

**Primitive Methodist Chapel,
Woolpit, Suffolk
WPT 038**

Historic Building Record

OASIS ID: Suffolkc1-145225



Leigh Alston MA (Oxon), Architectural Historian
on behalf of
Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service

**The Archaeological Service
(Field Projects Team)
Suffolk County Council, Shire Hall
Bury St Edmunds IP33 2AR
Tel. (01284) 352446**

February 2013

Primitive Methodist Chapel, Heath Road, Woolpit, Suffolk

(TL 977 622)

Historic Building Record

This report provides a record at English Heritage (2006) Level 2 of a disused chapel. It has been prepared to a specification by Sarah Poppy of Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service dated 20th February 2013, and is intended to fulfil a condition of planning permission for conversion (Mid Suffolk District Council application 2981/11).

Introduction

The report is accompanied by a CD containing a full photographic record in the form of 44 digital images of 21 megapixels (Appendix 1), but also includes 14 printed photographs of key features to illustrate the text. Each image is described in a separate schedule and wherever possible includes a scale rod with half-metre divisions in red and white. The site was inspected on 28th February 2013.

Summary

The disused Primitive Methodist chapel in Woolpit lies on Heath Road approximately 500 m south-east of the parish church. Although now at the heart of the village, immediately opposite the Health Centre and close to the school, its position was relatively isolated in the 19th century. The building is a simple rectangular red-brick structure of three bays in the Mock Gothic style, with a hipped slate roof, arched windows and gault-brick dressing. A plaque above the entrance door in its roadside gable bears the date 1861, and the site is depicted as the empty corner of a field on the tithe map of 1845 – although documentary evidence suggests an earlier Primitive Methodist chapel had existed on Woolpit Heath approximately 1.5 km to the south-east. A centenary history of the building published in 1961 refers to a purchase of land from Walter Lord, who was recorded as the tenant of the adjoining windmill in 1845. The interior consists of a single hall with a raised dais behind a turned balustrade of stained pine at its western end and a number of late-20th century anterooms which interrupt the original windows to the east. The dais is not contemporary with the fabric as its wainscot panelling conceals earlier blue painted plaster, and no original fixtures or fittings survive.

At first sight the building appears to be a single, unified structure, but the easternmost of its three bays (as defined by gault-brick pilasters) is a late-19th century extension. The new brickwork was carefully matched to the old, but is darker and more uniform in colour and the bay is significantly narrower. The author of the 1961 history was sceptical, noting 'it is stated that the chapel has been somewhat extended and there are those living today who say they can remember a garden being in front of the present building'. The First Edition Ordnance Survey of 1884 shows this garden dividing the then eastern gable from the road, but it had disappeared by the edition of 1904. A small proportion of Methodist chapels possessed burial grounds that were often short-lived and poorly documented, and if the garden was designed for this purpose it is possible that inhumations still lie beneath the floor of the extension. The date plaque was presumably re-set in the new gable, and the present dais is likely to have been inserted as part of this refurbishment. The chapel remains an attractive example of Victorian Mock Gothic brickwork, despite its unfortunate re-pointing in cement, but given its alterations and lack of original fixtures is unlikely to meet the strict criteria for listing.

