METHODIST CENTRAL HALLS AS PUBLIC SACRED SPACE

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Ph.D in the Faculty of Humanities

> 2010 Angela Connelly School of Environment and Development

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Abbreviations

ANC: African National Congress DCA: Department for Chapel Affairs DCMS: Department of Culture Media and Sport **BL: British Library BMA: Bolton Museums and Archives BNEJ:** Building News and Engineering Journal **BRO: Bristol Records Office CMC:** Central Mission Committee GCA: Glasgow City Archives HMD: Methodist Church, Home Mission Division **IBC:** Islington Borough Council ILEA: Inner London Education Authority JRBT: The Joseph Rank benevolent trust LCC: London County Council LRO: Liverpool Records Office MALS: Manchester Archives and Local Studies MARC: Methodist Archives and Research Centre MCBF: Metropolitan Chapel Building Fund MPO: The Methodist Church Property Office NPOR: National Pipe Organ Register NMR: National Monuments Record PD: Methodist Church, Property Division **RIBA: Royal Institute of British Architects** TCF: Twentieth Century Fund WHS: Wesley Historical Society WLA: Wigan and Leigh Archives

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Abstract

Few people know that the first sessions of the General Assembly of the UN in 1946 were held in a place of worship - Westminster Central Hall. It was part of an ambitious construction programme, initiated by the Wesleyan Methodists, which resulted in Central Halls in most British cities. They were, and in some cases still are, flexible, multi-functional spaces used on a daily basis for a wide range of purposes. They are widely perceived as public space but they are also sacred - camouflaged churches, created as sites for missionary activity and social outreach by a faith which from its origins has challenged the dichotomy between sacred and secular space.

They have never been systematically studied – even their number and locations were unknown. This thesis tells their story by presenting them as an undocumented building type of social and cultural significance. It explores the concept of building type and the dimensions of social and cultural analysis that may be explored with the method. The typological approach is then demonstrated with a specific monographic focus on Methodist Central Halls from the 1880s to the present. Using a combination of visual methods, archival research and personal testimony, the analysis offers insights into the many aspects of Methodism through the long twentieth century – the church's spatial distribution, its modes of mission and worship, its cultural identity and its business model. These centrally located assembly halls with their landmark architecture are for many towns still the top venues for meeting and entertainment. The typology of such public sacred spaces is not only a chapter in the history of British cities but provides findings of wide interest for religion and society.

Declaration and Copyright Statements

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the "Copyright") and she has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such copyright, including for administrative purposes.

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The most obvious academic debts are to Professor Michael Hebbert and Dr Andrew Crompton who both, in their own ways, taught me to open my eyes to the built environment. I have also been fortunate to have many people comment upon aspects of the thesis at various points including Professor Jeremy Gregory, Professor Cecilia Wong, Professor John Archer, Dr Christopher Wakeling, the Revd. Dr John J. Vincent and Dr. Peter Forsaith. Many others drew upon their own research to provide me with leads including E. Alan Rose, Colin Dews, Brian Frost, John D. Beasley and Revd. John Munsey Turner

Staff at numerous local studies libraries across the country have helped me to find the relevant data. Well-used places were the Methodist Archives and Research Centre at the John Rylands University Library (Special Collections), Bristol Records Office, Wigan and Leigh Archives, Liverpool Records Office, Manchester Archives and Local Studies, the National Record of Monuments, the RIBA Library, London Metropolitan Archives, Islington Local Studies, Bolton Museums and Archives, Sheffield Libraries and Archives, the Hull History Centre, Glasgow City Archives, Lewisham Local Studies, Lambeth Local Studies, the V and A Library, Manchester Metropolitan University Library (Local Studies) and the British Library. I must also make special mention of the assistance given by Morag Robertson and Donna Pope at the University of Manchester (Maps Collection).

Finally, I must not neglect to mention Matthew Steele who offered moral support, a positive outlook and suggestions regarding the illustrations.

Standing by a purpose true, Heeding God's command, Honour them, the faithful few! All hail to Daniel's band!

Dare to be a Daniel, Dare to stand alone! Dare to have a purpose firm! Dare to make it know.

Words and Music: Philip J. Bliss (1873)

PART ONE

Chapter 1: Researching Methodist Central Halls

Background

As Michael Hebbert played the organ during an interdenominational service to celebrate the 90th anniversary of a scout troop in the East End of London in 2007, he looked around and was 'taken aback by the scale of the building, with its public presence, basement activity rooms, street shop frontage, upper storey apartments, and central worship space'.¹ This was the Methodist East End Mission Hall (1907) in Stepney (Figure 1.1). He subsequently discovered that similar 'Central Halls' existed throughout London and in every other British city, all of them mixed-purpose buildings in prime locations, many being well-known civic landmarks. They are perceived as public space but they are also sacred: camouflaged churches created as sites for missionary activity and social outreach.

Central Halls were built by the Wesleyan Methodists in response to the growing nineteenth century cities and the problem of religious indifference. The 1886 report of their Home-Mission and Contingent Fund conveyed their main fears:

If the songs of the people form their character more than do their laws, the outlook in nearly all directions is dark...manners and beliefs like fashions, find their way from the great centres to the country localities, reaching even the most distant of these, and being assisted in their progress by modern appliances.²

The Wesleyans could have chosen to ignore the problem. Nevertheless, as Andrew Lees has convincingly argued, contemporaries may have viewed urban society with horror yet it could equally be a place of hope.³ For Wesleyan Methodists, the city could be a place of redemption. However, to accomplish the salvation of urban souls they required buildings. So, there was a second choice: finding a form and function to fit their requirements. In 1896, the *Methodist Times* summed up the intention behind this new type:

¹ Michael Hebbert and Angela Connelly, 'Learning from Buildings' in Linda Woodhead (ed.) *Innovative Methods in the Study of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

² The Wesleyan Methodist Church, The Thirty-first Annual Report of the Wesleyan Home Mission and Contingent Fund for the Support and Spread of the Gospel in Great Britain and Ireland (Leeds: Walker & Laycock, 1886), 1.

³ Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820 – 1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).



Figure 1.1: The Former East End Mission, Stepney (1907) by Weir, Burrows and Weir, September 2009. Source: Author

The days of small missions are over. The supreme necessity of every aggressive agency now is a great Central Mission that shall do for our Evangelical Church what Cathedrals did and do for a different type of church work. The multiplication of small mission halls which do not cluster around a great Central Hall is the most costly as well as the least successful method of attacking the problem areas of great cities.⁴

In sum, over £2.8 million was expended to create new buildings or adapting existing ones between 1886 and 1945. The result was around one hundred Halls and their associated buildings: all of it financed by voluntary subscription and Chapel Committee grants.⁵ They are the tangible high-water mark of urban nonconformity yet there is a lacuna in the academic literature.⁶ Their spatial requirements remain a puzzle. The aim of this thesis is to present them as an example of an undocumented building type of social and religious significance. This raises a specific set of questions regarding location, construction, management and funding. In addition, their multi-functionality offers the opportunity to address substantive questions concerning the way that the secular architecture shaped the way that the Central Halls were used. How did the sacred and secular interact with one another?

The narrative of Central Halls will be set against a background of declining religious observance, and the changing meanings and potentials of these spaces. This highlights a further group of questions: what became of the Central Halls? How was decline experienced in the Methodist urban missions? Were they modified or disposed of? What becomes of them when they are no longer used for religious purposes? Moreover, what can we learn about religious change from church buildings?

⁴ 'Notes on Current Events', The Methodist Times, Jan/Feb 1896, 72.

⁵ Taking 1918 as the middle period this amounts to around £90 million in contemporary terms. Excluding Westminster Central Hall, at a cost of £350, 000, this equates to roughly £30, 000 per building. Data is available for 83 out of 99 Halls. Compiled from the WCCAR, 1886 – 1945; See especially 'List of Mission Halls Returned as Completed 1898 – 1928', WCCAR 1929, 19 – 22.

⁶ A cyclostyled history of the Central Missions was published by George Sails, *At the Centre: The Story of the Methodist Central Missions* (London: Division of Home Mission, 1970). One M.Sc. thesis directly discusses the Central Halls see Rachel Godden, 'Methodist Central Halls: A Study in Re-Use' (M.Sc thesis, Oxford Brookes University, 2000). The historian Robert Currie wrote 'Were the Central Halls a Failure?', *New Directions*, 1 (1967), 21 – 24. Others mention their role briefly, for example, Kenneth S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 92 – 95 and Kenneth Young, *Chapel: The Joyous Days and the Prayerful Nights of Nonconformists in their Hey-Day* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), passim

Solving the Puzzle: A Collaborative Doctoral Project

Adrian Bailey, Catherine Brace and David C. Harvey urge those who research religion to critically reflect upon their 'positionality'- or religious persuasion – and suggest making 'explicit the role of one's commitments in choosing between theories, while at the same time allowing others to scrutinise those commitments'.⁷ The Methodist Church Property Office became the partner organisation in the collaborative project. The contract governing the relationship framed its aims and objectives. MPO are provided with a scholarly study of their principle city centre assets and a consideration of how the social and cultural contributions of the Halls may be maintained and developed in the future. The research approach has been developed to fulfil these objectives and MPO has taken an active role in commenting upon the interpretation and presentation of data. This has been valuable since the author of the thesis is not a Methodist and any misunderstandings - particularly on specific policies - were quickly corrected. Equally, academic integrity was also protected by the contract and a sufficiently critical stance could be maintained.

The collaboration afforded unprecedented access to the archives and knowledge base of the Methodist Church Property Office. Prior to the Union of the Methodist Church in 1932, this office was the location for the Wesleyan Chapel Committee. Although other sections such as the Primitive Methodists built similar buildings, they did not do so on such a wide scale.⁸ Owing to these sources, the thesis relates to the buildings constructed by the Wesleyan Church. The reliance upon Methodist archives and the contacts means that this is very much written from the point of view of the Methodist Church: it is about the image that they projected through the medium of Central Halls and their subsequent management of decline.

Research Approach

The research was collected in two phases. The first consists of a national narrative that gives an overview of the roll-out of the construction programme and the major modifications and adaptations. However, as the historian Alan Gilbert argues, histories based upon religious

⁷ Adrian R. Bailey, Catherine Brace and David C. Harvey, 'Three Geographer's in an Archive: Positions, Predilections and Passing Comment on Transient Lives', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 34/2 (2009), 254 - 69.

⁸ Colin Dews, *Email to the Author*, 2 July 2010.

organisations and their archives frequently overlook the role of the worshipping congregation.⁹ David Hempton re-iterates this sentiment and suggests that Methodism 'was rooted in the particularities of time and place. Its tender pieties and harsh disciplines were embraced by individuals and expressed in communities'.¹⁰ He calls for local studies of non-metropolitan urban religion.¹¹ To address this, the themes raised by the national study are interrogated in part three which consists of six individual case study sites of the English Central Halls.

Case studies are particularly applicable to studies that have a large exploratory component.¹² It is a method widely applied in surveys of the built environment where it allows for a detailed consideration of a building.¹³ Thomas Markus used a variety of case studies to inform his thematic exploration of innovative nineteenth-century building types and, although it draws on the iconic, Peter Blundell-Jones' *Modern Architecture through Case Studies*, presents a history of modernist architecture approached through its buildings.¹⁴

The case studies are Manchester (1886), Victoria Hall in Bolton (1900), The Charles Garrett Memorial Hall in Liverpool (1905), The Queen's Hall in Wigan (1908), Bristol Central Hall (1924) and Archway Central Hall in North London (1934). Four criteria picked the sites. Firstly, they were chosen over the time period of construction to discern any changes in type. Secondly, the archive needed to have a quality and depth through which the material changes could be traced. Preliminary searches were made via the national archives hub with the national study providing an overview of potential sites. Hull, Sheffield and Birmingham were omitted because of the refurbishment of local studies archives during the research period. The architectural firm of Bradshaw and Gass (Later Bradshaw Gass and Hope) has a complete (and rare) archive of drawings, tenders, specifications and letters between the firm and its clients and so three of their designs were chosen.¹⁵ Hence, three of their five designs

⁹ Alan Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A History of the Secularization of Modern Society* (London, Longman Group Ltd, 1980), 389.

¹⁰ David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c. 1750 – 1900* (London: Routledge, 1996), 1.

¹¹ Ibid., 49.

¹² Robert K. Yin, Case Study Research: Design and Methods, Third Edition (London: Sage, 2003)

¹³ Mark Francis, 'A Case Study Method for Landscape Architecture', *Landscape Journal*, 20/1 (2001), 15 – 29; Linda Groat and David Wang, *Architectural Research Methods* (New York/Chichester: Wiley, 2003).

¹⁴ Thomas Markus, *Buildings and Power*, 1993; Peter Blundell Jones, *Modern Architecture through Case Studies* (Oxford: The Architectural Press, 2002).

¹⁵ For the overall scope and contents of the archives see Jane Lingard and Timothy Lingard, *Bradshaw Gass and Hope: The Story of an Architectural Practice, the First One Hundred Years* (London: Gallery Lingard, 2007), 11 - 44.

have been chosen. Thirdly, the case studies are skewed in favour of the English provinces. The different religious backgrounds in Scotland, Wales and Ireland were considered to be outside of the scope of a case study. In addition, one third of the Halls were built in London yet Archway is the only example taken from this area since Methodist organisations approached the metropolis in a different manner. Archway was chosen because it was the last purpose-built Central Hall to seat over one thousand people. Lastly, the buildings have different trajectories: Manchester and Archway have survived by innovative use of their building assets; Bristol and Liverpool were sold and have been converted to new uses; Bolton and Wigan continue to attract sizeable congregations for worship.

Research Materials

Visual Sources: Collating, Generating and Interpreting

Data derived from visual sources included architectural drawings and photographic evidence. This thesis draws upon both sociological and design methodologies to query the context of producing an image¹⁶; its dissemination¹⁷ and the relationship of images to text.¹⁸

Architects communicate their intentions through drawings and models.¹⁹ Perspective drawings give an impression of how the finished exterior will look although with room for some artistic licence. Sections are vertical planes through the building which showed the construction of floors, walls and roofs. As Chapter One will fully explain, plans were the most important resource for this project. They show the size, shape, designation and relationship of rooms, the circulation routes, entrances and exits as well as the stairs and corridors.

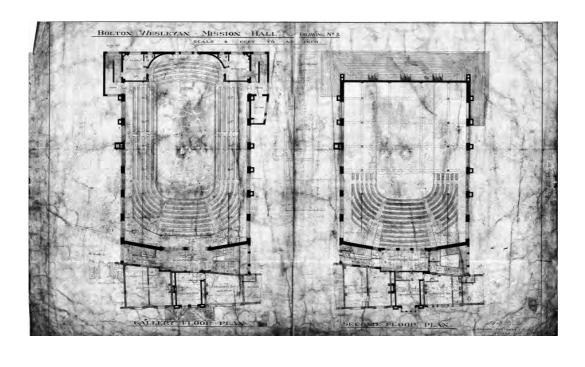
The Wesleyan Chapel Committee Annual Reports accompanied some architectural descriptions with lithograph drawings and occasionally photographs. They rarely contained plans - only eight were available from this source suggesting that style was a sufficient

 $^{^{16}}$ Howard Becker, 'Visual Sociology, Documentary Photography and Photojournalism: It's (Almost) All a Matter of Context' Visual Studies, 10/1 (1995), 5 – 14.

¹⁷ Jon Miller, 'Capturing the Visual Traces of Historical Change: The Internet Mission Photography Archive' in Gregory C. Stanczak (ed.) *Visual Research Methods: Image Society and Representation* (London: Sage, 2007).

¹⁸ Iain Borden, 'Imaging Architecture: The Uses of Photography in the Practice of Architectural History', *The Journal of Architecture*, 12/1 (2001), 57 – 77.

¹⁹ Kate Conway and Rowan Roenisch, Understanding Architecture: An Introduction to Architecture and Architectural History, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2005), 82 – 109; Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME), Recording Historic Buildings: A Descriptive Specification, 3rd edition (London: RCHME, 1996).



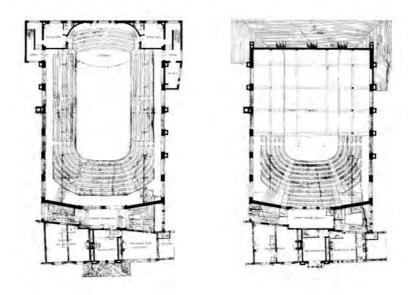


Figure 1.2: First and Second Floor Plans of the Victoria Hall, Bolton (1900). Source: Bradshaw Gass and Hope.

indicator of intention. In the architectural press the Central Halls (except Westminster) were conspicuously absent. When Manchester Central Hall opened in 1886, the *Builder* concentrated upon the new Art Gallery and Shipping Canal. Occasionally it referred to the building of a Central Hall under its section on 'dissenting building news' and it tended to adopt a snobbish attitude to nonconformist buildings.²⁰ The *Building News and Engineering Journal (BNEJ)* yielded seven plans between 1900 and 1912. Four of these were by the Bolton firm of Bradshaw and Gass whose work clearly impressed the editor. Letters in their archive indicated that requests were often made for their illustrations which they obligingly provided.²¹ Planning authorities, local history centres and the church (if it was still in existence) sometimes had copies of historic plans and photographs but these could be poorly stored and while useful to consult they were difficult to reproduce to the sufficient quality required for publication.

Some Halls kept their own archives of newsletters, correspondence and photographs. Here, the status of religious organisations as charities and the level of pride in their buildings meant that the plans were often used in the advertising literature to demonstrate to subscribers the extent of the accommodation provided. Indeed, the Revd. Joseph Jackson, who was in charge during the construction of Liverpool Central Hall, requested that Bradshaw and Gass provide him with more than elevation and interior drawings. He wanted plans to be prepared on foolscap to make them portable enough to show potential subscribers.²² This gives some indication of the initial dissemination of these images. It also shows that it was the accommodation contained in the building and not the style that was most important. The plans have not been redrawn to keep them as faithful to the originals as possible although in many cases they were cleaned using Corel Graphics Suite. Figure 1.2 shows the work done on one image.

In total, twenty-five plans were consulted and supplemented with thirteen site visits. Where the Hall was still in Methodist ownership, the minister or hall manager gave a tour of the building (including any parts that may appear out of access to a general visitor) after which a

²⁰ Christopher Wakeling 'The Nonconformist Traditions: Chapel, Change and Continuity' in Chris Brooks and Andrew Saint, *The Victorian Church: Architecture and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 82 – 97.

²¹ G. A. T. Middleton also included a number of Bradshaw and Gass buildings in his *Modern Buildings, Their Planning, Construction and Equipment*, 6 vols. (London: The Caxton Publishing Company, 1921).

²² Letter from Joseph Jackson to John B. Gass, 11 August 1902, Bolton Museums and Archives (hereafter BMA), Bradshaw Gass and Hope Archive (hereafter ZBGH), BMA ZBGH 257.

note of general impressions and questions was written. For each case study, the individual building plans are related to historic ordnance survey maps. These were consulted prior to the archival research and generated a subsidiary set of research questions regarding the relationship of the building type to the wider urban environment.

Photographs were derived from the Mission's literature or in the local history archive and these could be compared to contemporary photographs to track external changes.²³ Where images have been displayed they are accompanied by a simple description and the source along with a reference in the text in order to relate the use of these sources closely with the written argument.²⁴

Archival Research

MPO²⁵ has much under-used material. Their own library covers both general and specialist works on architecture including Sir Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method for Students, Craftsmen, & Amateurs*, J. M. Richards *An Introduction to Modern Architecture* and Nikolaus Pevsner's, *Pioneers of Modern Design*.²⁶ Nonconformist architectural writing includes Joseph Crouch and Edmund Butler, *Churches, Mission-Halls and Schools for Nonconformists* and William Beddoe Rees, *Chapel Building: Hints and Suggestions*.²⁷ The influence of the 1960s liturgical movement is also evident with Peter Hammond's edited collection, *Towards a Church Architecture* and J. G. Davies' *Worship and Mission*.²⁸ In addition, MPO holds a complete collection of their *Annual Reports*, minutes of meetings, the official *Minutes of the Methodist Conference* and their associated Conference Agendas which contained written reports to be read prior to Conference. Correspondence between each church and MPO is filed in boxes usually covering a thirty year period.

²³ Stewart Brand, How Buildings Learn, 1995, 1.

²⁴ Following Marcus Banks, Visual Methods in Social Research (London: SAGE, 2001), 145 - 8.

²⁵ The Property Office in Manchester has existed under different names. Prior to Methodist Union, between 1854 and 1932 it was the Wesleyan Chapel Committee (WCC). For three years the amalgamated group became the Methodist Chapel Committee. Up until 1976 it became known as the Department for Chapel Affairs (DCA) after which it became the Property Division (PD) and latterly the Property Office (MPO).

²⁶ Sir Banister Fletcher, A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method for Students, Craftsmen, & Amateurs (London: Batsford, 1924); J.M. Richards, An Introduction to Modern Architecture (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1940) and Nikolaus Pevsner, Pioneers of Modern Design: from William Morris to Walter Gropius (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1940).
²⁷ Joseph Crouch and Edmund Butler, Chapels, Mission-Halls and Schools for Nonconformists (Birmingham: Buckler and Webb, 1901) and William Beddoe Rees, Chapel Building: Hints and Suggestions (Cardiff: Cardiff Printing Works, 1903).

²⁸ Peter Hammond (ed.) *Towards a Church Architecture* (London: The Architectural Press, 1962); J. G. Davies, *Worship and Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1966).

MPO's *Annual Reports* were published for discussion and official adoption by the annual Methodist Conference. Up until 1938 these included a general overview of building developments, statements of funding accounts and selected architectural descriptions of new buildings. Additionally, statistical returns were compiled every ten years (excepting 1920, 1930 and 1950). Eighty-three of the Central Halls are documented from this source and the information gathered was used to construct a database consisting of location, date of opening, architect, size, number of rooms, style and fate. A list of Central Halls is available in the appendix.

Analysis of the Documentary Sources

The Mission's own literature was overwhelmingly optimistic and written to justify the worth of their activities. Unpublished minutes of meetings provided a balanced account of the problems faced by urban mission. Committees of laity and ministers would meet to debate and decide on particular issues to do with the buildings, management and mission. Trustees meetings were usually conducted annually and their meetings discussed major issues specifically relating to the buildings. Daily management was normally delegated to a separate sub-committee. Leaders meetings discussed issues pertaining to the Mission and spiritual life of the Church. Specific matters, for example the organisation of an Anniversary Day, would have a committee appointed for a set duration. The researcher is at the mercy of the minute takers level of detail but generally they provided the possibility of tracing the decisions, choices and views of those immersed in the Central Halls.

In addition, from 1960 until 1989, statistics were collected relating to the provincial Central Missions which document membership, attendance, future prospects and condition of the buildings.²⁹ Moreover, Conference set up a City and Town Centre Review Group (1986-1988) composed of ministers and the laity to produce a report on its city missions. They collected written and oral responses about the buildings, geography, personnel, target groups and activities and the results of their meetings published as *In the Streets of Every City* (1988).³⁰ These documents were crucial to understanding the tensions surrounding the continuing viability of the Central Halls in a markedly different religious and urban landscape.

²⁹ 'Records of Home Mission and Evangelism', MARC 9863, Box 1.

³⁰ Tony Holden, *In the Streets of Every City: The Witness of the Church in City Centres* (Westminster Central Hall: Home Mission Division, 1988). Details of the group's activities are found in 'Records of Home Mission and Evangelism', MARC 9863, Box 3.

Tables denoting membership trends have been compiled but should be considered with a note of caution. Membership required a significant amount of commitment. Many more were adherents who chose to get the benefits of attendance without full commitment. Clive Field has estimated that attendance at Sunday worship prior to 1830 could have been as much as five times higher than membership.³¹ By the 1960s, the collection of data changed to include a 'community roll' of persons under pastoral care such as baptized children, Sunday school and adult adherents as well as members. These were often irregularly updated. At the Central Halls, statistics were given in their Conference Reports. After 1937 this became less exact with the euphemistic phrase that 'congregations were well maintained'. As one minister sharply pointed out: 'maintained could mean a congregation of two.'32 Secondly, the status of Central Halls makes the interpretation of members and adherents difficult. Firstly, they drew upon a wider geographical area than chapels for their congregations - often attracting people from other circuits - and it is possible that this was also the case with membership. Secondly, as we will see, Sunday worship was not the only activity. While membership figures are given to demonstrate the level of drop-off, it must be remembered that these were multi-functional buildings and well-used every day for a wide variety of purposes.

The research questions cover the Halls in use and what they mean to the Church and the wider community. Newspaper reports were used to identify the relationship between the spatial structures and their social and cultural uses. These can contextualise official documents and 'can help to establish the atmosphere of the time, the purpose of speeches and statements, or the public reaction to a statement'.³³ Here, the digitisation of some newspaper collections offered factual evidence as well as the reception of the buildings in the national, local and denominational press.³⁴ This showed how the Central Halls were communicated to the wider public. Local newspapers with sympathetic non-conformist editors, such as the

³¹ Clive D. Field, 'The Social Composition of English Methodism to 1830: A Membership Analysis', Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 76/1 (1994), 154.

³² Personal Interview, 18.

³³ Deborah Welch Larson, 'Sources and Methods in Cold War History: The Need for a Theory-Based Archival Approach' in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (eds.) *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001), 327-50.

³⁴ For example, Periodicals Archive Online (http://pao.chadwyck.co.uk/home.do), Nineteenth Century British Newspapers from the British Library (http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs); *The Times*

⁽http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/) and *The Guardian* (http://archive.guardian.co.uk/). For a discussion on the pitfalls of using digital resources, see Patrick Leary 'Googling the Victorians', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 10 (2005) 72 – 86 and a special issue of the *Journal of Victorian Culture* on using digital resources, 13 (2008) especially, 56 – 124.

Manchester Guardian and the *Liverpool Daily Post*, regularly published accounts of mission work. Reports detracting Central Halls were rare and if opinions were mooted in this direction they were not voiced publicly. However, inferences could be made. The writer of the Manchester and Salford Mission's 1899 annual report indicated that 'all fears and doubts were...swallowed up in the splendid success of that first Sunday'.³⁵ Similarly, Liverpool's emphasis that three-quarters of the money was raised from its own boys reveals that reservations were expressed about the spiritual purpose of this charity.³⁶

Personal Testimony

The documentary evidence is cross-referenced with personal testimony. As the historian Raphael Samuel noted, history 'is a social form of knowledge; the work, in any give instance, of a thousand different hands'.³⁷ He compellingly advises researchers to consider unofficial forms of knowledge such as local lore and biographies. Methodist historians have pointed out that it is an oral tradition communicated through its sermons and hymns and the Methodist minister and statistician, Jeffrey Harris, observed that: 'Methodists love to repeat the myths and folklore in which they delight'.³⁸ Existing oral archives assisted in the collection of these remembrances but often their purpose could be too general to assist in determining the collective memory surrounding the Central Halls.³⁹ Alternatively, special anniversary years afforded an opportunity for the Church to construct and publish its own history. Their titles illustrate a narrative that glorified the past but also highlighted their ongoing work: *From the Heart of the City* to *Mission Accomplished!* and *The Story...So Far.* They were both an aid and an object of historical research by providing a useful starting point to negotiate often vast and unsorted archives as well as providing evidence of personal testimony.

³⁵ The Manchester and Salford Mission, *The Twelfth Annual Report of the Manchester and Salford Wesleyan Mission*, 1898 – 99 (Manchester: Hall and Sons, 1900).

³⁶ Anonymous, *A Visit to the Liverpool Wesleyan Mission by a London Journalist* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Bookroom, 1896), 17.

³⁷ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory, Volume One: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), 8. ³⁸ Jeffrey W. Harris, *A Profile of Methodism* (London: Home Mission Division, 1982), 2.

³⁹ Reviewed transcriptions included 'Family Life and Work Experience before 1918', British Library Sound Archive (hereafter BLSA), C707; National Life Stories Collection, 'Artist's Lives', BLSA, C466/120/01-07 and C467/21/01-09; The BBC 'WW2 People's War' Archive includes four wartime experiences at Central Halls (bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar); BMA, Mass Observation's 'Worktown' Project also considered Bolton and catalogues experiences around the Victoria Hall. See pp. 205 – 232 below.

An article placed in the *Methodist Recorder* in January 2008 also requested information. This resulted in fifty-four letters or emails and it was clear that the buildings elicited powerful memories (Figure 1.3). In several instances, there was an exchange of correspondence with a specific set of questions. This mail, and personal introduction from ministers, led to thirty face-to-face interviews with members of the laity that were unstructured and conversational in tone. Within the first few minutes there would be an enquiry about whether I was a Methodist. I am not and the follow-up question tended to be 'Why are you so interested in us then?' After these preliminaries, I began by asking how a person came to be in contact with the Central Hall.

Without prompting, interviewees often brought mementoes, photographs and souvenirs of their time at the Central Hall prepared in advance of my visit along with souvenir items and other memorabilia. Mostly, these photographs were of people. Eight of the interviews involved two people – usually where the initial contact had a spouse also connected with the Central Hall. Very occasionally, these images could provoke long forgotten feelings. One minister had not looked at his own photographic archive since the day he left his central hall position but, painfully it seemed, forced himself to confront the past in anticipation to my visit. These images helped to provide a focus to otherwise unstructured interviews. Whenever I asked about sacred aspects of the building it was impressed upon me that the building is merely the Church and, for a Methodist, the mediating object that provides the surroundings through which their religious lives could be enacted. Fellowship, it became clear, was the most important word.

Interviews with ministers followed a more structured, yet still qualitative, approach.⁴⁰ The narrative centred upon their tenure and background information was prepared prior to the interview. Requests were made on three occasions to turn off the digital recording equipment particularly when another living person was mentioned. This was usually the case when a Hall had subsequently closed and it demonstrated the conflict over the role of Central Halls in the late twentieth century. For this reason, all the interviews have been anonymised even

⁴⁰ Anthony Seldon, 'Elite Interviews' in Brian Brivati, Julia Buxton and Anthony Seldon (eds.) *The Contemporary History Handbook* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 353-65 and David Richards, 'Elite Interviewing: Approaches and Pitfalls', *Politics*, 19/3 (1996), 199-204.

Suring the 1950s the attendance rose, V it was recessary to arrive early for the Junday evening service of one wished to sit in the baliony. After the evening service, at 8.00pm, there were concerts given by visiting bands, choirs, etc. There were many new initiatives to raise funds, which included Efforts with stalls selling articles during the afternow, followed by tea I and evening concert. Three such "afforti were hald annually. Another initialine (not to raise Junds) was the annual youth - Eistedfold, which included arts ~ crafts, music, drame elocution, etc, which lasted you a whole week, with a concert on the faturday. evening patiering all the winners years each class Other meetings & services continued normally. These were also youth Aports Days and Jumming Galas. There was a large youth blub. In the 1960s, these was a new arrangement whereby a group of members were each given a list of members who leved in their immediate neighbourhood, V requested to visit. It was proped that this would give rise to improved pastoral care you everyone, especially those in need. All other work, services, meetings, etc progressed normally. In the following years, attendance decreased, partly because the original numbers had aged ~ several had died. Also the advance of television had repercussions involving the less dedicated congregation members.

There was a problem of meeting expenses with a smaller congregation, and cuts in staff were necessary. The life of the church continued despite the problems, although many people moved away from the inner, city area to the subwhs.

After many struggling years, the Contral Hall was closed, & the members scattered to worship in their neighbourhood prathedist churches.

Figure 1.3: One page of a letter received from a former member of Bristol Central Hall.

though only two interviewees requested this. There is a gap in not interviewing those who used the premises on an ad hoc basis or former members. This is partially the result of the recruiting technique although there were ethical considerations over people who accessed the mission during times of distress.

Both oral and archival methods were conducted in tandem to inform each other. For example, the minutes of committee meetings relating to Archway indicated that the changes in the wider built environment and the changing population demographic significantly affected church attendance. I was able to ask two former members of the Hall how they experienced this change. They could not remember when it began nor could they recall the period of the building work.⁴¹ This suggests that for adherents, rather than committed members, upheaval significantly affected whether or not they chose to go to services.

Chapter Structure

Chapter One examines approaches to interpreting the historic built environment by drawing upon the idea of typology as a relevant analytical tool to trace social and historical change. It discusses building types of the nineteenth century to show that, as a method, it is rarely applied to religious buildings. The first part of Chapter Two covers the factors, institutions and individuals that gave rise to Central Halls. It then moves on to consider the concept of 'secularisation' as the dominant narrative of religious change in twentieth century Britain. This provides the framework for interpreting the material presented in the following chapters. Chapter Three covers the initial construction period between 1886 and 1945. It delineates the type and will show exactly how the buildings were used as a tool to further religious mission. Chapter Four continues the story from 1945, where the policy on chapel extension significantly changed, to the present day to document the major adaptations as different generations struggled to create a meaning for the buildings and their urban mission during a period of membership decline. Chapters Five to Ten introduce the results from six case studies of individual sites. The concluding chapter will draw together the characterisation of the building type and the comparison between the case studies with a reflection upon method and unresolved questions.

⁴¹ Personal Interview, 17.

Chapter 2: Learning from Buildings

The Practice of Architectural History

The architectural historian, Nikolaus Pevsner, opens his *An Outline of European Architecture* with the statement that: 'a bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture'.¹ In one sentence, Pevsner encapsulates the traditional approach to the study of architectural history. The discipline draws its methods from the fine arts with a concentration on external appearances and visual styles – Gothic, Palladian, Arts and Crafts, Modernist and so forth. Pevsner was so firmly convinced that the correct role of the architectural historian lay within the discipline of art history that he clearly makes the distinction between 'style [as] a matter of architectural history, function of social history'.²

Often, this approach may lead to the selective defence or critique of a particular mode of architecture by presenting one style as the true and correct moral form.³ Although still holding to the art historical approach, David Watkin suggests that architecture evolves in response to the real needs and the normative aspirations of society and therefore to 'question these forms is certainly anti-social and probably immoral'.⁴ A second criticism is that it tends to privilege iconic buildings or the role of the architect as author of a building. Many buildings and thousands of architects escape our attention because they are not considered to be 'architecture'. It is as though, Dell Upton notes, that architectural historians, 'have been content, by and large, to act as the public relations branch of the professions'.⁵ Furthermore, the complex interactions of those who formed the built environment are overlooked and ultimately, it does not pay due regard to the range of human and technical actors who create and maintain buildings.⁶ Why should the bicycle shed be any less worthy as an object of study than Lincoln Cathedral? If it is not and we choose to consider buildings other than art objects

¹ Nikolaus Pevsner, An Outline of European Architecture, 7th ed., (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 15.

² Nikolaus Pevsner, A History of Building Types (London: Thames Hudson, 1976), 6.

³ Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and Histories of Architecture Theories and History of Architecture* (London: Granada, 1980] and Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).

⁴ David Watkin, Morality and Architecture: the Development of a Theme in Architectural History and Theory from the Gothic Revival to the Modern Movement (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, 3).

⁵ Dell Upton, 'Architectural History or Landscape History?', Journal of Architectural Education, 44/4 (1991): 195-99.

⁶ Dana Cuff, Architecture: The Story of a Practice (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); Albena Yaneva, The Making of a Building: A Pragmatist Approach (Oxford: Peter Lang AG, 2009).

then we need an alternative methodological approach that can clearly elucidate the complex relationship between buildings and society.

This is offered by typology, or the study of building types. Its intellectual pedigree stretches back to the eighteenth century where it was rooted in the empirical and technical practice of architecture.⁷ The categorisation of architectural forms provided the blueprint, however vaguely defined, for future types. The method fell out of fashion but has been revived since the 1960s in direct response to the perceived mass production and potentially destructive impact that the Modernist movement exerted in the twentieth century.⁸ As a refutation of Modernism, the idea of type has been revived and connected firmly to history. In this reading, a building is not considered to be an 'isolated architectural event' but exists as part of the wider spatial, social and historical development of the urban fabric.⁹ Therefore, increasing our knowledge of the types that compose the city may allow contemporary designers to make sympathetic interventions into the wider urban fabric.¹⁰ The documentation of past types has an instrumental value to architectural scholarship by 'expressing commonalities among certain works of architecture while maintaining the specificity of time, place and culture'.¹¹

The Social Production of Building Types

The insight that space is a social production has added a further dimension to the notion of an architectural type.¹² Here, social and cultural relations can be approached through the material form, function and spatial structure of architecture. Similar buildings often share enough of the same characteristics and have a spatial logic that makes them appropriate for type-based classification.¹³ Spatial structures are seen to map the values and the power relations of those who use them. These are all central aspects to Michel Foucault's seminal

⁸ Alan Colquhoun, 'Typology and Design Method, Perspecta, 12 (1969), 71-4.

⁷ Anthony Vidler, 'The Idea of Type: The Transformation of an Academic Ideal, 1750-1830' reprinted in K. Michael Hays (ed.) *Oppositions, A Reader: Selected Readings from a Journal for Ideas and Criticisms in Architecture, 1973 - 1984* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 439 - 60.

⁹ Rafael Moneo, 'On Typology', Oppositions, 13 (1978), 23 - 45.

¹⁰Aldo Rossi [trans. Diane Ghirado and Joan Ockman], *The Architecture of the City* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press). ¹¹Guido Francescato, 'Type and the Possibility of an Architectural Scholarship' in Karen A. Franck and Lynda H. Schneekloth (eds.) *Ordering Space: Types in Architecture and Design* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1994), 253 – 70.

¹² Henri Lefèbvre [trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith] The Production of Space (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991 [1974]).

¹³ Bill Hillier and Jean Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

study of the development of Western punitive measures for social control.¹⁴ Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the spatial organization of a Berber house in Algeria demonstrates how the gendered hierarchies of social life played out on plan.¹⁵ Anthony King illustrates that the global circulation of the bungalow as a housing type indicated culturally relevant social differences.¹⁶

The clearest exposition of typological analysis is given by Thomas Markus in his study of innovative nineteenth century building types such as factories, schools, museums and gentleman's clubs.¹⁷ In Markus' hands, the method decodes spatial logic through its visual replications in the plans of buildings and groups of buildings. The standard texts on modern building types, mainly written for a practical purpose, consider them from a drawing-board perspective and focus on design requirements.¹⁸ Yet the same visual materials are a rich and neglected resource that can be treated as social documents.¹⁹ Site maps, building plans, detail drawings and photographs show the entrances, corridors, stairways, rooms of varying sizes, the doors and passages that connect them, and the sight-lines, views and zones of surveillance.

Plans though do not always make their intentions clear and may be interpreted in a way that obscures the power relations at work.²⁰ Markus adds language to the analysis of form, function and space. The spatial is typically communicated and therefore what is written about buildings and the labels associated with it are as much of importance as what it looks like and may be decoded using linguistic analysis.²¹ So, the brief, financing, management, the rhetoric of its foundation and use and its membership are equally important tools to uncovering the meaning of buildings.²² Typing is also concerned with the meaning of buildings and this we see in the social relations that form between people in and with the material reality.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault [trans. Alan Sheridan] *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979).

¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu 'The Kabyle House, or the World Reversed' in Pierre Bourdieu [trans. Richard Nice], *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 271-319.

¹⁶ Anthony D. King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

¹⁷ Thomas A. Markus, Buildings and Power: Freedom and Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types (London: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁸ e.g. Talbot Hamlin, *Forms and Functions of Twentieth-Century Architecture*, Vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952); David Neuman, *Building Type Basics for College and University Facilities* (London: Wiley, 2003); Nicholas R. Roberts, *Building Type Basics for Places of Worship* (London: Wiley, 2004).

¹⁹ P. J. Aspinall and J. W. R. Whitehand, 'Building Plans: A Major Source for Urban Studies', *Area*, 12/3 (1980), 199 – 203.

²⁰ Markus, Buildings and Power, 1993, 38.

²¹ Thomas Markus and Deborah Cameron, *The Words Between the Spaces: Buildings and Language* (London: Routledge, 2002).

²² Thomas A. Markus, Buildings and Power, 1993, 244.

As illuminating as Markus' study is, it confines itself to the production of a building and spends less time tracing the continued history of the types he studied.²³ Buildings can be remarkably enduring structures and outlive their protagonists. They are modified or replaced to meet changing circumstances. The relationship between building design, its uses and people is complex and not one-dimensional. As Thomas Gieryn points out:

They are forever objects of (re) interpretation, narration and representation – and meanings and stories are sometimes more pliable than the walls and floors they depict. We deconstruct buildings materially and semiotically, all the time.²⁴

Here, Stewart Brand gives an excellent, and underused, study of change over time.²⁵ He uses photographic evidence to show the material changes that can be traced through time including the interior and exterior of the building as well as site context. This provides valuable longitudinal evidence for the same sorts of social and cultural analysis that has been used to study the formation of type. Brand points out that 'when we consider a building that is loved or loathed, it is not a question of praising or blaming the designer or owner but of teasing apart the whole tangle of relationships that make the building work or not'.²⁶ How buildings learn over time, therefore, is just as important as the question of how they are designed in the first place. By combining the production, operation and consumption of a building type we have a relevant and practical alternative to the study of built environment.

Typological Innovation

Before demonstrating the method, we will stray back into the territory of innovative nineteenth-century types to find an example. Markus' study concentrates on particular sites that aimed at the formation or reformation of social practices, such as workhouses, factories and schools. Other architectural historians have similarly looked to the nineteenth century and these social studies of architecture reveal much about the reasons that gave rise to the form of our modern urban cities.

²³ Bridget Franklin, Bridget 'Hospital - Heritage - Home: Reconstructing the Nineteenth Century Lunatic Asylum', *Housing, Theory and Society.* 19/3-4 (2006), 170-184.

²⁴ Thomas F. Gieryn, 'What Buildings Do', Theory and Society, 31/1 (2002), 35.

²⁵ Stewart Brand, How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built (New York: Viking, 1994).

²⁶ Ibid., 214.

The extension of the vote to a larger share of the population after the 1867 Reform Act saw the development of local democratic institutions as expressed in town halls and public libraries. Newly formed municipal corporations imposed rates on tax payers to help fund town improvements but they also had to borrow substantial amounts towards capital.²⁷ Local prestige and wealth were to be found in town halls and despite private squalor these public architectural expressions were lavish. They catered for a range of functions and typically large scale with opulent detailing to signify status.²⁸ Occupying substantial sites, those in Leeds (1853 - 8), Cardiff (1906) and Bolton (1873) dominate the skyline with towers and domes raising their profile above commercial architecture of banks, warehouses and factories.²⁹ In addition to containing rooms for council business, town halls provided public meeting rooms to provide an alternative venue for clubs and societies outside of public houses.³⁰ Styles were played about with and employed because of their wider connotations and significance. Undenominational board schools, a result of the 1870 Education Act, were in a freely treated English renaissance style with large sash windows. The architect to the London School Board, Edward R. Robson, chose the style over Gothic which was considered to be the architecture of religion and inappropriate for secular schools.³¹

This Victorian laissez-faire state, with minimal regulatory involvement, meant that charitable and religious organisations supported those who could not do so themselves. Part of this meant bringing a civilized culture to the working classes.³² Guided by evangelical zeal and a genuine desire to effect social change, reformers believed that the working class could be elevated through improvement of morals, habits and their environment.³³ This was the era of

²⁷ Helen Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City*, 1870 – *1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 65 – 70; Mark Girouard, *The English Town: A History of Urban Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 204.

²⁸ Colin Cunningham, Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls (London: Routledge/ Thoemms Press, 1981).

²⁹ Mark Girouard, The English Town, 1990, 214.

³⁰ Colin Cunningham, Victorian and Edwardian Town Halls, 1981, 204; Robert A. Fellows, Edwardian Civic Buildings and Their Details (Boston: Architectural Press, 2000).

³¹ Deborah Weiner, Architecture and Social Reform in Late Victorian London (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 3.

³² Seth Koven 'The Whitechapel Picture Exhibitions and the Politics of Seeing,' in D. Sherman and I. Rogoff, (eds.), *Museum Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 1994); F. M. L Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (London: Fontana, 1988), 247 – 302; Gareth Stedman-Jones, 'Class Expression versus Social Control? A Critique of Recent Trends in the Social History of Leisure', *History Workshop*, 4 (1977), 162-170. For the mixed working class perception and use of these provisions see Peter Bailey, "Will The Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?" Towards a Role Analysis of mid-Victorian Working-class Respectability'. *Journal of Social History*, 12 (1979), 336-53.

³³ Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2004), 313 - 65. Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century*, 3rd edition, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 13-33.

charity schools, board schools, hospitals, public libraries and art galleries. The power of aesthetics to alleviate slum life was promoted through the work of reformers, such as Octavia Hill, who aimed to 'bring beauty home to the people' with the establishment of the Kyrle Society.³⁴ She championed public parks and green spaces but also addressed housing provision by providing homes in mock Tudor cottages, a symbol of country life, in a model housing development designed by Elijah Hoole.

Hoole also provided the plans for Samuel Barnett's Toynbee Hall (1884-5). Barnett, an Anglican clergyman, implemented his idea of bringing university graduates into close contact with the poor by providing lodging and residence.³⁵ The replication of university life in the East End was given physical form in Gothic style buildings, set back from the street behind warehouses and grouped around a quadrangle. Other religious groups, notably the Wesleyan Methodists, also commissioned Hoole to provide their own version in Bermondsey (1892) under the stewardship of John Scott Lidgett.³⁶

In Manchester, Charles Rowley took over the Star Music Hall and adapted it to an art gallery in Ancoats in the slums of inner city Manchester.³⁷ Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1883) was one of a host of pamphlets and books that popularised the concern for the poor. Besant, in particular, promoted the idea of a 'People's Palace' for London's East End. Designed by Edward Robson, mentioned in connection with the Board Schools above, it was considered to be novel by combining a gymnasium, swimming pool and library with a large hall for concerts. It, however, fell into financial difficulties very early on and was forced to resort to administration by the Draper's Company. Still, Robert A. Woods, writing in the *Poor in Great Cities* (1896), believed that 'there is still sufficient reason for believing that the idea, as

³⁵ There is a significant body of literature discussing the settlement movement particularly in its relation to social reform. For example, Nigel Scotland, Squires in the Slums: Settlements and Missions in Late Victorian Britain (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007); Michael E. Rose, 'The Manchester University Settlement in Ancoats, 1895-1909', Manchester Region History Review, 7 (1993), 55 – 63; Asa Briggs and Anne McCartney, Toynbee Hall: The First One Hundred Years (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984); Lucinda Matthews-Jones 'Centres of Brightness: The Spiritual Imagination of Toynbee Hall and Oxford House, 1883 – 1914' (Ph.D Thesis: University of Manchester, 2009).
³⁶ Alan Turberfield, John Scott Lidgett, Archbishop of British Methodism? (Peterborough, 2003) especially, 29-44, 361-67, John D. Beasley, The Bitter Cry Herd and Heeded: The Story of the South London Mission of the Methodist Church, 1889

- 1989 (Bermondsey: The South West London Mission, 1989), 39.

