



Building Investigation and Assessment of Significance

**The Old Zion Chapel
60, High Street
Birstall
West Yorkshire**

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Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Synopsis | 2 |
| Acknowledgements | 2 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| Location | 4 |
| Aims and Objectives | 4 |
| Methodology | 5 |
| Historical Background | 6 |
| General History | 6 |
| 60, High Street Birstall | 9 |
| Description | 13 |
| Exterior | 13 |
| Interior | 15 |
| Discussion | 23 |
| Conclusion | 25 |
| Bibliography and Sources | 26 |
| Appendix | 29 |

Synopsis

60 High Street Birstall is an unlisted building in the Birstall Conservation Area of the Borough of Kirklees, West Yorkshire. It was originally constructed by a non-conformist congregation in the 1836 and was probably the second chapel to be built in the village, an area that was highly active in Protestant dissent. It was used for short periods by a number of non-conformist congregations between 1847 and 1879 as they moved to larger accommodation, before being sold into private hands. The chapel became a joiner's workshop, and sometimes residential accommodation, until the business closed in 2009. The building is now the subject of a planning application for change of use to residential accommodation.

Since its sale in 1879, the chapel has undergone extensive changes which have affected its character and significance. Much of the interior of the chapel has been lost, particularly on the ground floor, fixtures and fittings have been removed, whilst a first floor has been inserted. It is, however, a survivor of the non-conformism which, since its decline, has seen the loss of other chapels in Birstall. It is hoped that an understanding of the building's history and fabric will inform the conversion of the building and enable the new owners to retain and enhance its character.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Mr and Mrs Brook the owners of 60 High Street, Birstall, for access to the building and their hospitality; Susan Brook for her on-site assistance; the librarians of the local studies section of Huddersfield Central Library for their enthusiasm and assistance and for the archivists at the West Yorkshire Archives in Huddersfield for their help.

Introduction

The building of 60, High Street, Birstall in the borough of Kirklees, West Yorkshire, is located at grid reference SE 223 264. It has for the last 130 years been the workshop of R Watson & Sons, a joinery business initially run by the Watson family, and later in the 20th century by the Brook family.

The building is not listed but is within the Birstall Conservation Area. This means that any application for extensions, change of use or demolition must seek Conservation Area Consent from the local Authority and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area must be always considered, respected or enhanced¹.

It was established that the building, which was referred to locally as 'The Old Chapel', had been built in 1836 for members of the 'Wesleyan Protestant Methodists Society at Birstall'. One of six chapels connected with village, it was used by a number of groups but was a victim of the success of the non-conformist movement; it was simply too small to house the expanding congregations of non-conformism in the nineteenth century. Finally sold by the Primitive Methodists to Mr. John Watson in 1879, it became both a workshop for his joinery business and a home for his family. The joinery business ceased trading on the retirement of the new owner Mr. Malcolm Brook.

The building itself has undergone many internal changes over time and relatively little evidence remains of its use as a chapel. Most of the chapel fittings have been removed and a first floor inserted over the gallery. However, enough evidence remains to suggest that the chapel had been originally designed along simple, classical lines externally, with an equally simple interior, reflecting the style of the times, the austerity of the Methodist faith, and the social and economic status of the builders.

The present owner has applied for change of use to residential accommodation under planning application 2012/62/90208/E from Kirklees Borough Council, prior to its eventual sale. This study undertaken by Bev Kerr will form part of the planning application documentation. Site fieldwork took place during 16th to 18th March 2012.

Due to issues of access and health and safety, the 1960s extension and land to the side and rear of the property, including the rear of the vestry, could not be accessed and did not form part of the survey.

¹ Kirklees Council, *Birstall Conservation Area Appraisal*,
<http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/business/conservation/pdf-appraisals/Birstall.pdf> [14/04/12]

Location

Birstall (sometimes spelt historically as Birstal or Burstall) is a large village, giving its name to the parish of Birstall, which along with the villages of Great and Little Gomersal and Birkenshaw, form the township of Gomersal. The village is approximately 6 miles south-west of Leeds and 8 miles north-east of Huddersfield and just 2 miles from the neighbouring town of Batley. It lies between the A62 Huddersfield to Leeds road, and the A652 Bradford to Dewsbury road, and is situated a mile from the M62 junction 27 to the north-east. Birstall is within a small subsidiary valley of the Spen Valley, and the village nucleus sits on a steep south facing slope.



Figure 1: Location of 60 High Street, Birstall (<http://maps.google.co.uk/>)

The property of 60 High Street is situated on the south side of the road (B6125), opposite the drive to 'Old Hall' (see figure 1).

Aims and Objectives

The principle aim of the project was to ascertain and understand from documentation and on-site analysis, the historical development of the building, understand its various phases of use, and to produce a drawn, written and photographic record of the building prior to the building undergoing conversion. It was hoped to place the building in its social, economic and religious landscape, and to establish a level of significance.

Methodology

This building investigation is comprised of four elements intended to provide a suitable building record in accordance with guidelines described in *Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice* produced by English Heritage at levels 3 to 4². These comprise:

- Documentary research - a search was made of all relevant material, published and unpublished, including historic maps, early photographs and drawings, and primary and secondary sources held by the NMR (National Monuments Record Office), the Kirklees office of the West Yorkshire Archive Service, and the Huddersfield Local History Library. Research was aided by the present owners holding the deeds to the property. A full list of sources is contained in the Bibliography.
- Photographic record - this comprised a series of general and detail shots of the building, internally and externally, using a high resolution digital SLR camera, Canon EOS 550.
- Visual analysis – a written description of the interior and exterior was made between 16th to 18th March 2012, noting details such as construction materials, architectural details, building breaks, room layouts, and uses and fixtures and fittings.
- Measured survey - a hand survey was made during the site visit using a combination of tape and a Leica Disto electronic distance measuring device in order to create a ground plan at 1:100 (see appendix).

