



University of
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Archaeological Services

**An Archaeological Standing Building Survey of
The Former Independent Congregational Chapel
Chapel Road, Wymondham
Leicestershire (NGR SK 850 187)**

Gerwyn Richards



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For: Francis W. Keyworth Architects

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(NGR SK 850 187).**

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Summary

University of Leicester Archaeological Services was commissioned by Francis W. Keyworth Architects to undertake a programme of historic building inspection and recording of the former Independent Congregational Chapel, Chapel Road, Wymondham, Leicestershire. Planning permission is being sought to re-develop the site for residential use. The proposed re-development will require the demolition of the Chapel.

The Chapel was built in 1840 and remained in use until 1959, serving the independent congregational community of Wymondham. As with most nonconformist chapels, the Old Chapel is simple in appearance but does include a number of flourishes. To the south of the Chapel house is a lean-to range, most likely the school room. Internally, the Chapel has suffered considerable neglect, leaving little of architectural or historical interest.

The archive for the archaeological work will be held by Leicestershire County Council, under the museums accession number X.A146.2011.

1. Introduction

University of Leicester Archaeological Services was commissioned by Francis W. Keyworth Architects to undertake to undertake a programme of historic building inspection and recording of the former Independent Congregational Chapel, Chapel Road, Wymondham Leicestershire. (SK 850 187; *Figures 1 & 2*). Planning permission is being sought to demolish the Chapel in advance of the proposed redevelopment of the site for residential use. The Chapel is 19th century in date and as a result, the Senior Planning Archaeologist, Leicestershire County Council, as advisor to Melton Borough Council has recommended that a programme of historic building inspection and recording be undertaken prior to the commencement of any works. This is to be equivalent to English Heritage Level 2 as defined in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (English Heritage 2006).

The project was completed in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) *Code of Conduct* and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing buildings or Structures* (2008). In addition, Leicestershire County Council's *Guidelines and Procedures for Archaeological Work in Leicestershire* was followed.



Figure 1. Site location

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Congregational Chapels are chapels practicing Congregationalist governance, each congregation independently and autonomously runs its own affairs. Congregational Chapels trace their descent from the Protestant Reformation and based upon the theory of union published by Robert Browne in 1592. The early Congregationalists were called *separatists* or *independents* to distinguish them from the similar Calvinistic and Presbyterians. On occasions the term Independent still remains.

Unusually for such a small village, Wymondham had three Nonconformist chapels operating during the mid 19th century. The Wesleyans pre dated the Congregationalists by a few years, meeting regularly from 1820 and eventually built a Chapel on Church Lane in 1841. The second group, the Primitive Methodists were earlier again and had a Chapel built in 1826 on Spring Lane. In 1839, the Rev. James Roberts opened a hired house for religious worship on behalf of the Independents, with the first meeting being held on 17th February. The meetings soon outgrew the hired house and moved to a barn, fitted out as a temporary place of worship on what is now known as Nurses Lane. It is claimed that Sunday congregations regularly reached 150-200 people.

Within the year it was decided that a permanent place of worship was required and a plot of land was bought on Chapel Lane. The foundation stone was laid by the Rev. James Roberts on 21st May 1840 and the Chapel opened on September 25th 1841. Deeds dated 1st May 1841 indicate that Thomas Nunneley, grocer from Leicester and John Hack, the miller from Wymondham had built the Chapel and conveyed it to the Trustees on the above date. The total cost was £900, which according to Chapel records had been reduced to only £160 by as early as 1846, which gives some indication to the size and devotion of the congregation. The Ecclesiastical Census of 1851 records a morning congregation of 65, an evening congregation of 77, while 47 children attended

morning Sunday school and 21 in the evening. A total which far exceeded the Wesleyans and compared favourably with Parish Church.

The Chapel also had a school room and, unlike the Wesleyans, a Minister's house, The Manse, almost certainly what is now number 6 Chapel Lane, to the north of the Chapel. The school has a rather unclear history; during the 1840s there was school for poor girls set up under the patronage of Mrs Ann Day, a widow, teaching reading writing, knitting and sewing. Upon her death in 1851 Mrs Day endowed £500 in trust to the Rector and Churchwardens of the Parish that the interest be used to pay a school mistress. The use of the Rector and Churchwardens as trustees suggests Mrs Day was of the established church. However, it is known that by 1846 the Mrs Day school was being held in the Congregational Chapels School room. It is unclear whether Mrs Day's girls were taught alongside the Congregationalist children or whether they used the school room separately. In 1854 the nephew and nieces of Mrs Day bought the closed Wesleyan Chapel which from then on became Mrs Day School.

