

*Report on*

SHOREDITCH TABERNACLE  
CHURCH HALL

*18–20 Hackney Road, E2*  
LB TOWER HAMLETS

*by*  
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## *Nature of Request*

HART has been asked to assess the architectural and historical significance of the Shoreditch Tabernacle Church Hall, designed by George Baines and built 1890-1. The building is unlisted and still in use. Considerable repairs are needed. The information contained within this report will support consideration for listing and grant applications for repair. Access was provided to the building, although not all rooms were seen.

Origin of Request: *Ray Rogers (North and East London)*  
Date of Request: *17 August 2000*  
Date of Report: *29 September 2000*  
File Number: *Tower Hamlets 244*



## *Nonconformism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

The 19th century was a period of enormous change for Protestant groups such as Unitarians, Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Parliamentary enactments of the 1820s made it possible for Nonconformists to vote and hold office, and they achieved a level of status which had hitherto been denied them.<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that any of these groups were exempt from criticism by Victorian society. Nonconformists continued to be seen as 'other' or 'inferior' by many people, especially among the upper classes. This did not, however, prevent growth. As population numbers increased, and the working and middle classes became dissatisfied with Anglicanism, Nonconformism became a far more common and acceptable standpoint.

Until the changes of the 1820s, Nonconformists had made every effort to differentiate their places of worship from Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. Architecture was simple and plain, with no external ornamentation, needs differing very little between denominations. Requirements were that the minister be clearly seen and heard (preaching was central to both Nonconformist and Anglican worship), that seating was comfortable (services could often last for some time) and that the building was as economical as possible (Nonconformists — unlike the Church of England — did not benefit from State aid). Orientation was not an issue for Nonconformist groups, and chapels were often fitted neatly into prominent sites on crowded street frontages.<sup>2</sup>

During the nineteenth century, far more Nonconformist chapels were erected than Anglican churches. In Kent, for example, the established church produced only half as many buildings during the Victorian period as the Baptists, Methodists and Congregationalists.<sup>3</sup> This was due to newfound wealth and popularity, but also because of the increased number of Nonconformist sects and branches, many choosing to break away from their parent body and set up separate chapels. Population levels were also rising. In the parish of Islington alone, the population rose from 15,000 in 1811 to 320,000 in 1891, growing fastest between the 1840s and 1870s.<sup>4</sup>

It gradually became standard for professional architects to design Nonconformist chapels and often, individuals would specialise in work for one or two particular denominations. For example, John Wills of Derby has been termed 'the G.G Scott of 19th-century Baptist chapel building'<sup>5</sup> and the Unitarians had Thomas Worthington and Bowman & Crowther. Other popular names were Poulton and Woodman of Reading, James Cubitt, John Sulman and, as we shall see, George Baines.

## *Early History of the Church*

The need for a Baptist church in Shoreditch first surfaced in the early 1830s. A small group of men associated with the ragged school in Curtain Road had begun to preach on Sundays and a regular congregation had started to form. By 1833, the group had grown so large that they were able to call 'Calvinistic' James Smith of Ilford to be their minister. Initially, the congregation moved to Providence Hall, Worship Street, but some time in the mid 1830s (probably 1835), a piece of land off the Hackney Road was acquired. Here, 'situated in the midst of a very dense population of the lower classes', Providence Chapel opened in 1836.<sup>6</sup> The building was of a plain, Classical design, with a galleried interior, and seated between

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<sup>1</sup> Stevens Curl 1995, p.18

<sup>2</sup> For further details of architectural needs, see: Stevens Curl 1995, pp.18-19

<sup>3</sup> Homan 1984, p.9

<sup>4</sup> Temple 1992, p.4

<sup>5</sup> Homan 1984, caption to illus 65

<sup>6</sup> Evans 1985, p.4

600 and 700 people.<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 1) When William Cuff preached there in 1872, he found a 'small and dirty' building,<sup>8</sup> not visible from the Hackney Road: 'It stood behind the houses, and a passage led to it from the street. There was a good yard in front and a burying-ground by the side. At the end of the yard stood the chapel-keeper's house'.<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 2) In 1844, a new school room for the Sunday School was built, which had an average attendance of 200.<sup>10</sup>

All did not go well, however. In 1849, membership began to slowly decrease and by mid 1851 the minister, Reverend William Miall, threatened to resign due to the irregular attendance at ordinary services. The deacons decided that this problem was due 'to the situation of our place of worship' and the congregation moved to a new church in Queen's Road, Dalston. Again, this did not work out, and by 1859 the Dalston chapel had disappeared from all records.

In 1854, the great icon of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Nonconformism, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, came to preach at Providence Chapel. If the intention had been to rejuvenate the flagging congregation, it worked. By 1855, 800 or 900 people were turning up to hear the preacher, and all could not fit in. In 1872, when William Cuff, who had attended Spurgeon's Pastors College in London, became pastor of Providence Chapel, the problem remained the same. The chapel had 'become too small for all the church members to sit at the Lord's Table together at the same time, galleries and all full'.<sup>11</sup> Many were forced to stand in the yard and listen to the services through open windows. The Sunday School was having to turn children away because they already had too many for their rooms.<sup>12</sup>

A temporary solution was found to this problem in December 1872, when Cuff first preached at Shoreditch Town Hall, which seated around 2,000 people. 'After that', he wrote, 'the chapel in Hackney-road was no good to us'.<sup>13</sup> Cuff preached at the Town Hall for seven years, whilst trying to raise money for a new church, to be called the 'Tabernacle', after his mentor Spurgeon's building in Southwark. The building was to hold well over 2,000; a massive enterprise. Cuff's poverty stricken congregation could give no promises of financial assistance, and so the pastor took a cut in salary, and went around the City asking for contributions. The first estimate was placed at £16,000, which included the cost of buying six houses on Hackney Road in order to build onto the street frontage (see Fig. 2). Spurgeon, who initially said it could not be done, gave his help and influence to the enterprise. In 1878, a 'Travelling Correspondent' published his *The Reverend William Cuff in Shoreditch: Realistic Sketches of East London Life and Work*, and gave further support to Cuff's campaign. The writer argued that in the neighbourhood of Shoreditch 'a tabernacle with well-filled pews and crowded aisles is properly a mission-station - a feeder of other churches; and as such has claims on the country at large which ought not to be ignored. The reformation of Shoreditch would be a conquest in which all England should rejoice'.<sup>14</sup> Cuff was finally successful in raising the full sum, and turned to the practicalities of building his Tabernacle.

### *The Building of Shoreditch Tabernacle Church*

Apparently, William Cuff had great difficulty in explaining to the architect the sort of building he required. A proposed design by the little-known architect Joseph Staines Moye survives, and shows an impressive, fiercely Classical façade to Hackney Road, more reminiscent of banks and town halls than

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid; VCH 1998, p.234

<sup>8</sup> Cuff 1915, p.26

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.28

<sup>10</sup> Evans 1985, p.5

<sup>11</sup> Cuff 1915, p.36

<sup>12</sup> Evans 1985, p.8

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.30

<sup>14</sup> *Travelling Correspondent* 1878, p.54

Nonconformist churches of the period.<sup>15</sup> (Fig. 3) It is certainly in stark contrast to the Tabernacle's final, Gothic design (Fig. 4). David Evans, in his *More Light, More Power*, relates how Cuff 'tried unsuccessfully sketching on the dusty pavement, then, seizing a pear from a costermonger's barrow, he cut it lengthways. 'This', he said, 'shall be the shape of my interior, and here', indicating the stalk, 'shall be my pulpit'.<sup>16</sup> There is probably a boast involved in this story; a pear-shaped space is an effective way of overcoming a restricted site, which this was, whilst also retaining the open, unrestricted view crucial to Nonconformist worship.<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 5)

On 1 November 1878, the first stone of Shoreditch Tabernacle was laid by Samuel Morley MP, and the church was opened just over a year later, on 11 November 1879, filled 'to its utmost capacity, even to standing room'.<sup>18</sup> The design, by Thomas Lewis Banks – reasonably well known as a church architect – was Romanesque, and the cost of erection reached between £8,000 and £9,000. (Fig. 6) *The Building News* reported that 'the interior will measure 120ft by 80ft, and will be surrounded on three sides by a gallery, the platform occupying part of the fourth side'.<sup>19</sup> In the days following the opening, a series of famous evangelical figures preached at the Tabernacle, including Archibald Brown, who had founded the East London Tabernacle, Dr Barnardo and Spurgeon.

### ***The Building of Shoreditch Tabernacle Church Hall***

The erection of an additional building for the Shoreditch Tabernacle had been planned for some time. *The Building News* of 1878 mentions that 'ground has been acquired on which to erect at some future time school buildings.'<sup>20</sup> A plan of 1872 shows that this land, just behind the new church, was previously occupied by buildings which fronted onto 'Godfrey's Place' (see Fig. 2). The foundation stone was laid on February 24<sup>th</sup> 1890, the same year in which the neighbouring Milday Mission Hospital was begun (completed 1892). In spite of severe financial pressures – it was discovered soon after the Tabernacle's opening that 'somebody had not been straight' and there was a debt of £8,000 still remaining<sup>21</sup> – Cuff set to work on the new 'schoolroom, with many good classrooms for senior scholars and Bible-classes'.<sup>22</sup> He mentioned in his 1915 work that 'the hall itself will seat over a thousand people, yet in five minutes we can turn it into a delightful church parlour' and stated that the cost of Tabernacle, school, classrooms and the caretaker's house, reached £25,000.<sup>23</sup> The *Baptist Handbook* for 1890 includes the architect's plan and an interior view (Figs 7 and 8), and gives a detailed description of the proposed building, which is here quoted in full:

*These schools are about to be erected in the rear of Shoreditch Tabernacle, and it is expected they will be opened in July next. The total estimated cost of the scheme is £4,200. The building will consist of a large central school-room, fifty feet by thirty-five feet, with ten large class rooms ranged round it in a horseshoe shape, as shown on plan, shut off from it by means of revolving wood shutters and having wickets therein, and divided from each other by panelled partitions, which can be pushed up in sections against the side walls, so as to throw the whole space on the ground floor into one large room, sixty-five feet by sixty-five feet. Above the side*

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<sup>15</sup> The design was published in *The Architect*, August 12 1876. There is a copy in Tower Hamlets Local History Library.

<sup>16</sup> Evans 1985, p.8

<sup>17</sup> In 1889, Clarendon Chapel in Camberwell New Road was built to George Baines's designs. *The Baptist Handbook* says that the site was irregular, so the building has a 'pear-shaped plan, with the pulpit at the stem'. It is likely that Baines was following a convention, rather than being indebted to the Shoreditch Tabernacle.

<sup>18</sup> Cuff 1915, p.31

<sup>19</sup> *Building News*, November 8 1878, p.492

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>21</sup> Cuff 1915, p.51

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p.52

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p.53

*class rooms is a gallery which will accommodate twelve class-rooms, and open to the central schoolroom. This will be lighted by clerestory lights over the flat roofs of the gallery which will be formed on iron joists and concrete finished with Seyssel asphalt. The clerestory windows will open for ventilation.*

*In addition to these rooms there will be an infants' class-room, twenty feet by twenty-one feet, a lecture room, twenty-five feet by thirty-two feet, and two large class-rooms over these. All the necessary lavatories and offices are also provided; and a caretaker's house. Three spacious fireproof staircases are provided from the upper floor, and six wide doorways for exit, all of which will open outwards.*

*The floor will be of wood blocks on solid concrete. The joinery will be varnished. The schools will be well heated and ventilated, and the sanitary arrangements will be complete. There will be accommodation for about 1,500 scholars.*

*The architect is Mr George Baines, 4 Great Winchester Street, London EC.*

This description gives an impression of the scale of the building; as we shall see, it was more usual for school rooms and lecture halls to be built underneath the church, and it is rare indeed to find one so large. In 1896, Henry Walker described 'the beautiful octagonal school-building, with conical roof, clerestory, gallery, central hall, and separate bays cut off for classes' as 'one of the most notable and best equipped edifices for its purpose in the kingdom' and mentions it housing 'no less than 1300 children'.<sup>24</sup> Its size can be explained, in part, by the lack of such schools in Shoreditch. The 'Travelling Correspondent' found in 1878 that many schools were 'full to overflowing...the children sit on the floor in double rows around their teachers; and, in sheer despair, the superintendent closes his books, while he assures the crowd of applicants out-of-doors that he can receive no more until new schools are erected.'<sup>25</sup> The Shoreditch Tabernacle school, opened in July 1891, must have been welcome indeed.

