

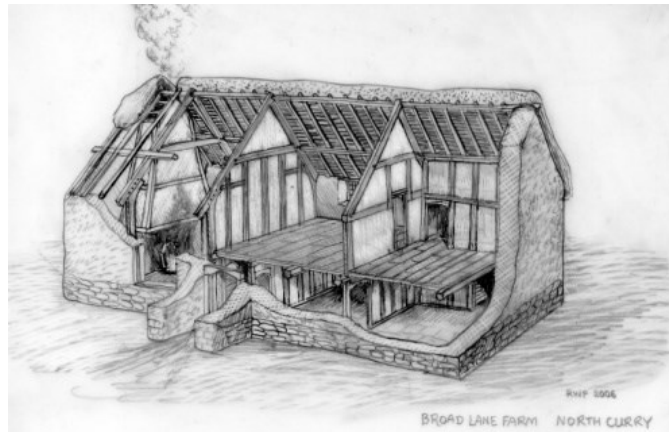
Historic Building Survey

Of

THE FORMER UNITED REFORMED CHURCH,
TIVERTON, NOW 'THE OAK ROOM'

By R. W. Parker

For Sue Searle



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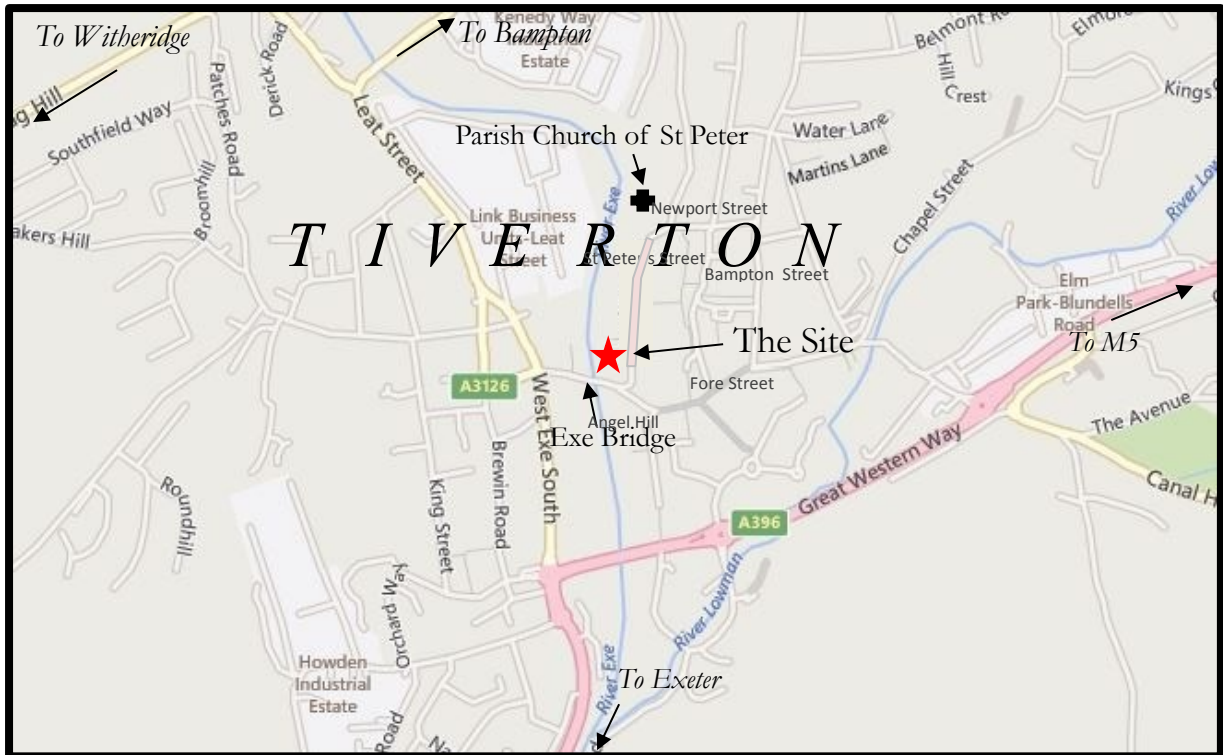


Fig. 1 Location of the site

1. INTRODUCTION

The former United Reformed Church at Tiverton (SS 9537 1254) is a large Nonconformist chapel standing on the west side of St Peter's Street near its junction with Angel Hill, immediately east of the ancient river crossing point at Exe Bridge (Fig. 1). The chapel is part of a larger complex of church buildings comprising the former manse, to the south at the corner of Angel Hill, the Memorial Rooms, to the north of these and the chapel on the northernmost part of the site. To the rear (west) of the site the ground falls steeply away towards the river and the basement storey of the chapel on this side lies at ground-floor level. The garden at the rear of the chapel is raised a considerable height above the riverside (Fig. 2) and is approached by a rough incline (not currently accessible) from a yard to the rear. The building lies in an area of the town which largely escaped the disastrous fires which ravaged Tiverton in the late 17th and 18th centuries, and which still contains a number of fine early buildings. Among these is the former Chilcott School, founded in 1611, which adjoins the property on the north side and, immediately opposite the chapel, the Great House of St George, an early 17th-century merchant's house of great architectural importance (Cherry & Pevsner 1989, 817). These structures are both designated as Grade II* Listed Buildings. The chapel, manse and Memorial Rooms are also individually Listed at Grade II (refs: 1384905, 1384951, and 1384959) and all these structures lie within the Tiverton Conservation Area.

Owing to falling attendance and the difficulty of meeting the cost of repairs, the congregation took the decision to sell the chapel in 2012. The church community have since united with the Methodists and now meet in an historic chapel in another part of St Peter's Street. The manse is now in different ownership and no longer forms part of the property; it was not therefore surveyed as part of this project. The Memorial Rooms and the chapel were acquired by the present owner in April 2014, but the Memorial Rooms are the subject of a separate planning application for conversion to three flats. An historic building evaluation for this building has been prepared by Martin Watts in June 2014 (Watts 2014), and therefore it was also not surveyed as part of the present project.

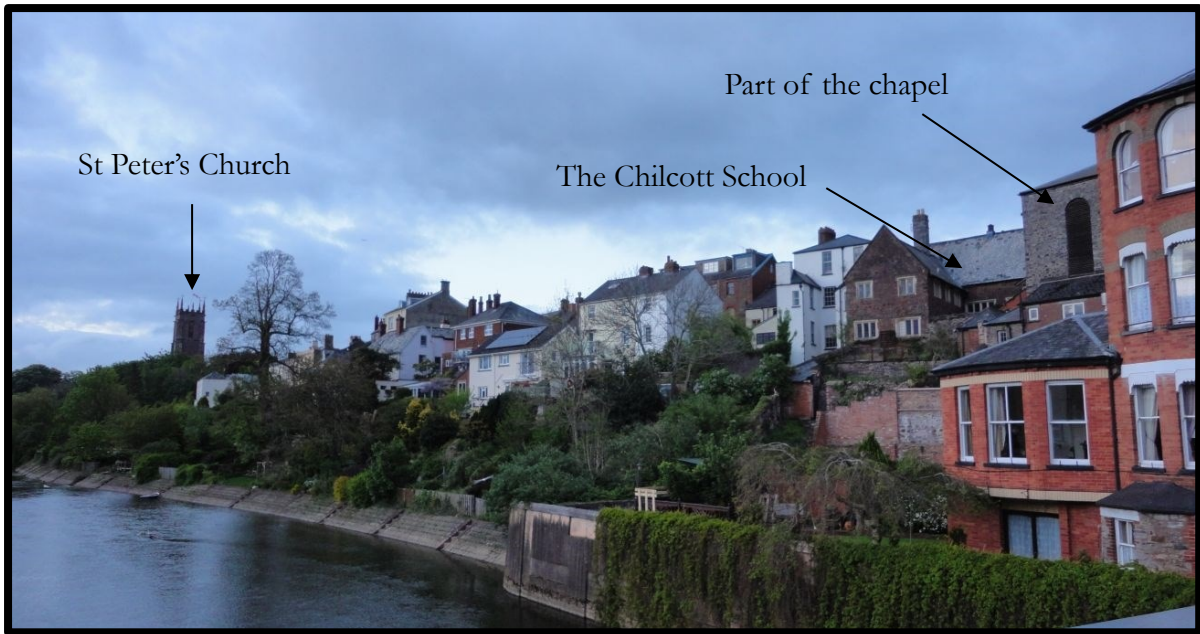


Fig. 2 The east bank of the Exe at Tiverton, showing the steeply sloping land to the rear of the chapel.

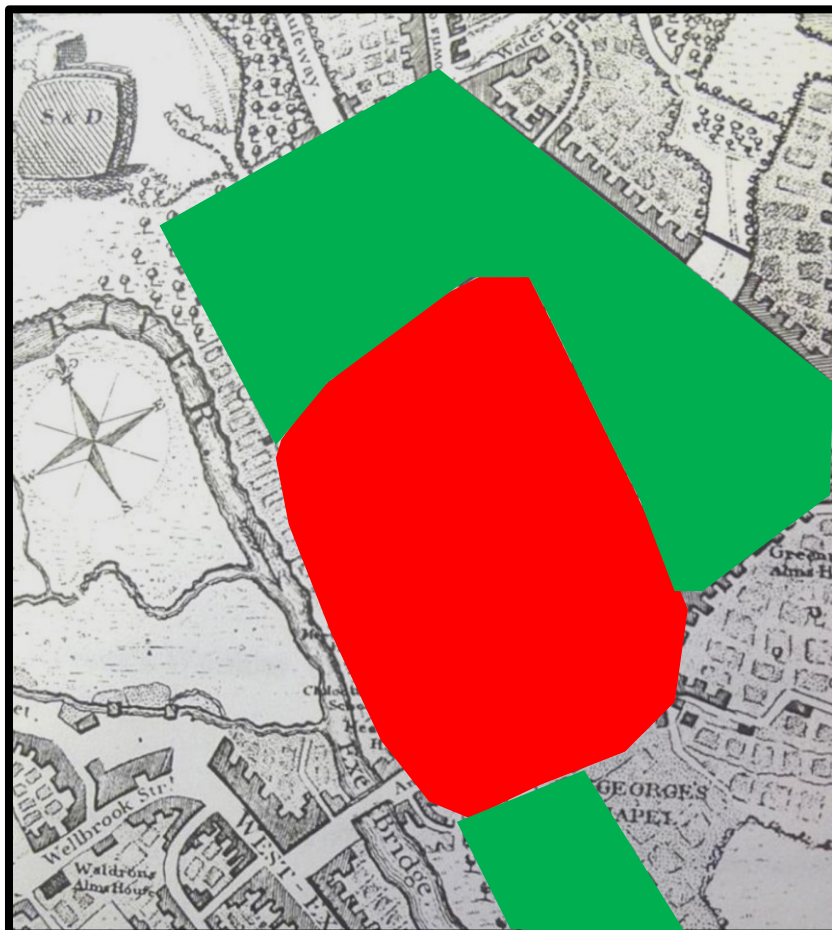


Fig. 3 Extract from Charles Tozer's map of 1790 showing the layout of the town and the site (coloured red) prior to the construction of the present chapel. The supposed early settlement is shown in pink and later planned developments and extensions in green.

