

Nonconformist Chapels in Lincoln

REPORT ON THE SURVEY OF NONCONFORMIST CHAPELS IN THE CITY OF LINCOLN

Introduction

Nonconformist chapels have been a feature of the British landscape for over two hundred years. They exist in many different sizes and architectural styles and offer a rich field of study for the local historian. The majority of chapels were built in the mid 19th century and their location and size related obviously to past communities sustained mostly by agriculture and industry. The architecture of the buildings, as in the rest of the UK, came from the prominence of preaching in Nonconformist worship, with a central pulpit and with fixed pews like an amphitheatre, so that the preacher could be seen and heard by every member of the congregation. Nonconformist chapels cover an enormous span of architectural types and ambition - far broader than Anglican buildings from the most modest vernacular to successive levels of aspiration and prosperity within chapel communities. They also manifest other key factors in dissenting communities, such as schism and revival.

Historic chapels represent one of the most threatened building types in England. The Methodist Church has had little choice but to sell off chapels where there are insufficient members to carry the cost of maintaining them. They were and remain theatres designed for preaching and are now less suited to the pastoral needs of contemporary congregations. Many congregations are finding it impossible to maintain their buildings, dozens of chapels are demolished each year while others are unsympathetically converted to other uses without first being photographed or recorded. Moreover, large numbers of chapel records and documents are destroyed or lost, despite the fact that nonconformity is of great importance in the history of both England generally and of local communities.

Survey of nonconformist chapels in the City of Lincoln

To ensure that recognition is given to the contribution that chapel buildings make to Lincoln's distinctive character, a survey of the nonconformist heritage of the city was undertaken by the Historic Environment Record of Lincolnshire County Council. The survey was designed for use in the planning process, and is a basic standing building record of chapel architecture and structural survival (both written and photographic). The survey is also an account of what has been lost; with a review of archaeological, bibliographic and cartographic evidence for past chapels and associated buildings.

The results of the study are presented on a map-based computer database.

It is hoped the findings of the survey can be used to encourage the study and preservation of the nonconformist heritage of Lincoln, to offer advice to congregations on the ways to maintain and preserve their buildings and, ideally, to encourage the sympathetic conversion of chapels no longer required for their original purpose.

Definition

A nonconformist chapel is a building, usually of rectilinear form, which accommodates worship and meetings by Protestants outside the established Church. The earliest buildings, and all those of the Society of Friends, are termed meeting houses. Other denominations refer to their buildings as chapels, although towards the end of the 19th century the term church came into use.

Chapels are recognised as standing buildings; sites previously occupied by chapels can sometimes be identified from documentary and cartographic evidence. Few meeting houses were built before the passing of the Act of Toleration in 1689. Patterns in nonconformity may subsequently be divided between the Old Dissent (Society of Friends, or Quakers; Baptists; Presbyterians; Congregationalists, or Independents; Unitarians) and, after c1750, the New Dissent (Moravians; Methodists, including Countess of Huntingdon Connexion, New Connexion and Wesleyans; Primitive Methodists), with denominational distinctions to some extent expressed through building design and the placement of internal fittings and fixtures. The main components of a Nonconformist Chapel are its facade (windows, doorways, inscribed tablet), interior fittings which may include a (pulpit, pews, font, baptismal tank, organ), galleries, porch, external staircases, minister's house, tower, burial ground and enclosing walls. Since Church of England schools were not attended by nonconformists, many chapels have school rooms or associated school houses.