### *Subsequent History*

The popularity of the Shoreditch Tabernacle and its schools continued for the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was mainly due to William Cuff, whose services appealed to young and old alike. Cuff said that he prided himself on the fact that 'our Tabernacle services are among the brightest in London. My people not seldom laugh and cry by turns.'<sup>26</sup> In 1886, the chapel had the area's largest Nonconformist attendance, averaging 1,033 people for the morning service and 1,468 for the afternoon.<sup>27</sup> Henry Walker, in his 1896 book on church life in the East End, referred to Shoreditch Tabernacle as 'one of the most conspicuous mission churches of East London' and mentions the 'thongs of the better class of well-dressed working people'. (Fig. 9) At the service he attended, a congregation of around 3000 people had assembled.<sup>28</sup>

By 1903, however, numbers had gone down to 546 for the morning service, and 1,220 for the afternoon.<sup>29</sup> This was largely because early supporters had moved away from the area, as it became more commercialised. In 1915, Cuff wrote that 'Shoreditch is a totally different place from what it was in the seventies and eighties and part of the nineties...There were many streets with nothing but dwelling-houses in them, and these were occupied by well-to-do people. Now they are full of offices or business places...The well-to-do people are all gone to live elsewhere.'<sup>30</sup> The congregation of Shoreditch Tabernacle was mainly made up of the working classes, who lived in the crowded slums of the area. Social work became a crucial part of church life, aided by many workers (there were 300 in c.1898) and by deaconesses from 1918.<sup>31</sup> The Tabernacle had eight mission halls, the main one in Gibraltar Place, once the 'Nonconformist Cathedral' of

<sup>24</sup> Walker 1896, p.75

<sup>25</sup> *Travelling Correspondent* 1878, p.51

<sup>26</sup> Walker 1896, p.75

<sup>27</sup> *VCH* 1998, p.234

<sup>28</sup> Walker 1896, pp.73-74

<sup>29</sup> *VCH* 1998, p.234

<sup>30</sup> Cuff 1915, p.45

<sup>31</sup> *VCH* 1998, p.234

East London.<sup>32</sup> Others were housed in the former Bethel Baptist Chapel in Austin Street and the Shacklewell Street school.<sup>33</sup> The mission halls at Hoxton House and Shap Street were evacuated in the Second World War, and never reopened.<sup>34</sup>

Shoreditch Tabernacle was kept buoyant by William Cuff until his retirement in 1917, by which time the official membership was down to 645. The church was in serious need of repairs, which were likely to cost around £2,000. The congregation had declined so much that there was talk of selling off the Tabernacle for building ground and converting the lecture room into a chapel.<sup>35</sup> This struggle for existence continued after the First World War, although there was a period of growth in the mid 1920s under Pastor Alfred Butler and another in the late 1930s. When Ernest Clifford replaced Butler in 1929, he found that the church was 'dirty and derelict; badly in need of repairs because of rotten window frames and crumbling stonework'. The repairs, completed in 1931, eventually cost £7,500.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout this time, the school building continued to be well used. There was something at the Tabernacle every night for young people – brigades, youth clubs and classes – Sister Jessie writing in 1934 that 'the Tabernacle is the home of the young from the time they finish work until a none too early bedtime'.<sup>37</sup> Sister Dorothy wrote in 1945 that her 'first recollection of Shoreditch Tabernacle was the young people's fellowship held in the Lecture Hall. Over 100 young people were singing, as only Shoreditch folk can sing.'<sup>38</sup> (Fig. 10) There were also Women's meetings, the membership of which numbered 200 in 1928 and 900 in 1936. When the Second World War broke out, Clifford suggested that the lecture hall become an emergency centre for those who were bombed out, numbering over 150 people. This proved very successful, and the neighbouring church was also used, the cellars being inhabited for some years. Some time in the early 1940s, a bomb fell on the hall roof, which was quickly repaired by the government because of the building's use as a rest centre.<sup>39</sup>

In 1944, the fate of the Shoreditch Tabernacle Church was sealed. A VI fell in nearby Calvert Avenue, and Ruth Clifford described how 'all the windows blew in. Doors were ripped, ceilings dropped... Every hall and room had suffered.'<sup>40</sup> The Cartwright Hall was temporarily used as the church, and the Margaret Lofts Hall became a meeting place for the children.<sup>41</sup> (Fig. 11) Clearly, the bomb had damaged both church and school, but the former was almost destroyed. The foundations had been badly shaken, and Ernest Clifford knew that the building could not be saved. All services were held from then on in the lecture hall, and were still being held there almost twenty years later. Every Sunday evening, the hall held about 130 people.<sup>42</sup>

Eventually enough money was raised for a new chapel, and demolition of the old Tabernacle began in 1960. The building makes its last appearance on the Ordnance Survey map of that year (Fig. 12), and its appearance is recorded in some photographs taken around the time (see Fig. 6). The new church, designed by Goddard and Phillips, was opened on 14 December 1963, and cost £32,000. (Fig. 13) It is a plain, modern building, designed to seat 300, and was built back from the road to accommodate a planned road-widening scheme, which never went ahead.<sup>43</sup> (Fig. 14) The contrast between this unmemorable, brick building and its massive, grand predecessor could not be greater.

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<sup>32</sup> Walker 1896, p.75

<sup>33</sup> VCH 1998, p.234

<sup>34</sup> Evans 1985, p.13

<sup>35</sup> Evans 1985, p.10-11

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.12

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> *Shoreditch Tabernacle* 1945

<sup>39</sup> Evans 1985, p.14

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.15

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p.17

## *The Church Hall: The Building Described*

Externally, Shoreditch Tabernacle Hall is markedly plain and unpretentious, and there are few signs of the flamboyant style Baine used in his churches. The building is all of brick, with some banding to the east façade, which faced Godfrey's Place.

The simplicity of design is easy to explain. Firstly, the building was to be functional rather than beautiful, as Baines was no doubt instructed. He must also have been aware of the congregation's lack of funds and, although the building cost a rather expensive £4,000 plus, display was to be concentrated on the interior. However, the main reason is that, as built, the Hall was hemmed in on all sides by other buildings, and could not be seen from any distance (see Fig. 5). On the west, was the main church building and a classroom block, divided from the Hall by a narrow passage (see Fig. 7). Today, after the demolition of the block and the rebuilding of the church, this space has been opened up and the Hall can be seen from more of a distance. (Fig. 15) To the north, the Hall adjoined the rear part of four terraced houses, which fronted onto Cooper's Gardens. These houses still appear on the 1938 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 16), but had gone by 1960 (see Fig. 12), and the site is now occupied by a car park (see Fig. 14). The scrappy rendering which covers this façade of the Hall is therefore modern. (Fig. 17) To the south, was the terrace of houses fronting Austin Street (Fig. 18), which were divided from the Hall by a tiny, almost insignificant, yard (see Fig. 7). Again, these houses appear in 1938 but have largely disappeared by 1960. Today, the site is occupied by a terrace of modern, probably 1980s, houses and the 'yard' is considerably enlarged. (Fig. 19) The only side from which the Hall could originally be viewed with any ease was the east, which faced Godfrey's Place and the Mildmay Mission Hospital, and was – as it remains now – the principal place of entrance (the building could also be entered from the west, via passages from Hackney Road). (Fig. 20) It is this façade that is given a more elaborate treatment; there is red-brick banding and window arches, a full-height Serliana window which originally lit the lecture hall, and a series of memorial stones were taken from the Tabernacle and relaid in 1890. (Fig. 21)

Moving inside the building, the difference in architectural treatment is immediately obvious. The most elaborate elements employed are Corinthian iron columns to support the gallery and ornate ironwork railings. (Figs 22 and 23) As shown in the photographs of c. 1945, the Hall is also ornamented by lettering covering the frieze beneath the gallery (see Fig. 10) In plan, the Hall forms a horseshoe, the space between the columns and the rear walls originally used as classrooms, as we have seen from the plan and description published in the *Baptist Handbook* (see Figs 7 and 8). These classrooms were ten in number, and all but one were lit by a window at ground floor level. Some were also given added illumination by the use of lights in the floor of the gallery, many of which survive. (Fig. 24) The main floor space was used as a school room, and its area could be extended by pushing back the partitions which divided the classrooms and rolling up the wooden shutters. The view published in the *Baptist Handbook* shows the Hall as it may have looked with all these screens removed, although the benches which run around the walls do not survive (see Fig. 8). These benches still appear on photographs taken around the time of the Second World War (Fig. 25, and see Fig. 10), which also show the partitions pushed back.

Today, more permanent partitions have been built between the columns, sectioning off the former classrooms into larger rooms, the crèche to the east and storerooms to the west and south. (Figs 26 and 27) These alterations were probably made at the same time as the new Tabernacle church was constructed, in the 1960s. A photograph of the Hall taken in 1945 shows that it could still then be opened up (see Fig. 10). Remarkably, despite these alterations, some of the movable partitions survive. In one case, the partition still functions, and can be pushed back to the wall. (Fig. 28) Also, some of the revolving wooden shutters are visible and in working order (Fig. 29), and it is possible that all remain behind the architrave beneath the gallery, which has been blocked up by the modern partitioning. Again, there is a photograph of c. 1945 showing several of these shutters down (Fig. 30), so they must have been blocked up after that date.

At the head of the Hall – to the north – is a curved stage or platform. Since that shown on the plan published in 1890 is smaller and of a different form, it is to be assumed that the present stage was added at a later date, although it does look rounded in a photo of c. 1945 (see Fig. 10). On the wall to the north, either side of the stage, are two memorial stones. (Fig. 31) An early photo, probably c. 1945, shows these together

with a foundation stone at the centre. (Fig. 32) The latter stone has, at some point since then, been removed, decreased in size, and reset into the wall to the west. (Fig. 33) Panelling lines the bottom half of the outer walls, and it seems to be an adaptation of the benches, which survived probably until the 1960s.

The gallery is divided from the main space by a series of wooden columns, which support the clerestory, and a series of ornate, wrought iron railings. (Fig. 34) This gallery, as the description published in the *Baptist Handbook* makes clear, formed twelve classrooms, which were open to the central schoolroom. The interior view depicts them as being divided by curtains (see Fig. 8), and the positions of these curtains can still be seen in places on the ceiling of the gallery. (Fig. 35) The gallery was lit by skylights, formed in the flat roof. (Fig. 36) Like the ground floor, this area has been partitioned at some point in the middle of the twentieth century, to form independent rooms. (Figs 37 and 38)

The clerestory survives in its original form (see Fig. 34), almost exactly as shown in the 1890 view (see Fig. 8), although the glass in the windows seems to have been replaced, as is the case throughout the Hall. This without doubt happened after 1944 when 'all the windows blew in' after a bomb fell in Calvert Avenue<sup>44</sup>. The roof, despite also being heavily bombed, seems to be mainly original. (Fig. 39) It is a complex structure of arched braces, collars and ties, in wood and iron, and is a reminder of how fascinated the Victorians were with engineering. It is also, of course, a clever means of spanning a thirty-five feet wide space.

On the north of the Hall, behind the stage and divided from the schoolroom by a wall, is a separate section containing lecture room and infants' room, with classrooms over. All rooms survive, those on the upper floor accessed via the gallery, and the Serliana to the east provides ample light. (Fig. 40) The staircases shown on the plan of 1890 remain in their original positions (Fig. 41) as, it seems, do the lavatories at the south-east and the 'caretaker's house' at the south-west. The flooring throughout is of 'wood blocks', as mentioned in the description in the *Baptist Handbook*.