³⁴ Nancy Boyd, *Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill, Florence Nightingale: Three Victorian Women who Changed their World* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 95 -163.

³⁷ Michael Harrison, 'Art and Social Regeneration: The Ancoats Art Museum', *Manchester Region History Review*, 7 (1993), 63 – 82.

it was first held, is a practicable one' and hoped that 'all the more gloomy regions of London shall be lit up with veritable Palaces of Delight'.³⁸

In the commercial sector the greater amount of disposable income and enforced leisure time meant more buildings to compete for the general public's money and time. Music-halls and theatres were in their glory days in the early twentieth century.³⁹ Stylistically eclectic, they employed eye-catching architecture, bright lights and attention-grabbing advertisement in competition with each other. Public houses also raised the stakes to appeal to a cross-section of classes. Often opulent and richly decorated, they provided a convivial home for clubs, societies and trade union organisations. Although Mark Girouard points out that they were often under pressure from temperance activities.⁴⁰ Shops also developed significant functions by the late nineteenth century. Most major cities in Britain had their own department store containing tea, beauty and play rooms making shopping itself a leisure activity and not a chore. All of these commercial organisations used lighting and prominent architectural features to draw attention. Large glass windows made striking window displays even past closing time.

For the purpose of space, the above discussion of building types is selective but it demonstrates three issues. Firstly, the Victorian buildings of social reform and commercial endeavour incorporated a variety of functions. Secondly, they could symbolize prestige or else evoked a particular set of ideas. Thirdly, they were often in competition with one another for the general public's attention. The decorative richness and profusion of types suggested that any new enterprise in the cities faced adding a competitive edge to entice people through their doors.

In all of the literature on Victorian typological innovation there is no attention given to church building even though it was one of the most prolific periods of ecclesiastical construction. In 1818, Parliament passed the Church Building Act which gave the established Church of England $\pounds 1$ million to erect places of worship. This was partially to provide

³⁸ Robert A. Woods 'The Social Awakening in London' in Robert A. Woods and Thomas Hughes (eds.) *The Poor in Great Cities: Their Problems and What is being Done to Solve Them* (London: Kegan Paul, 1896), 1 – 41; quote, 24.

³⁹ Peter Bailey, *Music Hall: the Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986); John Earl, *British Theatres and Music Halls* (Risborough: Shire Books, 2005).

⁴⁰ Mark Girouard, The Victorian Pub (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 9.

church accommodation in the growing urban regions and the Church of England increased its total building stock by twenty-five per cent between 1841 and 1876.⁴¹ Concurrently, the number of Methodist chapels increased by about 400 per cent between 1818 and 1910.

Markus only briefly mentions Sunday schools but otherwise omits the ecclesiastical sector from his study.⁴² J. G. Davies describes the pre-Reformation church as multi-purpose spaces where the nave doubled as a social space for living, eating, business and meeting places.⁴³ His consideration of nineteenth-century churches is cursory. Secular and sacred functions diverged, and so were to be characterised by 'the now universal conviction that a church was and is only a place of worship.'⁴⁴ Are we to suppose that the ecclesiastical sector, during its most intensive period of building activity, stood by and watched as other organisations in the Victorian period were typologically innovative?

Religious Architecture

Architecture used to be a well-established field in the study of religion. For the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs the interiors of worship spaces were the paradigmatic demonstration that collective memory has a spatial basis.⁴⁵ Similarly, Mircea Eliade contains a lengthy discussion of the materiality of a city centre church in his seminal work *The Sacred and the Profane.*⁴⁶ Every belief system finds expression in its architecture. Doctrinal shifts, reformations, conquests and conversions invariably involve material change to buildings.⁴⁷ It would be impossible to discuss the Reformation or the Tractarian and Evangelical disputes in the nineteenth century without reference to the design and reordering of places of worship. The fine distinctions of ecclesiastical building typology appeared so large in traditional architectural literature that when Nikolaus Pevsner came to write his *History of Building Types* he could disregard them completely - they had been exhaustively covered elsewhere.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Christopher Brooks and Andrew Saint (eds) *The Victorian Church: Architecture and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 9.

⁴² Markus, Buildings and Power, 1993, 52-7.

⁴³ J. G. Davies, *The Secular Use of Church Buildings* (London: SCM Press, 1968).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 204.

⁴⁵ Maurice Halbwachs, 'The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land' in Lewis A. Coser (ed.) *Maurice Halbwachs: On Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 193 – 235.

⁴⁶ Mircea Eliade, (Translator: W. R. Trask) *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (London: Harcourt Inc, 1957), 25.

⁴⁷ Joseph Leo Koerner, 'Reforming the Assembly' in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, *Making Things Public:* Atmospheres of Democracy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 404 – 432

⁴⁸ Nikolaus Pevsner, A History of Building Types, 1976, 9-10.

Yet, nonconformist⁴⁹ architecture has been overlooked by architectural historians despite a wide variety of styles.⁵⁰ In making a case for the cultural significance nonconformity to British society, James Munson contended that they tended to punch above their numerical weight.⁵¹ Conversely, in the architectural arena, their numerical weight tends to punch above their influence. Their foremost historian asserts that they defied easy classification with denominations often exchanging premises.⁵² A common view is that they tended towards a plain simplicity, eschewing unnecessary frippery as uneconomical and mere ornamentation without purpose. Therefore, when Richard Kieckhefer examined the relationship between theology and architecture, he did not consider evangelical churches. The emphasis upon seeing and hearing the preacher means they '…are grounded in a single and readily appreciated principle, are easily understandable and widely understood. They have the plainness and the familiarity of prose.' ⁵³

Since the 1990s, a growing body of literature shows us that sacred spaces, as with any other, are not rigid social forms but contested, modified and reconstituted.⁵⁴ Ultimately, 'against all the efforts of religious actors, sacred space is inevitably tangled with the entrepreneurial, the social, the political and other 'profane' forces.'⁵⁵ However, they rarely tackle the design of these spaces. Those that do concentrate upon religious buildings that are markedly different, such as the recent erection of mosques, gurdwaras and temples to the British landscape.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ There is an argument that Methodism should be considered separately from the other nonconformist religions by virtue of its genesis as a reforming tradition within the Church of England. This should be noted. However, in the late nineteenth century Methodism was strongly allied to the Free Churches. When discussing their buildings it makes sense to talk of 'nonconformist' as distinct from the Church of England as many architects designed for a range of denominations and architectural manuals were similarly widely targeted. ⁵⁰ See George W. Dolbey, *The Architectural Expression of Methodism: the First One Hundred Years* (London: Epworth

Press, 1964); Christopher Wakeling "'A Room Nearly Semi-Circular": Aspects of the Theatre and the Church from Harrison to Pugin', *Architectural History*, 44 (2001), 265-274; 'The Nonconformist Traditions: Chapel, Continuity and Change' in Christopher Brooks and Andrew Saint (eds.) *The Victorian Church* (Manchester: Manchester University Press', 82 – 97.

⁵¹ James Munson, The Noncomformists: In Search of a Lost Culture (London: SPCK, 1991), 3.

⁵² Christopher Wakeling, 'The Nonconformist Traditions', 1995, 82.

⁵³ Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16.

⁵⁴ For example, Lily Kong, 'In Search of Permanent Homes: Singapore's House Churches and the Politics of Space', *Urban Studies*, 39/9 (2002), 1573-1586; Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London: Equinox, 2005). David C. Harvey, Catherine Brace and Adrian R. Bailey, 'Parading the Cornish Subject: Methodist Sunday Schools in West Cornwall, C. 1830-1930, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 33/1 (2007), 24-44; Adrian R. Bailey, David C. Harvey and Catherine Brace, 'Disciplining Youthful Bodies in Nineteenth Century Cornwall', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 97/1 (2007), 142 – 157.

⁵⁵ David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, 'Introduction' in David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal (eds.) *American Sacred Space* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995), 17.

⁵⁶ For example, Simon Naylor and James Ryan, 'Mosques, Temples and Gurdwaras: New Sites of Religion in Twentieth-Century Britain' in David Gilbert, David Matless, and Brian Short (eds.) *Geographies of British Modernity: Space and Society in the Twentieth Century* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003) and Richard Gale 'The Multicultural City

Equally, as both Timothy Gorringe and Philip Sheldrake have noted, contemporary academic religion and theology has been surprisingly indifferent towards the materiality of architecture, its symbolic power, its potency in making place and identity, and its costs of upkeep.⁵⁷

This thesis will argue that the Central Halls offered more than plainness and that their spatial structure and architectural history offer a route into the dimensions of faith. It will present them as an example of an undocumented building type of social and religious significance. Using the method of typological analysis outlined above it will be of interest to urban designers. Equally, their features are of relevance to specialist Methodist studies and to the study of religion and society. Their multi-functionality will testify to the wide variations in types of religious buildings. Before delineating their characteristics, we must first understand what factors brought these buildings into existence and it is to this, the puzzle of urban Methodism, that we now turn.

and the Politics of Religious Architecture: Urban Planning, Mosques and Meaning-making in Birmingham, UK', *Built Environment*, 30/1 (2006), 18–32.

⁵⁷ Timothy Gorringe, A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Philip Sheldrake, Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

Chapter 3: The Puzzle of Urban Methodism

'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the homeless poor in Trafalgar Square, or unto one of the down-trodden harlots in Piccadilly, ye did it unto me'.¹

John Wesley's Methodism

When John Wesley became the leader of a Holy Club at Oxford his aim was to reform the existing Church of England.² Wesley challenged the Calvinist doctrine, where a select few are predestined for heaven, and preached that absolution from original sin was open to anyone. In Britain, this message offered comfort for populations at the mercy of the unpredictable upheaval of the industrial revolution and its success has led to Marxist historians crediting Methodism with nullifying a workers revolt.³

Its strength amongst the early industrial urban working classes cemented Methodism in parts of Lancashire, Yorkshire, the South West and the Midlands. Methodism's flexible organisation of a travelling ministry and direct means of communication through outdoor preaching explains its appeal and it was thought to benefit where the Church of England was weak.⁴ Wesley also placed a specific emphasis on philanthropy: to lead a Christian life was to exercise charity and followers were encouraged to visit the poor, destitute and prisoners as an expression of their faith.⁵

¹ Hugh Price Hughes, *Social Christianity: Sermons*, 3rd Edition (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890), 16. ² On early Methodism, see Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989); Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the rise of Methodism*, 3rd edition, (London: Epworth Press, 2002) Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England*, *1727-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) and John H. Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) 91-102.

³ Elie Halévy, [trans. Bernard Semmel] *The Birth of Methodism in England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) and Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (London: Gollancz, 1964). For a review see Alan D. Gilbert, 'Methodism, Dissent and Political Stability in Early Industrial England', *Journal of Religious History*, 10/4 (1979), 381 – 399.

⁴ John Gay, *The Geography of Religion* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., 1971); Keith D. M. Snell and Paul S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), 191. Conversely, Michael Watts' argues that Methodism benefited from Anglican expansion and so should be noted. See Michael Watts, *The Dissenters, Vol.2: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity*, *1791 – 1859* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 110 – 132.

⁵ Richard P. Heitzenrater (ed.) The Poor and the People called Methodists (Nashville: Kingwood Books, 2002).

Wesley laid down the foundations for the modern Methodist Church. It is known as the 'Connexion' where individual worshippers are brought together in local churches which are in turn linked together in circuits, a close grouping of two or more churches. Circuits are joined together in districts from which representatives are elected to the annual Conference: the supreme decision making authority. In addition to districts, Conference appoints specialized committees to consider particular aspects of church work, such as social responsibility or overseas mission. Ministers are itinerant and move to a new appointment every three (now five) years. These structures are designed to ensure that no one person or group assumes a disproportionate amount of power and encourages the sharing of both human and financial resources across the polity.

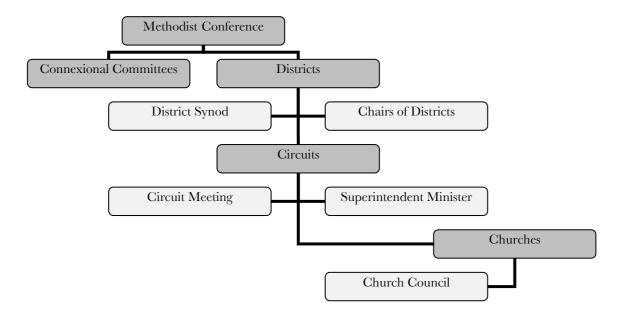


Figure 3.1: Simple representation of the contemporary structure of the Methodist Church of Great Britain.

With voluntary membership and funding, the class meeting became essential to raising funds and fostering mutual reciprocity. These gatherings consisted of up to twelve people who came together for bible study, prayer and testimony. Each member paid their dues and was issued a class ticket every quarter as evidence of membership. A leader recorded attendance and, if missing, the errant person was visited. This maintained good pastoral oversight and gave stability to the itinerant ministry. Methodists also assisted each other in self-help and the close fellowship of the organisation saw the establishment of lending stocks and employment schemes. The social capital conferred through religion resulted in employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for members.

Buildings became important and were called 'preaching houses' to distinguish them from the 'meeting houses' of the older Dissenting traditions and Anglican churches.⁶ As a reforming tradition Methodism adopted a pragmatic approach to buildings: sites were not consecrated since God is found in worshipping community, not in bricks and mortar. Symbolically, these buildings gave stability to the religious community by providing both social services, such as medical dispensaries and savings banks, as well as religious fellowship. ⁷

'Model Trust Deeds' governed the management and ownership of buildings.⁸ Each chapel had an invited group of trustees who ensured that activities were in accordance with Methodist law. The trusts separated secular building concerns from spiritual endeavour but the *Methodist Church Act* (1976) enshrined new thinking that unified local church property and spiritual matters into one Church Council, replacing the previously separate meetings of trustees and leaders.⁹ Under both systems, all assets belong to the Connexion not the local congregation.

Revivalism or Respectability?

After Wesley's death, the movement fragmented into a number of competing denominations. These secessions signified on-going power struggles in chapels: between centrally appointed

⁶ E. Benson Perkins, *Methodist Preaching Houses and the Law: The Story of the Model Deed* (London: Epworth Press, 1952); George W. Dolbey, *The Architectural Expression of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1964).

⁷ John Betjemann, 'Nonconformist Architecture', *The Architectural Review*, 88 (1940), 161-74 and Christopher Wakeling, 'The Nonconformist Traditions', 1995, 82-97.

⁸ E. Benson Perkins, Methodist Preaching Houses and the Law, 1952, 3-7.

⁹ John Munsey Turner, Modern Methodism in England, 1932-1998 (London: Epworth Press, 1998), 22-3.

ministers and local societies; and between revivalism and its Anglican traditions. The Methodist New Connexion (1797), the Bible Christians (1815) and Primitive Methodists (1810) favoured enthusiastic preaching and became independent not long after Conference rejected revivalism in 1807.¹⁰ The Wesleyan Methodist Association (1838) left over a disputed organ in Leeds whose wider significance reflects dissatisfaction with the perceived authoritarianism of Conference.¹¹ This culminated in 1849 when a series of anonymously published 'flysheets' attacked the central authority of Conference who expelled those ministers they held responsible.¹² In two years, 100, 000 members left the original group, the Wesleyan Methodists, although they retained the largest share with sixty per cent of the total Methodist membership. After phenomenal growth in the early nineteenth century, they did not recover their expansion until 1875.¹³

The unequal status of dissenting religions in Britain was partially redressed through the repeal of the Test and Corporation Act (1828) which permitted the holding of public office. Roman Catholics were emancipated in 1829 and the Great Reform Act (1832) nominally enfranchised middle class dissenters. Acceptance bolstered the Wesleyans who took an active part in politics and society. Chapel life became an essential part of middle class culture and it allowed business entrepreneurs to extend their networks of influence.¹⁴ By encouraging them to lead a thrifty life, religious enthusiasm was replaced with respectability.¹⁵ Clive Field's data shows that the social composition of Victorian Wesleyans was differentiated but increasingly dominated by the lower middle-classes of skilled artisans and clerks.¹⁶

By the mid-nineteenth century, chapels of all denominations were the sites of a wide range of activities that aimed to encourage thrift and 'rational' recreation. The 'Pleasant Sunday Afternoon' movement was designed to make religious services more appealing and adopted

¹⁰ Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, 35-48; Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided*, 1968.

¹¹ William Townshend, Herbert B. Workman and George Eayres, *A New History of Methodism*, Vol. 2, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), 479.

¹² Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, 34-5.

¹³ David Hempton, *Methodism*, 2006, 104-106.

¹⁴ Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Middle Class: Ritual and Authority in the English Industrial City*, 1840 – 1914 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 106 -133 and Doreen Rosman, *The Evolution of the English Churches*, 1500 – 2000 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 233-67.

¹⁵ David Jeremy, *Capitalists and Christians: Business Leaders and the Churches in Britain, 1900-1960* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, 613-5.

¹⁶ Clive D. Field, 'The Social Structure of English Methodism: Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries', *British Journal of Sociology*, 28/2 (1977), 199-225.

the maxim: 'brief, bright and brotherly'.¹⁷ Mother's Meetings, Christian Endeavour and rambling clubs aimed to capture the souls of men and women, young and old and, in particular, the working class. For the middling sort, musical excellence grew out of the choirs and orchestras in their chapels and James Obelkevich suggests that the vitality of religious music explained why the English excelled at oratorios rather than opera.¹⁸ Christianity was also much in evidence on the streets of the city where annual parades, such as whit walks in Lancashire, were community events.¹⁹

Platform speaking, political or otherwise, drew large crowds to public halls. Religious groups made use of the Sunday closure of theatres and music halls, usually available at a reduced rate. This helped where sufficient capital could not be raised to build their own premises but it seemed to attract larger crowds than a church could. The Baptist minister, Arthur Mursell, regularly took himself out of his Grosvenor Street pulpit and onto the platform at Free Trade Hall in Manchester in the 1860s.²⁰ His co-religionist, Charles Spurgeon entertained no less than 10, 000 people at Surrey Gardens Music Hall in London. The Metropolitan Tabernacle (1861) in south London was built in a classical style of architecture, specifically for Spurgeon, with accommodation for 5, 000 worshippers.²¹ The first Methodist Missions in east London, under the guide of Edward Smith and Peter Thomspon, made a virtue out of hiring, and in some cases buying, music halls.²² When the American Evangelists, Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey, came to Britain on tour in 1873, their blend of hymns set to catchy tunes caught the nation's mood.²³ Thousands attended public venues and this demonstration of what could be achieved was to prove seminal for the Wesleyan mission in cities. However, it is worth noting John Kent's two observations about these mass revivals. He contends that they did more to encourage existing believers of their duty to reclaim lost souls than they did to convert

¹⁷ Kenneth S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes*, 1963, 79. On churches and their organisations see Simon J. D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire*, 1870-1920 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Peter Yalden, 'Association, Community and the Origins of Secularisation: English and Welsh Nonconformity, c. 1850 – 1930' *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55 (2004), 293-324.

¹⁸ James Obelkevich, 'Music and Religion in the Nineteenth Century' in Raphael Samuel *et al, Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy* (London: Verso 1987), 551-65.

¹⁹ A. W. Smith, 'Popular Religion', Past & Present, 40/1 (1968),181-186; Steven Fielding, 'The Catholic Whit Walk in Manchester and Salford, 1890 – 1939', Manchester Region History Review, 1/1 (1987), 3-10.

²⁰ Martin Hewitt, 'Popular Platform Religion: Arthur Mursell at the Free Trade Hall 1857-1866', *Manchester Region History Review*, 10 (1996), 29-39.

²¹ Christopher Wakeling, 'The Nonconformist Traditions', 1995, 89 – 91.

 ²² George A. Leask, Peter Thompson: The Romance of his Mission Work (London: Robert Culley, 1909); Edward Smith, Three Years in Central London: A Record of Principles, Methods and Successes (London: T. Woolmer, 1889).
 ²³ David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 148.

unbelievers. Secondly, their format, indoors and in theatres, was a decidedly respectable Victorian interpretation of enthusiastic revival.²⁴

The 1851 Census of Religious Attendance

The only national survey of religious attendance prior to 2001 was undertaken in 1851.²⁵ It recorded attendance on one Sunday but failed to distinguish between those who were present more than one service.²⁶ Despite these methodological problems, Horace Mann, the government clerk charged with writing the subsequent report, indicated that churchgoing was weakest in the industrial towns and cities, particularly amongst the working classes.²⁷ According to Mann, they felt inferior since most churches charged pew rents and these reserved seats conferred a certain social status. Moreover, they had little space for private prayer in crowded homes, distrusted the motives of ministers and thought that the church was aloof to the experience of poverty. Yet, church extension alone was inadequate since the majority of unoccupied pews were those allocated as free seats. This fact, according to Mann, was 'proof so manifest as unconcern on spiritual matters on the part of a great portion of the people, that, until they are impressed with more solicitude for their religious culture, it would be useless to erect more churches.²⁸

The 1851 census had significant ramifications for Christian organisations. Conferences were held between ministers and workers with the latter group reiterating Mann's conclusions: class distinctions and pew rents kept them from church. When asked what was wrong with the classless and free seats of Salvation Army citadels, the reply came that 'the Salvation Army was not intellectual enough for working men. They could not find satisfaction in the antics of the Salvation Army.'²⁹ One knitting machine worker in Leicester regretted that the working class were 'placed on back benches, in draughts, and where they could not hear or listen with

²⁴ John Kent, Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism (London: Epworth Press, 1978).

²⁵ Clive D. Field, 'British Religion in Numbers: An Historical Introduction', *BRIN Discussion Series on Religious Statistics, Discussion Paper 001*, November 2009, available at http://www.brin.ac.uk/commentary/drs/. Accessed 16 May 2010.

²⁶ Keith D. M Snell and Paul Ell, Rival Jerusalems, 2000, 23-4.

²⁷ Horace Mann, *Religious Worship*, 1854, 93-5.

²⁸ Horace Mann, Religious Worship, 1854, 95.

²⁹ 'Working Men and Religious Services', *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 April 1889, 7; See also H. T. Smart, 'The Recreations of the People', *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, September 1890, 664-8.

any comfort'.³⁰ The message was clear: religion had to change and one way it could do so was through its material provision.

In 1851, Wesleyan Methodism provided enough seats for around eight per cent of the population.³¹ Twenty years later, contemporaries calculated that the Wesleyans provided for a mere 1.25 per cent London's population.³² They desperately wanted to provide for the urban populace but just how far were the Wesleyans able to meet any commitment to chapel extension? In its formative years, chapel building was reliant on voluntary subscription with services offered as a gift.³³ Trustees often authorised loans or mortgages that congregations could ill-afford to pay.³⁴ These arrears were a source of embarrassment to the Connexion, so much so that in 1852 a Wesleyan minister, William Kelk, circulated a pamphlet entitled 'Our Chapel Debts' throughout the connexional committees. He suggested amalgamating the existing building committee and a chapel extension fund into one body who could also direct loans from wealthy circuits to relieve the worse off. Two years later, the reformed Wesleyan Chapel-Building Committee met in Manchester with Kelk as its first secretary.³⁵ In addition to their financial powers, they required that all construction proposals be submitted to them for approval.³⁶

Home mission efforts were also remodelled by Charles Prest after he witnessed the social and spiritual hardship in towns and villages during his itinerancy. He effected changes that provided funds to train ministers for work in districts perceived as being difficult. Prest raised additional finances by holding public meetings with wealthy Wesleyans to explain the needs of people in cities and villages.³⁷ Home Mission was further strengthened when the Wesleyans belatedly embraced the temperance agenda in 1875. Initially began as a workers movement, by the 1860s, it gained widespread support and united the evangelical churches. ³⁸ The link

³⁰ 'The Working Classes and Places of Worship', *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 March 1867, 4.

³¹ Michael Watts, *The Dissenters, Vol.* 2, 1995, 24 – 25.

³² T. H. E 'The Metropolitan Wesleyan Chapel-Building Fund: A Ten Year Review', *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, August 1872, 730- 6.

³³ Christopher Stell, *The Architects of Dissent: Some Nonconformist Patrons and their Architects* (London: Dr Williams Trust, 1976).

³⁴ David Hempton, *Methodism*, 2006, 115-116.

³⁵ The Wesleyan Chapel Committee, *The Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the Wesleyan Chapel Committee* (London: Hayman Brothers & Lilly, 1900) (hereafter WCCAR), 8 – 14. ³⁶ WCCAR, 1900, 9.

³⁷ William J. Townsend, Herbert B. Workman, and George Eayrs, *A New History of Methodism*, Vol. 1 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), 449.

³⁸ Brian Harrison, Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England: 1815 – 1872 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971).

between religion and temperance was forged through organisations such as Band of Hope, begun in Leeds in 1847 to encourage adults and children to pledge a life of abstinence, and the UK Alliance, a prohibition pressure group founded in Manchester in 1853. Once committed to the temperance agenda, the Wesleyans pursued abstinence with gusto. City missioners such as F. Luke Wiseman and Samuel Chadwick of Leeds used their visible presence to launch attacks on the drinks industry by lobbying local councillors to refuse licences.³⁹ For many Wesleyan ministers, poverty and alcoholism became inseparable and their eradication required both religion and abstinence.

Other funds were established to redress the problems that the 1851 Census exposed. An Extension Fund (1874) was diverted towards building work and a Thanksgiving Fund (1878), partly established to celebrate the entry of laymen to Conference, saw £297, 000 divided between overseas and home mission.⁴⁰ London, Methodism's 'Waterloo',⁴¹ received targeted help when the Metropolitan Chapel Building Fund (MCBF) was established in 1861.⁴² Prominent laymen strengthened these initiatives. Sir Francis Lycett, a glove manufacturer from Worcester, promised to give £50, 000 over a ten year period as long as the same amount could be raised in public. The provinces were not left unremunerated: the whole Connexion received a boost when two-thirds of his £250, 000 estate was left to Wesleyan chapel building.⁴³ Between 1861 and 1871, sittings in London increased by 75 per cent.⁴⁴ The MCBF stipulated that these chapels had to seat one thousand worshippers and provide connected schoolrooms, lecture halls and classrooms. New regulations in 1884 permitted smaller premises to address criticisms that large buildings could not attract the consistent congregations required to attain 'the necessary agency of the Holy Spirit' and were hindered by a continual need to raise funds for maintenance.⁴⁵

³⁹ William H. Crawford, *The Church in the Slum: A Study of English Wesleyan Mission Halls* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1908), 94 – 100; 112.

⁴⁰ Henry D. Rack gives a comprehensive overview of funding in 'Wesleyan Methodism, 1849 -1902' in Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and George Rupp (eds.) *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, Vol. 3* (London: Epworth Press, 1983), 128 – 132.

⁴¹ James McCulloch, calls London 'The Waterloo of Methodism', noting that not even Wesley attained success there in *The Open Church for the Unchurched, or How to Reach the Masses* (London: Fleming H. Revell and Co., 1906), 33. This view is backed up by the statistics in Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, 132.

⁴² 'Religious Intelligence', Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine, December 1864, 574.

 ⁴³ 'Bequests of the late Sir Francis Lycett, *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, 25 December 1880, 430.
 ⁴⁴ Harry Rack, *Wesleyan Methodism 1849 – 1902*, 130.

⁴⁵ T. H. E, 'The Metropolitan Wesleyan Chapel-Building Fund', 1872, 733.

In 1898, Sir Robert Perks (1849-1934), leading light of the lay men and Liberal MP, proposed that one million guineas be raised from one million Methodists in what became known as the Twentieth Century Fund. ⁴⁶ The sum of £350, 000 was allocated to establishing large headquarters in London fit for an organisation believing in 'the National and Imperial importance of a suitable centre for world-wide Methodism'.⁴⁷ For local considerations, the WCC was awarded £300, 000 in 1902 and was successful in soliciting a further £100, 000 from the Home Mission Committee towards the end of that year.⁴⁸ In 1915, the WCC proudly reported that the fund was responsible for 669 new chapels, 217 schools and a further 330 alterations to existing buildings.⁴⁹ However, it strongly suspected that these nationwide initiatives taxed the generosity of members. ⁵⁰ Despite building over one thousand chapels, subscriptions to the WCC in 1910 were £593 less than they had been in 1875.⁵¹

'The Bitter Cry' and A Forward Movement

Following the publication of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861), social commentators and novelists highlighted the poor living conditions in the industrialised cities. The Victorian 'slum' was rediscovered for middle-class observers who often wanted to experience it for themselves.⁵² For religious organisations, the pivotal moment came with the scandal caused by an anonymously published penny pamphlet, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*.⁵³ Its author evocatively described scenes of poverty and commented upon the failure of the religion:

⁴⁶ *Minutes of Conference*, 1898, 342 - 7. For a fictional account of raising funds within the circuits see John Ackers, *The Making of the Million: Tales of the Twentieth Century Fund* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1899).

⁴⁷ Revd. Hugh Price Hughes to the Revd. Thomas E. Brigden, 12 August 1902, Methodist Archives and Research Centre, Manchester, (hereafter MARC), PLP 57.6.39.

⁴⁸ Minutes of the Wesleyan Chapel Committee (hereafter MWCC), 3 December 1902, available at the Methodist Property Office (herafter MPO), Manchester.

⁴⁹ WCCAR, 1915, 10.

⁵⁰ WCCAR, 1907, 8.

⁵¹ WCCAR, 1910, 19 – 20.

⁵² On the rediscovery of the slum and Victorian middle class attitudes towards it see Harold J. Dyos, `The Slums of Victorian London', *Victorian Studies*, 11 (1967), 5-40; Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991) and H. L. Platt 'From Hygenia to Garden City: Bodies, Houses and the Rediscovery of the Slum in Manchester 1875 – 1910', *Journal of Urban History*, 33/5 (2007) 756-772.

⁵³ Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (London: James Clarke, 1883) reprinted in Anthony S. Wohl (ed.) *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1970 [1883]). On its impact, see Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 2002, 16 – 17.

Whilst we have been building our churches and solacing ourselves with our religion and dreaming that the millennium was coming, the poor have been growing poorer, the wretched more miserable, and the immoral more corrupt; the gulf has been daily widening which separates the lowest classes of the community from our churches and chapels, and from all decency and civilization.⁵⁴

Methodism's contribution to the debate came from ministers such as Forster Crozier and Hugh Price Hughes.⁵⁵ They believed that Wesleyan Methodism was composed of the upwardly and outwardly mobile middle classes.⁵⁶ Crozier pointed out that the fifty per cent congregational contribution required to access the MCBF meant that the poorest districts could not raise the necessary amount.⁵⁷ Resources were flowing away from the areas of poverty and, in effect, they were not attracting new members but providing for the existing faithful. Shabby and half-empty city missions were ill-equipped to compete with public houses and music halls in the teeming streets of the late Victorian city.⁵⁸ Despite these observations, Crozier was reluctant to propose anything more radical than the existing system of small mission halls linked to the circuit system.

It was Hughes who proposed sweeping changes through his printed sermons and editorship of *The Methodist Times*.⁵⁹ He popularised his version of 'social' or 'ethical' Christianity and criticized the very structure of Methodism. Hughes wrote that:

it is difficult to shake off the influences of conventional, aristocratic Christianity and to become as democratic as Christ was. Moody's success shows how ready the masses still are to respond to divine truth and human sympathy. Trustees and pew rents are a great hindrance to the evangelisation of the poor.60

The itinerancy of ministers was a further barrier. In a letter to a younger colleague Hughes surmised that: 'three years is not always long enough in existing social circumstances...if Methodism is to flourish we must be continually adapting to new circumstances. We lose

⁵⁴ Andrew Mearns, 'The Bitter Cry', 1970 [1883], 55-6.

⁵⁵ See Forster Crozier, 'Methodism and 'the Bitter Cry of Outcast London', reprinted in Anthony S. Wohl, *The Bitter Cry*, 1970 [1885], 92 – 108.

 $^{^{56}}$ This was overplayed with as much downward as upward mobility. See the evidence presented by Clive D. Field 'The Social Structure of English Methodism', 1977, 202 – 209.

⁵⁷ Henry D. Rack Rack, 'Wesleyan Methodism 1849 – 1902', 1983, 130; Forster Crozier, 'Methodism and the Bitter Cry', 1970 [1885], 99.

⁵⁸ Forster Crozier, 'Methodism and the Bitter Cry', 1970 [1885], 91 – 110.

⁵⁹ Hugh Price Hughes, *Social Christianity*, 1890 and Idem, *Ethical Christianity: A Series of Sermons* (London: Samson, Low & Marston Co., 1892)

⁶⁰ Hugh Price Hughes, Social Christianity, 1890, 21.

more members than any other Church – that is our weakness.⁶¹ The result was a 'Forward Movement' who boldly promoted their policy through Conference. Two committees were appointed at the 1884 Conference to consider 'Old Chapels in Large Towns' and 'Spiritual Destitution in London'.⁶²

In 1885, the Committee on 'Spiritual Destitution' recommended that missions should be detached from the circuit system.⁶³ When the London Wesleyan-Methodist Mission was inaugurated in that year, Conference instructed them to usurp existing premises that had failed: 'any such chapels as shall be thrown open for Mission services.'⁶⁴ Simultaneously, 'Old Chapels in Large Towns' cautioned against selling central sites, instead: 'public services in such chapels...should be adapted to meet the requirements of the people, and that a larger number of free seats be provided; and that more practical interest should be shown in the domestic and social well-being of the people.'⁶⁵

Although a few ministers were released from itinerancy prior to the Forward Movement, the policy was not widely applied until 1885 when Samuel Collier was appointed to Manchester and Peter Thompson to London's East End. The following year Hugh Price Hughes and Mark Guy Pearse set up a mission in London's fashionable West End in recognition that rich as well as poor could be spiritually destitute. Their emphasis was on an 'aggressive' Christianity with the unwavering aim of conversion – a topic that Catherine Booth of the Salvation Army lectured upon.⁶⁶ It chimed with a more pronounced social gospel across Christian groups. Progressive ministers and laymen supported campaigns to reform housing and sanitary welfare as well as providing social work and supporting the urban poor in mutual self-help.⁶⁷ With this was a growing recognition of a 'nonconformist conscience': solidly Liberal and with a concern to bring Christian ethos to public life.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Quoted in Dorothea Price Hughes, *The Life of Hugh Price Hughes* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), 132.

 $^{^{62}}$ Minutes of Conference, 1884, 281 – 2.

⁶³ Minutes of Conference, 1884, 251.

⁶⁴ *Minutes of Conference*, 1885, 230. For the full list of the resolutions relating to the London Wesleyan-Methodist Mission see 228-30.

⁶⁵ Minutes of Conference, 1885, 265.

⁶⁶ Catherine Booth, Aggressive Christianity: Practical Sermons (Washington: McDonald and Gill, 1883).

⁶⁷ John Atherton (ed.) Social Christianity: A Reader (London: SPCK, 1994).

⁶⁸ On the Nonconformist Conscience, see William McGuire King, 'Hugh Price Hughes and the Social Gospel', *Journal of Religious History*, 13/1 (1984), 66-82; David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics*, 1870-1914 (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1982), Specifically on Hughes see Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a New Methodism, Conscience of a New Nonconformity*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999).

In all of this, the churches were supported by an able legion of women. In most religious groups, mission work afforded middle class women the opportunity of escape from the private sphere into a more public role.⁶⁹ Even though Conference officially banned women from preaching in 1803, they continued to play an important role in Methodism.⁷⁰ Opportunities were limited at the institutional level but they occasionally acted as lay preachers and assumed much of the district visitation, tract distribution and the organisation of women's groups.⁷¹ Married ministers came as a package with their wives. Katherine Price Hughes, wife of Methodism's social conscience, established and trained 'Sisters of the People'.⁷² The Sisters in West London set up a crèche, medical dispensary and hospice and were occasionally asked to speak at open-air services. The Wesleyan Deaconness Order was a separate group created in 1890.⁷³ They differed from Hughes' sisters in that they were called to serve in a manner similar to ministers and undertook preaching work. Once a deaconess married she was required to leave the Order. At the central missions, ministerial work was supported by a team of deaconesses: up to twelve in the case of Manchester.

Wealthy Laymen

Philanthropists and social reformers were frequently connected through religion.⁷⁴ The Wesleyans did not differ. Affluent laymen provided the financial backing to extend the aims of the Forward Movement. They included Thomas Ferens in Hull (Figure 2.2), Jesse Boot in Nottingham and Thomas Walker in Bolton who gave significant sums to these missions of anything between £1, 000 to £5, 000. Where one publicly pledged a significant amount, others soon followed. Appeals were made widely to 'interested Christians' to support these specific initiatives to the poor and fund-raising ventures such lectures, teas and bazaars.

⁶⁹ See Alison Twells, *The Civilizing Mission and the English Middle Class*, 1792 – 1850 (London: Palgrave MacMillan) and Amanda Vickery (ed.) *Women, Power and Privilege: British Politics*, 1750 to the Present (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁷⁰ Doreen Rosman, *The Evolution of the English Churches*, 2006, 230.

⁷¹ See Jennifer M. Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism: Persistent Preachers*, 1807 – 1907 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

⁷² See Katherine Price Hughes, *The Story of My Life* (London: Epworth Press, 1945); Dorothea Price Hughes, *The Sisters of the People and their Work* (London: Horace Marshall and Son, c. 1900) and T. Morcom Taylor, *Portraits and Pictures of the West London Mission* (London: Stenlake and Simpson, 1893), 10 – 13.

⁷³ E. Dorothy Graham, *Saved to Serve: The Story of the Wesley Deaconness Or*der, 1890 – 1978 (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2002).

⁷⁴ Simon Gunn, *Public Culture*, 2000; Frank Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service: A Disinherited Spirit?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Mayors, aldermen and other civic dignitaries, regardless of their denominational background, would be in attendance to ensure these events had a high profile.

Laymen provided more than simply finance. David Jeremy's *Capitalists and Christians* documents the social composition of Wesleyan business leaders at the turn of the twentieth century as:

...a narrowly selected group, generally of mid or late middle-age; ascendant in business and capital; dominated by London perspectives bonded by a Wesleyan education, or, less frequently, marriage and enjoying solid civic and political (usually Liberal) status. These were men rising within and between classes, despite any social handicap associated with their minority religious faith.⁷⁵

Successful in the commercial sector, these were worldly men who looked beyond the narrow confines of church to the expanding range of commercial, civic and cultural building types. Industrial innovation, into which they sunk their capital, received architectural expression in warehouses, mills, factories and railway stations. Their extensive knowledge and expertise was used at local chapel level and, from 1878 when laymen were admitted to Conference, at national level too.

Above all, the names of Joseph Rank and his son, J. Arthur Rank, are indelibly linked to the Wesleyan Central Missions (Figure 2.3). Joseph Rank had built up a large firm specialising in flour milling yet he lived a frugal life and gave most of his money to charitable causes.⁷⁶ When the TCF closed in 1908 having raised a total of £800, 000 Joseph made up the outstanding amount. He was impressed by the Forward Movement and became involved because of concerns about the spiritual welfare of his workers in Hull. Conference was less than enamoured with the idea of setting up a Central Mission in Hull, because of cost, but Rank stood up at a meeting and declared that: 'we are going to have those halls in Hull; and if the Wesleyans won't foot the bill, Mr. Ferens and I will.'⁷⁷ Estimates put his gifts to the Methodist Church prior to his death at £3. 5 million in addition to the founding of the Joseph Rank Benevolent Trust (JRBT). In 1932, he purchased the ground rents owned by Westminster Central Hall, when it found itself in financial difficulty, and gave them to the WCC as a

⁷⁵ David Jeremy, Capitalists and Christians, 1990, 306.

⁷⁶ R. G. Burnett, *Through the Mill: The Life of Joseph Rank* (London: Epworth Press, 1945).

⁷⁷ Quoted in R. G. Burnett, Through the Mill, 1945, 97.



Figure 3.2: Portrait of Thomas Ferens by Fred Dicksee. Source: Hull History Centre.

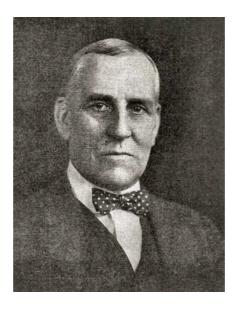


Figure 3.3: Joseph Rank. Source: The New Room, Bristol.

'Special Endowment Fund' for all chapels.⁷⁸ Rank's gifts were anonymous and he preferred to stimulate local giving by matching it pound for pound. However, the WCC Annual Reports continually make reference to the 'well-known, munificent donor' to whom they were grateful.

The Twentieth Century: Secularisation?

Twentieth century Christianity in Britain is characteristically depicted by sociologists as one of unremitting decline. Despite the unification of the various Methodist groups into one church in 1932, the available statistics on church attendance and membership chart significant drops (Figure 2.1). Other mainstream churches have also experienced declension (Figure 2.2). This process of secularisation, where religion loses wider social significance, was thought to be teleological, with religion eventually becoming an irrelevant social force.⁷⁹ The reasons put forward to explain the decline commonly link it to modernization. Democracy, improved education and scientific rationality provided an intellectual framework to explain human life without reference to the supernatural. Voluntary attendance and a greater choice of competing religious groups meant many people had only an associational relationship with the church and no firm conviction of support.⁸⁰ Finally, urbanization broke strong rural community ties that religion had been implicated in. Religious groups became focused upon individual expressions of piety and less involved in the public sphere.

Historians turned to the nineteenth century to provide an explanation and gave sustenance to the sociological narrative of decline. Despite church attendance being relatively high groups such as the Wesleyan Methodists experienced a relative decline to the rate of population.⁸¹ In addition, it was strongly argued that religion was a middle-class phenomenon and, for the

⁷⁸ MWCC, 2 November, 1932, MPO.

⁷⁹ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (London: Doubleday, 1969); Bryan Wilson, *Religion in a Secular Society: A Sociological Comment* (London: Watts, 1966).

⁸⁰ See, for instance, David Hempton, 'Established Churches and the Growth of Religious Pluralism: a Case Study of Christianisation in England since 1700' in Hugh McLeod and J. Ustorf (eds.) *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750 – 2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Peter Yalden, 'Association, Community and the Origins of Secularisation', 2004.

⁸¹ Robert Currie, Alan D. Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) and Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided*, 1968, 85-103.

most part, the working classes were indifferent.⁸² Not only were the seeds of secularisation sown in the nineteenth century but religion and modern industrial cities were incompatible.

Hugh McLeod drew attention to the silent voice of the working classes suggesting that the historical use of official statistics and organisational literature simply reflected the anxieties of the Victorian middle class about their perceived failure to reach the working classes.⁸³ Following his lead, local studies viewed the situation from the ground pointing out that the working class were not all so aloof from religion.⁸⁴ A number of oral history studies indicated the prevalence of a 'popular religion', including superstition and folk belief that remained a significant part of people's lives often working outside of the narrow confines of church and chapel.⁸⁵

By the 1980s, some questioned the pervasive narrative of secularisation. Jeffrey Cox's study of south London churches drew attention to a 'diffusive Christianity' where religion still retained significance outside of conventional church boundaries.⁸⁶ Church attendance statistics alone did not provide enough evidence of social significance and Cox argued that religion provided a large share of social services for poor. Consequently, the establishment of a national Welfare State in the United Kingdom in 1945 usurped this social role. While broadly accepting that secularisation has occurred, attention turned towards its timing.

⁸² Kenneth S. Inglis, Churches and the Working Classes, 1963; E. R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964); Owen Chadwick, *The Secularisation of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Alan D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel, and Social Change, 1740-1914* (London: Longman, 1976); Stephen Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (London: Croom Helm, 1976); Alan D. Gilbert, *Post-Christian Britain*, 1980 and Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

⁸³ Hugh McLeod, Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 279 – 287.

⁸⁴ For example, Rosemary Chadwick, 'Church and People in Bradford and District, 1880 – 1914' (D. Phil thesis: University of Oxford, 1986); Alan D. Bartlett, 'The Churches in Bermondsey, 1880 – 1939' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1987); Mark A. Smith *Religion and Society in Oldham and Saddleworth*, 1994; Richard Sykes, 'Popular Religion in Decline: A Study from the Black Country', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 56/2 (2005), 287-307; Rex Walford, *The Growth of "New London" in Suburban Middlesex (1918-1945) and the Response of the Church of England* (Lampeter: Edward Mellen, 2007).

⁸⁵ For example, Gillian Rose, 'Imagining Poplar in the 1920s: Contested Concepts of Community', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 16/4 (1990), 425-437; Sarah Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark*, c. 1880 – 1939 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Dorothy Entwhistle "'Hope, Colour, and Comradeship": Loyalty and Opportunism in Early Twentieth-Century Church Attendance Among the Working Class in North West England', *The Journal of Religious History*, 25/1 (2001), 20 – 38.