The current report on the former chapel was commissioned by the present owner of the site, Sue Searle, in February 2015, as part of an application for listed building consent for repairs, alterations and change of use of the building to serve as a café, art gallery and entertainment centre, known as ‘The Oak Room’.

1.1 The Archaeological Recording Project

The archaeological works were undertaken by Richard Parker Historic Building Recording and Interpretation in late February 2015 in accordance with a brief supplied by the Devon County Historic Environment Service (Ref. ARCH/DM/MD/20047) dated 22nd April 2014. The survey took the form of a photographic and descriptive record of the buildings, with a limited programme of documentary research, since much of the background to the site had previously been researched for the adjoining property by Martin Watts. The documentary research and map regression therefore concentrated on the period following the erection of the present building and aimed to establish how and to what extent the fabric had been altered and remodelled during the 19th and 20th centuries. The research particularly sought to establish the likely date of the present church furnishings, including the pulpit, seating and galleries, and their significance.

Following acceptance of this report and payment for the works a digital copy of this report will be uploaded onto the OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of archaeological investigationS) database, identified by the reference ‘richardp1-208801’.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Tiverton is an ancient borough and manufacturing town situated on the east bank of the River Exe some 13 miles north of Exeter and bounded on its eastern side by the River Lowman, which joins the Exe just south of the town. The settlement is of Saxon origin (Watts 2014, 2), but the greatest periods of its prosperity were in the late-medieval and early post-medieval periods, and in the 18th and 19th centuries, when the local cloth industry and lace-making industry brought huge wealth to the town. This is demonstrated by the survival of many large ecclesiastical buildings, including the medieval Parish Church of St Peter, the 18th-century town church of St George, and the Victorian church of St Paul’s West Exe, as well as a large number of handsome Nonconformist churches, late-medieval and 17th-century almshouses and schools and some of the most impressive 18th-century town houses in the county.

2.1 The Town.

The site under discussion lies on the cliffs above the eastern bank of the Exe (Fig. 2), just north of the ancient river crossing and on the western side of the historic town centre. The basic layout of the town (Fig. 3) is an oval rectangle, formed by St Peter’s Street, Newport Street, Bampton Street and Fore Street, the latter returning on the southern side to meet Angel Hill and St Peter’s Street as they rise up from the river crossing at Exe Bridge. This part of the town (in which the present site is located) may perhaps be assumed to be the site of the earliest settlement. To the north and east of this is an area of urban development of quite different character, lying to the east of the Castle and the Parish Church, which consists of parallel streets arranged in a grid. These include Frog Street (now Castle Street) and the northern part of Bampton Street/Park Street. These streets may represent a planned development of late 12th and early 13th century date, perhaps associated with the re-founding of the town as a borough by the Earl of Devon (Watts 2014, 2). Park Hill, formerly ‘The Works’, overlies the defensive works of the Castle and may not have been built up until the 19th century. The streets to the east of the town, Barrington Street and Gold Street, may also form part of the

12th/13th-century planned development, or are perhaps a latter addition, since they lie on a markedly different alignment.

South of the town, St Andrews Street runs along the east bank of the Exe and represents a suburban extension. On the west bank of the Exe lies West Exe, another ancient suburb, whose character is now largely defined by 19th-century industrial buildings and housing. Further evidence of medieval town planning survived into modern times in the form of the town leats which ran down many of the principal streets to provide a source of water for the townsfolk.

Other sites of archaeological interest in close proximity include the sites of two medieval chapels (Fig. 4). The chapel of St Thomas, which was demolished to make way for a new town hall following the Incorporation of the town under James 1st in 1615 (White 1850, 308), may have stood near the present site of St George's Church, on the opposite side of St Andrew's Street from the present Town Hall. Dunsford's history of Tiverton, dating from 1790, claims that the Independent Chapel was built in 1687 on the site of an earlier chapel, which dated from 1552 and was dedicated to St Peter (Watts 2014, 3). Although a mid 16th-century date seems rather unlikely for the establishment of a church (given the turmoil of the Reformation during the years of Edward VI's reign) it is possible that an earlier church building on the site was repaired and fitted out at this time. This might perhaps represent a votive chapel or bridge chapel associated with the river crossing. Medieval bridges in urban settings were often provided with chapels, and towns of Saxon or earlier origin are well known for their proliferation of small churches and parochial chapels, often in close proximity to one another, as is still evident at Exeter, Norwich, York and London. It is possible that the buried remains of many more unrecorded churches and chapels may survive in the town.

The town suffered much during sieges in the Civil War of the 17th century. In Newport Street and St Peter's Street 120 houses are reputed to have been levelled to provide a clear field of fire during the siege of Tiverton Castle (Gillard *et al.* 2009, 8). The survival of the Great house of St George and the Chilcott School in close proximity to the chapel suggest that the southern end of St Peter's Street was unaffected by this upheaval, though it is not known what defences may or may not have been put in place to protect the bridgehead to the south and west.

The religious controversies of the Civil war and Commonwealth period also provided the germ of the town's large and influential Nonconformist communities. The Rectory of Tiverton was anciently divided into four portions, named Pitt, Tidcombe, Priors and Clare, each of which had its incumbent. An article in Trewman's *Exeter Flying Post*, dated 27th February 1845 records that, during the commonwealth, the portions of Clare and Tidcombe were held by one Theophilus Polwheile, who had been appointed to the position in 1654. After the restoration of the Monarchy and the Church hierarchy in 1660 he was ejected as an intruder and "many of his flock followed him and suffered severely under the various acts then passed for the suppression of Nonconformity. The Minister and his flock were thus driven about for seven and twenty years in a perpetual storm of trouble and danger until King James's Declaration of Liberty relived them from their grievances" (EFP 27.02.1845 p.4 b). The site on which the present building now stands 'was originally occupied by a barn, converted into a chapel' (was this perhaps the late 16th-century chapel of St Peter?), and this "barn-constructed chapel" (*ibid.*) was rebuilt by Polwheile in 1687 as a new Independent Meeting House which, owing to its position at the head of the steps leading to the bridge, became known as 'Steps Meeting House'.

2.2 The Steps Meeting House 1660-1831.

The Appearance of the Steps Meeting House is recorded in an elevation and plan 'copied from an old sketch' (Watts 2014, 16; citing Authers 1960, 18). This shows a building of wholly un-

medieval appearance with a square front divided into five bays, with entrances at either side of the façade and tall mullion-and-transomed windows on two storeys, presumably lighting both the main seating area and a gallery above. The roof seems to be shown as a hipped, rectangular-pyramidal structure with a cornice. The plan (Watts 2014, Fig. 4) shows the interior divided into four blocks of seating with the pulpit located on the centre of the west wall and three access

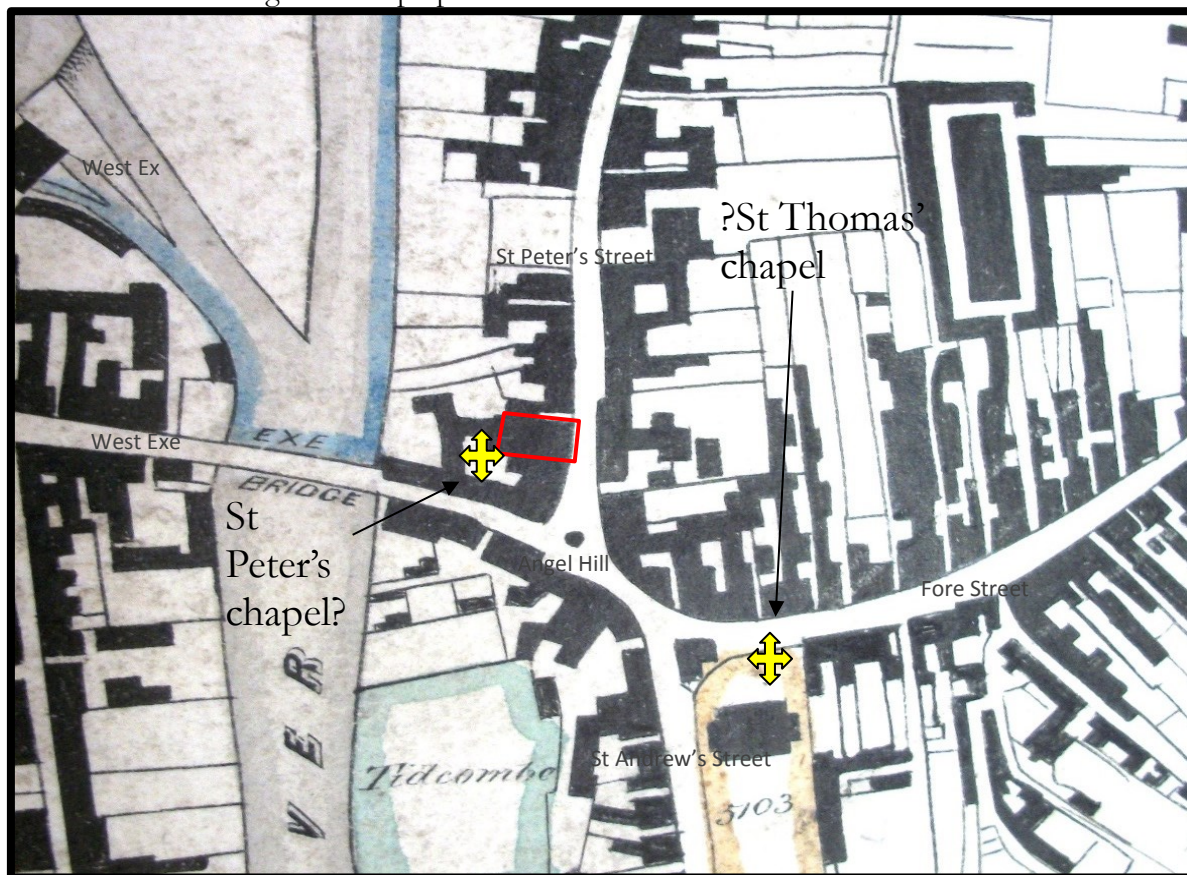


Fig 4 Extract from the Tithe map of Tiverton, dated 1842, showing the chapel outlined in red and the probable sites of the medieval chapels of St Peter and St Thomas.

alleys. The communion table appears to be located in an enclosure in the central block of pews, below the pulpit, with smaller seats, perhaps communicants' pews, facing it. Dunsford's history records that there were galleries (though neither these nor gallery stairs are shown on the plan) and that the chapel seated 500 people in seats described as 'generally bad and irregular' (Watts 2014, 3). The purpose of the sketch is likely to have been for allotting seating and recording pewrents and this may explain the omission of the gallery, which may have contained unallotted free seating, or seats for the school, which was founded in 1811 (EFP 27.02.1845 p.4 b).