## *Historical Context*

An essential element of Nonconformist architecture is the provision of subsidiary features, such as classrooms, rooms for the preacher and caretaker's houses. There had long been an emphasis laid on education and self-improvement, Nonconformists having organised Sunday Schools since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, such schools were one of the chief educational institutions before the Anglicans turned to primary education on a larger scale in the 1840s. After the Education Act of 1870, Sunday Schools increased in importance as providers of religious education. Many churches, especially the large Late Victorian establishments, built separate buildings for schools, including a church hall which could be used for lectures and other activities. Often, such structures were erected before the church itself. This was a way of immediately establishing services, and of raising much needed funds.

There were a variety of ways of dealing with schools and church halls. Some were built adjacent to the main church, and echoed its style. For example, the recently listed Trinity Church and Hall at Mansel Road, Wimbledon, designed by the well-known firm of Potts, Sulman and Hennings and built in 1885-1891. Here, the hall formed part of the original design and echoes the main building, with its gabled end and flèche.<sup>45</sup> (Fig. 42) Others are John Wills's Wesleyan Chapel and Schools, West Kirby, near Birkenhead (c.1890)<sup>46</sup> (Fig. 43) and the Former Whitefield Tabernacle, Leonard Street, Islington, built in 1868.<sup>47</sup> An exceptional and extravagant case is John Sulman's Highbury Quadrant Congregational Church and Schools, Islington (1881-2, church demolished 1954, ancillary buildings survive). (Fig. 44) At the rear of the church Sulman built a large octagonal school, attached to a block containing infants' room and vestries.

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<sup>44</sup> Evans 1985, p.15

<sup>45</sup> See HART Reports and Papers 24

<sup>46</sup> *Builder*, Dec 27 1890, p.499. The school cost around £1,050 (exclusive of land) and consisted of assembly room, one vestry, three classrooms.

<sup>47</sup> Temple 1992, p.43

More often, however, classrooms and lecture halls were incorporated within the main church building, predominantly within the basement. This was the case at Spurgeon's Tabernacle in Southwark (1859-61)<sup>48</sup>, the Tabernacle in New Brompton, Kent (begun 1888 to the designs of John Wills)<sup>49</sup> and Baines's Clarendon Chapel, Camberwell New Road (c.1889, the school was 44 feet by 50 feet and horseshoe shape)<sup>50</sup>. At the Finsbury Park Congregational Church in Playford (formerly Palmerston) Road, built in 1882-3 to the designs of Charles Henry Searle, the hall seating 900 was placed over the church, rather than in the basement.<sup>51</sup>

A great number of Nonconformist schools and church halls survive, although they have – because of the nature of the buildings – been largely altered. Many are listed, usually with the church itself. This is the case with, for example, J. William Stevens's Herne Hill Baptist Church, Church Hall and Offices (1889 and 1904-6, Grade II) and James Cubitt's Dulwich Grove Congregational Church and Church Hall (1889-90, Grade II). A Baptist church hall, by George Baines, at Mundania Road, Honor Oak (1887) is listed Grade II, and forms a group with his later church (1891).

### *The Architect: George Baines*

George Baines (1852-1934) is a well-known architect of the Late Victorian and Edwardian period. He was born in Suffolk, was articled to Messrs Bottle and Olley of Great Yarmouth for three years, and then spent a further year in the office of W. G. Habershon & Pite. Around 1870, he won a competition to build a Baptist chapel in Cannon Street, Accrington, Lancashire, which was followed by a number of other jobs in the area. Baines commenced practice in Accrington in 1871, and came to London in 1884. Seven years later, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and the list of works which he submitted included twenty-two Nonconformist chapels (mainly Baptist) and three blocks of flats in Westminster, besides a large number of commercial and domestic buildings. By the time of George's death in 1934, he – with his son, who he took into partnership in 1901 – had designed nearly two hundred free churches.<sup>52</sup>

Baines's churches, mainly in the Gothic Revival style, include Nelson Chapel and Schools, Lancashire (1877); Chapel and School at Honor Oak, Southwark (1887); Congregational Church, Sidcup (1887-8); Congregational Church, Bexley (1890); Greenwich Baptist Church, Lower Road (1895, demolished 1982); Lambeth Methodist Church, Fentiman Road (1900-1, Grade II); Mitcham Lane Baptist Church, Wandsworth (1902, Grade II) (Fig. 45); the United Reformed Church, Muswell Hill Broadway (1902, Grade II, now a pub) (Fig. 46); Baptist Church, Streatham (1902-3); Hertford Baptist Church, Cowbridge (1906, Grade II); Braemar Avenue Baptist Church, Haringey (1907, Grade II); and Friern Barnet Congregational Church (1910, Grade II). His church halls and schools include the Baptist Lecture Room and Infants' School, Accrington (1872); Baptist School, Preston (1885); Leyton Baptist Schools (c.1887?); Baptist Infants' School, Woodnook, Accrington (1891); and Church Hall, Creighton Avenue, East Finchley (1902, Grade II).

The Shoreditch Tabernacle Hall was a key piece of work for Baines. He was already a practised architect, and was about to be elected FRIBA. After 1901, Baines's work becomes virtually inseparable from that of his son, his partner. At Shoreditch, we see Baines working in one of the mediums he knew best, the Baptist school and hall. Although not as prominent, or externally stylised, as his churches, it was one of his key commissions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. His RIBA nomination papers of c.1891 show that the Shoreditch Tabernacle Hall cost £4,200, an amount surpassed by only four of his previous Nonconformist buildings, the Baptist Chapel at Accrington (£9,000), the Baptist Chapel and Schools at Colne (£8,500), the Baptist Chapel at Honor Oak (£5,500) and the Baptist Chapel and Schools ('Clarendon Chapel') at Camberwell (£5,000).

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<sup>48</sup> Hayden 1962, p.15. At the Tabernacle the floor level was 10 feet above the ground, to allow for half-basement lecture halls, Sunday school rooms, offices and so forth.

<sup>49</sup> *Baptist Handbook* 1889, p.380

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p.381

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p.77

<sup>52</sup> *Builder*, March 23 1934, p.494



## Conclusion

Although there are many Nonconformist buildings throughout London, Shoreditch Tabernacle Church Hall is a rare survivor in the East End, an area referred to as 'darkest London'<sup>53</sup>. Much was bombed, or demolished during the slum clearance of the early twentieth century, and to find a Victorian Nonconformist building at all – let alone one very little altered – is notable. When Henry Walker wrote his *East London: Sketches of Christian Work and Workers* in 1896, he found Shoreditch Tabernacle 'one of the gladdest sights we shall see', and noted its conspicuous location close to the parish Church of St Leonard.<sup>54</sup> The fact that a congregation of around 3000 was then attending the church, and 1300 children were taught at the school, is a measure of the Tabernacle's importance. Both church and hall played a vital part in the religious life and education of people from Shoreditch and beyond, and it was clearly enormously popular. The Tabernacle's connection with Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 'the *Wunderkind* of mid-Victorian nonconformity'<sup>55</sup>, must have made it even more so. The Tabernacle towered over its neighbours and, until 1893, it 'stood alone as a great mission citadel in the district'.<sup>56</sup>

In 1893 a new colleague entered into the field, the Wesleyan Shoreditch Mission on Hackney Road. (Fig. 47) In 1896, Walker wrote that 'In the morning the visitor will find a larger congregation here than any in the neighbourhood, except that of the Shoreditch Tabernacle'.<sup>57</sup> This building, further along from the Tabernacle at 162A Hackney Road, has now been converted to luxury flats. Other important 19<sup>th</sup>-century Nonconformist buildings in the area were the East London Tabernacle, Burdett Road, Bow (now completely rebuilt), home of the popular minister Archibald Brown, and the Meeting House at New Stepney (destroyed by bombing)<sup>58</sup> (Fig. 48). As most comparative buildings in the East End have, therefore, been rebuilt or demolished, the Shoreditch Tabernacle Church Hall is a remarkable survivor.

Although the Hall's importance would undoubtedly be increased if the Tabernacle church had survived, it still has a great deal of interest in its own right. Contrary to the usual practice, the Hall is by a different architect from the main church, and in this case it benefits by the change; George Baines is a much more significant name than Thomas Lewis Banks. The Hall is not just an echo of a larger structure now lost. It is of a completely different form and in a largely different style from the church it abutted.

Most importantly, the Hall has been remarkably little altered internally and externally. There are certainly works dating from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, but these are superficial in nature and seem to be reversible. It would be charming to see the building with its gold lettering, revolving wooden shutters and movable partitions reinstated. The Hall, which is still in use by the congregation, makes a significant contribution to the history of the area and is, internally at least, an architectural surprise and treat. Baines is at present only represented in listed building terms by nine churches and one church hall. The Shoreditch Tabernacle Church Hall is another fine example of his work.

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<sup>53</sup> Walker 1896, p.71

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.72

<sup>55</sup> Ed Brooks and Saint 1995, p.89

<sup>56</sup> Walker 1896, p.75

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.77

<sup>58</sup> Walker mentions that attached to the Stepney Meeting House were 'a school-hall, lecture-rooms, and classrooms on a scale unparalleled in any other part of London.' Ibid, p. 149

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*Shoreditch Tabernacle* (1945) – pamphlet LP 1792, 226.2

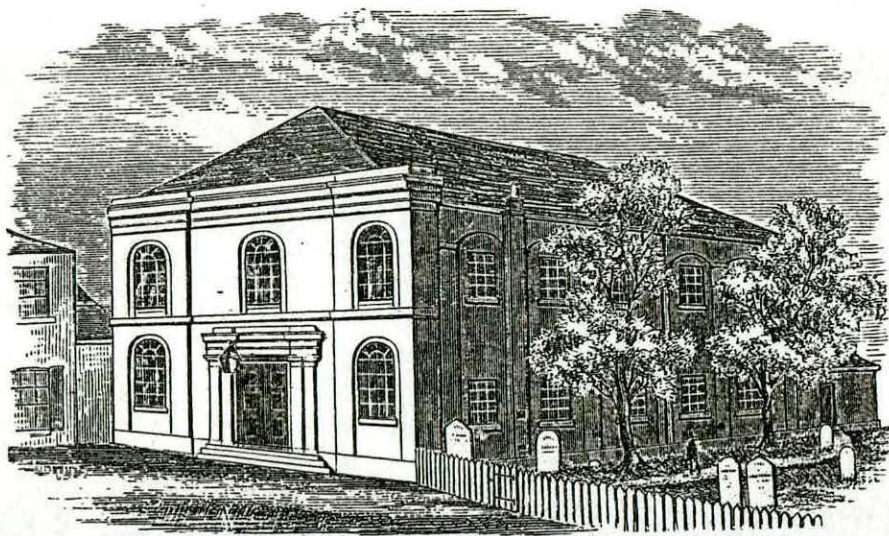
RIBA Biography Files

HART Records including:

Reports on the United Reformed Church, Muswell Hill Broadway, Haringey (HAR 7)

Report on Trinity Church and Hall, Mansel Road, Wimbledon (Reports and Papers 24)

PROVIDENCE CHAPEL, HACKNEY ROAD.



REV. W. CUFF, PASTOR.

Fig. 1 View of Providence Chapel, Hackney Road, probably built 1835 and demolished in the 1890s to make way for the Shoreditch Tabernacle Church. This drawing is held by Tower Hamlets Local History Library.