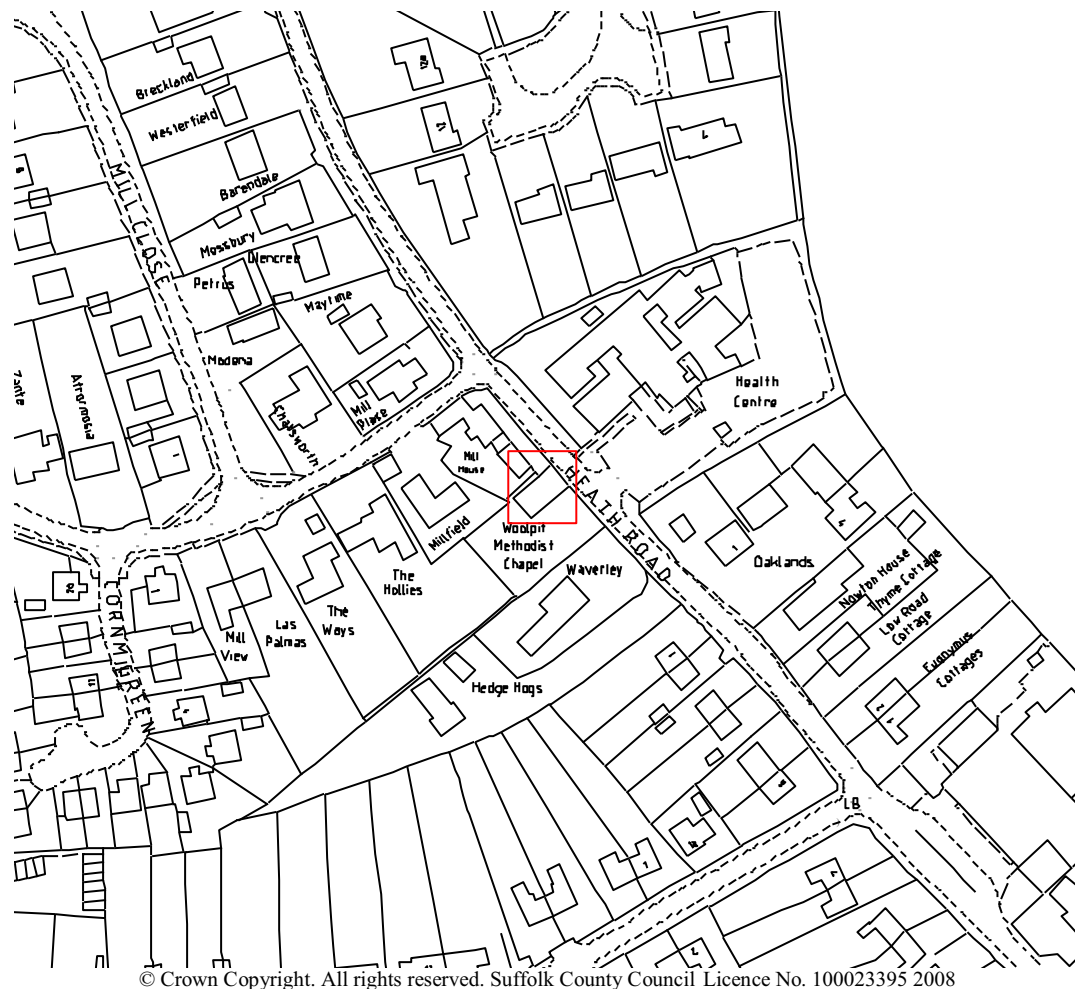


Figure 1. Modern Ordnance Survey, enclosing the chapel in red.

Documentary and Cartographic Evidence

The former Primitive Methodist chapel in Woolpit lies approximately 500 m south-east of the parish church on Heath Road, immediately south of its junction with Mill Lane. Although now at the heart of the village, immediately opposite the large new Health Centre and close to the school, its position was relatively isolated in the 19th century. The rectangular brick building bears the date 1861 on a plaque above its eastern entrance, but the 1851 Census of Religious Worship records a Primitive Methodist Chapel with 78 sittings and a regular attendance of 60 worshippers on Sabbath afternoons and evenings (Suffolk Records Society vol. XXXIX, 1997, p.60). This building is said to have been erected before 1800 and to have been located on Woolpit Heath some 1.5 km to the south-east. White's Suffolk Directory of 1844 notes that 'the Primitive Methodists have a small chapel here', but it is not recorded by name on the Woolpit tithe survey of 1845 which includes only the much larger Meeting Rooms of the Plymouth Brethren built in 1841 with 300 sittings at Broadgrass Green on the old Bury Road to the north-east of the village (now the Christian Fellowship Room). This building was named simply as a non-conformist meeting house on the Ordnance Survey of 1884. Curiously, White's edition of 1855 states that 'the Plymouth Brethren have a small chapel here, formerly used by Primitive Methodists' – and the 1874 edition fails to mention any non-conformist denominations. Prior to its enclosure in 1848 Woolpit Heath was a popular meeting place for horse fairs and would have suited the Primitive Methodists' preference for so-called 'camp meetings'. The movement was founded in the early years of the 19th century (not before 1800) as a working class reaction against the hierarchy of traditional Wesleyan Methodism (increasingly seen as part of the establishment).