It is intended that this report will be placed in an appropriate archive.

² English Heritage, *Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2006).

Historical Background

General History

Although Birstall is not mentioned in Domesday Book, it is known that the area was active prior to 1086. A prehistoric trackway is believed to have run through the village, along the line of Low Lane and past the site of the church of St Peter, this track was later used by the Romans as a route from York to Chester³. Birstall is also thought to have been a missionary centre in the seventh century, which if defended, may have given the village its name; 'burg' and 'steall' meaning 'fortified place', or 'site of a stronghold'⁴. Other evidence for an Anglo-Saxon presence was a carved stone recovered from near the present church which can now be found within the nave⁵.

The earliest part of the church at Birstall appears to date from the twelfth century. It has been speculated that the Manor of Gomersal was responsible for its construction, and although there is no evidence of this, it is known that the De Tillys who held the manor gave their rights of patronage to Nostell Priory⁶. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the lands associated with the church passed into the hands of Trinity College, Cambridge who remained important land owners in the area until the nineteenth.⁷ A number of names in Birstall still reflect this connection, for example, Cambridge Road, Trinity Terrace, College Street, College Mills and College Colliery.

Birstall is known to have been occupied by the Parliamentarians after the defeat at Alwalton Moor in 1643. It is also the birthplace of Joseph Priestly (1733-1804) a theologian who was also a chemist and discovered nine gasses including oxygen. Birstall also claims an association with Charlotte Bronte, as nearby Oakwell Hall built by the Batt family in 1583, is thought to have been her model for 'Fieldhead' in her book 'Shirley'⁸.

Situated in the foothills of the Pennines, Birstall lies on a Coal Measure belonging to the Carboniferous series which is mainly of shale, mudstone and sandstone⁹. With the availability of power through local water courses such as Smithies Beck the industries which grew up around Birstall were mainly textile related, whilst mining, stone quarrying and iron manufacturing were also key activities.

Daniel Defoe visited Birstall in the seventeenth century and mentioned the textile industry in his travel writings:

a little southerly, between Hallifax and Leeds, is a little town called Birstall. Here the kersey and shalloon trade being, as it were, confined to Hallifax, and the towns already named, of Huthersfield and Bradforth, they begin to make broad cloth... This town is famed for dying, and they make a sort of cloths here in imitation of the Gloucester white cloths, bought for the

³ Kirklees Council, *Birstall Conservation Area Appraisal*,
<http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/business/conservation/pdf-appraisals/Birstall.pdf> [14/04/12], p.5.

⁴ Bryant, A., *The towns and villages of Yorkshire* (Millom: Regent Lane, 1997) p.41.

⁵ *Birstall Conservation Area Appraisal*, p.5.

⁶ Ibid, p.6.

⁷ Ibid, p.6.

⁸ Bryant, p.41.

⁹ *Birstall Conservation Area Appraisal*, p.4.

*Dutch and the Turkey trades; and though their cloths here may not be as fine, they told us their colours are as good. But that is not my business to dispute, the west country clothiers deny it; and so I leave it as I find it.*¹⁰

The village, like many other settlements, grew rapidly during the industrial revolution. Pigot's Directory of 1828-9 says that the village's population was 2,500¹¹. By 1881, Kelly's Directory put this figure at 6,044¹².

The Ordnance Survey 1:10,560 series map of 1854 shows the main nucleus of the village concentrated around the triangle defined by High Street, Low Lane and Church Street, with further settlement along Huddersfield road (figure 2).



Figure 2: Ordnance Survey map 1:10,560 of 1854. Huddersfield Road runs north to south on the right.

It also shows the existence of Birstal Foundry, a dye works and the textile mill of Britannia just beyond the edges of the settlement. Rapid expansion followed and the 1894 Ordnance Survey 1:2,500 series map shows the area south of Low Lane and around Smithies Lane now infilling with housing, with further mills established along Smithies Beck and the Bradford/Dewsbury Road.

Kirklees has been described as a 'hotbed of non-conformity'¹³, which was to thrive within industrial communities and amongst the poor¹⁴ and which saw a massive increase in numbers during the first half of the nineteenth century¹⁵. Birstall had a

¹⁰ Defoe, D, *Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, Letter 8, Part 4, A Vision of Britain: travel writing: http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/text/contents_page.jsp?t_id=Defoe [19/04/12].

¹¹ *Pigot's Directory, 1828-29, Part II Nottinghamshire, Rutland, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Westmorland, Worcestershire, Yorkshire, Wales* (Manchester: Pigot & Co.) p.934.

¹² *Kelly's Directory, 1881, West Riding of Yorkshire, (Part1: county information & places A-K)* (London: Kelly & Co.) p.83.

¹³ Shann, G., 'Non-conformist Chapels of Kirklees: a survey' unpublished MA dissertation, University of Leeds.

¹⁴ Wakelin, C., 'The nonconformist traditions: chapels, change and continuity' in *The Victorian Church: architecture and society*, edited by C. Brooks and A. Saint (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) p.83.

