).

Next it was into Birkenhead proper for two visits to places of worship in the town's high-class 'villa-land'. **Trinity with Palm Grove Church** (*interior pictured right*), now a United Reformed Church/ Methodist L.E.P., opened in 1866 as Trinity Presbyterian Church. Palm Grove Methodist Church merged with it in 1977 when that chapel was demolished; a drawing of this fine building was displayed in the Session Room (an essential feature of any Presbyterian chapel). Trinity itself was also built to a high standard and is grandly situated on a corner site, allowing its tower and spire to be appreciated fully. The stonework, quarried locally at Storeton, matches that of the villas. A Celtic cross war memorial in the grounds was



transplanted here from an earlier Presbyterian chapel in the town centre; Trinity's founder, Liverpool merchant Samuel Stitt, attended that chapel but wanted one closer to his home. He paid most of the £8,000 cost. The chapel has seen minimal alteration and has a rabbit-warren of rooms and spaces inside, with some given over to a clothing bank for locals in what is now a rather poorer area than it was 150 years ago. Upstairs, the fine curved gallery retains its numbered pews; generally speaking, servants sat here and their masters worshipped downstairs.

Nearby stands **Birkenhead Friends Meeting House** (1892), whose date is given in frilly Arts and Crafts lettering on the gable of what is, on the outside, quite a domestic-style Vernacular building. Inside it is a characteristically simple and straightforward meeting house, restrained and unembellished, with wooden benches set in a square formation and a high ceiling to which tie-bars have been added for structural integrity. Big windows of opaque glass with just a touch of red decoration (a stained glass border – unusual in a Quaker building) let in plenty of light, although in a more traditional fashion than Heswall's tall clear-glass fenestration. Grave slabs moved from an earlier meeting house (which survives in alternative use) can be found in the pleasant garden. George Grayson, the architect, designed many buildings in Port Sunlight, and a family resemblance could be seen. Perhaps the biggest incongruous feature in this day of



quirky findings was a pair of highly decorative Doulton & Co. ceramic lavatory bowls, one of which has overpoweringly intricate blue decoration typical of that firm. Many photographs were taken, presumably to be filed in members' 'Unclassifiable oddities' folders.

Our journey to the final church at Wallasey took us past the wrecked Catholic Apostolic Church next to Birkenhead Park – at least a few bits survive, unlike the church in central Liverpool which Stell's *Inventory* covers in detail [N105] – then through dismal Bidston and past a sadly abandoned F.X. Velarde Catholic church. Holy Cross was finished in 1959, the last church opened before he died, but closed in 2006. The long-derelict church is now the territory of local youths; their glares moved us on. Several Velardian motifs could be seen, and were repeated and expanded upon in the **Church of the English Martyrs** (1953) at Wallasey, his best church apart from the monumental St Monica, Bootle – a picture of which will appear in *Newsletter* 90. Church members again spoke with passion and authority about this justifiably famous church and the restoration project which started in 2017 to improve the structure, which had become very weather-beaten on account of its high, exposed site close to the Irish Sea. The long, tall brick church (*pictured on page 8 above*) is in excellent condition outside now; it has a typically Velardian near-detached campanile and an exterior brick arcade decorated with high-quality stone sculptures. For no apparent reason, one depicts a dog with a hind-leg where its foreleg should be: another for today's oddities list. The interior is monumental, of bare brick and with round arches everywhere: really an excellent example of Romanesque with a modernist twist. Windows (originally Crittall) are grouped in patterns typical of Velarde; the aisles of unequal width, another of his traits, were interesting to examine, and one was home to a detailed information board about the church's history and restoration. The sanctuary has Art Deco influences: the eye is drawn to the gigantic figure of Christ on the Cross flanked by figures at prayer.

The day concluded here with refreshments and much chat as members made their various ways home, many by rail. On the train, a chatty passenger – upon establishing that the 'motley crew' (her description) who had boarded at Wallasey Village were on a chapel tour – bemoaned the state of Merseyside's fine chapels and churches, commenting astutely that magnificent buildings are falling to ruin for the want of a few roof-slates. An encouraging reflection that locals do notice and care about the nationally important collection of religious buildings they live alongside. Thanks are due to Mike, our coach driver; all those who gave their time to open their places of worship and describe their histories; and especially to *Roger Holden* for a splendid, well-documented and expertly arranged day.

Matt Davis (text and photographs)

UNITED REFORMED CHURCH CLOSURES

AN ARTICLE BY MICHAEL HOPKINS

Newsletter 87 (February 2024) raised the question of United Reformed Church closures. As three had been highlighted in the ‘Chapel Closures’ section, with another four in the next issue – three in the East Midlands alone – it is clearly a very pertinent question. Lists of closed churches are presented to the General Assembly each year, accompanied by a brief ‘obituary’ where possible.¹ This is a lovely touch, but a sobering one as the lists get longer each year. It is undeniable that the United Reformed Church is struggling a bit, but our church closures are almost always initiated locally by a decision of the Church Meeting, not imposed by others – don’t believe everything that you read from an upset person in a local newspaper.

The question in my mind is whether the United Reformed Church is in a worse place than other traditions? Although Methodist chapel closures are agreed by Synods, they are not reported centrally together, and I do not believe Baptist chapel closures are a part of Association or Union business.