It is clear from the sketch drawing of the Steps Meeting House that Polweile's chapel must either have been a very extensive rebuilding of the earlier structure, or that it must have been extensively rebuilt soon afterwards, perhaps during enlargement in 1699 (Dunsford 1790, 151). The plan and elevations of the building are typical of Nonconformist churches of the late 17th or 18th centuries, and unlike either a barn or an earlier chapel or church building. The rectangular mullion-and-transomed windows are typical of the period around c.1700, similar examples dating from 1680 can be seen today at the rear of the Exeter Custom House.

2.3 Rebuilding of the Steps Meeting House, 1831-2.

The church community flourished during the 18th century, partly by amalgamation with other congregations and, unusually at this period, by adopting a broad theological base. The article in

the *Exeter Flying Post* describes the life of the church and the circumstances of its rebuilding thus:

“In 1787, the Pit Meeting House being shut up, the relics of its ruined congregation joined the people on the Steps and brought with them the endowments of Ame’s Fields.... The Pit Meeting House congregation held



Fig. 5 Extract from the map surveyed by Richards and Son in 1843, showing the chapel (outlined in red) and the Memorial Rooms hatched with a dark tone to distinguish them from residential and commercial buildings.

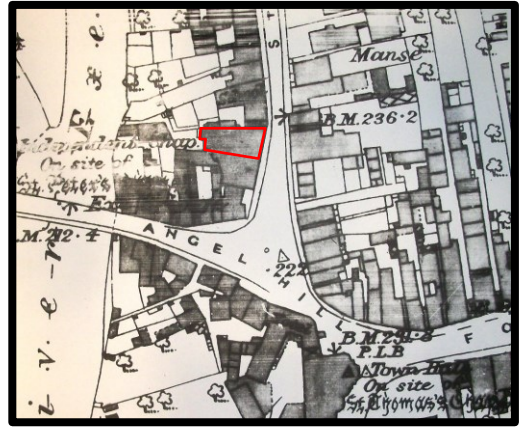


Fig. 6 Extract from the OS 1st edition 1,2500 County Series Map, Sheet 45, 7, dated 1890, showing the chapel in the late 19th-century.



Fig. 7 The façades of the manse, Memorial Rooms and chapel to St Peter's Street, with the corner of Angel Hill to left.

Trinitarian and Calvinistic principles. Afterwards it became a strange mixture of Trinitarians, Arians, Unitarians, Calvinists and at least half a dozen othersects, the congregation thus formed giving themselves the very appropriate title of “Dissenters”.... In 1811 the school was set up and contained between 50 and 60 children....In 1829, measures were adopted for building a School behind the meeting house ...and at this juncture, in comes the Rev W. H. Heudebourck, touches the shabby old Barn Chapel with a golden wand and down it falls – then, proudly and slowly arises the present handsome, modern edifice [entertaining details about fundraising methods]... Mr Heudebourck has thus got a New Chapel, a new Parsonage House and a very excellent income from seats and endowments and...further enjoys the comfort of a wife...”

(EFP 27.02.1845 p.4 b).

The new building is described in the same article as:

“an extremely neat, spacious, oblong building, capable of holding about six hundred persons. Besides the usual sittings below, there are two galleries, and a sort of organ loft, but the place of the instrument is supplied by a solitary bass-viol. The singing is good and deserves a better accompaniment” (*ibid.*).

The Tiverton Tithe map of 1842 (Fig. 4) and the map by Richards and Son of 1843 (Fig. 5) show the layout of the rebuilt buildings at this time. The maps appear to show changes in the layout of the buildings at the rear of the site between 1842 and 1843, but it is possible that these are simply poorly depicted on the tithe map, since the basic outline of the structures is very similar. The later map appears to have been surveyed in more detail and may represent more accurately the plan of the rebuilt buildings.

It is not known to what extent any earlier fabric was retained in the new chapel, but the most likely location for any surviving early fabric relating to earlier buildings on the site is perhaps the party wall with the Chilcott School.

The school rooms and manse adjoining the church (Fig. 7) were also rebuilt in the 1830s, as part of a general improvement to the premises under the leadership of the Revd. Mr Heudebourck. This was to include the levelling of the steps to the bridge and the widening of the road at St Peter’s Street and Angel Hill, partly at the expense of the congregation (Watts 2014, 4). The Manse and the School room have façades in very different styles, the manse being in ‘Old English’ style and the School room in Gothic style. The architecture of the church is in a more advanced, if not eccentric style (discussed below). Authers and Watts both attribute the design of the buildings to Heudebourck, assisted by his brother-in-law, the architect Samuel Pollard of Taunton. (Authers 1960, 81; Watts 2014, 4).

The schoolroom has since been remodelled several times (Figs 7, 8, 9). A top storey was added in 1862, and the frontage was probably refaced at the same time in a very spikey Gothic style with rows of handsome lancets and a plaque bearing the elaborate inscription ‘MEMORIAL ROOMS’. The walls of the 1830s schoolroom largely survive, and the rear elevation also retains a stair turret, rising to the first floor only, which seems thus to be part of the original building. The designer of the Memorial Rooms at their rebuilding of 1862-3 is unknown. Unfortunately this fine building was damaged by fire in 1962 and at its rebuilding the internal levels were changed, with quite extraordinary disregard for the disposition and heights of the windows. The adjoining manse and the chapel escaped significant damage in the fire and still retain most of their original fabric and appearance.

The description of the chapel as ‘Congregational’ rather than ‘Independent’ in newspaper articles and on late 19th- and 20th-century maps reflects 19th-century developments towards co-operation between the various Independent churches, and the formation of

affiliations or unions of such churches. These unions were initially made on a local or regional basis, but increasingly aimed towards a national union of Congregational churches. Such churches retained their independence as congregations, but were able to feel themselves part of a larger Protestant/Calvinist movement which was able to compete in the mission field with other large denominations such as the Baptists, Methodists and Anglicans. The affiliation of the Tiverton church to the Congregational Union may have occurred before 1862, since that date, the bicentenary of the ejection of Nonconformist ministers from the Church of England, was the catalyst for the investment of much money and effort nationally in the restoration and improvement of chapels belonging to the union, and also marks the decision to establish a 'Congregational Memorial Hall' in London as an administrative centre for the denomination. The reconstruction of the former Schoolroom at Tiverton as 'Memorial Rooms' in that year (Figs 8, 9) may well reflect the affiliation of the chapel congregation to the Congregational Union.

2.4 Late 19th-century remodelling of the Chapel.

By the late 19th-century the chapel interior, which may have remained largely unchanged since 1831-2, was felt to be old fashioned and gloomy and its furnishings inconvenient. The building was filled with high enclosed pews, and the difficulties of providing natural lighting to the interior of a building which was enclosed on two sides by other structures, was exacerbated by overhanging galleries on four sides. A programme of radical re-ordering was then undertaken which involved structural changes to the exterior and interior of the chapel as well as full redecoration and reseating. On the 2nd of November 1894 the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* reported that "Yesterday, the Congregationalists reopened their chapel which had undergone complete internal renovation". More details are given in the *Tiverton Gazette*, on Tuesday November 6th 1894, and this is worth quoting in full:

"After a process of renovation of the most thorough nature, and extending over several months, the handsome block of buildings in St Peter-street, Tiverton, occupied by the Congregational Church, was re-opened on Thursday last [1st November]. The chapel, which stands on the site of what was formerly known as the Steps Meeting House, (founded in 1687) was built about 1830, the minister's house and school premises being added shortly afterwards. In 1891 the Rev Thomas Webster succeeded to the pastorate and ere long it became evident that the internal fittings of the chapel, with its high-backed pews, narrow seats and dingy appointments must soon give place to a more convenient and comfortable state of things... The heavy appearance of the interior of the building has been largely removed although there still remains the disadvantage (which can never be overcome) of a lack of side light, the judicious blending of colours has, to a large extent, obviated the effect of this inconvenience [rest of the sentence, about 5 words, obliterated by damage to the film]. The width of the galleries has been reduced three feet and in the place of the old enclosed wooden front has been fixed an ornamental iron balustrade with a pitch-pine dentil cornice. The whole of the iron work is gilded and is picked out with pink and green. New floors have been laid throughout and in the lobby where formerly existed stone flagging has been placed encaustic tiling of handsome pattern. The pews throughout are of pitch-pine of modern pattern and are varnished. The rostrum is of the same wood of a handsome description and is large enough to accommodate four persons. There is also a raised platform. The organ has been overhauled and re-decorated. The walls have been coloured a pale green with a pretty stencilling.

The lobby is enclosed with a partition of pitch pine with a framework of tinted glass and harmonises with the interior of the building. The ventilation has been thoroughly re-modelled, as has that of the schoolroom, vestry and other rooms which have also been very nicely decorated. The stone-work of the front of the chapel and the coping have been reset and repointed, and the roof repaired. The windows have been replaced by others of a more modern pattern; where formerly existed diamond panes in iron frames, has now been placed rolled diaper glass..." (TG, 06.11. 1894)



Fig. 8 Lithograph of the chapel 'from nature and on stone by G. Day' entitled *'The Independent Chapel, Schoolhouse and Chapel-Parsonage, Tiverton, 1845. W.H. Heudebourck, Pastor'*. Printed by C. Risdon, Exeter, showing the buildings before remodelling in the 1860s (Sue Searle's collection).



Fig. 9 Photograph of the buildings by E. McDonald, undated but probably *c.*1900, Showing the buildings after the 19th-century alterations, including the 1860s addition of an upper storey to the Memorial Rooms (Sue Searle's collection).



Fig. 10 The main elevation of the chapel from St Peter's Street. A discontinuity in the coursing of the plinth can be seen far right.

The architect of these works was named as Mr S. Deering, and his alterations to the chapel have survived almost complete and largely determine the character of the present interior. An organ had clearly been provided during the 19th century, since this was refurbished and redecorated at the time, and it is likely that this occupied the position of the present instrument at the centre of the western gallery, infilling the polygonal apse and 'sort of organ loft' mentioned in 1845. This organ seems to have been replaced with the present large instrument in 1902, at a cost of £398.00 (Authers 1960, 100).

2.5 20th-century alterations

Deering's 1890s interior has survived to the present day more-or less intact. A new vestry, known as 'the Upper Vestry' was added to the rear of the building in 1926 in memory of

Ebenezer Musgrave Winton, who had served the church since 1861 as a Deacon, Treasurer and Sunday School Superintendent; this involved some alteration to the west wall of the chapel and the insertion of a glazed and timber screen at the base of its large central west window. A brass plaque commemorating him and the work survives in the building. The church escaped significant damage during the fire which destroyed the adjacent Memorial Rooms in 1962, though in redecoration afterwards it is possible that some of the stencil decorations of the interior were lost. Since the 1890s alterations have been limited to the removal or reconfiguration of some of the benches and the alteration of the rostrum, to create a larger open platform at the centre of the church, possibly reflecting changes in the focus of the worship in line with 20th-century liturgical trends.