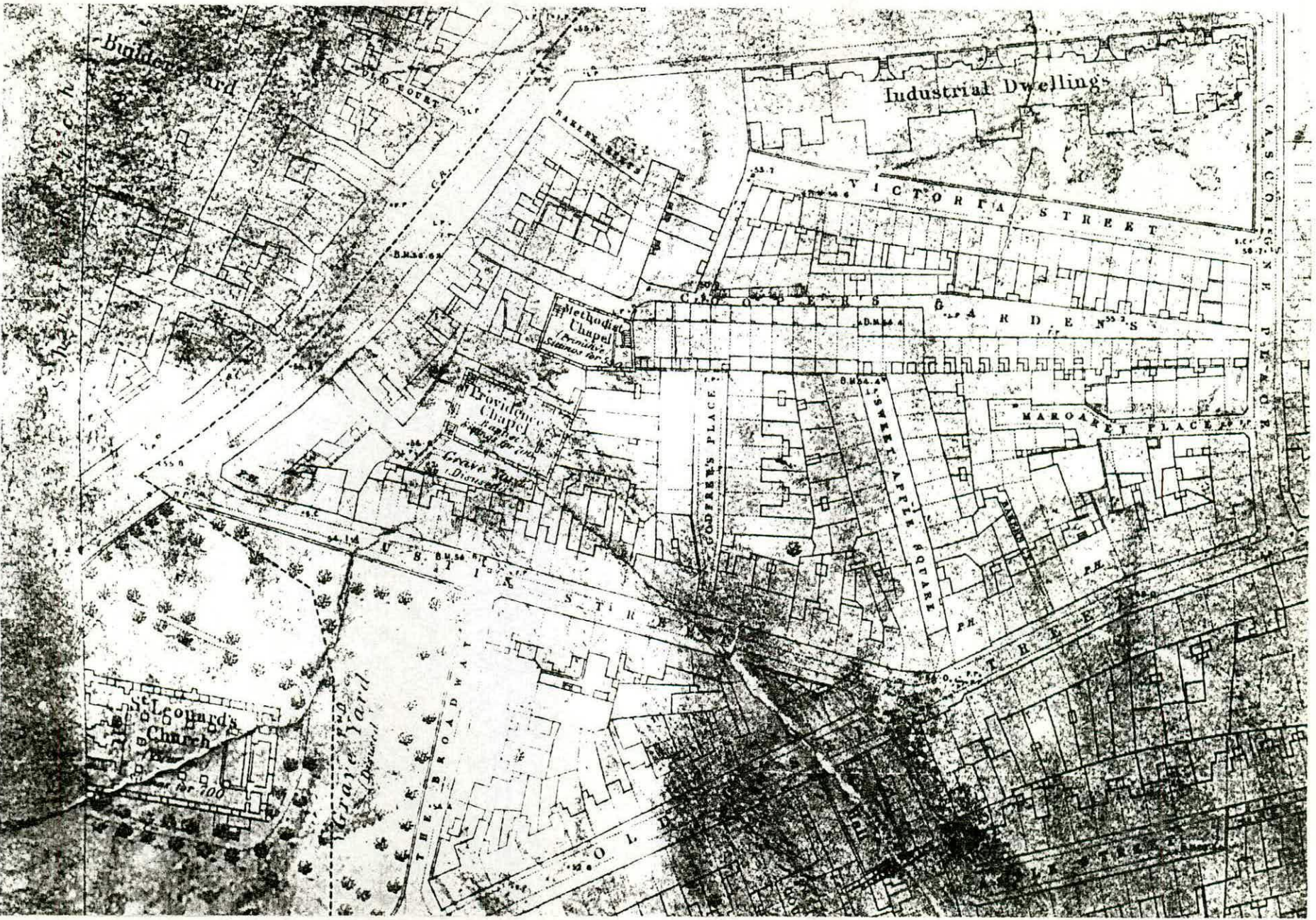


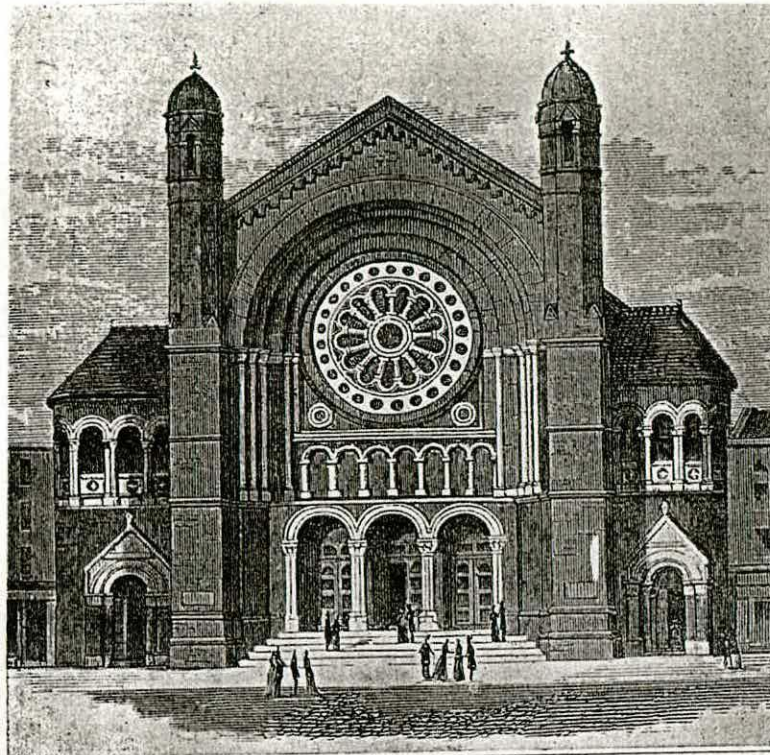
Fig. 2 Detail of the Ordnance Survey map of 1872, showing the site of Providence Chapel and its adjoining graveyard.





Fig. 3 Unexecuted design for the Shoreditch Tabernacle Church, by Joseph Staines Moye, published in *The Architect* in 1876.





SHOREDITCH TABERNACLE.

Fig. 4 Drawing of the Shoreditch Tabernacle Church, which appeared in William Cuffs *Fifty Years Ministry* (1915). The church was built in 1878-9 to designs by T. Lewis Banks.



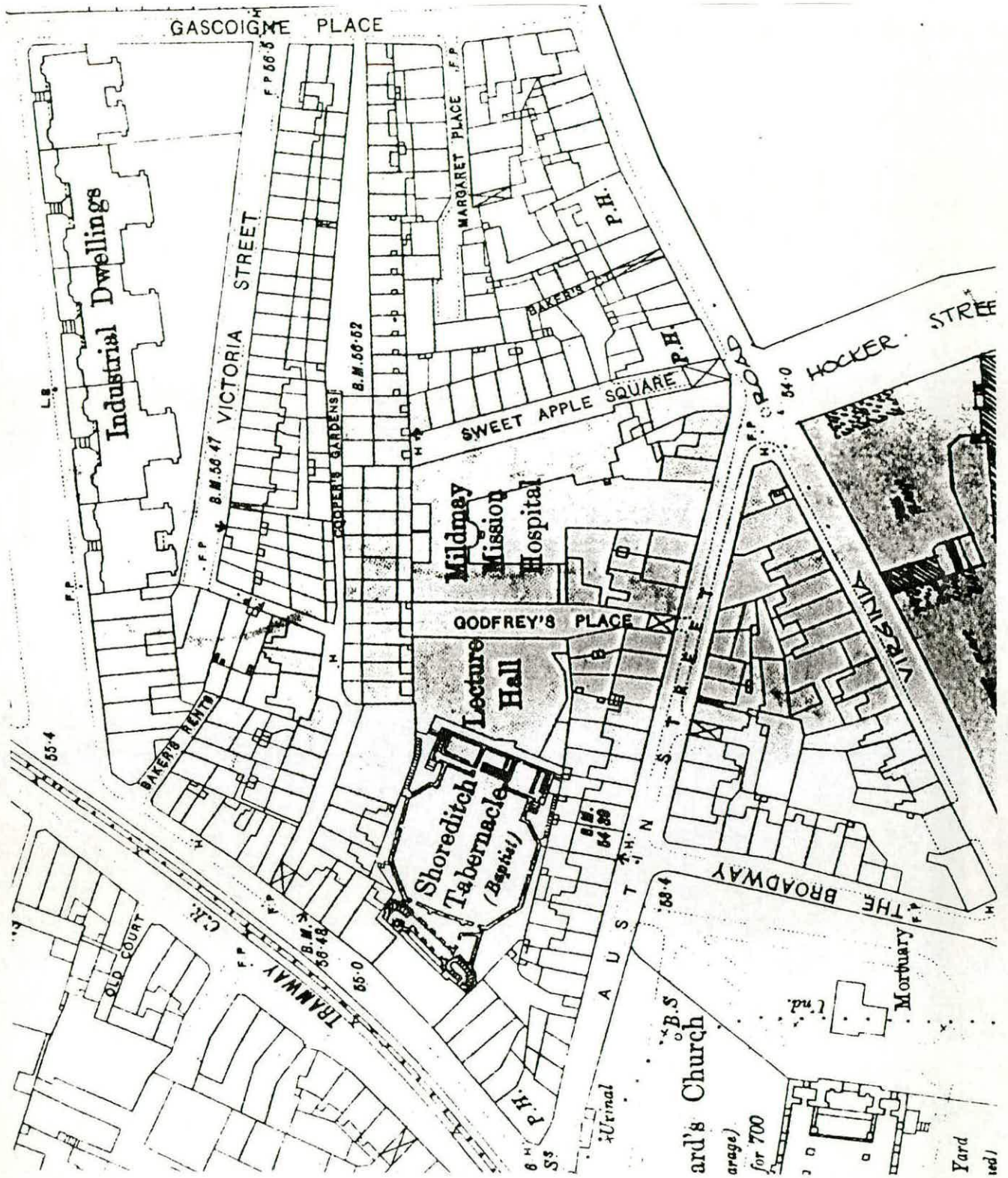


Fig. 5 A detail of the 1894 Ordnance Survey map showing the recently built Shoreditch Tabernacle Church and Hall, and the adjacent Mildmay Mission Hospital.





Fig. 6 Photograph of the Tabernacle Church, taken just prior to its demolition in 1960 [EH Photo Collections].



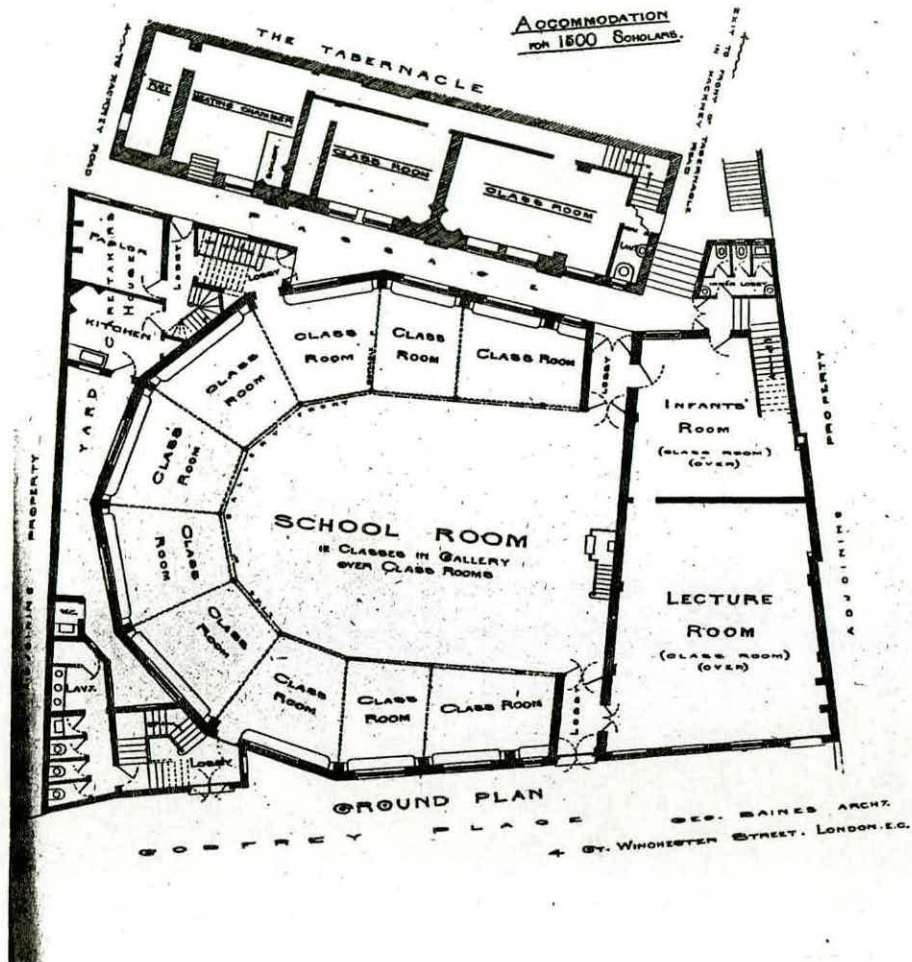


Fig. 7 Architect's plan of Shoreditch Tabernacle Hall, published in the *Baptist Handbook* for 1890.