1972 is an obvious timeframe for United Reformed Church closures, and there are plenty of examples of what were once Congregational and Presbyterian chapels merging in one building. The church in which I grew up did this in 1975, but not everywhere has, and the average member of the United Reformed Church has now had somewhat more than half their life in the United Reformed Church rather than predecessor denominations. However, in some communities there was more than one church of the same tradition, and the 1972 date is irrelevant. The village of Hindhead, Surrey, had two Congregational chapels, both built at the turn of the 20th century, one being for the servants of the members who attended the other chapel. Both remained open until 2005.² Such situations were more common than many realise. In the town of Wooler in Northumberland, there were once three Presbyterian chapels, of differing kinds of Presbyterianism, all of which had a seating capacity enough for the entire village. No-one expected all three to be full, but each chapel fervently wanted theirs to be full and the other two to be empty.

Looking across to other traditions, in Scotland the peak period for Presbyterian chapel building was 1843–1900, during which period all the kinds of Presbyterians built an almost obscene excess of buildings as they set up rival parish structures across Scotland. In Methodism the 1932 union finally brought together the vast majority of what had once been 22 different denominations. Amalgamations and chapel building closures were not rapid, and perhaps it was not until the 1960s or even 1970s that local unions following the national union were at their peak. There is also the question of ecumenical unions, some of



Woking United Reformed Church, Surrey, seen here in June 2015, was built in 1952 as St Andrew's Presbyterian Church. It took its present name in 2000 when the nearby York Road United Reformed (ex-Congregational) Church closed and amalgamated with it (photograph copyright Matt Davis)

which have created some really rather impressive new churches. For example, in Eastbourne, Sussex, two United Reformed churches and two Methodist churches have all pooled their resources to build a much more appropriate chapel for their work in the 21st century, and have a strength greater than their constituent parts, yet on one count this is four closures.³

My point is not to minimise the difficulties the United Reformed Church is currently facing, but to ask deeper questions about what timeframe is objective for which denominations, and how relative decline might best be measured in each denomination. Should amalgamations/unions be considered differently from a straightforward closure, especially if they result from different former denominations consolidating? The more I consider this, the more complex the questions become, let alone any answers!

¹ All are available in PDF format at <https://urc.org.uk/> (enter 'General Assembly archive' in the search bar).

² The 'Faith Group Focus' article in *Newsletter* 88 notes that 'The 3 Counties Vineyard ... occupies one of three attractive domestic-style Congregational chapels built in the Haslemere/Hindhead area'. The other two were the chapels referred to here.

³ An article on what has happened in Eastbourne will appear in a forthcoming *Newsletter*.

Michael raises an important point: not all closures are equal. This is true of the United Reformed Church and perhaps especially of the Methodist Church – both of which were formed from unions, in 1972 and 1932 respectively. When denominations unite, there will inevitably be an excess of chapels – especially in urban areas. The idea of categorising closures into three types is a sound one. I suggest this terminology: **amalgamations** (two congregations originally of different pre-union traditions moving into one building); **closures through proximity** (two churches of the same tradition closing one building and merging into one – as happened, for example, in Burgess Hill, Sussex, where for many years up to 1976 there were two Congregational, latterly United Reformed, churches – see *Newsletter* 78); and **straight closures** (where a chapel is no longer viable because its congregation has declined). For denominations which have experienced no unions, only the second and third categories apply. For the Roman Catholic Church, with its parochial structure, it could be argued that all closures count as a ‘closure through proximity’: in a multi-church parish, the affected village, suburb or whatever would remain as part of the parish and parishioners would simply be expected to attend the other church (or one of the others), and in a one-church parish, the entire parish would be absorbed into another, whose church would then ‘take over’. (It would be unusual for the latter to happen, though: a parish would be more likely to expand to cover more churches as a first step. Sometimes the situation is more complex, as at Widnes, Cheshire, where *Newsletter* 79 described how eight churches, each with their own parish, were merged into one parish and four were closed at the same time.) In some denominations, closure decisions are made above the local level – in the Catholic Church specifically, by the diocese (i.e. on a regional basis); this contrasts with the local control available to individual United Reformed churches.

Returning to the United Reformed Church, Sussex can be used again as example to demonstrate the point. Of the 35 closures mentioned in *Newsletter* 87, six can be characterised as amalgamations between an ex-Congregational and an ex-Presbyterian church: all in urban areas, to which the county’s Presbyterian chapels were confined by 1972. At Bexhill, Bognor Regis and Worthing, the Presbyterian building is now used; in Hove, the Presbyterian chapel was closed and worship was concentrated on the Congregational building, which although older is much more centrally located; Central Free Church at Brighton, which was Congregational, was sold to fund a new church building adjacent to the existing Hanover Presbyterian Chapel (the Brighthelm Centre – seen on the Chapels Society’s 2022 visit) and formally amalgamated with it; and in Eastbourne, the former Presbyterian and Congregational chapels merged with two Methodist churches into a new building (Emmanuel Church) on the Congregational site, as noted in Michael’s article. Meanwhile, nine other closures can be described as ‘closures through proximity’: one of the former Congregational chapels in

Burgess Hill as noted above, four in Hastings, one in Crawley, and one ex-Presbyterian and two ex-Congregational chapels in Eastbourne, which closed at various points prior to the recent changes which have created the new Emmanuel Church. That leaves 20 ‘straight closures’, almost all in villages – including some small and remote ones. Many of these were Victorian mission chapels founded by the minister in a nearby town. Rev. Charles New of Robertson Street Chapel, Hastings, for example, founded several Congregational missions in the surrounding countryside, and Ashburnham, Brightling, Netherfield, Robertsbridge and Sedlescombe all survived into the United Reformed Church era. Of these, only Sedlescombe remains open. (Even Robertson Street itself has closed – although, to link neatly with a current theme in *Newsletter*, a Pentecostal group has taken it on and is taking good care, and making good use, of the splendid landmark town-centre chapel.)