⁸⁶ Jeffrey Cox, The English Churches in a Secular Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

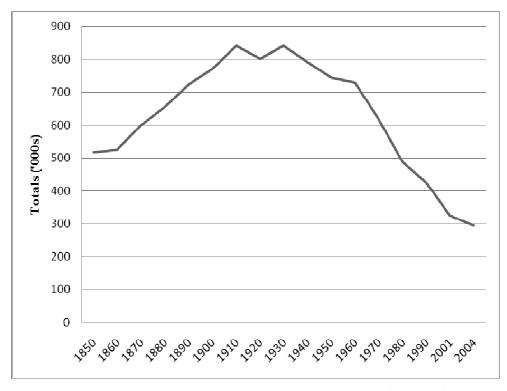
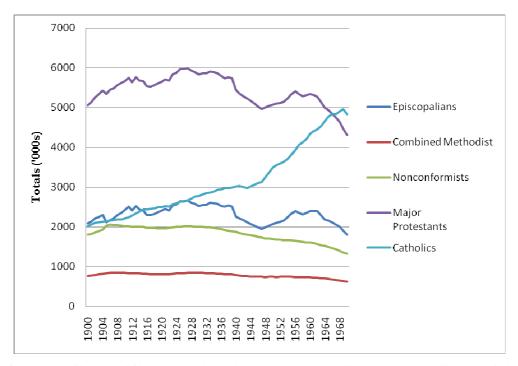


Figure 3.4: Total number of members in the Methodist Church (1850 – 2004).

Source: 1850 – 1990, David Hempton, Methodism, 2006: 214; 2001- 2004, The Methodist Church of Great Britain, Triennial Membership returns and Statistics for Mission, 2004.

Figure 3.5: Annual British church membership totals, selected groups (1900 – 1970).



Source: R. Currie et al., Churches and Churchgoers, 1977, Table A1, 128-129 and Table A7, 161-165 available at British Religion in Numbers, 'Charts, Maps and Data Tables', http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/#ChurchesandChurchgoers.

In his seminal book, *The Death of Christian Britain*, Callum Brown points to a revival in attendance during the 1950s, contending that severe haemorrhaging occurred during the 1960s.⁸⁷ Religion, he argues, adapted in the period after the Second World War making any teleological theory or comparative work problematic. Twentieth century British society remained culturally Christian, largely accepting and supporting of its moral tenets evidenced by the significant numbers of people who were baptised, married and given a funeral by the Christian churches. Brown's focus is on the wider cultural reasons that support decline – with women entering the work place in larger numbers and the existence of an increasingly permissive society.

Sociologist Grace Davie terms the British situation as 'believing without belonging': people may not be part of the church but still retain belief.⁸⁸ In addition, the resilience of religion in other parts of the world raised questions about the Eurocentric nature of the secularisation thesis.⁸⁹ Immigration into Britain since 1945 has also significantly changed its religious geography.⁹⁰ These doubts highlight that secularisation is neither as linear nor as all-encompassing as once appeared. Jose Casanova reconsiders the role of religion and modernity, pointing out that 'privatization' does not imply that religion loses all social significance.⁹¹ Instead, it adapts and changes to ensure that it remains a public force in new ways. This can take the form of voluntary provision of social services or, in some areas performing an important community function at the local level. However, the study of religion in Britain amongst sociologists and historians has been conducted within the terms of the debate.⁹² Wedded to either a refutation or confirmation of secularisation, historians and sociologists commonly ignore the material realities. This thesis will not consider the concept of secularisation but will explore how decline is experienced within one religious group and what this means for the present day.

⁸⁷ Callum Brown, 'Did urbanisation secularize Britain?', *Urban History Yearbook*, 15 (1988), 1–14; Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000*, 2nd Edition (London, Routledge, 2009).

 ⁸⁸ Grace Davie, Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).
 ⁸⁹ Although note the longitudinal data suggesting otherwise: Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *The Sacred and*

the Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁹⁰ Gerald Parsons (ed.) The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain from 1945, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁹¹ Jose Casanova, Public Religions in the Modern World (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁹² David Nash 'Reconnecting Religion with Social and Cultural History: Secularization's Failure as a Master Narrative, *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 302 – 325.

Church Buildings and Decline

The theologian Robin Gill is one of the few discussants who points to the physical features of decline. ⁹³ He asks where empty churches come from and looks at the number of ecclesiastical buildings and the provision of seating. Challenging the conventional view that religious organisations failed to keep up with population expansion, he argues that, with the exception of the Roman Catholics, they *over-provided* accommodation in the nineteenth century. Once church-going began to decline, the sight of empty churches served as visual evidence to the wider population that religion was losing social significance. The time spent on managing resources led to pressures on evangelising.⁹⁴ Empty churches demoralized congregations and financial worries followed. In the end, they close.

While Gill draws attention to buildings, there are a number of flaws in his argument. Examining the number of sittings provided does not take into account the various places that were rented. Moreover, if Jeffrey Cox is correct that the Churches provided other functions, a focus on seating provision tells us little about the sacred *and* public spaces of religion. Lastly, buildings are not mere backdrops to social events: they can mean different things for different people in particular times and places. Very often religious buildings serve as a visual mnemonic. Danièle Hervieu-Léger notes that while Danish citizens stay away from Churches they continue to legitimise and pay a tax towards the maintenance and upkeep of Lutheran churches 'because they like to see religious buildings properly maintained'.⁹⁵ These buildings provide a link to the past, allowing the memory of religion to live on even if this means assuming an alternative identity.⁹⁶ English Heritage, the public body tasked with maintaining the built environment, promotes the care of Church buildings as an important part of England's collective memory. However, this means finding new uses for churches and the implication is that, in some cases, a very small congregation may have to co-exist with a range of other functions.

⁹³ Robin Gill, *The Empty Church Revisited* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

⁹⁴ A similar point is made by Stephen Yeo in *Religion and Voluntary Organisations*, 1976, 248.

⁹⁵ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, 'The Role of Religion in Establishing Social Cohesion' in Michalski Krzysztof (ed.)*Conditions of European Solidarity, Vol. 2: Religion in the New Europe*, (Budapest: Central European University Press 2006), 45 – 63, quote 48.

⁹⁶ Martin Percy, 'Losing Our Space, Finding Our Place? The Changing Identity of the English Parish Church', in Simon Coleman and Peter Collins, *Religion, Identity and Change: Perspectives on Global Transformations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 26-41; Paul Chambers, 'Sacred Landscapes, Redundant Chapels and Carpet Warehouses: the Religious Heritage of South West Wales' in Elizabeth Arweck and William Keenan (eds.) *Materializing Religion: Expression, Performance and Ritual* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) and Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

In 1940, the number of registered Methodist places of worship was 13, 632. By 2000, this was reduced to 6, 270 with the largest number of closures occurring between 1961 and 1970 where an average of 300 chapels closed per year. This is by far the largest decrease in any Christian organisation (See Table 3.2). Most of its present building stock is in villages but three-quarters have a membership less than thirty. The Property Office of the Methodist Church (MPO) estimates that if the decline remains constant, there will be 5, 000 Methodist

Year	Church Buildings		
1941	13, 632		
1951	-		
1961	11, 500		
1971	8, 500		
1981	7,664		
1991	6, 919		
2001	6, 270		

Table 3.1: Numbers of Methodist Church Buildings, 1941 – 2001.

Source: The Methodist Church Property Office, Decennial Statistical Returns for Methodist Chapels, 2001, 2.

Year	C of E	Methodist	Combined Baptist	Congregational	Salvation Army	Catholic
1851	14,077	6, 579	2, 789	-	-	626
1861	-	-	-	-	-	872
1871	-	7, 485	2, 364	2, 811	-	1, 180
1881	15, 867	7,854	-	2, 597	29	1, 300
1891	16, 686	8, 123	-	4, 417	1,006	1,599
1901	-	-	-	-	-	-
1911	17, 817	8,606	6, 921	4, 890	1,431	2,021
1921	18, 236	-	7, 287	4, 861	1,244	2, 323
1931	18, 318	-	7, 202	4, 585	1,610	2,443
1941	18, 550	13, 632	7,220	4, 576	1,837	2,859
1951	-	-	7, 292	4, 516	1,656	3, 242
1961	17, 980	11, 500	6, 943	4, 188	1,610	-
1971	17, 761	8, 500	6, 897	-	1,571	-

Table 3.2: Number of church buildings, selected denominations (1851 – 1971).

Sources: Figures are from R. Currie et al, *Churches and Churchgoers*, 1977; Table F1, 216 – 7 Table E, 213. The Methodist figures 1851 -1931 are for the Wesleyan Methodists only. The 1871 - 1911 Wesleyan figures are reported in the *WCCAR*, 1851, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1911.

owned chapels by 2020 although it tempers its predictions by observing that 'the capacity of the Methodist structures to maintain themselves to a remarkable extent'.⁹⁷ Certainly, the long and active existence of the Property Office means that it has developed resources to ensure its listed buildings receive expert help on technical and conservation matters.⁹⁸

The Church of England faces similar issues. Since 1969, eleven per cent of Anglican churches have closed.⁹⁹ Almost half of these have found a new purpose and church buildings can be viewed as a repository of social capital and a community resource.¹⁰⁰ English Heritage points to the continued prominence of these on the nation's psyche and calls for a real need for their maintenance and a consideration of alternative uses in order to preserve them.¹⁰¹ While many people stay away from churches, surveys indicate an ambivalent attitude towards the buildings.¹⁰² One poll, commissioned by the Church of England and English Heritage, discovered that fifty-nine per cent of adults think of their local church as a landmark with almost two thirds expressing concern if it were to disappear. Indeed, English Heritage estimates that eighty-five per cent of the population has attended a church at least once a year for a service or visit.¹⁰³

Conclusion

The Wesleyans absorbed lessons from their wider cultural and social environment. Utilising their connexional structure, funds were raised and distributed through the centralised Chapel Committee. They listened to the working classes and responded to what they thought their potential recruits wanted most from church buildings and they constructed a new building

¹⁰¹ For example, Marcus Binney, and Peter Burman, *Chapels and Churches, Who Cares: An Independent Report* (London: Country Life, 1977); Kenneth Powell and Celia de la Hey, *Churches: A Question of Conversion* (London: Save Britain's Heritage, 1987); English Heritage, *A Force for our Future* (London: Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2001); Trevor Cooper, *How Do We Keep our Parish Churches?* (London: The Ecclesiological Society, 2004). ¹⁰²Opinion Research Business, 'Places of Worship Research Survey', 2003,

⁹⁷ The Methodist Church, *Decennial Statistical Returns for Methodist Chapels, 2000* (Manchester: Resourcing Mission Office 2001).

⁹⁸ Kenneth Street and Ian Serjeant, Heritage and Mission (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2000).

⁹⁹ Linda Monckton, 'Churches and Closure in the Church of England: A Summary Report', English Heritage, 2010, http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/content/imported-docs/a-e/churches-and-closure-in-cofe-mar-2010.pdf. Accessed, 5 May 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Comedia, *Spirit of Place: Redundant Churches as Urban Resources* (Comedia: Stroud, 1995); Chris Baker and Hannah Skinner, 'Telling the Stories: How Churches are Contributing to Social Capital', *Report for the William Temple Foundation* (Manchester: The William Temple Foundation, 2005).

http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/papers/worshipsurveytable.pdf. Accessed 22 October 2007. ¹⁰³ Ibid.

type. Having followed this path, the twentieth century brought the challenge of declining membership and redundant church buildings.

While the precision of the secularisation thesis is questionable, Methodism has undoubtedly experienced a significant decline. The speed of this process led one commentator to observe that Methodism 'has known, in rapid succession, remarkable success and severe chronic recession, a change of fortune which other churches have only experienced slowly and in a milder form'.¹⁰⁴ This thesis does not propose to confirm or refute secularisation which, as discussed above, can be a problematic narrative. Instead, it will show that the building type offers a different approach that powerfully documents the *experience* of religious and social change over the twentieth century. The following section now turns to the investigation of this hybrid building type as an example of public sacred space.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Currie, Methodism Divided, 1968, 12 - 13.

PART TWO

Chapter 4: A Hybrid Building Type

The wide doors stand open to everybody; the brilliantly lighted porch vies in brightness with the gin-palace itself. There are neither pew doors nor pew rights. The seats run round in great curves, rising tier above tier. There is a separate place for everybody, the seat swinging back to a touch, as in theatres. Nobody has an exclusive right to any particular seat; and in some of the halls even at lectures – where a charge is made for admission – no reserved seats are permitted. The mission hall is absolutely democratic – as democratic as a family circle.¹

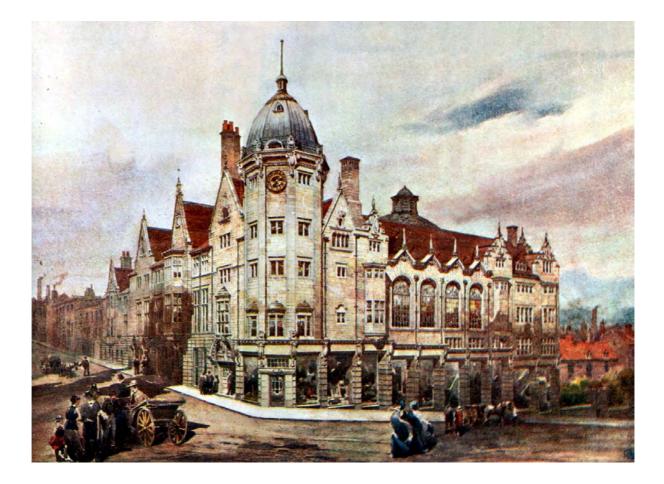


Figure 4.1: Westgate Hall, Newcastle by Crouch and Butler (1902). Source: WCCAR 1902.

¹ Revd. W. H. Fitchett, 'Amongst the City Missions', Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine, May 1905, 35.

Introduction

In 1850, Frederick Jobson, Methodist minister and architect, published his guide to the design of nonconformist architecture. Disparaging the eclectic collection of existing town churches, he suggested that they shared a closer resemblance with:

warehouses or factories than Houses of God; and where, if in any case, a tall chimney were added to one side, the building would immediately appear ready for use as a cotton mill or wool factory. And others might be named that look much more like concert-rooms or theatres, than erections for Christian worship – others with shop-like fronts.²

Jobson defended Gothic as the style most appropriate to nonconformist needs, keen to rescue it from Catholic associations.³ He argued that it represented true English and Christian architecture and claimed that it was also the most economical. Yet, a generation later, the Wesleyans Methodists began to construct Central Halls. Their secular architecture and retail space at street level may have horrified Jobson. However, as the previous chapter explained, existing Gothic churches failed to attract people. For the Forward Movement to leave the city was tantamount to failure and inertia. Writing about the proposal of Birmingham Mission to sell the city centre Cherry Street Chapel in 1889, one sage surmised 'to a stranger...this might seem to show that they had no proper care for the masses, and wished to think only of "making Methodism respectable", and of "building chapels for nabobs in the suburbs".⁴

The success story of the new building type was carried through the land by laymen and ministers on the Connexional committees and in the denominational magazines. They emphasised the 'romance' of their missions and the rekindling of evangelical zeal. Architecture was placed at the centre of the narrative. As one commentator asserted, previous missions failed precisely because:

When it is tacitly assumed that for the Christian worshipper there must be the best that architecture and music and a trained ministry can supply, but that for a "mission" all that is needed is good intentions and a warm heart, however shabby and incompetent the accessories may be, is it any marvel if the results are meagre?⁵

² Frederick R. Jobson, Chapel and School Architecture, as Appropriate to the Buildings of Nonconformists, Particularly Those of the Wesleyan Methodists (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1991 [1850]).

³ Compare with Augustus W. N. Pugin Contrasts (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1969 [1841]).

⁴ A Worker, 'The Story of the Birmingham Central Mission', Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine, February 1889, 97.

⁵ George Jackson, *Collier of Manchester: A Friend's Tribute* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), 51. This view was shared by Percy Alden's description of the 'The Ideal Church for the East End' in Richard Mudie-Smith, *The Religious Life of London*, 1901, 43 - 5.

The multi-functional building type became the keystone to Methodism's urban strategy. The WCC's Annual Reports detail eighty-three adaptations or new builds. This chapter offers an analysis of the type by assessing their distribution, site procurement, style, planning, interior spaces and use.

Geographical Distribution

The first Central Missions were established in larger cities such as Liverpool, Sheffield, Hull and London. They operated from existing churches and hired theatres for Sunday services. The first purpose-built Central Hall was in Manchester (1886).⁶ Rather cautiously, it was another twelve years before Bermondsey and Ipswich chose to follow the Manchester model. With the establishment of the Twentieth Century Fund (TCF), Central Halls swiftly followed in Leeds, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Bolton, Sheffield and Liverpool. By 1908, the WCC reported that with forty-one halls built, most cities and towns were well-equipped with a few exceptions in Blackburn, Bristol and Rochdale (Figure 4.2).⁷

London perplexed them. Around a third of Central Halls were constructed in the capital, predominantly in the South and East, at the scene of Andrew Mearns' *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*. Their establishment could be sporadic because of the recent erection of chapels under the earlier Metropolitan Chapel Building Fund (1861). However, in 1910, it was merged with the London Mission Fund. The new London Mission and Extension Fund brought together the interests of mission and property and an inaugural appeal raised £150, 000. They spent £2 million on chapel extension between 1919 and 1939. Joseph Rank had moved to Surrey by this time and turned his attentions to the London Mission, giving £330, 000 between 1930 and 1939 alone.⁸ Central Halls moved with the London population to the suburbs of Southall, Uxbridge and the new London County Council (LCC) cottage estates at Dagenham and Becontree (Figure 4.3).⁹

⁶ See pp. 179 – 204 below.

⁷ WCCAR, 1908, 18; WCCAR, 1912, 11.

⁸ Brian Frost, *Pioneers of Social Passion*, 2006, 120.

⁹ The Methodist Church, *Beginning at Aldersgate: The Review of the Methodist London Mission and Extension Fund* (London: Methodist Church Home Mission Division, 1989).

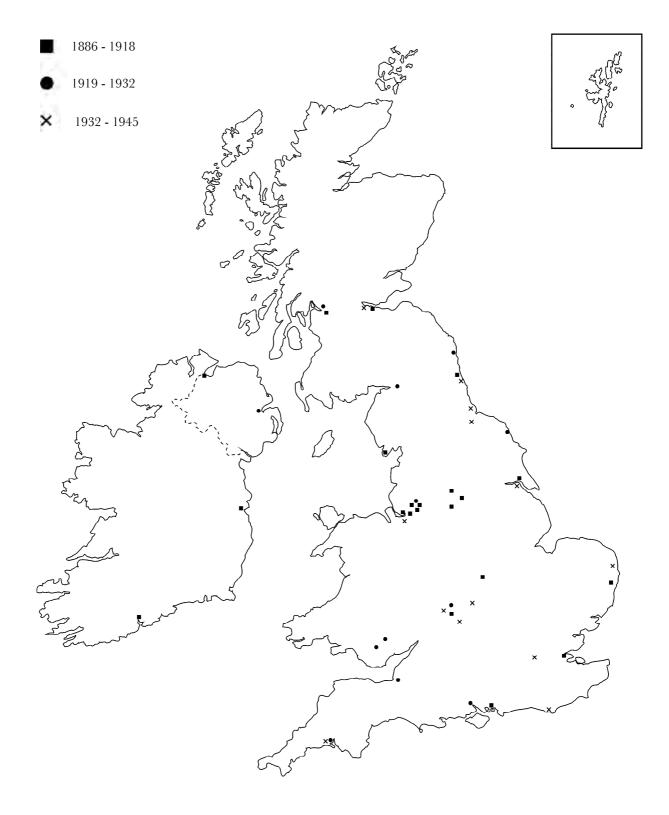


Figure 4.2: Location of Central Halls 1886 – 1945 including Ireland. Note: some locations had more than one hall. See separate map on p.81 for London.



Figure 4.3: Location of the London Central Halls.

The early Central Halls were large venues, typically seating upwards of 1, 500 people. The First World War delayed building but allowed many trusts to eradicate debt.¹⁰ In 1919, two legacies reached maturity and provided a renewed impetus to chapel building. So, during the 1920s delayed schemes in the provinces came to fruition such as those in Bristol, Blackburn and Glasgow. Specific missions to the South Wales and South Yorkshire coal districts were also initiated and resulted in Central Halls in Bargoed and Tonypandy.

The average number of sittings decreased over time (Table 4.1). When the Wesleyans were re-united with the United Methodists and Primitive Methodists in 1932, smaller towns, for example Chester and Great Yarmouth, converted existing premises to include ancillary accommodation and bring their furnishings into line with the Central Halls. The last purpose-built venue to seat over one thousand people was that opened at Archway in North London (1934).¹¹ The Queen's Hall for the Battersea Mission accommodated 500 people; the result of a collaboration between the church and the new welfare state. It opened in 1945 and represented the end of the build out.¹²

Time Period	Number of Halls	Main Hall seats
1886 - 1914	39	1,616
1915 - 1929	23	1, 284
1930 - 1945	13	843
Total	75	-

Table 4.1: Table of average seating accommodation in the main hall by time period.

Source: Data compiled from the Wesleyan Chapel Committee Annual Reports and the 1940 Statistical Returns. Data available for 75 out of 99 Halls.

¹⁰ WCCAR, 1917, 10 - 12

¹¹ See pp. 325 - 353 below.

¹² 'New Premises for the Battersea Central Mission', *The Architect and Building News*, 26 September 1941, 192-3. Note that Hull Central Hall, an adaptation of the Great Waltham Street Chapel, opened in 1960 as a replacement building for the original three Central Halls in that city.

Procuring a Site

All sites are situated on main thoroughfares where people congregated. Around half are at a junction or street corner where external facades could be exploited to provide rent producing space. In this they were assisted by municipal improvements to streets that made new, wide thoroughfares in city centres. Close proximity to main transport hubs made them readily accessible. In the larger cities the first Central Hall was supplemented by smaller buildings of a similar type in working class residential districts but always located on through roads or near public houses and shops.

Even where land was already owned, the demand for comprehensive accommodation required additional space. Sites purchased outright raised overall costs and so the majority of the buildings replaced older Wesleyan chapels. Acquiring the freehold became an asset in order to avoid finding an additional yearly expense.

Raising the Capital

Rallies and meetings raised interest and gathered more funds. Typically, they appealed to suburban Wesleyans or wealthy Christian philanthropists. Bricks were imprinted with the names of substantial donors. Those of more modest means received a certificate allocated with the number of a brick. Connexional funds, such as the TCF, partially provided for costs. The outstanding amounts on the building accounts usually resulted in a loan or mortgage although the term 'opened free of debt' in the WCC's annual reports increasingly became an emblem of pride. Usually this was only achievable because of a gift from 'the anonymous wealthy donor' whom every Methodist knew to be Joseph Rank. He stepped in to subsequently write off the debts of several halls: but the presumption was always that the halls should be self-reliant.¹³

How much influence did this wealthy patron have over the design of the buildings? Rank gave widely to a number of causes in the Methodist Church and the setting up of the Joseph Rank Benevolent Trust in 1930 was partly in reaction to the free spending of some ministers on expensive furnishings. David Jeremy quotes one of Rank's replies to an application to the

¹³ MWCC, 2 November 1932, MPO.



Figure 4.4: The front entrance of Belfast's Grosvenor Hall. Source: The Belfast Mission Archive.

Special Endowment Fund that clearly expresses this view: 'I do not agree with wasting money to carry out the views of some people who do not mind how much they spend so long as they do not have to provide the money.'¹⁴ Once he imparted his gifts there was little final control he could have although he dispensed much advice based upon his business acumen. At Belfast's Grosvenor Hall, he advised the Revd. Ker to begin by examining the advertising strategy and suggested that an electric sign over the main entrance was essential (Figure 4.4).¹⁵ In 1938, the trustees at Great Yarmouth found Rank cautioning against converting an existing church to a Central Hall believing that the mission movement was nearing an end.¹⁶ This advice they ignored.

Managing the Construction Process

How were the designs to be procured? In their manual to guide the design of nonconformist church buildings, Joseph Crouch and Edmund Butler discuss the issue.¹⁷ The competition method was widely used in architectural commissions but perspective drawings fooled selectors with artistically drawn exterior views bearing little resemblance to the finished product in its real environment.¹⁸ This meant bad and unsympathetic architecture. Westminster Central Hall (1905 – 1912) was put to competition and over one hundred entries were received. The winning design by Henry V. Lanchester and Edwin A. Rickard's was a self-assured Baroque building that was criticized by the *Builder* for being 'decidedly too secular' – the result of the competition process that: 'promotes designs of striking buildings rather than what is appropriate'.¹⁹

In the end nine out of every ten Central Hall commissions went to trusted friends of Wesleyan Methodism. Four firms feature prominently: Arthur Brocklehurst and Co., Gelder and Kitchen, Bradshaw and Gass (Later Bradshaw Gass and Hope) and Gordon and Gunton (See Table 4.2). Available denominational information shows most had strong links to Wesleyan Methodism. Albert E. Lambert of Nottingham and William J. Hale of Sheffield

¹⁴ David Jeremy, *Capitalists and Christians*, 1990, 349. See also pp. 312 – 314 below.

¹⁵ Eric Gallagher, At Points of Need: The Story of the Belfast Central Mission, 1889 -1989 (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1989), 64.

¹⁶ David Jeremy, Capitalists and Christians, 1990, 349.

¹⁷ Joseph Crouch and Edmund Butler, *Chapels, Mission-Halls and Schools for Nonconformists* (Birmingham: Buckler and Webb, 1901), 7 – 8.

¹⁸ Joseph Crouch and Edmund Butler, *Chapels, Mission-Halls and Schools*, 1901, 7.

¹⁹ 'The Wesleyan Hall Competition Design', *The Builder*, 88, June 24, 1905, 669.

Architect	Location	Number of Central Hall Commissions
Arthur Brocklehurst and Son	Manchester	22
Charles Bell (later Bell, Withers and Meredith)	London	2
Bradshaw and Gass (Later Bradshaw Gass and Hope)	Bolton and London	5
Gelder and Kitchen	Hull	11
Gordon and Gunton	London	6
Ewan J. and A. Harper	Birmingham	2
W.J. Hale	Sheffield	2
W. J. Morley and Sons	Bradford	4
James Weir/ Weir, Burrows and Weir	London	4
George E Withers (later with Kenneth G. Withers)	London	3
Unknown	-	17
One Commission Only	-	21
Total		99

Table 4.2: List of architects, location and number of commissions.

Source: Compiled from the Wesleyan Chapel Committee Annual Reports, 1886 – 1945.

were both practicing Wesleyans.²⁰ Jonas Bradshaw and John B. Gass were Unitarians but occasionally worshipped at a Wesleyan chapel in Bolton and contributed to the annual anniversary appeal of Victoria Hall until their deaths.²¹ Sir Alfred Gelder, of Gelder and Kitchen, was close friends with the wealthy Methodist philanthropists, Joseph Rank and Thomas Ferens of Hull. He designed Rank's flour mills and was approached when he wanted to finance a mission building in Hull. Their wives were life-long friends.²² Arthur Brocklehurst, based in Manchester, was in partnership with Alan Wiseman Hornabrook 1914. His father, Joshua Hornabrook was secretary of the Wesleyan Chapel Committee and a former President of Conference. Lastly, Charles Bell, Ewan Harper, William Morley and Josiah Gunton were until leading lay men who could count fellow Wesleyans among their clientele.²³ All designed a wide range of commercial, industrial and religious buildings. These networks ensured that the complex buildings had an architect familiar with the nature of the mission work and the church.

Selecting a building committee to oversee the construction process was as important a step as choosing the architect. This delegated group of trustees decided on tenders, modifications and administered funds. The sound business sense of Wesleyan lay members was put to good use in such committees. Crouch and Butler were in a position to dispense advice from experience: 'Don't', they caution,

get a crank on your Committee...don't get a man... [who] fancies he knows more about the subject than an architect. What is wanted is not so much men who have had practical experience...as men who know how to manage their own business well, men capable of taking a broad view of things, and men also who can grasp the details...but, above all, men who, having satisfied themselves that the architect is honest and competent, will be prepared to take his advice in the same way as they would take the advice of their lawyer or their doctor.²⁴

²⁰ On A. E. Lambert, see Ian Caulfield-Grant, *You have Nothing to Do but Save Souls: the Evolution of the Nottingham Central Mission* (Nottingham: Grant, 2001), 46. On W. J. Hale, see N. D. Wilson, 'Sane if heroic': The Work of William John Hale (1862 – 1929) Wesleyan Methodist Architect', *The Chapels Society Miscellany I, Occasional Publications* (London: The Chapels Society, 1998), 51 – 73.

²¹ Timothy Lingard and Jane Lingard, Bradshaw Gass and Hope, 2007, 25.

²² Geoffrey E. Milburn 'Piety, Profit and Paternalism: Methodist's In Business in the North-East of England, c. 1760-1920', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 44 (1983), 45-69 ; J. S. Fletcher, *The Making of Modern Yorkshire*, 1870 – 1914 (London: G. Allen Unwin, 1918), 331.

²³ On Charles Bell, see 'Obituary', *BNEJ*, 26 May 1899, 730. For Ewan Harper and William Morley see David Jeremy, *Capitalists and Christians: Business Leaders and the Churches, 1900 – 1960* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 303. For Josiah Gunton, see Anon., *Notable Londoners: An Illustrated Who's Who of Professional Business Men* (London: London Publishing Agency, 1921/22), 12.

²⁴ Crouch and Butler, Chapels, Mission-halls and Schools, 1901, 7.

In What Style?

After the architect was chosen, style was the next decision to be taken. Particular styles resonated with the Victorians and most architectural firms were capable of designing in a wide variety of idioms to suit client or use. For the Central Halls, loose and eclectic interpretations of Classical styles were deemed appropriate. As James Schmiechen suggests, Victorian architecture was not a simple case of 'mixing cash-box aesthetics with an overdose of cut-glass and velvet' to be competitive.²⁵ Certainly, these camouflaged churches were intended to be as bright and welcoming as public houses and music halls in order to attract the poor and religiously indifferent. The intention of one group of trustees to build a 'semi-gothic' Hall in South London encountered resistance from the London Mission Committee who protested that the style was inappropriate for a working class area.²⁶

However, they fulfilled other criteria for the Wesleyans and they resemble other public buildings of the period such as libraries, town halls and theatres. Sympathetic to their environment, they use the materials of their locality: terracotta in Birmingham and Walsall; sandstone in Glasgow; ashlar in Bradford; Accrington bricks for Blackburn. They merge into the urban fabric and replace church-like spires with domes and towers. The campanile at Birmingham (1903) stands fifty-five metres high marking the entrance to the building and usefully doubling as a means of ventilation (Figure 4.5). Promoters of the scheme describe it as 'in the free Renaissance style in which so much of central Birmingham is being rebuilt and which lends itself better probably than any other buildings of composite character.'²⁷ The Central Hall in Islington exploits a corner site with one dome to mark the entrance and another covering the main hall (Figure 4.6).

They were also not reserved solely for worship and were to be viewed as a community resource and a gift. The half-timbered Elizabethan façade of the Victoria Hall in Ancoats, Manchester (1898) by Walter R. Sharp, was intended to be redolent of country manor estates to contrast with the perceived bleakness of the district (Figures 4.7 and 4.8).²⁸ The *Building News and Engineering Journal* thought its red brick walls and red pantile roof a pleasing colour

 ²⁵ James A. Schmiechen, 'The Victorians, the Historians, and the Idea of Modernism' *The American Historical Review*, 93/2 (1988), 287. See also Joseph Mordaunt Crook, *The Dilemma of Style*, 1979), 189 – 219.
 ²⁶ WCCAR, 1905, 258.

²⁷ 'New Central Hall, Birmingham'; Souvenir Brochure, 1901, 11.

²⁸ WCCAR, 1896, 161.



Figure 4.5: Birmingham Central Hall (1903) by Ewan J. and A. Harper. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.



Figure 4.6: The domes of Islington Central Hall by Sir Alfred Gelder (1927). Source: Archway Methodist Church.



Figure 4.7: Victoria Hall, Ancoats by Walter R. Sharp. Source: WCCAR 1896.

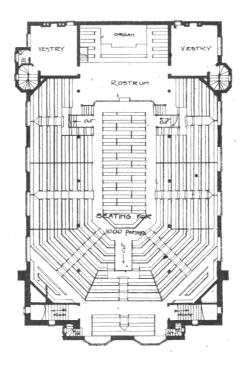
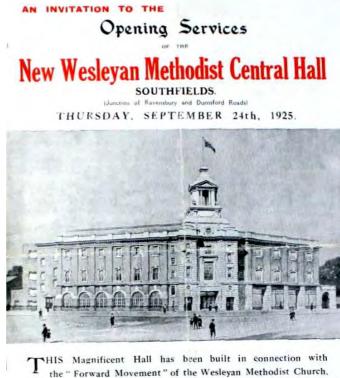


Figure 4.8: Plan of Victoria Hall, Ancoats. Source: BNE7, 1907



This Magnificent that has been built in connection with the "Forward Movement" of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, which has already accomplished such wonderful results in the great cities of this land by bringing together people of all classes, bridging the gulf between the Church and the non-Churchgoer and fostering good-will and mutual helpfulness throughout the whole community.

The development of similar work in this neighbourhood is of the utmost importance to all who are not indifferent to the true welfare of their fellow men.

Figure 4.9: The opening brochure of Southfields Central Hall Source: London Metropolitan Archives.



Figure 4.10: The neo-Jacobean exterior at Plumstead by Bells, Withers and Meredith. Source: WCCAR, 1903.



Figure 4.11: Eastbrook Hall in Bradford by W. J. Morley. Source: WCCAR, 1901.

scheme and a worthy addition to an area, 'where an object-lesson in building was badly needed'.²⁹ Figure 4. 9 shows the opening invitation to Southfields Hall in Wimbledon (1924) and it highlights the wider aspirations behind adoption of a classical design. It hoped to 'foster good-will and mutual helpfulness throughout the whole community'. Coventry's lack of a civic hall meant that the promoters of its Methodist scheme in 1931 emphasised it as 'a centre for worship as well as concerts, public meetings and other community celebrations.'³⁰

The architectural and linguistic disguise did not mean that these were humble buildings. The Central Halls aimed to be monumental in effect. At Plumstead (1905), sited in a working class area, a prominent entrance tower 'will be a landmark in a neighbourhood of uninteresting architecture' according to the WCC (Figure 4.10).³¹ William Morley's design for Eastbrook Hall (1903) in Bradford, with five shops and offices at the front, formed 'an imposing façade' (Figure 4.11).³² At Blackburn, the local newspaper hoped the Wesleyans could provide a building that 'will be a welcome and important addition to Blackburn's local features, especially as it will be located in that part of the centre of town which presents a striking lack of imposing structures.'³³

There are some exceptions to the classical rule. Queen's Hall in Hull (1905) is late Gothic (Figure 4.12). Bargoed in South Wales (1927) and Eastney in Portsmouth (1928) show Gothic influences (Figure 4.13). The architectural historian, Nikolaus Pevsner, described Manchester's Albert Hall (1911) as 'approximately church like'.³⁴ In social investigator Charles Booth's appreciative words, Victoria Hall in Deptford (1903):

is a remarkable structure, and in its design ideas have been taken from the musichalls...For popular purposes it would seem to be an excellent design and at the same time a church-like effect is preserved by the Gothic character of the roof.³⁵

²⁹ 'The Victoria Hall, Ancoats, Manchester', *BNE*7, 16 Aug 1907, 213; 217. Hermann Muthesius extensively discusses the church architecture of nonconformity using Victoria Hall as an example of an auditorium church with rising tiers of seating. See Hermann Muthesius, *Die neuere kirchliche baukunst in England; entwicklung, bedingungen, und grundzüge des kirchenbaueus* (Berlin: W. Ernst and Sohn, 1901), 127.

³⁰ 'New Hall for Coventry', The Midland Daily Telegraph, 31 November 1931, 9.

³¹ WCCAR, 1903 297.

³² WCCAR, 1901, 188.

³³ 'The Welseyan £20,000 scheme: Character and Extent of the Proposed New Mission Hall', *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 19 Oct 1912, 12.

³⁴ Clare Hartwell and Nikolaus Pevsner, *Manchester, Pevsner Architectural Guides* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 186.

³⁵ Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People of London, Third Series, Vol. 5: Religious Influences, South-East and South-West London (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd, 1902), 66.



Figure 4.12: The Queen's Hall, Hull (1905) by Alfred Gelder. Source: Hull History Centre.



Figure 4.13: Bargoed Central Hall by Arthur Brocklehurst and Co. (1927). Source: WCCAR 1927.

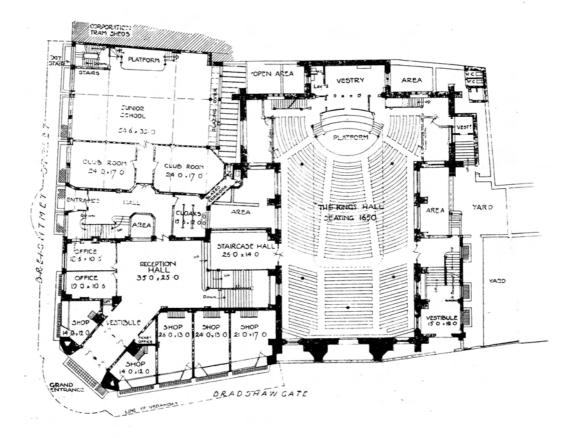


Figure 4.13: Ground floor plan of King's Hall, Bolton by Bradshaw Gass and Hope. Source: BNEJ, 1906.

Clearly, there were no hard and fast rules and sometimes, particularly when the Central Hall was an adaptation of an existing chapel, there were limitations to what could reasonably be achieved. Bolton's King's Hall (1907) enlarged the existing Wesley's Chapel and the plans show the incorporation of the nave and transept arrangement with the required institutional premises towards the front of the building (Figures 4.14). Indeed, some protested at the news of the proposed demolition of the former chapel, complaining of 'the blasphemous idea that God cannot now convert men in a Gothic building' and the *Methodist Times* thought the result was 'a handsome model and example of how to modernise a dark and deserted Gothic chapel.'³⁶

These prominent additions to the landscape were not always approved of. Westminster Central Hall originally had two towers flanking the main entrance, in addition to the large concrete dome (Figure 4.15). Westminster Hospital objected to the towers on the grounds of right of light and they were never built (Figure 4.16). It is worth having a sideways glance at the Wesleyan headquarters in London. It was sumptuous and could afford to be with £350, 000 allocated towards its total cost from the TCF. The resulting building closely resembles Cardiff Town Hall, which Lanchester and Rickard's designed in the same period, with Henry Poole carrying out the external sculpture work on both buildings. Contemporaries gave it a mixed reception. Initially critical of the original drawings, *The Builder* marvelled at its bold *beaux-arts* planning, shown in clear symmetry in figure 4.17. It went on to claim that 'it is without parallel as an example of modern construction in London'.³⁷ Partisan observers thought otherwise. A correspondent to the Catholic newspaper, *The Tablet*, believed that:

architectural wickedness can flourish in high places. It is improbable, if not impossible, that the Wesleyans are as bad as their architecture; their new central meeting-house near Westminster Abbey must be concrete libel on that most respectable body...it is impossible that the creators of shrinking Little Bethels throughout our quite pretty country can have become quite suddenly the apostles of swagger...How can the mystic symbolism of Ezekiel fit with an orgy of secular carving?³⁸

The criticism is somewhat harsh. The dome was the third largest in the country and although it was designed specifically to contrast with the towers and spires of the Church of England, it

³⁶ Both quotes from *The Methodist Times*, 7 February 1907, 45.

³⁷ 'New Wesleyan Church House', The Builder, 11 October 1912, 412 – 416.

³⁸ Quoted in 'Our Office Table', BNEJ, 20 June 1913,874.



Figure 4.14: The winning design by Lanchester and Rickards for Westminster Central Hall with the proposed towers. Source: The Architectural Review, 1905.



Figure 4.15: Westminster Central Hall as built without towers. Source: The Architectural Review, 1912.

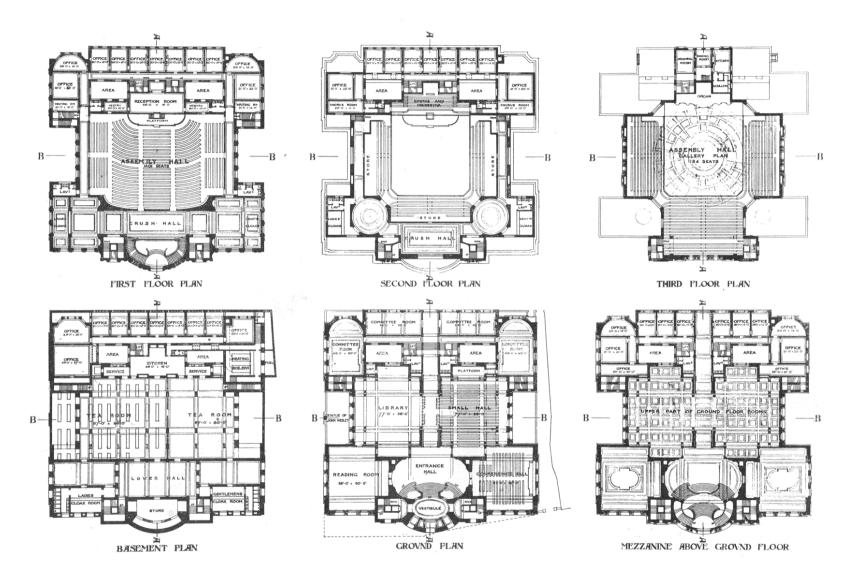


Figure 4.17: Plans of Westminster Central Hall. Source: The Architectural Review



Figure 4.18: Interior view of the staircase at Westminster. Source: Architectural Review, 1912



Figure 4.19: External decoration on the Eastbrook Hall in Bradford. Source: The Jack Booth Collection.

was intentionally smaller than St Paul's Cathedral in order not to compete with that venerable site.³⁹ The *pièce de resistance* is the richly moulded staircase, pictured in figure 4.18, which is modelled upon the *Opéra Garnier* in Paris (1861 – 1874). In a lecture to the Royal Institute of British Architects, Lanchester suggested that 'it looked like it should do, like the hall of a great corporation'.⁴⁰ Renting a room to the City and Midland Bank did not look out of place.

Westminster's 'orgy of secular carving' was the exemplar of the Central Hall style. Few architectural descriptions or photographs depict ecclesiastical embellishments. Facades such as Westminster, Bradford and Liverpool were richly detailed without religious symbolism (Figure 4.19). This raised costs and subsequent maintenance expenses. Over time they became plainer as a cost saving exercise.⁴¹

The Buildings Analysed

When the site, architects and style had been decided, the next task was to set out the functional needs and the relationship between the rooms. The four essential requirements of the Central Halls were:

- 1) A large main hall to seat between 1, 000 and 3, 000 worshippers.
- 2) Sufficient administration accommodation for a ministerial team.
- 3) Smaller rooms and halls for fellowship groups, recreational facilities and meetings.
- 4) The ability of some portion of the premises to generate revenue.

The Main Hall

The main hall took up most of the space and was located wherever it could be best insulated from the noise of busy high streets, typically towards the first and second floors as shown in the plans for the Albert Hall in Manchester (Figure 4.20). This freed up ground floor for

³⁹ 'The Wesleyan Hall, Westminster', BNEJ, 28 Nov 1913, 383 - 393.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 384.

⁴¹ See p. 266 below.

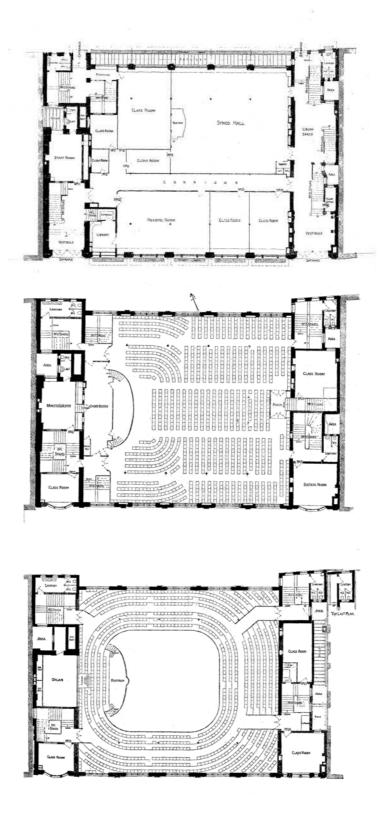


Figure 4.20: Top to Bottom: Ground, First and Second floor plans of the Albert Hall, Manchester (1911). Source: Modern Buildings Record, 1912.

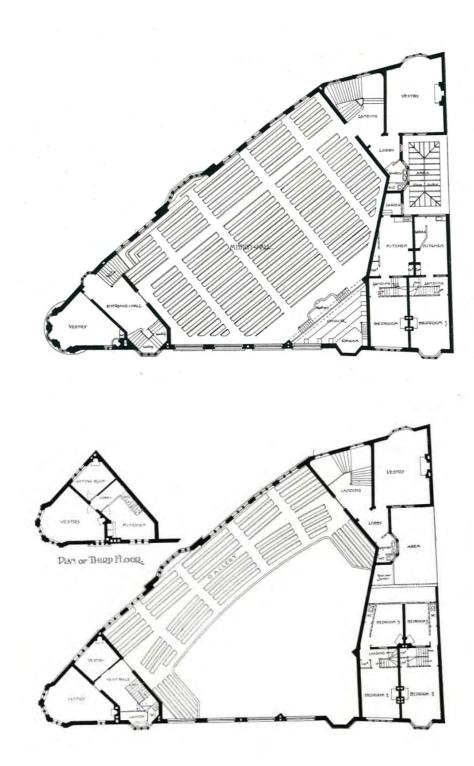


Figure 4.21: Top to Bottom: First and Second Floor Plans of Westgate Hall in Newcastle by Crouch and Butler. Source: Crouch and Butler (1901).



Figure 4.22: Interior of East Ham by Sir Alfred Gelder (1906). Source: Mrs Margaret Davies.