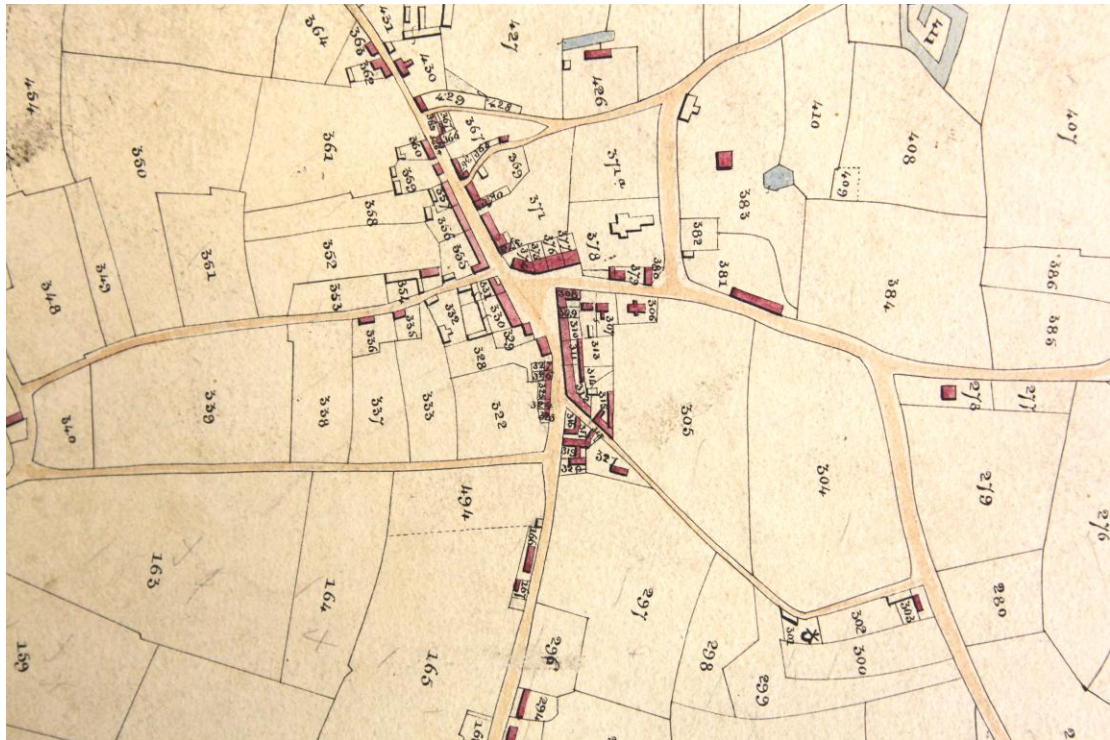


Figure 2. The village of Woolpit as depicted on the tithe map of 1845 (reoriented to show north at top). The site of the chapel (detail below) lies in the bottom left-hand corner, well away from the main conurbation. (Suffolk Record Office).