‘Closure through proximity’: The former North Hayling United Reformed Church (1874), Hayling Island, Hampshire, seen in May 2019. For many years both North and South Hayling had their own Congregational chapels. Activities were concentrated at the larger South Hayling chapel in 1991 and North Hayling, formerly Stoke Congregational Church, closed (photograph copyright Matt Davis)

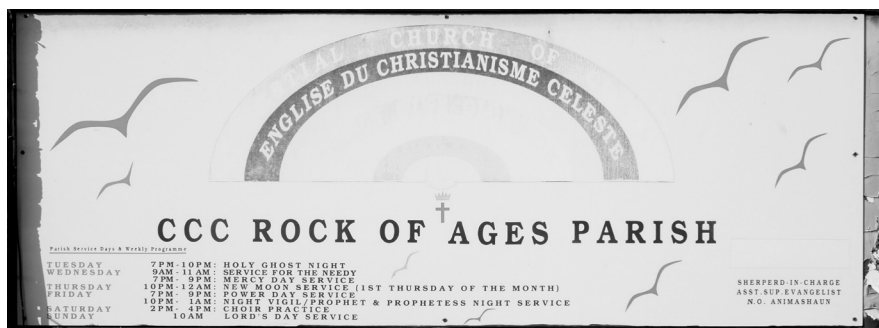
FAITH GROUP FOCUS: THE CELESTIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST

AN ARTICLE BY MATT DAVIS

Churches belonging to the Aladura movement are an increasingly significant feature of Britain's religious landscape. Largely unknown here until the 1960s, they have risen in prominence and prevalence as the African diaspora has grown. Aladura ('praying person' in Yoruba, a west African language) refers to Christian churches which emerged in west Africa among the Yoruba people around a century ago. All have been infused with aspects of Yoruba cultural and spiritual traditions, and all are strongly prayer-focused, stressing the importance of evangelism and the centrality of the Holy Spirit. While not explicitly associated with the Holiness movement, many of its tenets apply to Aladura churches; and interestingly, many original founders had Methodist backgrounds. The main Aladura churches in Britain – whose names may be recognised by those who live or chapel-crawl in cities – are the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim, Christ Apostolic Church, the Deeper Life Bible Church, and the Celestial Church of Christ.

The Celestial Church of Christ (hereafter CCC) is newer than some Aladura churches: its origin can be dated specifically to a divine revelation experienced by Samuel Oshoffa, a Methodist from Benin (then Dahomey), on 23 May 1947. Six months later the church was formally founded. He led the church until his death in 1985, exercising firm control over doctrine and administrative matters. (The church has always been led by one leader rather than, for example, a group of elders.) Evangelical efforts 'spread the word' throughout west Africa, and migrants from Nigeria – CCC's hotbed and its global headquarters – brought it to Britain and other countries.

CCC's doctrines are essentially Christian, and like all other Aladura churches great store is set on excluding traditional African belief systems and pagan or animist¹ elements. Most features are recognisably Protestant, but one explicitly Catholic element is noteworthy: members take holy water from a stoup and cross themselves when entering their place of worship. There is a system of 'recommendations', the Tenets and Modes of Worship, which amount to a Statement of Faith. When compared to other denominations there is nothing particularly unusual: various restrictions are placed on food, alcohol, clothing and so on. Their buildings, whatever their form, have two distinctive features: they must always be oriented eastwards (liturgically); and the altar has seven candles, a reference to Revelations 4:5 and the 'seven spirits of Jehovah'. Men and women sit separately. The various Tenets, certain practical aspects of worship and even the church's name are said to have been revealed in various divine revelations.



The sign for the CCC Rock of Ages Parish church in Woolwich, London, seen here in 2020, gives an indication of the wide range of services typically offered: nearly 20 hours per week. The CCC's logo, mostly faded here, consists of a rainbow above an eye, a crown and a Cross (photograph copyright Ethan Doyle White, from Wikimedia Commons: licensed for reuse under Creative Commons licence CC BY-SA 4.0)

The first CCC church to be registered in England was at Harton Street, Deptford in March 1975,² and inner southeast London remains the movement's stronghold. (Signage at Harton Street indicates that it is the 'European and American Headquarters'.) Growth was rapid from the late 1990s, although still confined to the inner London boroughs, particularly in the eastern half of the capital: Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Lewisham, Lambeth, Southwark³ and so on. The first excursion outside London came in 2007, when a decrepit tin tabernacle (formerly St Mary's Mission Church) in Grays, Essex, was registered. This vanished a couple of years later in favour of housing. Short-lived rentals of industrial units in central Birmingham and Manchester soon followed, but it was not until the 2010s decade that congregations started to become established in smaller urban centres: Sheffield, Bolton, the Medway Towns, Nottingham, Basildon and Swindon among others. In 2024 new churches have opened at Dartford – where the 'Valley of Berachah Parish' was newly registered in a shop unit which had latterly been a tanning salon – Cheetham Hill in Manchester (also an old shop) and Catford (in part of a large office building).