¹⁵ In 1791 numbers may have been about 80,00 and by 1848 had increased to 339,000. Dolbey, G (1964) *The architectural expression of Methodism* (London: Epworth) p.118.

direct association with Wesleyan Methodism; it had been introduced to the area in 1741 by a local stonemason John Nelson, who had been a convert of John Wesley and is described on his tomb in St Peter's churchyard as 'a pioneer of Methodism in Yorkshire'¹⁶. John and Charles Wesley are both known to have visited and preached at Birstall; Charles records his many visits in his diaries, and mentions John Nelson by name¹⁷. The first chapel in Birstall was located on the Huddersfield Road (figure 3). Its foundation stone reads: 'The original Wesleyan Chapel was built in 1750. Rebuilt and enlarged 1782. This chapel was built in 1846'.

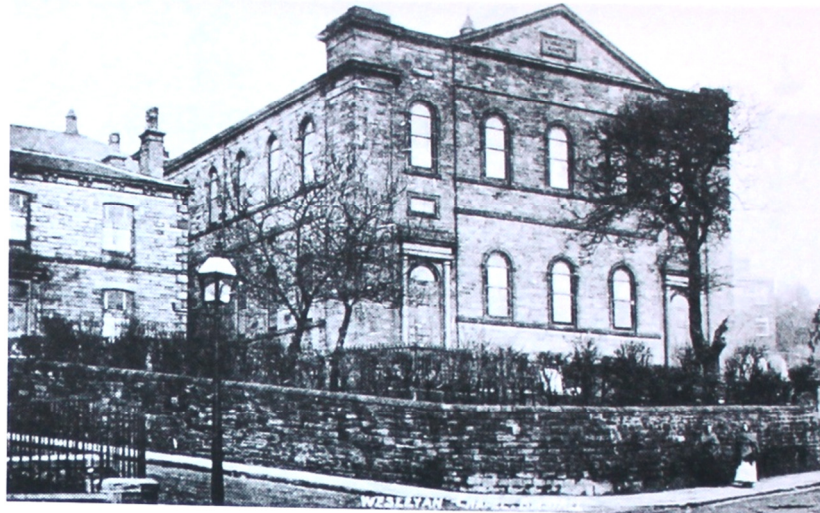


Figure 3: Wesleyan Chapel, Birstall. The first chapel on this site was built in 1750 (Naylor, A., and Burns J., *Birstall's Heritage* (Keighley: Fretwell, 1995) p.9).

Following John Wesley's death, disputes within the Methodist church led to the formation of a number of break away groups, including the Methodists New Connexion in 1797, the Primitive Methodists in 1811 and the Protestant Methodist in 1828¹⁸. Because of this it is not unusual for places like Birstall to see the erection of a number of churches or chapels in addition to their Anglican Church. There appears to have been up to six chapels erected in Birstall; the Wesleyan Chapel mentioned above, the chapel which forms part of this study in High Street, the Mount Tabor in North Terrace built by the Wesleyan Reform Church (now demolished), Salem Chapel in Low Lane by the Congregational or Independent Church (now housing), the chapel of the Primitive Methodists also in Low Lane (demolished), and a Wesleyan Chapel in Raikes Lane (now housing). The first Wesleyan Chapel in Birstall is sadly now offices, the congregation moved first into the Sunday school, and with numbers reducing even further, are in the process of moving into an adjacent building. Other groups have also had a presence in Birstall including the Salvation Army, the Spiritualists and the Temperance Movement¹⁹.

¹⁶ Bielby, R., *Churches and chapels of Kirklees* (Huddersfield : Libraries and Museum Services, Kirklees Borough Council, 1978) p.72.

¹⁷ Wesley, C, *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley*. A Vision of Britain: travel writing: http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/text/contents_page.jsp?t_id=C_Wesley

¹⁸ Barton, D., *Chapels and Meeting Houses* (Princes Risborough: Shire, 1975) p.8-9

¹⁹ Clegg, M., *A history of Birstall: the last 200 years* (Batley: M Clegg, 1994) p.91-2.

As the textile, mining, iron and quarrying industries declined in the twentieth century, the landscape of Birstall has altered. Many of the mill buildings have disappeared to be replaced by housing or light industrial units, whilst clearances of the later twentieth century have removed many of the older buildings of the village and much of the nineteenth century worker's housing. Birstall has now become a commuter village for the larger towns and cities which surround it.

60, High Street Birstall



Figure 5: High Street in the late nineteenth century.

In contrast to the quiet backstreet it is today, High Street was once a focus for the community in Birstall (figure 5). Below The New Inn public house was the village market place. It relocated to its present position in 1887. Much of the older housing and shops were demolished in the 1960s²⁰. Now a mixture of modern and nineteenth century housing, it is characterised by traditional buildings constructed of the local honey-coloured sandstone and stone roof tiles, whilst much of the modern housing is of brick and concrete tile (figure 6). High Street sits above part of the village and commands views across the valley.



Figure 6: Left – view north-west above no. 60 along High Street. Right – view south east down High Street. Note the New Inn in the middle of the photo has recently been converted to housing whilst the old market lay below this.

²⁰ Naylor, A., and Burns J., *Birstall's Heritage* (Keighley: Fretwell, 1995) p.27.

60, High Street, sits on the south (downslope) side of the street, flanked by stone houses of the nineteenth century. Legal documents record that the land on which the chapel now stands had been owned by Martha Wood by her marriage to The New Inn innkeeper, Thomas Matthewman. The land was described as 'staked up and divided from New Inn Croft', of 327 square yards, and 'bounded on the west and south by other parts of the New Inn Croft', to the north were tenements of Richard Nussey, and an 'open quarry'. However, to clear an unpaid debt of £750 owed by Martha Wood to Elias Holt, the land was sold to George Wilkinson a blacksmith and Joseph Daughtry, a shoemaker, for £40 17s 6d on 30th June 1835²¹.