Nonconformist chapel design

The Society of Friends

Seventeenth century meeting houses were often cottage conversions and were generally domestic, rather than ecclesiastical, in appearance. Some Friends' meeting houses had enclosed graveyards which sometimes predated the building. In contrast to other nonconformists, the Friends' buildings have no liturgical centre. Instead, benches were arranged along three sides of a square, facing a raised bench (the ministers' gallery, or elders' stand). Many of the earliest Friends' meeting houses were simple single storey buildings. Some had galleries; or lobbies over which was the womens' meeting house. Interiors were often plain plaster or whitewashed, with unfinished wood panelling fixed to form the seat backs. From as early as the 17th century until the (mid) 19th, the Friends separated mens' and womens' business meetings. A womens' meeting room was provided adjacent to, or above the main meeting. Butler (1978, iv-v) has suggested that Friends' meeting houses although often studied according to chronological typologies, may be better considered in regional groups. Their great uniformity of style was not due to a central model, but to Friends' principles of simplicity, and to communication between meetings. In the Lake Counties, Friends' buildings follow local farm buildings in proportions, materials and details of construction. Their orientation generally allowed the windows to face south, in an effort to insulate these unheated structures. By the end of the 18th century, sash-windows were incorporated; by the 19th, porches and iron stoves were added. In general, longer meeting houses are common in the north of England and wider ones in the south. Eventually the Friends required larger, purpose-built premises with school rooms, and occasionally detached caretakers' and guests' houses. By the 19th century a classical facade replaced the vernacular character of earlier buildings, and wood interiors were varnished. Some meeting houses were divided internally by shutter partitions operated by means of a lift-out or counterweight system.

Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists

The chapels of the other main dissenting groups were designed to accentuate the preachers' sermon. Hence the pulpit is often the focal point. The earliest buildings were single halls or rooms equipped with a pulpit. They resembled vernacular architecture in design, details of windows, and materials of construction. The Presbyterians and Congregationalists favoured narrow rectangles, with a gallery at each end. Galleries were not always integral to the original structure, sometimes they were added one by one until they flanked three sides of the chapel. They provided extra

seating and brought the congregation closer to the pulpit. Interiors were generally whitewashed, with dark wood pews arranged along three sides facing the pulpit, which was placed in the centre of a long wall. In front of the pulpit was a communion table. Baptism was undertaken using a silver or pewter basin fixed by a bracket to the pulpit (Arnold 1960,92); later, chapels acquired fonts. The Baptists used nearby rivers or constructed outdoor baptismal tanks. Underfloor baptisteries were common only from the (mid) 19th century.

From the 18th century chapels acquired a more ecclesiastical appearance, sometimes with prominent bell-towers. Generally only the main front, or facade, was decorative. Frequently its design was symmetrical, with a pair of central windows lighting the space for the pulpit within. Internally, arrangement of benches gave way to box-pews.

Unitarians

The first Unitarian chapel was opened in 1774 (Essex Chapel, London), beginning a building tradition of larger, more stately and ornate chapels than those of other denominations. In the second half of the 19th century the Unitarians adopted styles affiliated to those favoured by Anglicans.

Methodists

Eighteenth century Wesleyan chapels were, in effect, preaching houses that were not designed to accommodate sacramental worship. They were usually of vernacular character with no superfluous decoration. Often these buildings were short-lived, to be replaced by larger chapels. The Countess of Huntingdon chapels were "neo-classical", and often grand. From an early date those of the New Connexion were also imposing chapels. Some 19th century chapels included towers. From the early 19th century many nonconformists began to reject austerity in favour of architectural display. They built grand downtown chapels. Their classical facades incorporated colonnaded porticos and pediments. Larger chapels resulted in large clear roof spans and great galleries supported by slender iron columns. Chapels were built in new materials, with rich plasterwork and polished wood interiors, complete with elaborate organs and cases. Box -pews were superseded by bench-pews. Some of these pews were privately owned and decorated with fine fabrics and carpets. Many chapels included vestibules which helped to shut out street noise, and were raised upon a school hall. The Dissenters continued to build classical designs until the end of the century, whereas the Anglicans lost interest from the 1820s/30s (Morris 1989). The Methodists were associated with Greek Revival; others experimented with an "eclectic classicism" influenced by Italian and French Renaissance. Later in the century the Baptists and others built in "Gothick". By about 1840 a five bay front was usual; smaller urban examples retained the rectangular auditory. Nineteenth century Methodists, in contrast to other nonconformists, placed altar rails in their chapels (White 1964, 115), and some had panels with the Creed and Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. The Wesleyans favoured facades with central Venetian windows (Powell 1980).