CCC churches are almost always called 'Celestial Church of Christ, [phrase] Parish', implying the existence of a quasi-parochial system. Parish names are occasionally geographical but more usually of the scripture-based, aspirational type common among Pentecostal and similar churches: Palace of Liberty Parish, God's Fulfilment Parish, Unity Parish, Amazing Grace Parish, Rock of Ages Parish and similar. The range of services, typically six days per week, is astounding in variety and length: most last for two or three hours, some carry on into the early hours, and some require worshippers to provide their own candles and water, which are used for ceremonial purification rituals. The 'Glorious Day Service' on Sunday mornings is the primary event.



Memorial Road [Primitive] Methodist Church, Walkden, Greater Manchester, seen in February 2012 when up for sale. Soon after this it became the 'Citadel of Celestians Cathedral Salford Parish'

(photograph copyright Phil and Juliette Platt, adapted from geograph.org.uk/photo/2786968: licensed for reuse under Creative Commons licence CC BY-SA 2.0)

At present, in common with many newly established denominations and religious groups with largely urban followings, the use of disused factories and warehouses, former shop units, rooms above shops, old office premises and so on is rife but not universal. The church has shown an impressive ability to take on, maintain and improve redundant Church of England parish churches – examples can be found in Barnsbury, Elephant & Castle, Peckham and elsewhere – and some Nonconformist chapels have also been acquired. The CCC church at Romford Road, Manor Park, east London (acquired in 1992 at auction; registered in 1998) occupies a large former Primitive Methodist chapel of 1902, built for £5,000 and distinguished by a corner tower whose round window now bears the new owners' message 'Jesus is our Supreme Head'. Similarly, Memorial Road Primitive Methodist Chapel (1929) in Walkden, Greater Manchester, became a CCC church by 2015, soon after its closure. At Upper Norwood, south London, after the original St Aubyn's Congregational Church was demolished, the congregation moved into the old Sunday School. It later became Upper Norwood United Reformed Church. After it closed, a CCC

congregation moved in. In Edgbaston, Birmingham, an early-20th-century chapel which had housed an African Methodist congregation since the 1970s closed in 2019 and was a CCC church by 2020. Its original denomination is currently unknown. Former chapels are still very much in the minority, though. The eastward orientation requirement described above may partly explain why industrial warehouses and other flexible spaces are preferred: open rooms are easier to orient as required.

One of the most recent new CCC churches, opened in February 2023, is also the most interesting for the purposes of the Chapels Society. Members, especially if they have Essex connections, may be familiar with The Peculiar People – a group whose dramatic name was originally matched by some of its curious practices. Founded in the 1830s at Rochford by James Banyard, whose conversion at a Wesleyan chapel turned his life around, the movement found great popularity among the rural population of east and southeast Essex. By 1956, when the present name (the Union of Evangelical Churches) was adopted and many of the unorthodox practices had ceased, the group was in decline but still strong locally – as it remains today, with 14 active churches. The headquarters was Eastwood Road Evangelical Church in Rayleigh – a landmark in the town, and much larger and grander than most U.E.C. chapels, which are extremely plain. It closed in 2019 and, after one of the pandemic lockdowns put paid to attempts to reopen it, the chapel was put up for sale in April 2022. Locals seemed resigned to its demolition; but a CCC church originally founded in London in 2000, and latterly based in an industrial unit in Romford, promptly bought it, simply changed the signage, and instantly turned it into a thriving church again: the Celestial Church of Christ Rehoboth Parish, or The Rehoboth Family (note the use of a traditional Biblical chapel name!).

What would be interesting to know is the extent to which the existing congregation ‘followed the church’ to Essex compared to new congregants being found locally. My research indicates that Rehoboth is explicitly not an example of a church plant: the church, as an entity, actually relocated wholesale to Rayleigh. Romford to Rayleigh is a 20-mile journey each way, admittedly with a fast road and a direct rail connection; but the range and length of worship services detailed above imply that worshippers must live locally.⁴ It suggests the church has perhaps found and catered for an ‘unmet need’ in Essex, taking advantage of good premises becoming available and moving accordingly. There are surely parallels to be drawn here with instances of ‘traditional’ Nonconformist denominations reaching out to new areas and sometimes taking over chapels abandoned by others. (For members who came on the Brighton visit in 2022: what would the Railway Mission have done had the Primitive Methodists at Viaduct Road not moved round the corner to a bigger chapel in 1894? Or at Salisbury, would the Elim Pentecostal church have flourished so strongly in the city had a succession of second-hand chapels not been available?)

The most scholarly treatment of the CCC movement is a comprehensive paper, *Building Bridges and Barricades* by Afe Adogame of the University of Bayreuth, published in March 1998 in the *Marburg Journal of Religion*, volume 3, issue 1.