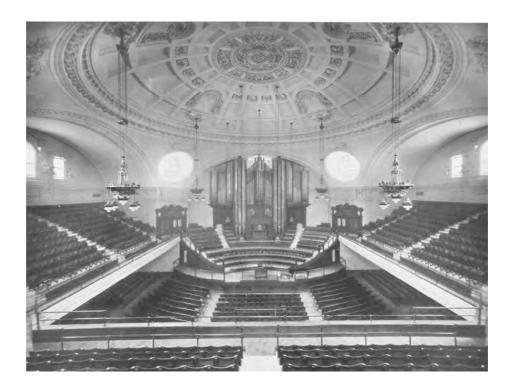


Figure 4.23: Interior View of the Great Hall at Westminster. Source: The Architectural Review, 1912.

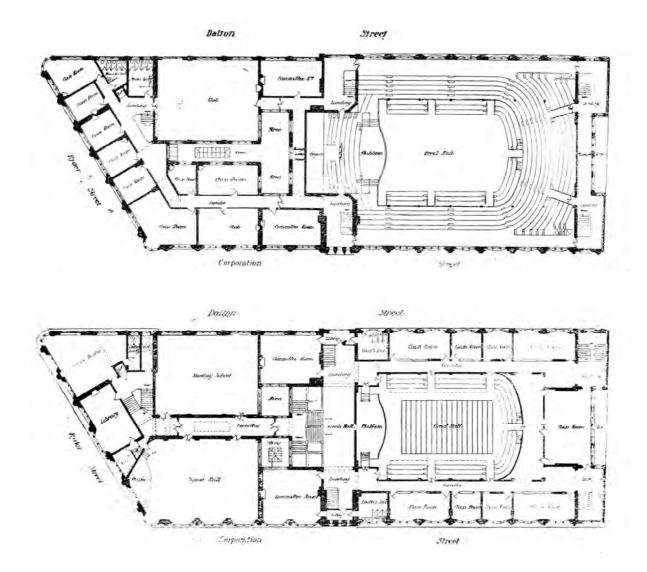


Figure 4.24: Birmingham Central Hall. First (bottom) and second (top) floor plans. Source: BNEJ 1905.

commerce and administration as well as allowing for the construction of spacious lobby areas, even on restricted sites, as shown in figure 4.21 of Westgate Hall in Newcastle. The large hall and circulation corridors are spatially separated from the rest of the premises so when in public use the mission activities could continue uninterrupted. The judge of the competition to design Victoria Hall in Sheffield praised the superior design of one entry but placed it third because 'the arrangement for the separation of the main hall for public purposes is incomplete'.⁴²

Internally, the objective was for every person to see and hear the preacher. This meant that they often adopted a horseshoe gallery to the second floor: an undesirable arrangement. Not only was it thought to be an antiquated reminder of earlier preaching houses but it could distract the crowd from the preacher because they found each other a more fascinating spectacle.⁴³ However, the size of the space often meant that this was the only solution available to them. The inclusion of the gallery was subsequently turned into a positive feature. A resemblance to the early Methodist buildings linked the Central Halls to a traditional evangelical revival and they were soon described as places for 'open-air preaching with the roof on'.⁴⁴

Technological innovations separated the type from preaching houses. Architects such as Bradshaw and Gass learned from their designs of mills and warehouses which used concrete and steel to support large open spaces with fewer columns. Their multi-disciplinary firm unusually included engineers and, as well as touring Europe with his sketchbooks, John Gass went to America to learn of these innovations.⁴⁵ In Central Halls, the use of new materials was cautious: concrete floors and steel framed roofs primarily chosen because they were thought to be more resistant to fires. Latticed steel trusses carried wide roof spans for the main halls. Most were disguised with plaster enriched ceilings except at Wigan where this was made an elegant feature.⁴⁶ Thin cast-iron columns provided additional support and with cantilevered galleries ensured minimal visual disruption. The cantilevered gallery was fully exploited at Westminster and East Ham (Figure 4.22 and 4.23).

⁴² 'Sheffield Wesleyan Central Mission Buildings: The Report', *The British Architect*, 10 June 1904, 61/24, 419–420.

⁴³ Crouch and Butler, Chapels, Mission Halls and Schools, 1901, 78.

⁴⁴ This is a common description. See, for example, 'The report of the Spiritual Advance Committee', *Conference Agenda*, 1924, 73.

⁴⁵ Lingard and Lingard, Bradshaw Gass and Hope, 2007, 52 - 3.

⁴⁶ See p. 282 below.

Building regulations further differentiated the Halls from earlier Methodist buildings. The London Building Act (1895) and local bye-laws demanded fireproof construction materials, wide entrances and spacious corridors to reduce the chances of panic during large gatherings.⁴⁷ These regulations helped the Wesleyans to build flexible multi-purpose spaces that could be rented out to other organisations. In London, all public buildings, staircases and corridors were required to be no less than four feet and six inches up to a maximum of nine feet.⁴⁸ Galleries needed their own means of exit and entrance directly to street level. In the case of Chatham and East Ham this was solved by introducing side corridors to the galleries.⁴⁹ Birmingham had a total of twenty-one exits from the main hall (Figure 4.24). Other safety features included doors opening outwards, a fact that Samuel Collier in Manchester was reputedly proud of since the entrance doors swung in and out like those found in public houses.⁵⁰ The WCC's *Annual Reports* proudly describe the fireproof construction in the Central Halls throughout, as the following account of Blackburn makes clear 'five wide and easy fire-proof staircases give good access and perfect safety exits from all parts'.⁵¹ They were entirely suitable for public gatherings.

Tip-up seats replaced pews and sloped upwards in the gallery. Pulpits were exchanged for platforms large enough to hold the preacher, orchestra and choir to which a magnificent organ acted as a backdrop. The effect was that 'the preaching is stripped of the pulpit accent. It is terse, pointed, urgent, frank...Christianity is not treated as an argument but as a message'.⁵² Many evangelical churches adopted this form from the 1860s onwards and it was the style of public halls they also hired.⁵³ This configuration indicated the increasing power of the congregation who were not to be preached at but rather persuaded to convert.⁵⁴ Certainly, the effectiveness of the preacher was dependent upon cultivating sublime feelings in the audience through the power of words and music. Revd. E. Benson Perkins, who preached at

⁴⁷ In 1869, seven people died at Surrey Gardens Music Hall as Charles Spurgeon preached.

 ⁴⁸ See Banister Fletcher, Banister Flight Fletcher and Herbert Philips Fletcher, *The London Building Acts, 1894 – 1909: A Textbook of the Law Relating to Building in the Metropolis*, Fifth Edition (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1914), 73.
 ⁴⁹ WCCAR, 1905, 254; WCCAR, 1907, 261 – 2.

⁵⁰ John Banks, *The Story...So Far: the First One Hundred Years of the Manchester and Salford Methodist Mission* (Manchester: Manchester Central Hall, 1986), 37.

⁵¹ WCCAR, 1913, 242 -3.

⁵² W. H. Fitchett, 'Amongst the City Missions', 1905, 35.

⁵³ Doreen Rosman, The Evolution of the English Churches, 2006, 266; Mark Girouard, The English Town, 1990, 199.

⁵⁴ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 22-56.

Birmingham and Sheffield, wrote that: 'it is a challenging responsibility to face week after week a congregation approaching 2, 000...the large crowd does create its own atmosphere and expectancy'.⁵⁵ Some ministers rose to the occasion better than others and earned a special status in the minds of the people.⁵⁶

However, the theatre principle was also perfect for surveillance.⁵⁷ The preacher remained central and had a superb vantage point to observe the audience. He was assisted by stewards who – as in any place of assembly – were required to supervise the emergency exit and fire escapes.⁵⁸ Usually converts, they were given roles of responsibility and acted as the face of the Mission to ensure that every person had a seat and a hymn sheet. They had other tasks too, recording information gathered during the service to be used in district visitation afterwards. Not only was every person to see and hear the preacher, but the audience were also closely watched and listened to.

The shape of the main hall was acoustically important and indicates the centrality of voice and music to the Central Hall experience. Octagonal main halls (or close variations) were particularly resonant; John Wesley himself suggested building 'all preaching houses, where the ground will permit, in the octagon form. It is the best for the voice, and on many accounts, more commodious than any other'.⁵⁹ The octagonal plans of Eastbrook Hall and Bermondsey Central Hall, displayed in figures 4.25 and 4.26, clearly demonstrated the Central Hall ethos: attract people off the street into a comfortable, entertaining environment, and evangelise in the process. Those who could be drawn into closer fellowship with the church were able to access the institutional premises towards the rear and upper floors. The main hall also furthered the temperance agenda of the Church which legitimised the establishment of popular Saturday concerts to compete with similar entertainment in music halls. Here, the sacred and secular mixed and concerts began with a rousing hymn, followed by variety entertainment with people invited to attend the following day's religious services.

⁵⁵ Revd. E. Benson Perkins, So Appointed: The Autobiography (London: Epworth Press, 1964), 60.

⁵⁶ For first hand accounts see *Gipsy Smith His Life and Work, by Himself*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1901) especially 283 – 295; William H. Lax, *Lax, His Book: The Autobiography of Lax of Poplar* (London: Epworth, 1937); Gillian Rose documents the Lax affect in her oral history interviews in inter-war Poplar. See Gillian Rose, 'Imagining Poplar in the 1920s: Contested Concepts of Community', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 16/4, (1990), 425 – 437.

⁵⁷ Thomas A. Markus, *Buildings and Power*, 1993, 42

⁵⁸ For example, WCCAR, 1913, 242 -3.

⁵⁹ John Emory (Ed.) The Works of the Rev. John Wesley A. M (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1835), 235.

Amphitheatre main halls, as illustrated in figure 4.27 of the East End Mission, were surrounded by a barricade of smaller rooms which acted as further insulation from noise. Main halls dominate the plans. However, understanding the function of these rooms shifted the analysis towards their role. Prominent entrances led into spacious lobby areas known as 'crush halls' and wide corridors where stewards looked out for new faces. When potential recruits came out of the main hall, they were directed towards these 'enquiry' rooms in easy reach of the main hall. People were encouraged to sign a pledge of alcohol abstinence and names were noted for use in follow-up visitations. During the week, these rooms doubled as space for class meetings and the weekly fellowship groups with bible study, prayers, testimony meetings and general life advice that were as essential to Methodist worship as Sunday attendance was. This demonstrates that the liturgical requirements were complex and not simply focused upon the preacher: it is these smaller rooms that were crucial to drawing people into wider fellowship with the Connexion.

Administration and Social Work

The Central Missions often constructed subsidiary premises, such as labour yards and hostels, to support extensive social work programmes that were similar in scope to the university settlement movement.⁶⁰ Sufficient space was required on-site for ministers and their staff to effectively manage this and engage in the professional advertising that was the hallmark of the outreach policy. The offices were placed in order to make the minister as accessible to the front entrance as possible, even when other spatial requirements meant that they were located on the first or second floors.

Revenue Generation

One other element born of business sense and with an eye to the future was to allocate a portion of the premises for commercial use. Where costs were high the inclusion of rent-producing income offset the interest on the inevitable mortgage. At a meeting with representatives of the Edinburgh Mission in 1897, the Chapel Committee explained that:

⁶⁰ Nigel Scotland, Squires in the Slums, 2007.

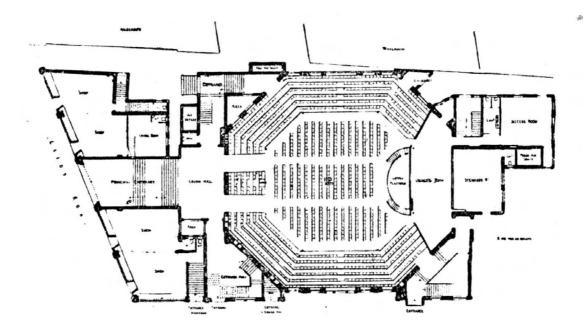


Figure 4.25: Plan of Eastbrook Hall in Bradford by William Morley. Source: BNE7 1907.

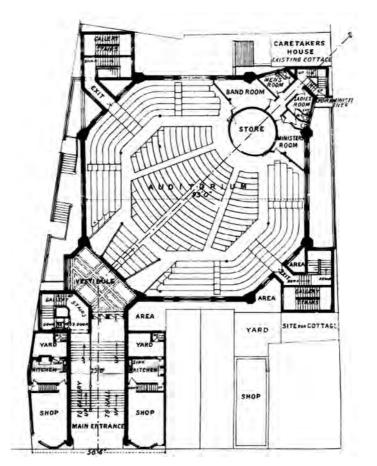


Figure 4.26: Octagon at Bermondsey by Charles Bell. Source: WCCAR, 1898.

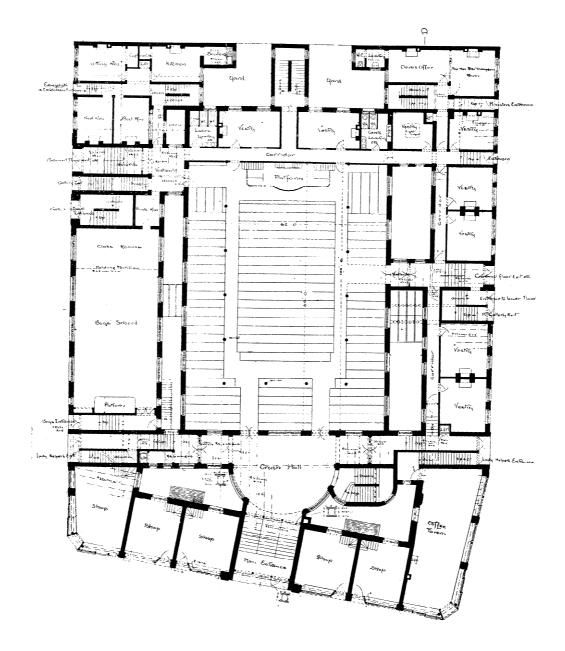


Figure 4.27: Ground floor plan of the East End Mission in Stepney by Weir, Burrows and Weir (1907). Source: WCCAR 1907.

there were great difficulties of acquiring such a site which, if obtainable at all, could only be purchased at a cost so heavy, that unless rent yielding property could be created it would be impossible to proceed.⁶¹

Shops are included in twenty-three architectural descriptions. The line drawing of the Leysian Mission in figure 4.28 depicts the eight elegant showrooms that made an interesting feature at street level. The number could vary from two, on either side of the main entrance where the façade was narrow, to twelve at Birmingham. Entirely self-contained, they enjoyed generous basement storage. These were not shops to service the worshipping public. They existed to produce an income although occasionally there could be a Methodist bookshop. Banks were common and respectable tenants. During the reconstruction of Oxford Place in Leeds, an alternative set of premises was erected adjacent to the existing building to be a source of revenue in order to place the Mission in a better financial position.⁶² This could mean warehouses, separate office blocks or flats. The architects of Westgate Hall in Newcastle reflected that the inclusion of eight lock-up shops meant 'the interest on the entire capital expended on the site and shops is provided by the income produced by letting the shops; in other words a site costing nearly £9, 000 is obtained for nothing' (Figure 4.29).⁶³

Building	Total Cost (£)	Site Cost (£)	Number of Shops
Edinburgh Hall	59, 664	20,000	8
Westgate Hall	33, 394	9,000	8
Wesley Hall, Lower Sydenham	7, 765	1, 350	0
Champness Hall, Rochdale	72,230	14,000	2
Victoria Hall, Bolton	39, 499	10, 760	4
Queen's Hall, Wigan	30, 167	10, 200	2

Table 4.3: Selected list of total cost, site cost and number of shops.

Source: Wesleyan Chapel Committee Annual Reports, 1886 – 1945.

⁶¹ MWCC, 3 November 1897, MPO.

⁶² MWCC, 3 October 1900, MPO.

⁶³ Crouch and Butler, *Churches, Mission-halls and Schools*, 1901, 93.

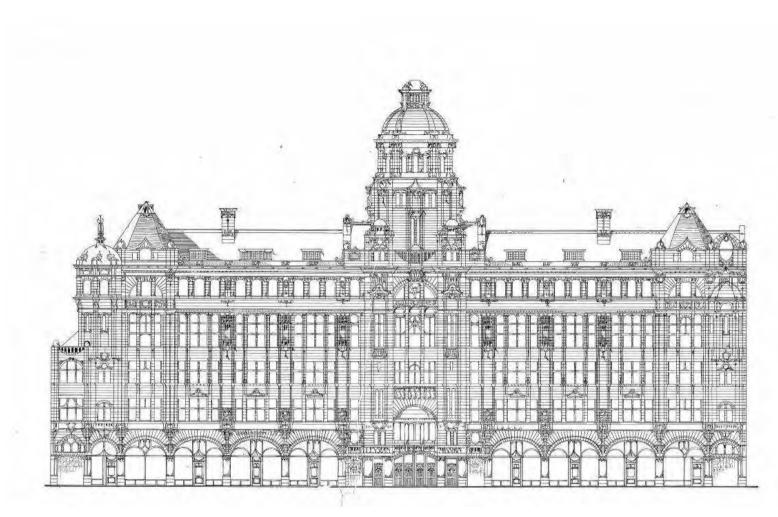


Figure 4.28: Line drawing of the Leysian Mission, EC1 with shop showrooms at ground floor level by Bradshaw and Gass (1905). Source: Bradshaw Gass and Hope.

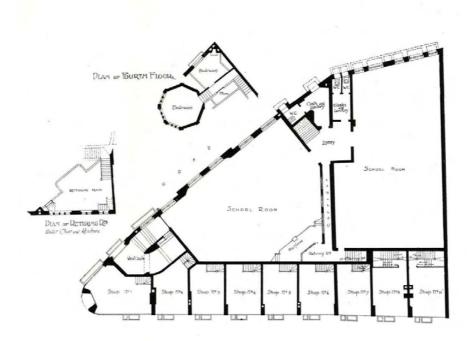


Figure 4.29: Ground floor plan of Westgate Hall in Newcastle by Crouch and Butler (1900). Source: Crouch and Butler (1901).

In theory, the commercial rents covered the interest on ten year mortgages and then provided a sinking fund to repay the capital. Not only would the building be an asset to the Connexion once this was paid off, the rents could then be diverted towards the daily expenses incurred by mission work. At all times rental income was reinvested back into the mission and communications. As chapter four will demonstrate, this prudent business sense did not take into account the cost of the extensive mission work or the running costs of these large buildings which only increased as they aged.

The *Builder* thought, rather haughtily, that the mix of commerce and religion was a 'very odd arrangement...which we suppose offers nothing objectionable to the Wesleyan mind'.⁶⁴ Closer inspection of similar buildings of the period suggests that it not to be as peculiar as the *Builder* presumed. A Presbyterian 'Central Hall' (1886) in Belfast, intended for suburbanites who made the trip into town, contained two shops to pay for the upkeep of the premises.⁶⁵ Also in Belfast, an undenominational mission hall in Shankhill Road (1897) contained four shops at ground floor with offices above.⁶⁶ Artisan dwellings at Oldham Road in Manchester provided shops in the façade, partly to break up the monotony at street level, but also for the convenience of its inhabitants.⁶⁷ This composite solution for city centre buildings seems to be a common, particularly for charitable organisations desiring central locations.

The WCC conferred with a solicitor on the legal basis of providing commercial space in line with the charitable status of places of worship.⁶⁸ Sunday schools and ministers houses could be officially leased and permissible under charity law. Specifically regarding Birmingham, the solicitor thought the terms were 'sufficiently elastic' enough that it could apply to any shops and warehouses erected on the site as well as to public use of the main hall. Sub-leases were let for a maximum of fourteen years.

Fellowship and Recreation

Other accommodation is featured where space allowed. Larger premises, such as Nottingham's Albert Hall (1908), Kingsway Hall (1911) and Manchester's Albert Hall and

^{64 &#}x27;Wesleyan Central Hall', The Builder, 1897, 303.

^{65 &#}x27;Opening of the Central Hall, Rosemary Street', The Belfast News-Letter, 15 January 1886, 8.

⁶⁶ 'Shankhill Road Mission Buildings, Belfast', BNEJ, 4 March 1898, 403.

⁶⁷ 'City of Manchester Labourers Dwellings', BNEJ, 13 December 1895, 851.

⁶⁸ MWCC, 3 Jan 1900, MPO.

Aston Institute (1912) were fully developed 'institutional churches'⁶⁹ providing a panoply of associational activities: gymnasiums, parlours, reading rooms, (non-alcoholic) refreshment facilities and crèches. Large buildings required in-house caretakers, accommodated on the top floor. Where roofs were flat, they could become gardens for outdoor preaching, summer concerts and children's play areas (Figure 4. 30). The Leysian Mission in London had four where: 'the East End worker can enjoy his pipe while he listens to the band or an address delivered from the open-air pulpit.'⁷⁰ The plans of this building testify to a complicated arrangement which combined two settlement houses and a main hall with rooms for mission work (Figure 4.31). Its third floor plans show that while the settlers may have been 'slumming', they were not without the comforts and provisions of a butler and servants, clearly demarcated from the rest of the premises in addition to two internal loggias upon which they could stroll at their leisure.

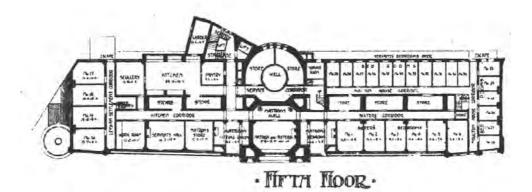


Figure 4.30: Children play on the flat roof garden at the Leysian Mission, c. 1950s. Source: London Metropolitan Archives.

⁶⁹ 'The Institutional Church', *Encyclopaedia Britannia*, 14 (1911), 651. Available at

<http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/I27_INV/INSTITUTIONAL_CHURCH.html#ixzz0yN2StdYV> accessed 3 March 2008.

⁷⁰ 'The Finest Mission Hall in the World', *The Daily Express*, 12 July 1904, BMA, ZBGH 198.





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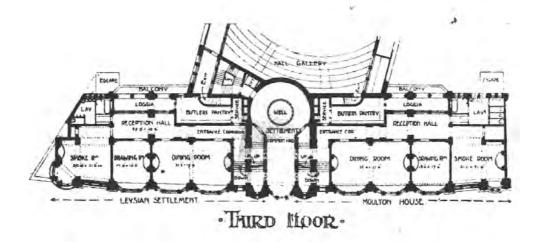


Figure 4.31: Plans of the Leysian and Moulton Settlement Houses as part of the Leysian Mission buildings. Source: BNEJ, 1905

Unlike typical parish churches, the Halls were user friendly. These were not draughty or cold in either appearance or ethos. Up-to-date technologies kept them warm and well-ventilated typically ensuring a change of air every twenty minutes. Ample space was provided for lavatories and cloakrooms. Even today, only forty-four per cent of Parish Churches have a toilet.⁷¹ William Beddoe-Rees, the Welsh chapel architect and Liberal MP, noted in 1903 that while the design of mission halls would be determined by their local context and site restrictions, success generally meant 'an entirely up-to-date building, fitted out and arranged with care and skill in every detail, so as to make it attractive, bright, cheerful and inviting'.⁷²

To further distinguish the Central Halls from ordinary churches, the traditional bells of Sunday worship were, of course, not considered in calling people to a service. In some cases, a balcony was featured over the main entrance where a brass band played to entice passers-by in. At Chatham Central Hall, this was thought to offer 'a magnificent advertisement, and a far more agreeable call to service than the monotonous clanging of the church bell.'⁷³ Often the provision of a veranda meant a yearly charge payable to the local authority, usually c. £1-£5 per year owing to the projection over pavements but the publicity far outweighed the cost.

Sunday Schools

Later plans show the increasing importance of Sunday school as part of the mission particularly through the 1920s and 1930s. Hitherto, Sunday schools were typically in separate premises or in the basement of the church as the basement plan at Bermondsey shows (Figure 4.32). Crouch and Butler, writing in 1901, drew attention to their inadequacy claiming that existing accommodation:

is depressing, and as soon as children reach an age in which they have a voice in the disposal of their time they...lose interest in the Sunday school, and this is due in a large number of cases to the character of the buildings in which the instruction is given.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Richard Chartres, 'Church buildings and the Community', Building Conservation, 2007,

http://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/churchbuildings/churchbuildings.htm. Accessed, 11 November 2009.

⁷² William Beddoe Rees, Chapel Building: Hints and Suggestions (Cardiff: Cardiff Printing Works, 1903), 25.

⁷³ The Methodist Recorder, 27 February 1908, 2.

⁷⁴ Crouch and Butler, *Churches, Mission-halls and Schools*, 1901, 44.

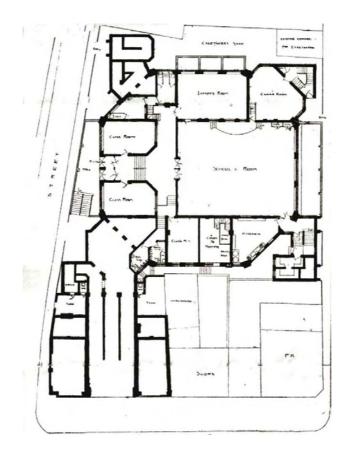


Figure 4.32: Basement Plan at Bermondsey in 1898. Source: WCCAR, 1898.

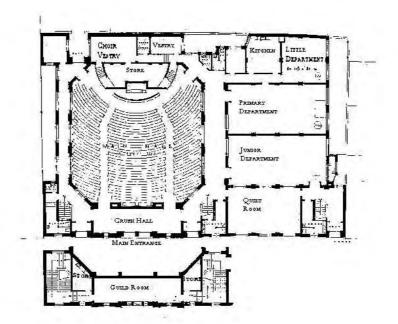


Figure 4.33: Ground floor plan of Grimsby (1933) by Arthur Brocklehurst. Source: Wesley Historical Society Archives, Oxford Brookes

By the Edwardian period children were the receipt of 'increased care which the Church is bestowing on the young'.⁷⁵ The WCC thought that uniting schools and churches on the same premises would benefit future recruitment.⁷⁶ The plan of Grimsby Central Hall (1934) in figure 4.33 illustrates the change. The Sunday school is graded according to age, as was the contemporary fashion, with teaching tailored to suit. Here, children are placed at the centre of the building in recognition that they should be brought into closer contact with the church community. These rooms included moveable, folding screens in order to be easily adjusted to suit requirements. When not in use for school purposes, the rooms could easily be let out to other organisations of varying sizes as meeting rooms. Not only were the Halls highly organised spatially, but temporally so ensuring maximum usage of the site.

Interiors

Music is attached equal status to the spoken word: sermons and hymn singing being a key element of the repertoire. Experts were consulted on appropriate acoustical arrangements with Professor T. Rogers Smith at University College London and Alfred Waterhouse, both appraising the design of the South London Wesleyan Hall at Bermondsey (1898).⁷⁷

Platforms accommodated orchestras and choirs of up to 250 (Figures 4.34 – 4.37). Organ lofts were included even though few Missions could afford one in the early days. In the meantime, gutsy hymn singing was supplemented by a brass or string band usefully staffed by converts and not thought to be detrimental since the working class, allegedly, preferred them.⁷⁸ However, organs became desirable additions for growing congregations. Occasionally, the expensive instruments were gifts. Jesse Boot, a devout Methodist, philanthropist and owner of Boots chain of chemist shops, gave the people of Nottingham an organ costing £4, 500 to be housed at the Wesleyan Albert Hall (Figure 4.38). Designed by Binns of Nottingham, the Italian and Spanish mahogany case was built in the Boot's shop fitting workshop.⁷⁹ This four manual, fifty nine stop instrument was modelled on the Rochdale

⁷⁵ WCCAR, 1910, 14.

⁷⁶ S. J. D Green, 'The Religion of the Child in Edwardian Methodism: Institutional Reform and Pedagogical Reappraisal in the West Riding of Yorkshire', *Journal of British Studies*, 30/4 (1991), 377–98; Frank Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service*, 2006, 28–60.

⁷⁷ WCCAR, 1898, 181.

⁷⁸ R. Martin Pope, *The Life of Henry J. Pope*, 1913, 128-9.

⁷⁹ See the survey description in the National Pipe Organ Register, Number: N01509, www.npor.org.uk. Accessed 11 July 2010.

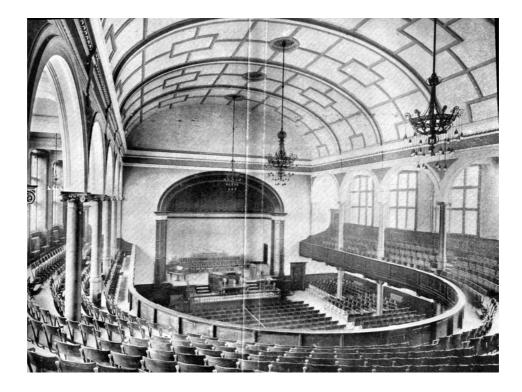


Figure 4.34: The interior of Central Hall in Edinburgh by Dunn and Findlay (1900). Source: WCCAR 1900.



Figure 4.35: A Gaelic Concert at the Central Hall in Edinburgh 1955 with organ. Source: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

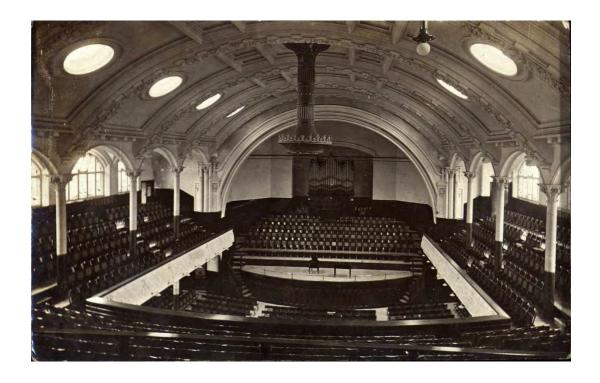


Figure 4.36: The interior of the Queen's Hall in Hull with large platform. Source: The Hull History Centre.

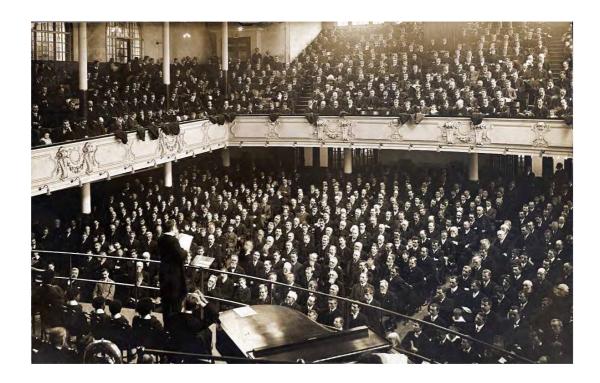


Figure 4.37: The Queen's Hall, Hull at full capacity for a lecture. Source: The Hull History Centre.

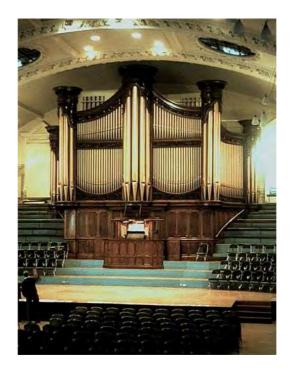


Figure 4.38: The Binns Organ at Nottingham Source: The Derby Telegraph

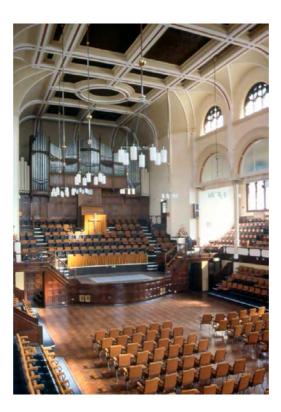


Figure 4.39: Interior of Birmingham Central Hall showing the organ in the background. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.



Figure 4.40: The boys club at the Leysian Mission playing pool. Source: London Metropolitan Archives.



Figure 4.41: Closing time at the Poor Man's Club. Central Hall in Manchester, c. 1938. Source: Manchester Archives and Local Studies.

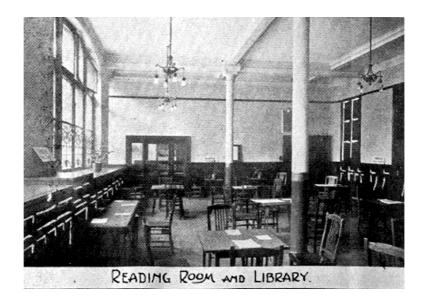


Figure 4.42: The Reading Room and Library at the Albert Hall and Aston Institute, Manchester (1911). Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.



Figure 4.43: The small hall at Eastbrook Hall in Bradford. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.

Town Hall organ. The organist at Birmingham town hall, C. W. Perkins and Rev. F. Luke Wiseman of the Birmingham Mission drew up the specification. Wiseman's aunts were keen attendees of the Halle Orchestra in Manchester and influenced his musical appreciation.⁸⁰ Wiseman was also an accomplished organist. Under his ministry, the Birmingham Central Hall developed a reputation for fine choral performances to an organ built by German firm E.F. Walcker (Figure 4.39). These organs were intended to support, not dominate, the choir and congregation, particularly if an unfamiliar tune was being played.⁸¹

A characteristic Sunday evening service at the Albert Hall in Nottingham was led in by a hymn for ten minutes before the mission staff assumed their roles on the platform. Service began promptly at 6: 30 p.m. and included five hymns, an anthem, two prayers, a portion of scripture and the sermon which lasted thirty-eight minutes.⁸² An interviewee memorably described evening services at the Victoria Hall in Bolton as a 'hymn sandwich'.⁸³ These came from the *New Methodist Hymnbook*. Rather than giving out heavy books, the words were printed on sheets that could be easily passed on as a form of advertisement and more akin to receiving a programme at a theatre. Cinemas or lantern screens provided another medium to depict words. One attendee of the men's fellowship group at East Ham in the 1920s captured the audience experience:

The thrill of it in those days and the difference on a Sunday afternoon, two thousand four hundred men there. They had a voluntary orchestra, they had a grand organ and a choir. At the first hymn, the organ, the orchestra and choir would all play and the gallery, well, you could feel it vibrating.⁸⁴

If pew rents were a hindrance so were the pews. Mission Halls had chairs with a rack for hats underneath. Not only was this cheaper at twenty-five shillings per seat, they could be rearranged to accommodate smaller or larger audiences as required. This surely added to the theatre-like feel of the main auditorium, and for ministers released from the pulpit it signified the comfort and ease of Central Halls. In practice, the seats could be noisy when not

⁸⁰ Frederick Luke Wiseman and R. G. Burnett, *Frederick Luke Wiseman* (London: Epworth Press, 1954), 38. ⁸¹ Ibid., 38.

⁸² See John Telford, Sunday Evenings in Methodism: Sermons and Suggestions, (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1906); 31–32.

⁸³ Personal Interview, 9.

⁸⁴ Jack Hart (b. 1912). Interviewed as part of Paul Thomson's 'The Edwardians'. Recording available at the BLSA, C609/97/01.

upholstered. Interviewees recall the clattering noise of latecomers even as they tried to silently slip in.⁸⁵

Imposing exteriors contrasted with homely interiors. Recreational club facilities provided a quiet and warm space intended to be much more attractive than the apparently inhospitable places club members called home (Figures 4.40 and 4.41). The rooms presented in figures 4.42 and 4.43 show richly moulded ceilings and plentiful windows that aimed at to be bright and luxurious. At the Leysian mission, an inglenook fireplace formed a 'cosy corner' in the Men's club. Premises belonging to the West London Mission operated a 'People's Drawing Room' once a week. Here, carpets were rolled out, a piano brought in and the room decorated with flowers, comfortable chairs and tables 'to provide a comfortable, cheerful place where the honest poor could retire for rest after their long day's toil.'⁸⁶ All of this was standard practice at settlements and missions of early twentieth century Britain.

Municipal authorities were less sure about religious exploitation of the commercial. Churches were usually exempt from rates as long as they were theoretically open to non-members.⁸⁷ However, some corporations decided to levy a ratings charge because of commercial use. This could mean an additional expenditure of between £100 and £150 per annum and influenced extra-mural activities. The large hall and smaller classrooms were intended to serve as a temperate meeting place for philanthropic organisations at a nominal charge to cover expenses. Prior to opening Bristol the minister, John Broadbelt, sent a questionnaire to other Halls including the question 'Do your city authorities understand the social value of Saturday Night Concerts?'⁸⁸ Bermondsey, unrated, replied 'our pull in Bermondsey is that if they rate us we should let our hall and they would lose a great many lets for the Town Hall and so would be poorer'. Replies from Sheffield, Bolton and Hull indicated that they were rated but still maintained a reduced rental for philanthropic organisations. One minister

⁸⁷ The West London Methodist Mission was taken to court by Holborn Borough Council over its use as a recording studio for EMI and Decca records. The High Court found in favour of the religious organisation. See the West London Methodist Mission v Holborn Borough Council. Court of Appeals of England (1958) 3 RRC 86. Conversely, a Mormon temple in Chorley, Lancashire was rated because it did not advertise its services as open to the public. See 'Mormon temple is Not a Place of Public Worship', *The Times*, 7 August 2008. Available at *The Times Online*, www.thetimes.co.uk.Date accessed 15 February 2009.

⁸⁵ Personal Interview, 14.

⁸⁶ See the description in James McCulloch, The Open Church for the Unchurched, 1906, 77.

⁸⁸ 'Papers relating to the Building and Furnishing of Bristol Central Hall', Bristol Records Office (hereafter BRO), 37329 (5) j.

Bristol Central Hall is the Headquarters of the Bristol Methodist Mission.

Bristol Central Hall is ideally situated near the centre of the City for it to be reached from all parts of the City. Many bus routes stop outside the Central Hall.

The large Main Hall seats 1,400 people.

Smaller halls, each with a stage, seat 200 and 275 people.

There are a number of smaller rooms, seating up to 40 people.

Kitchens are available for use.

Catering can be arranged. (No alcohol).

Do you need a room in the city centre regularly or occasionally for a:

Trade Union Meeting

Committee Meeting Political Meeting

Lecture Theatre

Choir Rehearsal

Exhibition

Examinations

Keep Fit Class

Friendly Society

Theatrical Productions

or any other similar purpose?

For further information and bookings please contact:

Superintendent Minister: Rev. Roy Allison at the Central Hall, Old Market Street, Bristol BS2 0HB. Telephone: 291580-294604 if no reply, telephone: 651089.



CENTRAL HALL

DO YOU NEED PREMISES FOR MEETINGS?

The Central Hall has many sizes of rooms for regular or occasional bookings.

Old Market Street, Bristol BS2 0HB Telephone: 0272-291580/294604

Figure 4.44: Brochure advertising rooms for rent at Bristol Central Hall with regulations regarding 'refreshments' c. 1979. made his sentiments perfectly clear regarding his local authority, 'it is ridiculous to treat a Hall built for religious work on the same basis as a Hall built for entertainment and profit.'⁸⁹

The sheer versatility of the premises was constrained only by temperance and the ethical constraints of Methodist ownership. Rules accompanied leases to prevent activities that might have offended the nonconformist conscience, essentially alcohol or gambling (Figure 4.44). A few months after the opening ceremonies took place at Manchester, the first tenant of the basement restaurant was dismissed because of misinterpreting the stringent conditions of the no alcohol rule. The next two refused to renew their leases after one year and the fourth negotiated a forty per cent reduction in rent since 'the condition forbidding him to send out for ale and porter for the use of his customers was so seriously restricting his business that he was unable to pay his rent'.⁹⁰

Relationships with Other Circuits

Cut off from the circuit system, Central Halls were held to account by reporting directly to Conference and their yearly statements published in the Conference Agendas. Their ministers, released from itinerancy, were independent and compelling men who could easily be perceived as autocratic. Birmingham's opening souvenir brochure tried to allay fears that the new Central Hall would undermine neighbouring Methodist churches. Rather, they hoped to foster a spirit of mutual reciprocity by increasing numbers across the district. Clearly, not all were convinced: rumour had it 'that intimations reached the architects that it would be well to construct the building so that it could be easily turned to warehouses when the Mission failed!".⁹¹ Attempts to establish a permanent residence for the West London Mission met resistance from Great Queen Street and Hinde Street Circuits who objected to 'the establishment of the new mission in its centre, on the grounds that all financial resources and workers needed in the great enterprise, and to divert any of their help will imperil their scheme.' They also pointed out that a rich West London location meant that 'the proposal is not in harmony with the purpose for which the mission was inaugurated, i.e., to provide for

⁸⁹ Letter from Rev Guy W. Teale to Rev John A. Broadbelt, 'Papers relating to the Building and Furnishing of Bristol Central Hall', BRO, 37329 (5) j.

⁹⁰ 'Meeting of the Trustees of Oldham Street, Manchester 1884 – 1907', 28 February 1889, MPO.

⁹¹ Opening Souvenir Brochure of New Central Hall, Birmingham, 1901, WHSA, Oxford, 7.

the most spiritually destitute parts of London.^{'92} This puts Hughes pronouncements that all classes could be spiritually destitute into context.⁹³

Nevertheless, by 1908 Conference authorised the closure of Great Queen Street and the West London Mission erected a permanent home on the wide open boulevard of Kingsway.94 Regarding circuit relations The New History of Methodism (1909) offered a more restrained assessment than is available in the mission literature. Its authors tell us of 'complaints...that the circuit system is weakening; that mission halls are still on their trial, and are not proving in every respect an unqualified success; that the cost of connexionalism is heavy at a time when local resources are approaching exhaustion. The complaints are not in every place without justification.^{'95} On the other hand, according to the author of *The Religious Life of* London (1903), Wesleyan Methodism was in numerical decline and: 'the only places where...they can be said to be successful, are their Central Missions; these illuminate an otherwise sombre record'.96 Whether or not the Central Missions managed to raise attendance across the districts would require a deeper level of analysis on the statistics of their available statistics and would only be illuminating if the transfers between Methodist Churches indicated the exact locations. However, given the amount of money and time invested at Connexional level in the roll out programme described above would reveals a confidence that the Central Missions were attracting people, both adherents and members, to worship.

Their Public Contribution

All seats were free and unreserved for Sunday worship meaning long queues for up to an hour particularly by those desiring a gallery seat. Attendance was higher in the winter months where a warm and bright hall contrasted with the cold weather outside. During summer, the

⁹² 'The Proposed Wesleyan Mission to the Spiritually Destitute in London', *The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 5 April 1886, 3. James Obelkevich highlights within-church rivalry among the Wesleyans in *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825-1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) *passim.*

⁹³ 'The Wicked West End: An Interview with the Disraeli of Methodism', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 March 1886, 1-2.

⁹⁴ Minutes of Conference, 1908; 29.

⁹⁵ William Townshend, Herbert B. Workman and George Eayres, *A New History of Methodism*, Vol. Two, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), 479.

⁹⁶ Richard Mudie-Smith, 'Introduction' in Richard Mudie Smith (ed.) *The Religious Life of London*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904), 10.

premises were used as a base from which mission staff could organise their spiritual assault on the profane city with outdoor preaching, tract distribution and visitations.

The insight of the Forward Movement was the duty to minister to people's bodily needs before they could hope to influence their spiritual ones. Extensive social work programmes in the larger cities operated upon the basis of 'need not creed' and were supported by large numbers of staff. The West London Mission provided a crèche for working mothers, open for twelve hours a day, and believed by the Mission to be one of the first of its kind. This was in addition to an employment registry, a men's social department to provide relief for the unemployed and St Luke's Hospice. ⁹⁷ Where it could be afforded, alternative premises would be acquired to provide lodging house facilities and labour yards to avoid referring cases to other organisations.⁹⁸ This ensured that requests were genuine and that the promotion of dignity and self-reliance had lasting effects on character. Economic benefits were an associated gain by using labour for maintenance work in return for bed and board.

Social work activities varied depending on perceived need and money available. The advertising brochure for Gateshead, depicted in figure 4.45, details its provision for unemployed men. This was the result of extensive research by its minister into the needs of the area.⁹⁹ Most of the provincial Central Halls had at least thrift clubs, savings banks as well as old clothes stores. Fellowship clubs promoted social capital aiming to teach good citizenship skills, share advice and skills in particular, mothers meetings. This cross-denominational initiative attracted thousands of women for tea, a chat and some buns, while the children were looked after by the deaconesses or sisters. Prior to the establishment of the Welfare State, the Central Halls were part of a network of philanthropic and charitable agencies that provided much-needed social assistance and education. Indeed, the social work of the Manchester and Salford Mission meant that it was regarded in that city as 'one of the Seven wonders of Manchester' along with the sewage system, Rylands Library and Trafford Park. ¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ T. Morcom Taylor, Portraits and Pictures of the West London Mission (London: Stenlake and Simpson, 1893).

⁹⁸ For example at the Victoria Hall, Sheffield. See Nicholas Farr, *At the Heart of the City*, 1991, 7 – 34. See also p. 190 and p. 246 below.

⁹⁹ Maldwyn Edwards, *Survey of Unemployment in Gateshead-upon-Tyne in 1933 -4* [s.l] [s.n], MARC, MAW/LH456. ¹⁰⁰ 'The Seven Wonders of Manchester', *Manchester Evening News*, 15 October 1926, 2.

The Central Hall Unemployed Men's Club.

ACTIVITIES include :--READING ROOM open daily 10 till 12. 2 till 5. FOOTBALL MATCHES arranged in week. EDUCATIONAL TALKS on MONDAYS at 7-30. BROTHERHOOD on TUESDAY at 2-30. FELLOWSHIP CLASS on THURSDAY at 7-30. "KEEP FIT CLASS." Times as arranged.

All Unemployed Men welcome.

The Central Hall stands for :--

	A brighter Gateshead.
	A originer oncoancau.
4.	A keen interest in the Unemployed and their problems.
5.	Virile fellowship in the things that matter most.

s-3

Figure 4.45: Advertising Brochure for Gateshead Central Hall, c. 1936. Source: The Wesley Historical Society Archives, Oxford Brookes.