There are a number of notable Ministers recorded at the Chapel, the Rev. Roberts remained until 1847 and was replaced by the Rev. William Palmer who remained until 1851. In 1868 the Rev. Charles Haddon arrived in Wymondham and undertook a number of internal alterations to the Chapel. The back-door entrance to the pulpit was blocked, the walls and ceiling papered and alterations made to the entrance. The heating stoves were also improved, all at a cost of £90, which again showing the size and devotion of the congregation was raised within the year. The Rev. Haddon remained until 1875.

Soon after the Rev. Haddon, Rev. William Fox arrived and remained for only 18 months before resigning to become a Theological student; however the former Rev. Fox remained in The Manse, forcing the new Minister, the Rev. David Renwick-Hall to lodge with the Stimson family. Rev. Renwick-Hall remained in ministry until 1888; it is unclear how long he was forced to lodge with the Stimsons.

The Chapel and Sunday school continued to thrive during the later years of the 19th century and by 1899 was licensed to hold marriages. The Chapel remained in use during the early part of the 20th century, but dwindling congregations began to show and eventually the Chapel was closed in 1959.

Both the Chapel and the above mentioned Rev. Fox feature prominently in one of the most humorous and scurrilous episodes in the history of Wymondham. In 1879 a poem entitled *Lyingham* was published anonymously attacking with a large degree of venom the village and its inhabitants:-

*...dreadful in aesthetic eyes-
In Chapel Lane a dreary building stands,
A temple surely made by careless hands.
This chapel where old Sector crows so loud,
Is but a cock pit for the pious crowd*

The poem, in the following two verses then proceeds to attack the hapless Rev. Fox and his congregation.