Evangelical Methodist denominations tended to downplay architectural display. The Bible Christians built rectangular boxes with plain facades. Similarly, the Primitive Methodists built rectangles with plain, often three bay and sometimes gabled, fronts. These had single entrances, often flanked by tall, semi-circular headed windows. A vestry or porch was sometimes added later.

The design, style and material of execution of a chapel varied across denomination, region and time. During its life-time an individual chapel might have adjacent structures added or removed

(for example, a minister's house or stables). The interior might be altered through the addition of galleries and changes in seating arrangements. Throughout the 18th century, and perhaps into the 19th, men and women were sometimes segregated during worship. This practice also occurred within buildings of the Church of England, but was more consistently followed by the Friends and Wesleyans. The mens' side of a chapel (ground floor or gallery) might be recognised where hat-pegs are extant.

Graveyard memorials follow the general chronological typologies, with the exception of the Friends and Moravians. Their memorials tend to be uniform between individuals and across time. Between c1715 and 1850, the Friends disapproved of monuments to their dead. From the 18th century many chapels had flat memorial slabs incorporated into floors, and commemorative brasses on walls. Large, urban chapels commissioned marble wall memorials. From the third quarter of the 19th century, many chapels did not have private burial grounds, choosing instead to use the municipal cemeteries.

National distribution and regional variation

According to Watts, the Old Dissent (Baptist, Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Quaker) was strongest in towns. The Particular Baptists were most popular in Bedfordshire, Montgomeryshire and Monmouthshire. The General Baptists were more dispersed, with concentrations in Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Buckinghamshire, Kent and Sussex. The Quakers, or Friends, were strongest in the Lakes, London, and Bristol, with general representation across England. The Congregationalists found support in Northamptonshire, Hertfordshire, and Essex. The Presbyterians had their greatest following in the southwest, northwest, Northumberland, the Pennines, Berkshire and Essex. The Unitarians were more strongly represented in the West Midlands, Lancashire, Cheshire, the West Riding, West Country, London and the southeast (Sellers 1977,51).

The Countess of Huntingdon established chapels in spa and resort towns popular with aristocrats (for example, Bath; Brighton). The New Connexion was concentrated mainly in the northeast. New Dissent flourished in areas where the Church of England was weak: in sprawling rural and densely populated urban parishes. The Wesleyans were popular initially in the east of England, the Midlands, northeast and West Riding. During the 19th century their popular support shifted to the southeast, London and the Home Counties. The Primitive Methodists found their following in the rural and industrial villages ignored by Wesleyans. Their heaviest concentrations were in Staffordshire, Cheshire, Shropshire, south Lancashire, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, East Riding, Durham, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

Chapel distribution in the City of Lincoln

Within towns the chapels and meeting houses of Old Dissent were frequently placed back from street frontages or down alleyways, in semi-secluded situations (Friends Meeting House, Park Lane). In contrast, 19th century chapels were often in more prominent locations, particularly in down-town areas. Not all chapels were detached structures, with some forming part of a continuous row of terrace houses, for example the United Methodist Chapel on Portland Street. Missions were often set in suburbs of larger towns. Within towns, chapels may cluster into enclaves of nonconformity. In Lincoln, four apparent groups, or clusters, can be seen:

- Northern - Burton Road, Bailgate, Saxon Street, Rasen Lane, Chapel Lane.
- Central west - Orchard Street, Park Lane, Newland, Gresham Street.

- Central east - Silver Street, Clasketgate, Monks Road, Rosemary Lane, Croft Street, Baggholme Road.
- Southern - High Street/Newark Road.

Quakers

South of the St Martin's 'overspill' cemetery, there is a small Quaker meeting house of about 1689 (PRN 70415). As such, it represents the oldest standing nonconformist building in the City of Lincoln. It will preserve in its fabric and fittings the evidence for the slight changes which occurred in Quaker observance through the 18th and 19th centuries; in-particular, the changing status of women in the sect, and, therefore, the changing uses to which the 'gallery' were put in the 19th and 20th centuries. Such details may be detected by appropriate recording programmes associated with repair and restoration. The burial ground will also be of considerable interest because it will preserve a paleopathological record of the social circumstances of the Quaker community through time.