In documents dated April 1836, the land was passed to 'The Trustees of the Wesleyan Protestant Methodist Society of Birstal' for the sum of £41²². It also mentions that the land was for the erection of a chapel or meeting house 'now in progress of erection'. The eight trustees of the Wesleyan Protestant Methodists were either clothiers, cordwainers or coalminers, giving an insight into their social status. Given that the chapel was already under construction before it was legally the property of the Trustees, suggests that Messrs Wilkinson and Daughtry were either members of the society or had purchased the land specifically for the organisation.

In the following month, documents record that the Trustees required a loan of £100 from Samuel Smith in order to complete the construction. Monies to repay this loan were to be raised from donations and income from the chapel congregation²³.

In documents dated 1838, the chapel is now known as 'Zion Chapel' and described as a 'chapel or meeting house with vestry adjoining'. This document records the change of ownership from the Trustees of 'The Wesleyan Protestant Methodist Society of Birstall' to Christopher Atkinson, minister of the New Connexion of Methodists, for 5 shillings and a peppercorn rent for one year²⁴. The trustees themselves do not appear to change as many of the same trustees are named in a sale document nine years later. It seems likely that this was a merger between the Protestant Methodist Society and the New Connexion of Methodists²⁵.



Figure 7: 1854 OS 61:10,560 map showing the 'Zion Chapel, Independent' marked in red.

²¹ Conveyance document dated 30th June 1835 in private ownership of M. Brook.

²² Bargain and sale and declaration dated 23rd April 1836, M. Brook.

²³ Mortgage document dated 7th May 1836, M. Brook.

²⁴ Conveyance document dated 1st / 2nd August 1838, M. Brook.

²⁵ Clegg, p.87.

But the New Connexion of Methodists do not appear to have worshipped there for long as deeds show that the chapel was sold by them in April 1847 to an Independent denomination (later known as the Congregational Church)²⁶. On the 1854 Ordnance Survey 1:10,560 series map, Zion Chapel is marked as 'Independent' (figure 7). What became of the Methodist New Connexion is unclear, but one suggestion is that some or all joined the Wesleyan Reform Church at Mount Tabor in North Terrace²⁷. For the new independent congregation this was only a temporary move, as new premises were built for them in Low Lane in 1853 (figure 7). This chapel was later called the Birstall Salem Congregational Church, and was also known as Birstall Independent Church²⁸. Built in the neo-gothic style, it is thought to have been originally built as the Sunday school with a church planned for the adjacent land. This did not materialise, and the Sunday school became the place of worship²⁹. Sunday schools had become an important part of non-conformist activity and they were either housed nearby or planned and incorporated into newly built chapels³⁰. The Zion Chapel at High Street simply couldn't accommodate this development.



Figure 7 Salem Church in Low Lane built in 1853 for an independent congregation and now converted to housing.

By 1856 the chapel in Low Lane was ready and Zion Chapel was sold to the Primitive Methodists³¹. It is known that this group had been gathering in Birstall since at least the 1830s, having rented rooms in the village³². The sales documents also list the contents of the chapel as containing amongst other things a 'gallery pulpit, pews and stalls'.

The Primitive Methodists remained owners of the chapel until its sale into the private ownership of John Watson a joiner on 5th June 1879 for £280³³. The documents record that the 'chapel school' had become too small for their needs and that new premises 'are now in the course of erection' because the 'said society at Birstall has so increased as to require a more commodious chapel school and premises'. The 'more

²⁶ Conveyance document 12th April 1847, M Brook.

²⁷ Ibid, p.89.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 91.

²⁹ Naylor and Burns, p.24.

³⁰ Dolbey, G., *The architectural expression of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1964) p.126.

³¹ Conveyance document, 18th November 1856, M Brook.

³² Clegg, p.91.

³³ Conveyance document, 5th June 1879, M. Brook.

commodious premises' were a large imposing neo-classical building located on the south side of Low Lane³⁴.

Chapel records for Zion Chapel could not be traced by the West Yorkshire Archive Service. This is perhaps not surprising as most of the congregations appear to have moved on to other churches or chapels and would therefore have taken their records with them.

The Watson family are recorded in the census returns of 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911 as living in the 'Old Chapel':

Census Returns for Birstall

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1881 | '2 households up from the New Inn' | | | |
| John Watson | Head, Married | 67?? | Joiner | Birstall |
| Sarah Watson | Wife, Married | 50 | - | Birstall |
| Thomas Watson | Son | 9 | Scholar | Birstall |
| 1891 | | | | |
| John Watson | Head, Married | 61?? | Joiner | Birstall |
| Sarah Watson | Wife, Married | 60 | - | Birstall |
| Thomas Watson | Son | 19 | Scholar | Birstall |
| 1901 | 'Old Chapel' | | | |
| Mrs John (Sarah) Watson | Head, Widow | 70 | - | Birstall |
| Robert Watson | Son, Married | 43 | Joiner & Carpenter | Birstall |
| Ellen Watson | Daughter in Law | 47 | - | Huddersfield |
| Mary A | Grand-daughter | 17 | Clothweaver | Birstall |
| John | Grand-son | 10 | - | Birstall |
| 1911 | 71 High Street | | | |
| Robert Watson | Head, Married | 53 | Joiner worker | Birstall |
| Ellen Watson | Wife, Married | 56 | | Huddersfield |
| John Watson | Son, single | 19 | Joiners Apprentice | Birstall |

The Ordnance Survey 1:2,500 map from 1894 confirms the private ownership as it is no longer marked as a chapel (figure 8). The business was sold to the current owners, the Brook family, in 1960 but the building remained in the ownership of the Watsons. The Brooks continued to call the business by the name Watson & Son. A document dated 1969 records the passing of a 'joiners shop known as 60 (formerly 71) High Street from the ownership of John Watson of 20 Nova Lane, to his wife Frances Annie Watson of that address, on his death. The building remained in Mrs Watson's ownership until it was gifted to Malcolm Brook in 1986.