¹ Animism is the belief that non-human entities contain souls or spirits.

² The Harton Street building, a long and narrow hall with an apsidal end, was originally St John's Mission Hall and Working Men's Institute, associated with St John's parish church to the south. The 'spacious and prettily designed' hall, as the *Evening Standard* called it, opened on 6 April 1869.

³ Researchers at the University of Roehampton have found that there are about 20,000 African Christians in the borough of Southwark: the highest proportion of any place in the world outside Africa.

⁴ Physically moving house to be near a place of worship is not unknown – it is common enough among members of the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church (PBCC) to be considered one of that church's distinctive features – but for it to occur outside the special circumstances of that group would represent an intriguing development.

NATIONAL HERITAGE LIST FOR ENGLAND: NEWLY LISTED PLACES OF WORSHIP

Just one new listing between April and June 2024:

St Mary's Church, High Street, Gosport, Hampshire (Grade II; NHLE reference 1488749; designed in 1855 by R.E. Philips)

Gosport had an early Catholic chapel which served a wide area – including Portsmouth, remarkably, given the lack of ferries in the 18th century. The wooden chapel was replaced in 1855 by a permanent building by Robert Edward Philips – his only known Catholic church. Henry John Hansom (son of the better known Joseph Hansom) altered it in 1874, as did A.J.C. Scoles, priest and architect, in 1898. The tall west end is a landmark on the busy pedestrianised street, but little else can be seen as buildings surround it.

DESECULARISATION DIGEST: I.E.L.B., BOURNEMOUTH, DORSET

It is always pleasing when a building of clear architectural merit is restored from seedy dilapidation; even more so when it also holds an important position in its locality's history and development. Bournemouth town centre has lost several interesting places of worship in the 21st century, particularly those of smaller or lesser-known religious groups; but a new one has joined the scene in the former Theatre Royal premises on Albert Road, a Grade II-listed building of 1882 which went on to have many secular uses.



The former Theatre Royal, Albert Road, Bournemouth, seen in September 2022 when used by the Igreja Evangélica Luso-Brasileira (photograph copyright Matt Davis)

The Brazilian-Portuguese Evangelical Church had its origins in prayer meetings in houses in 1997, instigated by Brazilian twin brothers who lived in the town. Word spread, and in due course a number of Portuguese speakers with Protestant Christian backgrounds had come together in search of a different worship experience from what they had encountered in local churches. In about 1999 the pastor of Wessex Christian Centre – an Assemblies of God Pentecostal church founded in 1985 – allowed the community to start sharing its premises (of which more later!). The church experienced rapid growth – it now has 150

members, many of whom are converts – and was soon formally constituted with the name Igreja Evangélica Luso-Brasileira (Brazilian-Portuguese Evangelical Church – the prefix ‘Luso’ meaning ‘relating to Portugal’, based on the Roman province of Lusitania which was roughly coterminous with modern Portugal).

By 2009 the church was in a position to search for premises of its own. Round the corner from the Wessex Christian Centre is a striking building spanning the entire block between Albert and Yelverton Roads. The rear quarter, facing Yelverton Road, is a three-storey brick-and-stone building which has operated as a casino for many years; but the bulk of the building is a four-storey, four-bay, stuccoed Baroque-style structure with Corinthian pilasters and some rather Regency-influenced pediments above the windows. It was designed by local architects Kemp-Welch & Pindar and opened on 7 December 1882 as the Theatre Royal – Bournemouth’s first theatre. Nightingales of Bournemouth built it, and R.T. Sims and Walter Bevis fitted out the interior. The cost was £10,000, and 800 people could be seated. Harry Nash, a vigorous and innovative manager, did his best to attract custom, but attendances were low. When the old town hall was sold for commercial use in 1887, Nash stripped the furnishings out of his theatre and offered it as a

replacement (and as a venue for lectures, banquets and so on). It served in that role for just five years before he re-established theatrical events in the building in July 1892. It was damaged by fire in 1943, shortly after it was closed, but it reopened as a theatre for a third time in 1949. Conversion into a cinema, bingo hall and casino followed in 1962, and its reputation declined: in its last incarnation as the Tatler Cinema Club, the cinema part was dedicated to the showing of ‘blue movies’. It closed in 1981 and the building was half-empty thereafter, retaining only the bingo hall for a while and the casino to the rear. When listed in 1974 the stucco was said to be painted ‘sea green’; by the early 21st century it was sickly pink.

Local press reports in early 2009 stated that the Brazilian-Portuguese Evangelical Church were set to buy the building, and it was registered for their use in July of that year. The exterior was well restored in 2016–2017, and the building is in its best condition for a long time. The premises are used for church services, a ‘Discipleship Training Centre’ and Bible study groups. Subsidiary meetings take place in Southampton and Andover as well.