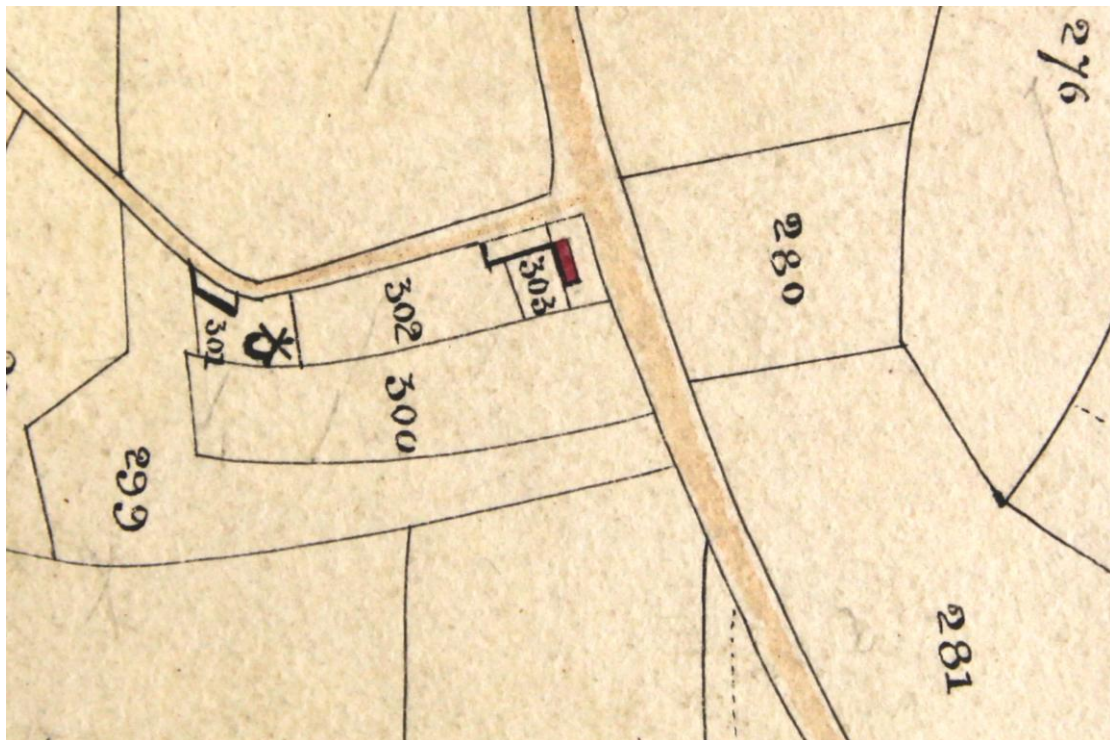


Figure 2a. Detail of the 1845 tithe map showing the junction of Heath Road (right) and Mill Lane. The windmill is depicted to the left but the site of the chapel is shown as the empty north-eastern corner of Mill Field (plot 300) belonging to Hague Farm at Woolpit Heath 1 km to the south-east. The ‘mill and yard’ (301) and pightle (302) on the north were occupied by Walter Lord but belonged to George Robinson who lived in the ‘house, garden and premises’ (303).

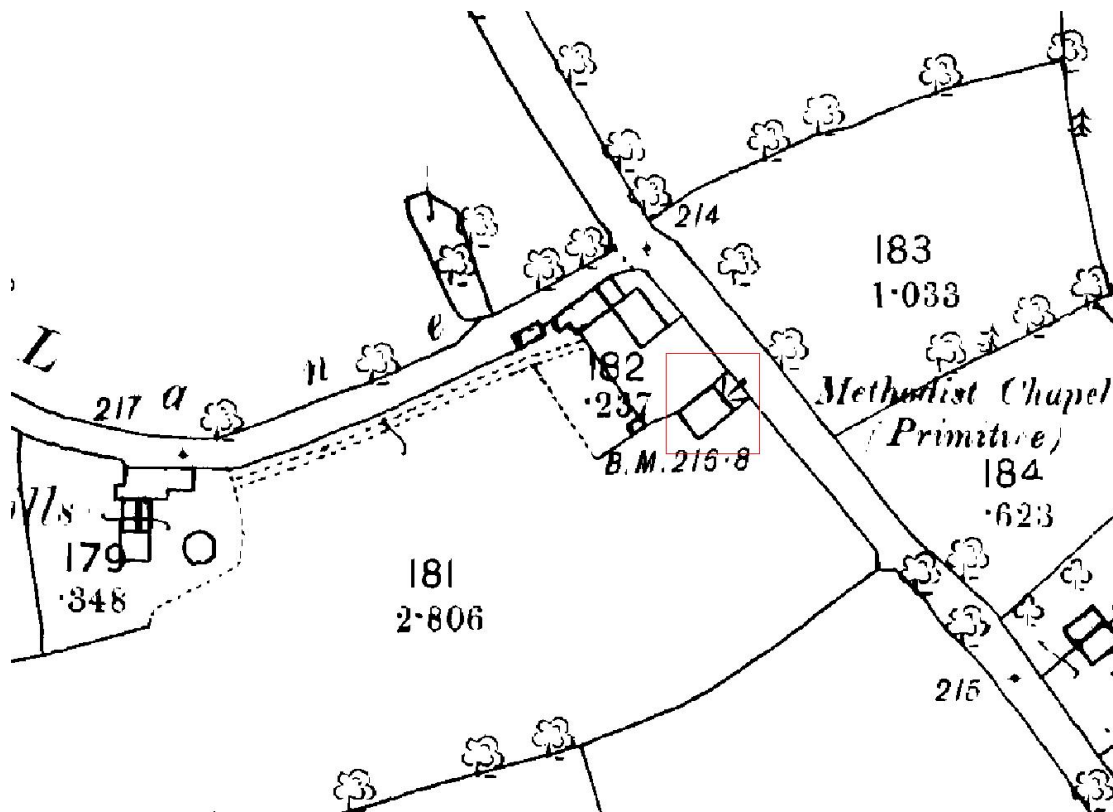


Figure 3. The First edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1884. The site was still relatively isolated at this period, some 500 m south-east of the village centre. The windmill is the circular feature to the west. The chapel had been erected since 1845 and is shown with an Ordnance Survey benchmark (datum point) in the centre of its eastern gable with a small garden dividing it from Heath Road. This garden was still remembered by older members of the congregation in 1961 and may have originated as a burial ground.