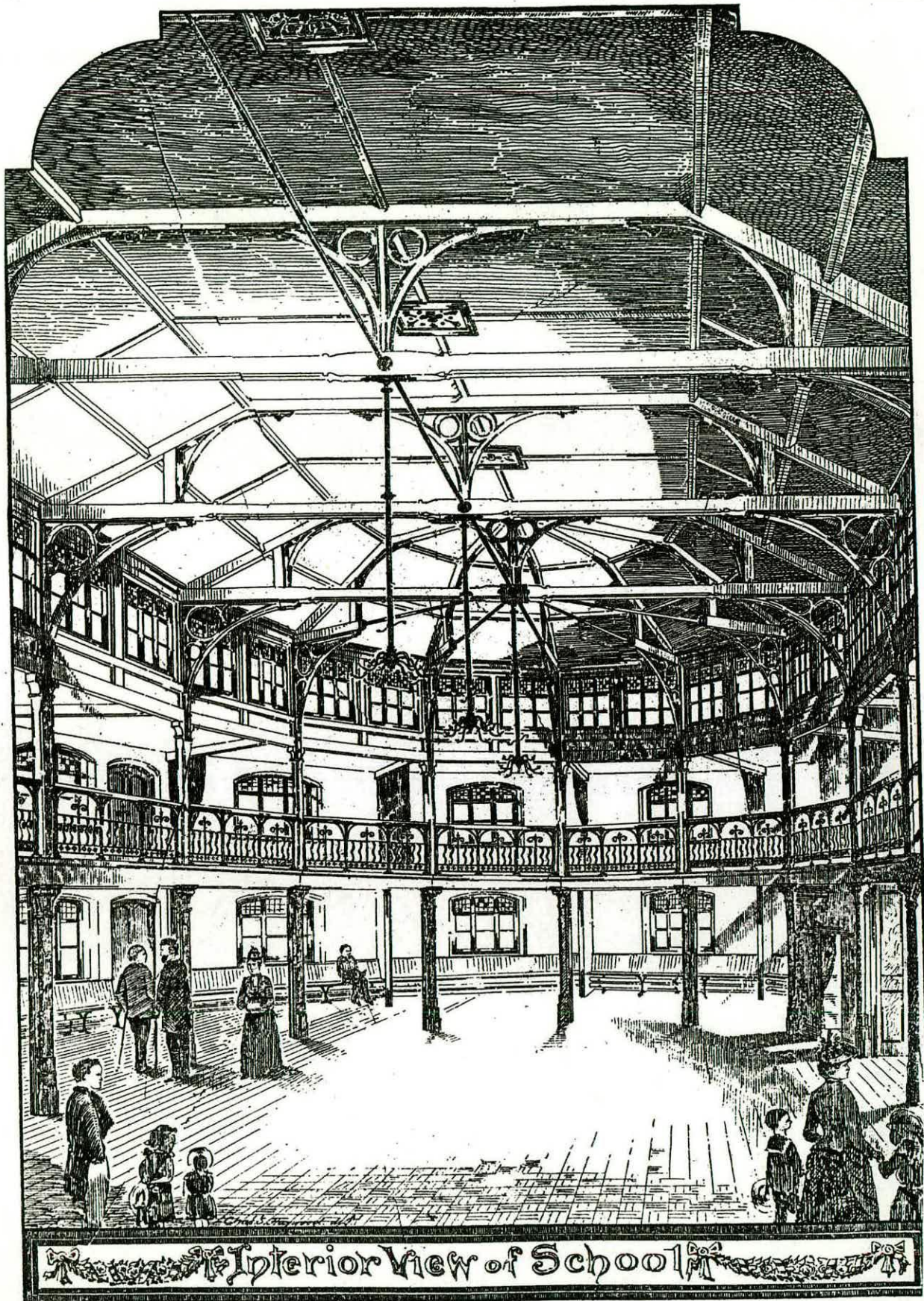


Fig. 8 Architect's interior view of the Hall, which appeared in the *Baptist Handbook* for 1890.



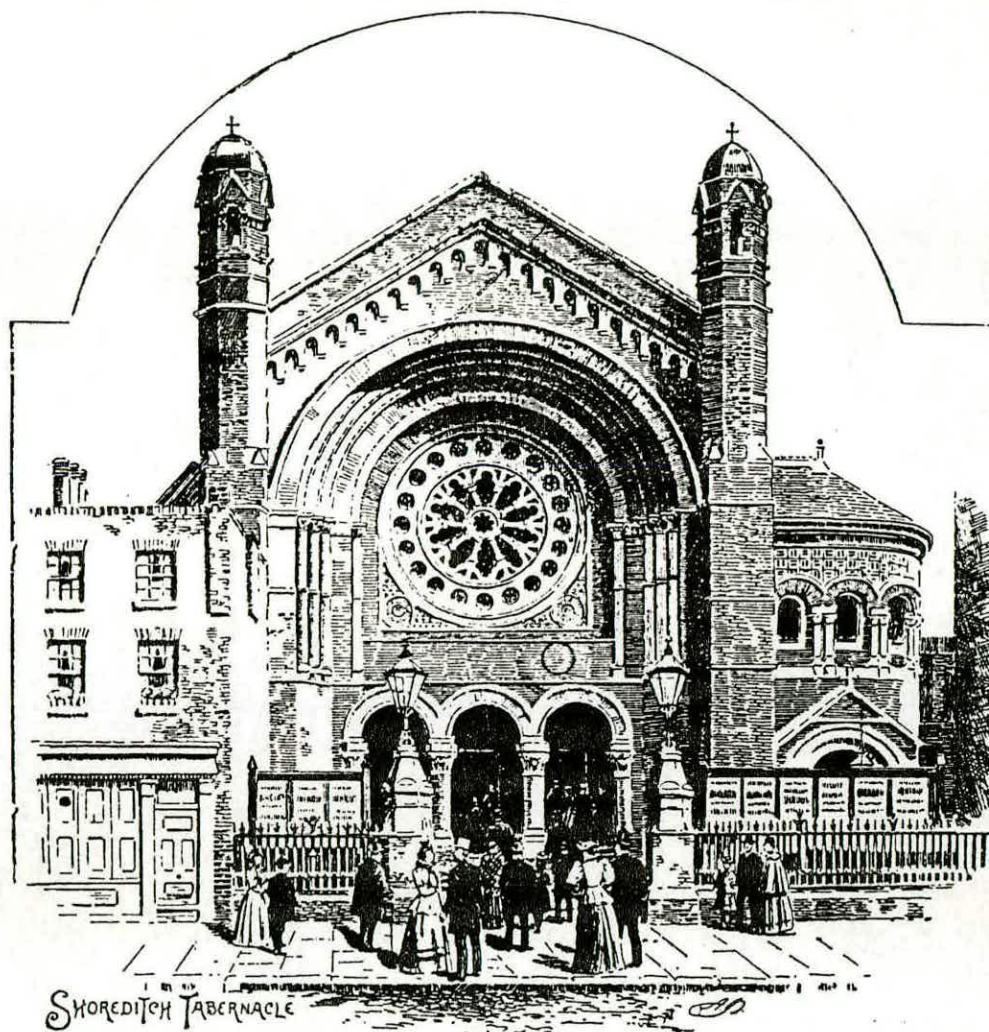


Fig. 9 A view of Shoreditch Tabernacle Church taken from Henry Walker's 1896 work *East London: Sketches of Christian Work and Workers.*





Fig. 10 Photograph of the Tabernacle Hall taken some time around the Second World War. The photo appeared in the 1945 leaflet *Shoreditch Tabernacle*.





Fig. 11 Photograph taken c. 1945 showing a class of children in an unnamed room, clearly in need of repair.



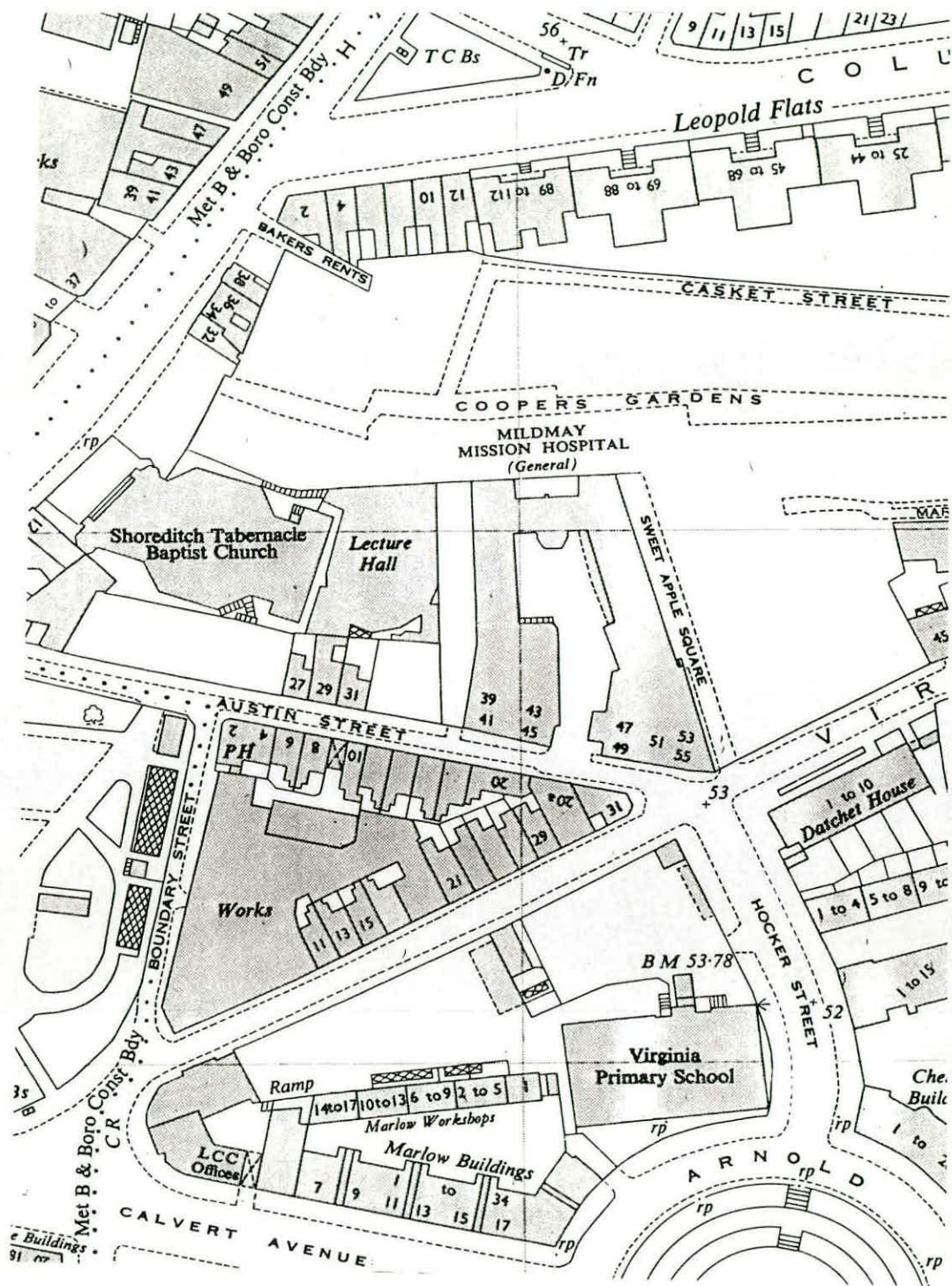


Fig. 12 Detail of 1960 Ordnance Survey map. Most of the buildings to the north and south of the Hall have been demolished.



Fig. 13 The present Tabernacle Church, designed by Goddard and Phillips, opened on 14 December 1963.



