

FORMER CHURCH OF ENGLAND CHAPEL,  
PARK LANE CEMETERY,  
KIDDERMINSTER –  
HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

WSM 68379



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# Former Church of England Chapel, Park Lane Cemetery, Kidderminster - historic building recording

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## 1 Summary

*A Level 2 historic building record of the 1877-8 Cemetery Chapel at the Park Lane Cemetery Kidderminster was undertaken by Mike Napthan Archaeology in November 2016. The chapel is an essentially unaltered brick and stone edifice with a spire at the south-western corner. The chapel is approached through a three bay ambulatory which provided shelter to the mourners. At the end of the ambulatory a doorway provides access to the vestry which is in the base of the tower. The main doors of the chapel are at the west end and are matched double doors on both northern and southern elevations. The chapel was built to serve the new Church of England Cemetery which was built to the north-west of an existing Non-Conformist Cemetery which has its own chapel closer to the Park Lane/Castle Street junction.*

*The building is comparatively simple with rectangular nave and apsidal chancel, lit by plain stained glass windows and stone carving limited to the chancel arch bases and consoles. The floors are red and black quarry tiles, except under the former pews which were on boarding. The pews had been largely removed prior to recording, but the remaining examples are of simple pitch-pine form. Two readers desks and the altar table remain in the building, and one of the reader's desks is a particularly fine carved oak example, broadly contemporary with the building. The building has a relatively simple roof structure that is notable for its turned and faceted tiebeams and kingposts. The building is well documented as the original architects drawings survive and local newspaper records indicate that it was built by Mr H Smith of Kidderminster on earthworks prepared by G Law of Kidderminster and designed by Mr Meredith. The foundation stone was laid on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1877 and the consecration ceremony on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1878. The formally carved initials "T" and "J S" are present in the haunches of the spire and these presumably reflect the stone-masons.*

*There is little evidence of previous changes to the building other than installation of electric lighting and new heating arrangements. There is evidence of a former coal-fired stove in the vestry. The belfry shows no sign of having ever been fitted with a bell, though provision was made for one in the design of the spire and a bell would usually be expected.*

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 A rapid historic building survey was undertaken by Mike Napthan Archaeology at the former C of E chapel, Kidderminster Cemetery, Park Lane, Kidderminster, DY11 6TB NGR (SO

82720 76105). The project is based upon the standard brief supplied by Historic Environment Advisor of WAAS (Planning refs Wyre Forest 15/7069 and 16/0457) The project has been commissioned by Mr Neil Hollingworth of Dean-Walker Hollingworth Associates Ltd. on behalf of the landowner Colin Henshall (the Client). The project design was prepared in accordance with the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994) and English Heritage's Understanding historic buildings – a guide to good recording practice (2006).

- 2.2 Pevsner described the building as follows: *The Chapel in the larger undulating section, W, by J.T.Meredith, 1876-8 is Geometrical Decorated, brick with stone dressings; apsed chancel, S tower with octagonal bell-stage and spire, three-bay cloister s of the nave. Contemporary LODGE to Park Lane, SE.* The Chapel is not Nationally Listed but is included on the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record WSM12870 and is thus classified as an undesignated heritage asset. The building (other than the tip of the spire) is not easily visible from outside the cemetery, and is not intervisible with the Grade II Listed Non-Conformist Chapel to the east due to topography and tree cover.
- 2.3 The property is currently vacant, and Planning Permission has been granted to convert the chapel to residential use.

### 3 Aims

- 3.1 The aims of the building recording were to gather, record and analyse information relating to the standing structure. The project aimed to identify the full extent of the historic building fabric and determine the principal stages of development of the present building. Architectural features of intrinsic interest and those which relate to the construction and subsequent uses of the building were individually noted and recorded. The purpose of this is to inform the formulation of a strategy for the conservation, alteration, demolition, repair or management of a building.

### 4 Methodology

- 4.1 The principal features of the building were photographically recorded. A walk through survey was undertaken and features of note recorded. The building was empty at the time of survey, with some loose pews remaining. A full set of plans has been prepared by the architect, and these may be compared with the original design drawings (Figs 2 and 3)
- 4.2 The photographic archive for the building assessment is presented on a DVDROM enclosed with hard copies of the report.
- 4.3 A documentary search was undertaken to determine the building contractor and precise dates of construction, the name of the architect being already known.