The theatrical auditoriums were used on Saturday evenings for popular concerts. Initially known as 'Gospel Temperance Concerts' and later simply referred to as 'the Saturday Popular Concert', they were cheaply priced, usually at tuppence, in order to compete with comparative entertainment in less temperate venues. The variety acts included comedians and musical recitals and could last up to three hours. They were interspersed with sermons and hymn singing with ministers in attendance, occasionally as the compere to proceedings.¹⁰¹

In addition, there were programmes of self-improving lectures. At Tonypandy in the heart of the Welsh valleys, coalminers took part in weekly 'Men's Parliament' in which they would debate and discuss the main social and religious issues of the day. At least one former speaker of the House of Commons, Mr T. George Thompson, perfected his skills at this weekly institution.¹⁰² For the mission staff there was no dissonance in the mixing of sacred and secular because concerts were a means to get people comfortable in the space and invite them to attend public worship the next day. Furthermore, they ensured that audiences were tempted away from the salubrious entertainment on offer at pubs and music halls. Certainly, the common view across the literature was to permit anything, within reason, as long as people were kept out of public houses. One former minister described his time in Nottingham:

It was custom at the Hall to dim the auditorium lights when the sermon was about to begin and the spotlight came upon the preacher. That was the signal for hands in the gallery to slip down the side of the seat, feeling for the hand of the girl sitting in the next seat! I think they thought I couldn't see them, but I could – my eyesight was sharper in those days than it is now. But I wasn't worried – *I'd rather see them holding hands in Church than cuddling on the back row of some town cinema!*¹⁰³

Clearly, people accessed the Central Halls for a wide variety of reasons. Contemporary evidence suggests the Halls attracted people from across the social classes: a theme that will receive fuller exploration in the individual case studies. William Crawford's, *The Church in the Slum*, documents a number of dirty collars at Sunday evening services across the Missions. Equally, he quotes a steward in Edinburgh who commented that 'these are respectable folk

¹⁰¹For example, F. Luke Wiseman and R. G. Burnett, F. Luke Wiseman, 1954, 8 and Hilda Marsh, Recollections of Southfields Central Hall (London: Southfields Central Hall, 1993), 10.

¹⁰² C. E. Gwyther, 'Sidelights on Religion and Politics in the Rhonnda Valley, 1906-1926', *Llafur, The Journal of the Society for the Study of Welsh Labour History*, 3/1 (1980), 38.

¹⁰³ GS, Personal Correspondence, 13 July 2009, my emphasis.

who come to the Central Hall'.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, they were public venues in central locations and hired out for special occasions. Then Duchess of York, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, opened Central Hall in Slough in 1932 (Figure 4.46). King George V and Queen Mary presented medals to the war dead during a 1919 event held in Sheffield's Victoria Hall. The platform at Westminster has been graced by a stellar cast of figures from twentieth century history: Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King and Mikhail Gorbachev amongst many others.¹⁰⁵

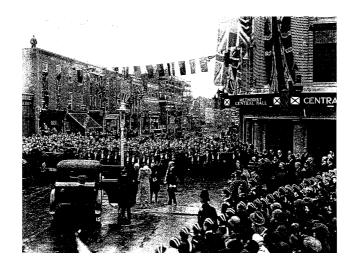


Figure 4.46: The Duchess of York opens Slough in 1932. Source: Westminster Central Hal

The mission literature highlights evangelistic work over and above other activities. That they did so, suggests they had their detractors who feared the dilution of the religious experience.¹⁰⁶ Methodist Conference continued to restate resolutions on 'Entertainment on Trust Premises' which prohibited dancing, singing and other such activities.¹⁰⁷ However, by 1909 they softened their stance in light of the Central Mission's activities. Instead, 'in certain localities where the people have little opportunity of wholesome recreation such recreation may with advantage be permitted'.¹⁰⁸ This may be the case but the spiritual dimension was always emphasised. The staff at Maryhill Central Hall in Glasgow were duly reminded by

¹⁰⁴ William Crawford, *The Church and the Slum*, 1908, 78.

¹⁰⁵ Brian Frost, Pioneers of Social Passion, 2006, 127.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, the exchange between Revd. W. Charrington of Tower Hamlets Mission and Revd. F. W. Chudleigh of the East End Mission regarding the use of films, *Cuttings relating to the East End Mission Volume Three of Three*, 1922 – 1928, LMA/4249/C/06/010.

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of Conference (1880), 191 and Minutes of Conference (1890), 262.

¹⁰⁸ WCCAR, 1908, 27 and *Minutes of Conference*, 1908, 107.

Birmingham's minister, F. Luke Wiseman that: 'the primary purpose of all Central Missions – viz, the conversion of men'.¹⁰⁹

When the Pictures Came

With an up-to-date building, staff naturally looked to new technologies to convey their religious message. They recognised the power of visual representations.¹¹⁰ Henry T. Meakin, at the South London Wesleyan Mission, taught himself photography and slide-making upon witnessing 'the eagerness with which crowds gathered at newspaper shops to see newspapers such as the *Daily Graphic* and the *Illustrated London News*'.¹¹¹ Some of the larger missions had their own equipment, such as the early example at the Belfast Mission in figure 4.47. The Cinematograph Act (1909) tightened regulations on public buildings using the highly flammable equipment. Figure 4.48 shows the addition of a projection room at Edmonton Central Hall which was located underneath the gallery.

The showing of images could be intensely participatory experience. Lantern slides inspired wonder in people. As a minister at the East End Mission in London described: 'what struck me most forcibly was the really smart way in which these Eastenders rose to the occasion as soon as a certain type of picture was put on the sheet. If it was a mother ill-treating a little boy, there were loud and angry cries of 'Shame!' 'Leave 'im alone!' and other such expressive comments.' ¹¹²

One wonders exactly how expressive the comments were. Certainly, other evidence suggests that by not resembling a church, behavioural rules had to be negotiated. Thomas Tiplady, at the Lambeth Mission, took over old mission premises and restyled them as a commercial

¹¹⁰ Many religious organisations were quick to harnass the use of new technologies. On other denominations see, Dean Rapp, 'A Baptist Pioneer: The exhibition of film to London's East End working classes, 1900-1918' *Baptist Quarterly: the journal of the Baptist Historical Society* 40/1 (2003), 6 - 21; Dean Rapp 'The British Salvation Army, the Early Film Industry and Urban Working-Class Adolescents, 1897-1918', *Twentieth Century British History* 7/2 (1996), 157-188 and the contributions to a special issue on religion and film in *Film History*, 14/2 (2002). ¹¹¹ Frederick Church, *A Mender of Hearts: The Story of Henry T. Meakin* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1914), 11.

¹⁰⁹ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the Glasgow Missions Committee', Vol. 1, 1923 – 1961, 10 September 1923, Glasgow City Archives (hereafter GCA), TD 853 8/1.

¹¹² George W. Leask, Peter Thompson: The Romance of the East London Mission (London: R. Culley, 1909) 99.

cinema six days per week with services on a Sunday.¹¹³ His description highlights some of the difficulties staff had to face:

We had hundreds of young people in their 'teens. They did not know how to behave in Church but came in wearing caps and smoking cigarettes. They let off "stink bombs" and broke chairs, and at each service some of the worst offenders had to be forcibly ejected by a stalwart body of "Chuckers-out". They knew nothing of prayer and so, to teach them to pray, I used a shortened form of the Evening Service in the Book of Common Prayer. These prayers were thrown onto the screen. The people knew no hymns but were willing to learn tunes new to them, and in addition to the existing stock of hymns I began to write new hymns that had their needs especially in mind.¹¹⁴

One particular Sunday school in Surrey, supervised by J. Arthur Rank, son of Joseph Rank, thought that films could convey his message in a more inspiring way to the children. Tiplady, Joseph and J. Arthur Rank established the Religious Films Society because 'in the cinema we have the most powerful and popular medium for the education of the people, but it was being almost exclusively used for unworthy ends.'¹¹⁵ The Gaumont-British film studios at Shepherd's Bush, having abandoned large-scale film production, now turned to religious films. The first, marketed as *Mastership* (1934), starred the preacher Lax of Poplar.¹¹⁶ Three years later J. Arthur Rank became the owner of Pinewood studios and set up Gaumont-British Educational Films specifically to make and distribute films tinged with a religious or moral message.¹¹⁷ Rank's venture grew in its turn into the Rank Organisation and so the conglomerated British Film Industry was developed as an extension of the aims of the Central Hall movement.

From the 1930s, every Methodist Church was supplied with projection equipment and access to the film shows. Home Mission set up a cinema committee to promote the use of religious films in 1928 and went on to establish specific missions in cinema mobile clubs.¹¹⁸ Its 1956

¹¹³ Thomas Tiplady, *Spiritual Adventure: The Story of 'the Ideal' Film Service* (London: The United Society for Christian Literature, 1935).

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Margaret O'Brien and Alan Eyles 'The Ideal, Lambeth: an experiment in a cinema church', *Picture House*, 19 (1993-4), 16. The hymn book was published as Thomas Tiplady, *Hymns from Lambeth: Tunes Arranged and Compiled* (London: Epworth Press, 1930).

¹¹⁵ 'Profile :- J. Arthur Rank', *The Observer*, 13 November 1949, 2; See also Michael Wakelin, *J. Arthur Rank: The Man Behind the Gong* (Oxford: Lion, 1996.

 ¹¹⁶ William H. Lax (1937) Lax, His Book: The Autobiography of Lax of Poplar (London: Epworth, 1937), 226.
 ¹¹⁷ Specifically on the Religious Films Society, see Kenneth C. Grubb, 'Religious Education in Britain', *Religious Education*, 42/6 (1947), 362 – 4, especially 364. Also see R. G. Burnett and Edward Martell, *The Devil's Camera: The Menace of a Film Ridden World* (London: Epworth Press, 1932)

¹¹⁸ Harold Roberts (Convener) The Message and Mission of Methodism: The Report of the Committee Appointed by the Methodist Conference, 1943, to Re-consider and Re-state the Mission of Methodism in the Modern Society (London: Epworth Press, 1943), 77.

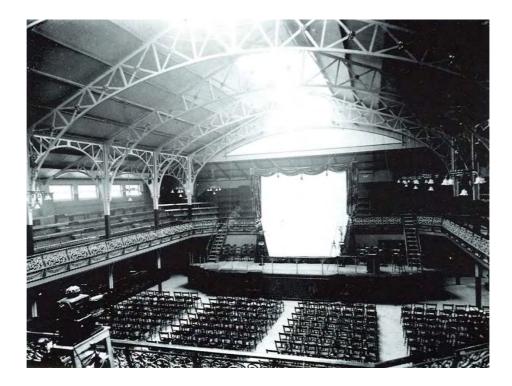


Figure 4.47: Early cinema projection equipment in the Grosvenor Hall in Belfast. Source: Archives of the Belfast Methodist Mission.

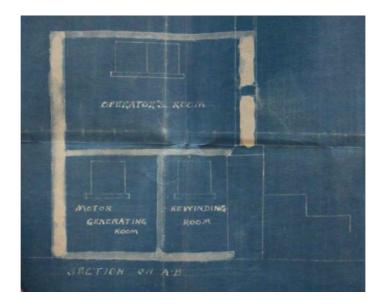


Figure 4.48: The projection room underneath the gallery at Edmonton Central Hall. Source: London Metropolitan Archives.



Figure 4.49: Children leaving the 'Penny Pictures' at the Ideal in Lambeth. Source: Lambeth Borough Council

report saw it lending projection equipment to churches and the Rank Organisation provided facilities in over three hundred of his Odeon cinemas for 'five-minute talks' on Good Friday.¹¹⁹

Cinema shows, concerts, popular hymns and light sermons were an attempt to demystify religion and should be understood in the same vein as the removal of pulpits. While these energetic ministers retained an air of authority as the organisers of very large missions, they are presented as approachable and down-to-earth. The following description from *The Methodist Recorder*, describing a sermon by the Revd. C. Ensor Walters, is evocative: 'they rolled in their seats...they want laughter. It is a most religious thing to make them shake their sides with merriment. God knows they will not get too much of it at home.'¹²⁰

A separate issue from the raising of the initial capital concerns the funds for the activities described above. This included providing social work and wages for ministerial, lay and caretaking staff. Fuel and maintenance costs were higher because of the size and extensive use of the premises. With no pew rents, alternative sources of finance had to be found. The rental income has already been mentioned. Collection plates were passed around at Sunday services but these were never expected to raise substantial funds since their congregations were supposedly composed of the poor. Most of the clubs and fellowship groups made a small fee a condition of membership. Yearly subscriptions were encouraged from Methodists in the surrounding circuits. The list of subscribers, whatever amount they gave, was published in the annual reports to show that the people who used the Mission were making any contribution they could. Aside from these and one-off donations, the year was punctuated by fundraising activities. The annual Anniversary appeals became a fixed point in the calendar where the services of prominent preachers would be secured for evening services and a series of events aimed to attract Methodists from across the district. Bazaars and sales of work could last up to six days and showcased the work of the various clubs. In all cases, the anniversary appeal was relied upon for generating the shortfall in day to day finances. Bequests were equally important and these would be channelled into investment funds, typically war bonds, to provide future dividends.

¹¹⁹ Conference Agenda, 1956, 274 – 5.

¹²⁰ 'Laughter and Song down the East End: The Forty Second Birthday of the East End Mission', The Methodist Recorder, 27 October 1927; *Cuttings relating to the East End Mission*, Vol. 3, 1922 – 1928, LMA/4249/C/06/010.

Conclusion

In a social and cultural milieu that produced new building types to reflect the diversity of city life coupled with a middle class obsession with the plight of the urban poor, the Wesleyan Methodists built Central Halls. In absorbing the lessons of other religions, philanthropic organisations and cultural institutions they presented this architectural synergy. Where these Halls differ from other domestic missions is the ability of Wesleyan Methodism to use the resources and networks of their connexional structure. This resulted in a sustained national evangelical strategy spearheaded by the building.

It would be easy to suggest religion only 'flatter[ed] the realm of leisure by imitation'.¹²¹ Yet, for progressives in the church, no sphere of activity was immune from religious influence. To the Forward Movement, sacred and secular were not mutually exclusive categories. This meant that meanings, rules and behaviour had to be reshaped and old methods called into question. This, after all, was guerrilla war-fare: an aggressive Christianity that could bring its influence to bear on any activity and had relevance to all facets of society. It is also an extension of John Wesley's Arminian teachings: that it is possible to save souls in this life and that Christianity is demonstrated through everyday actions as well as individual piety.

In providing valuable community space these buildings knitted into the urban fabric with ease: camouflaged churches for a religion that continually emphasises the relationship between faith and social action. So they are public and sacred spaces that evoking the architecture of democracy. Perhaps their closest type is to be found in those monuments to local civic pride: the town hall albeit with a dash of commercial theatres and cinemas thrown in. They played with form and created a hybrid sanctified space in the early twentieth century: one both public and sacred. But having built one of most prominent testaments to the cultural power of urban nonconformity, how were they perceived in a twentieth century of membership decline?

¹²¹ Douglas A. Reid, 'Playing and Praying' in Martin Daunton (ed.) *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Vol. 3, 1840-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 745.

Chapter 5: More Public than Sacred, 1945 - 2007

Introduction

The previous chapter described the characteristics of the building type. However, after radical expansion and early success, the Methodist Church went into a steep decline in numbers. In 1932, the remaining three separate Methodist groups came together in as a united church. This significantly swelled the numbers of chapel buildings. Too many buildings coupled with declining congregations and membership has saw fifty-four per cent of Methodist chapels close between 1940 and 2000 (Table 5.1).¹ Over the same period two-thirds of Central Hall sites were disposed of. This chapter will consider the changing meanings and uses of Methodist Central Halls. It analyses church policy towards this significant architectural legacy and the various adaptations as congregations and the wider church struggled to reinterpret the role of their buildings.

Year	Number of Sites
1941	99
1971	61
2001	36
2010	29

Table 5.1: Number of Central Hall sites in Methodist ownership (1941 – 2010)

Source: 1941 – 2001 compiled from the Methodist Church Property Office, Decennial Statistical Returns for Methodist Chapels, 2001.

1939 - 1945

The policy of dispersing residential populations towards new towns and suburban estates soon made its effects felt in Central Halls. As early as 1928, the Liverpool Mission reported to Conference that: 'one of the greatest difficulties we have to face in our work at the Central

¹ The Methodist Church Property Office, *Decennial Statistical Returns*, 2001, 2.

Hall is the constant movement of population from the centre of the city to the new areas.² In 1939, the Manchester and Salford Mission anticipated that 'unless some scheme of rehousing...is forthcoming, the position of some of our branches will have to be seriously considered.³ Many of the smaller satellite halls experienced manpower and financial difficulties. Bridgeton Hall in east Glasgow adopted the lesson of Thomas Tiplady at Lambeth and operated as a cinema six days every week from 1936. Here, the motive was financial, not evangelistic.⁴

The Second World War disrupted activities. Public worship continued, albeit at odd times, with blacked out windows and reduced congregations. Subject to requisitioning orders, Central Hall basements became air raid shelters and the rest of the premises were used to provide rest-centres, first-aid posts and military headquarters.⁵ The war broke habits⁶ but churches continued to provide people with comfort: both spiritually, and materially with an 'air-raid spirituality' evident.⁷ At the Missions, ministers led sermons and prayers during bombing raids and mission work continued to provide relief. However, beneath the rhetoric of camaraderie, certain Methodist customs came under threat which caused friction. The Revd. E. Benson Perkins, secretary of the Department for Chapel Affairs (DCA), made use of contacts within the Government when it became apparent that soldiers were being served alcohol on the premises. He managed to secure a ban on these 'wet-canteens' in requisitioned Methodist Halls.⁸

Size and location were convenient for war work but rendered them vulnerable to air-raid attacks (Figures 5.1 and 5.2). Two-thirds were damaged, those in Barking, Greenwich and

² Liverpool Wesleyan Methodist Mission, 53rd Annual Report, 1928, 2.

³ 'Manchester and Salford Mission', Conference Agenda, 1939, 195.

⁴ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the Glasgow Missions Committee', 18 December 1936, GCA TD853 8/1.

⁵ Stan Cornish, 'Early Memories of The East Ham Central Hall', undated typed transcript in authors possession,

^{10 -13.} See also the descriptions in the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) 'WW2 People's War Archive', J. D. G Smart, A4488898. Martin Cox, A2715950. Arnold Hornsby, A3511982.

⁶ This was thought so in E. Benson Perkins and Albert Hearn, *The Methodist Church Builds Again*, 1945, 35-38; Clive Field suggests that the War merely accelerated trends already evident in his 'Puzzled People Revisited: Religious Believing and Belonging in Wartime Britain, 1939-45', *Twentieth Century British History*, 19/4 (2008), 446 - 79. While holding to a gradual model of religious decline, Steve Bruce and Tony Glendinning pay considerable attention to the Second World War in their most recent contribution to the secularization debate. 'When Was Secularization? Dating the Decline of the British Churches and Locating its Cause', *British Journal of Sociology*, 61/1 (2010), 107-26.

⁷ Stephen Parker, *Faith on the Home Front: Aspects of Church Life and Popular Religion in Birmingham*, 1939 – 1945 (Oxford/Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2005).

⁸ E. Benson Perkins, So Appointed (London: Epworth Press, 1964), 108.



Figure 5.1: Thornton Hall, Hull in 1941 after sustaining bomb damage. Source: The Archives of the Wesley Historical Society, Oxford Brookes.



Figure 5.2: Manchester Central Hall exterior to Dale Street after bomb damage c. 1941. Source: The Methodist Centre.

Lambeth destroyed.⁹ At the end of the war, the DCA estimated 3, 000 damaged properties, one-third of which were in London.¹⁰ It offered an opportunity to streamline their building stock substantially enriched after the Wesleyans, the Primitive and United Methodists reunited in 1932. More than one chapel often served the same locality. However, attachment to these church buildings meant 'rationalising resources' was no easy matter.¹¹

Churches received special consideration under the terms of the *War Damage Act* (1941). The Chancellor responsible, Sir Kingsley Wood, was Methodist and the son of a minister and so sensitive to the particular needs of religion.¹² Compensation for damaged buildings was paid at their 1939 asset value. This was not straightforward in the case of church buildings because of their recognised social worth. The Bishop of London, Dr Geoffrey Fisher, organised 'The Churches Main Committee'. This ecumenical body that included clerical and lay representation from the main Christian churches with a high proportion of architects, surveyors or lawyers.¹³ Over several meetings, they worked out a specific form of church payment in collaboration with the body set up to administer payments: the War Damage Commission.

There were three significant elements: all denominations were accorded equal treatment; assessed payments were portable so churches were not obliged to rebuild redundant buildings; and new premises were to be plain.¹⁴ While disregarding the market value of churches, the War Damage Commission provided for 'plain repair' of premises or a 'plain substitute building'. The guiding principle was 'the sort of building in type and size which might reasonably be erected on the site of the damaged building by the denomination if it were paying the bill from their own fund and were neither financially embarrassed nor unduly

⁹ See the Statistical Returns of Accommodation, 1941 (Manchester: DCA, 1944).

¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹¹ Currie, Methodism Divided, 1968, 303.

¹² Benson Perkins, So Appointed, 1964, 111.

¹³ Ibid., 112 -3. This body continues as the Churches Legal Advisory Service (CLAS) conveying to the Government the views of the churches on legislation and matters such as heritage grants, planning and building regulations. See http://www.churcheslegislation.org.uk.

¹⁴ The DCA, Serving the Church: Being Guidance in the Care and Use of Methodist Church Buildings, (London: Epworth Press, 1948), 83 – 85.

rich'.¹⁵ By 1962, the total amount received by the Methodist Church was estimated at $\pounds 3$ million, the largest share of the non-established denominations.¹⁶

The Methodist Church Builds Again

Conference passed its own scheme for a rebuilding fund in 1942 to which Home Mission was allocated £250, 000. From 1943, the DCA reports change from a general overview of building work and accounts to emphasise its advisory capacity. It addressed specific questions regarding war damages, funding, taxation and trusts. In tandem with this, a sub-committee on planning and design was set up in 1942 composed of members from the DCA and architects from within the laity.¹⁷ These consultations led to the eventual publication of two documents: *The Methodist Church Builds Again* (1946) and *Serving the Church: A Guide for the Care and Maintenance of Methodist Church Buildings* (1948).¹⁸ They signify a critical moment in the Central Hall story. Local authority plans indicating the continual displacement of the population did not augur well for mission halls. In a reversal of the Forward Movement's policy of remaining on prominent sites, the DCA claimed that 'the future of our Methodist Church depends upon the extent to which we are to develop Methodism in the new towns and areas being replanned'.¹⁹

The photograph of the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, built around 1898, shows it standing in sharp contrast to the cleared landscape and new tower block (Figure 5.3). In a cultural milieu of visionary re-planning, the committee worried that rising standards of welfare in the general population might make churches seem less than desirable. The DCA keenly emphasised that:

The higher standard in the amenities of life generally, particularly the better standard of homes, is a specific mark of progress. It would be impossible to say, however, that a higher standard has operated similarly in regard to the appointments, decoration and condition of our Methodist sanctuaries. It is also a matter of regret that so often the congregation is quite unconscious of the failure to secure the best possible conditions for

¹⁵ 'War-Damaged Churches: Basis of Payment Accepted by the Commission', *The Manchester Guardian*, 16 May, 1944, 3. DCA, *Serving the Church*, 1948, 83.

¹⁶ Cecil Northcott, '40 million paid to Churches', *The Observer*, 18 March 1962, 3. The Church of England received £30 million.

¹⁷ 'Minutes of a Meeting of the Committees on Plan and Design', Minutes of the DCA (1942), 13 October 1942, MPO.

¹⁸ Perkins and Hearn, *The Methodist Church Builds Again*, (London: Epworth Press, 1946). DCA, *Serving the Church*, 1948.

¹⁹ DCA, Problems of Town and Country Planning Today (Manchester: Manchester Central Buildings, 1948), 17.



Figure 5.3: Bridgewater Hall in Hulme c. 1960s. Source: Manchester Archives and Local Studies.

worship, and suffers needlessly and without realizing the effect of the building upon the atmosphere of fellowship.²⁰

If, and it was a significant if, war damaged Central Halls were to be rebuilt a capacity of 800 – 1000 was suggested with a chapel set aside exclusively for worship.²¹ The majority had not originally provided a separate chapel. Their smaller rooms coupled devotional space with other activities. Subsequently, this was remedied by designating a room for the purposes of private prayer with chairs, a table and a cross. To the committee this indicated that 'it is extremely difficult....to combine both a Hall for general purposes and the Church in the same place.'²² Trustees debating over the fate of Tooting Central Hall in 1959 thought that whatever the outcome, any new church 'should be reserved solely for church purposes – worship, sacred concerts, etc.'²³

Architect and Methodist, J. C. Prestwich of Leigh, prepared the guidance plans and drawings that accompany *The Methodist Church Builds Again*. In the revised Central Hall type, the chapel is placed at main floor level rather than as an appended afterthought (Figure 5.4). It is complete with communion table, cross and a choir placed in the gallery at the back of the room. This arrangement divided the functions of worship from the ancillary activities. The chapel is used solely for prayer and Sunday services with the main hall for concerts, drama events and other community uses although continuity could be maintained if the type of popular Sunday evening services seen before the war were in demand.²⁴

Other types illustrated in the book testify to the positive aspects associated with Central Halls. The preferred model for inner city developments and new towns is the 'Christian Community Centre' depicted in figure 5.5. In this example, club rooms are combined with a Hall for both public and sacred use on a restricted site. It includes a projection room, stage and retiring rooms behind. Such planning recognised that fellowship in the Methodist Church 'finds it expression both in acts of public worship and in the manifold activities of religious education and social and culture and enjoyment'.²⁵ Edward Mills, architect and Methodist, devotes a chapter of his book *The Modern Church* (1955) to 'The Church and the

²⁰ DCA, Serving the Church, 1948, 13.

²¹ Perkins and Hearn, *The Methodist Church Builds Again*, 1946, 96 – 98.

²² Ibid., 35.

²³ Tooting Central Hall, 'Minutes of the Leaders Meetings, 1948 – 1966', 2 March 1959, LMA ACC 2707/33.

²⁴ Perkins and Hearn, *The Methodist Church Builds Again*, 1945, 96.

²⁵ Ibid., 33.

Community'.²⁶ Mills was writing prior to the Liturgical Movement of the 1960s which championed community churches with their social spaces and street architecture.²⁷ Yet, he noted that the growing fashion for 'Hall-Churches' may have been a novel concept for Anglicans and Roman Catholics but the Central Hall movement had made this common place in Methodism. Indeed, his own unrealised scheme for a Hall-Church on Surrey's suburban Morden Estate was such a community church and 'today the architect sees how the scheme looked back to the communality of the Central Hall.'²⁸

As plain as post-war reconstruction had to be, the DCA focused upon the positive aspect of war-time shortages since 'it will emphasize the necessity of simple design with reliance upon form and line for genuine beauty and structure. Added ornamentation is generally as inartistic as it is useless.'²⁹ The replacement building for Devonport Central Hall (1950) well-illustrates this and figure 5.6 shows the incorporation of a former RAF Blister Air Hangar into the curved roof design. It provided seating for 500 where the old building accommodated 1, 200. The only adornment – and a change in type - is a large cross above the main entrance (Figure 5.7).

Decline was not always apparent on the ground: large congregations could be attracted for special occasions and, in their public function, Central Halls were used by a wide range of people using the network of social agencies. During important occasions in the Methodist calendar, such as the annual anniversary and Harvest festivals, main halls could be filled with local dignitaries in attendance. In 1953, over two thousand people crowded Manchester's Albert Hall to see leading sportsmen, such as Bert Whalley of Manchester United publicly reaffirm their faith (Figure 5.8). Sir Malcolm Sargent, chief conductor of the BBC symphony orchestra, waived his fees for the Battersea Mission who also called on the services of other notable personalities such as the Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden, the cricketer Dennis Compton and television's Richard Dimbleby.³⁰

²⁶ Edward Mills, *The Modern Church* (London: The Architectural Press, 1956), 29 – 52.

²⁷ Robert Proctor, 'Churches for a Changing Liturgy: Gillespie, Kidd and Coia and the Second Vatican Council', *Architectural History*, 48 (2005), 291 – 322.

²⁸ J. Thomas, 'Liturgy and Architecture, 1932 – 60: Methodist Influences and Ideas', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 40 (1975/6), 112.

²⁹ Perkins and Hearn, *The Methodist Church Builds Again*, 1945, 21.

³⁰ P. Ashworth, Forward With Christ: The Story of the Battersea Central Mission (Battersea: Battersea Central Mission, 1992), 15 - 16.

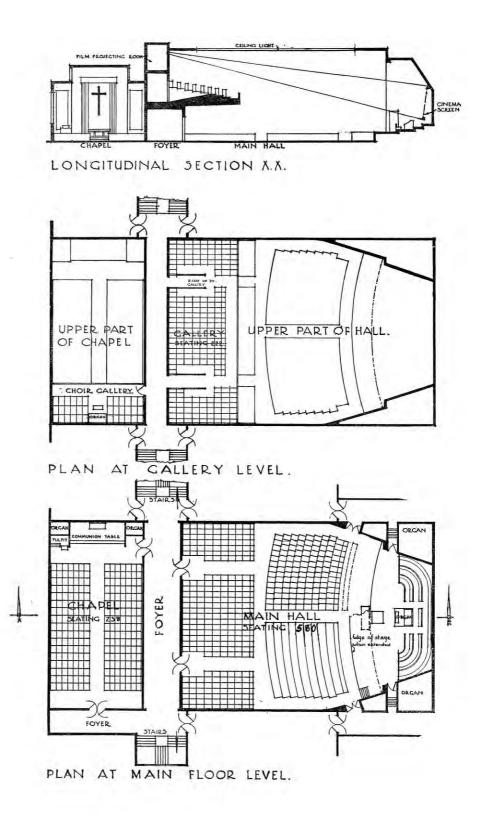


Figure 5.4: Plans and Section of the Revised Central Hall Type. Source: The Methodist Church Builds Again, 1946.

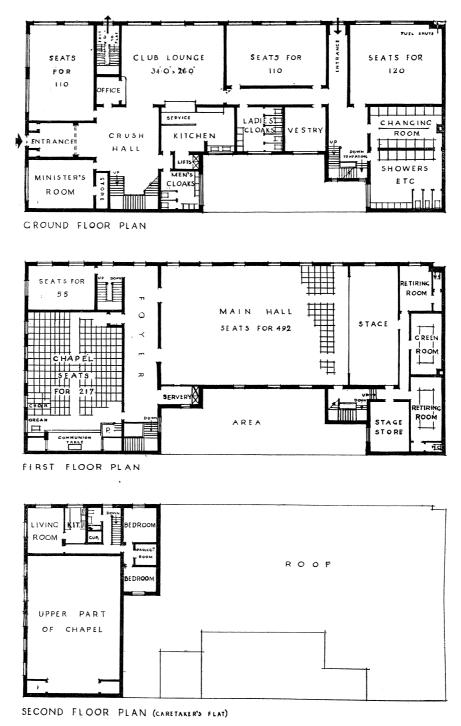


Figure 5.5: Prototype plan for a Christian Community Centre. Source: The Methodist Church Builds Again, 1946.

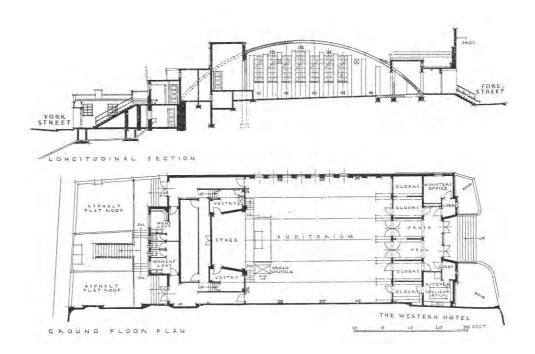


Figure 5.6: Plan and Section of Devonport Central Hall, 1951. Source: Building News, 1951.

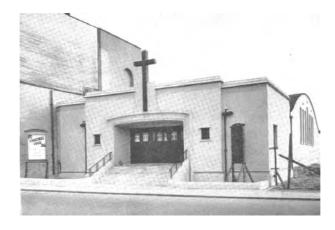


Figure 5.7: Exterior view of Devonport Central Hall, 1950 Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.

Changing Use

War damage to other important civic buildings meant that Central Halls not severely damaged were in demand when hostilities ceased. The Church, in some cases, demonstrated a pragmatic attitude towards the modification of previously entrenched stances. Party political meetings were not supposed to be held on the premises as it conflicted with trust deeds. However, the DCA noted that the Albert Hall in Nottingham and Westminster were exceptions and once hostilities ceased they felt that 'Methodism owed a service to the community and could not be indifferent to the need for political meetings, especially in these days when so many buildings had been destroyed.'³¹ In January 1946, Westminster Central Hall, the only central venue of adequate size in the area, was asked to hold the founding sessions of the UN general assembly in January 1946.³² It was also the location to where the new Labour Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, rushed to join his fellow Party members



Figure 5.8: Sportsmen's Service at the Albert Hall in Manchester, 1953. Source: Manchester Archives and Local Studies.

³¹' Minutes of a Meeting of the DCA', 20 June 1945, MPO.

³² 'UNO at Westminster: The Central Hall in a New Guise', *The Builder*, 15 February 1946, 160 – 162.

following their landslide win in the 1945 election.³³ So, Westminster continued a long and often fruitful association hosting a wide variety of political groups.

Good acoustical properties of the main halls meant that city orchestras found appropriate homes in the Methodist missions. The Manchester Hallé resided at the Albert Hall on Peter Street until Free Trade Hall reopened in 1951. Similarly, Coventry, Chester and Nottingham were heavily used by choral groups and orchestras.³⁴ Kingsway Hall in London built its reputation on the superb acoustics of its main hall, used by Decca and EMI for their large scale classical recordings even with the faint rumble of the Central line of the London underground in the background. In the words of one former user, it was 'a mecca for classical musicians. If you recorded in London, you did it in Kingsway Hall. It had tremendous acoustics'.³⁵ One expert, who measured the distances between the orchestra and reflecting surfaces, argued that the well-curved shape of the horseshoe gallery ensured that it was 'the prize recording hall of the world'.³⁶

Popular cinema shows and Saturday penny concerts disappeared off the agenda in the 1930s because of competing secular provisions in cities. The Manchester and Salford Mission (MSM) saw their licences revoked by the local authority due to safety reasons. Cinema operating boxes were described as death traps and licences not renewed unless substantial structural work was undertaken. The *Manchester Guardian* though it best that the MSM 'leaves the film to the professionals'.³⁷ Most continued to show religious films after Sunday service, provided by the Religious Films Society, but specifically public shows became rare.

Social work also changed. The government increasingly provided for the material welfare of the general population. Initiatives such as employment exchanges and labour yards ceased.³⁸ Health dispensaries were no longer required when a free National Health Service was established. Workhouse teas disappeared when workhouses were formally abolished in 1929.

³³ David Kynaston, A World to Build (London: Bloomsbury, 2008) 75.

³⁴ Ian Caulfield Grant, *You Have Nothing to Do but to Save Souls*, 2001, 124-5; Ronald Hoar (ed.) *A Good Ideal: The Story of the Central Hall, Bristol* (Bristol: Bristol Central Mission, 1974), 46; Chester Central Hall, *Silver Threads Amongst the Gold* (Chester: Chester Central Hall, 1959).

³⁵ Sir James Galway and Linda Bridges, *The Man With The Golden Flute: Sir James, A Celtic Minstrel* (New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), 142.

³⁶ D. Vaughan, 'The Perception and Appreciation of Richness and Timbre in Rooms for Music', *Applied Acoustics*, 15/4 (1982), 305.

³⁷ The Manchester Guardian, 21 February 1930, 13.

³⁸ Jeffery Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society*, 1982; G. I. T Machin, *Churches and Social Issues in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

The emphasis was then changed to support those whose needs the state did not meet. Still in evidence in the 1960s were clubs for the unemployed and clothing stores that were complemented by provision for drug and alcohol rehabilitation, hostel accommodation, day centres for the elderly, and counselling for the mentally unwell.³⁹ Many of these were the result of a developing partnership between Church and State. In some cases, location, size and inability to afford purpose-built premises meant that local authorities strategically used a Central Hall to host their social services departments: a function preferred by the Church over commercial lets.

Main halls became too big and sometimes unaccommodating of new forms of worship. The Liturgical Movement of the 1960s filtered through to the Methodist Church.⁴⁰ While wellknown preachers such as Donald Soper, Billy Gowland and Leslie Weatherhead could still hold sway, the focus shifted to the participation of the congregation with an emphasis on shared ministry through the whole body of believers.⁴¹ In other areas, it was felt that in order to revitalise the Methodist Church, a radical new style of ministry was needed, but whereas once the Central Halls were associated with experimentation and novel methods, the buildings were thought to inhibit any change from the traditional sermon-led form of worship.

Traditional methods of outward evangelism also eroded. In some cases, open-air preaching suffered from increasing amounts of traffic and city centre redevelopments that privileged roads although Donald Soper still took to his soap box in Hyde Park until his death and Billy Gowland continued outdoor evangelism in Piccadilly Gardens in Manchester while ministering at the Albert Hall.⁴² Door-to-door visitation had previously played a vital role in

³⁹ Local church history books provide valuable information on these changing uses. See, for example, Ian Caulfield Grant, *You Have Nothing to Do but to Save Souls*, 2001, Nicholas Farr, *At the Heart of the City: A Methodist Mission in the Twentieth Century*, (Sheffield: Victoria Hall, 1991), especially 73 – 88; John D. Beasley, *The Bitter Cry Heard and Heeded: The Story of the South London Mission*, 1889 – 1999 (Bermondsey: Central Hall, 1989), 88 - 96, Brian Frost, *Pioneers of Social Passion: London's Cosmopolitan Methodism* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2006); Eric Gallagher, *At Points of Need*, 1989, 85 - 94; P. Bagwell, *Outcast London: A Christian Response* (London: Epworth Press, 1987).

⁴⁰ Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*, 2004, 265 – 292.

⁴¹ John Munsey Turner, *Modern Methodism in England*, 1998, 54-9; Home Mission Division, *Mission to the City: The Role of the City Centre Church – A Guide for Ministers and Church Members* (Westminster Central Hall: Home Mission Division1983), 26-30, W. O. Phillipson, *A Methodist Church Builder's Decalogue* (Manchester: DCA, 1966), 23 – 5; Tony Holden, *In the Streets of Every City*, 1988, 11; Henry D. Rack, *The Future of John Wesley's Methodism: Ecumenical Studies in History*, 2, (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1965), 74 – 80.

⁴² For example, compare Anon. (1960) *Tooting Central Hall: Golden Jubilee, 1910-1960* (London: Tooting Central Hall), 11; with Brian Frost, *Goodwill on Fire: Donald Soper's Life and Mission* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996) and David Gowland and Stuart Roebuck, *Never Call Retreat: A Biography of Bill Gowland* (London: Chester House, 1990), 75-89.

the pastoral oversight of the population. Some Missions, with a decreasing army of voluntary workers, had to cover a greater area and, as former deaconesses testified, visitations decreased in frequency.⁴³

Changing Meanings

Official attitudes towards the buildings were shifting. One of the first sales was that of Islington Central Hall in 1953 for £30, 000.⁴⁴ It had been open for a mere 33 years and had cost £43, 300. At Tooting Central Hall, where Joseph Rank once taught in the Sunday school, the treasurer bemoaned its prominent position on Broadway saying that it:

is out-dated and its vast seating capacity is no longer required. This white elephant is a bête-noir and its forlorn appearance cannot evoke the respect and interest of passers-by. Neither does the vastness and ill-repair of the interior offer any attraction.⁴⁵

Not only were the buildings considered physically unsuitable and counter-productive to the image of the Methodist Church, many questioned activities. Writing in 1962 for the East End Mission's newspaper, *The Star*, a minister issued a warning:

Those of us engaged in the service of the Church in the inner belt areas must not repeat one of the greatest mistakes made in nineteenth century evangelism. This is the mistake of ... flinging away both experience and common sense in a spate of puerile preaching, shallow services, cheap notices, and all the gimmicks of a religious salesman whose motive was to have a better building and a bigger crowd (not to mention the collection at the Sunday School anniversary) than the other lot down the road.⁴⁶

This judgement marks the shift of missionary strategy in twentieth century Methodism. Nineteenth century evangelists competed vigorously for souls in the language and architectural media of the modern city. Conversely, in decline a reassertion of sacred functions becomes evident. It became necessary to say that the Central Halls were, in fact, a church. One technique was to introduce floodlighting and electric signs. The DCA endorsed this saying that:

Evangelism has many forms in these modern days and every advantage that science has given in the way of lighting and in many other directions should be used in order that the fact of the Church and its invitation may be constantly before the people.⁴⁷

⁴³ Personal Interview, 4; Personal Interview, 6.

⁴⁴'Minutes of a Meeting of the DCA', 1953, 41, MPO.

⁴⁵ E. A. Sherlock, 'Memorandum on Edmonton Central Hall for the Methodist Commission', 26 September 1963, LMA ACC 1104/31/1 – 97.

⁴⁶ 'The Superintendent Says...', *The Star*, Feb 1962, 2.

⁴⁷ DCA, Serving the Church, 1948, 25.



Figure 5.9: The new canopy for the East End Mission c. 1960s. Source: The Wesley Historical Society Archives.



Figure 5.10: Painting the East End Mission with voluntary labour. Source: The Wesley Historical Archives.

St George's Hall in Stepney was redecorated to include a cross and identity board outside in order to reverse local habits of referring to the building as 'the penny pictures'. Indeed, cinema shows were discontinued in favour of a junior club with bible study and prayer that attracted fewer people but was perceived to be more appropriate.⁴⁸ One mile away on Commercial Road, at the headquarters of the East End Mission, a cross and canopy were erected with the words 'The Methodist Church' prominently placed (Figure 5.9). This reversed a decision taken in 1922 when the words 'Methodist' were dropped from the official title to reflect the wide operation of its activities.⁴⁹ Similarly, at the Albert Hall in Manchester two illuminated crosses, name signs and neon strip lighting were added to the existing canopies in 1957.⁵⁰

Such superficial treatment was the prelude to substantial adaptations. Religious work suffered at the missions as ministers struggled to cope with the workload with a reduced number of staff. When Conference was made aware of £26, 000 of debt carried by the Liverpool Mission, the role of its provincial city centre buildings came under scrutiny.⁵¹ They appointed a Central Missions Committee (CMC) which comprised of representatives from Home Mission and the DCA. Thirty-three Central Halls were visited between 1959 – 1961 and evidence collected about the condition of the premises, the composition of congregations and financial situation.⁵²

Congregations varied. The majority attracted lower middle class and respectable working class congregations.⁵³ Many describe their numbers as 'healthy' but struggled to find leadership from within the congregation to undertake positions of responsibility. The material situation eclipsed this. The subjective responses indicated that their premises were 'shabby'; 'in need of decoration'; and, at best, 'adequate'. Many more express worry that they could not meet the costs of essential refurbishment. While some trusts had astutely channelled

⁴⁸ Leslie E. Day, (n.d.) *This is Our Story* (Stepney: East End Mission), 2.

⁴⁹ Press Cuttings of the East End Mission, Vol. 3, 1922 – 1928, LMA ACC 4249/C/06/010.

⁵⁰ 'Agreement between The City of Manchester Corporation and the Manchester and Salford Wesleyan Mission, in relation to illuminated crosses, signs and strip lighting on the existing canopies at the Albert Hall, Peter Street, Manchester' (1957), MALS, M196/8/1/7/3.

⁵¹ This is approximately £350, 000 today.

⁵² For details see George Sails, At the Centre, 1970, 35 – 41.

⁵³ The Central Mission Statistics cover the period 1961 – 1989. See the Methodist Archives and Research Centre (Hereafter MARC), Manchester, 'Records of Home Mission and Evangelism', MARC 9863, Box One.

money from legacies and donations into investment funds to build up a 'repairs reserve' few could easily command the capital resources required for the scale of refurbishment work.⁵⁴

But refurbishment became pressing as buildings aged. Table 5.2 presents selected data from the statistics reported to the CMC. In 1961, Eastbrook Hall in Bradford spent £54 per week was spent on heating alone: equivalent to £800 today. This was an extreme case. Other halls roughly paid between £7 and £22, per week, or around £100 - £400 today. As membership declined, fundraising became centred on a smaller cohort of people. The CMC concluded that 'the maintenance of large buildings, always a costly business, becomes an increasingly heavy burden with the passing of years, and the provision of a staff adequate to meet the challenge and opportunity of the city centre situation places an additional strain on the mission resources.'⁵⁵ Buildings could be redecorated by voluntary labour which could give a veneer of adequacy, but failed to address substantial renovation work required by fifty years of heavy use and the now obsolete heating and ventilation systems.

The information was distilled in a report to Conference in 1961. While main hall capacities dwarfed congregations, the committee tempered this by observing that these were still among the largest Methodist gatherings in the country.⁵⁶ In 1960, Eastbrook Hall in Bradford enjoyed an average Sunday evening attendance of 1400. Similarly, at Sheffield, Plymouth and Bolton, congregations were between 800 and 1000. However, the average across all twenty-eight reports is 554. In light of these findings, the DCA found it difficult to contemplate the abandonment of visible city centre sites. Instead, they recommended demolition in favour of smaller premises. As funding such a radical proposal was often untenable, the majority were advised 'to adapt and modernize ...where there is a realistic prospect of survival until the end of the century'.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ The *Annual Reports* of the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes provide a detailed record of the investments associated with each trust. A complete set of copies is available at MPO.

⁵⁵ George Sails, At the Centre, 1970, 35.

⁵⁶ Sails, At the Centre, 1970, 71.

⁵⁷ DCA , *Report* 1972, 4.

Building	Average Sunday attendance (1960)	Average Sunday attendance (1969)	Seating Capacity (1941)	Maintenance Costs, 1961 (£)
Birmingham	600	200	2,000	12
Blackburn	510	180	1, 768	17
Bradford	1,400	230	2,086	54
Glasgow	500	130	1, 320	5
Grimsby	276	120	956	-
Nottingham	400	400	2, 500	16
Plymouth	400	150	1,075	16
Rochdale	180	125	1, 726	-
Walsall	300	275	1,230	9

Table 5.2: Selected Central Missions Statistics as reported to the CMC.