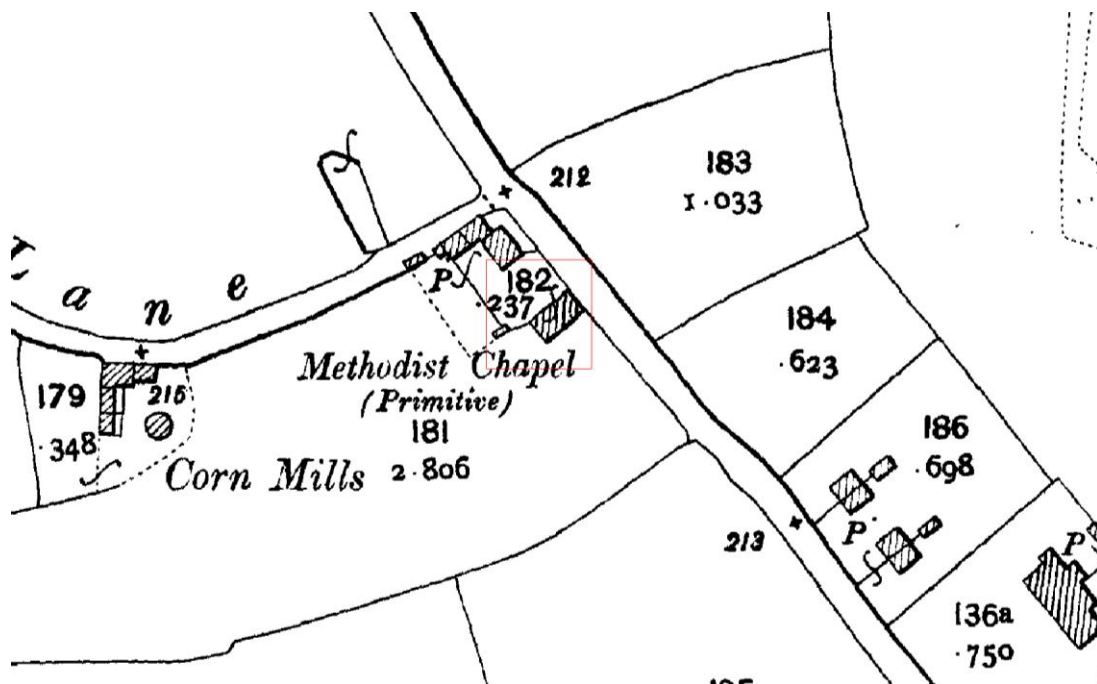


Figure 4. The Second Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1904. The chapel had been extended eastwards since 1884 and abuts Heath Road as it does today.

The original chapel on Woolpit Heath was replaced by the present building in 1861, as dated by the plaque above its entrance. The 1845 tithe map shows the site as the corner of a field belonging to Hague Farm, then owned by Edward Walker and James Cudden. A 'Centenary Souvenir Handbook' written in 1961 by Harold Smith, the superintendent minister, notes that land was bought for the new chapel from a Mr Walter Lord, but is otherwise sadly lacking in historical detail (Ipswich Record Office, FK1/1.4902/6). Walter Lord was the miller at the adjoining windmill in 1845, but may have acquired the adjoining land before 1861. The typescript pamphlet refers to coloured tiles 'put down in the centre of the chapel' (possibly surviving beneath the present carpet), and to the purchase of additional land that was fenced 'in case an extension was needed'. This presumably refers to the plot of land adjoining the chapel on the south and west.

Despite the presence of the date plaque on the eastern gable the Ordnance Survey of 1884 shows a smaller building with a benchmark (datum point) in the centre of its eastern gable which was divided from the road by a small yard (figure 3). A benchmark would not have been placed on an internal partition. The chapel had obtained its present outline by 1904 (figure 4) and the benchmark had disappeared. This eastwards extension is not immediately apparent today as the new work was carefully designed to match the old (possibly with the windows entirely renewed) but the brickwork of the roadside bay is significantly different in colour and uniformity and the plaque was either moved or renewed with the original date. The expansion is confirmed by the Centenary Handbook which notes (as if in disbelief) that 'it is stated that the chapel has been somewhat extended and there are those living today who say they can remember a garden being in front of the present building'. A small proportion of Methodist chapels possessed their own burial grounds which were often short-lived and poorly documented, and it is possible (albeit unlikely) that early inhumations may lie beneath the eastern end of the existing structure on the site of the former garden.