³⁴ The Primitive Methodist Chapel in Low Lane closed in 1909 having been too large and too expensive for them to maintain. The building became a cinema in 1911, and later a library. It was demolished in 1981(Naylor and Burns, p.55).

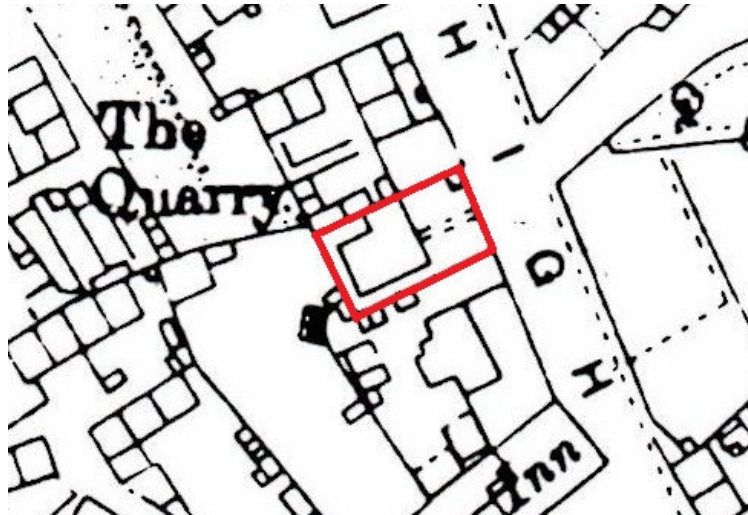


Figure 8: OS 1:2,500 map 1894.

Description

Exterior

The former Zion Chapel, now 60, High Street, Birstall is rectangular and of three bays wide by three bays deep and gabled to the road. It is a two storied building of hammer dressed sandstone blocks with a stone slate roof, cement ribbon pointing, and part rendered to the sides and rear. It has two red brick chimneys attached to the north and west of the building. Some of the original timber guttering remains (figure 9)



Figure 9: Front façade of 60, High Street.

The chapel sits in a small plot bounded by a stone wall to all four sides, and is set back from the road. As is the tradition of non-conformist chapels, there is no particular orientation³⁵. To the front of the property is a concreted area which contains a low

³⁵ Wakelin, p.83.

timber store attached to the front wall; a structure is shown in this position on the Ordnance Survey 1:2,500 map of 1894. The yard is accessed by wide double metal gates which are set off centre to the front door of the chapel suggesting the present gates have been widened. The same 1894 map confirms this and shows only a footpath leading direct to the front door (figure 8).

The building is symmetrical with a central projecting porch with a timber half glazed door, and rectangular light above. The door, with heavy moulded lower panels and arched glazed panes above and letter box appear to be of the later nineteenth century and probably date to when the Watson's lived here after 1879³⁶. The original door would probably have been a solid panelled door, rather than glazed³⁷. The steps up to the front porch are heavily worn and off-centre and suggest that even if they are not the original doors, they have been in-situ for many years, or respect an original door arrangement (figure 10).



Figure 10: front door and porch.



Figure 11: Re-set window to front gable.

The quoins to the porch, are large rectangular blocks set in a 'long-and-short' pattern, with a single rectangular stone lintel to the door. On top of the porch and behind the timber signage can be seen the ends of stone 'scrolls', suggesting that the porch is topped by one of the chapels few decorative features. This may be the location of an inscription which is a common feature of non-conformist chapels. A timber gutter supported on timber brackets runs around the top of the porch with a single electric light over the door.

The porch is flanked on each side by four light timber top opening casement window, with three evenly spaced similar windows to the second floor. Each window has a heavy surround, with a single rectangular stone lintel, jambs of vertical stones, with a horizontal stone mid-way. This 'long-and-short' arrangement (which is also seen in the porch) appears to be a common feature on buildings in the surrounding area. The

³⁶ House letter boxes only became common from the middle of the nineteenth century, Calloway, C., *The Elements of Style* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996) p.241.

³⁷ Before 1840, only internal doors would have been glazed, Parissen, S., *The Georgian Book* (London: Aurum Press, 1999) p.108.

casement windows are probably twentieth century additions and it is more likely that the chapel originally had timber sliding sashes.

To the right of the front door, the ground floor window shows evidence that it has been lowered, with new stonework above and roughly cutting through the string course below. It was probably lowered when the chapel was partially used for domestic purposes, and this window lit the living room (figure 11).

A stone string course runs below the ground and first floor windows, whilst a further string course runs above the first floor windows creating a simple classical pediment to the gable. The large rectangular rendered panel in the gable indicates the former position of a business sign. This may hide a date or inscription stone.

A small window close to the ground and below the left hand window is modern and lights the area under the stairs. An internal inspection confirms that the window is not original and the rough finish of stonework inside suggests it was a later insertion.

Access could not be obtained to the rear of the building which is heavily overgrown, but the sides and rear could be observed and photographed from neighbouring properties. Both the north and south walls are also of three bays, the side walls containing a single timber two light top opening casement window set centrally on the ground floor, whilst the first floor walls have three similar styled windows offset towards the rear of the building (west). Guttering is supported on stone brackets. The rear (west) wall which is rendered and has a central brick chimney stack, which is flanked to the ground floor by two windows, again similar to those previous described. There are no windows to the first floor.