Source: Statistics of the Central Missions Committee, MARC, 'Records of Home Mission and Evangelism', MARC 9863, Box One. Funds were set aside at the Joseph Rank Benevolent Trust (JRBT), which J. Arthur Rank, and his son-in-law, Paul Bartlett-Lang, were administering. Between 1960 and 1970, a total of \pounds 380, 050 was granted towards modernisation schemes in Central Halls, every one requiring the approval of the CMC. ⁵⁸ Members raised their own funds to meet the overall costs. Volunteers were employed to undertake superficial maintenance and many of the architects of these schemes came forth from within the Methodist laity.⁵⁹ Indeed, the alterations at the Albert Hall, Manchester; Central Hall, Grimsby and Victoria Hall, Sheffield were undertaken by Bernard W. Blanchard of Hull, later Revd. Bernard W. Blanchard.⁶⁰

Adapting to Change

Modifications aimed to reduce the seating capacity of main halls unable to attract large crowds. The following four solutions were the most common:

1) Floor the main hall at gallery level, creating another level as a small hall or rooms for letting.

Demolish part or all of site to provide smaller premises on the same site.
 Remaining land could be redeveloped by the mission or sold, typically the front section as this held greater value.

3) Sale of the entire site.

4) Internal redecoration that modernised the premises but changed little substantially. This took place where incumbents believed the main hall could still provide lucrative letting possibilities.

At Hull, resources were rationalised. Queen's and Thornton Halls had suffered bomb damage, the latter beyond repair. The DCA and the Hull Mission fashioned an agreement with the War Damages Commission to sell both sites and use the money to adapt an existing chapel at Waltham Street in the city centre.⁶¹ The new Hull Central Hall was opened in 1960 by J. Arthur Rank. It probably went against the grain of the time with a seating capacity of 700 for a membership totalling 330 in 1964. In 1968, they were joined by the remaining

⁵⁸ Sails, At the Centre, 1970, 49.

⁵⁹ See p. 252 and p. 315 below.

⁶⁰ Nicholas Farr, At the Heart of the City, 1991, 62.

⁶¹ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the DCA', 6 May 1952, MPO.

congregation of the King's Hall but amalgamating people could be difficult. At Hull membership continued to drop: to 250 in 1969.⁶²

Another illustrative case is found in Glasgow. The Central Hall on Maryhill Road enjoyed a membership of 532 in 1950 but this eroded because of a 'drift to new housing areas of Drumchapel, Barlanark and Milton'.⁶³ In 1968, having raised £20, 000 from the JRBT and local donations, a floor was introduced at gallery level to reduce the capacity of the main hall to 600. Numbers continued to fall. In 1972, the mission touted its building to Glasgow City Corporation.⁶⁴ Negotiations to share the premises with the Salvation Army were aborted because the Army refused to compromise on their desire for the entire premises.⁶⁵ Eventually, the cause folded. A group of volunteers, determined not to allow another community facility disappear in Maryhill took over, a situation which continues today.⁶⁶ Flooring the gallery was the solution similarly applied at Brunswick in Newcastle shown in figures 5.11 to 5.13. Originally built as a Chapel in 1820 and adapted to become a Central Mission, it underwent further refurbishment in 1981 and remains in existence as a Methodist Mission.

At Oxford Place in Leeds, the ancillary premises were sold in 1977. The original facade was kept but it was completely reordered internally (Figure 5.14 - 5). Central is a carpeted worship area that was believed to evoke 'beauty and atmosphere'.⁶⁷ Full provision for the celebration of sacrament is made in clean and bright surroundings to provide user comfort as interpreted in the late 1970s.

Central Hall in Portsmouth was demolished and a worship centre built with community facilities and accommodation for the homeless (Figure 5.16).⁶⁸ The £830, 000 venture, in partnership with Portsmouth Housing Association, was funded by the sale of land, local authority grants, the JRBT and other Methodist Church funds. The DCA though that this was 'a partnership in which each has needed the others, so that the worship and the work of

⁶² This was also the case when Albert Hall in Manchester was put up for sale. See John Banks, *The Story...So Far*, 1986, 160 -1.

⁶³ 'Minutes of a Meeting of the Glasgow Missions Committee', 21 October 1954, GCA TD 853 8/1.

⁶⁴ 'Minutes of the Leaders Meeting of the Glasgow Methodist Mission', 5 June 1972, GCA TD853 8/2.

⁶⁵ Letter from Revd. W. O. Phillipson to Revd. Harold Hammond (Glasgow Methodist Mission) 12 June 1963, 'Records of Home Mission and Evangelism', MARC 9863, Box 9.

⁶⁶ John Robertson, Rachel Pateman, Karen Dunlop, Janet Darling and Michael Turner, *Maryhill Road: From a Needle to an Anchor* (Maryhill: Maryhill Community Central Hall, 1986), 27 – 29.

⁶⁷ DCA, Chapels Old and New (Manchester: DCA, 1984), 5.

⁶⁸ DCA, Buildings in Progress: New Methodist Chapels, 1980 – 1993 (Manchester: DCA, 1993), 41.

the Church can go forward.⁶⁹ Few of the refurbishments could have been enacted if external funds had not been solicited. Redhill Central Hall in Surrey was one of the most fortunate when it received new premises costing £2.25 million from a local Housing Association who built six flats, appropriately named 'Wesley Court', on the remainder of the site (Figure 5.17).⁷⁰

Where redesigned, the ancillary premises reflected changing social situations. Sunday schools became multi-purpose 'youth centres'. The Albermarle Report (1961) established a £28 million building fund to address the newly identified 'teenage' problem.⁷¹ The DCA set out more guidelines in *The Methodist Church Builder's Decalogue* (1966). Youth Centres would succeed in 'breaking down the barrier between the sacred and secular' by providing a balanced programme of worship, games, drama and music.⁷² The spaces were to achieve an 'informal, spontaneous and homely' atmosphere.⁷³ At Nottingham, the basement was converted to provide such relaxed space as the plan in figure 5.18 shows. Managing these

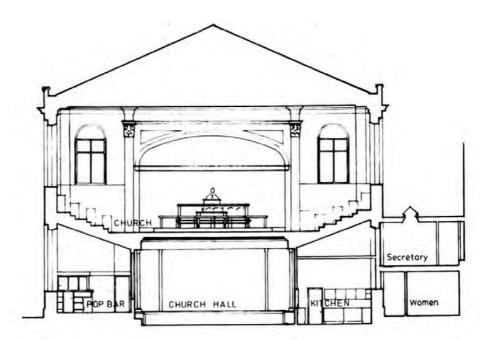


Figure 5.11: Brunswick Place, Newcastle by Grimshaw and Townsend, Accrington Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ DCA, Buildings in Progress, 1993, 19.

⁷¹ M. K. Smith and M. E. Doyle 'The Albemarle Report and the Development of Youth Work in England and Wales', *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education*, (2002), http://www.infed.org/youthwork/albemarle_report.htm. Accessed 13 April 2008.

 ⁷²W. O. Phillipson, A Methodist Church Builder's Decalogue (Manchester: DCA, 1966), 38
 ⁷³ Ibid.



Figure 5.12: The old hall at Brunswick Place in Newcastle. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.



Figure 5.13: The new worship space at Brunswick Place in the former gallery. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.

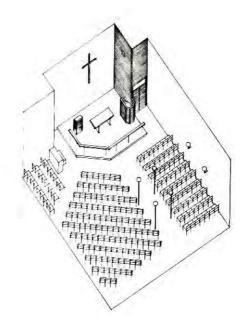


Figure 5.14: Plan of new chapel at Oxford Place in Leeds by Trevor Wilkinson Associates. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.



Figure 5.15: The new chapel at Oxford Place, Leeds by Trevor Wilkinson Associates. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.



Figure 5.16: New premises at Portsmouth, 1980. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.



Figure 5.17: Replacement buildings for Redhill Central Hall. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.

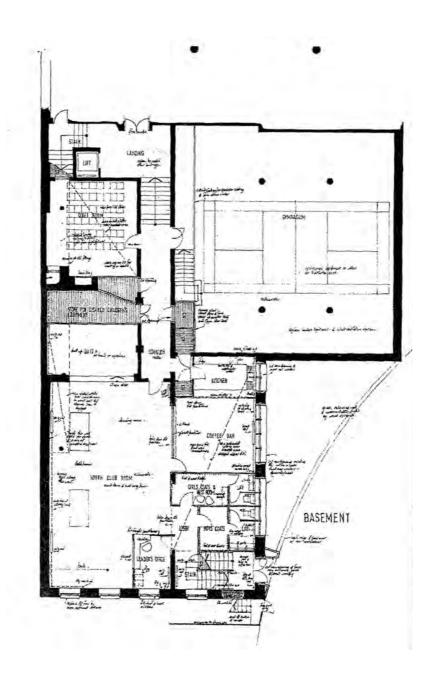


Figure 5.18: Plan of the youth club in the basement of the Albert Hall in Nottingham, 1964. Source: Ian Caulfield Grant, You Have Nothing to do but Save Souls.

youth clubs could be problematic. The demands on staff were such that evangelism could not be combined with youth work, as the case study chapter on Archway demonstrates.⁷⁴ Certainly, the DCA were aware of difficulties of simultaneously integrating children into the church but keeping them separate when adult activities took place. It was often achieved through the use of multi-purpose rooms equipped with moveable fixtures and furnishings, but these often proved flimsy as the 1972 chapel affairs report described:

In church design there is increasing tension between the 'multi-purpose' and 'holy place' concepts and the resultant principle of maximum flexibility is not easy for architects to implement, especially as folding and sliding partitions, admirable on paper, in practice are often so lacking in sound resistance as to make simultaneous use of adjoining rooms impossible.⁷⁵

Some acquired a bad reputation because of rowdiness, drug taking and hooliganism.⁷⁶ At the Thomas Champness Memorial Hall in Rochdale, the minister persisted with the club, arguing that there was a greater need for the work with unruly children. Answering the question of damage to the premises, one supporter replied: 'when will we learn that buildings are not sacred and people are important?'⁷⁷

Selling Up

Following this line of reasoning, two-thirds of the premises were sold between 1940 and 2001. The Methodist Church Act (1976) strongly advised the sale of buildings superfluous to the church. Only under exceptional circumstances was a local society permitted to become letting agents.⁷⁸ When a Conservative Government abolished building licences in 1953, Central Hall trustees were approached by speculative developers who recognised the commercial potential of the city centre sites.⁷⁹ Negotiations could be protracted and many proposed developments left unrealised. Problems were partly attributed to restrictive covenants relating to the disposal of trust premises. These covenants prevent Methodist buildings, specifically churches, being used for purposes contrary to the principles advocated by Methodism

⁷⁴ See p. 343 below.

⁷⁵ DCA, Church Affairs, 1971, 2.

⁷⁶ Personal Interview, 26.

⁷⁷ Anon. 'An Open Youth Centre', *Today: An Independent Newspaper* published by the Champness Hall, Rochdale, No. 27, July 1967, 1.

⁷⁸ PD, Question Time: The Property Division Annual Report for 1977 (Manchester: PD, 1977), 15 – 16.

⁷⁹ DCA *Chapel Affairs* (Manchester: DCA, 1965), 1; On this see Oliver Marriot, *The Property Boom*, (London: Hamilton, 1967). pp. 324 - 6.

including gambling and drinking.⁸⁰ At Southampton, plans to sell the premises to the County Borough were abandoned when a proposed theatre intended to serve alcohol.⁸¹ In 1965, the approved sale to Hampshire County Council was a building for educational purposes only.

In 1960, the DCA reports that the covenants were accepted by buyers without reducing the cost of sale. However, Conference was asked to 'extend some discretion' and waive covenants on sales where buildings would be demolished.⁸² This suggests that the site was not considered sacred but the buildings had become so, contrary to protestations otherwise. Once the building was erased from the landscape, its lasting meaning could be forgotten. However, this proposition was not enacted until 2000 when Conference finally allowed the decision on whether covenants would be used to be taken at circuit level.

As the case studies will show, the fuel crisis in 1974 increased costs substantially. City Centre redevelopment proposals had also resulted in planning blight meaning that shops became hard to let. Several of the more well-known missions closed their premises. The termination of activities at Bristol (1984), Nottingham (1985) and Birmingham (1986) sent shockwaves through the connexion. In 1986, Conference directed the Home Mission and Property Division (PD) to open up their city property base for re-examination by the City and Town Centre Review Group.

The City and Town Centre Review Group, 1986 - 1988.

Urban unrest marked British cities with riots in Liverpool, Manchester and London in 1981 and again in Birmingham and north London in 1985. These received extended discussion amongst faith groups based in the inner cities and the Church of England openly criticized the incumbent Conservative Government in the Archbishop of Canterbury's report, *Faith in the City.*⁸³ Meanwhile, the Methodist Church had already set up its Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield in1969 and subsequently provided funds through its *Mission Alongside the Poor*

⁸⁰ See The Methodist Church Property Office 'Directions for Advertisement for Sale of Methodist Church Properties', available at http://www.methodist.org.uk/static/rm/directionsforsale.pdf date. Accessed 6 November 2009.

⁸¹ Letter from Warmington and Co, (Surveyors) to Mr F. Ridge, (Hampshire Borough Council), 'Records of Home Mission and Evangelism', MARC 9863, Box 9. The covenants were waived if the building was demolished which would increase the value from \pounds 50, 000 to \pounds 60, 000

⁸² 'Minutes of a Meeting of the DCA', 16 November 1960, MPO.

⁸³ Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation* (London: Church House, 1985).

programme after concerns about urban poverty were expressed from ministers working in the cities.⁸⁴ But the problem still remained: it was difficult to adapt existing buildings and they drained resources.

The City and Town Centre Review Group, therefore, presumed the maintenance of an urban presence but participants were anxious that 'adverts of our weakness, like Bristol and Bradford cannot be repeated.'⁸⁵ Between 1986 and 1988, they gathered written and oral evidence as described in Chapter Two. Local area was imperative. At Manchester, Oldham Street, 'once a thriving shopping centre' had 'become a downtown street surrounded by warehouses and second-class shops, and amusement arcades and sex shops.'⁸⁶ At Birmingham, redevelopment rendered Corporation Street less of a thoroughfare. One worker described an introduction to the area given by the incumbent minister:

[He] said to me 'just come out and stand on Corporation Street' and it was interesting that the traffic would come down the road to the roundabout above us or up the road to the roundabout below us but we were no longer central, we were a little off the beaten track...roads were being built that did not bring people in wanting shops.⁸⁷

Reiterating the previous commission, the review noted that the central missions were placed under the microscope because of the relative costs in maintaining the property compared to the national picture. It stopped short of advocating any concrete policies. Once site value and location were taken into consideration, two major alternatives to the status quo are suggested: either embark upon further redevelopment or else create a ministry without buildings.⁸⁸

Conversely, Halls that were once bright, warm and attractive become costly, cold and difficult to manage. But some sense of their social value persisted. Most refurbishments ensured a greater amount of space devoted to lettings and community facilities a fact increasingly turned into a positive as it 'has more advantages than financial. The church is able to make

⁸⁴ See Niall Cooper, *All Mapped Out?: A Critical Evaluation of the Methodist Mission Alongside the Poor Programme* (Manchester: William Temple Foundation, 1991).For an overview of Methodism's recent policy on cities see: The Methodist Church and NCH Action for Children, *The Cities: A Methodist Report* (London: NCH Action for Children, 1997), 35 -9.

⁸⁵ Letter from Ron Crewes to the City and Town Centre Review Group, 27 September 1987; 'Records of Home Mission and Evangelism', MARC 9863, Box 3.

⁸⁶ Ross Peart 'Introducing the city centre church' in Home Mission Division, *Mission to the City: The Role of the City Centre Church – a Study Guide for Ministers and Church Members* (Central Buildings, London: The Methodist Church Home Mission Division, 1983), 8.

⁸⁷ Private Interview, 25.

⁸⁸ Tony Holden, In the Streets of the City, 1988, 22.

contact with a great number of people by virtue of the fact that they use church premises.' ⁸⁹ Of the refurbishment at the Champness Memorial Hall in Rochdale, the minister John J. Vincent recalled that:

After seven years of knocking walls down and building offices, we had the Ecumenical Centre, the Lonely Hearts, the Samaritans, the Pakistanis, the Youth Centre, the Play Centre, the Disabled, the Advice Centre, and a Residential Community. By the end of the time they used to say there were more Muslims than Methodists going to John Vincent's place.⁹⁰

Indeed, the existing missions, particularly those in London, have benefited from an influx of ethnic minorities. Most of the Missions boast the existence of at least one foreign speaking Methodist congregation. At the King's Hall in Southall, services are held in Urdu and Hindi. Integrating congregations was not always an easy process. The worshipping styles of an elderly British congregation could be very different to that of younger, male immigrants from Caribbean or African backgrounds. Deep-seated racism forced many out of the Church.⁹¹ Indeed, at a small sample of Central Halls, attendance amongst black males was markedly low.⁹² However, Methodism in London is increasingly multi-cultural.⁹³ At Westminster, there is a significant increase in the Ghanaian fellowship, drawn to it as the symbolic home of Methodism, although many other halls have equally benefitted from this.⁹⁴ The space in Central Halls is also much used by other Christian organisations, usually Pentecostal or Charismatic groups, who are able to rent rooms. However, the Methodist Church will only permit Sunday worship on their premises if that organisation is Christian.

The Picture Today

In 2001, the Methodist Church owned thirty-one Central Hall sites. Of these, seven have since been sold.⁹⁵ Of the remaining twenty-six, seven central missions still operate from the site but the original building has been demolished. Nineteen have experienced drastic alteration but remain externally recognisable to the original build so maintaining a link to the

⁸⁹ Home Mission Division, Mission to the City, 1983

 ⁹⁰ John J. Vincent, 'Strategies for Mission', *New City Special*, 1, November 1977, 2. Copy provided by the author.
 ⁹¹ Heather Walton, Robin Ward and Mark Johnson, *A Tree God Planted: Black People in British Methodism* (London: Ethnic Minorities in Methodism Working Group, 1985).

⁹² Ibid., 21.

 ⁹³ Brian Frost, *Pioneers of Social Passion: London's Cosmopolitan Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 2006), 202 – 213.
 ⁹⁴ Mattia Fumanti, 'Virtuous Citizenship, Ethnicity and Encapsulation among Akan Speaking Ghanaian Methodists in London', *African Diaspora*, 3/1 (2010), 13-42.

⁹⁵ The Methodist Church Resourcing Mission, *Decennial Statistical Returns for Methodist Chapels* (Manchester: Resourcing Mission Office, 2001), 21 – 148.

past while re-ordering the interior to meet the present. Of the ninety-nine halls documented only nineteen survive with sufficient integrity to be listed.

Those in Methodist use have exploited their commercial potential which often means substantial sharing of their premises with other organisations. A recent £6 million refurbishment of Westminster Central Hall reorganised the space to reflect contemporary patterns of use. Funded by proceeds from hosting the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, the former bank premises was converted into a chapel, while the fixed tip-up seating in the main hall was dispensed with in favour of movable chairs to increase its flexibility as a conference venue.⁹⁶ In 2005, Westminster was granted a licence to sell alcohol on the premises except those areas were worship activities take place. The retraction of almost 150 years of Methodist tradition exercised a wider debate about the viability of Westminster Central Hall. One letter to the *Methodist Recorder* suggested selling the asset, to turn 'property into people' and divert funds towards training ministers, deacons and laypeople for mission.⁹⁷ Such views illustrate a long held conception amongst Methodists that people matter, not buildings. Perhaps, the letter writer suggests, premises could be rented.

Like all points of view there are opposing arguments. Their position is strategic. Then minister at Queen Street Central Hall in Scarborough, Peter Shilling, argued that to 'withdraw from the Westminster Central Hall site and we will never again get back in and we will be sending out a strong signal that Methodism has had its day.'⁹⁸ The solution at Westminster was found in a separate company to market and manage its commercial use, so freeing up ministerial staff to commit to worship and mission. The money gained from rental purposes is reinvested back into church work.

Where known, nineteen of those sold have been reinterpreted for new uses. They are considered assets to their local context: architecturally and socially. Around one-third remain as a community resource. At Grimsby, the acoustical properties of the main hall see it in use for local organ recitals and concerts. It is managed by a charitable trust. Similarly, when Nottingham's Albert Hall closed in 1985, the local council found £350, 000 towards restoration. It is now a concert and conference hall with the original Binns organ performing

⁹⁶ 'Methodist Central Hall: Chapel Revamp at the Heart of Westminster', *Church Building*, 83 (2003), 32-7.

⁹⁷ Revd. Norwyn E. Denny, 'Property into People', *The Methodist Recorder*, 24 February 2000, 12.

⁹⁸ Revd. Peter Shilling 'Future of Westminster Central Hall, *The Methodist Recorder*, 9 March 2000, 11.

regularly to the people of Nottingham as Jesse Boot intended. In Southampton and Rochdale, the memory of the building as a church is maintained in their use by other Christian organisations. Indeed, the latter was bought by a property developer who had previously been a member of the Methodist Mission in order preserve the building. At least one non-Christian organisation use the premises: Prospect Hall in Bradford is a Sikh Gurdwara.

In several cases, the central location has seen the building become part of a wider regeneration strategy. Eastbrook Hall in Bradford enjoyed a high profile restoration after dereliction by fire in 1996 and gained the support of the Princes Regeneration Trust. The $\pounds 12$ million pound project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, opened in 2009 as a mixed use development of flats, offices and shops. A rare salvage operation restored the Grade II listed façade saving eighty per cent of the original stonework.⁹⁹ The lettings manager claims that: 'Eastbrook Hall is our most popular development, especially with the international students. They all ask for it. It's a landmark and the launch was well-publicised.'¹⁰⁰

As property developers in the 1960s realised, these central locations can be exploited for commercial gain. In Liverpool and Cork, the Halls house shops in the main building in addition to the front. Albert Hall, Manchester became a public house after changing ownership enough times to circumvent the covenants restricting such use.

Conclusion

The interesting thesis advanced by Robin Gill suggests that management of material resources turned religious groups inwards.¹⁰¹ Certainly, the reality of declining congregations impacts upon the ability to properly conserve their buildings. However, the preceding chapter demonstrates that closure does not necessarily follow declining membership. Those Central Halls that continue in Methodist ownership have been capable of exploiting a wide range of funds to adapt their buildings as well as accepting the increased sharing of their premises with other organisations. In part, the original design and intention of the Halls has encouraged this pragmatic attitude and the ability to continue to remain with open doors.

⁹⁹ 'Prince of Wales opens Eastbrook Hall Restoration', *Building Design Online*, 27 November 2008, http://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/prince-of-wales-opens-eastbrook-hall-restoration/3128729.article. Accessed:
2 December 2008.

¹⁰⁰ 'Flats almost full at Bradford's Eastbrook Hall', The Telegraph and Argus, 8 January 2010.

¹⁰¹ Robin Gill, The 'Empty Church' Revisited, 2001.

The following six case study chapters interrogate the key themes of the national picture and relate them to the specific contexts that frame such changes. They represent a range of eventual adaptive outcomes and will allow for a more thorough account of the relationship between the buildings, its users and the experience of decline.

PART THREE

Chapter 6: Manchester (1886)



Figure 6.1: Manchester Central Hall Exterior Photograph, c. 1950s Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.

The Development of a Practical Idea

^cCentral Buildings' in Manchester was the first of the hybrid building type described in the previous two chapters and it gave birth to a successful religious and social mission that drew admirers from around the globe.¹ It was an experiment and therefore the details of its birth are crucial to the narrative. The story begins in 1874 when the WCC requested Conference to authorise better suited administrative accommodation and was instructed to confer with the trustees of the Oldham Street Chapel. Opened in 1781 by John Wesley, the days of its fashionable congregation had faded into the memory.² While the Manchester district contained some of the wealthiest Wesleyan chapels in the country, they had left the city centre for suburban residences taking their precious funds with them and building new chapels. The old sanctuary became dilapidated and attendance dwindled.

This contrasted with a vibrant city centre predominantly composed of commercial, civic and cultural space.³ Land prices in the central district were high, ensuring that only institutions and commerce could financially compete.⁴ By day, Oldham Street was a bustling thoroughfare with tailors and drapery shops attracting ladies. By evening, particularly Sundays, the street attracted the young who paraded up and down in the hope of attracting members of the opposite sex. Numerous public houses added to the attraction and the area was also known for prostitution.⁵

Utilitarians argued that the valuable city centre site should be sold to fund new churches in the suburbs. Others were less than happy to leave a site that had so much Methodist history attached to it. By 1875, a document entitled 'Oldham Street Chapel – What Shall be Done With It?' circulated amongst North West Methodists that attempted to appease both camps. It urged the retention of the site with alternative premises: a Methodist club to foster a spirit of reciprocity across a religious constituency that had become disparate as they dispersed.

¹ William H. Crawford, *The Church and the Slum*, 1908, 17 – 46. F. E. Hamer, *After Twenty-Five Years: The Story of Evangelism and Social Reform in Connection with the Manchester and Salford Mission* (Manchester: Foulkes, Hall and Walker, c. 1911), 9.

² Clive D. Field, 'The Social Structure of English Methodism', 1977, 204.

³ Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture*, 2000.

⁴ John J. Parkinson Bailey, *Manchester: An Architectural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 117–19; H. B. Rodgers, 'The Suburban Growth of Victorian Manchester', *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, 58 (1962), 1-12.

⁵ Jenny Birchall, 'The Social Lives of a Street: Oldham Street, Manchester in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twenty-first Centuries (University of Manchester: Ph.D. thesis, 2005).

Containing a small chapel, offices for the Wesleyan Chapel Committee, a library and a large public hall it would be suitable for gatherings for Wesleyans drawn to Manchester on business. As to the financing of such an enterprise: 'a suitably imposing elevation... [will] yield a large annual rental, ample enough to provide the estimated endowment, and to keep all the premises in good condition.⁶

Conference approved the scheme in 1879 but an economic downturn made the Trustees question the wisdom of pursuing the experiment.⁷ One anonymous minister, from within the district, thought the experiment to be folly. In a letter to the *Methodist Times* he wrote that: 'as an ordinary place of worship there are not the conditions of success. The population around it is very, very small...we cannot work miracles and build up a living church out of shops and warehouses.'⁸

In the meantime, the discovery of embezzlement at the WCC forced the resignation of the Revd. Edwin Tindall.⁹ This left the Revd. Dr. Henry J. Pope (1836 – 1912) as sole secretary and this man, close friends with Hugh Price Hughes and part of the Forward Movement, was determined to see the project through to completion. To leave city centre Manchester would have been an advertisement of failure.¹⁰ He called on influential allies. The MP and textile manufacturer, Sir Isaac Hoyle, pointed to the success of the American evangelists Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey. In addition, an increasing concern for the poor saw the development of the idea that building could be more than just a city centre club for suburban Wesleyans. Instead, Pope began to promote the idea of a secular building that would not charge pew rents and where:

people who do not know what the Gospel means, and who therefore hate Chapels, may be met in public halls, and if they receive the truth there, they will afterwards find their way to the sanctuaries of their own localities. The object will not be to found a central Church of non-residents in the hall, but to feed all the Churches by the special agency at work in the hall.¹¹

⁶ Revd. John Bedford, *Oldham Street Chapel: What Shall Be Done With It?*, January 1875, 2. Kindly provided by E. Alan Rose, Wesley Historical Society (Lancashire and Cheshire Branch).

⁷ 'The Trustees of the Oldham Street Chapel, Minute Book, 1880 – 1884', MALS, M196/7/2/1, 2 May 1881.
⁸ Reprinted in 'Oldham Street Chapel, Manchester', *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 August 1880, 9.

⁹ John Horton was the trusted head clerk who escaped to Canada with his illicit gains. See 'Police Intelligence', *The Manchester Guardian*, 1 January 1886, 7.

¹⁰ R. Martin Pope The Life of Henry J. Pope (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1913), 123-36.

¹¹ Henry J. Pope, A Letter to the Methodists of Lancashire and the Neighbourhood Respecting their Property in Oldham Street, 10 March 1885, 2. Kindly provided by E. Alan Rose of the Wesley Historical Society (Lancashire and Cheshire Branch).

Plans were prepared by George Woodhouse and displayed to the public in 1882.¹² A practicing Wesleyan in Bolton, his architectural practice designed mills and warehouses as far as North America as well as many nonconformist chapels in England. He came second in the competition to design Bolton Town Hall (1873) but the assessors preferred his planning and the eventual building married the winning design, by William H. Hill of Leeds, with Woodhouse' spatial layout.¹³ He was an obvious choice for the Manchester buildings: by religion and design he could combine a complicated building plan with sympathy for the main requirements of the Wesleyans.¹⁴ Woodhouse died in 1883 but had the foresight to enter an agreement with William J. Morley of Bradford who looked after the firm until Woodhouse' son, George Herbert, came of age in 1885. The younger Woodhouse and Morley formed the partnership attributed with seeing the adaptations through to completion in 1886.

Initial estimates of £20, 000 soon began to rise after building commenced. Local bye-laws required better fire-proofing and means of exit. Wooden corridor floors were replaced by concrete; the gallery in the main hall was strengthened and an additional entrance provided on Dale Street. An ancient right of lights was invoked which resulted in legal fees and compensation to an aggrieved Mr Heywood. Moreover, the trustees agreed to pay £9,000 in compensation to the Oldham Street circuit for their premises.

Funders of the scheme aspired to a certain image. George Cooper, who made his money in the wholesale of straw hats in nearby Church Street, had underwritten the mortgage for the property. In May 1885 he sent a letter to the Trustees promising to pay half the cost towards stone cladding instead of naked brick, something he had been trying to persuade those in charge of the purse strings to do for six months.¹⁵ Even the general contractor, Lewis C. Webster, agreed to subscribe £50 towards the cost of stone. However some economies were made: a proposed tower over the main entrance was dispensed with, saving £1, 321.¹⁶ The polished stone building had little ornamentation except for some simple relief carvings

¹² 'The Wesleyan Property in Oldham Street: Proposed New Premises', *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 January 1882,6.

¹³ 'Death of Mr George Woodhouse', The Bolton Weekly Journal and District News, 8 September 1883, 3.

¹⁴ The original building plans are in too fragile a condition to consult.

¹⁵ 'The Trustees of the Oldham Street Chapel Minute Book, 1884 – 1907', The Methodist Church Property Office (hereafter TMCPO), 14 May 1885.

¹⁶ 'The Trustees of Oldham Street Chapel', MALS, M196/7/2/1, 22 December 1882.

described as an 'appropriate design'.¹⁷ Appropriate included scallop shells: a feature of the Wesley coat of arms (Figure 6. 2). The gable end protruded slightly over Dale Street, a feature thought to indicate the large public hall inside should anyone be confused by the lack of a spire or cross (Figure 6.3).

The main entrance on Oldham Street opened up into an entrance hall enriched with pilasters, panels and a marbled mosaic floor. A twenty-foot wide corridor contained two spacious stone staircases, to the left and right, lighted by stained glass windows. A morning chapel, with 148 seats, was provided at ground floor level and made full provision for sacramental worship with a pulpit, semi-circular communion rail and pews. It was intended for the regular worshippers who met on Sunday mornings and the size reflects the belief that that a consistent congregation could not be gathered in the city. In practice, the regular congregation outgrew the chapel within months and began holding services in the main hall while that room was used for class meetings. This was the first and only mention of a designated space reserved for devotional purposes in a Central Hall until 1934.

The original plans are considered too fragile to consult but the GOAD Fire Insurance Map in figure 6.4 shows the organ loft which suggests that the amphitheatre main hall was located towards the rear. This left the front section for commercial exploitation with the offices for the WCC to the second floor. This hall was the location of special Sunday afternoon and evening services intended to reach out to 'the sensual; cynical, ungodly crowds'.¹⁸ The open pitch pine roof was carried by slim, cast iron pillars. At the very least, the acoustics and sight lines of an amphitheatre ensured that the main requirement was fulfilled: everyone could see and hear the preacher. Between 1, 200 and 1, 600 people could be seated on pitch pine pews with moulded bench ends; twelve deep at the sides and fourteen deep at the ends (Figure 6.5). The pews nearest the platform were moveable to increase the flexibility of the room and provide a more intimate space for smaller gatherings. A wide corridor with accessible 'enquiry' rooms provided a further barricade between the hall and the noise of Oldham Street.

¹⁷ WCCAR, 1886, 165.

¹⁸ 'New Methodist Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester', The Methodist Times, 14 May 1885, 314.



Figure 6.2: Decorative work over a window, 2006. Source: The Methodist Centre.



Figure 6.3: Architectural drawing of Manchester Central Hall by George Woodhouse, 1883. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.



Figure 6.4: Oldham Street with Central Hall marked. Source: GOAD Fire Insurance Plans c. 1891 © Digital Archives Association.

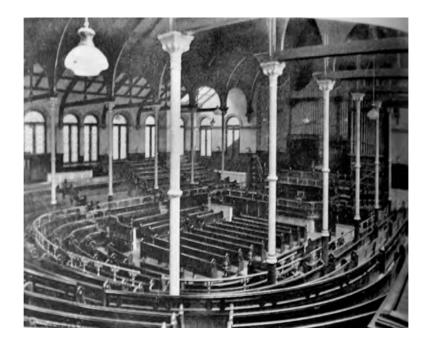


Figure 6.5: Interior view of Manchester Central Hall with organ. Source: Manchester Archives and Local Studies.



Figure 6.6:Undated postcard of the Main Hall, c. 1898 - 1913. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.

A platform replaced the pulpit with an octagonal organ loft included. It was not until 1913 that the trustees could afford to provide the instrument, designed by Jardine and Company, for $\pounds 1$, 096.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the opportunity was taken to accompany hymn singing with an orchestra and choir and was found to be popular with the working classes.²⁰ The postcard in figure 6.6 shows three stained glass window panels as a replacement backdrop to the platform. Added in 1898, these depicted the parables of the lost son, the lost coin and the lost sheep with the dictum 'the Lord God omnipotent reigneth here'. So the interior has some modest religious elements while the external elevations had none.

A light and airy library and reading room, with ornamental roof and skylight, were to be found on the third floor along with the caretaker's accommodation. Plentiful lavatories provided further comfort. The main hall was ventilated by inlet tubes with air extracted through ventilators in the roof. Electric lighting was introduced in 1895. It was meant to be bright and welcoming. The furnishings and leisure activities in club rooms evoked domesticity: a 'home from home' and a sanctuary for those whose own home may have been overcrowded.²¹ Figure 6.7 shows the parlour room in 1938 with its rugs, lamps and pictures on the wall and the first annual report of the Mission was quick to make the distinction clear: 'in the wintertime especially, the contrast between the cold, damp streets, and the warmth and brightness of the spacious, well-lighted and comfortable hall, must have at once been felt.'²²

Completed at an actual cost of £43, 174, bazaars, public meetings, subscriptions, public collections and sale of fixtures from the old chapel raised a little over £14, 000. The WCC contributed £4, 000 to the capital sum and agreed to pay £100 per year towards maintenance. The Star Life Assurance Company provided a £15, 000 mortgage offset against the value of the rental income. The Oldham Road circuit and the WCC offered further loans; both charging four per cent interest and therefore making their own shrewd investments. At the end of 1887, the trust account showed a debt of £26, 364 and in

¹⁹ 'Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester: N10778', The National Pipe Organ Register,

<http://npor.rcm.ac.uk/cgi-bin/Rsearch.cgi?Fn=Rsearch&rec_index=N10778> Accessed: 25 November 2008. ²⁰ The Manchester and Salford Wesleyan Methodist Mission (hereafter MSM), *The First Annual Report of the Manchester and Salford Wesleyan Methodist Mission* (Manchester: Foulkes, Hall and Walker, 1888), 8.

²¹ MSM, *The First Annual Report of the Manchester and Salford Mission* (Manchester: Foulkes, Hall and Son, 1888), 17 – 21.

²² MSM, The First Annual Report, 1888, 8.



Figure 6.7: Girls serving in the parlour room Source: Manchester Archives and Local Studies.

subsequent years the largest expenditure on the trust account was 'interest'. It was not until 1919 that the debt was paid off by a legacy.

The Central Hall was held in trust on behalf of the Connexion. The thirty trustees, mainly businessmen, were drawn from Bolton, Macclesfield, Liverpool and Manchester to demonstrate that this building was of regional interest. Their commercial acumen influenced the financial model. All seats for Sunday services in the main hall were to be free and unreserved, so the building became the alternative source of revenue.

Seven self-contained shops were included with show rooms along the Oldham and Dale Street facades and basement storage below. They were independent but, optimistically, could be reunited with the rest of the building should the church in future require the space more than the rent.²³ When not in use, the trustees also permitted the main hall to be let for charitable and philanthropic meetings at preferential rates. However, caveats were placed on the leases: under no circumstances were political meetings or alcohol to be allowed on the premises.

'A Pool of Bethesda'

Social welfare was viewed as a means to win converts to faith but religion could also alleviate poverty by teaching thrift and temperance.²⁴ The Manchester and Salford Wesleyan Lay Mission, established in1872, provided remedial social work with little derivative success in conversions.²⁵ A newly formed Central Mission effectively rented Central Hall from the trustees. Their monetary contribution was negligible: allowed free use of the premises in lieu of the trust paying an annual grant towards their upkeep. Samuel Collier (1885 – 1921) was the untried minister appointed to head the enterprise and specifically chosen to avoid a celebrated preacher attracting existing members. He set about implementing his 'practical' and 'aggressive Christianity' which provided spiritual sustenance through the preaching of the Gospel. Other activities aspired to nurture healthy bodies as well as souls: free tea and buns were as essential as free seats and sermons.

Novel methods were used to reach those thought to be indifferent to religion and the design and layout of the building helped to achieve these ends. The Mission was nondenominational: Collier promoted the building as having an ever-open door so making it a public building as well as sacred space. Certainly, the description of the plan is suggestive of a town hall rather than a church and the Mission defined its work in a language of citizenship. Social work was based on 'need, not creed' and vagrant souls were saved and converted to be 'presented to the community as a brand new citizen' (Figure 6.8).²⁶

Equally, the building emulated the tactics of public houses and music halls. Goose clubs, through which the poor saved for a parcel of food at Christmas, were initiatives traditionally based in public houses and Mission workers were proud to announce that their club 'had

²³ The Methodist Times, 14 May 1885, 314.

²⁴ Frank K. Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service*, 2006 and Margueritte Dupree, 'The Provision of Social Services' in Martin Daunton (ed.) *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: 1840 – 1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 351 – 394.

²⁵ George Jackson, Collier of Manchester: A Friend's Tribute (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), 51.

²⁶ The Manchester Guardian, 10 November, 1910, 9.



Figure 6.8: The logo of the Manchester and Salford Mission. Source: Manchester Archives and Local Studies.

practically annihilated the public-house club in the Mission area'.²⁷ The main hall also allowed for a popular Saturday concert entertaining with a mix of both secular and sacred songs. Two pence secured a seat in the gallery and one penny for the floor and at every interval stewards encouraged people to sign a pledge of abstinence against alcohol. The moving power of images and film was recognised with occasional silent films shown from 1898.²⁸ Ten years later the mission upgraded to its own cinema projection equipment cinema shows. Other measures included brass band marching with a well-trained and spiritually prepared 'button-hole brigade' who collared people outside gin-palaces and public houses to invite them to the services.

²⁷ MSM, Annual Report of the Manchester and Salford Mission, 1907 – 8, 106.

²⁸ William Shenton, 'Manchester's First Cinemas 1896 - 1914', *The Manchester Region History Review*, 4/2, 1990/91,
7.

Along with evangelism, social work played a central role using the charitable services of women. 'Sisters of the People' were drawn from a variety of backgrounds and undertook much of the district visitation and social work. Deaconesses, ordained women who also took on responsibility for preaching, ably supported the team of ministers. Central Hall provided enough space for the administration of a large social work enterprise that promoted Methodist ideals of thrift, temperance and piety. Room 'number eight' was the hub of this enterprise where a Sister assessed and processed all cases asking for help (Figure 6.9). It was located next to the minister's office should a Sister be unable to decide on the right course of action, the minister was consulted and his word final.

The building attracted a wide cross-section of people, mainly from the respectable working classes of artisans and skilled workers although the very poor were also attracted. Roger 'Gipsy' Smith, a famous preacher hired by the Mission for use throughout the district, describes a congregation that totalled:

Three hundred to six hundred people [and] consisted of bookmakers, gamblers, drunkards, harlots and thieves. ...I do not know of anybody except Mr. Collier who could have managed such a congregation. His method was to give them a lantern lecture; to seize their attention by means of the pictures, and get in the Gospel when he could.²⁹

Even larger numbers of destitute men attended a weekly dinner in the basement: 'the dismal procession of 600 or 700...showed the living presence of Christ as no words could do.'³⁰ For businessmen Collier introduced Tuesday afternoon services specifically aimed at reminding those in town for Exchange Day to remind them of the importance of applying Christian principles to their commercial endeavours. Sermons were given by preachers from a range of Protestant denominations and attendance was similarly mixed. This provided a source of publicity and donations.

In its multiple uses the building signified a changing relationship between ministers and people. A series of Sunday afternoon lectures in 1903 interrogated the notion 'Is Christianity True?' Lectures in the main hall were followed up by a conference between mission workers and working men in the adjoining enquiry rooms. Here, ministerial staff thought that:

²⁹ Gipsy Smith, His Life and Work, By Himself (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1909), 187.

³⁰ Ibid.

The safe entrenchment of the pulpit has its own uses, but it is intensely suspect with many whom we want to reach. There are thoughtful and not unsympathetic men by the thousand who would gladly listen to a presentation of Christian truth which comes to them, not on authority, but as the frank appeal of mind to mind, with every opportunity of serious question in reply.³¹

Central Hall became too small for these purposes.³² Overspill services were held in St James' Theatre (1887) then St James' Hall (1888) before moving to Free Trade Hall (1889). Failing chapels in areas such as Hulme, Ancoats and Salford were acquired and developed a similar blend of popular entertainment, clubs, simple services and relief work. In 1891, the Mission opened a men's home in Ancoats. This was followed by a Maternity Home in Chorlton-on-Medlock (1892) and a Women's Night Shelter (1899) on Great Ancoats Street, the latter also designed by Walter R. Sharp (Figure 6.10). In 1903, the architect J. Gibbons Sankey planned a new Mens' Home and Labour Yard on Hood Street in Ancoats.³³ Both lodging houses in Ancoats followed the socially uplifting Elizabethan architecture of the Victoria Hall in Ancoats described in Chapter Three. By 1908, Central Hall had acquired an additional thirteen premises across Manchester (Figure 6.11).

Most of these additions were the result of generous donations by wealthy and interested Wesleyan laymen impressed by the work. A site on Peter Street, later to become the Albert Hall and Aston Institute (1911), was purchased for £23, 500 to provide a permanent building for the Free Trade Hall congregation (Figure 6.12). The main hall for 2, 500 was combined with rooms for institutional premises. A legacy left by Edward Aston, a merchant and local magistrate, provided the funds for the cost of £63, 370. The sum total left by Aston was estimated to be £100, 000 and it also paid off Central Hall's debt as well as leaving monies to the WCC for chapel building.³⁴

The Mission ran an extensive advertising publicity campaign, through newspapers and magazines, to generate funds. On the general expenditure advertising costs are second only to

³¹ J. H. Moulton (ed.) Is Christianity True? A Series of Lectures Delivered in the Central Hall, Manchester (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1903), vi.

³² 'The Manchester and Salford Mission', Manchester Faces and Places, 11/10, October 1900, 155 – 159.

³³ Both the Womens' Night Shelter and the Mens' Home have recently been restored. The Women's Night Shelter, known locally as the 'Derros building' was developed by, amongst others, the Manchester Methodist Housing Association.

³⁴ 'The Late Mr E. Aston Munificent Bequests to Methodist Institutions', 18 October 1907, *The Manchester Guardian*, 6.

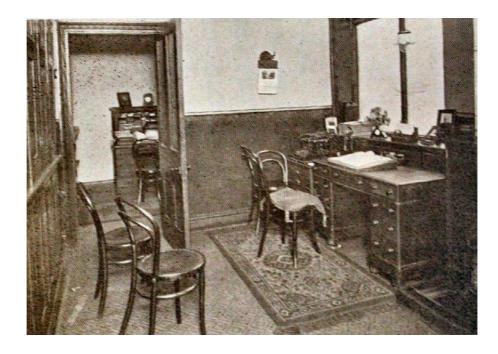


Figure 6.9: Room 'number eight'. Source: Manchester Archives and Local Studies.



Figure 6.10: The Women's Night Shelter on Hood Street in 1900. Source: Manchester Archives and Local Studies

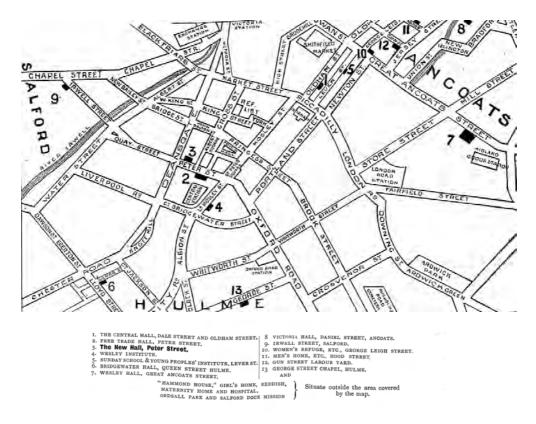


Figure 6.11: Map of the Mission premises from the Annual Report of the Manchester and Salford Wesleyan Mission, 1908 Source: Manchester Archives and Local Studies.



Figure 6.12: The Albert Hall and Aston Institute by W. J. Morley and Sons (1912). Source: Author.

Year	Number of	Number of
	Members	Halls/Chapels
1887	87	1
1892	953	3
1900	3097	5
1922	3462	8
1928	3612	8
1932	3566	9
1944	2604	9
1947	2407	9
1964	2867	7
1974	2063	5
1983	1585	5

Table 6.1: Members of the MSM and the number of halls.