### 5 Historical and Cartographic background

- 5.1 The Church of England Cemetery at Park Lane Kidderminster was planned in the early 1870s by the Burial Board in response to the increasing population of the town and pressure on existing church graveyards. The sloping site chosen was immediately adjoining the existing non-Conformist graveyard established in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The topography of the site made it unsuitable for housing development, and substantial landscaping was required to make the cemetery accessible. Heavy storms during the landscaping resulted in extensive damage and some redesign was necessary; repairs and alterations to paths and shrubbery in the Old and New Cemeteries were estimated at £322 in August 1877 (Worcester Journal Aug

25<sup>th</sup> 1877). As the existing chapel was non-Conformist a funerary chapel was required for the Church of England portion of the enlarged cemetery. The Burial Board appointed local architect J T Meredith to design the new building and the cemetery layout (also later the lodges and greenhouses). “*The ceremony of laying the memorial stone of the chapel of the Kidderminster Public Cemetery was performed on Wednesday after-noon, by Mrs. G. D. Boyle.* (6<sup>th</sup> January 1877 - Worcester Journal). Plans and elevations survive of the original design (Fig 3), which was followed closely in construction. Due to the steeply sloping site it was necessary to create a level earthwork platform on which to construct the building. This work was undertaken by G Law of Kidderminster. It was presumably Law who constructed the foundations, which are likely to be substantial given the underlying geology. The building was constructed by H Smith a well established Kidderminster concern. Despite some concerns about the quality of the work (Worcester Journal October 6<sup>th</sup> 1877) the building was completed in the spring of the following year. Following consecration of the New Cemetery on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1878 the chapel was used for funerals for over 125 years prior to becoming redundant due to lack of space for further burials in the cemetery.

## 7 Building Description

- 7.1 The chapel is aligned broadly east to west, with a tower and spire at the south-east corner (Fig 2). The building has a rectangular nave and apsidal chancel. To the south there is externally an ambulatory with pent roof, and the main entrance lies on the southern side of the building at the western end of the ambulatory. The main entrance is mirrored on the northern side of the building with matching double doors clad with decorative ironwork. At the eastern end of the ambulatory there is a single door leading to the vestry which is located in the base of the tower. The building is lit from all sides by simple quarried and plain stained glass windows set in pointed arched openings. The interior finish is painted plaster over brick with freestone detailing to the windows and door surrounds. The roof structure is open to the underside of the diagonally run sarking boards. The trusses are of an evolved turned king-post design in Baltic Pine with slender bolted king-post and turned and faceted tie-beam. The turning of the principal timbers is unusual and possibly reflects prototypes in cast iron.
- 7.2 The chapel consists of four plan elements: the rectangular nave, an apsidal chancel at the east end, a vestry in the base of the tower (to the south east) and an ambulatory/cloister to the south. The nave is of conventional form, of three bays and relatively wide for its length. There were formerly two blocks of fixed pews in the nave, now removed revealing a wooden sub floor. A further line of fixed pews remains along the back wall, and there are loose pew elements in the building. The pews are of conventional form, of pitch pine and with raking matchboarded backs and prayer book shelves to the rear.
- 7.3 The apsidal eastern end is raised by a single step and the apse is essentially a three-sided bay with flanking walls. A pointed chancel arch (supported by carved consoles) separates the apse from the nave. The consoles are deeply but simply carved with simplified foliage designs. Interior finishes through-out are plain painted plaster with stone detailing to the window and doorway reveals.
- 7.4 The vestry is a square room occupying the base of the tower – it has a timber boarded floor (pitch pine) and replaced deep softwood skirtings. A concrete slab in the north-west corner of the room appears to be related to a former flue opening at high level in the northern wall, and these undoubtedly reflect the former presence of a coke burning heater. A fitted cupboard remains in the room. The centre of the room is occupied by a fixed metal ladder leading up to the ringing chamber above. The ringing chamber shows no signs of use for ringing, and is not painted or plastered internally. The only furniture present is two plain softwood coffin trestles, probably contemporary with the building. Access to the bell chamber in the base of the spire is via a loose wooden ladder, which rests on the trapdoor of the bell chamber floor. The interior of the spire is conventional, with a timber core / bell base frame and large sound

vents. The bridging stones that form the diagonal base to the haunches of the spire have neatly carved lettering – “T” on one and “J S” on the other. Given the neatness of the carving and very inaccessible position of these inscriptions these are likely to be initials of the masons responsible for the stonework.