The west wall also has a modern flat roofed extension containing a small office (circa 1970) which was not accessible for survey.

Also attached to the chapel on the north side is a single storied unit with parapet to the front elevation and a stone slate roof in diminishing courses. There are two blocked windows to the north elevation, whilst a single four light timber casement window facing west. Access is provided by a door to the front elevation and a door internally. A straight joint between it and the chapel, and the lack of coursing through, suggest this building was built later. It also sits awkwardly with the chapel as its location upsets the symmetry. However, documentation suggests it is almost contemporary with the chapel as within two years of construction it is described as a 'chapel or meeting house with vestry adjoining'³⁸. It may be that it was not originally part of the design and was added very soon after the chapel was completed.

Interior

Ground floor:

The entrance lobby floor is partly tiled in simple polychrome 'checker-board' pattern quarry tiles. These types of hard wearing tiles were very common in the Victorian household for entrance paths and halls³⁹ and mass production only began in the 1840s, after the chapel was constructed⁴⁰.

³⁸ Bargain and sale and declaration, 23rd April 1836, M Brook.

³⁹ Calloway, S., p.251

⁴⁰ Parissen, S., p.143



Figure 12: Looking down the first flight of stone stairs into the entrance lobby, facing north. Note the checker-board pattern to the quarry tiles cut by the modern doorway into the workshop beyond.

This suggests that it may date to the period it was sold to the Watson's for workshop and domestic accommodation. A further door separates the ground floor workshop from the hallway and is a twentieth century arrangement which does not respect the lobby floor tiles. To the left a set of heavily worn stone stairs lead to the first floor. The walls to the lobby and stairs are boarded out with tongue and groove panelling, overlain with a modern board wainscot. There is evidence of a simple cornice to the plain plastered ceiling (figure 12).



Figure 13: view facing west of the ground floor. Note the four slender iron columns and the modern suspended ceiling which would have once been open to the gallery above. The area to the right was once divided off as domestic accommodation – note the green tiles would once have lined the kitchen.

The ground floor is open plan, lit by five windows, with the entrance to an understair cupboard beneath the cantilevered stone stairs, whilst another door leads to the old vestry on the right. The main features observed were the four slender iron columns supporting beams to the ceiling, whilst the workshop contains a variety of machines,

shelving, benches and equipment from its use as a joiners business for over 100 years. The majority of the equipment is powered by electricity and dates to the twentieth century, whilst a number of pieces of equipment may be much older; for example, a brace for drilling holes to form a king post truss whilst other pieces were hand powered or appear to have been adapted with the addition of electrical motors (figure 14).



Figure 13: Twentieth century workshop equipment (left), whilst (right) this brace for drilling holes for King Post trusses is probably nineteenth century in date.

The timber suspended floor has been renewed and repaired over many years, leaving boards of a variety of lengths and widths. Notches cut into the floor were observed in the south west of the floor. It was difficult to tell if the notches were from the fixing of pews or from removed workbenches.

Evidence that the ground floor workshop had once been partially used for domestic use could be seen. On the north wall an area of green tiling around and below the right window indicates the area of a kitchen/scullery, whilst a cement line on the floor shows the foundation line of a brick party wall. Timber to the ceiling also indicates the location of timber party walls which crated the living room, and an earlier line of the entrance hall. The presence of a chimney breast with a blocked fireplace also confirms the use of this area for domestic accommodation and is not original to the chapel. A door enters the attached vestry to the left of the chimney breast (noted above).

A picture rail runs along the right (north) wall and the west wall for a short distance. The picture rail does not respect the evidence of domestic accommodation and may be part of an earlier phase to the building. However there was no evidence of this feature on the south wall.

Little remains to suggest that this lower floor was a chapel apart from the cast iron columns. These would have supported an upper gallery, which has now been infilled. A

modern suspended ceiling indicates the central area which would have been open to gallery above, and shows that, despite the modest size of the chapel, it would have had a gallery running around three sides of the building. Removing some of the suspended ceiling tiles, it was possible to locate the edge of the lower gallery floor (figure 14).



Figure 14: Removal of tiles from the suspended ceiling reveal the underside of the gallery above. Note the decorative top to the iron column (camera facing east).

A stove has been installed into the workshop against the west wall. This is probably where the 'gallery pulpit' mentioned in documents, would have been located, though no evidence now remains. From the restricted space between the galleries and the modest size of the chapel, the pulpit would have needed to have been raised to ensure that the minister could see, and be seen by everyone within the chapel.

There are three blocked up holes of roughly 30cm square and 90cm off the ground in the west, north and south walls. These were used to pass through long pieces of timber into the workshop which required cutting or working (pers comm. M. Brook). These openings can also be seen in the external north and south walls.

The small vestry is accessed in the north wall of the chapel. This was once used as a sitting room. There are no features of interest as it has been entirely lined with modern panelling, and has a suspended ceiling. This work dates to its use as a chapel of rest in the later twentieth century.

First floor:

The stone staircase leads up to a modern door through to the 1970s extension, which did not form part of the survey. The stairs then turn right ninety degrees, through a modern door and up narrow and worn stone stairs to the first floor (figure 15). The stairwell walls are clad in tongue and groove panelling. The stone steps show many years of wear.



Figure 15: Narrow stairs to the second floor. Note tongue and groove panelling and worn steps.