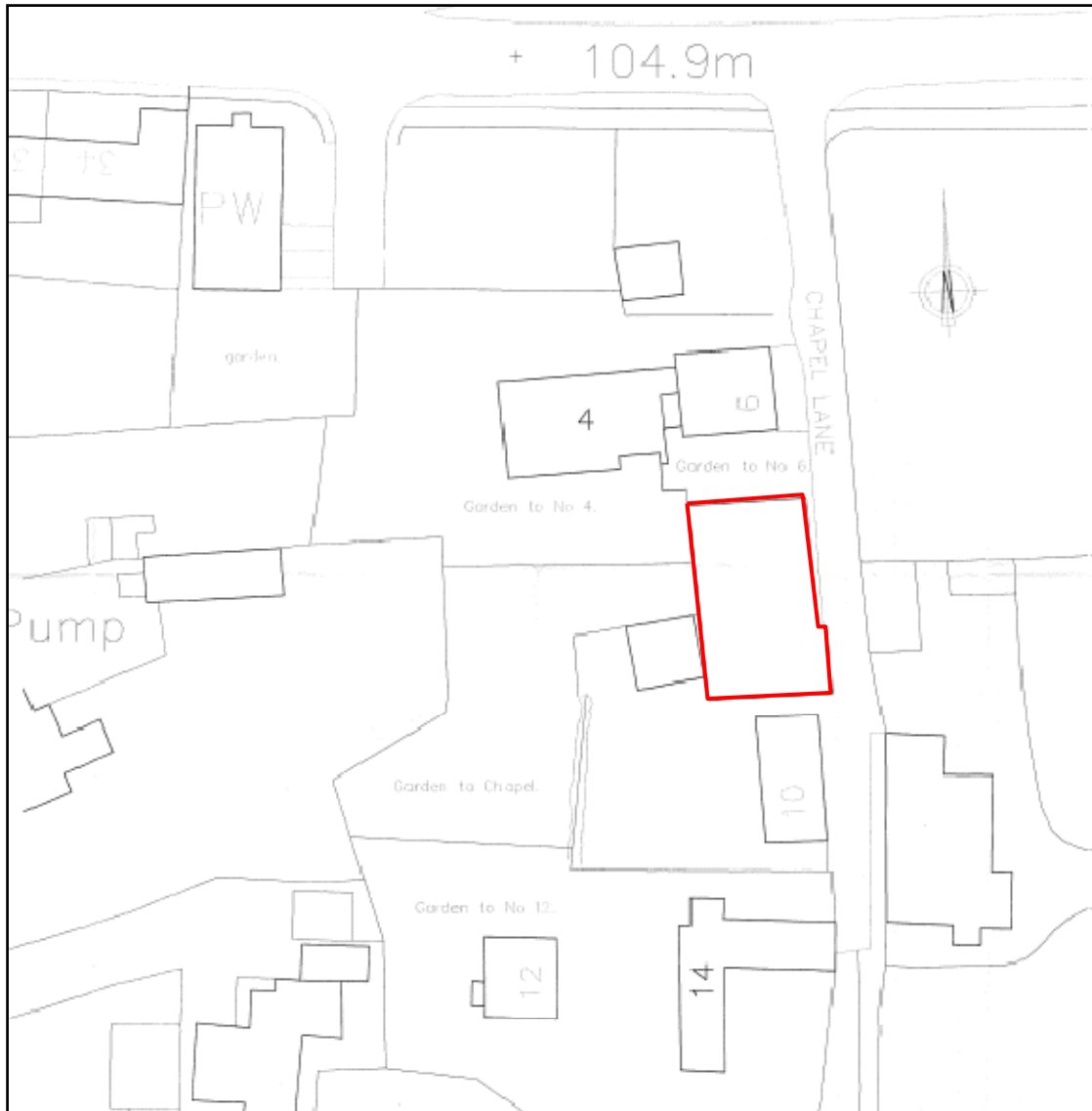


Figure 2
Proposed development area in detail with Chapel highlighted in red.
(Not to Scale).

2. Aims and Methodology

The specific objectives of the standing building survey were as follows:

- To provide a written, drawn and photographic record of the Chapel prior to its demolition.
- The project report will provide a comprehensive review of the local and regional historical context of the structures recorded by the project, making reference to the appropriate regional research agendas. This will be adequately detailed to place the findings of the recording in their context and to be able to inform future conservation decisions and the subsequent management of the structures.

- The project will produce a high quality, fully integrated archive suitable for long-term deposition in order to 'preserve by record' the buildings in their current form prior to conversion and demolition.

Addressing the requirements stipulated in *Written Scheme of Investigation for Historic Building Inspection and Recording in advance of the demolition of The Old Chapel, 8 Chapel Lane, Wymondham, Leicestershire LE14 2AA* (ULAS 2011).

Orientation: This building survey covers a single Chapel located on Chapel Lane. The structure is aligned approximately north-north-west to south-south-east, but for ease of reference this has been simplified to north-south in the following report. The principal elevation of the Chapel is north facing. Where the terms 'left', 'right', 'front' and 'back' etc. are used in the report, this is in relation to this principal elevation. Letter identification has been issued for the purpose of this report and a number prefix added for significant partitions if required.

The site visits were undertaken by Gerwyn Richards on October 18th and November 23rd 2011. As far as is known, the Chapel has not previously been subject to a programme of historic building recording.

3. Description of the Building

The Chapel consists of a single-storey rectangular Chapel house of local ironstone with a pitched roof of apparently Welsh slate (the low winter sun and wet roof prevented precise identification). There is a smaller schoolroom abutting the southern elevation, which is largely brick-built (*Figure 3*). The Chapel house has six timber framed brick arched windows, two each on the north, east and west elevations. Access is via a central door on the north wall, above which is a brick-built Thomas Thomas arch (*Figure 6*). A date stone inscribed *DEO 1840 LAUS*, (Praise be to God), and in apparently local sandstone is also above the door (*Figure 7*). There is a decorative finial on the apex as well two decorative pier caps (*Figures 7 & 8*). The finial appears to be a possible floral design while the pier caps are an unusual looking 'tri-corn' design, possibly Classical Ionic inspired. There is a hint of further decoration which has suffered weathering and is not clearly visible.

The body of the Chapel (A) is built of coursed and squared local iron stone, there has been extensive 20th century re-pointing with cement mortar, but traces of early lime mortar still remain in places. There are full-height stone-built columns on the northern elevation and flanking the door; interestingly the north-westernmost column does not continue on the western elevation, probably because this elevation is not as visible as the remainder of the building.

The windows are simple timber-framed four-light arched windows with an opening dimpled stained glass radial arch fanlight. The main glazing bars are large and only plane-finished, reflecting the modest nature of the chapel. The main door is a double door consisting of two six panelled doors, a common early 19th-century design. Above which is a fanlight with rather intricate intersecting glazing bars and ogee arches (*Figure 12*); considerably more ornate than those above the windows.