Source: 1887 -1947, MSM Annual Report; 1964 -1983; Central Mission Statistics, MARC 9863, Box One.

gas and electric.³⁵ Collier and his band of workers addressed Wesleyan congregations throughout Greater Manchester. A visible presence of the Mission in suburban eyes was maintained by these means. Lists of subscribers, with the amount given, were published every year in the annual reports. While this may have enhanced the image of certain wealthy philanthropists, all sums were published no matter how small. This was used to emphasise that up to three-quarters of the funds were generated from people who attended the Central Hall: whether for religious, social or commercial purposes.³⁶ The Mission's status as a charity also meant that its funds had to be transparent.

The headquarters on Oldham Street were described as 'a pool of Bethesda' and 'a veritable hive of good works'.³⁷ Within twenty years, membership grew to over three thousand but it is the numbers accessing the premises throughout the week that is impressive. The Annual Report of 1909 documents 45, 000 people per year asking for social work help. This was in addition to the thirty-three prayer meetings, ten bible classes, 118 fellowship meetings, fifty-two open air services, twenty cottage meetings, nine band marches as well as midnight meetings, popular concerts and educational classes. The Free Trade Hall congregation attracted 4, 000 people to two Sunday evening services and Sunday scholars exceeded 4, 000. Samuel Collier was the controller of this philanthropic and religious empire. He managed a voluntary staff numbering 2, 500 as well as raising the funds to cover daily expenses amounting to over $\pounds 1$ million p.a. today.³⁸ A two volume book of condolence stands as testament to his remarkable achievement: most of the entries note his enthusiasm and organisation.³⁹

One lady, who spent her early life in Moss Side near the city centre, told me that her father was saved from alcohol and she travelled three miles by tram to attend the Central Hall for worship and the numerous weekly activities.⁴⁰ She commented upon the noise and the bustle – particularly at the annual swimming festival held at the Victoria Baths, where the various

³⁵ The statement of accounts is published annually in the Wesleyan Methodist Conference Agendas between 1886 and 1968. A complete set is held by the MPO.

³⁶ c.f. Peter Shapely 'Charity, Status and Leadership: Charitable Image and the Manchester Man', *Journal of Social History*, 32/1 (1998), 157 – 77 and Alan Kidd, 'Charity Organisations and the Unemployed in Manchester, 1870 – 1914', *The Journal of Social History*, 9/1 (1984), 45 – 66.

³⁷ 'The Central Hall, Manchester and its superintendent the Rev S. F. Collier', *Manchester Faces and Places*, 11/10 (1900), 90.

³⁸ MSM, Annual Report of the Manchester and Salford Mission, 1907 – 8, 106.

³⁹ 'Rev S. F. Collier: In Memorium, Letters and Testimonials', 2 vols, 1921, MALS, M196/10/4/3/2.

⁴⁰ Personal Interview, 19.

branches of the Mission would compete for prizes. Up until 1935, the Mission was busy, active and of recognised social value to the city of Manchester. But congregations were about to enter a long decline, and change was on the horizon.

After 1945

The superintendent minister of the Manchester and Salford Mission declared that it was 'now at rock bottom' citing population dispersal and the breaking of habits during the War as the main causes.⁴¹ Central Hall had sustained a direct hit towards the rear of the site from an incendiary bomb during a German air-raid attack in 1941 which obliterated the main hall. Only the basement and a portion onto Oldham Street remained intact. But, it was to be rebuilt and the 1954 reconstruction follows the recommendations given in the *Methodist Church Builds Again* described in Chapter Four.

The architects, Halliday and Agate, worked within the limitations of the remaining walls. Comparing the description of the arrangement of the rooms in the original 1886 building with the plans displayed in figures 6.14 to 6.17 indicates a close correlation between the two designs but with a main hall whose capacity was half that of the original. The design cues are taken from the theatre with six hundred tip-up seats arranged on the ground floor section and tiered back gallery. Floor, platform and lower wall panelling was a mix of dark mahogany, sycamore and light idigbo. The acoustic panels around the skylight and platform were modelled upon the same type used for the similar reinstatement of Free Trade Hall (1951). Fixtures and furnishings were designed to be flexible. Figure 6.18 shows the triptych hung at the rear of the platform which remained closed during secular activities but opened up to show a Cross during worship. A communion table was placed in front of the platform on a dais both of which could be dismantled. Fixed pews were replaced with tip-up seating, moveable on the ground floor. For the DCA, the new hall indicated 'a striking illustration of the manner in which present day taste can be used to produce an atmosphere of reverence and worship.'⁴²

⁴¹ MSM, Minutes of a Quarterly Meeting, 16 March 1945, MALS, M196/7/2/1/1.

⁴² DCA, Manchester, 1955, 25.

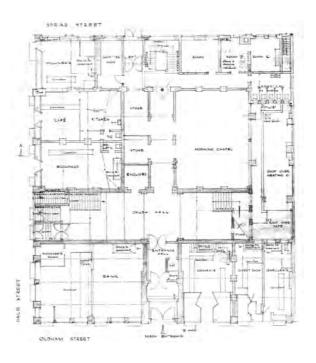


Figure 6.13: Ground floor plan of the reinstated hall. Source: Halliday Meecham.

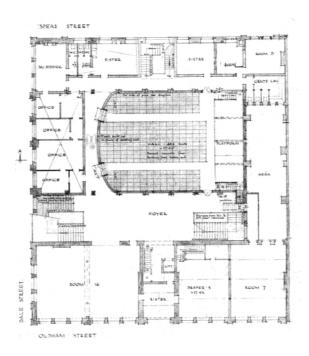


Figure 6.14: First floor plan of the reinstated hall. Source: Halliday Meecham.

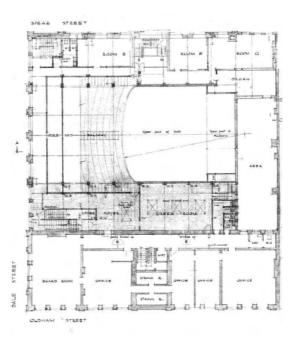


Figure 6.15: Second floor plan of the reinstated hall. Source: Halliday Meecham.

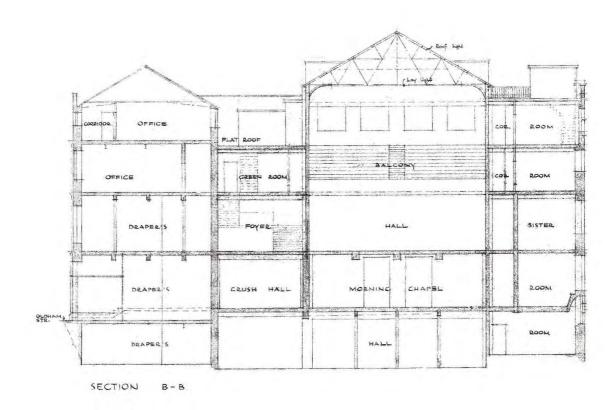


Figure 6.16: Section through the reinstated hall. Source: Halliday Meecham.



Figure 6.17: The reconstructed main hall interior. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.



Figure 6.18: The offices of the Chapel Committee after reconstruction. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.

The reconstruction of the central premises of the Mission began a period of streamlining resources. The Lodging Houses, Men's Home and Labour Yard were sold when the postwar Welfare State came into effect. But the memory of past commitments to social work saw the mission developing in new ways even when rationalising resources: a drug and alcohol rehabilitation unit was established in Chatterton Hey in 1969 with funding from both state and voluntary sources. But the newly refurbished headquarters did not halt declining membership and funds, even though the Albert Hall on Peter Street could still attract congregations of up to one thousand to the best attended service in 1960.⁴³ The opportunity had been taken to merge three churches into one at Trinity Ancoats. A similar policy was applied in Salford. It would now be used in the city centre.

Questioning

The difficulty was in deciding which one. The Albert Hall was a good candidate for retention with a membership of 560 to Central Hall's 250. However, other factors worked against it. Refurbishment in 1954 provided commercial lets to Peter Street but the main hall still accommodated 2, 500 and would require serious work to reduce the size. Albert Hall was also under threat of compulsory purchase as Manchester's police headquarters. Central Hall's tradition as a district wide gathering place and the flexibility of the refurbished premises worked in its favour.⁴⁴ The rental income and perceived difficulty in re-housing the Division of Property ensured its continuation. Further, it was believed that the site on Peter Street held much greater monetary value. The opening of the Arndale shopping centre nearby pulled trade from Oldham Street and reduced it as a focal point of social activity.⁴⁵

Those in favour of the move to Central Hall maintained that the Church could ill-afford to rest on past glories and large buildings. When the Albert Hall closed in 1971, numbers attending Central Hall rose slightly. Some people preferred to travel into the city rather than attending a suburban church. One member expressed a preference for: 'the wider and less insular fellowship of a city centre church'.⁴⁶ However, it proved a more difficult merger than

⁴³ 'Records of Home Mission and Evangelism', John Rylands University Library, Methodist Archives and Research Centre (hereafter MARC), MARC 9863, Box 1.

⁴⁴ 'Renewing the Structures of a City Mission', *Memorandum to Members of Leaders Meeting*, June 1970, MALS, M196/8/1/5/2,

⁴⁵ Jenny Birchall, 'The Social Lives of a Street', 2005, 69.

⁴⁶ Hazel Moore, 'Why I belong to the Methodist Centre' in *Orbit Magazine*, February 1980, 5. MALS, M196/7/3/7/8.

anticipated.⁴⁷ Many members of the Albert Hall dispersed and the downward trajectory across the Mission soon resumed. More rooms at Central Hall were offered to other users. Room 'number eight', the former hub of social work, was declined by Barclays Bank in 1972 and the billiards room of the men's club, now with a membership of two, proposed as extra accommodation for the Methodist Church's Division of Property.⁴⁸

The Albert Hall was on the market for sixteen years before it sold in 1987 for £250, 000. Its grade II listing in 1983 irked ministerial staff who wanted to see it demolished to make it the site more attractive to property developers.⁴⁹ Subsidising their social work was becoming too much of a burden and the mission argued that it was better to get rid of the building and reinvest the money back into people. Even with the money generated from its sale, the 1980s raised the question of selling Central Hall and following the population to suburbs reared its head yet again. The depopulation of Manchester accelerated from 1971 onwards.⁵⁰ One report given to the City and Town Centre Review Group appears to echo similar concerns to those facing Henry J. Pope when Central Hall was established, commenting that 'it may be that our work in the city centre has been of the flagship variety, making it difficult for us to contemplate failure.'⁵¹

Even so, Manchester Methodism in the 1980s was not as strong as in the 1880s. The remaining centres of Mission work were sold by 1986 The superintendent minister, Garth Rogers, writing to the City and Town Centre Review Group on Manchester's plans and future acknowledged continual population movement away from the city centre but cautioned against the closure of centrally located churches. Cities, he maintained, are sites of work, leisure and shopping. Inner city areas with remaining residents experienced markedly high levels of deprivation. It was vital to retain a city centre presence since:

It is assumed that missionary strategy is concerned with identifying where people will be likely to respond to the appeal of belonging to such a Church and planting it there...I

⁴⁷ Banks, *The Story*....So Far, 1986, 160.

⁴⁸ 'Property Management Committee Minutes', 19 May, 1975, MALS, M196/7/2/1/1.

⁴⁹ 'An Open Letter from Revd. John Banks to the Victorian Society', MALS, M196/10/4/2/24.

⁵⁰ See the analysis of Manchester as a 'shrinking city' in Ed Ferrari and Jonathone Roberts, 'The Re-growth of a shrinking city' in Philipp Misselwitz (Ed.) *Complete Works 1: Manchester/Liverpool*, Working Paper, *Shrinking Cities*, published online *http://www.shrinkingcities.com/fileadmin/shrink/downloads/pdfs/II.1_Studies1.pdf*, accessed 27 November 2009.

⁵¹ Garth Rogers 'Manchester: Plans and Futures', *Paper presented to the City and Town Centre Review Group*, MARC MA 9863, Box 3.

had believed our Methodist Calling is to go into 'all' the world and to those who need us most, not where possibilities of growth are greatest.⁵²

Under these terms, the Mission would focus on the centrality of the Hall as a basis for community and mission. This was achieved through wider use of the premise. Some internal reconfiguration was required to fulfil this and its protagonists thought that Manchester could again be the exemplar: of how a mission could exist without a gathered congregation.⁵³ The premises had to meet the needs of people who did use the city centre.

The basement area was readapted as a youth centre with the superintendent minister, Carl Howarth, soliciting advice from architecture students at the Manchester Polytechnic. How much influence they had on the design of the multi-functional space is unrecorded. It made provision for discos, lectures and was adaptable in anticipation of future changes in method. This happened sooner rather than later. It tried to emulate Manchester's vibrant late 1980s nightclub scene, but without drugs and alcohol. As recession hit, the church were unable to raise the funds to maintain it. A day centre for homeless men, with a separate entrance on Spear Street was similarly contained in the basement and inside the premises, a counselling suite was added.⁵⁴ Of the £30, 000 total cost, £9, 600 came from the Manchester Corporation and the Department of Education and Science.

The Methodist Church as Property Manager?

The present worshipping congregation numbers less than one hundred. Activity is focused on the ground floor chapel and café. The Tuesday midday service continues but is largely attended by an elderly group who value the fellowship it offers. The rest of the premises are rented out to a variety of different groups including the Property Office, residents associations, and the Girl Guides. A professional hall manager is employed to deal with maintenance and letting. Rentals cover maintenance costs and the employment of a permanent ministerial staff to minister to the needs of certain groups of people: the homeless, ex-offenders and the lonely. On Sundays, seven non-Methodist evangelical churches hire the premises for their religious services.

⁵² Garth Rogers, 'Manchester: Plans and Future', 4

⁵³Property Management Committee Minutes; 24 June, 1974; 19 May, 1975; 24 November, 1975; MLSA, M196/7/2/1/1.

⁵⁴ MSM, *Mission at the Centre: Brochure to Mark the Re-opening After Alterations* (Manchester: Manchester Central Hall, 1975).

The building is not listed since little of the original structure or interior remains. A modicum of protection is offered by its location in a conservation area. This holds advantages and disadvantages for the Central Hall. The building and street fabric are preserved and funds provided to ensure that the exterior remains in good condition. However, attempts by the church to give a more visible outward appearance to the building have met resistance from planners. When the old entrance canopy was removed in 2001, planning approval for a new canopy and a distinguishing white cross was denied. Its outward appearance remains modest belying the primary religious function of the building.

Conclusion

This chapter has covered the factors that led to the construction of the first of Methodism's Central Halls. Through canny advertising and sustained social work the Manchester and Salford Mission attracted large crowds well into the 1930s and occasionally beyond. Always more than a place of religious worship, the extent of its welfare agencies made it a Manchester institution. Many people were helped, both socially and spiritually, regardless of whether or not they eventually became members.

However, population movement and wider city developments changed the way in which the mission and church were used. From its reinstatement in the 1950s, the building continued to be modified in use to suit changing social and cultural practices. It is still busy, but now with those on site for work or leisure. This hybrid building type continues to shape its policy to reach outsiders albeit with less pomp than in the late nineteenth century. Many may have forgotten the extent of its work but the building remains in Methodist use. A versatile building type, it is widely used by the public on a daily basis. So, in an era where many churches have closed their doors, the business principles of the founders ensures that in Manchester the Central Hall building generates enough income to pay for the ongoing maintenance of the premises and a limited range of social work. To the extent that it remains resilient and still functioning as a religious hybrid space it can be judged to have attained some measure of success.

Chapter 7: Victoria Hall, Bolton (1900)

No Church can show a more humble and democratic spiritual grouping, here is the nucleus of the strength of the movement which swept the Western World, here in the classes I found straight speaking, earnest enquiry and sincere answer.¹

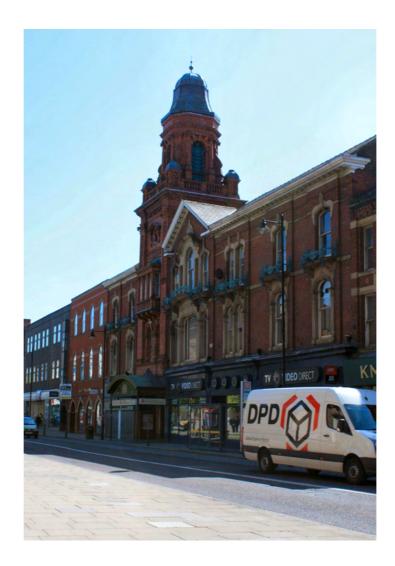


Figure 7.1: The Victoria Hall, Bolton, April 2009. Source: Author.

¹ Joseph Wilcox, 'Methodism Alive!', Mass Observation Worktown Project, BMA, Box 28, Reel 17.

Background

In 1748, John Wesley received a rather rough reception upon entering the Lancashire town of Bolton. In his journal he recorded that stones were thrown. 'The lions at Rochdale', he writes, 'were lambs in comparison to those at Bolton. Such rage and bitterness I scarcely ever saw before in any creatures that bore the form of men.'² Despite such inauspicious beginnings, the Methodist cause was well-established enough that he preached at the opening services of Bolton's first Methodist place of worship, the Ridgway Gates Chapel, in 1776. It lay on the banks of the River Croal, to the north of the town centre, surrounded by open fields.

One hundred years later, Bolton, like many Lancashire towns, had developed into a thriving hub based around the cotton industry. Migrants came from surrounding rural districts enlarging the population from 5, 339 in 1773 to 168, 000 in 1901.³ As the town centre expanded to accommodate growing residential and industrial needs, mills and warehouses formed huge structures, surrounded by a haphazard collection of streets and lanes. Friedrich Engels' paints a vivid image,

the older part of the town is especially ruinous and miserable. A dark-coloured body of water, which leaves the beholder in doubt as to whether it is a brook or a long string of stagnant puddles, flows through the towns and contributes its share to the total pollution of the air, by no means pure even without it.⁴

To effect change, municipal developments were triggered by the Bolton Improvement Act (1850). The first public library opened in 1853 followed by a Town Hall (1873) modelled after Leeds Town Hall with its imposing tower. A new Market Hall (1851 – 1855) graced the wide thoroughfare of Knowsley Street which became a main shopping area along with Bradshawgate and Deansgate. In 1860, the sewage committee cleaned and paved sections of the foul River Croal so evocatively described by Engels above. The river was now central to Bolton but the Ridgway Gates Chapel, with its associated graveyard, was to be found in a culde-sac.⁵

² Percy Livingstone Parker (ed.) The Journal of John Wesley (Chicago: Moody Press, 1951), 105.

³ C. H. Saxelby, Bolton Survey (London: Redwood Press, 1953), 80.

⁴ Friedrich Engels and Victor Kiernan, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Penguin, 1987 [1845]), 83.

⁵ Charles Deane Little, *The History and Romance of Our Mother Sunday School: 150 Years of Bolton Methodism* (Bolton: Coop, Hunt and Co., 1935).

Bolton enjoyed a vigorous religious life. Colloquially known as the 'Geneva of the North' on account of its support of Puritanism in the English Civil War, it was considered a Lancashire stronghold for dissent.⁶ The 1851 Religious Census showed thirty-six churches spread across fourteen denominations although attendance was similar to other urban areas at thirty-five per cent. Children attended Sunday school in large numbers as was common throughout Lancashire in the late Victorian period.⁷ Cultural interests were often religious in nature with annual celebrations such as Whitsuntide Walks and Sunday school anniversaries. Enthusiastic as the religious groups may have been, some leaders looked outside their church and were aware of the large share of the population who did not cross the threshold of a church.

Mr Thomas Walker was so sure of this fact that he commissioned a religious census of the town in 1895. Walker was a successful tanner who held numerous civic posts. In addition to being a councillor and magistrate, he was treasurer of the Wesleyan Home Mission Department, the Lancashire Branch of the National Children's Home and the Baptist's Queen Street Mission.⁸ The latter was initiated by the Baptists but was unsectarian, hence Walker's involvement.⁹ The figures printed in the *Bolton Journal and Weekly Guardian* show just over twelve per cent of the population attending some form of worship in the evening – not an entirely unusual time to sample since most people attended church after tending to Sunday lunch (Table 7.1).¹⁰ The Wesleyans, with sixteen chapels, attracted one quarter of churchgoers. At eight mission halls, attendance was 1, 445 not including the Temperance Hall singled out because it attracted 3, 000 on account of its lantern service. For comparative purposes, Walker consulted the Chief Constable and the assistant Chief Magistrate, to obtain estimates of the number of people on the street. Here, it was found that 10, 000 people wandered the streets of Bolton during public worship times mostly drawn to Bradshawgate with 4, 000 passing the corner of Knowsley and Oxford Streets.

⁶ See Malcolm Hardman, *Classic Soil: Community, Aspiration and Debate in the Bolton Region of Lancashire, 1819 – 1845* (London: Rosemount Publishing, 2003), 179 – 189.

⁷ Thomas W. Lacquer, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780 – 1850* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 242 – 246; Keith D. M Snell, 'The Sunday School Movement in England and Wales: Child Labour, Denominational Control and Working Class Culture', *Past & Present*, 164 (1999), 122-168.

^{8 &#}x27;Memorial Notices', The Manchester Guardian, 15 May 1906: 7

⁹ 'Townships: Great Bolton', *A History of the County of Lancaster: Volume 5* (1911), 243-251, http://www.britishhistory.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=53037. Accessed: 9 June 2009.

¹⁰ The figures are 14, 214 for a population of 118, 000 and only counted evening service.

These statistics gave Walker food for thought. As treasurer of the Wesleyan Home Mission department, he was close friends with Henry J. Pope at the WCC and more than familiar with Samuel Collier's Manchester Mission.¹¹ To establish a similar enterprise in Bolton, Walker wrote a paper which he presented at a meeting of the Bolton Wesleyan Methodist Council during January 1886.¹² This proposed four solutions to evangelise the non-church goers. Firstly, the effort spread across eight mission halls that were 'practically useless and often enfeebled by internal bickering' should be concentrated in one.¹³ Secondly, all chapels

Denomination	Attendance	% Total Attendance
Church of England	4, 825	33.9
Wesleyan	3, 642	25.6
Roman Catholic	1, 515	10.6
Congregational	1,040	7.3
Other Methodist	1, 294	9.1
Baptist	1,065	7.4
Unitarian	110	0.8
Salvation Army	60	0.4
Others	663	4.7
TOTALS	14, 214	98.8

Table 7.1: The religious census of Bolton, evening of 22 December 1895.

Source: the Bolton Journal and Weekly Guardian, 22 January 1896.

¹² 'Notes on Current Events', *The Methodist Times*, Jan/ Feb 1896, 72.

¹¹ Revd. Charles W. Andrews, 'Obituary: Thomas Walker J. P', *The Bolton Journal and Guardian*, 14 May 1906, 5.

¹³ Ibid.

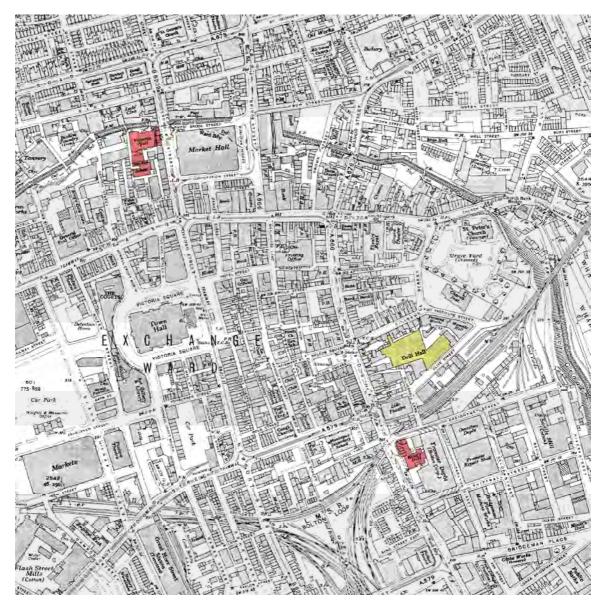


Figure 7.2: Map of Central Bolton showing the location of the premises the mission used. King's Hall is situated on Bradshawgate. Source: © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2010) All rights reserved (County Series Map, 1939; 1: 2500).

should also be opened free of charge at least once a month. Furthermore, the help of Sunday school workers was to be enlisted to feed churches from schools. Lastly, to achieve all of this, a large mission hall was needed, roughly similar in activities to those at Manchester. Towards this, he offered £5, 000. Conference approved on the condition that a suitable site could be found.

This was not straightforward. Ideally, Walker wanted premises on the busy thoroughfare of Bradshawgate (Figure 7.2). An approach was made to the existing Wesley's Chapel on that street. They were offered compensation to erect new premises, but the trustees were less than enamoured with the idea. Rivalry was anticipated as they made clear to a meeting of the Bolton Wesleyan Methodist Mission in 1896: '[we] are of the opinion that a new Chapel in the neighbourhood...would have to face the fierce competition of the Mission which would only be five minutes away.'¹⁴ Fortunately the Ridgway Gates Chapel was heavily in debt. It was thought unlikely that they could sell their difficult site with its hard-to-find entrance and associated burial ground.¹⁵ Walker, unaware that the Chapel possessed extra land, turned down the offer. However, when their minister, William Barlow, made clear just how much land they owned, Walker agreed. One problem remained: the mission premises needed an entrance on a busy street.¹⁶ Between 1896 and 1898, Walker secured the sites of seven shops on Knowsley Street, directly across from the Market Hall at a cost of £10, 760.¹⁷

Construction

Having obtained the permission of the Home Office to remove bodies from the burial ground to the nearby Tonge Cemetry, a local firm of architects, Bradshaw and Gass, were appointed to the project in 1897.¹⁸ As explained in Chapter Three, this multi-disciplinary firm of architects, surveyors and engineers embraced technical advances in iron and reinforced concrete in their industrial commissions.¹⁹ Their expertise was put to good use since the total

¹⁴ 'Meeting of the Committee of the Bolton Mission',17 April 1896. Unless otherwise stated archival sources are located at the Bolton Mission, Victoria Hall.

¹⁵ 'Meeting of the Committee of the Bolton Mission',7 December 1896.

¹⁶ William Barlow, Some Recollections of Ridgway Gates Sunday School together with the Story of the Origin of the Bolton Mission (Bolton: Coop, Hunt and Co., 1933), 8.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ 'Minutes of Meeting of Trustees of the Bolton Methodist Mission', 13 July 1897.

¹⁹ On the practice see Jane Lingard and Timothy Lingard, *Bradshaw Gass and Hope*, 2007; Austen Redman, 'Bolton Civic Centre and the Classical Revival Style of Bradshaw Gass & Hope' in Clare Hartwell & Terry

site area, of 13, 022 square foot, sloped down to the River Croal. The firm's archive contains plans of the Star Music Hall and Victoria Hall in Manchester and the Grosvenor Hall in Belfast. These were sketched by Gass in preparation for the Bolton commission. The eventual scheme retained the old Chapel, connected to the new hall and shops by a corridor which doubled as an alternative exit (Figure 7.3 to Figure 7.5).

Four self-contained shops, two on either side of the entrance, formed part of the distinctive front. The bright red terracotta tower reached up to ninety feet, half the size of Town Hall's tower. The domed cupola served the dual purpose of ventilation and indicating the entrance. A polished granite archway surrounded the entrance door which was covered by a cast iron canopy bearing its name, 'The Victoria Hall', a title unanimously adopted by the mission committee in 1899 (Figure 7.6).²⁰Lighting at the four corners of the tower made it a 'prominent feature in the town by both day and night'²¹ and the splendid point of entry made an important landmark in a street otherwise dominated by the neo-Grecian Market Hall opposite.

The narrow façade gives little indication to the extent of the main hall and associated rooms behind. Entry leads to an ornate Crush Hall with two staircases at either side (Figure 7.7). Two first floor entrances give access to a main hall which slopes down towards the platform. The barrel-vaulted roof is carried on eight slim columns offering unobstructed views of a platform large enough to accommodate an orchestra and choir of up to two hundred people (Figure 7.8). Contemporary accounts report that the Revd. Charles W. Andrews, 'scorning even such ordinary accessories as a stand for his book, and with nothing at all between him and the people'.²² Behind him was space for an organ, but the mission were unable to afford one and relied on a choir and orchestra to lead the music.²³

Tip-up seats were a late addition in 1900 after Andrews returned from a visit to the Carr's Lane Congregational Chapel in Birmingham. These 'lift-up' seats, according to the minister, 'are splendidly arranged. I would like us to adopt the system with some changes in

Wyke (eds.) Making Manchester (Lancashire & Cheshire Antiquarian Society, 2007), 157 – 176; Roger N. Holden, Stott and Sons: Architects of the Lancashire Cotton Mill (Lancaster: Carnegie, 1998), 70-1.

²⁰ 'Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee of the Bolton Mission', 5 January 1899.

²¹ 'Opening of Victoria Hall: An Imposing Scene', The Bolton Journal and Guardian, 17 March 1900, 1.

²² 'Victoria Hall, Bolton', Manchester Faces and Places, 13/2, February 1902, 30.

²³ There was a small two-manual organ in use in the 1930s to accompany the orchestra.

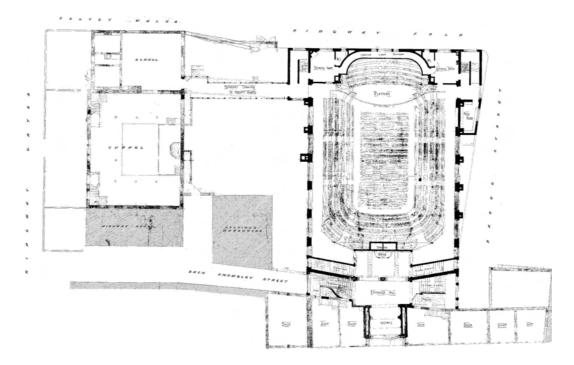


Figure 7.3: Ground floor plan of the Victoria Hall and temporary corridor linking to the old Ridgway Gates Chapel. Source: Bradshaw Gass and Hope, Bolton

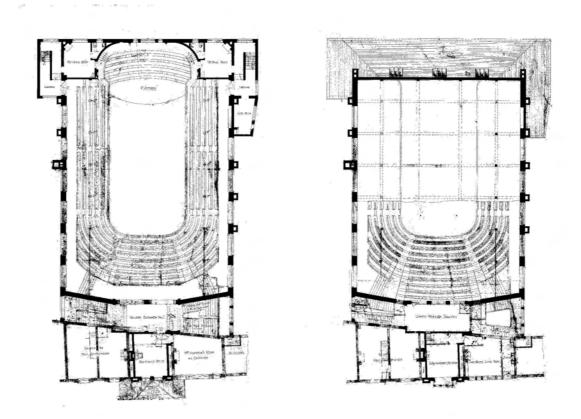


Figure 7.4: First and second floor plans of the Victoria Hall. Source: Bradshaw Gass and Hope, Bolton

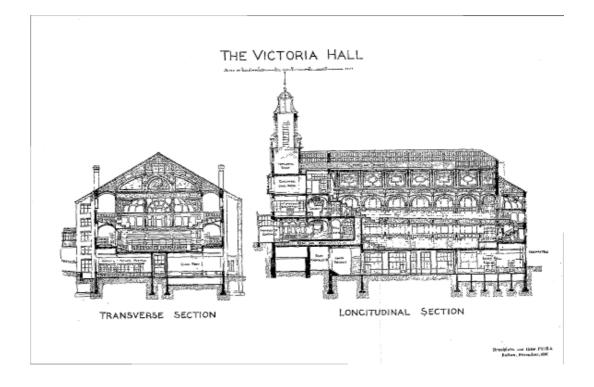


Figure 7.5: Longitudinal and transverse Sections of Victoria Hall, showing the extent of the slope. Source: Bradshaw Gass and Hope.



Figure 7.6: Postcard showing the tower and original entrance canopy, 1901. Source: BMA, 2002.128.

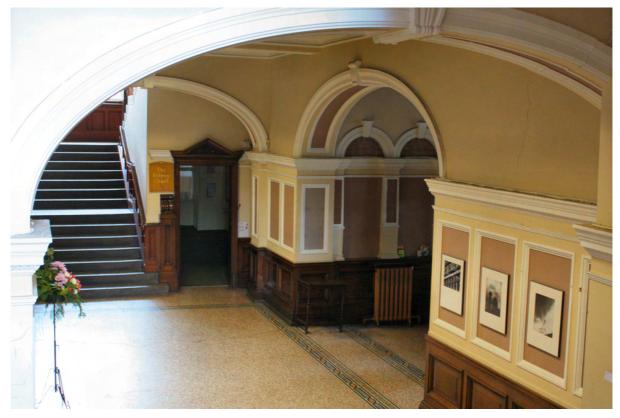


Figure 7.7: View of the crush hall, March 2009. Source: Author.

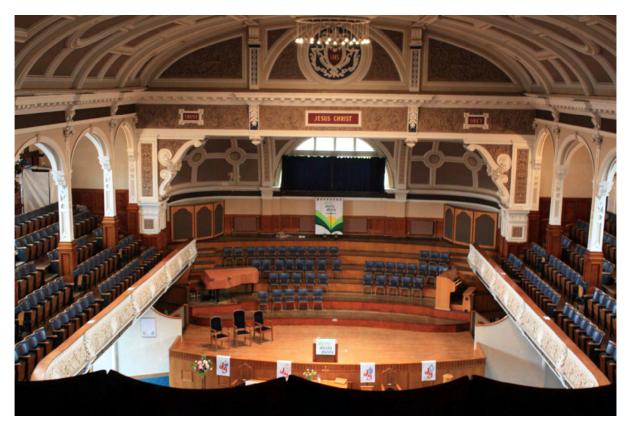


Figure 7.8 The interior of the main hall, March 2009. Source: Author.

upholstering'.²⁴ David and Henry Waddington of Bolton supplied 1, 801 seats for less than ten shillings each. The specification states that each 'should have good springs and a hard surfaced railway carriage covering' in leather.²⁵ The material was chosen as it was hardwearing but suggested 'cleanness and health' to one visitor.²⁶ They must have been wellreceived for they were adopted as standard practice in subsequent Central Halls. Provision was also made for permanent lantern slide and, in 1903, cinema projection equipment. During Saturday night concerts, the screen would be winched down from the ceiling at the back of the platform with silent movies being shown. A visitor from the Manchester magazine, *Manchester Faces and Places*, thought that 'those who are on the look-out for a chapel will probably be shocked. Frankly, to the "man of the world" the first suggestion is very more that of a high-class theatre."²⁷

The knowledge John B. Gass had gained during his travels in America, were put to good use in making a bright and warm hall. Electric power was introduced into the town in 1896 and the Bolton Corporation provided lighting for the Mission premises where sufficient current could be generated - there were 621 lights in the main hall alone. The combined heating and ventilation scheme drew fresh air from the top of the tower which was warmed and distributed throughout the hall with electric fans to give pressure when required.²⁸ Upon opening, the caretaker was required to take temperature readings, although on both recorded occasions only the minister's office reached the standard. At Victoria Hall we see the full expression of church as luxurious theatre. The building attracted criticism for being extravagant, especially with the number of lights, to which the staff replied 'we set out to give the poor the best that could be done'.²⁹

Clever planning made the sloping site an asset, with a small hall provided in the basement with kitchen and tea room. Initially, this accommodated the intermediate and senior departments of Sunday school with the primary department using the existing chapel. Providing space for a Sunday school met Walker's call for greater collaboration between schools and churches. In order to retain members, it was becoming essential that the Central

²⁴ Letter from Revd. C. W. Andrews to Bradshaw and Gass, 27 April 271899, BMA ZBGH 465.

²⁵ Letter from Bradshaw and Gass to D. and H. Waddington; 20 May 1899, BMA, ZBGH 465.

²⁶ 'Victoria Hall, Bolton', Manchester Faces and Places, February 1902, 30.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ WCCAR,1898, 180.

²⁹ 'Victoria Hall, Bolton, Manchester Faces and Places, 1900, 30.

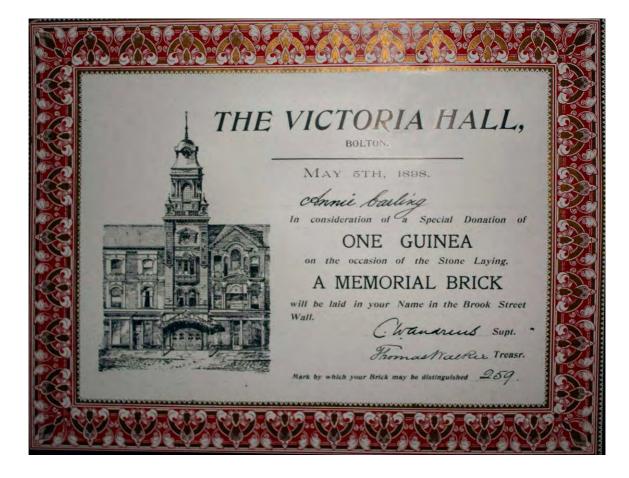


Figure 7.9: The mission raised money for the building by issuing certificates and bricks to subscribers. Source: The Bolton Methodist Mission.

Hall provided for the many activities associated with religion, all in the same building, if possible.

A Methodist Alhambra

When it opened on 26 March, 1900, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that unnamed sources thought it too reminiscent of a music hall; an accusation Andrews was quick to rebuke:

If you tell the Committee of a Mission it must only spend what it can get out of the poor people themselves you must expect them to put up small, ugly, and ill-kept Halls and have their work painfully understaffed. And does not everybody know that this is the policy that made 'Mission-work' an object of derision even up to this very day? The Missions need Halls as splendid and colossal as gin-palaces, as bright and as comfortable as palatial music-halls, as well-kept as suburban Gothic Churches.³⁰

Sir Robert Perks, instigator of the TCF, called it 'a sort of Methodist Alhambra'. ³¹ His whole speech highlights that these mission buildings were motivated by civic mindedness as much as evangelical zeal. In one revealing statement he asks:

If the 8, 000 Methodist places of worship and all their agencies and other Christian organisations had been closed in the last 200 years, what would have occupied their places? Workhouses (hear, hear), prisons, hospitals, asylums, deserted factories, wretched homes and immoral people (applause). They claim their aid in this work as citizens and ratepayers.³²

The TCF gave £5, 000 towards a total cost of £39, 499.³³ A further £500 came from the Extension Fund. In total £22, 931 was raised in 4 years. Subscribers were allocated a brick and given a certificate meaning they had a very real and material stake in the building (Figure 7.9). Speakers at the opening services expressed pride that Wesleyan Methodism was funded voluntarily, making pointed attacks at the reliance of the Church of England on state funds. However, the voluntarism principle would prove a problem particularly for this mission which remained £11, 000 in debt to the Star Assurance Company at a rate of 4 per cent interest.³⁴ On the Trust account, interest on loans is the largest expenditure at £434 per year in 1912, almost half of the total transactions. In the same year, lettings and rent provided

³⁰ The Bolton Mission, Annual Report, 1900-1, 3-4.

³¹ Ibid., 4.

³² 'The Churches', *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 March 1900, 11.

³³ The site cost £10, 760. Capitalized value of ground rent was £3, 730, cost of building was £19, 560 exclusive of heating, ventilating, lighting and furnishing which totalled £3, 485; Architects and Clerks fees were £1663. ³⁴ The Bolton Mission, *Annual Report*, 1912, 32 - 33.

£763. In addition the current account for mission work ran at a deficit of £318 meaning no extra income to divert towards the debt.

Live and Let Live

The 'aggressive' tactics of the Manchester and Salford Mission were adopted albeit with a reduced number of staff and volunteers. Domestic visitation was methodical with Bolton divided into districts for the monthly round. Male volunteers formed an 'Aggressive League' to stand outside pubs at closing time to collar men into attending Sunday afternoon and midnight services. A brass band paraded outside in an attempt to induce people to follow them into the Hall. The mission also advertised itself through the distribution of tracts, pamphlets, bill posters and, in 1915, buying advertisement space on public transport.³⁵

If these tactics didn't work, leisure activities were used to draw people away from pubs and into the mission. Soon, the Victoria Hall Mission added angling, football and cricket clubs to a range of activities designed to attract both sexes and a wide variety of ages. This was not purely religion mimicking secular pursuits. Rather, these were incorporated into their religious message. Lanterns slides were so popular, that the nearby Drill Hall was hired for evenings of prayer and 'A Grand Exhibition of Sacred Pictures'. The audience perplexed the supervising stewards:

At first some of the crowd whistled and shouted, but as soon as they saw the character of the pictures they were hushed into reverence. The men kept their hats on and many of them smoked. This was a puzzle to the Stewards and they came up for instructions. 'Leave them alone' they were told, 'it shows we have got the right sort of people.³⁶

The Mission utilised the strategy of a Saturday popular concert with entry priced at one penny. On the bill would be 'the best in mirth and music as we can command' which would begin with a hymn, a short prayer interspersed homilies of a minute or two. ³⁷ A film show would complete the evening entertainment. Crowds of up to 2, 700 people exceeded the seating capacity and were large enough to ensure that the concerts continued until they were eventually stopped by blackouts required during WW2. However, the ministerial team found

³⁵ Letter from Frank Mason and Company Ltd. (Railway and Tramway Advertising Contractors.) to Rev. F. L. Woodmass, 14 October1915.

³⁶ The Bolton Mission, Annual Report, 1903, 6

³⁷ Ibid.

it hard to evangelise the large crowds and complained that it was difficult to secure pledges during the Saturday concerts.³⁸

Other activities, copied from Manchester, soon fell by the wayside. A Sunday afternoon services for tourists and other visitors to the city were dispensed with since 'Bolton is infinitely less metropolitan than Manchester, and we have not here the great number of wanderers from all over the land.'³⁹ Similarly, only a limited range of social work activities was undertaken with neither enough room nor the money to provide lodging houses or workers yard. Food, clothing and advice would be dispensed by the Deaconesses and, although limited, it was not a self-supporting exercise. Charles Andrews' reports to Conference are unusually open compared with other missions. Here we learn of anxious worries about debt, continual backsliding by converts and the decline of the class meeting which indicated to Andrews that 'the devout, thus, are becoming less devout'. ⁴⁰

Membership grew to over a thousand by the outbreak of the First World War (Table 7.2). However, they did not always attract who they desired and one report admits that, short of policing the entrance, they could not prevent the well-heeled from attending.⁴¹ This, they claimed, was not habitual since they preferred 'a pew of their own, and a minister in a pulpit, and hymn books and an organ'.⁴² But relationships with neighbouring circuits could be strained. The minister, Francis Woodmass, keenly noted in 1918 that in twenty-one years only 225 members transferred in while 603 transferred to other Churches.⁴³ Later, the situation was assessed as 'somewhat delicate and needs charity and common-sense on both sides'.⁴⁴ Means were taken to make membership more difficult for people wishing to transfer from another Methodist Church.

For those who were welcomed, one contributor to the *Bolton Oral History Project* suggested that he attended Boys Brigade and Sunday services at Victoria Hall because his disciplinarian manager, Captain Low of Jackson's colliery, required that 'you had to be in Boys Brigade if you wanted a job there...You went everywhere with him you hadn't a night to yourself, you

³⁸ The Bolton Mission, Annual Report, 1900-1, 9.

³⁹ The Report of the Bolton Mission, Conference Agenda, 1904.

⁴⁰ See the Bolton Wesleyan Mission's Annual Reports to Conference, *Conference Agenda*, especially, 1904; 1905; 1907; 1909.

⁴¹ The Bolton Mission, Annual Report, 1901 – 2, 6.

⁴² Ibid., 7.

⁴³ The Bolton Mission, Annual Report, 1918, 1.

⁴⁴ The Bolton Mission, Annual Report, 1926, 4.

Year	Membership							
1908	964							
1918	1,055							
1928	1, 347							
1932	878							
1947	832							
1952	761							
1957	765							
1962	655							
1977	552							
1983	350							
1988	357							
1998	-							
2008	204							

Table 7.2: Membership figures for the Bolton Methodist Mission 1908 – 2008.

Source: 1908 – 1962, Minutes of the Leaders Meetings; 1977 – 2008, Bolton Mission Annual Report.

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Figure 7.10: Hymn sheets were given out instead of hymn books and had the weekly activities printed on them. Source: The Bolton Methodist Mission.

hadn't a night in seven days. You had to go at Sunday night to Church [at] Victoria Hall.'⁴⁵ Of the other four contributions to the *Bolton Oral History Project* that describe Victoria Hall, three mention only the Saturday night concerts which indicates that it was the popularity of these that made a lasting impression on the memory.⁴⁶ Figure 7.10 shows the extent of the weekly activities that the Mission facilitated.

A later account of users is contained in the Mass Observation archive.⁴⁷ During 1937 and 1938 the *Worktown* project conducted a survey of Bolton. The principal investigator of religion was Joseph Wilcock, a tramp preacher from the East End of London.⁴⁸ He described several visits he made to Victoria Hall. Morning services were poorly attended with the gallery closed and parts of the auditorium roped off to encourage people to congregate near the front. While its acoustics were praised when packed for a concert, Wilcock strained to hear what the preacher said when the Hall was near empty.⁴⁹ On the service to celebrate the bicentenary of Wesley's conversion, he reports of people crowded in doorways with some sitting on the windowsills. After the service the minister began a hymn, taken up by 300 people congregating in the crush hall, which turned the heads of passers by.⁵⁰ The range of individuals on the premises can be seen when contrasting Wilcock's description of the chauffeur driven cars that lined Knowsley Street for a Choral Union performance with the women's tea meeting, four hundred strong, which 'is a sight for the sorest eyes nearly all of them working class, the hard working ones, their hands clearly show this.⁵¹

More Buildings Required

The earlier fears of Wesley's Chapel concerning the establishment of Victoria Hall seemed to have some justification. In 1905, they offered their site to the Mission because of financial difficulty and reduced congregations.⁵² Along with an additional purchase of land, Thomas Walker was more than happy to commission Bradshaw Gass and Hope to design Bolton's

⁴⁵ Bolton Oral History Project, BMA, B025.178 B, PRO: AL/ JW/1a/005, 17 November 1981.