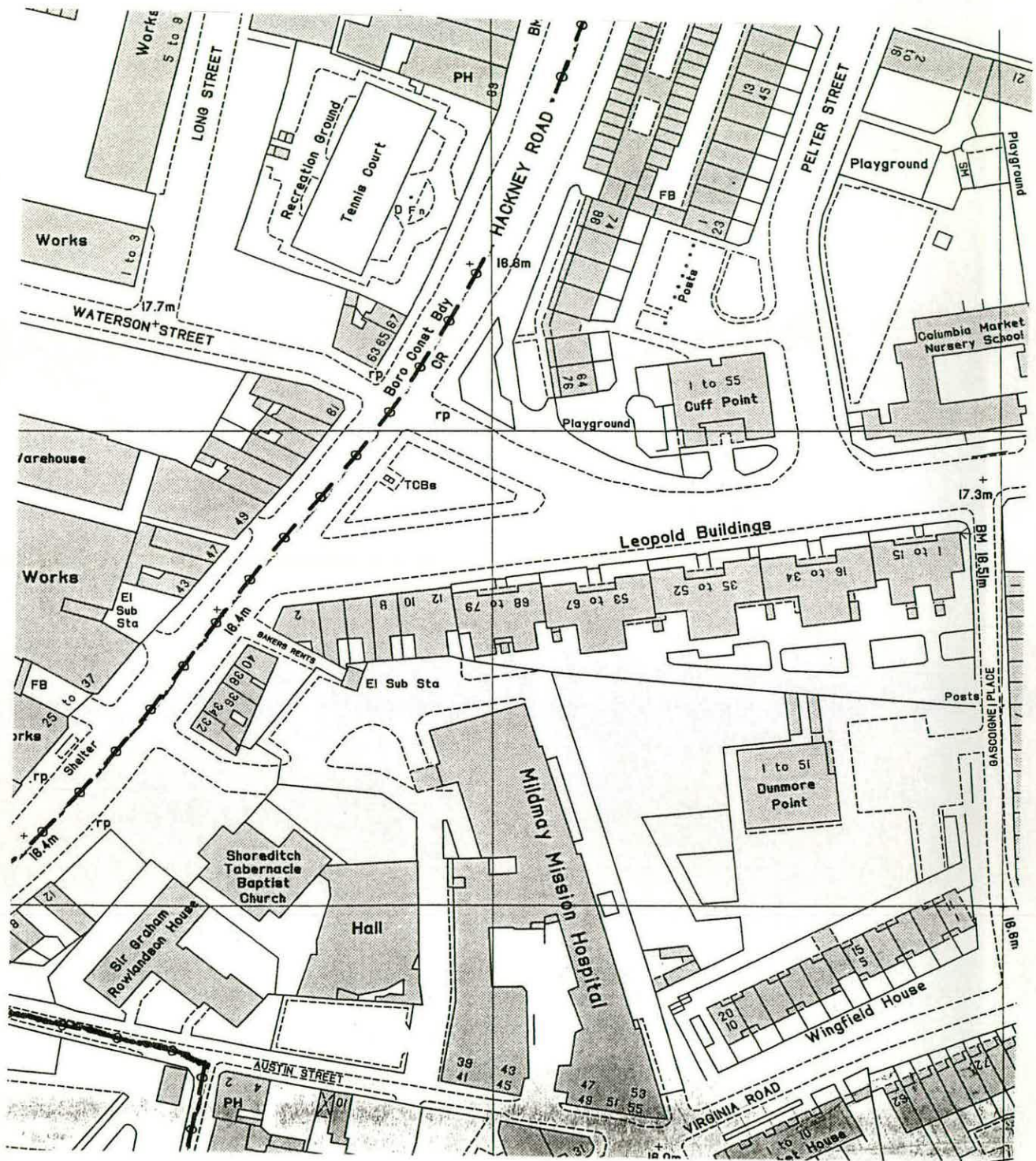


Fig. 14 Detail of a modern Ordnance Survey map, showing the Hall no longer hemmed in by other buildings.



Fig. 15 The Hall seen from the space at the west, formerly occupied by a classroom block.





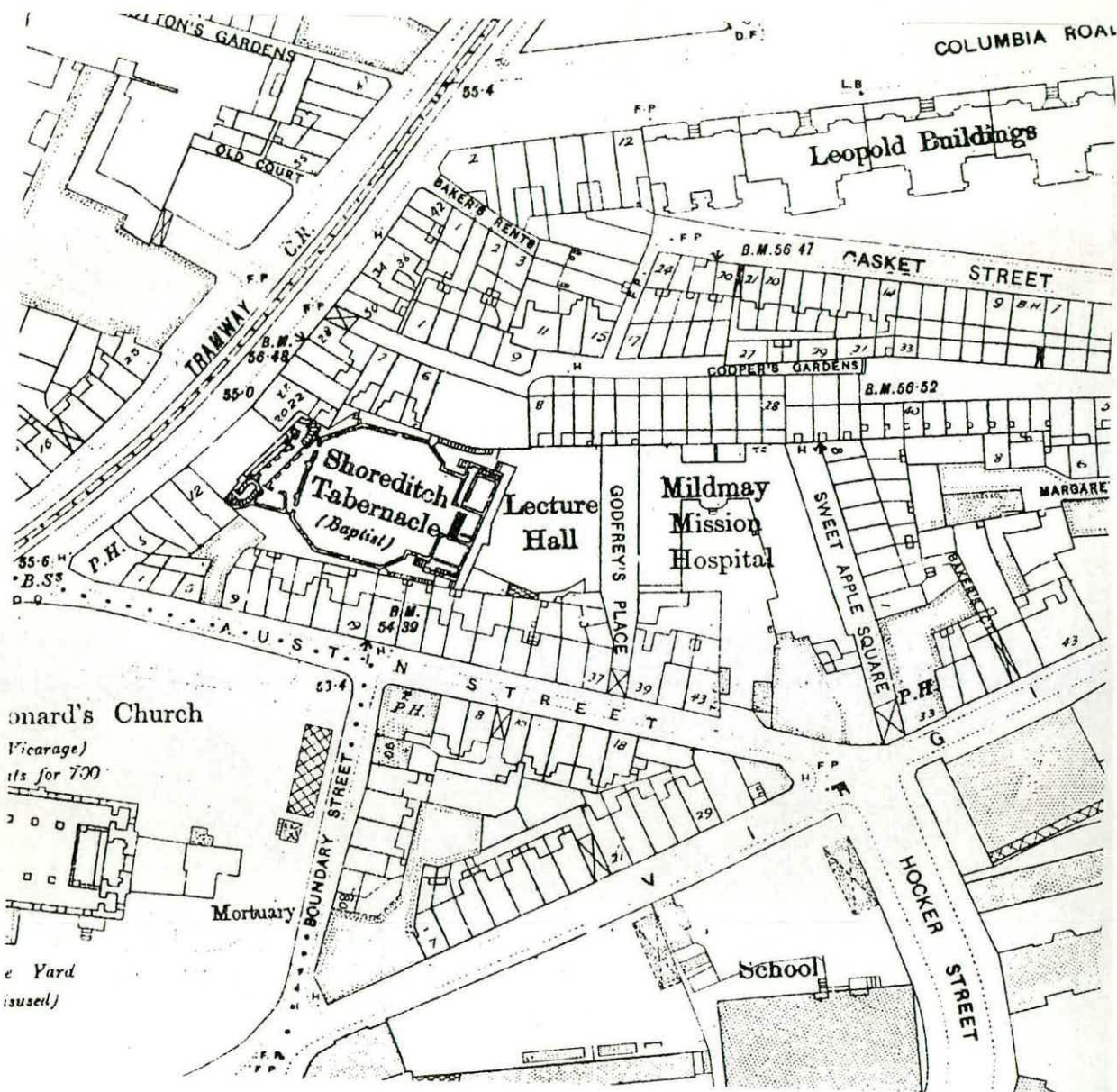


Fig. 16 Detail of the Ordnance Survey map of c. 1938, an LCC revision of the 1907 edition.





Fig. 17 The Hall viewed from the car park to the north. The rendering is modern, the Hall having formerly adjoined a terrace of houses.





Fig.18 A photograph taken in 1944 of 9-23 Austin Street. The picture gives a clear idea of the area at this time. [EH Photo Collection]





Fig. 19 Photograph of the Hall taken from the 'yard' to the south. This facade abutted a terrace of houses.





Fig. 20 View of the Hall from the south-east. The passage on the right was formerly called Godfrey's Place.





Fig. 21 Detail of the east facade of the Hall, showing the relaid memorial stones and the Serliana window which lit the lecture room and classroom above.





Fig. 22 General view of the interior of the Hall, looking south. The more ornate elements include the cast iron columns and the railings.





Fig. 23 Detail of the iron railings which separate the gallery from the main space.





Fig. 24 One of the surviving windows in the floor of the gallery. They were intended to help illuminate the classrooms at lower level.





Fig. 25 View of the Hall, c. 1945, showing the lettering which adorned the frieze beneath the gallery.





Fig. 26 The east side of the interior of the Hall showing the modern partitioning, which probably dates from the 1960s.





Fig. 27 Photograph showing the interior of the storeroom formed on the west of the ground floor of the Hall.





Fig. 28 An original, movable partition which survives to the south-west of the Hall.



Fig. 29 Some original revolving shutters, revealed for the first time in over thirty years.





Fig. 30 A photograph of c. 1945, showing some of the revolving shutters in a rolled down position.



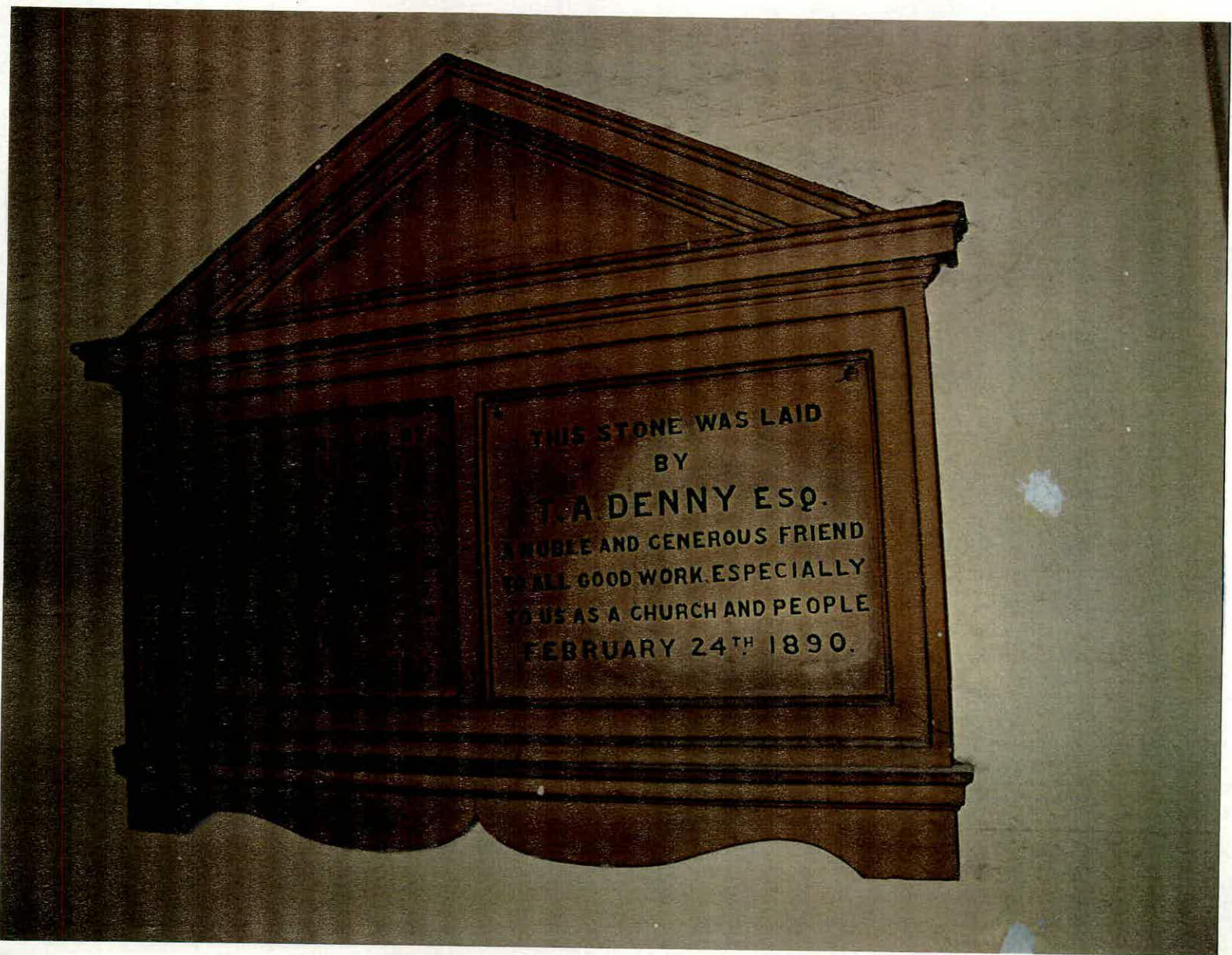


Fig. 31 Memorial stone which survives on the north wall of the main space, to the left of the stage.