Building Analysis

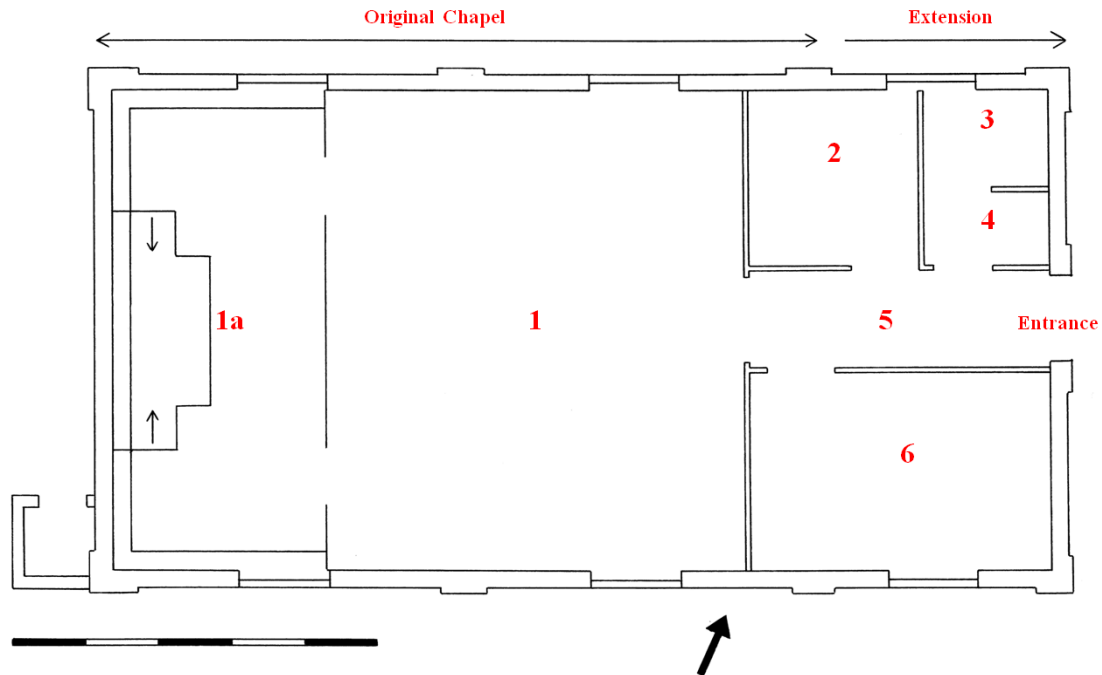


Figure 5

Ground plan of the building identifying each area with a number for ease of reference in the text and photographic record. Scale in metres. Not fully surveyed.

Key

1. Main hall with stained pine dais (1a) to west.
2. Kitchen.
3. WC.
4. Cloakroom.
5. Entrance passage.
6. Small anteroom that may have served as a committee room.

Proportions and Structure

The former Primitive Methodist chapel at Woolpit is a red brick structure in Flemish bond with a hipped slate roof that extends to a total of 13.4 m in length by 7.1 m in width and rises to 4.7 at its eaves (44 ft by 23.5 ft by 15.5 ft). The three windows of each side-elevation are in the Mock Gothic style with twin arched heads and gault-brick dressing, and projecting pilasters of gault brick divide the external walls into three bays. A six-panelled door with glazed lights (now containing modern wire-reinforced glass) adjoins the pavement in the centre of the eastern gable with a roundel of stained glass above. A plaque which ostensibly consists of hard cement (but may be of stone) between the door and roundel is incised 'PRIMITIVE METHODIST 1861'. The eastern end of the interior is divided by a series of late-20th century partitions, ostensibly of the 1970s, into a series of rooms flanking an axial passageway as shown in figure 5, with a balcony above reached only by a retractable loft-

ladder in the passage. The ceiling and partitions interrupt the easternmost windows and the interior appears to have formed a single space prior to their insertion (possibly with an internal entrance lobby of which no trace remains).