In 1972 many English Congregational churches chose to merge with the Presbyterian Church of England and redefine themselves as the 'United Reformed Church' (URC). Some churches voted to remain independent. The Tiverton Congregation voted to affiliate to the URC and they still remain a part of that Union after their recent move to join the Methodists in their chapel in St Peter's Street, where they worship together under the name 'Tiverton United Church'.

The building was extensively repaired in the late 20th century, with repointing of its western elevation in 1986, renovation of the basement rooms in 1993 and the renewal of the roof, following water damage, in 1995 (Sue Searle pers. comm. May 2015. May 2015).

3. BUILDING SURVEY (23rd February 2015).

3.1 Exterior.

The façade

The east wall of the chapel forms its front elevation and lies on the street line with the main door opening directly off the pavement above a deep, plain plinth with a chamfered top. This is a very handsome and well-built frontage of grey limestone laid in large ashlar blocks and basically in Classical style, though with references to the Lombard or Italian Romanesque (Fig. 10).

The façade has three bays, the central one wider and slightly recessed under an open pediment supported by shaped corbels. The two side bays are brought forward to frame recessed panels, giving the effect of pairs of pilasters framing the windows at each side of the façade, though these 'pilasters' have neither capitals or bases, and are divided at first floor level by a string course, so that the lower part of the façade becomes a basement storey. The effect is one of great subtlety, the pilasters appearing and disappearing into the wall surface in unexpected ways. Below the string course the pilasters merge into blind arches framing arched windows with drip mouldings. The voussoirs radiate in the Classical manner, but the drip mouldings are medievalising elements. The central doorway has a raised surround with a deep chamfer surmounted by a drip moulding.

Above first-floor level the pilasters are linked at cornice level by a plain entablature, supported on shaped brackets which might be interpreted either as Classical consoles or Romanesque corbels. Under the central pediment the main west window is a triplet of tall round-headed lancets under drip-mouldings, the centre one stilted to rise to a higher level. Above the pediment is a plain parapet rising into a gable over the pediment and supporting a square finial with panelled sides and a gabled top, not unlike a Roman altar. All the windows are fitted with Lombard-style timber tracery, which replaced the original iron casements with diamond quarries in 1894. It is possible that some of the other Lombard Romanesque elements may also be additions of 1894 when 'the stone-work of the front of the chapel and the coping' were 'reset and repointed' (TG, 06.11. 1894). If so, it has been so skilfully done that it is difficult to discern the difference between old and new work. A lithograph of c.1845 (Fig. 8),

however, shows the frontage very much in its present form. Only the parapet over the pediment is architecturally clumsy enough to look like an alteration, yet this too appears in the early lithograph.

If the medievalising elements of this façade date from 1831, it is a very early example of Italian Romanesque revival. Certain low-church parsons are known to have employed the Lombard Romanesque (with varying degrees of skill) in the 1830s and '40s (Bullen 2004, 150), but the style is rare in Devon at this early date.

The existing façade shows some slight evidence of alteration which might perhaps be interpreted as evidence of 19th-century remodelling. The central window does not have radiating voussoirs above the drip mould, like the windows immediately adjoining, and it is possible that it was extended above the line of the cornice at some point in order to create a triple lancet. The large central doorway is also without these voussoirs and this raises questions about the original appearance of the façade. Although the plinth appears continuous, there is a vertical break and discontinuity in the coursing at the north end of the façade which might imply that this archway was originally open to the ground. Might the chapel originally have had entrances on each side of the façade, and have been crowned by a plain straight parapet and cornice rather than a gable? If so, its character would have been closer to that of the façade of the original Steps Meeting House. The 'Tudor' details of the Manse and the 'diamond panes' of the original cast iron window frames are perhaps an indication that there were some medievalising elements in the original design, but the possibility remains that the fenestration of the chapel might have been renewed during an early phase of alterations.

Rear elevation.

The rear elevation of the chapel is immensely tall due to the fall of the land to the west (Fig. 11). The upper part of the west wall rises in a large rectangular projection containing the organ chamber and perhaps, originally the Communion Table. This projection is built against a polygonal apse, and pierced by a central, very tall, round-arched window. This is now infilled with timber louvres but was probably originally glazed. It is uncertain to what extent the glazing and window frame of the window survives, this may be concealed by the louvring: certainly parts of the glazing remain in the lower part of the opening, and these remain glazed with rolled or figured diaper glass matching that in the front elevation of the chapel. We may conjecture that the window was reglazed in the 1890s and then blocked when the present organ was installed.

On either side of the central projection the side walls of the apse have similar tall windows with timber Lombardic tracery and diaper-patterned rolled plate glass dating from the 1890s. Several of the panes are now damaged and very inadequately repaired.

The basement storey, which appears to have originally served as the schoolroom, retains a pair of tall, round-arched windows which may survive from the building of 1831. The masonry of this part of the wall is rougher and more varied in geology than the upper parts of the apse, and it is possible that it might preserve earlier masonry relating to the 17th-century meeting house. More detailed examination of the fabric would be necessary to establish this for certain and it seems more likely that this variety in the masonry simply represents the reuse of earlier building materials. The junction of the upper and lower parts of the building is unfortunately masked by the brick upper vestry, added in 1926, and also by the small turret-like structure containing the lower vestry and water closets. The lower vestry retains a small window with margin lights, typical of the early 19th century, but this is in fact a modern replica of the original.

3.2 Interior.

The lobby.

The chapel is entered from St Peter's Street through a pair of double sliding doors in the main east façade. These doors are decorated with vertical applied fillets and slide beneath a fixed tympanum in the semi-circular arched head, which is decorated with very simple Gothic tracery. As far as can be ascertained, the doors retain their original door furniture including recessed finger bolts. It is possible that the doors have been rehung in this position, since some of the bolt



Fig. 11 Rear elevation of the chapel showing the two arched windows of the former Schoolroom, the small projection containing the Lower Vestry, the brick projection of the Upper Vestry and the polygonal apse with organ chamber above. Note the stair turret at the rear of the Memorial Rooms.



Fig. 12 View in the lobby showing the tinted rolled glass panels of 'diaper glass' and the tiled floors dating

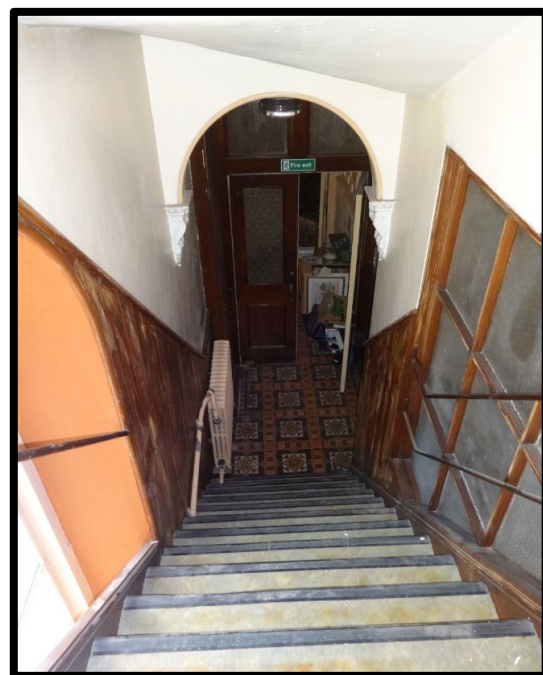


Fig. 13 View down the gallery stairs showing the plaster corbels and the way in which the stairs cross



Fig. 14 View of the chapel interior looking west towards the pulpit and the organ, showing the gallery fronts of 1894.



Fig. 15 View looking east with the inscription commemorating the Revd. Theophilus Polweile. This may have been retained from the 1830s church.

positions do not match their holes. The doors are unlikely to date from the 1831 rebuilding of the chapel, but closely resemble those of the Memorial Rooms. They may have been installed as early as 1862, and were perhaps rehung in the 1890s, which might explain the misalignment of some of the door furniture. Alternatively they may be contemporary with the 1890s remodelling. The internal door handle is made of old plumbing fittings and is certainly a later addition.

Entering the chapel, the first space one comes to is a small lobby with doors to north and south, and a glazed screen facing the entrance. This has a complex glazing pattern of two arched lights surrounded by smaller panels, filled with very sombre-coloured tinted rolled glass, in pinks, yellows and greens (Fig. 12). Some of the panes are cracked and, due to the difficulty of matching the damaged panels, some are now mismatched. On either side of the lobby, double doors give access to the church and to the two staircases to the galleries (Fig. 13). These doors are sprung and hinged to open in both directions and probably date from c.1894. The doors are plain glazed with rolled glass, but retain very handsome late 19th-century brass door handles and hook stays. Two decorative glazed arched-headed doors with glazed upper lights give access to the chapel. These have similar fittings. The lobby is tiled throughout with very rich encaustic tiles, probably manufactured by Minton or Maw & co and typical of the period c.1870 – 1910. These are in dark colours with decorative borders, but unlike most Anglican or Roman Catholic ecclesiastical tiling schemes, contain no religious emblems. There is a dado of tongued and grooved pine panelling to the lower parts of the lobby walls.

On either side of the lobby the gallery stairs (Fig. 13) rise under small arches supported by plaster corbels decorated with tulips; these corbels are more typical of the domestic than the ecclesiastical architecture of the period. The stairs rise against and across glazed windows in the timber screen between the lobby and the chapel and also cross those in the front elevation. The windows have rolled or figured plate glass dating from the 1890s. Two patterns are employed, a diaper pattern in the main façade and gadrooned circles resembling chrysanthemum heads in the screen to the chapel interior. Although the embossed patterns differ it is likely that these glazed panels are contemporary. There are a few damaged and some mismatched panels. The north lobby retains gadrooned glass to the screen towards the chapel, but has lost a panel of

diaper glass to the main elevation. Both of the north lobby doors have been replaced. The south lobby has one modern replacement panel towards the church side, all the rest being gadrooned. All the diapered glass in the main elevation survives and both south lobby doors retain gadrooned glass

The lobby and all its furniture and fittings was clearly created in the late 19th century, during the alterations of 1894, at which time the staircases to the gallery were renewed. The replanning of the gallery stairs created curious redundant spaces beneath the staircases. These areas show no plastering or boarding to the rear of the lobby screen but retain some earlier plaster on the external walling. Scars in the plaster show that the stairs originally rose at a shallower angle, and may have featured winders at the corners. These vanished staircases might have been configured so as to avoid the windows, but it seems unlikely that they could ever have co-existed with two side doorways. It is possible that the gallery stairs have been reconfigured several times. Possible contexts for such alterations might be the reconstruction of the Memorial Rooms, which may have necessitated the replanning of the stairs to allow for a communicating doorway, and the remodelling of the gallery and creation of the present lobby in 1894. The arrangement of the stairs in the 1830s building is unknown.