- 7.5 The ambulatory has an arcade of squat stone columns to the south and is covered by a tiled pent roof of oversized softwood half-trusses. The floor is of black and red 4” quarries. The grilles within the arcade are a late 20<sup>th</sup> Century addition and there is no indication of any earlier infill or fencing.
- 7.6 Externally the building is heavily buttressed which gives it an appearance of great solidity despite the relatively slender walls. The landscaped platform drops away rapidly to the south and east, and a set of stone steps (disused and dilapidated) is provided to the east of the apse. The ground drops dramatically to the east, and this approach can never have been much used. A service road, with turning area, lies immediately to the west of the church, with a parking bay to the south.

## 8 Interpretation and conclusions

- 8.1 The chapel stands today almost exactly as it was built, with only minor alterations (such as the metal security grilles and gates to the ambulatory). The building is fairly basic for its period and has little by way of ornate decoration. Since the building was dedicated to funerary services only it was probably felt appropriate to avoid all un-necessary ornamentation that might distract the mourners from thoughts of mortality. There are few signs of comfort in the building, with no provision for heating the congregation, but funeral services were traditionally fairly short. The officiant clergyman was provided with some comfort in the heated vestry but the remainder of the building relied on ambient heating.
- 8.2 The chapel is very typical of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century cemetery facilities. In 1843, as a result of increasing urbanization and resultant disease epidemics filling churchyards, J. C. Loudon drew up an influential plan on the layout of cemeteries *entitled On the Laying Out, Planting and Managing of Cemeteries*. In 1847 the Cemeteries Clause Act provided guidelines for the establishment and running of commercial cemeteries. After a second cholera epidemic the, the first Public Health Act, (August 1848), received the Royal Assent. This Act laid the foundations for all subsequent public health measures and was the beginning of the legislative process that would establish public cemeteries throughout Britain. The Act created a General Board of Health with powers to appoint officials and inspectors and create local boards of health (London was exempt from this coming instead under the Metropolitan Commission of Sewers). The general public health functions that the boards were responsible for included powers relating to the burial of the dead. Starting with the Metropolitan Burial Act in 1852, a series of Acts, which became known as the Burial Acts, were passed. Consolidated in 1857, they established a national system of public cemeteries. Parish vestries appointed Burial Boards to be responsible for providing for the interment of the dead of the parish and they would often do so by building a cemetery and charging the expenses to the Poor Rate. The Burial Board was responsible for the management of the cemetery, for fixing fees and charges and the sale of grave plots. These cemeteries would have grounds consecrated for Anglican use and grounds unconsecrated for the use of Nonconformists. In the Burial Act of 1854 town councils were enabled to form Burial Boards using the Borough Rate to establish cemeteries deemed to be for the parishes within the Borough. In this case it was the Kidderminster Burial Board that led the project to create a municipal cemetery albeit the Board was effectively under the control of the local churches. At this period burial was compulsory – however in 1874 The Cremation Society of England was founded (to much opposition from the general public). The first legal cremation occurred in 1885 at Woking Crematorium. Due to this legislative background the vast majority of urban cemetery chapels were built between 1855

and 1880, and significant numbers survive. Many are now disused due to changed funereal practices and the fact that the Victorian planned cemeteries are almost all full except where there has been space for them to expand.

- 8.3 Re-use of cemetery chapels is limited by the fact that they generally are surrounded by burials without room for extension and there is a cultural diffidence towards living or working within close proximity to the dead. In the present case the siting of the chapel is rather fortunate and the building has the potential to make a good sized urban dwelling with a fine outlook. The proposed development scheme is respectful to the original fabric of the building and will result in minimal loss of the principal structural elements. Externally the changes will be barely noticeable, and conversion, in this instance, offers the only long term future for the building. The proposals will have no impact on the setting of the Grade II Listed Non-Conformist Chapel to the east and will retain the character of the cemetery as a whole.