The former Wessex Christian Centre, Hinton Road, Bournemouth, as it appeared in September 2022 (photograph copyright Matt Davis)

A quick trip back round the corner to the Wessex Christian Centre reveals, coincidentally, another former theatre – although this one is shortly to be ‘resecularised’ as a theatre once more. Prolific local architects Seal & Hardy designed it in 1931 for the Bournemouth Little Theatre Company in a blocky Art Deco style, of Portland stone, with a large window above the semicircular entrance and very narrow windows on the recessed flanks. It became the Palace Court Theatre and then the Playhouse, but struggled in the 1980s. The local Assemblies of God congregation, which had been hiring it for services, bought it in 1986 or 1987 and converted it into a church – amid controversy and against the wishes of both the local council and a wide range of famous actors, all of whom campaigned for to remain a theatre. That is now happening, albeit 35 years later, as the Wessex Christian Centre (now named ‘DISCOVER.church’ – a very distinctive 21st-century name!) has moved out into a Church of England church hall and the Arts University Bournemouth has bought the old building and will reconvert it into a teaching and performance venue. When inspected and photographed in September 2022, the signage was gone but the large Cross remained.

A comprehensive history of the early days of the Theatre Royal is given in C. Graeme Barber’s The Bournemouth Theatres 1882 to 1908 (ISBN 0-906287-20-0), published in 1980 by Bournemouth Local Studies Publications.

CHAPEL CLOSURES

Rev. Reginald Rooke has kindly supplied details of some more United Reformed Church closures in the East Midlands, including Fowlmere where he served as minister in the 1980s and 1990s.

Wisbech United Reformed Church, Cambridgeshire [E46]

The present chapel dates from 1818, although a congregation existed here in 1689. Prominently sited between the town war memorial and the River Nene, it forms part of a long, curving terrace together with its adjacent Sunday School, through which a wide ground-floor archway leads to some mews at the rear. The chapel has a flat parapet with a slightly elevated centre section incorporating a datestone. The doorcase is elaborate, and five tall arched windows create neat symmetry.

Fowlmere United Reformed Church, Cambridgeshire [E33]

The chapel is the earliest of several founded for congregations which developed from the itinerant ministry of Rev. John Berridge. The original part of the building is timber-framed and rendered; several extensions were made in the 19th century (the projecting façade, an apse and the schoolroom, whose clock

tower is an unusual feature – as is its Mears and Stainbank bell). There is a three-sided gallery. A final thanksgiving service was held on 25 February 2024. (*Pictured right in July 2007; photograph copyright Robert Edwards, adapted from <https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/497604>; licensed for reuse under Creative Commons licence CC-BY-SA 2.0*)



Bourne United Reformed Church, Lincolnshire

Just four weeks later, on 23 March 2024, a thanksgiving service was held to mark the closure of this town-centre chapel, originally Eastgate Chapel. The tall, gabled entrance wing, with a Classical-style pedimented stone door surround, leads through to a sanctuary and hall with a sliding panel between them. Various plaques, stained glass windows and other fittings commemorate past chapel members, including Elizabeth and Eleanor Presgrove, who helped found the church. The chapel, built in 1846, sits behind a small burial ground which retains some tombstones, although it is no longer grassed.

Rowley Street Methodist Church, Stafford, Staffordshire

(Latterly known as ‘The Church at Rowley Street’.) The terracotta decoration on the main window, which according to old photographs was covered up by modern signage for many years, identifies this as a ‘Wesleyan Mission Hall’. It was built in 1885 to serve the terraced streets



north of the town centre, and is a good example of a small late Victorian mission hall – albeit with a more elaborate façade than usual. It was for sale when visited in May 2022. Many original interior fittings are said to survive, including a good organ. In June 2023 it was under offer as a ‘development site’, which implied potential demolition; but happily it has been rescued by a new congregation. Mount Peniel Church, an independent Pentecostal church which previously met in a community centre in Stafford, has bought it and converted it into a combined church and community facility. It was registered for worship in May 2024. (*Pictured right in May 2022; photograph copyright Matt Davis*)

LOST CHAPELS: PRIMITIVE METHODIST MISSION ROOM, HORSHAM, WEST SUSSEX (1885–2018)

The ancient market town of Horsham has a great deal of small-scale, low-key Victorian and Edwardian architecture – attributable mostly to its growth during the ‘railway era’ when its importance as a regional junction was even greater than today. Unsurprisingly for a place which has been a Nonconformist hotbed for 400 years, there are plenty of modest chapels and meeting-houses – some of which were seen during the Chapels Society’s visit to the town in 2018. One of the smallest, which has been out of religious use for over a century, has recently been lost; despite its long period of secularisation its mission-hall origins remained obvious. Although a local newspaper’s description¹ of it as a ‘landmark’ may be baffling, it complemented its varied Victorian street-scene nicely.

After 1860 a new suburb developed some distance from both the railway station (to the east) and the town centre (southeast), near a large house called Springfield Park. The streets of terraced housing were anchored by Rushams Road, which looped round to connect the main western and northern routes out of town. The Church of England reacted quickly, erecting a tin tabernacle in 1879 to serve the growing district. Nonconformist places of worship were confined to the town centre at this point, but the Primitive Methodists were first off the mark. Having already opened a chapel in Roffey, another outlying district, in 1878, a smaller building followed in 1885 in the middle of the Rushams Road district, very close to the tin tabernacle. Its registration for worship (on 22 May 1885) as ‘Primitive Methodist Mission Room’ rather than ‘Chapel’ (or even ‘Church’!) gives an idea of how small it was. Experience elsewhere suggests that such mission rooms were often replaced in due course by proper chapels, and in a way that happened with the Rushams Road mission: but rather than one being provided on its site or nearby, the new chapel – large and with an unusually exuberant façade – was built on East Street on the other side of town in 1892. Despite Rushams Road’s registration being cancelled only in 1925,² careful study of map evidence has revealed that its closure coincided, at least approximately, with the opening of East Street – because by 1900, the building’s description on maps had changed from ‘Chap.’ to ‘Trinity Hall’. The mission hall had now become the church hall of Holy Trinity Church, built in 1900 to replace the Anglican tin tabernacle.