The first floor has a slightly barrel vaulted ceiling of lath and plaster, supported on three trusses terminating in large scroll brackets (figure 16). There are number of plaster ceiling roses indicating the position of light fittings (figure 17). Immediately noticeable are a number of changes in the floor level. It has also been divided into a workshop area whilst three rooms have been inserted into the whole space for domestic use.



Figure 16: Bracket to ceiling



Figure 17: Ceiling rose

The three domestic rooms which partially occupy the first floor are constructed of timber and of concrete blocks. It became clear during the survey that these inserted rooms were built respecting the heights of the top two tiers of the chapel's galleries, with two rooms positioned on the highest gallery, along the east wall of the chapel, whilst a later room built of concrete blocks, is raised on a timber platform and respects the second gallery level (figure 18) The floor of this gallery can be seen running around the north, east and western walls. A step below this is a later timber floor to infill the area between the galleries. From lifting part of this floor it was seen to have been inserted on top of the lowest gallery floor level. This same gallery floor was also observed when ceiling tiles on the ground floor were removed (see above). It was therefore possible to reconstruct how the galleries once appeared (appendix 1).



Figure 18 First floor facing west. Note the inserted room on a platform to the right. Panelling to the west wall has been inserted or re-located to this position.

The domestic rooms are of little interest and contain a bathroom fitted out in the second half of the twentieth century, and two rooms used as bedrooms and later used for storage. All original features apart from the brackets indicating the end of the truss have been covered up or removed (figure 19).



Figure 19 – the same domestic room shown in figure 18 Facing north..

The timber tongue and groove wainscoting which is seen in the stairwell continues along two thirds of the south wall up to window sill height. This may date from the construction of the chapel and was originally stained dark brown. The wainscot continues behind storage containers. On closer inspection it was realised that the storage boxes were built into a pew. The extant pew was of simple construction with a seat and curved bench ends, the back rest was provided by the tongue and groove wainscot (figure 20). This was the only extant, and possibly insitu, piece of chapel furniture to be found during the survey.



Figure 20: Converted into a storage container, this is the last remaining pew to be found in the chapel. The middle containers rest upon the seat, whilst pew ends can be seen at each end. Note the change in floor level denoting the gallery edge. Facing south.

At the end of the pew, and towards the western end of the chapel, the tongue and groove changes to plain panelling. The panelling would have acted at the pew backs and does not extend to the floor (figure 21). This may indicate the seating area for the 'better off' chapel goers, who would pay more to sit closer to the galleried pulpit. The panelling terminates on the west wall. This same panelling can be found on the northern wall.



Figure 21: This plain panelling behind the lathe would once have been the backs of pews. Facing south.

A wainscot extends across the length of the west wall, but differs from the panelling of the pew backs and is paint-grained with moulding. This panelling is topped by a narrow shelf at waist height. Evidence suggests this panelling has been moved from elsewhere and re-hung on the west wall as it sits on top of the inserted floor, does not 'fit' the west wall, fitting against the panelling of the pew ends on the left (south), but terminating awkwardly and cutting into the panelling on the right (north) (figure 22).



Figure 22: wainscot to the west wall. Left and right images are each end of the wainscot, showing both the awkward fit and the difference in quality. Note also the narrowness of this side gallery. Facing west.

Clegg mentions that the chapel may once have been used as a Working Men's Club⁴¹. Whilst no historic evidence has been found, the panelling may support this idea. It has been relocated into this position after the chapel was converted, is too decorative for a workshop in which it is located, and does not appear to belong to the domestic phase of the building. It was also noted that the shelf on the top of the panelling was a useful height for resting a drink!



Figure 23: Facing south-east, this image shows both the over boarding to the floor for a possible snooker table, the various floor levels, and to the left a door through to a bedroom built upon the rear upper gallery.

⁴¹ Clegg, p.88.

Also supporting this idea is the curious over boarding on the floor which is thought to be where the snooker table once stood (pers. comm. M Brook). The dimensions of the boarding were found to be exactly the size of a snooker table and might have been a walkway around the perimeter. If a snooker table was ever installed here it would have predate the insertion of the third domestic room which overlies this boarding (figure 23).

Another feature to the west wall is a blocked window. This was probably blocked when the building was converted to a workshop and a chimney was build against the west wall for the stove on the ground floor. It would have been positioned above, and would have lit the pulpit.

Discussion

Overall the chapel façade is very plain, but reflects a classical symmetry and rectangular form typical of non-conformist chapels of the Georgian period⁴². The string course and the decoration to the porch roof also hint at classical elements. The architecture reflects an austerity found in the Methodist faith at the time, whilst also reflecting the economic and social status of the trustees. Similar examples of chapels from around this period exist. For example the more sophisticated grade II listed Thurstonland Methodist Chapel, Holme, Kirklees also built in 1836 on similar, but rather more sophisticated lines (figure 23). Another example is the Zion Congregational Chapel, Wibsey in West Yorkshire built in 1841. Parallels may also be drawn with the Dacre Congregational Chapel in Nidderdale built in 1827 with a single central doorway and simple two bay gabled façade.⁴³