## 9 **Acknowledgements**

The project was completed with the assistance of the following; the Client Mr Colin Henshaw and Neil Hollingsworth of Dean-Walker Hollingsworth Architects

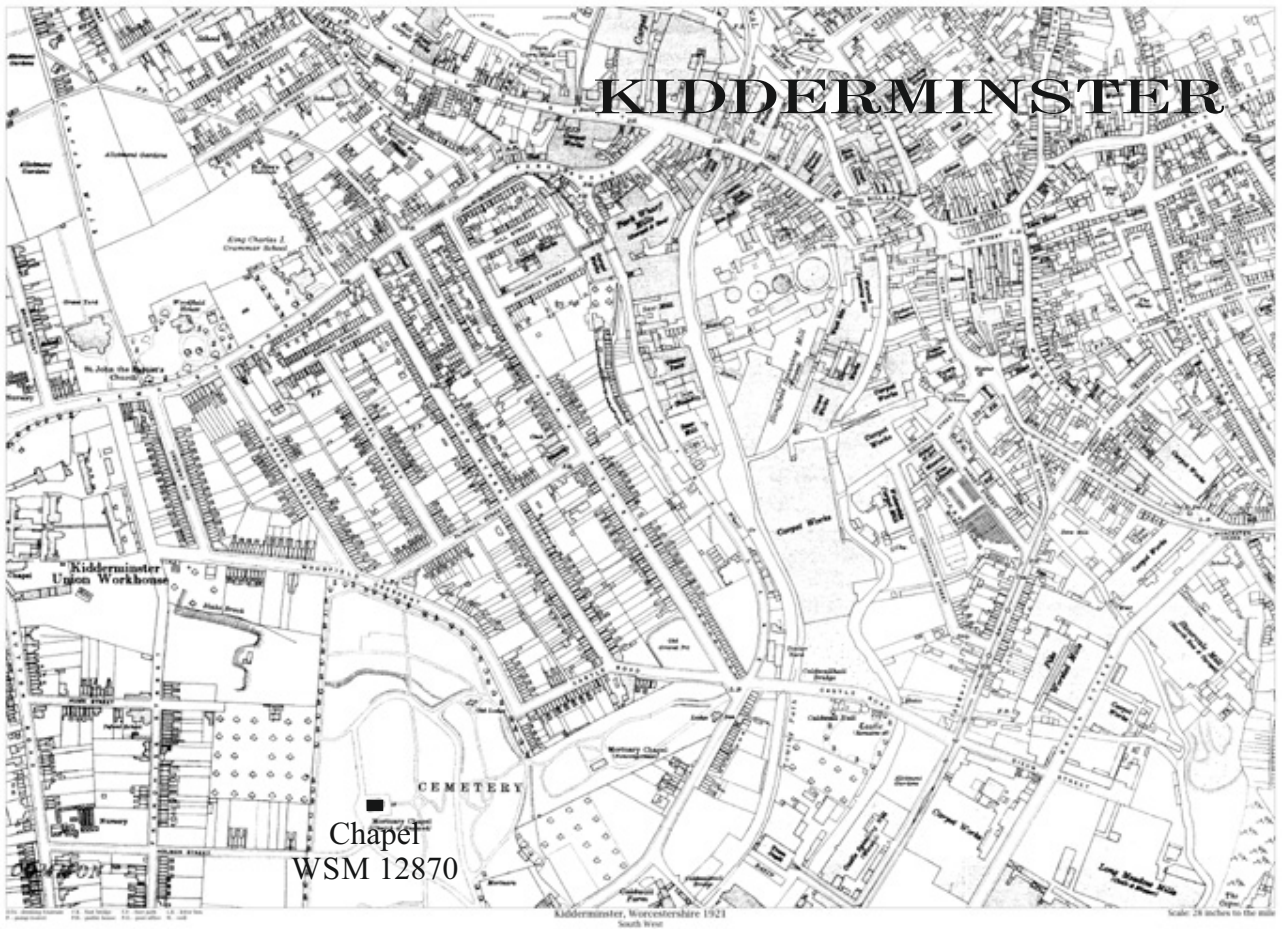


Figure 1: Chapel location

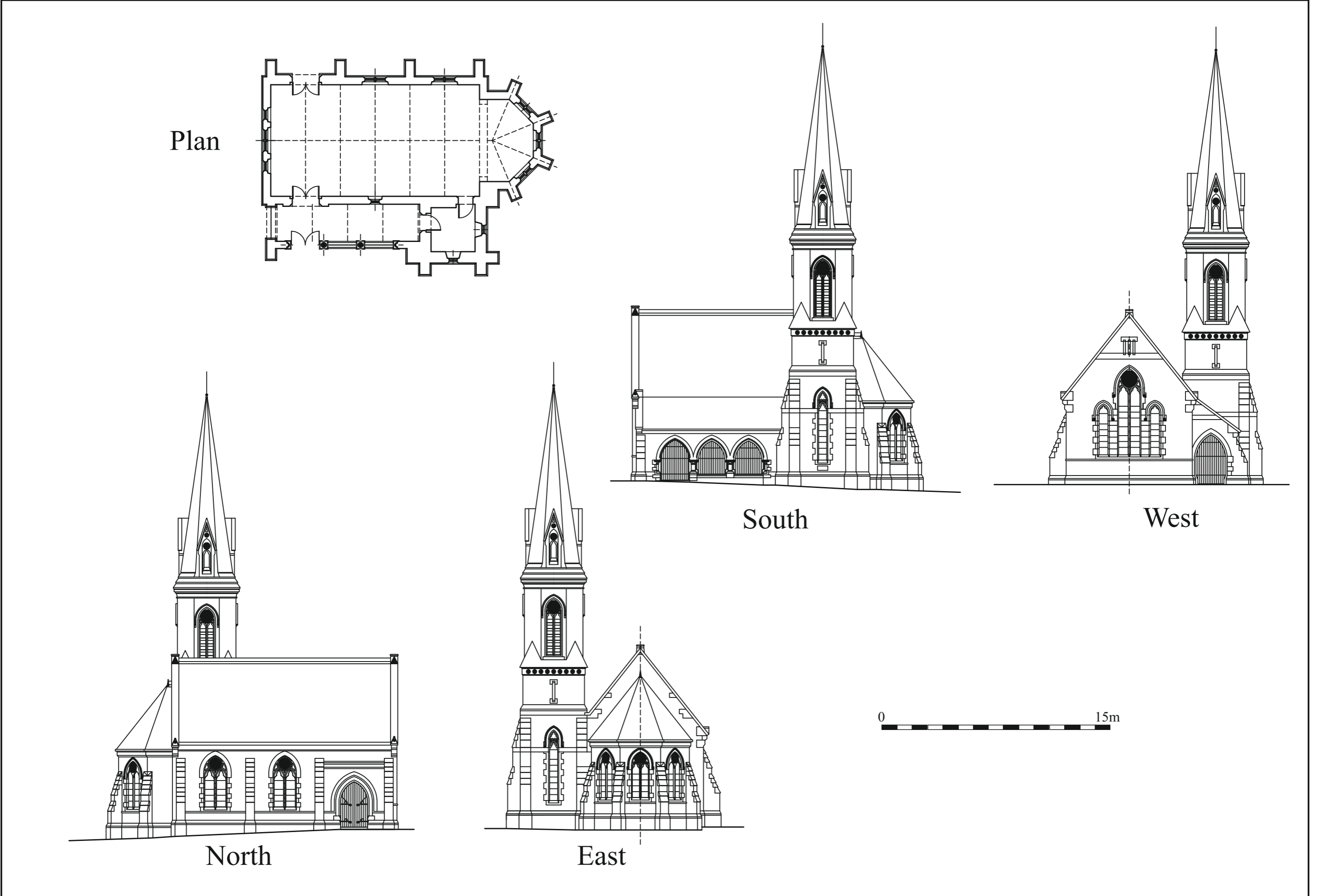


Figure 2: Chapel elevations and plan (courtesy of Dean-Walker Hollingworth Architects)