It is odd that a Primitive Methodist cause should not thrive in an artisan district with no competition from other Nonconformist denominations.³ Did Rushams Road close because East Street had been built expensively? Was the east of town considered a better prospect? (It certainly had a great deal of working-class and similar housing by the late 19th century – more so than the still fairly small and isolated Rushams Road district.) With the gradual improvement in transport,



Primitive Methodist Mission Room (1885), Rushams Road, Horsham, West Sussex: seen (left) in June 2010 and (right) in April 2018 immediately after demolition. Holy Trinity Church is just visible on the right (photographs copyright Matt Davis)

was it perhaps considered that the new East Street chapel was close enough to the Rushams Road area to serve it as well? The 1890s was, after all, the decade of the ‘bicycle craze’, which may have boosted the average catchment area of a typical chapel. Perhaps Holy Trinity Church was simply too popular. Whatever the reason, the mission was very short-lived; but the building lived on unchanged, a good example of simple vernacular architecture, with a tile-hung gable and a little tiled porch-like element supported on brackets with terracotta corbels.

The building retained the name Trinity Hall until its demise; but it was used by the British Red Cross from 1975 after a new church hall was built for Holy Trinity. (Interestingly, when the Red Cross acquired the building from the Anglican Diocese of Chichester in July of that year, a restrictive covenant was imposed to prevent any future use of the building as a place of worship. Ironic, given its origins!) A single-storey ambulance garage was added to the north side, joined to the main building by a flat-roofed vestibule. The Red Cross used the premises as a base to store and hire out mobility aids and similar medical items. In 2016, changes took place nationally to the provision of mobility aids, including the development of a home delivery service, resulting in the Red Cross consolidating these services on a smaller number of sites. The equivalent facility at nearby Crawley was expanded at the expense of Horsham, and in July 2016 the old mission hall was placed on the market at a suggested price of £350,000. It was sold in May 2017, and planning permission for its demolition and replacement with a pair of semi-detached houses was granted four months later. Demolition followed in spring 2018: the site was still being levelled when I visited on 21 April.

There is happier news at Roffey and at East Street, where both of Horsham’s other former Primitive Methodist chapels survive in religious use. St Andrew’s Methodist Church, as the Roffey building is now known, was given a dramatic

re-fronting around 10 years ago – an improvement on the uninspiring post-war porch it previously had – and is a key feature of the suburb's main road. East Street closed when the Methodist Union took place in 1932, but was taken on by a Pentecostal congregation in 1957. Now named 'Christian Life Centre', it is a non-denominational Charismatic Evangelical church with an emphasis on prophetic ministry – a topic of recent discussion in *Newsletter*.

¹ *Crawley and Horley Observer*, 11 August 2006.

² A major 'bulk revision' of the Worship Register, the first for some years, took place in 1925, clearing out lots of old disused chapels and mission rooms which had long since fallen out of use but which had not been deregistered at the time. A deregistration year of 1925 should be treated with extreme caution: in this instance the *Victoria County History* does so, noting that Rushams Road 'closed before 1925'. Other years in which bulk revisions were carried out include 1876, 1895–96, 1954, 1964, 1971 and 1980.

³ It took until 1921 for another Nonconformist place of worship to open in this part of Horsham, when Brighton Road Baptist Church and a recently arrived family got together to provide a Baptist mission on Trafalgar Road, just off Rushams Road. The original tin tabernacle, later refaced in brick, was replaced by a splendid, much larger building in 2011.

BOOK NOTICES

A reminder that *Places of Worship in Britain and Ireland 1929–1990*, edited by P. S. Barnwell and Allan Doig, is now available (see *Newsletter* 87 for full details) and can be bought by Chapels Society members for £35 (a £15 discount on the cover price) and with free postage. Email the publisher, Shaun Tyas, at shaun@shauntyas.myzen.co.uk, call 01775 821542, or write to Shaun Tyas, 1 High Street, DONINGTON, Lincolnshire PE11 4TA; and pay by cheque (made payable to Shaun Tyas), PayPal (directly to the above email address) or bank transfer (check the account details with Shaun). A review will appear in *Newsletter* 90.

NEWS AND NOTES

Methodist Church Listed Buildings Advisory Committee

The Methodist Church is seeking new volunteer members for their Listed Buildings Advisory Committee, to contribute to the review, evaluation and recommendation process for proposals relating to alterations to the Church's listed buildings. An advertisement, application pack, job description and associated documentation can be found at <https://methodist.current-vacancies.com/Jobs/Advert/3560845?cid=1885>, and applications should be made there. The closing date is **25 August 2024**, and interviews are expected to take place on 13 September 2024. Questions about the role may be sent to hr@methodistchurch.org.uk.