On the southern gable of the Chapel, there is a brick and stone-built lean-to range (B) (*Figures 3 & 9*), many independent Chapels had a school room on the rear of the Chapel house, and it is certain that this building is the school room. Despite the difference in styles and building materials there is no clear evidence that this is a separate or later phase of building. Both the east and west facing elevations are in the same stone as the Chapel house while it is only the southern elevation which is brick-built, perhaps out of economic necessity the un-obtrusive southernmost wall was brick-built. The bricks themselves are 9 inch x 3 inch 4 ½ inch (230mm x 77mm x 114mm) red bricks laid in Flemish garden wall bond (three stretchers to one header in each course), almost certainly contemporary in date as the stone-built Chapel. Towards the western end there is a straight joint visible in the brickwork beyond which is single shorter bay (C), possibly pre dating B. Further evidence of this can be seen in the windows, B has three four light vertical sash windows with recessed sash boxes, while C, on the other hand has a six light non opening window with a wide, exposed frame, possibly mimicking the 18th-century fashion of exposed sash boxes. There are flat cambered brick arched headers above the windows in B while the wall plate is above the window in C. Both roofs on this range are red pan tiles.

Internally, the Chapel has suffered considerably from neglect and disrepair, as a result, there is very little of historical or architectural interest remaining (*Figure 11*). There is tongued and grooved panelling on the wall, as well as the remains of a panelled porch around the main door. The floor of the porch is red brick paviours, the remainder of the floor is machine-sawn softwood, approximately 0.14m above the brick floor. There are no pews remaining within the Chapel house and only the pulpit at the southern end gives any indication of the layout of the Chapel. To the west of the pulpit is a six-panelled door leading to the school room (B); to the west is blind door, the symmetry of these doors suggests it is unlikely that this blind door is the back door entrance to the pulpit blocked by the Rev. Hadden, of which there is no visible trace. In the centre of the ceiling is a decorative plaster ceiling rose.

The school room is rather plain in appearance and is likely always to have been plain (*Figure 10*). There is nothing remaining to indicate its previous use and although there is a map board against the northern wall, it is unclear whether this is original or not. At the western end of this range is the smaller bay, C, which has two rooms. The unusual angle of the wall between B and the northernmost room of C strongly suggests that this is an inserted wall, and not the original layout (*Figure 3*). The exact function and origin of this bay is unclear; there is a fitted dresser on the northern wall suggesting a possible domestic use, while the southernmost room appears to be a scullery or even a WC, but without any evidence of sanitation. The wall between these two rooms is stone-built and the same thickness as the other exterior walls, while the current, brick-built exterior wall is only single skin (4inch/100mm), evidence which potentially contradicts the earlier assumption that C pre dates B (*Figure 3*). The evidence suggests that C is the later of the two.

4. Discussion

The Old Chapel is good example of the small, probably subscription-built independent chapel which began to appear across Leicestershire during the early to middle part of the 19th century. Being dissenters, the independents shunned the ostentation associated with the established Anglican Church and aspired to reflect this plainness within their Chapels. A trait alluded to in the poem *Lyingham*. However, the Old Chapel at Wymondham with its decorative finial, pier caps and fanlight clearly shows that this did not always occur. Independent Chapels were also frequently built to be invisible on small plots which were little use for anything else and frequently away from main roads and thoroughfares, this can be seen in the Old Chapel, which is built on a narrow lane off the Main Street, which is now known as Chapel Lane, which prior to the Chapel being built appeared to be un-named.

Nevertheless the Chapel is of interest in relation to the development of the village and the history of Nonconformity in Leicestershire. The fact that within the space of less than 50 years a village the size of Wymondham had no less than three Nonconformist Chapels, built by subscription shows both the size and devotion of their congregations and the reaction of the wider society against the established Church brought about by the social changes caused by rapid industrialisation and economic changes in the 19th century.

5. Bibliography & Sources

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6. Archive & Publication

The site archive consists of

- 1 A2 permagraph sheet containing floor plan & site notes
- DVD containing 54 digital images
- 2 A4 contact sheets
- 54 Black & White negatives and contact prints
- 2 A4 photo record sheets
- Unbound copy of this report (ULAS Report Number 2011-199)