The chapel interior.

The body of the chapel (Fig. 14) is trapezoidal, narrowing towards the west end, which is the main focus of the interior (the usual eastward orientation of ecclesiastical buildings was disregarded here on the grounds of topography, besides being of no particular importance to Nonconformist churchmen). The church interior is surrounded on four sides by a gallery, oval towards the west and semi-octagonal towards the east. This is supported on plain iron columns with vaguely Gothic capitals, deeply undercut, but without moulded bases. This strongly implies that the floor of the church has been raised slightly above its original level. Moulded bases and evidence of earlier flooring may well survive in the void beneath the church floor.

Limited investigations beneath the present floor, by lifting a loose board in the western part of the southern alley revealed, instead of the earlier floor level, a surprisingly large and most unexpected void beneath the building. The gallery columns are supported below floor level on brick piers, beyond which can be seen an arcade of brick arches. These are clearly load bearing and may have been intended to support the earlier flooring of the chapel. Lifting a board in a corresponding position in the northern alley was less instructive. It is uncertain whether the chapel site was ever used for burials. If so these are likely to lie under the eastern part of the present chapel, rather than the western part, which overlies a large basement.

The gallery has a moulded cornice over which are a band of dentils and a cast-iron balustrade rail with acanthus and anthemion ornament supporting a moulded handrail. This is all probably of 1894 and replaces a high, enclosed parapet, extending three foot further into the church, which dated from the 1830s. The gallery bears the inscription "This church was founded AD 1660 by the Revd. Theophilus Polwheile MA", in gilt letters in a script which seems authentically 1830s (Fig 13). It is probable that some parts of the original gallery were retained or reset in the present gallery.

The side walls of the chapel are each decorated with six tall blind arches, recessed and splayed and resembling blocked windows. Due to the presence of buildings on either side, these can never have been open. Where plaster has been stripped away on the south side due to dry rot, it is clear that these were built as blind arches and that their brick heads and 'blocking' are in fact integral. There is some evidence to show that parts of these walls may predate the present building: an earlier recess high up in the south wall has been partially blocked in lath and plaster to correspond with the blind-arches. This retains earlier wall plaster behind the present lath and plaster and may be a remnant of the earlier meeting house on the site. On the north gallery stair, the decorative treatment of the walling of the building can still be seen. This

consists of incised 'jointing' in imitation of large ashlar blocks and can be seen to run over the splayed openings of the blind arches. This may preserve the original decorative treatment of 1831.

The body of the chapel is laid out in three blocks of seating divided by north and south alleys. Both the north and south blocks of seating are splayed to face towards the pulpit, whereas the central block of benches faces the pulpit head on. The north block has lost two north-and south-facing benches at the west end, and five other seats in the section at the east end near the doors. The central block has lost at least two seats towards the west end and one towards the east near the doors. The south side has lost its north and south facing seats at the west end and at least one seat at the east, near the doorway to the Memorial Rooms. These alterations were made in 1980 to enable easier access around the church and to make a prayer corner at the rear of the chapel (Sue Searle pers comm.). The layout of the seats is particularly interesting, the seats in the aisles having angled ends reflecting the pedestrian routes through the interior. The rear benches of the central block of seating also have angled ends to allow easy access from the lobby. The central block of seats is separated by pew dividers into different sections accessible only from the north or the south; these benches were clearly appropriated and pew rents would have been charged for them.

The seats are of pitch pine and generally in good condition. The benches have shouldered ends with rounded trefoil tops of a rather exuberant form (Fig. 16). These are fitted with brass umbrella stands, cast iron drip trays and (formerly) either numbers or some other system of identification in oval plaques, now removed. Needless to say, the seats are not constructed for kneeling. They have book or elbow rests, angled tongue-and-grooved boarded backs and, below seat level, reverse-angled lower sections fitted with wooden rails. These were clearly designed as hat rests, to keep hats out of the way and prevent people in the seat in front or behind from accidentally kicking them. This was considered a tidier and more seemly solution to the problem than the traditional 'chapel hat pegs' fitted along the side walls.



Fig. 16 Detail of the benches in the body of the chapel showing the shouldered ends, trefoil tops and the umbrella stands. Each bench incorporates a hat rest in the lower section.



Fig. 17 Detail of the simpler form of benches in the curving part of the gallery. These have simpler profiles to the bench ends and may have been either free seats or choir seats, though they are not provided with suitable book rests for this purpose.



Fig. 18 Interior of the Mint Methodist Chapel, Exeter, constructed in 1812 (partially demolished c.1965) showing typical Nonconformist furnishings of the early 19th century including a central two-decker pulpit, choir seating and an impressive organ in the gallery and an apsidal sanctuary featuring the Commandments and Creed,

preserving an arrangement characteristic of 18th-century Anglican liturgical planning.

Each seat also has a small brass display plaque for the insertion of a card identifying the owner of the pew. Some of these have since been employed for small scripture readings. Although the benches here were obviously allotted to particular families or households paying pew-rents, there are no doors and all the benches are identical, with nothing to distinguish the higher and the lower-status seats.

Up in the gallery the benches are of simpler form and without umbrella stands, numbering or book rests (Fig. 17). They respect the cast-iron front of the gallery and the present gallery stairs and this must also date from 1894. These benches are of simpler form and without markings, which suggests that they were free and unappropriated seats, of lesser status than those in the body of the chapel. Not even the curving seats at the west end of the gallery have book rests, suggesting that these seats were not designed for use by a liturgical choir.

The only evidence of the earlier form of the seating survives in the high tongue-and-grooved dado around the room which may reflect the height of the original high pews of 1831. As early 19th-century pews were usually designed to resemble wainscoting it is possible that some have been reset elsewhere as panelling, perhaps in the manse. This reuse of material was common in the 19th-century. Unfortunately the material from the gallery known to have been incorporated in the Memorial Rooms (Authers 1960, 100) was probably destroyed in the fire of 1962.

The ceiling is canted like the lid of a casket and divided into seven panels separated by moulded plaster ribs with rosettes. There is no cornice (though one has conceivably been removed, since the decorative detail on the ribs does not extend quite to the walls). At the centre of the ceiling is a handsome plaster ceiling rose for the chandelier and two inverted bell-shaped plaster roses which may be designed as ventilators. These are apparently connected by a system of steel ducting above the ceiling, which vents to the west above the organ. These were a common feature of 19th-century places of public assembly and could often be opened and closed by means of ropes and shutters. The valves and ropes are still present, but fixed with wire with all the valves closed. There is evidence that the ventilators have been capped, but must formerly have extended through the roof to vent on the exterior (Sue Searle pers comm.). These systems rarely survive in working order today. The chapel is heated by a wet heating system served by handsome cast-iron radiators which are probably contemporary with the seating. It is clear that the whole chapel was re-seated, the lobby created and the floor very slightly raised in the late 19th or very early 20th century, probably during the alterations of 1894.

The pulpit and Communion Table.

The central part of the body of the chapel was considerably altered in 1971-2 to create a larger raised dais or platform, which has led to some loss of fittings, including the front pew and communion rail (Sue Searle, citing Eric Shapland). The modern dais replaced a smaller dais or platform for the Communion Table, which was probably installed in 1894. This may not have been the original arrangement: the provision of the large apse and square recess beyond it at the west end of the church may reveal that the Communion Table was originally accommodated to the rear of the pulpit, under the gallery. An example of this arrangement survived at the superb Mint Methodist Church in Exeter (1812) until its demolition in the 1960s. This chapel retained handsome furnishings typical of early 19th-century Nonconformity (Fig. 18). These included a high, two-decker pulpit with a clerk's desk, an oval choir gallery and organ and, to the rear of the pulpit, in a semi-circular apse, a 'Sanctuary' containing the Communion Table. The Sanctuary at The Mint survives today as a lumber room behind the pulpit of the modern building. It is still decorated, like a contemporary Anglican church, with

panels recording the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Apostle's Creed. These decorations are a rare example of the survival of 17th- or 18th-century Anglican liturgical planning in a Nonconformist context, and show the deeply conservative nature of the Nonconformist liturgy of the period. At Tiverton the provision of a structural apse and recess under and beyond the gallery, in a recess very similar to the one at The Mint Chapel may also represent a vestigial survival of the Anglican roots of the Independent Church, or perhaps a conscious restatement of these roots.

The primary form of the pulpit, in 1831, is unknown, but it is likely to have been a two or three decker, incorporating several levels, including a raised central section for the preacher and a platform below it with seats for the elders or deacons. The present pulpit is of mid-to-late 19th-century date, but has been mutilated. In its original arrangement it was a large rectangular raised enclosure which would have housed the deacons' seats, with a polygonal projecting central section for the preacher (Fig 19). This platform was approached by a staircase, probably from the rear, though two staircases on each side are not uncommon. The lower part, below the platform, has chamfered uprights in pitch pine with notched and ogee stops and diagonal boarding below a steeply sloping 'string course' supported by dentils. Above this, the parapet to the rostrum has two storeys of panelling, the lower consisting of small rectangular panels and the upper part featuring large panels with trefoiled heads and applied nook shafts. Above this is a projecting cornice crowned by a fat roll-moulding serving as a handrail, with seating points for candle sticks or gas lighting standards at the side of the reading desk.

The rear of the pulpit bears the scars of fixed bench seats, but these were removed during the reordering of the chapel in 1983, when the pulpit was cut in half, and the two sections reversed and repositioned west of its original position, under the gallery, so that the two halves of the original central projection stick out at either end (Fig. 20). These alterations were undertaken at the instigation of Mr Ken Cornish with the aim of increasing the stage area, which had been formerly entirely filled by the pulpit and which was the only part of the interior visible from every part of the building (Sue Searle, citing Eric Shapland).

The pulpit may possibly be contemporary with the 1890s seating of the chapel, or perhaps a little earlier, since its muscular Gothic detail is perhaps more in keeping with the assertively Gothic alterations to the Memorial Rooms of 1862 than the curiously domestic treatment of the lobby. It is of course possible that the pulpit represents a mid 19th-century improvement to the furnishings which was retained in the 1890s alterations. Although it has been damaged by modern alterations, most elements of the pulpit remain in the building and reinstatement would be possible. Even the staircase survives in store.