Presbyterians and Independents

There were several sects of Presbyterians and Independents in the city by the late 18th century although most have obscure histories (Hill 1966, 68-9). The best documented, however, is that which began as early as 1672 and met in the chapel, built in c.1725 on the east side of High Street, at the corner with Monson Street (PRN 70409). This group called themselves Presbyterian in 1719, but they were Independent by 1774 (Ibid.) and the congregation became Unitarian in 1837 (Hill 1974, 184; Hill 1966, 68). The chapel is a rare building type, and its alterations will represent the changing aspirations of the dissenting community; each alteration should be analysed as a potential expression of changing creeds and should, therefore, be recorded in detail during the course of repair works. The site includes the whole plot on which the chapel stands on the presumption that the surrounding ground may have been used for burial, or for other purposes associated with the conventicle, which may have left an impression in the archaeological record.

A second Independent group had formed in 1819 in a building in Tanners Lane. This group had their origins in a group of Baptists who had succeeded from the Zion Chapel (Hill 1974, 185) and the remains of this chapel, now converted into industrial buildings, survive (PRN 70435). They represent an important (and now rare) survival of an early dissenters' chapel in Lincoln and should be fully recorded during repairs or alterations. In 1840 an offshoot of this community, now calling themselves Congregationalist, moved to a new purpose-built chapel in Newland. Although the sect had moved to new premises it seems that occasional services were held in the chapel until 1907. The Tanners Lane chapel site and buildings, consequently, offer the prospect of understanding the development of this group of dissenters over an extended period of time.

The new chapel in Newland of 1840 was built to the designs of the architect Fenton of Chelmsford (PRN 70417). The Congregationalists thrived in the central part of the 19th century, and in 1876 the chapel was converted to become the Congregational School and a new chapel was built on the plot to the west (to designs by the architects Bellamy and Hardy). Some of the funds for the new work came from Joseph Ruston, who was a member of the congregation, and the possibility that he may have influenced the architectural details of the new chapel should be investigated (PRN 70418). Such influential patronage must, at least, have lain behind the prosperity and influence of the Congregationalists in the Victorian city. There were additional chapels, or mission rooms, built in Gresham Street, Far Newland (PRN 70422), the eastern end of

Monks Road (PRN 70420) and, in 1905 on the east side of High Street (PRN 70411). All of these existing buildings will retain evidence in their fabric and fittings not just for the rapid growth of Congregationalism in the city through the 19th and into the 20th century, but for the development of their liturgy and beliefs. Recording work should therefore be carried out during phases of repair and alteration.

Baptists

The Baptist community off the west side of St Benedict's Square went through many changes through the Industrial Era, including a period in the first half of the 19th century when the chapel was used for other purposes, but the Baptists remained on this site and a large new chapel was built in 1884-6 (PRN 70433). Buried remains of this important early Baptist site will survive below ground, although the chapel was demolished in 1971-2. In 1818 a distinct sect of Calvinistic (or Particular) Baptists built themselves a separate chapel in Mint Lane, which has also been replaced, but this time by a new chapel on the same site (of 1870-1 to designs by architects Drury and Mortimer) with a small graveyard behind (PRN 70416). The buried remains of the 1818 chapel will be of considerable interest, especially if they can be compared with the remains of the chapel in St Benedict's Square. Before 1887 a Baptist chapel had been opened on the north side of Monks Road to the east of the City School (PRN 70438) and a small Baptist chapel was constructed on Orchard Street by 1888 (PRN 70453).