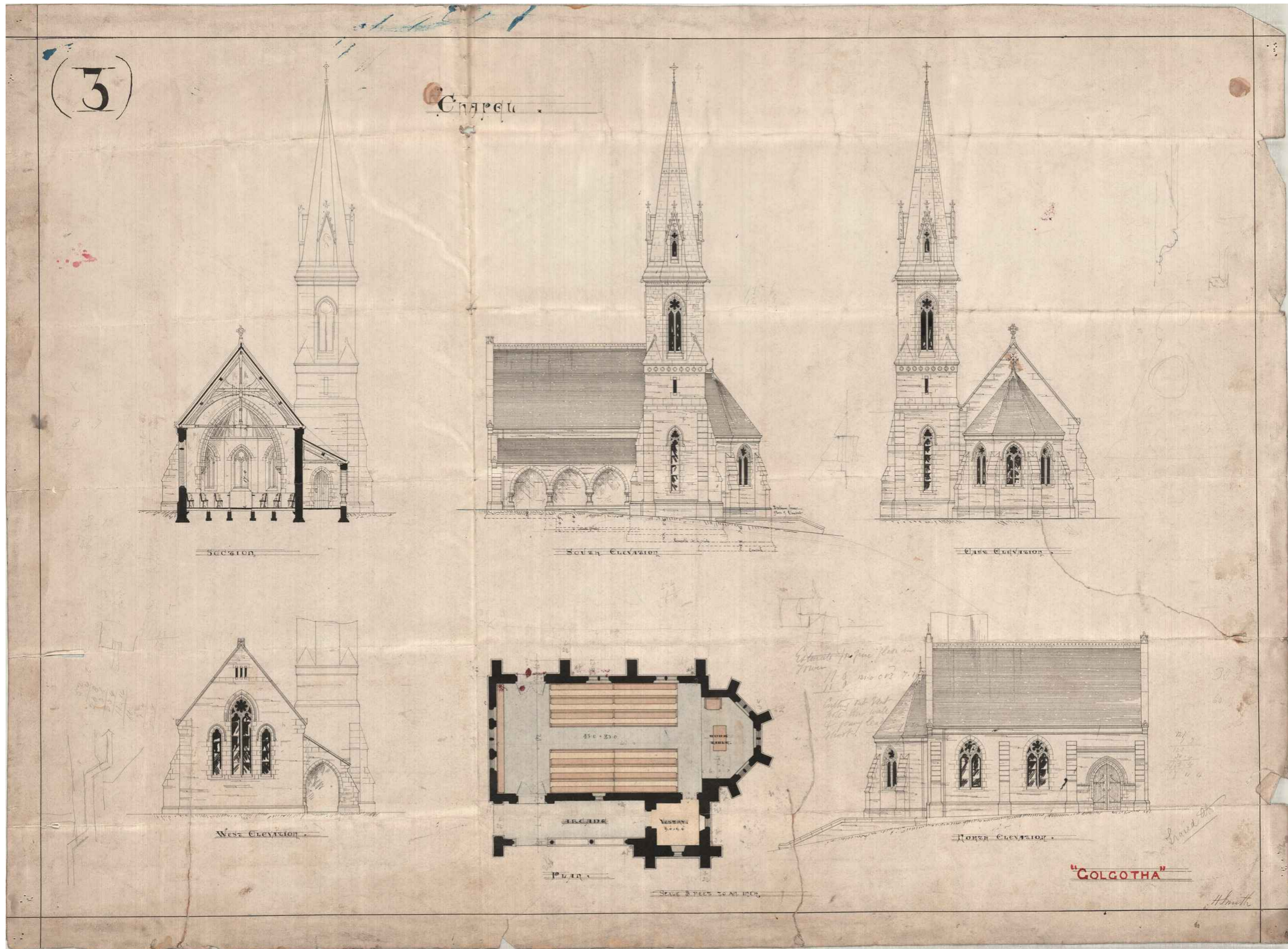


Figure 3: Original elevations and plan (courtesy of GAJ Architects (Stourport) via Dean-Walker Hollingworth Architects)