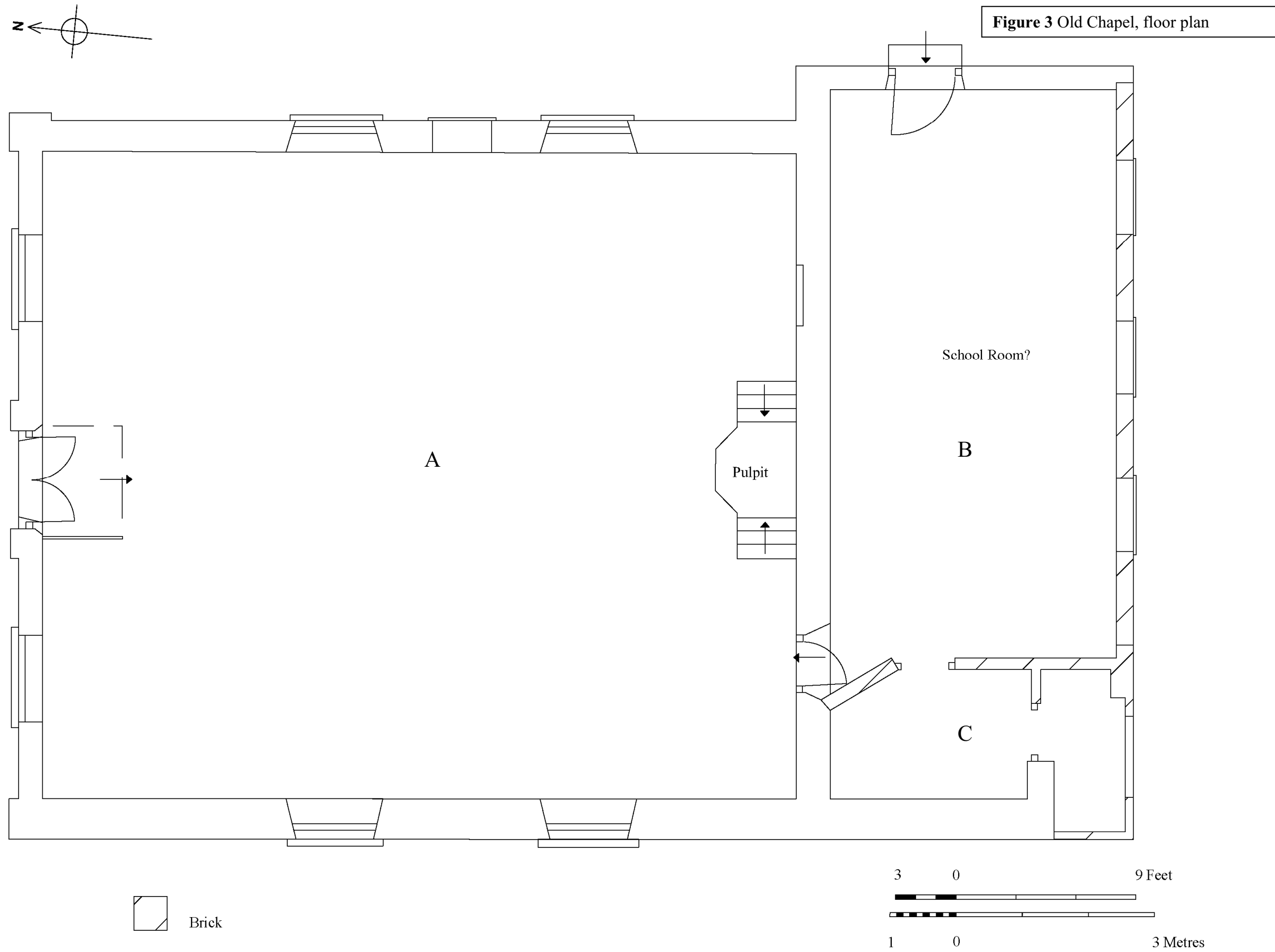
The archive will be held at Leicestershire County Council Museums under the Accession Number X.A146.2011.

A version of the summary (above) will be submitted to the editor of the local journal *Transactions of Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* for inclusion in the next edition.

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7 Colour Plates



Figure 4 North facing elevation.



Figure 5 View from Main Street.



Figure 6 Door, detail.



Figure 7 Date stone & finial, northern elevation.



Figure 8 Pier cap, north east corner.



Figure 9 School room.



Figure 10 School room, internal, view east.



Figure 11 Chapel House, from the Pulpit. View north



Figure 12 Fanlight in north door. Interior view.



Figure 13 Ceiling Rose.

Appendix OASIS Record

INFORMATION REQUIRED	EXAMPLE
Project Name	Old Chapel Wymondham
Project Type	Building Recording
Project Manager	Vicki Score
Project Supervisor	Gerwyn Richards
Previous/Future work	Previous: None. Future: Not Known
Current Land Use	Warehousing
Development Type	Residential
Reason for Investigation	PPS5
Position in the Planning Process	Not Known
Site Co ordinates	SK 850 187
Start/end dates of field work	Oct-Nov 2011
Archive Recipient	LMARS
Height min/max	104mOD
Study Area	N/A
Finds	None

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