The layout of Baptist chapels, incorporating the baptistery itself, tends to express the core beliefs of the sect. At St Benedict's it is reported that the original baptistery was outside the chapel, in the bank of the river, but we need to know at what stage in the development of the sect it was brought indoors. Was this move anything to do with the formation of the Calvinistic group within the Baptist community? Similarly we might hope to find some indications of differences in belief and doctrine in the differing layouts of the two chapels. The small graveyard will contain an extremely interesting population as its members are likely to have represented a particular social group. The Baptists in Lincoln had a reputation for evangelism amongst the working classes and so this population will make an extremely interesting group in comparison with other dissenters' graveyards and with graveyards belonging to the Anglicans.

Wesleyan Methodists

There were many Wesleyan communities in Lincoln in the Industrial Era. The principal community was that said to have been founded by Wesley himself in the 1780s in a lumber room next to Gowts Bridge. Unfortunately the exact site of this community could not be located. The community had moved to Waterside South by the 1790s and a chapel was provided (PRN 70458). This will be an important early chapel and any remains which can be located should be the subject of investigations. In particular it may be possible to recover the layout of the chapel and establish what differences it had compared with contemporary Anglican structures. The chapel was rebuilt in 1815 and closed in 1836. The chapel was replaced by a large new chapel on Clasketgate ('Big Wesley') built 1835-6 and demolished in 1963 (PRN 70431). This chapel represents the epitome of mainstream Victorian Methodism and information about its layout and design details will be of considerable interest. It had a small graveyard to the east which may contain a population of considerable paleopathological interest, because of the limited chronology of burial and because the population were socially self-selecting. Results from here should be compared with results from Anglican graveyards and with those from other dissenting sects.

A second community of mainstream Wesleyans also began life in St Peter-at-Gowts parish and by

1864 was prosperous enough to construct a chapel on Alfred Street (PRN 70426). In 1875 they built a larger chapel on High Street named after Thomas Hannah (but also known as 'Little Wesley'). The architects were Bellamy and Hardy; the chapel was demolished in 1965 (PRN 70436). The Alfred Street chapel subsequently became a Wesleyan school and, possibly in 1912, a Salvation Army Sunday School. A third community had begun life in 1831 in Newport and in 1842 they had built a chapel just inside Newport Arch at the north-east end of Chapel Lane (PRN 70414). This site is of special interest because the original chapel is said to have belonged to a Baptist community (Hill 1974, 183) and so we might see the doctrinal distinctions between the two sects reflected in changes made to accommodate the Wesleyans. In 1879 this chapel was moved to its present site on Bailgate (architects Bellamy and Hardy), and it survives today (PRN 70425). A fourth community had established itself in St Catherines, and, by 1881 they had established a chapel facing on to Colegrave Street, designed by Charles Bell (PRN 70423). By 1887-8, they were able to erect a fine chapel in the gothic style facing on to Newark Road and also designed by Bell (PRN 70443). A fifth community was established in a chapel in Bracebridge by 1887 on the corner of Francis Street and Newark Road (PRN 70444). By 1903 the Wesleyans had established mission chapels at Stamp End (at the southern end of Baggeholme Road – PRN 70439), Burton Road (at the corner of Mount Street – PRN 70424) and in Well Lane (PRN 70452).

The various sects which adopted a more extreme Methodist position than the Wesleyans, sometimes subscribing to Calvinism, form a distinct group within the Methodist family. The earliest such community in Lincoln was established under the patronage of the Countess of Huntingdon in the 1770s, but no chapel seems to have been built until 1805. This chapel was built on Silver Street and its buried remains will be of considerable interest (PRN 70434). Chapels of the Countess' Connection were never common and the details of its layout might help clarify the sect's doctrinal position. In 1818 this group built a second chapel in Mint Lane where they stayed until 1839, and again buried remains of this chapel will be of considerable interest and investigation should be aimed at understanding the layout of the chapel and, through that, the sect's doctrinal position. Unfortunately the site of this chapel is uncertain and so a PRN could not be assigned.