The present hall extends to 8.7 m (28.5) in length from its western gable to the 20th century partitions, and preserves a raised dais of 2.9 m (9.5 ft) with a turned balustrade and wainscoted walls incorporating storage benches. The wainscot may continue behind beyond the dais but is hidden by modern boarding beneath a moulded dado rail that coincides with the window sills. Other early decorative features such as coloured tiles may lie hidden beneath the fitted carpet and late-20th century ceiling tiles. An elaborate ceiling rose for a light fitting or simply for ventilation is visible where a tile has been removed above the balcony. The dais wainscot is not original to the fabric as it conceals an earlier scheme of blue paint, revealed where a small section of timber has been removed at the southern end of the western gable (to create an access to a small 20th century extension that may have housed a generator). The present dais was probably inserted in the final years of the 19th century when the original smaller chapel was extended onto the site of the garden that divided it from the road (as shown in figure 3 and described in the Centenary Souvenir of 1961). This extension is not immediately apparent, as the new work was carefully designed to match the old (and both have been uniformly re-pointed in modern cement), but is indicated by the narrow width of the eastern bay and its significantly darker and more uniform brickwork. The door, roundel and plaque may have been salvaged from the gable of the original structure, which extended to approximately 10.2 m in total length (33.5 ft). The position of this gable is indicated by an iron tie-rod secured by external straps.

Historic Significance

At first sight the chapel is externally unaltered since 1861, but closer inspection reveals a substantial late-19th century extension to the east which may have re-used the original date plaque. No original fixtures or fittings survive internally, and the raised dais of stained pine is probably contemporary with the extension. The interior was much altered in or about the 1970s, when the single hall was subdivided to form a series of anterooms, and other Victorian features may lie hidden beneath modern plaster and carpeting. The chapel remains an attractive example of Victorian Mock Gothic brickwork, despite its unfortunate re-pointing in cement, but given its considerable external and internal alterations the building is unlikely to meet the strict English Heritage criteria for listing.

Appendix 1 (on accompanying CD): Full Photographic Record

Descriptions of Photographs in Appendix 1

Photograph no.

1. General view of site from south-west showing the plot of land adjoining the chapel.
2. General view from south-east showing the chapel with its adjoining plot of land from Heath Road with the Health Centre on the right.
3. General view of site from south showing the plot of land adjoining the chapel in the foreground.
4. The southern exterior showing the gault brick pilasters with a significantly narrower gap between the windows on the right.
5. The eastern end of the southern exterior showing the more uniform red bricks of the extension to the right of the pilaster.
6. The exterior from the south-west showing the asymmetrical fenestration of the southern elevation.
7. The exterior from the south-west showing the asymmetrical fenestration of the southern elevation.
8. The external rear (western) gable showing the small 20th century brick shed to the right.
9. The 20th century Fletton brick shed adjoining the southern end of the western gable, showing the cement re-pointing of the main fabric.
10. The eastern external gable from Heath Road showing the hipped slate roof.
11. The eastern external gable showing the central entrance with foundation plaque dated 1861 above.
12. Detail of the circular window and foundation plaque dated 1861 above the external eastern entrance.
13. Detail of the foundation plaque apparently of painted hard cement above the eastern external entrance 'Primitive Methodist 1861.'
14. The 19th century six panel entrance door in the eastern exterior with 20th century mesh glass in the light above.
15. Detail of the undated graffiti and 20th century cement re-pointing to the eastern external gable.
16. The exterior from the north-east showing the entrance door adjoining the pavement of Heath Road to the left.

17. The northern exterior showing the asymmetrical fenestration and more variable, orange brickwork to the right of the pilaster.
18. The interior of the main hall (1) from the east showing the stained pine dais (1a) and 20th century ceiling boards.
19. The stained pine dais at the western end of the main hall.
20. Detail of the stained pine dais (1a) at the western end of the main hall (1) showing the balustrade and steps in the foreground.
21. Detail from north-east of stained balustrade and steps of dais (1a) to west of main hall (1), showing storage bench in foreground.
22. Detail of one of two brass lamps at the northern end of the dais (1a).
23. Northern side-bench on the dais (1a) at the western end of the main hall (1).
24. South-western internal corner of dais (1a) showing aperture to small external shed with blue pigment behind secondary panelling.
25. Detail of the southern end of the western internal gable on the dais (1a) showing blue paint beneath present cream.
26. Detail of southern end of western internal gable on dais (1a) showing original blue painted plaster beneath later panelling.
27. Main hall (1) from balcony to east showing stained pine dais (1a) adjoining western gable.
28. Northern interior of main hall (1) showing dado rail with 20th century cladding possibly concealing earlier wainscot beneath.
29. Southern interior of main hall (1) showing dado rail possibly with concealed earlier wainscot beneath.
30. Interior of main hall (1) from west showing partitions of circa 1970s beneath eastern balcony.
31. Detail of one of two identical brass lamp holders to eastern interior of main.
32. Eastern internal gable on balcony showing attic-type ladder access in centre, roof ventilation rose & stained glass roundel.
33. Eastern internal gable on balcony showing stained glass roundel and ladder access from entrance passage (5).
34. Eastern end of southern interior of showing iron tie-rod from balcony above ground-floor areas 2-6.
35. Detail of ventilation rose or chandelier support above 20th century ceiling tiles above eastern balcony.
36. Entrance passage (5) from west showing external door with ladder hatch to balcony above & committee room (6) on right.