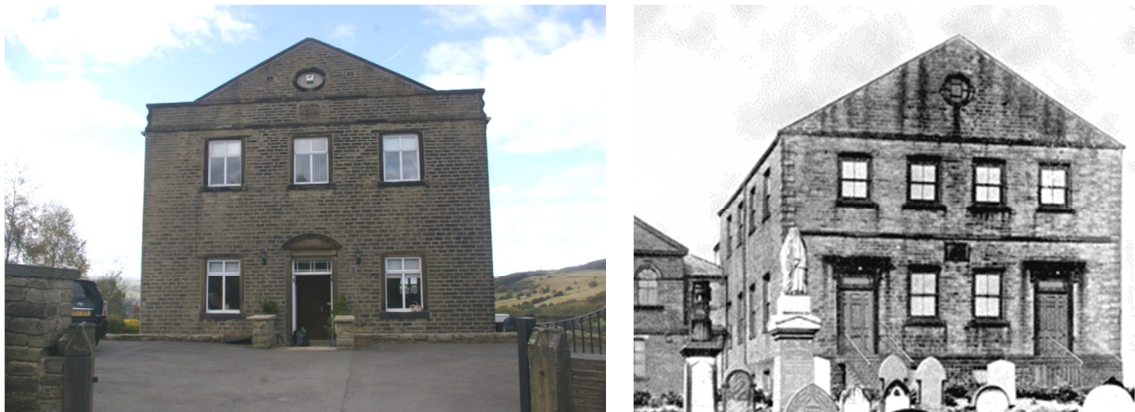


Figure 23: Thurstonland Methodist Chapel, Holme (left) and (right) Zion Congregational Chapel, Wibsey (South Bradford Local History Alliance - <http://www.sblha.com/zcw.html>)

Internally, evidence has been found to reconstruct a three sided gallery of three tiers, accessed by at least one stone staircase. Tongue and groove timber boarding lined some of the walls, whilst pews appear to have been quite plain. The arched ceiling is interrupted only by a number of decorative plaster ceiling roses and bracketed ends to the trusses. Although no evidence now remains, the gallery pulpit is likely to have

⁴² Powell, K., *Fall of Zion: northern chapel architecture and its future* (London: Save Britain's Heritage, 1980) p.5.

⁴³ Stell, C., *An inventory of Nonconformist chapels and meeting-houses in the north of England* (London: HMSO, 1994) p.249.

stood below the west window, below which was probably the usual arrangement of communion table and rail normally found in Methodist chapels and churches⁴⁴.

One question which may only be answered with the clearance and proposed conversion of the chapel to domestic housing is that of a second staircase. Many chapels, even of a moderate size had two staircases to access the gallery and to allow easy flow to and from seats by the congregation. It is therefore likely that this chapel also had a second staircase on the opposite wall from the present stone stairs. However, there appears to be no visible evidence for this. On the first floor, the area where a staircase might have emerged is covered by inserted domestic rooms. On the ground floor, the flooring gave no indication of the foundations necessary for a stone staircase, and no scarring was evident on the wall. These areas have undergone many changes through time, but it is still possible evidence may come to light in future work.

The simplicity of the Zion Chapel was driven both by the finances of some congregations and, as George Dolbey writes, Methodists 'aspired neither to ecclesiastical nor architectural distinction. Their *raison d'être* was the spreading of Scriptural Holiness and they regarded the world as their parish'.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Bielby, p.76.

⁴⁵ Dolbey, p 37.

Conclusion

In recent decades the closure of chapels and churches has been driven by the modern phenomena of shrinking religious congregations. In the nineteenth century, the opposite was true. The old Zion Chapel in Birstall is an example of where abandonment was driven by congregations becoming too large for their accommodation.

Where space allowed a new church might be built next door. This can be seen in the case of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, Huddersfield Road in Birstall, where the old chapel became the Sunday school (figure 3). But in the case of the Zion Chapel, the plot of land did not allow for expansion. Passed between different non-conformist groups as temporary accommodation, it had served its original purpose as a place of worship and ended as a Sunday school in 1879. No longer big enough, it passed into private hands to continue to be useful as both business and domestic premises.

The adaptive reuse of the chapel has unfortunately affected the building's significance. Externally, the classical symmetry has been lost through the lowering of a window, the original windows have been replaced, domestic pipework, chimneys and an unfortunate twentieth century extension mar the façade. Internally, the survey has shown how few original features remain from its use as a chapel. These include the simple iron columns which support the remains of the lower gallery, a stone stair, timber panelling to the first floor gallery, a single remaining pew, the lathe and plaster ceilings with decorative scrolls and ceiling roses, and the remains of galleries, partly ridden below the floor and the ground floor ceiling. The lack of original features is perhaps not surprising given that it has been a joiner's workshop and domestic accommodation far longer than a chapel. Indeed they have survived in spite of its later use. Some of these features, in particular the iron columns, stone stairs and plasterwork have the potential to add character to a new conversion scheme, and should be included wherever possible. But despite the loss of original fabric, its use as commercial premises since the later nineteenth century has saved it from total demolition – a fate met by other Birstall chapels.

The future for the Old Zion Chapel looks more promising and conversion to residential accommodation through good design and restoration utilising appropriate materials will ensure that it continues in use for many more years.

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Legal Documents

The following documents are all in the private ownership of Mr Malcolm Brook:

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23rd April 1836 bargain and sale and declaration document between Messrs Wilkinson and Daughtry to Trustees of the Wesleyan Protestant Society of Birstall.

7th May 1836 mortgage document arranged between Samuel Smith and the Trustees of the Wesleyan Protestant Society of Birstall.

1st /2nd August 1838 conveyance document between the Trustees of the Wesleyan Protestant Society of Birstall to Methodist of the New Connexion.

12th April 1847 conveyance document between John Ellis and others, to Thomas Burnley and others.

18th November 1856 conveyance document between Thomas Burnley and others to Thomas Webster and others.

31st November 1875 reconveyance document between John Lord and others to Thomas Webster and others.

5th June 1879 conveyance document Thomas Webster and others to John Watson.

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Appendix