Many Nonconformist pulpits have been lost as a result either of closure and conversion of churches or of modern reordering schemes designed to create larger preaching platforms. A good example of one of these pulpits in unaltered condition, incorporating a singing gallery of tiered seats with poppy-head bench ends (rising towards a magnificent organ) survives at the Lavington Chapel (URC) in Bridgeland Street Bideford. At The Lavington Chapel, as at Tiverton, the Communion Table now occupies a raised platform in front of the pulpit (Figs 19, 20). At Tiverton this seems to have been added in 1894; it is mentioned briefly in the *Tiverton Gazette* as 'A raised Platform' (TG, 06.11. 1894), and the actual Communion Table is not mentioned. This platform may have replaced an earlier 'sanctuary' under the gallery, since by the late 19th-century a Holy Table in the body of the church was more usual. Evidence of the 19th-century dais may well survive within the present modern platform, but this could not be investigated.

The organ, organ chamber and western apse.

The organ stands on the gallery and, apart from the pulpit, forms the main focus of the building. The organ is a magnificent instrument in a pitch-pine case with well-carved trefoil-

headed Gothic panels below a deep, coved cornice with applied vaulting ribs. Above this the organ takes the form of an open 'pipe-rack' with two side towers and a central flat tower separated by pipe flats in the centre and at the corners. The very richly-painted pipes in green and gold are without tower caps and, with the possible exception of the Fleurs de Lys, there is a total absence of any symbolic imagery or ecclesiastical motifs (Fig 18). The maker appears to have been the ubiquitous George Osmond of Taunton, one of the most prolific organ builders in the area during the 19th and 20th centuries. The organ was overhauled by Michael Farley in 1985 (Sue Searle pers comm.).

The organ occupies an oval-headed recess in the west wall which was almost certainly designed as a musicians' gallery, and may indeed have been intended from the start to house an organ. Although the area is now almost entirely filled by the present instrument there is some evidence of the remains of raked seating, in the form of raised platforms in the floor. The recess was lit by a tall, arched window like those to either side. Access to the musicians' seats seems to have been via a narrow staircase which survives on the southern side of the 'sanctuary' area (Fig. 22). This would allowed the Musicians to Communicate (on the occasions when this service was celebrated) without having disturb the other occupants of the gallery. The staircase has columnar newels swelling slightly to baluster form, stick balusters and a closed string. At the top the staircase has been enclosed by a door with Greek ogee mouldings and some glazed panels. Some parts of the original 1830s box pews may have been reused in forming a cupboard below the stairs, and survive as reused sections of plain panelling.

The organ replaces an earlier instrument which was retained and refurbished during the alterations of the 1890s. The date of installation of the previous instrument is not known, but it was certainly acquired after 1845 when the music was being accompanied only by 'a solitary bass viol' (EFP 27.02.1845). A possible context for the installation of the first organ would be the celebration of the Bicentenary of the ejection of Nonconformist ministers from the Church of England, which seems to have boosted the confidence of the Independent churches, and which certainly seems to have been a catalyst for improvements to the facilities at Tiverton and elsewhere.

Prior to the installation of an organ the music of this church may have been provided by congregational singing alone, accompanied by a church band (or sometimes only a solitary viol). This is another point of similarity between Anglican and Nonconformist liturgical practice of the period. In all denominations the development of liturgical choirs was a late 19th-century phenomenon and was often regarded with suspicion by low-church Anglicans and Nonconformists. There is no obvious provision anywhere in the chapel for seating a separate

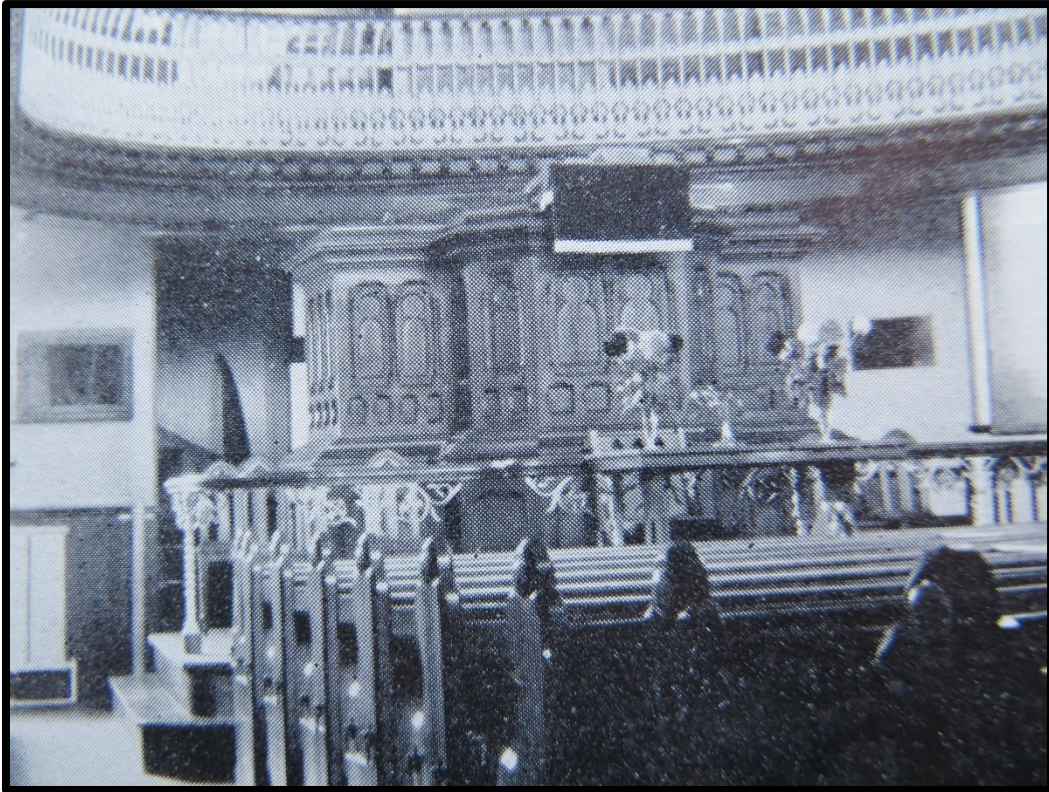


Fig. 19 The late-Victorian pulpit and rostrum at Tiverton before alterations, showing the late 19th-century railings round the platform (Sue Searle's collection).



Fig. 20 The late-Victorian pulpit and rostrum at Tiverton after modern alterations. The projecting polygonal centre is now divided into two parts and the sides and staircase have been removed to storage.



Fig. 21 The organ of 1902 occupying the entire space of the former musicians' alcove in the western gallery.



Fig. 22 The 'sanctuary' area behind the pulpit, showing the staircase to the organ gallery and the remains of the large west window in the apse, now converted into a screen for the Upper Vestry.

choir like that in the gallery at The Mint, and it may be that the Tiverton church retained its tradition of congregational singing to the end.

All three west windows are glazed with rolled plate diaper glass, but this certainly dates from 1894 and the original windows may originally have had iron frames with diamond quarries like those formerly in the main elevation. The lower part of the central window has been cut down to provide access to the Upper Vestry, which is enclosed by a glazed screen of rolled plate glass of a frosted pattern. This room was added at the rear of the chapel in 1926 and retains no fixtures or fittings of archaeological interest. No trace of stencilled, tiled or other decoration of this part of the church now remains, which suggests that by the late 19th century it had decreased in importance and now served as a circulation area.

The vestry and vestry stairs.

On the north side of the apse is a doorway with a fanlight over opening upon the vestry stairs (Fig. 23). This door has six panels, arranged in a pattern of 3/3, which is an unusual arrangement for this date, but which is repeated in the door of the lower vestry and thus seems possibly original. The fanlight over the doorway is more characteristic of the 1830s, with its three radiating spokes and semi-circular lunette.

The Vestry stair rises in a kind of curious angular tower to the north of the western apse of the church. This stair is very steep, and has for this reason been augmented by a crude additional handrail, but the original design is most elegant, with an open string, stick balusters and a continuous handrail which curls into a spiral at the bottom over a columnar newel without the kind of swelling to baluster form observable in the organ stair (Fig. 24). It is possible that this stair may perhaps be earlier and the other a later addition, but this remains uncertain and both have detail consistent with an early 19th-century date. The walls of the vestry stair have been partially stripped of plaster, due to an outbreak of dry rot, but the stairs remain more or less unaltered. These stairs were originally a flying stair of great elegance with an open, plastered underside, but have been enclosed in a cupboard to house the organ blower, probably since the mid-to-late 19th century. The Cupboard has a plain 19th century four-panelled door. The stairs are lit by an oculus in the flat roof above.

Half way down the staircase is the doorway to one of the most attractive rooms in the building, the small turret room known as the Lower Vestry. This very small polygonal room is approached through a six-panelled door (rehung in a modern frame) like that at the top of the vestry stairs and was clearly a prestigious room since it has a delicate ornamental plaster ceiling (Fig. 25). This room has suffered much from damp ingress and dry rot, as a result of which large areas of wall plaster have been removed, but it remains a very beautiful room.

The north wall is constructed of soft red/orange brick; no particular bond is identifiable and the date of this fabric is difficult to ascertain. The east wall is of similar materials and cants around to contain a small corner fireplace. The fire surround has been removed and the wall has been replastered. The south and west walls are of rubble masonry, now whitewashed. This cannot be the original treatment since the room was obviously of high status. There is a small west window with many small panes and margin lights with decorative etched glass; this is probably a modern replica of the original. The roof is slightly tented upwards and is decorated with five moulded plaster ribs meeting at a central boss decorated with a rose. The plasterwork is slightly damaged; the cornice is missing on the north side. This room must be the Deacons' or Ministers' vestry of 1831 and shows some influence of the Gothick revival of the Georgian, pre-ecclesiological type.

The basement room (Schoolroom?)

This large room is entered though a doorway fitted with a six-panelled door of more conventional early 19th-century type, featuring three tiers of 2 panels, the top pair of panels being square and of smaller size. The room within this door is lit by two tall arched windows in

the west wall overlooking a small yard or garden to the west of the chapel. These windows have fixed sashes of 16 lights with base-hinged ventilation flaps in the arched heads. Both windows retain their original iron bars with expanded ends. These may have been intended either to protect valuables (supposing the room to have served as a vestry), or, conceivably as a security measure for the pupils, if the room was a schoolroom, since they are fitted internally (like the bars in a nursery).

Adjoining the windows is a most unusual door which, though of six small panels (2 over 2 over 2), is studded with 19th century nail heads like an Elizabethan or Jacobean plank door. These nail heads are only fixed internally and do not appear on the exterior, which is unusual if they were intended as a security measure.

The large basement room (Fig. 26) was extensively refurbished in 1993 (Sue Searle Pers Comm.) and is now partly converted to a café. It is crossed towards the west elevation by a shallow four-centred Gothic arch, which presumably conceals a beam or girder supporting the jambs of the apse. To the south of this is a large fireplace (formerly fitted with a coke boiler) which may have been large enough to contain a range. The eastern part of the room broadens and is in part supported by three impressive brick arches standing over stone piers (Fig. 27). These are recessed behind a large plastered beam which presumably supports the brick piers supporting the gallery columns. A similar arrangement seems to exist under the south side of the church within an inaccessible void, where the piers and arches are visible by lifting floorboards in the chapel (described above). It is possible that these areas were originally open, and have been walled off, or that they are part of the substructure of the chapel and were not intended to be accessible.