37. Entrance passage (5) from east showing access to main hall (1) with doors to WC (3 & 4) & kitchen (2) right & committee room (6) left.
38. Interior from east of kitchen (2) showing sink to right & door to entrance passage (5) to left.
39. Interior from west of kitchen (2) showing sink to left & door to entrance passage (5) to right.
40. Interior from south of WC (3) showing large window obstructed by ceiling and partition to kitchen (2) on left.
41. Interior of WC (3) from north showing storage cupboard and door to cloakroom (4) with passage (5) in rear.
42. Eastern interior of cloakroom (4) showing entrance passage (5) on right and door to WC (3) to left.
43. Interior of committee room (6) from west showing eastern window of southern elevation obstructed by ceiling to right.
44. Interior of committee room (6) from east showing door to entrance passage (5) on right & window obstructed by ceiling to left.

Photographic Appendix 2 follows on pages 11-17

Appendix 2 (pp. 11-17): Selected Printed Photographs



Illus. 1. A general view of the site from Heath Road to the south-east showing the chapel with its adjoining plot of land on the left and the entrance to the modern Health Centre on the right.



Illus. 2. The southern exterior showing the gault brick pilasters which separate the elevation into three bays. The right-hand bay is narrower and was added as an extension to the original two-bay chapel in the late-19th century. Every attempt was made to match the earlier fabric, but the later brickwork is markedly darker and more uniform in colour.



Illus. 3. The exterior from the south-west, showing the small brick shed added to the southern end of the western gable in the 20th century (and the foundations of a new dwelling on the associated plot of land).



Illus. 4. The eastern external gable showing the six-panel 19th century central entrance door a stained glass roundel and foundation plaque above. The plaque appears to consist of painted cement and reads 'PRIMITIVE MEHODIST 1861.' It may have been salvaged from the original eastern gable, which was set back from the road behind a small garden.



Illus. 5. The chapel from the north-east showing the northern elevation matching the southern elevation.



Illus. 6. The stained pine dais (1a) at the western end of the main hall (1). This is probably contemporary with the extension of the chapel at the end of the 19th century.



Illus. 7. The stained pine balustrade and steps of the dais (1a) to the west of the main hall (1), showing a storage bench in the foreground. The seats of the wall benches lift in the same manner.



Illus. 8. A detail of the south-western internal corner of the wainscot panelling which surrounds the dais (1a). The aperture on the right connects with the small shed shown in illus. 3 and reveals the original painted plaster beneath the later panelling. The shed may have housed a generator.



Illus. 9. The northern interior of the main hall (1) showing the dais to the left and the *circa* 1970s partitions forming a balcony above a kitchen and ‘committee room’ on the right. These partitions interrupt the eastern windows and the interior appears to have contained only a single large hall initially (perhaps with an internal porch of which no trace remains).



Illus. 10. The main hall (1) from the west showing the *circa* 1970s partitions and ceiling tiles. Wooden wainscot may survive behind modern boarding under the dado rail.



Illus. 11. The balcony above the modern partitions at the eastern end of the hall (1), viewed from the north. This area was reached by a retractable steel loft ladder from the entrance passage (as shown to the left). Note the iron tie-rod that replaced the original eastern gable when the building was extended.



Illus. 12. A detail of the ventilation rose or chandelier support visible beneath the 20th century ceiling tiles above the eastern balcony, with the tie-rod shown in illus. 11. Other Victorian decorative features may be hidden behind modern cladding elsewhere.



Illus. 13. The entrance passage (5) from the west, showing the external door with the loft hatch to the balcony in the ceiling above, the ‘committee room’ (6) on the right and doors to the kitchen, WC and cloakroom (2, 3 & 4) on the left.



Illus. 14. The entrance passage (5) from the east showing the access to the main hall (1) with the doors to the cloakroom and W C (3 & 4) and kitchen (2) on the right and the ‘committee room’ (6) on the left.