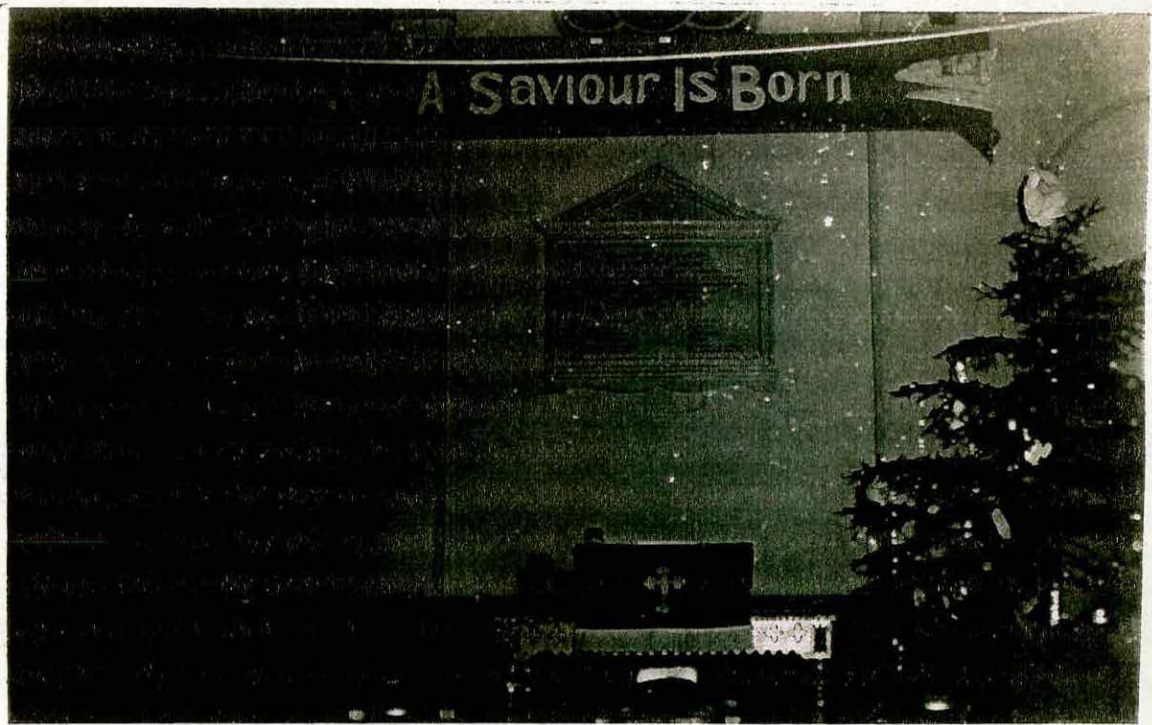


Fig. 32 Photograph taken c. 1945 showing the foundation stone in its original position on the north wall, to the rear of the stage.



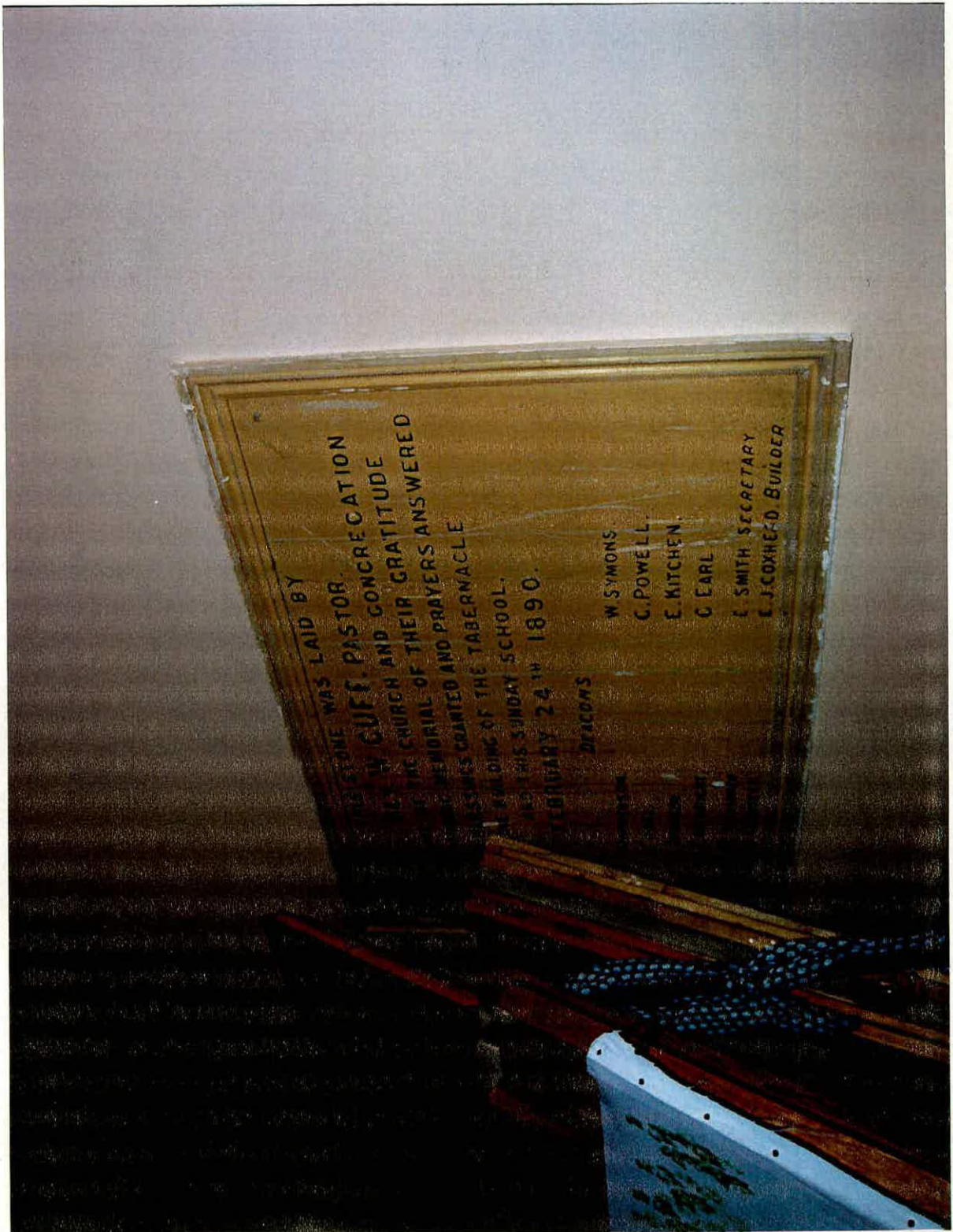


Fig. 33 The foundation stone in its present form and position, on the internal south-west wall of the Hall.





Fig. 34 A view across the south end of the gallery showing the clerestory, which remains largely original.





Fig. 35 View across the gallery, from east to west. The former positions of the curtains can be clearly made out on the ceiling.





Fig. 36 A view looking upwards towards the gallery, showing one of the original skylights in the flat roof.





Fig. 37 A photograph taken from the gallery looking north, showing the modern partitioning to both sides.





Fig. 38 Interior of one of the partitioned rooms on the east side of the gallery, probably created in the 1960s. Original partitions seem to have been adapted as walls.





Fig. 39 The complex roof of the Hall, constructed in timber and iron. The roof was bombed during the Second World War, but is largely original.





Fig. 40 Lecture room on the north of the building. Note the original wooden flooring blocks.





Fig. 41 An original staircase at the south-east of the Hall.



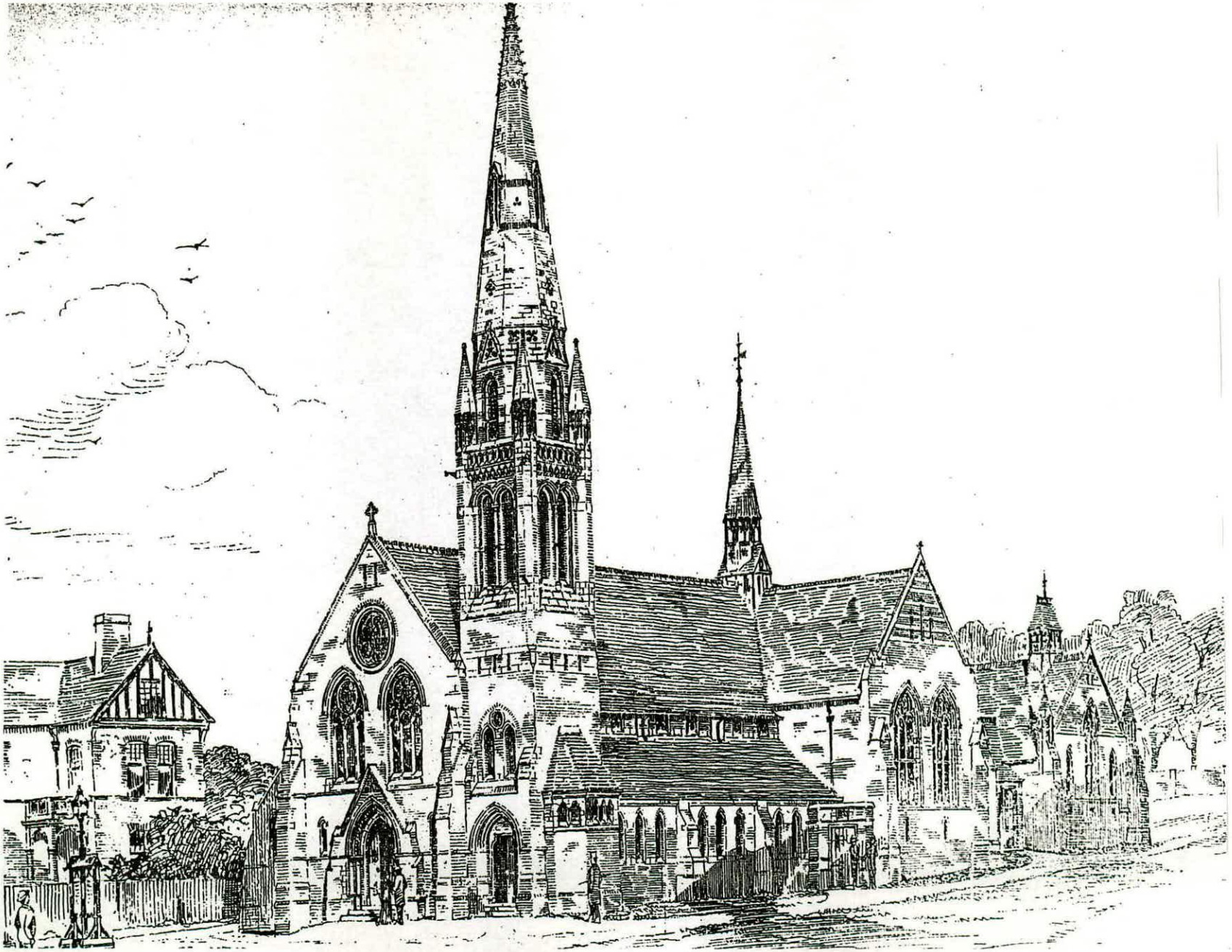


Fig. 42 Design for Trinity Church and Hall, Mansel Road, Wimbledon, built 1885-91 to designs by Potts, Sulman and Hennings. The hall is to the rear of the church, and echoes its style.