Funding available to keep chapels open and in use

Rachael Adams of the National Churches Trust (NCT) writes: ‘Are you looking for help to keep your chapel in good repair and open for all? A grant from the National Churches Trust can help you to do this. But don’t just take their word for it: see how funding from the charity made all the difference to a community in the south Wales valleys.

In 2023, the National Churches Trust awarded a large grant of £30,000 to Bryn Sion Baptist Fellowship in Aberdare. Their Grade II-listed chapel was condemned six years ago. It became too dangerous to use due to the risk of ornate sections of the ceiling becoming detached and falling. To continue their many community activities and services, Bryn Sion were forced to hire other buildings in the area. But a grant has transformed everything for this chapel. Bryn Sion’s minister Ian Ross says: “In recent years our congregation size and the many opportunities to serve our community have increased. We have had to limit the numbers attending events due to a lack of space. But having our chapel reopened will enable us to expand our activities and welcome greater numbers of people from our local community. For many years chapels in our valley have closed and often gone into disrepair. We are so happy that Bryn Sion will now



*Detail of the ceiling at Bryn Sion Baptist Chapel, Mill Street, Trecynon, Aberdare
(photograph copyright National Churches Trust)*

remain open as an accessible, warm, welcoming chapel in the heart of the village of Trecynon.”

Grants from the National Churches Trust are available to any Christian place of worship in the U.K. – Catholic and Nonconformist included – that is open for regular worship. Whether you are looking to repair your roof, install a kitchen or accessible toilets, clear asbestos or simply need help undertaking regular essential maintenance to your building, NCT offer a range of grants to suit the size and needs of your project. In 2023, more than 180 grant awards were made to churches, chapels and meeting houses throughout the U.K., with funding totalling more than £2 million. NCT would be delighted to partner with chapels – whether through a grant, or via the training and support they offer – to keep them open and in use. You can find out more at www.nationalchurchestrust.org.’

New uses for Brethren meeting rooms

In profiling a former Brethren meeting room taken over by Sikhs, *Newsletter* 84 noted that ‘it is rare for former Brethren meeting rooms to pass to non-Christian faith communities’. *Newsletter* 88 featured one which became a synagogue. It seems only reasonable to point out that all the major faiths have found ex-Brethren buildings useful. The London Sikh Centre is based in one in Ealing (west London); a mosque now occupies one in Fulmer, Buckinghamshire; and Hindu communities now use others in Bromley (south London), Feltham (west London) and Withington (Manchester). Interestingly, all five of these were built as ‘city rooms’ of what is now the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church (PBCC):

by design these are large, modern, secure, functional buildings with plenty of car parking, and therefore naturally appealing to any faith community with a large congregation drawn from a wide area – although, as alluded to in *Newsletter* 81 (where the ‘Desecularisation Digest’ feature briefly mentioned the former PBCC city room in Farnham, Surrey), their ‘rigid, inflexible’ interior layouts need altering to be suitable for any other form of worship. Roger Holden also reports that a former



Rebecca Street Meeting Room, Bradford, West Yorkshire, seen in January 2024 when in use as a mosque (Injeel Hall). This end-of-terrace stone building was home to a meeting of ‘Glanton’

*Exclusive Brethren for many years
(photograph copyright Gerard Charmley)*

PBCC ‘local room’ in Elm Park Road, Pinner, northwest London, has recently become the Jain Vishva Bahrati London (World Peace Centre), used by adherents of the Indian religion Jainism. Alongside Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism, this is the fourth of the major Dharmic religions.

Other strands of the Brethren movement should not be overlooked: *Gerard Charmley* notes that the former Rebecca Street Meeting Room in inner-city Bradford is now a mosque called Injeel Hall. The change happened at some point between 2018 and 2022. Rebecca Street was in use by the ‘Glanton’ faction of Exclusive Brethren by 1925, moving to an Open Brethren position c.2001. The ‘Glanton’ split, which occurred in 1908, was one of the major divisions in the Exclusive Brethren movement.

Bethany Chapel, Hodley, Powys

Another PBCC-related story saw this tiny Grade II-listed chapel of 1840 a few miles east of Newtown make the main headlines of the BBC News website on 7 September 2023. The PBCC, which has a growing presence in the Newtown area, bought it and, it is claimed, damaged the graveyard when building a car park and access road. Headstones have apparently been moved and lost, and families with relatives buried there have asked local police and the council to get involved. Bethany was built as an Independent chapel in 1840, became Congregational and then joined the United Reformed Church. It was still in use in 1996 but appeared derelict by 2009. Its listing particulars (Cadw reference 17300) describe it as ‘a good example of a rural chapel of the mid-19th century, set in a conspicuous position’ with a ‘very simple’ but attractive-sounding interior; no doubt this will also be altered.

Newtown is one of three areas in Wales, along with Swansea and Cardiff, where the branch of the Exclusive Brethren now known as the PBCC have had a long-term presence. As well as Hodley there are three meeting rooms in the town itself (the latest approved in 2022 and registered in early 2024), and another has been built from scratch at nearby Abermule and was newly registered in March 2024. Redundant chapels suit them because no ‘change of use’ planning permission is needed; by my calculations around 30 PBCC ‘local rooms’ in England and Wales occupy former chapels of other denominations, most of which are very recent conversions. Their requirement to have extensive car parking facilities could cause similar issues in future if they take on more chapels with graveyards.

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