To the south of the basement room, extending under the Memorial Rooms is a narrow passage roofed by a series of brick arches and extending past a pair of gloomy, subterranean chambers to a door which now communicates with part of the neighbouring property (Fig 28). This passage is partially closed by a handsome wrought-iron gate (Fig. 29). This retains its original pintles and latch. It is likely that this is passage was the entrance for the children to the schoolrooms and that it gave access to Angel Hill by a passage to the rear of the Manse. The two subterranean chambers may have been employed as store rooms or, possibly as cloak rooms for the boys' and girls' coats. Opening off the western side of the passage is the stair turret rising to the rear of the Memorial Rooms. This still contains some evidence of the stairs, though these did not survive the remodelling of the Memorial Rooms following the fire in the 1960s.

In the yard beyond the rear elevation the lower part of the turret containing the vestry, now a lavatory, may always have served this purpose. This has a modern west window and a modern opening in the south wall fitted with an old four-panelled door with blocked ventilation holes. Although access may always have been from the yard there is a possibility of a blocked doorway in the west wall at the base of the vestry staircase.

4. DISCUSSION

The existing structure dates from the rebuilding of 1831, at which time the greater part of the earlier chapel on the site must have been entirely demolished. Although it is likely that buried remains of earlier buildings may survive on the site, the only likely place for the preservation of any early fabric above ground is in the party walls, towards the street frontage. The proximity of the Chilcott School may have led to the retention of fabric from the earlier buildings in the north wall of the chapel, since this appears to have been a shared party wall whose demolition would have been difficult without disturbing the adjoining building and its occupants; however nothing is visible here due to later plaster finishes. This wall might preserve elements of the early chapel of St Peter, but it is probably safer to assume that the wall dates from the early 17th century and is contemporary with the Chilcott School.

On the south side of the chapel the survival of earlier fabric is more surprising, since all these properties belonged to the church community and, theoretically, total demolition and replacement of these structures would have been easier to arrange: nevertheless evidence of



Fig. 23 The 1830s six panelled door with fanlight opening on the vestry stairs with the wind duct for the organ alongside.

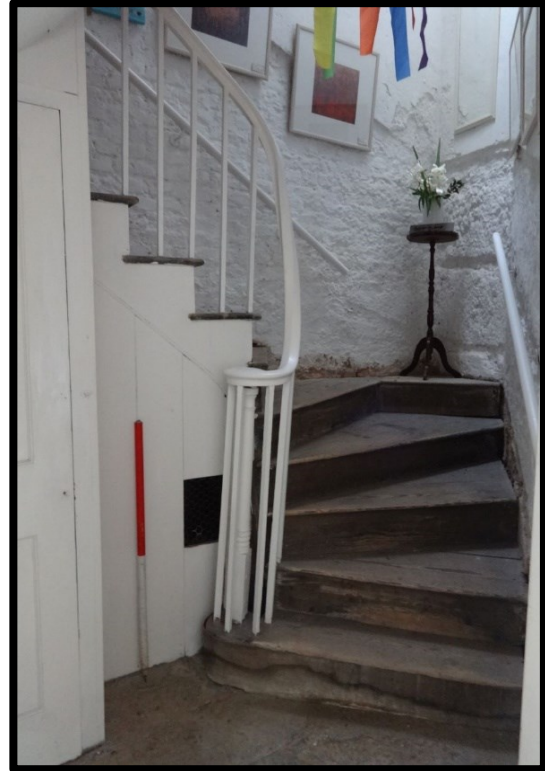


Fig. 24 View of the vestry stairs showing the enclosure of the lower section, which was originally open, to house the organ blower.



Fig. 25 Detail of the ceiling of the lower vestry showing simple Gothic motifs of ribs and a central boss.



Fig. 26 View of the basement room looking west showing the shallow Gothic arch supporting the jambs of the apse and the windows and doorway to the yard.



Fig. 27 View of the basement room looking north showing the arcade of three brick arches underlying the church. Similar arches exist within an inaccessible void on the south side.

earlier masonry and plaster survives at gallery level near the first-floor doorway connecting with the Memorial Rooms. Unfortunately only a very small area is actually visible and the extent of the preservation cannot be known, but it seems probable that that much of the south wall of the earlier chapel survives. This fabric might well date from the rebuilding of the chapel in 1687, or its subsequent enlargement under Polwheile's successor as minister in 1699. The retention of this part of the building is perhaps a consequence of the phased rebuilding of the church premises, the end wall of the chapel being embedded in earlier structures which were not acquired and redeveloped by the church until 1835 (Watts 2014, 4).

The western parts of the existing chapel are all likely to date from the 1830s rebuilding. The new chapel extended further west than the 17th-century chapel, since it was aligned with the pulpit as its focal point at its narrow end, rather than on the long side wall, as was formerly the case (*ibid.*, Fig. 4). The new building had therefore to be built over a substantial substructure to accommodate it to the steeply sloping site. The relation of this substructure to the building above is not very clear. The basement area was probably designated as a schoolroom, and may have been accessed from the rear of the site as well as by the vestry stair until after 1835, when the adjoining property was acquired by the church and rebuilt as church rooms. The access from the south by the passage behind the manse probably dates from this phase, as the details of its construction appear consistent with an early 19th-century date.

The interior of the chapel was originally quite different from its present appearance. Late 19th-century newspaper reports reveal that the building was completely filled with high box pews and had very large galleries, larger than the present ones, each with a high, solid panelled front. None of these furnishings remain, though evidence of the box-pews may be preserved in the high dado of tongue-and-grooved boarding which survives around the ground floor walls, and the galleries are highly likely to retain substantial elements of the earlier structures.



Fig. 28 The brick-vaulted passage to the south of the basement which may have been the access to the school.

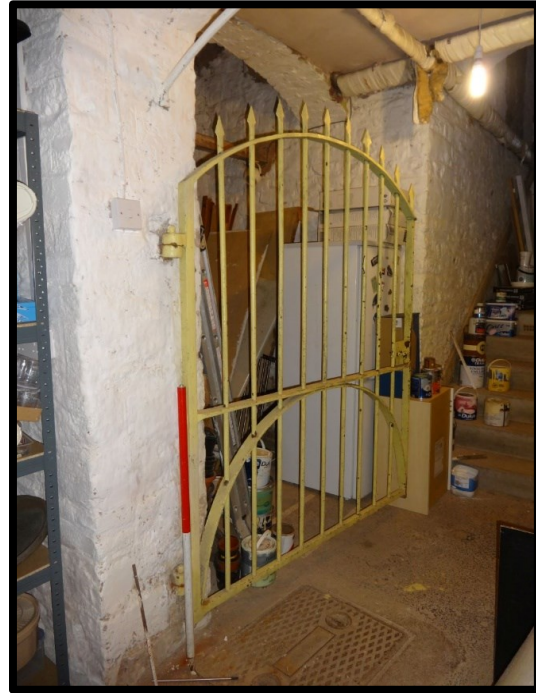
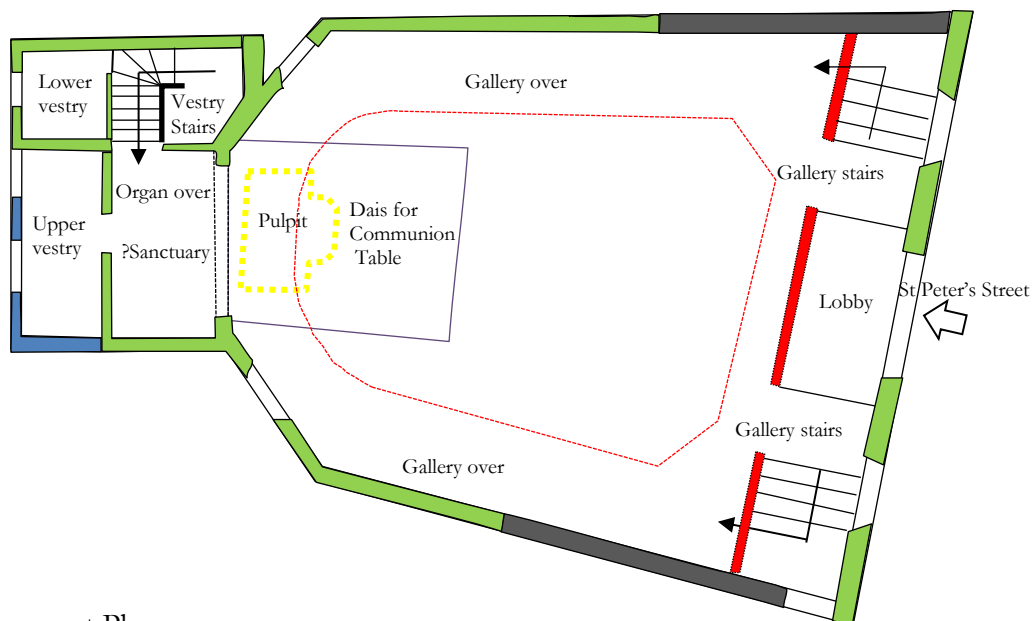


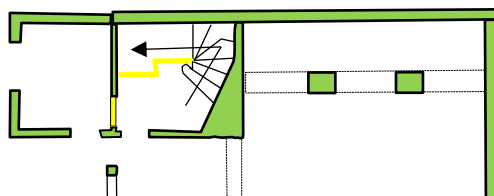
Fig. 29 Detail of the gate partially closing the passage showing the opening to the stair turret attached to the Memorial Rooms.