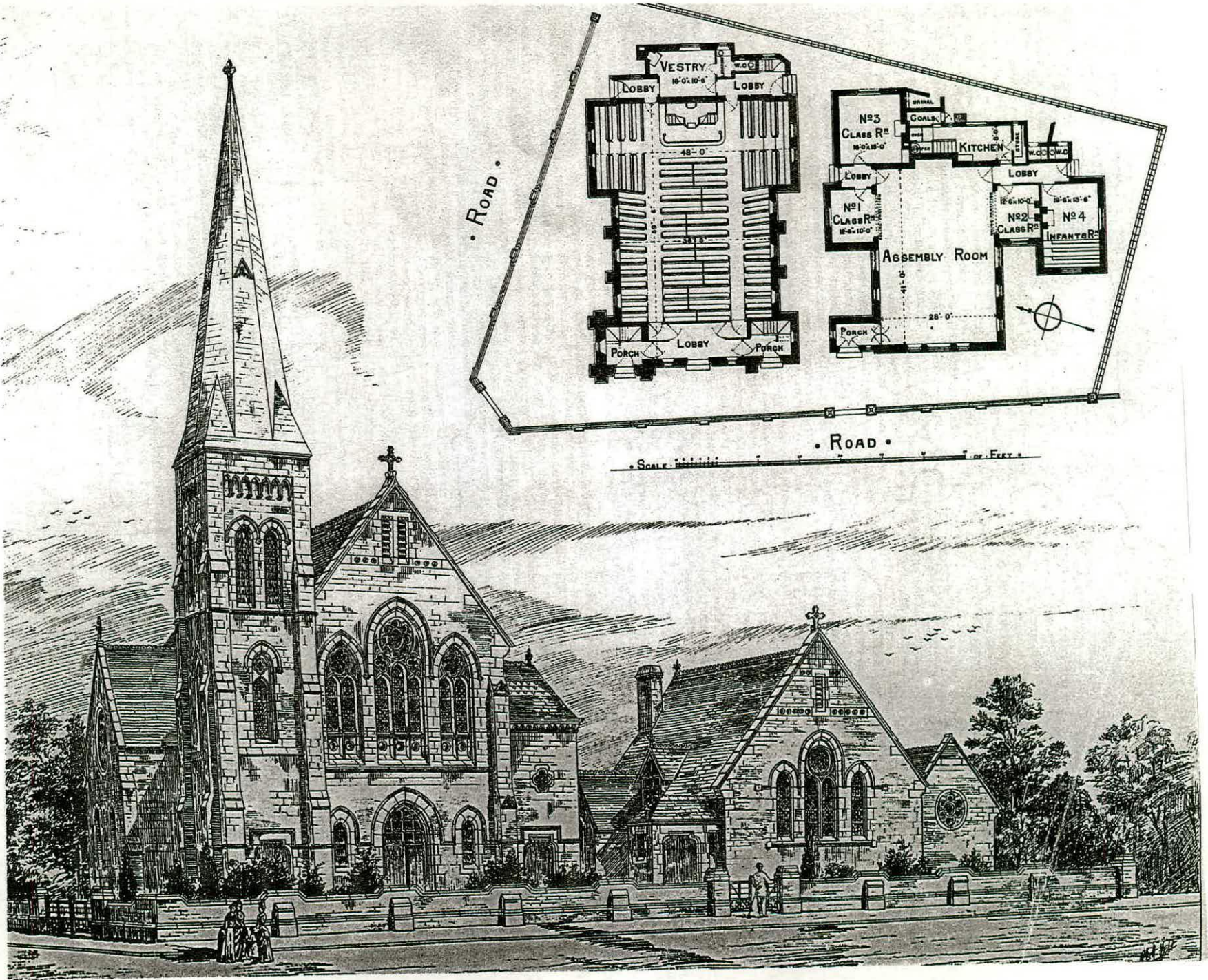
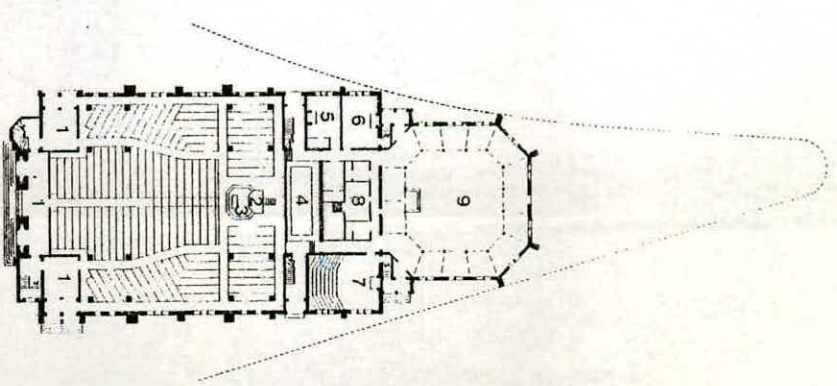
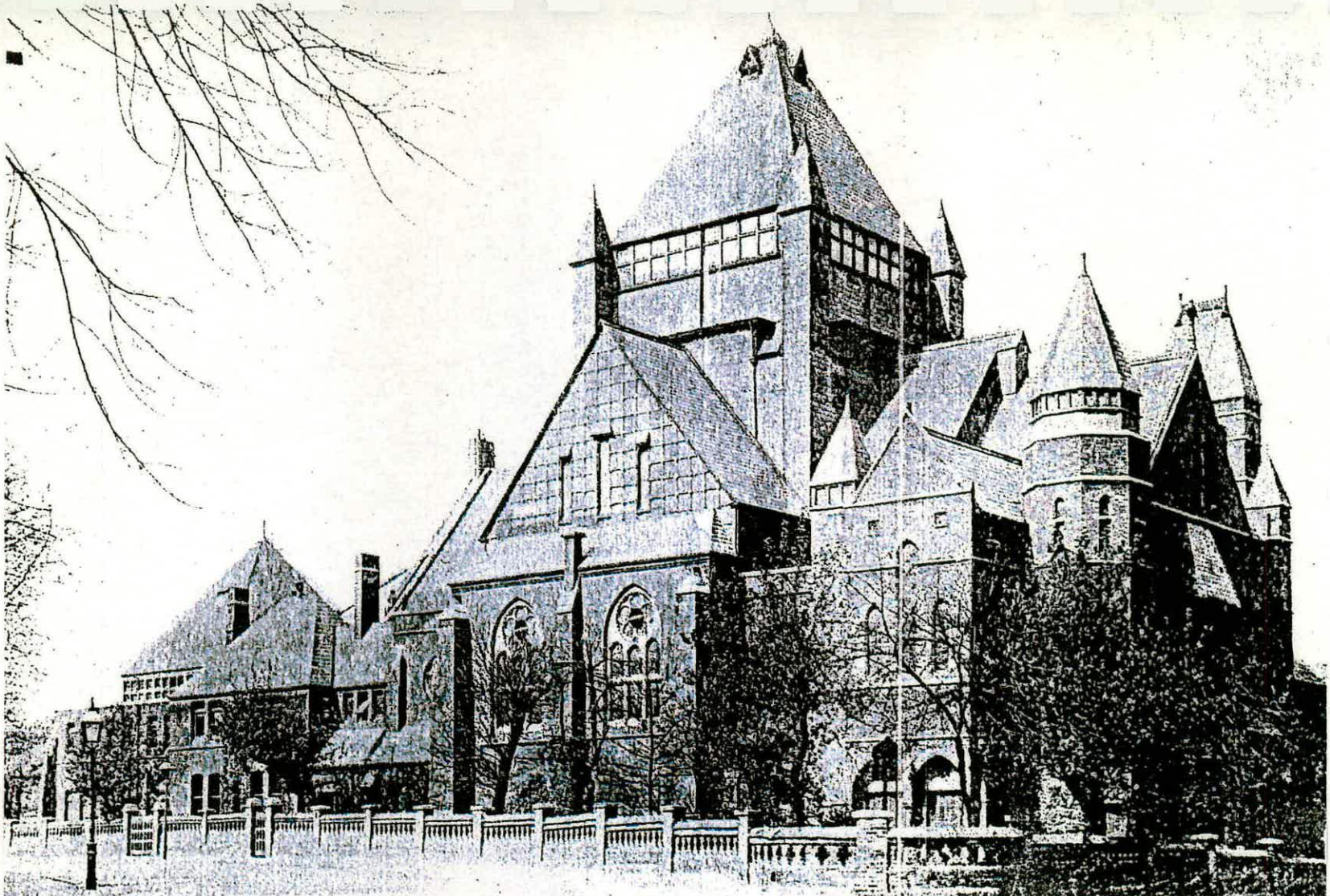


Fig. 43 John Willis's design for the Wesleyan Chapel and Schools at West Kirby, near Birkenhead. The drawing appeared in *The Builder* in December 1890.





- 1 Vestibule
- 2 Pulpit
- 3 Platform and communion table
- 4 Organ
- 5 Minister's vestry
- 6 Deacons' vestry
- 7 Infants' room
- 8 Scullery, etc
- 9 School



Fig. 44 Plan and photograph of John Sulman's Highbury Quadrant Congregational Church and Schools, built 1881-2.





Fig. 45 Photograph taken in 1978 of Mitcham Lane Baptist Church, Wandsworth, built in 1902 to designs by George Baines.





Fig. 46 Late 1970s photograph of Baines's United Reformed Church, Muswell Hill Broadway, Haringey, built in 1902 and now a pub.





Fig. 47 Photograph taken in 1951 of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Wesleyan Mission Church, 162a Hackney Road.  
The church has been converted to flats.



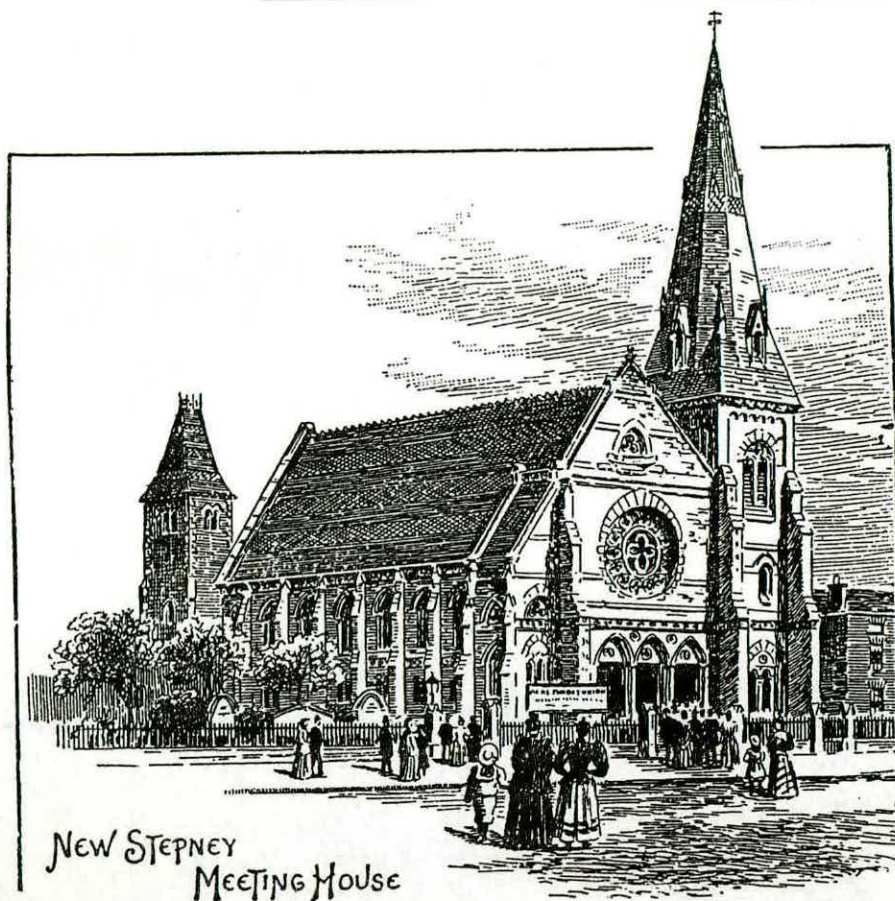


Fig. 48 Drawing of the New Stepney Meeting House, built 1863, as it appeared in 1896 in Henry Walker's *East London: Sketches of Christian Work and Workers*.