Figure 4: Chapel exterior views

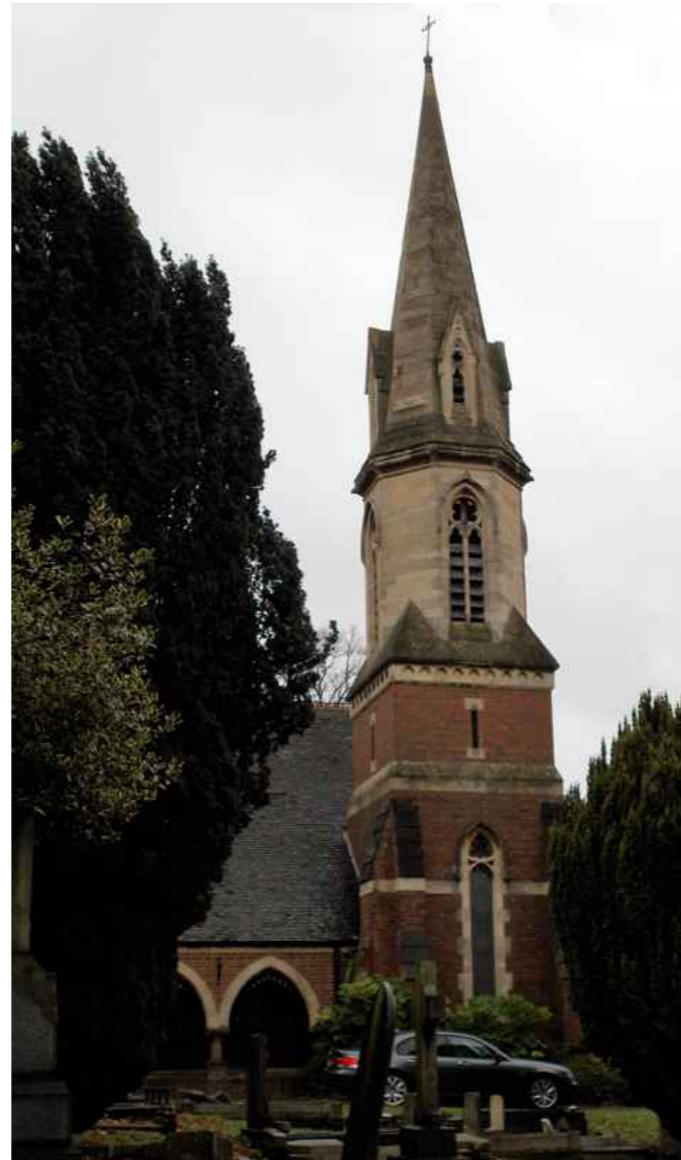


Figure 5: Chapel exterior views



Figure 6: Chapel interior details



Inscribed "JS" in haunch of spire



Views up spire interior



Inscribed "T" in haunch of spire



View of robing room from above

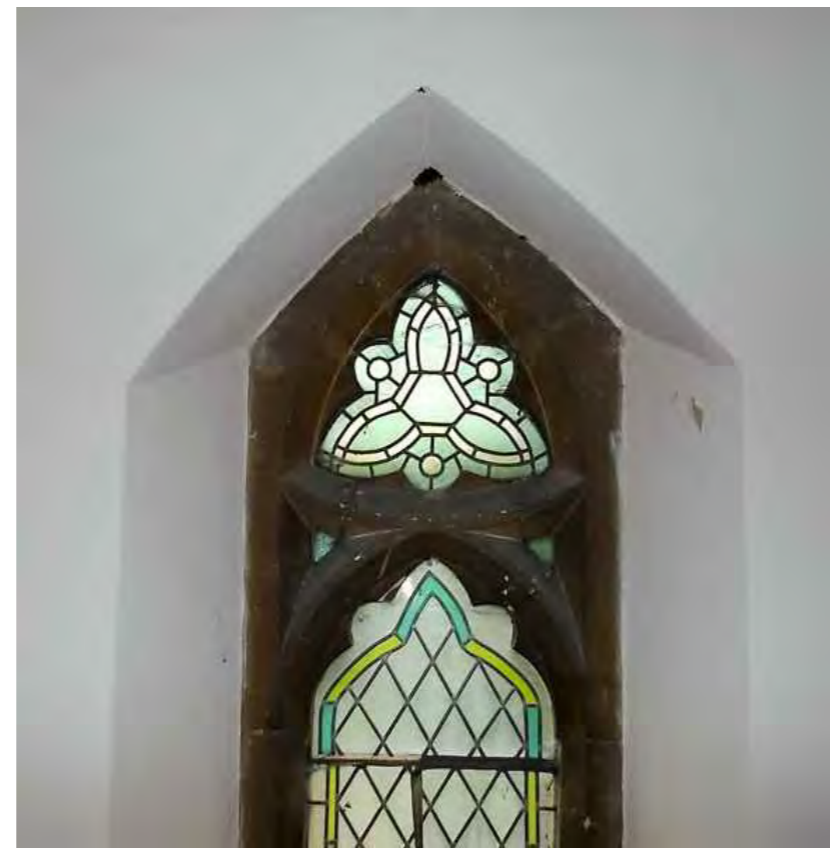