TIVERTON: UNITED REFORMED CHURCH, St PETER'S STREET 2015
 Phased sketch plans showing probable development

Ground Floor Plan



Basement Plan



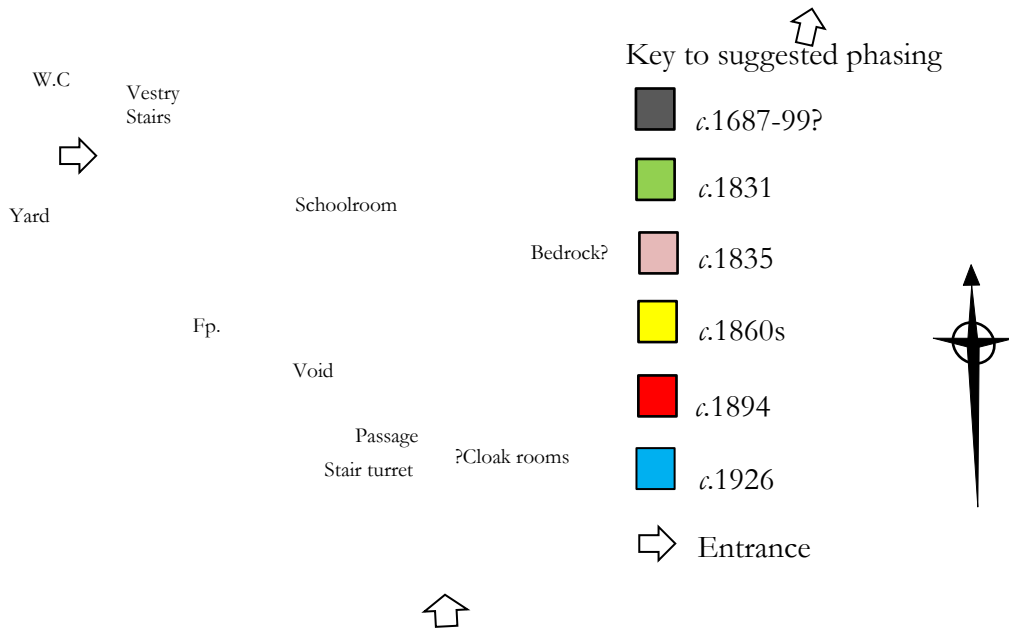


Fig. 30 Phased sketch plans of the basement and ground floors, based upon the estate agents' drawings and late 19th-century OS maps, showing the probable phasing of the building. The relationship of the ground and basement storeys is not absolutely clear and the plans may be distorted (Not to scale).

The form of the original pulpit is not known; it was probably a two or three decker designed to allow the preacher to be heard and seen from the galleries as well as from the body of the church. The provision of a structural chancel is relatively unusual in a Nonconformist church of this date, and perhaps suggests that the Communion Table may have originally been located to the rear of the pulpit; an interesting relic of Anglican usage. Later in the 19th century, perhaps in the 1860s, the present pulpit appears to have been added and the Communion Table brought round to the front of the pulpit and repositioned on a dais or platform in the body of the chapel. Throughout these changes the pulpit would have remained the focus of the interior.

The interior of the chapel was extensively altered in 1894. At this time the galleries were altered and reduced in depth, probably to improve the natural lighting of the ground floor areas, and the gallery fronts were replaced with the present handsome cast-iron parapets. The access to the galleries was also remodelled by the provision of new staircases rising from an entrance lobby with handsome, if rather domestic-looking floor tiles and plasterwork. All these features survive more-or-less intact today.

All the seating appears to have been renewed at the same time, arranged in a pattern common to late 19th-century Nonconformist chapels, characterised by the angling of the side blocks of seating to face the pulpit. This arrangement was more or less exclusive to Nonconformist chapels before the Liturgical Movement of the 20th-century, when central altars became fashionable in churches of all denominations. The arrangement is not found in any Anglican or Roman Catholic Churches in Devon until after the Second World War, with the possible exception of the church at Milber, Newton Abbot (1931-63), where the incumbent was inspired by a dream to experiment with a design involving three naves converging on a single sanctuary (Slader 1968, 127; Cherry & Pevsner 1989, 586).

Unlike many 19th-century Anglican churches, which were increasingly moving throughout the 19th century towards providing free seating for all, churches like this one

probably still derived much of their income from pew rents. The 1890s benches were therefore all numbered to identify their owners and the free seats for those unable to pay pew rents were of a simpler design and unmarked. Many of the benches still retain their umbrella stands and drip trays but the numbering has unfortunately been removed. Due to their centralised planning 19th-century Nonconformist churches were often more easily adaptable to modern forms of liturgy than their Anglican and Roman Catholic counterparts and, apart from some minor reconfiguration in the area of the Communion Table, the relocation of several rows of benches, the unfortunate mutilation of the pulpit and the loss of some internal plaster, the interior of the chapel has remained relatively unchanged since the turn of the 20th century.

The Lombard Romanesque architectural styling of the façade would have been highly advanced for the 1830s, though not entirely unprecedented, since architects and clergy were already by that time experimenting with revived Romanesque styles. The Romanesque style was particularly popular in Germany, where it was known as *Rundbogenstil*; it evoked the great German Romanesque cathedrals and was fashionably Medieval and National. It was also very popular for more exotic buildings such as synagogues. One reason for its popularity with Nonconformist congregations in England may be that it provided an alternative to Gothic, which was strongly associated at that time with the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. This may be why it was chosen for Tiverton. The possibility suggested by Authers that the Revd. W. H. Heudebourck may have been his own architect, assisted by his Brother in Law (Authers 1960, 89-90), is particularly interesting, and the unusual architecture may indeed reflect the dynamic character of this man (Fig. 31) whose rebuilding of this church and foundation of a number of churches in England and Canada still provide a testament to his extraordinary energy and zeal.

It remains possible that the present appearance of the façade is the result of careful remodelling in the 19th century. We know from the newspaper reports that some of the masonry was reset in the 1890s and thus some of the more overtly medievalising features of the present façade could have been introduced at this time, along with the timber Lombard tracery of the windows. The large, grey ashlar blocks of the frontage would have enabled the easy modification of the façade and, apart from a few small anomalies the extent of any modifications is now difficult to determine. The lithograph apparently showing the building in 1845 does, however, show the building in its present form and these alterations must therefore have been made within 14 years of the construction of the building. It may thus be reasonably argued that Heudebourck and his brother in Law were considerably in advance of the architectural fashion of the 1830s.



Fig. 31 Portrait of William Harvey Heudebourck; one of a pair depicting Heudebourck and his wife Sarah (née Robson), Auctioned on 07/12/2012 by Waddingtons of Toronto.

The Lombard Romanesque style was adopted with particular enthusiasm by Nonconformist groups in the mid-to-late 19th century, often incorporating elements of Gothic in an eclectic mix which can be very impressive. A good example of this style is the Baptist Chapel in Newport Street, Tiverton, by G. S. Bridgeman, dating from 1876 and, to its rear, the Baptist church hall, perhaps originally church schools. This chapel has Lombard style tracery in the smaller windows, fitted with rolled-plate glass of an unusual pattern incorporating false diamond quarries. For an example of the kind of glazing which may have featured in the original façade of the Independent Chapel, however, one must examine the triplet of lancets in the west elevation of the Baptist church hall, facing Park Hill. This has cast-iron diamond-patterned windows in which not only the frames but the lattice work supporting the diamond glazing are of cast iron. Tiverton retains many interesting examples of early industrial glazing of this type.

Many large urban Nonconformist chapels of this type were built in British towns to serve congregations of many different shades of churchmanship. The proliferation of these large buildings now presents a problem for congregations as they face the pressure of rising maintenance costs and falling attendance. Many congregations have had to close, to amalgamate with other sects, or to adapt their buildings wholly or partially to new uses. Unaltered examples of these kind of buildings are increasingly a rare survival. Many such chapels have been subjected to unsympathetic remodelling, such as division into two storeys by the insertion of new floors, as at the Bartholomew Street Baptist Chapel in Exeter (1817) or the Castle Lane Meeting, Exeter (1796), now a night club. Modern trends in Nonconformist churchgoing increasingly embrace Pentecostal rather than traditional forms of worship and this can have drastic consequences for historic interiors, as at the Elim Pentecostal Church, Northernhay Street, Exeter, where a well-preserved interior complete with 1840s box pews, designed for a congregation of Plymouth Brethren, was dismantled in the late 20th-century by a congregation apparently moved by the Holy Spirit to carry out their own reordering.

One of the finest surviving Nonconformist chapels in Devon, the Sidwell Street Methodist Church in Exeter (1905) remains wholly intact. The condition of many others is simply not known. They are rarely open except for services. Examples of large Nonconformist churches with facades in the Lombard Romanesque style remain at Brixham Baptist Church, Devon, and at Newton Abbot Baptist Church, in East Street, (now derelict). In many cases the present façade was added to an earlier building, or the early building survives alongside its replacement, serving as a Sunday School or Church Rooms. The significance of the chapel at Tiverton is much enhanced by its ancillary buildings, the Memorial Rooms and manse. Although the Memorial Rooms in particular has been much altered internally due to fire damage, the group retain their 19th-century character externally and provide an impressive architectural flourish at the entrance to St Peter's Street.

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The present owner of the site wishes to restore and refurbish the building to serve as a café, entertainment centre and arts centre. The proposals involve no major structural alterations to the chapel (though the adjoining Memorial Rooms is to be converted into residences) and it is intended that most of the existing furnishings will remain (Sue Searle, pers. comm. May 2015).

The greatest impact of the current proposals on the building will be the alterations to the seating. Proposals to create a flexible space in the body of the chapel for activities and refreshment areas will necessitate either the removal or reconfiguration of the seating, though the intention is to retain as much as possible on site to create new seating and furniture, on a new parquet floor (*ibid.*). The existing benches date from 1894 and undoubtedly contribute a great deal to the character of the interior. Though they are attractive and consistent with the other furnishings of the building, they are not the original furniture and they do not incorporate (as is often the case) reused elements of the original seating of the building. These benches are of a 'shouldered' type which is relatively common in 19th-century church building and incorporate no carving or other distinctive decorative detail. They were probably purchased from the catalogue of a church furnisher, rather than being specially designed for this location by the Architect.

The layout of the seating in blocks arranged at different angles is one of their most interesting aspects since it seems to anticipate the centralised liturgical planning developed in the Roman Catholic Church during the 20th-century. Layouts of this type were, however, already common in Nonconformist contexts during the 19th century since the requirements of their liturgy centred on the pulpit and Communion Table, in a way not unlike the central or nave altar so common in reordered churches of all denominations today. The significance of the seating has also been rather compromised by 20th century alterations to install a larger dais. The numbering of the benches, which might have allowed for a reconstruction of the layout of the interior, has been removed. In the gallery the seating is arranged in tiers, and removal of the seating here might necessitate changes in the floor levels which could impact on the structure of the gallery and its parapet. In any case it is likely that the parapet will have to be raised in order to comply with modern Health and Safety regulations.

Another area of potential impact lies in the provision of space for hanging paintings and artworks around the walls. This might conflict with or obscure the series of memorials to the members, Elders and Deacons of the church which survive today on the wall below the gallery. The removal or relocation of these monuments would result in the loss of a significant element in the history and archaeology of the building since these memorials provide some of the most tangible evidence of the lives, names and activities of its congregation. It is understood that though the memorials may have to be covered with display boards a display showing the monuments and their inscriptions will be made and exhibited in the building.

Repairs to the glazing and fenestration of the building will necessitate the replacement of some of the Rolled plate-glass panes with toughened glass to prevent accidents. Much of this glass dates from the refurbishment of 1894 and, unfortunately, these patterns are probably no longer manufactured.

The impact of the current proposals on the basement room would be likely to be minimal as few historic features remain in this area. The windows and door onto the yard may have to be modified to create appropriate fire escape routes but this is perhaps unavoidable and the intention is that this will not affect the external appearance.

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