By 1851 the Zion Chapel community had been joined by the 'United' or 'Free' Methodists' and in 1864 the chapel was rebuilt again, this time to designs by Bellamy and Hardy (PRN 70437). This new chapel was quite an elaborate building and a comparison between its layout and that of the other Methodist chapels designed by Bellamy and Hardy in Lincoln might assist our understanding of the doctrinal differences which separated the communities. In addition to the centrally located community, a group of United Methodists had been formed "Uphill" in the 1850s; by 1873 they had a chapel in Saxon Street off Rasen Lane in Newport (PRN 70441). The United Methodists also established chapels at the east end of Portland Street (PRN 70413) and in Bracebridge, enclosed on three sides by the Gas Works by 1890 (PRN 70457).

Primitive Methodists

The Lincoln Primitive Methodist community was founded in 1819, ten years after it had split from the Wesleyans nationally, and they opened a chapel in Hungate (Hill 1966, 296; Hill 1974, 183). The origins and development of the Lincolnshire Primitive Methodists have been discussed by Ambler (1989). Unfortunately the site of this chapel is unknown. Its discovery would be of considerable interest as comparison with remains from the Wesleyan chapel in Waterside South may illustrate the doctrinal distinctions over which the split occurred.

In 1839 a group of Primitive Methodists established themselves in a yard off St Mary's Street, Wigford (called Portland Place - PRN 70432). In 1873-5 this chapel was comprehensively rebuilt and they remained here until they moved to a gigantic new chapel sited opposite the old Unitarian Chapel in High Street and designed by Howdill and Sons of Leeds in 1905 (PRN 70410). The sect achieved a particular success within the working class and was known for its radical politics and work amongst the poor. In cities and towns the Primitive Methodists were concentrated in the less affluent and depressed suburbs, where they built schools and missions. It is not easy to distinguish Primitive chapels from those of the mainstream Wesleyans, but the sect itself was very careful of the distinction, and it may be reflected in the layout of the 1873-5 building and, perhaps more visibly, in the fabric and fittings of the existing chapel. Repairs and alterations should be the subject of a recording programme. The Primitive Methodists also established mission chapels south of Rasen Lane (PRN 70430), between Stanley Street and Saville Street (PRN 70427 - which still stands), to the north of Croft Street (PRN 70412), in Carholme Road (70440) and at Waterloo Street, New Boutham (PRN 70446).

Rarity, survival and potential

Nationally, seventeenth century meeting houses are fairly rare, with perhaps only a few dozen surviving. For the 18th century few buildings survive in relation to the number of permanent places of worship registered under the Toleration Act. Large numbers of 19th century urban and rural Methodist chapels were built. When the Methodist Church was formed in 1932, 14000 chapels were recorded for England and Wales, of which the Primitive Methodists accounted for 4356. Perhaps only half of this number are still in use, the remainder being redundant or destroyed. Redundant chapels have occasionally been sympathetically renovated to retain their internal fittings (for example the concert hall from Countess of Huntingdon' chapel, Worcester). More often interiors have been destroyed and the shell of the chapel is converted in a home, warehouse, showroom, or workshop.

Characterisation criteria

The four criteria for assessing class importance apply to Nonconformist Chapels as follows:

- *Period (currency)*: Restricted. The majority of chapels considered for scheduling may have been in use for c150-200 years. Many notable buildings will, however, be more recent and characterised by transient occupation. Some were abandoned or used only periodically after another chapel was built in a new location.
- *Rarity*: Abundant. The rarity of chapels varies by period. Seventeenth and 18th century chapels may, in fact, be rare. Several thousand 19th century chapels existed; probably half of these remain in use.
- *Diversity (form)*: Very high. When variation between denominations and period styles are considered, the number of types within the class is high.
- *Period (representativity)*: Low. Nonconformist Chapels are one of many monument classes characteristic of the period. They represent only one aspect of a much wider religious observance.

Assigning scores to these criteria following the system set out in the Monument Evaluation Manual, Nonconformist Chapels yield a Class Importance Value of 22. This lies about a third of the way up the range of possible values (max=64). In determining a sample of nationally important sites, special emphasis should be placed on professional judgement to include chapels of the main and more rare denominations.