Tower chamber

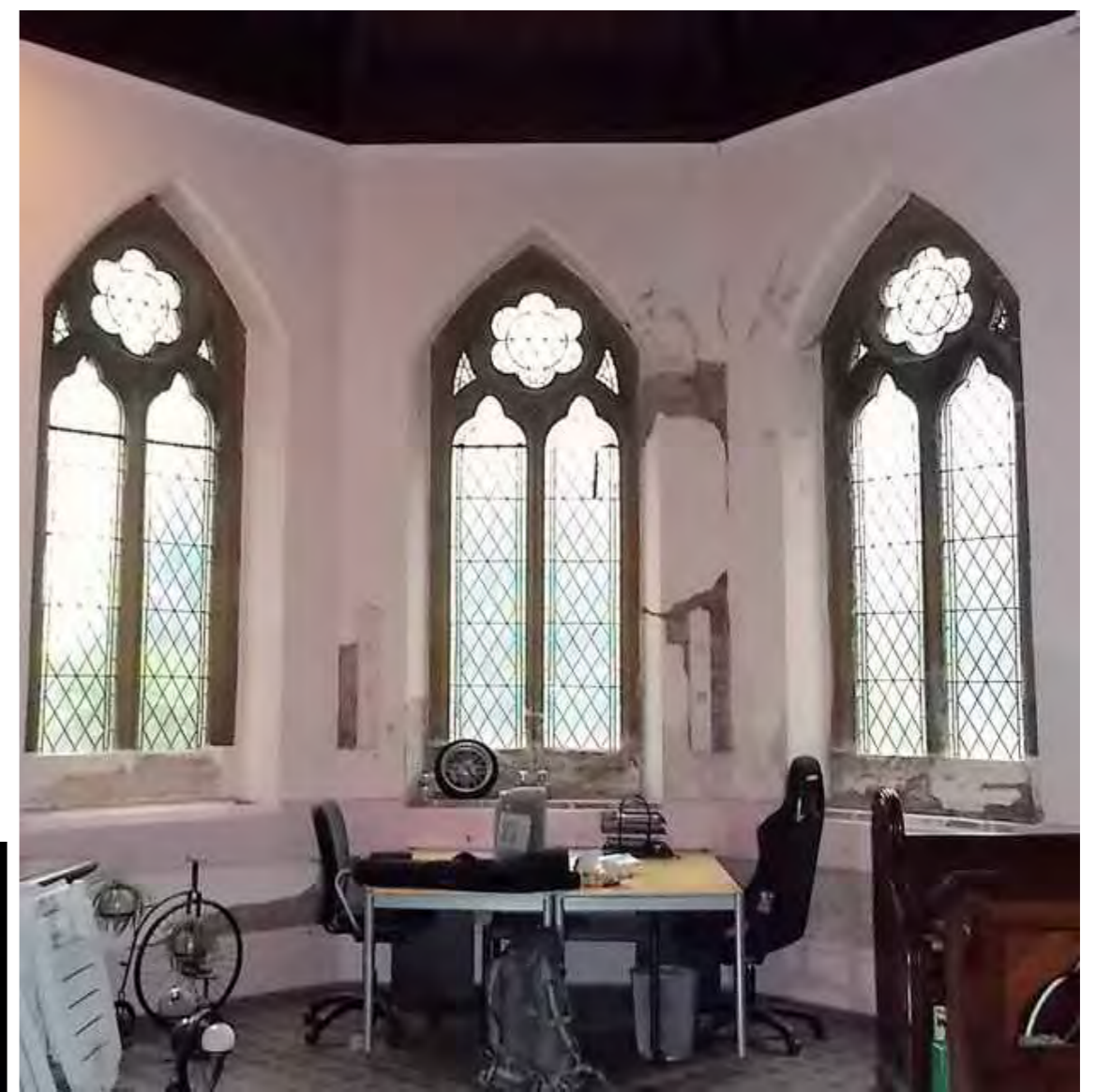
Figure 7: Chapel interior details



South window in ambulatory



East window in vestry



Apse



West end



Northern windows

Figure 8: Chapel window details



Altar table



Oak Reading desk



Reading desk detail of carving



Pitch Pine Reading Desk



Coffin trestles