⁴⁶ Bolton Oral History Project, BMA, B025.178 B, PRO: AB/SP/1/025, 20 September 1981; AB/CG/2/043, 29 October, 1981; AL/LSS/A/019, 20 November 1981.

⁴⁷ On Mass Observation's methods and impact see Nick Hubble, *Mass Observation and Everyday Life*, (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

⁴⁸ A. Calder & D. Sheridan (Eds.) (1984) *Speak For Yourself: A Mass Observation Anthology 1937-49* (London: Jonathan Cape) 23.

⁴⁹ Mass Observation Worktown Project, BMA, Box 28, Reel 17, 16 January 1938.

⁵⁰ Mass Observation Worktown Project, BMA, Box 28, Reel 17, 24 May 1939.

⁵¹ Mass Observation Worktown Project, BMA, Box 28, Reel 19, 12 October 1938.

⁵² Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustees of Victoria Hall', 2 February, 1905.



Figure 7.11: King's Hall exterior drawing. Source: WCCAR, 1907.

second Wesleyan Hall. Walker died before the building was completed but not before he lay down exacting guidelines that the King's Hall must be opened free of debt.⁵³

Rather than demolishing the old building, King's Hall was a conversion as described in Chapter Three completed at a cost of just over £13, 000. As figure 7.11 shows, the façade was an audacious and eye-catching example of Edwardian street architecture, comparable to a London West End theatre. Perhaps Bradshaw and Gass drew upon the fact that their growing firm had opened an office in the capital in 1901 following the Leysian commission. Inside the old Welsye's Chapel at Bolton, pews were removed in favour of tip-up seats and while the premises were smaller than Victoria Hall, the provision of an institute to attract young adults remedied the perceived lack of adequate club room accommodation at Victoria Hall.

Victoria Hall was also slightly modified in these years. In 1908, Bolton Corporation adopted LCC regulations on theatre buildings, and retrospectively found Victoria Hall sadly lacking in acceptable entry and exit points.⁵⁴ The Inspector of the Watch Committee, Mr F. Taylor, was concerned that the cinema shows would lead to panic and with six staircases all exiting into one hallway. The alternative exit onto Ridgway Gates lacked sufficient lighting and in order to re-obtain an entertainment licence handrails had to be erected to staircases, panic bolts fixed to the exits and the caretaker engaged to explain the correct exit procedure to audiences once a month.⁵⁵ How far they complied with this is not clear although Bradshaw Gass and Hope make clear that they thought fulfilment should be minimal since the building had passed inspection when it opened.⁵⁶

In 1924 debt on the mission account remained £6, 000. Despite an economic depression in the region, a special fundraising effort realised £3, 000. Eventually, an interest free loan of £3, 000 was secured from the WCC in 1927, to be paid back over ten years.⁵⁷ While this cleared the debt, finance was an ongoing concern despite the shop rentals. The severe economic depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s meant that the superintendent minister could not

 $^{^{53}}$ ' Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustees of Victoria Hall', 6 April, 1906. In the end, it carried a debt of £5, 000.

⁵⁴ Letter from F. Taylor (the Watch Committee) to Bradshaw Gass and Hope, 21 October 1908, BMA, ZBGH 465.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Letter from Revd. J. T. Gurney to Bradshaw Gass and Hope, 10 September 1908, BMA, ZBGH 465.

⁵⁷ W. E. Walker, 'Treasurer's Statement', 26 October 1927.



Figure 7.12: Exterior photograph of the Walker Memorial School, now the primary entrance into premises, March 2009. Source: Author

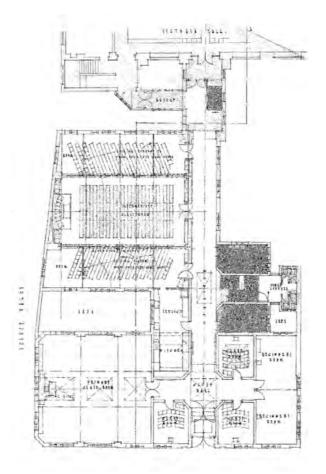


Figure 7.13: Ground Floor Plan of the Walker Memorial School. Source: Bradshaw Gass and Hope.

approach the businessmen who were the usual financial sources.⁵⁸ Fortunately the Walker family were solvent and Joseph Rank also helped the mission to keep afloat and even embark on some essential refurbishment and redecoration of the well-used Victoria Hall.⁵⁹

However, the old Ridgway Gates Chapel was becoming derelict and had to be vacated. In 1928, the treasurer of the Bolton Mission, William E. Walker enquired at Bradshaw Gass and Hope about the cost of various schemes to build a new Sunday school. Walker died the following year, but his widow donated sufficient funds to build more suitable premises for children than the basement of Victoria Hall. The new Walker Memorial School, built within six months, was opened in 1932 (Figures 7.12 and 7.13).⁶⁰ Again, the slope in the site was used to provide a kitchen, gymnasium and small basement hall seating 300 with moveable glazed screens so that separate rooms could be partitioned. The exterior is faced in hardwearing ruabon bricks chosen because of their relatively inexpensive maintenance costs.⁶¹ A corridor linked the school to Victoria Hall as the old chapel had previously done. The addition of the school changed patterns of use. In later years, this became the busiest part and now it is the school entrance which is regarded as the main entrance.

Postwar Activities

Bolton was not victim to air raid attacks but the Victoria Hall became a post for the Home Guard with a room allocated to the right of the main entrance. Funding was hardest hit in this period. The extra expense incurred by providing air raid shelters in the basement was coupled with a decline in internal lets and reduced congregations.⁶²

After the war ended, the annual reports and leaders' meetings ceased to announce the average Sunday attendance figures as they had done prior to 1939. This suggests that

⁵⁸ Letter from T. W Hannah to Mr Joseph Rank,, 15 Jan 1931

⁵⁹ Thomas Walker's two sons took over his business and served as treasurer's of the Bolton Wesleyan Methodist Mission. All three chose to worship in their suburban chapel. It was not until 1974 that Thomas's grandson, Robert Walker, became the first treasurer of the mission who also worshipped at Victoria Hall. See the Bolton Mission, *Annual Report*, 1975, 3.

⁶⁰ The only construction problem was the discovery of remains from two bodies, a previous oversight from the former burial ground

⁶¹ WCCAR, 1931, 186. See also Charles Deane Little (1935) *The History and Romance of Our Mother Sunday School*, 1935, 68-9.

⁶² Daniel Tomkins, *Mission Accomplished: The Story of the First One Hundred Years of the Bolton Methodist Mission* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1997), 43.

numbers were not recovered. Membership began to decline after 1928 but still remained buoyant at 765 in 1957. Yet, the decision was taken to close King's Hall in 1958. Partly this was the result of a survey revealing that the new extension to the old Chapel needed significant repair work.⁶³ However, declining numbers meant that it was not worth undertaking the additional expense involved.

The Bolton Corporation's post-war planners adopted a strategy that, using the Town Hall, the Market Hall and St Peter's Church as a focus, would provide better shopping, cultural and transport facilities. By virtue of its location, Victoria Hall felt the benefits of this. Where other Central Halls found themselves placed outside of city centres owing to development work, it remained central as one annual report describes: 'in so many ways the Mission is a community centre, for Bolton is still a compact town in spite of recent building developments and the Hall is in easy reach of all areas.'⁶⁴

In 1963, the local authority established a cultural programme of events by levying a three farthing tax rate on its citizens. This benefitted Victoria Hall. As the largest venue of its size, it played host to numerous orchestras, including the Manchester Hallé. The income from this, combined with an increase in internal lets and careful stewarding of finances, ensured the Mission remained on a firm financial footing as it had done so since paying back the Chapel Committee loan in 1937.⁶⁵ The limited range of social work activities were scaled back, but charities, such as Oxfam, and local social services rented rooms and provided more revenue.⁶⁶ The co-existence with these other groups was thought by ministerial staff to open up opportunities in bridging the perceived gap between the sacred and secular, in effect restating the original aims of the building.⁶⁷

Modernisation

A new canopy was erected in 1960 which signalled the beginning of a decade of modernisation for Victoria Hall. This was partly spurred by the money made available for building modernisation by the JRBT who provided £18,000 towards the £30,000 total. The

⁶³ The Bolton Mission, Annual Report, 1958, 1-2.

⁶⁴ The Bolton Mission, Annual Report, 1971, 1

⁶⁵ The mission rarely reported a deficit and money was channelled into a repairs reserve

⁶⁶ The Bolton Mission, Annual Report, 1971, 2

⁶⁷ See the Bolton Mission, Annual Report, 1970, 2

DCA granted $\pounds 2$, 000 with a smaller amount coming from the Church Urban Fund. The remainder came from fund-raising, donations and some timely legacies. By the end of 1968, the mission required only $\pounds 800$ to balance its books.

The original architects supervised the refurbishment. Between 1966 and 1968, a new minister, John Jackson, was a driving force in effecting the change. The old leather tip-up seats were replaced by 1, 300 similar seats but with soft blue upholstery. These were complemented by midnight blue carpeting for the main hall aisles that covered the renovated parquet flooring. The raked ground floor seating was levelled and the communion area refurbished.⁶⁸ Although seating capacity was reduced, it remained sizeable enough to reflect its continuing demand as a concert venue.

In the Walker Memorial School a coffee bar was on one side of the entrance to encourage casual footfall into the building. Offices for the ministerial staff were relocated from its deep first floor position at the rear of the main hall to the right of the more accessible entrance point in Ridgway Gates. This, combined with a fire which gutted the main entrance in 1973, changed the flow of people in and out of the building. The formerly bright main entrance on Knowsley Street is used only when a major show is performed. This is now a quiet area at the back of the building and when the entrance was reconstructed a small prayer room, Ridgway Chapel, was added to the right hand side in 1975. From a surveillance point of view, the location of the offices at Ridgway Gates means that it makes sense to have this part more open.

Despite declining congregations, the Victoria Hall has remained resilient. Partly this is down to its use by the wider community. In 1988, the Mission reported to the Bolton and Rochdale District that a Gilbert and Sullivan concert series was its most popular event.⁶⁹ Even though a smaller number of people engaged in church activities, they were a close congregation. One former minister comments that:

In a way I didn't feel that the Victoria Hall was a Mission church in the traditional sense in the time I was there. We didn't specifically go out to provide food and shelter for

⁶⁸ Bradshaw Gass and Hope, 'Preliminaries, General Specification and Bill of Quantities, Labour and Material Required in Connection with the alterations to the Victoria Hall', September 1967.

⁶⁹ 'Report of the Bolton Mission to the Bolton and Rochdale District', 1988, BMA, NMBR 10/6/4.

the down-and outs and provide soup kitchens...I felt it was a more strong, family suburban type of church which happened to be situated in a town centre.⁷⁰

This sometimes had its downside. A lifelong member of the Mission describes changes in attitudes towards sharing the premises. Reflecting upon his experience during the 1960s he said: 'As a youth worker, I'd be going out and getting kids in from the estates and...you'd have all sorts of wars with Church leadership because they didn't want them in'.⁷¹ Asked how this had change, he continues:

We've become less precious about the premises...We now are aware that unless you hire the premises out to other projects, outside people, Victoria Hall, even with the rents from the shops, it wouldn't work. That's the really profound thing that's happening now that's really difficult to manage through...[T]his [the mission] is on a knife edge all the time but I think we can manage, but unless we make changes to make this more commercially viable, then we won't survive.⁷²

The Picture Today

Commercial viability entails increasing the flexibility of the space for outside organizations. Redevelopment plans were formulated in 2001 as part of the local council's 'Bolton Vision' regeneration programme. At the Mission, the Walker Memorial School, deemed of little architectural value and not protected by the 1974 grade II listing of Victoria Hall, will be demolished. Retail and community space are combined in refurbished premises (Figure 7.14). A new performance space and balcony will overlook the shopping precinct proposed where shoppers can be serenaded by a band. A range of conference and meeting rooms are incorporated into the proposed development with a café in the Knowsley Street entrance to open up this underused space. Although an economic downturn means that the plans remain on the drawing board, the development officer of Bolton Council, still regards the retention of Victoria Hall as a vital piece in Bolton's redevelopment:

As a listed building in use for a number of important purposes and occupying a prime and highly visible location in Central Bolton, Victoria Hall remains important to the function of the town centre from a heritage, local distinctiveness and community use perspective. It also has a close physical relationship with the planned comprehensive

⁷⁰ Revd. Fraser D. Smith (1982 – 1992) quoted in Daniel Tomkins, *Mission Accomplished*, 1997, 136. The same view was expressed in *Personal interview*, 23 with another former minister.

⁷¹ Personal Interview, 9.

⁷² Ibid.

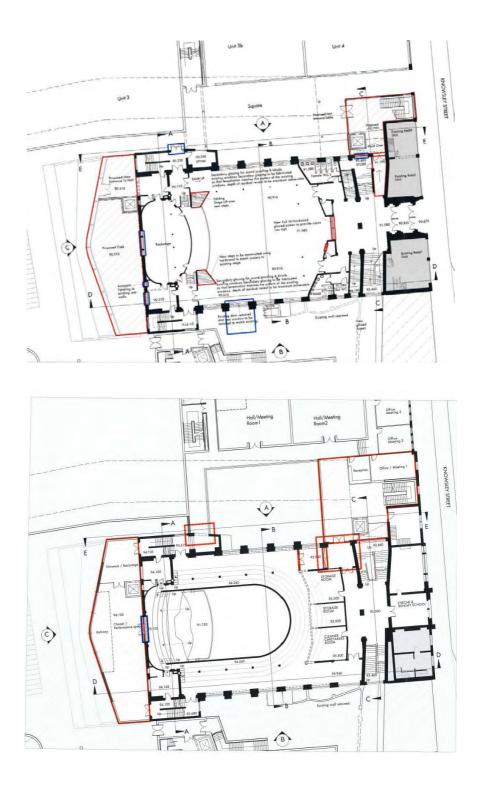


Figure 7.14: Ground and First Floor Plans of proposed development by Wilson Bowden Developments. Source: Wilson Bowden Developments.

regeneration of the St Helena area and the Central Street development in particular and as such has always been at the forefront of the Council's strategic thinking.⁷³

In 2008, membership stood at 204 with one morning Sunday service in the main hall. The move to morning services is the pattern across all of the Central Missions.⁷⁴ The strong basis means that while it may have not embraced social work to the same extent as Manchester, it retains the ethos of a church to reach the outsider. The mission, in partnership with charitable organisations, has developed a programme of social outreach work. The Simeon Centre provides one-to-one counselling. Befriending Refugees and Asylum Seekers (BRASS), began in 2001, offers support, training and conversation for Bolton's asylum seekers. Bolton STEPS offers support for people suffering mental health issues who can be provided with employment training in the mission's café. Developing projects in this way allows the mission to access a greater range of local and national funding opportunities to support them.⁷⁵ As one of the only venues of its size in the area, the Hall is in demand by a range of groups including rehearsals for the Bolton Bazaar, a yearly event designed to bring together a number of ethnic groups through performance, dancing and music. Chaplaincy work takes place in schools, colleges and workplaces, including Bolton Wanderers Football Club. This is seen as essential outreach work to the outsider. With its informal spaces and secular architecture, the rhetoric of it as a mission church to reach the outsider is maintained but has to be carefully managed.

Conclusion

Early experience of debt and variable fortunes in mission work left an imprint at Bolton. Once liabilities were paid, legacies and any surplus income were diverted to a reserve fund. The mission also did not embark on any schemes that could have seriously undermined its financial position and so its church activities share a closer resemblance to suburban churches than large city centre missions. As the premises became less used by the church, rentals to outside organisations increased. The evidence gathered suggests that potential conflicts were managed with a degree of success.

⁷³ Phil Green (Development Manager at Bolton Council), *Email to the author*, 9 June 2009.

⁷⁴ Author's own comparison of MPO, *Decennial Statistical Returns*, 1960 and MPO, *Decennial Statistical Returns* 1990. ⁷⁵ Personal Interview, 8.

It is one of the few central halls where the original building is intact and the whole of the premises owned by the church. The renovation work in the 1960s maintained the Victorian fabric of the Hall section of the premises. Size makes it an asset in a town where there is no other venue similar. Limited intervention has resulted in its façade and interior constituting an important part of Bolton's heritage. More recently, it has been able to turn this into an asset. In partnership with other organisations, it has developed its mission beyond the church to the wider community but in a way that complements the church and does not cause undue financial strain. In part, this has been necessary to keep the Mission afloat but it means that its value as a community resource is also maintained. So, despite declining numbers, it remains in use - not so very different from the original that Thomas Walker commissioned. A few miles away in the city of Liverpool, one Central Mission did not fare so well.

Chapter 8: Liverpool (1905)



Figure 8.1: Exterior of the Liverpool Central Hall, September 2009. Source: Author.

'The Whole Town Stinks of Alcohol'

Liverpool in the late nineteenth century was a city of contrasts. The prosperous port town contained its fair share of wealthy merchants who endowed the city with numerous public buildings and dispensed much philanthropy. The help was needed. Large numbers of migrants were searching for jobs on the docks or easy passage to other countries. Many stayed on unable to afford transportation. The population more than doubled between 1851 and 1881 from 320, 513 to 648,616 with migrants housed in densely packed courts and alleys.¹ Statisticians and social commentators were horrified by what they saw. In 1883, the *Whitehall Review* passed its damning judgement:

Liverpool is drunken, and is unashamed of its besotedness. Despite earnest endeavours to reach them, the lower orders are almost bestial. Their homes are dens of dirt, immorality and infirmity. It is doubtful whether any town in the country could match the scenes of depravity and lawlessness, which, on any night of the week, Liverpool can show. Drunkenness is a local calamity. The whole town stinks of alcohol.²

Charitable activities were directed towards alleviating the perceived immorality. Liverpool's wealthy merchants were generous, usually working within the social network of local chapels. Until its sale in 1896, The Unitarian Chapel on Renshaw Street had been the centre activity for philanthropists such as William Rathbone and William Roscoe.³ But, as in Manchester, these moved out to the suburbs and built new chapels. Despite an increasing population, religious censes showed that those remaining did not replenish the pews. In 1891 only 30.5 per cent of the population were chapel-goers, a steady decline from seventy per cent in 1831.⁴

During their tour of England between 1873 and 1875, Moody and Sankey addressed a special meeting in Liverpool on the subject of how to reach the masses.⁵ They invited Charles Garrett, a Wesleyan Minister, to speak. Garrett claimed that Christianity was failing the needs of the people by building churches and chapels: 'I pointed out that the Saviour's words

¹J. N. Tarn 'Housing in Liverpool and Glasgow: The Growth of Civic Responsibility', *Town Planning Review*, 39/4 (1969), 321 – 327.

² Quoted in R. G. Milne, 'Charles Garrett in Liverpool, 1872-1900: The early years of the Wesleyan Central Mission and the Liverpool Cocoa Rooms' (MA Thesis: University of Liverpool, 1983).

³ Margaret B. Simey, *Charity Rediscovered: A Study of Philanthropic Effort in Nineteenth Century Liverpool* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992 [1951]), 33-37.

⁴ D. Caradog-Jones, Social Survey of Merseyside, Vol. 3 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1934), 325.

⁵ R. G. Milne, 'Charles Garrett in Liverpool', 1983; Roger Standing, When the Windows of Heaven Opened: Liverpool Methodist Mission, 1875 – 1905 (No publ. details, 1981).

were 'Go to every creature', and in building Churches and Chapels we had been saying to the people 'Come' instead of obeying Christ's injunctions.'⁶

While Garrett spoke, Moody jumped from the platform to consult with Alexander Balfour, a ship-owner, merchant and philanthropist. An idea formed of establishing 'Cocoa Rooms' along the portside to offer cheap and non-alcoholic refreshments to casual dock workers. The British Workman's Public House Company was founded as other businessmen quickly bought shares, not losing the opportunity for philanthropic enterprise tinged with potential commercial gain.⁷

When the Wesleyan Conference tried to move Garrett to Bradford in 1876, Balfour stepped in arguing that Garrett's association was essential to the success of the enterprise.⁸ So, Conference took the unprecedented step of releasing him from the three year itinerancy principle to remain in Liverpool.⁹ His 'Riverside Mission' established a network of charitable agencies stretching through inner city Liverpool. Failing chapels were acquired and remodelled to be bright, comfortable and attractive to attract the poor with no other place of resort other than slums, or the even slummier pubs and music halls.

Yet, Garrett was rumoured to be suspicious of the Central Hall movement begun in Manchester in 1886.¹⁰ However, when he presided at the evening meeting to celebrate the opening of Bolton's Victoria Hall in 1900, Garrett declared that: 'there had been the opinion abroad that he was opposed to those large halls, but if it was any gratification to the Chairman he wished to say that he was converted.'¹¹ Nonetheless, Garret's focus on social work targeted funds towards the needy, not buildings and his mission was housed in an existing chapel on Mount Pleasant that was remodelled and described in the local newspapers (certainly after 1886) as 'Central Hall'.¹²

⁶ 'The Rev Charles Garrett', *The Methodist Recorder*, 25 October 1900.

⁷ R. G. Milne, 'Charles Garrett in Liverpool', 1983; The Company established eighteen coca rooms in its first eighteen months. See 'Cocoa Versus Beer' *Liverpool Mercury*, 19 January 1877, 6.

⁸ Roger Standing, When the Windows of Heaven Opened, 1981

⁹ Minutes of Conference, 1875.

¹⁰ R. G. Milne, 'Charles Garrett in Liverpool', 1983, 1-2.

¹¹ 'The Opening of Victoria Hall: Another Crowded Meeting', *The Bolton Journal and Guardian*, 24 March 1900,7.

¹² e. g. 'Local News', *Liverpool Mercury*, 21 December 1892.



Figure 8.2: Unbuilt elevation fronting Mount Pleasant by J. B. Gass. Source: Liverpool Records Office



Figure 8.3: Map of Central Liverpool showing the location of Central Hall. Source: © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2010) All rights reserved (County Series Map, 1909; 1: 2500).

Garrett died in 1900 and by February 1901 Henry J. Pope was suggesting to his replacement, Joseph Jackson, that he should speak to Thomas Walker who may extract a personal favour from Bradshaw and Gass to look at a site on Mount Pleasant for something grander.¹³ However, Jackson preferred the newly widened thoroughfare of Renshaw Street, closer to the city centre and train stations. It proved too expensive.¹⁴

One year later, a building committee was formed, and Bradshaw and Gass were awarded the commission in a limited competition which offered fifteen guineas to three architects. Gass provided interior and exterior drawings for a hall on the Mount Pleasant site with a striking tower (Figure 8.2). However, Jackson remained certain that Renshaw Street was a better proposition since the current proposal contained only the main hall and no rental space, something, by this time, considered desirable to offset the mortgage and provide for Mission work.¹⁵ Fortunately, the Liverpool Corporation were prepared to exchange the site of the old Unitarian Chapel on Renshaw Street with the Mission in order to establish a green space on Mount Pleasant. Quite how this was realised is not documented in the Corporation's minute books, although the Wesleyan Chapel Committee commended 'the exercise of considerable tact and business judgement'.¹⁶ Clearly, this went on behind closed doors.

Importance was attached to the retail value of the street. The builder, Henry Appleyard, considered Renshaw Street to be a second-rate shopping district however recent street improvements in 1902 and the provision of electric trams could enhance its value: $\pounds 8 - 10$ per yard while the equivalent for the Mount Pleasant site was $\pounds 3.^{17}$ Also, the site was a three minute walk away from both Lime Street and Central train stations which increased its suitability as a central meeting place (Figure 8.3).¹⁸ Indeed, the building was designed such that '[the] imposing mass of brick-work and stone...may be seen by anyone crossing from Lime-Street to the Central Station.'¹⁹

¹³ Letter from Joseph Jackson to Thomas Walker,7 February 1901, BMA, ZBGH 257

¹⁴ Letter from Joseph Jackson to Bradshaw and Gass, 8 February 1902, BMA, ZBGH 257

¹⁵ WCCAR, 1903, 298.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Letter from Henry M. Appleyard to J. B. Gass, 26 February 1901, BMA, ZBGH 257.

¹⁸ 'Charles Garrett Memorial Hall: The Stonelaying Ceremonies', *Liverpool Daily Post*, 22 September 1904.

¹⁹ 'Charles Garrett: A Liverpool Memorial', *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 December 1905, 8.

A Fusion Building

In style, the premises daringly fused a Byzantine tower and Gothic turrets with a dash of art nouveau. While this demonstrated eclectic architectural knowledge it also reflected other commercial architecture in the vicinity. Both the nearby Vines Public House (1907) and the Crown Hotel (1905) are similarly ostentatious in design. Red and yellow terracotta cladding, provided by the Hathern Station Brick and Terra Cotta Co Ltd of Loughborough, masked the steel framed building with concrete floors.²⁰ Nine external bays alternately projected out with decorative terracotta foliage in the central and flanking bays (Figure 8.4). Small domes surmount alternating bays, while the grand entrance had a small tower (Figure 8.5). A projecting veranda above this entrance entailed a service charge of £5 per year to the Corporation.²¹ To lower overall costs the terracotta cladding was reduced. Ornamentation to the exterior included the appropriate scallop shells – a nod to the Wesley family's coat of arms – and Liver birds, an acknowledgement to its Liverpool setting (Figure 8.6).²² This was a building designed to be seen and found. The Royal Academy thought it worth exhibiting and G. A. T Middleton included it as a 'fine example of this type' of assembly hall.²³

There are two ways to interpret the style. Firstly, although the Wesleyans, were mainly commissioning Gothic buildings after the publication of Jobson's handbook in 1850, they remained relatively unconstrained by long established traditions that dictated the built form of other religious groups.²⁴ Secondly, resembling commercial buildings indicates a nuanced understanding of the relationship between church and working class. A mooted 'People's Hall' in the late 1890s, to be funded by philanthropists, was the extension of Walter Besant's enterprise in the East End of London, discussed in Chapter One.²⁵ This plan fell through but the splendour of the Wesleyan Mission buildings is the denominational equivalent of the People's Hall.

²⁰ Bradshaw and Gass (1903) 'Specification of Materials and Labour required in erecting and completing Mission Premises for the Liverpool Wesleyan Mission on ground situated in Renshaw Street, Liverpool in accordance with plans, quantities, and this specification', BMA ZBGH 257.

²¹ Letter from Liverpool City Building Surveyor to Bradshaw and Gass, July 28, 1904, BMA ZBGH 257.

²² Letter from William Brown and Sons, Salford (Contractors) to Bradshaw and Gass; Feb 3, 1905, BMA ZBGH 257.

²³ Letter from Joseph Jackson to Bradshaw and Gass, 24 May 1904, BMA ZBGH 257; G. A. T Middleton, *Modern Buildings: Their Planning, Construction and Equipment, Volume Six*, 1921, 3 – 9.

²⁴ Christopher Wakeling, Nonconformist Chapel Building, 1995, 93.

²⁵ See 'The Liverpool People's Hall', *Liverpool Mercury*, January 5 1891, 7; 'The People's Hall for Liverpool', *Liverpool Mercury*, 13 May 1892, 6.



Figure 8.4: Elevation to Renshaw Street, 1912. Source: Liverpool Records Office



Figure 8.5: Entrance to the Charles Garrett Memorial Hall (Liverpool Central Hall). Source: Liverpool Records Office.



Figure 8.6: Exterior detail on Liverpool Central Hall, 2007 Source: © Philip G. Meyer.



Figure 8.7: Tower and Roof Terrace. Source: Liverpool Records Office.

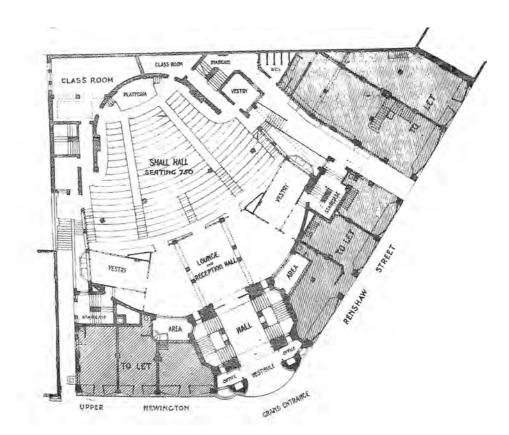


Figure 8.8: Ground floor plan of Liverpool Central Hall. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.

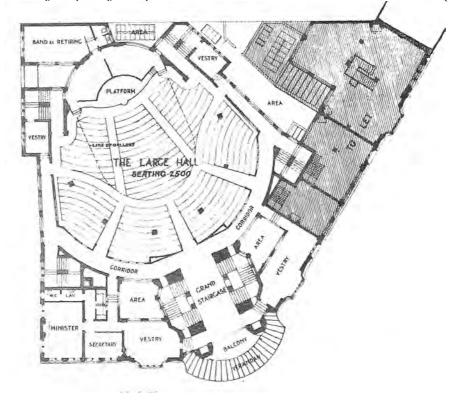


Figure 8.9 : First floor plan of Liverpool Central Hall. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.

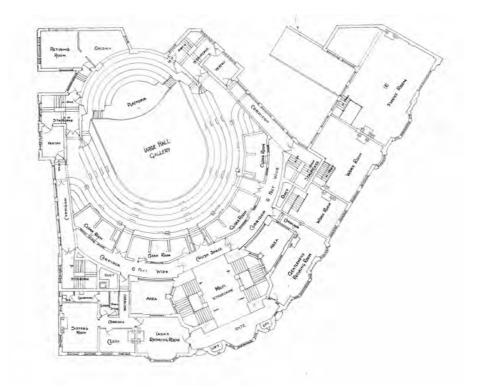


Figure 8.10: Second floor plan of Liverpool Central Hall. Source: Bradshaw Gass and Hope.

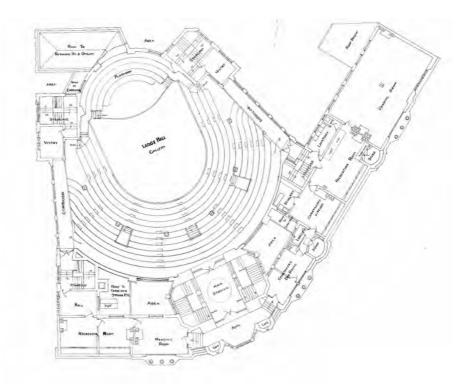


Figure 8.11: Third floor plan of Liverpool Central Hall with second tier of gallery Source: Bradshaw Gass and Hope.

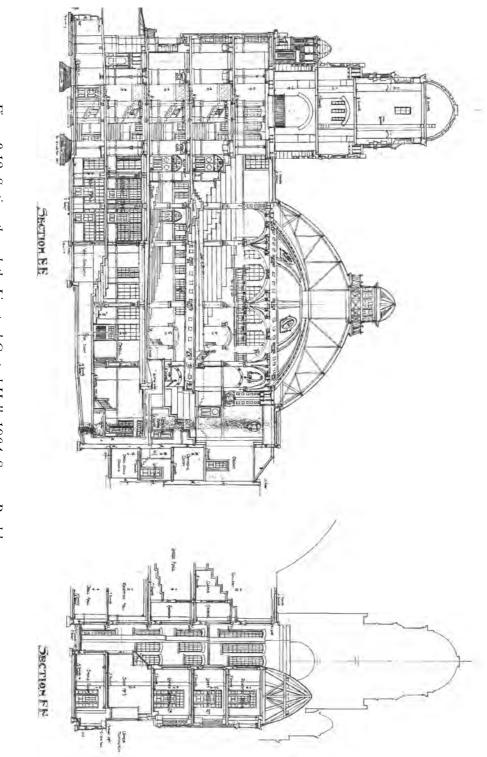


Figure 8.12: Sections through the Liverpool Central Hall, 1904. Source: Bradshaw Gass and Hope, Bolton.

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The site covered 87, 567 square feet. However, the functional requirements demanded by the mission meant that space was at a premium so the real merit is in its planning. The awkward site posed problems with the two main frontages meeting at a blunt angle. A series of exacting requirements had to be shochorned in. The building committee required entrances 'conspicuous in character'; a large hall to seat at least 2, 250 plus a smaller hall for 700; a 'good crush hall'; six club rooms; accommodation for the minister, secretaries and sisters; enquiry rooms and caretakers accommodation. The cost was to be kept to £20, 000 exclusive of furnishings and an organ.²⁶ Jackson did demand that careful consideration be given to the vestry accommodation – vestry in this multi-purpose church has a wider meaning – used for 'any preparation room for the giving of performances, whether these be lectures, sermons or concerts'.²⁷ Gass duly responded to stipulations.

A two-tiered horseshoe gallery allowed for cloakrooms underneath. Administrative offices were placed deep inside the building at first floor level. The basement included a drill hall, the ventilating and heating equipment, reading and smoking rooms and a coffee bar. A small hall and six shop units of varying sizes made up ground floor with vestry and meeting rooms – the latter also provided on a mezzanine level between ground and first floors. The crush hall, replete with grand staircase and marbled pillars, gave way to two porter's rooms. Circular corridors emanated out from the Crush Hall provided full access to all parts of the building such that 'there is good communication throughout, but good separation for effective control', that being in case of panic.²⁸ Every space was utilised with the flat roof serving as a terrace for outdoor summer preaching (Figure 8.7). Art nouveau stained glass windows were provided by the Manchester artist, Walter J. Pearce (1856 – 1942), who designed similar glasswork for churches in Manchester. The overall intention was that of 'a light and cheerful design' to give 'that brightness which helps so much to make the Mission Halls attractive'.²⁹ The tip-up seating was tiered at gallery level and moveable on the ground floor allowing the room to be reconfigured for smaller meetings.

Acoustics were enhanced by narrowing the hall towards the stage. All technical aspects of construction – particularly the acoustics, heating and ventilation - drew upon John B. Gass's

²⁶ Letter from Joseph Jackson to Bradshaw and Gass, 11October, 1902, BMA, ZBGH 257.

²⁷ G.A. T. Middleton, Modern Buildings, Vol. 6, 1921, 5.

²⁸ WCCAR, 1904, 324

²⁹ Ibid.

knowledge of modern building throughout Europe and America.³⁰ As for the platform and choir, the musical conductor insisted upon chairs with cushions and backs equivalent to those at Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall.³¹ The plans and sections presented in figures 8.8 to 8.12 show that the building had more in common with a theatre than a church.

These little embellishments pushed the cost up from £20, 000 to £47, 000 for the Central Hall and alterations carried out at the same time on the Boys' Home on Shaw Street. £21, 000 was secured by the time of the stone laying ceremony, inclusive of £7, 500 from the TCF. Subscribers had their names commemorated on bricks. Jackson was keen to emphasise the £600 contributed by boys under the Mission's care as evidence that they were not doling out free aid.³² Bazaars and other fundraising activities, attended by significant notables including the Lord Mayor, generated further income. The opening ceremonies, chaired by the locomotive engineer Sir Henry Fowler, demonstrate the extent of camaraderie across social and religious agencies in Liverpool with attendees including the Bishop of Liverpool and representatives from other churches. But still, the Trust account remained £12, 000 in debt on top of daily running costs. The financial situation did not bode well irrespective of the expected rental income.

Like other Central Missions a range of advertising tricks was employed to raise their profile and generate extra funds from those outside the congregations. At the opening ceremonies, the net was cast nationwide. Liverpool, they argued, had many people from all over the country accessing their social care. Along with other protestant churches and the citizens of Liverpool, the people of Britain should contribute.³³ To help with this, the Mission began its own magazine with the first section devoted to general articles, particularly travel items, with space reserved at the back for an account of Mission work. Priced at one penny it was aimed at 'sympathetic outsiders'.³⁴ Sir Edward Russell, the nonconformist, philanthropist and was also a keen supporter of the Missions in his role as editor of the *Liverpool Daily Post*.

The extra money was much needed. The more elaborate a building, the more expensive it is to build and subsequently run. In 1927, shop rentals totalled £813, however £1, 300 was

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Letter from Joseph Jackson to Bradshaw and Gass, 13 February 1905, ZBGH 257.

³² 'Laying of the Foundation Stone', *The Liverpool Daily Post*, 29 September 1904, 7.

³³ LMM Annual Report 1906 (Liverpool: Charles Birchall, 1906), 8, LRO H266.06 MET.

³⁴ Arthur Phillip(ed.), Central Hall Magazine, January 1908, 1, LRO 266.05 CEN.

spent on repairs and maintenance alone aside from daily costs such as wages and printing.³⁵ In addition, the mission over-stretched itself in providing social work. While clubs and benefits societies had subscription charges they never ran as self-supporting enterprises and the deficit mounted. At a large bazaar held in St George's Hall in 1908, the Mission set a target of £5, 000 towards the outstanding amount on the capital account and to make up the shortfall on the mission account.³⁶ This was in addition to sales of work and the annual Anniversary appeal. Between 1894 and 1926, the Mission received £14, 204 in legacies which mostly went straight to the property account with only two invested. Generous donations dwindled as the century progressed. Public philanthropists died, replaced by a generation for whom Christianity and social service were not so intimately tied.³⁷ Between 1913 and 1936, only £3, 607 was received.³⁸

'Not for Christians'

The Mission owned nine other premises. These smaller halls and lodging houses stretched through inner city Liverpool with activities on a similar scale to Manchester. A men's brotherhood offered access to talks, lectures and the reading room for one penny per week. Women had their own parlour with warm rooms. Rational recreation was encouraged with healthy activities held in the drill hall in addition to football, walking and cycling clubs all aiming at a disciplined body as well as soul. Thrift was promoted by sick and benefit societies and the mission ran a Tontine club, in effect, a form of burial insurance for the poor.³⁹

Saturday Night Concerts proved so popular an extra concert was held on Wednesdays, early closing day for shop workers. The grandness of the main hall and price helped to attract people to these temperate gatherings: two pence secured up to three hours of entertainment consisting of variety artistes and a cinema show.⁴⁰ In common with other Central Missions, the emphasis was firmly on the sacred ends achieved by these secular means:

³⁵ Liverpool (Wesleyan) Methodist Mission (LMM), Annual Report of the Liverpool Wesleyan Mission, 1927.

³⁶ Arthur Phillips (ed.) Central Hall Magazine, May 1908, 1.

³⁷ On the decline in philanthropic activities see Frank Prochaska, Christianity and Social Service, 2006, 148-176.

³⁸ LMM, 'Record of Legacies', LRO 287 LMM 1/3.

 ³⁹ Tontine clubs are now banned in the United Kingdom because of their abuse. On their history see, Kent McKeever, 'A Short History of Tontines', *Fordham Corporate and Financial Law Review*, 15 (2010), 491-521.
 ⁴⁰ William H. Crawford, *The Church and the Slum*, 1908, 51-55.

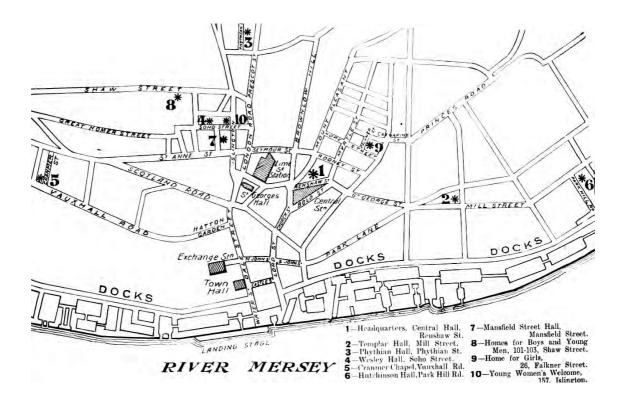


Figure 8.13: Map showing the ten centres of the Mission's Work, Liverpool Wesleyan Mission Annual Report 1906, frontispiece. Source: Liverpool Records Office.

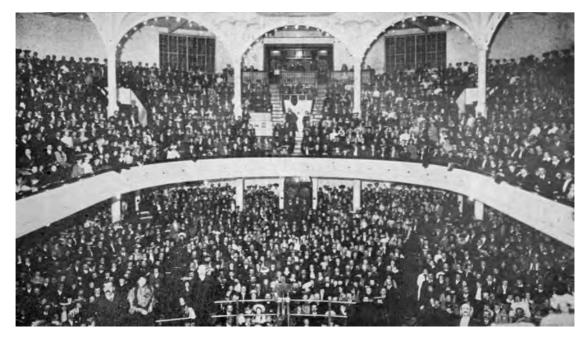


Figure 8.14: 'Saturday Night and Sunday Evening Congregations'. Source: Liverpool Records Office.

We believe there is nothing in a good innocent laugh incompatible with the most reverential spirit. We always endeavour to make our religion a thing of joy, and one that is thoroughly attractive. Advantage is taken of the interval to sing another illustrated hymn, to announce the Sunday Services, to appeal for pledges.⁴¹

A member of the Mission chaired proceedings leading the hymns and prayers interspersed throughout the service. Cinema projection equipment, provided for in the original build, illustrated hymns with different views.⁴² Policemen employed on the doors to shut out late-coming stragglers are an indication of their popularity.⁴³

The central location and competitive pricing ensured that the hall was in demand by a variety of voluntary organisations such as the White Slave Traffic Bill, the Alliance of Honour, the Laymen's Missionary League and the UK Band of Hope Union. While this generated funds, it indicated the public value of their premises and, by implication, that of Wesleyan Methodism. They claimed that 'these and other objects have been advocated under our roof, and the value to the community generally of a great hall like ours, where it is possible for people from all parts to rally, is incalculable.'⁴⁴

As a port city, Liverpool's population was transient and cosmopolitan.⁴⁵ Central Hall acted as a staging post for Methodists temporarily in Liverpool, lest city temptations get the better of moderate habits.⁴⁶ The proximity of the Hall to the railway stations and a policy of outdoor preaching at Pier Head, the landing stage for ships, enabled this. The eye-catching exterior on a main thoroughfare, no doubt, ensured that it was readily found. Many other immigrant groups used Central Hall as a base. In 1920, space was made for an African and West Indian Mission to attract sailors.⁴⁷ In the 1950s, the Central Hall Mission embarked on a campaign to recruit members from Commonwealth immigrants believing that 'there are certain influences brought to bear on them by other organizations, sometimes political influence that may not be helpful and we make a real effort to give them a Christian welcome and give a

⁴⁶ The Liverpool Mission Report to the Representative Sessions, Conference Agenda, 1908, 59.

⁴¹ LMM, Annual Report, 1906, 25.

⁴² William Crawford, The Church and the Slum, 1908, 51.

⁴³ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁴ LMM, Annual Report, 1911-1912, 8.

⁴⁵ D. Englander, 'Leeds and Liverpool: Some Comparisons and Contrasts', *Journal of Urban History*, 7 (1995), 501 and S. Wilks-Hegg, 'From World City to Pariah City? Liverpool and the Global Economy, 1850-2000' in Ronaldo Munck, *Reinventing the City? Liverpool in Comparative Perspective* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 36-52.

⁴⁷ LMM, Annual Report, 1936-7, 18 – 20.

good impression of our British way of life.⁴⁸ Throughout the twentieth century, Liverpool Central Hall variously hosted a Welsh speaking Methodist chapel, a Dutch Methodist congregation and Sunday school from the 1950s onwards was composed of children drawn from many nationalities.⁴⁹

So how good were they at attracting those they professed to? While the well-heeled could not be excluded, observers were at pains to emphasise the number of artisans attending, that is, the deserving poor who they thought to be indifferent to religion yet 'whose lives have plenty of dull monotony and little relaxation'.⁵⁰ Some anecdotal evidence, of a conversation between Joseph Jackson and 'a gentleman', makes the justification for the secular activities clear:

'Mr Jackson, I was at the concert last Saturday night, and I didn't quite like it. Do you think it is the place a Christian ought to go?'

'Of course not,' said Mr Jackson, 'it is not *for* Christians – it is for the men who do not go to church. *You* ought to have been at a prayer meeting or a class meeting somewhere. Besides you did a positive wrong in going, for you occupied a seat that I wanted badly for a poor workingman who was shut out.'⁵¹

While the very poor made up some of the number the documentary sources indicate that they were separated – either on the premises or else more likely to be found at other branches of the Mission.⁵² On Sundays, worshippers crowded into a lavishly enriched Main Hall with grand organ, choir and conductor to lead hearty hymn singing. Downstairs, two hundred homeless men had a service in the small hall, led by an earnest lay preacher. Whether the men felt inhibited from attending regular service or were barred is difficult to ascertain. With regards to women, the Mission claimed that 'they have no clothes good enough for Sunday Services, but they come to the Pleasant Monday Evening, knowing there will be others in the same circumstances' suggesting that attendance was self-censorious.⁵³ The Halls were established to overcome working class prejudice towards churches hence the reason for free and unreserved seats. However, despite the grand secular building – perhaps because of it – notions of the appropriateness of 'Sunday best' in clothing were hard to overcome.

⁴⁸ LMM, Annual Report, 1950, 14.

⁴⁹ LMM, Annual Report, 1953, 8.

⁵⁰ LMM, Annual Report, 1906, 24.

⁵¹ William Crawford, W. H., The Church in the Slum, 1908, 50, original emphasis.

⁵² Author's own analysis of the LMM, Annual Reports, Volume One, 1905 - 1911, LRO, H 266.06 MET.

⁵³ LMM, Annual Report, 1906, 19.

Forsaken

A 1934 social survey of Merseyside documents the leisure and church activities of the region.⁵⁴ Most religious organisations provided social and cultural activities to augment religious life with the Free Churches dominant in literary and debating societies in comparison to the high number of billiards clubs at Roman Catholic churches. Women attended the Wesleyan Churches more often with 177 women for every 100 men where the corresponding ratio in the overall population was 111 to 100. Protestant congregations were weighted towards the elderly or the young with interest waning in middle age. Certainly, at the Liverpool Methodist Mission there is a marked preponderance of boy scouts, guides and the Wesley Guild for the young in addition to the fellowship groups for the elderly.

The survey counted fifteen cinemas in the Lime Street area and this pursuit attracted forty per cent of the Merseyside population once a week to the detriment of music halls and theatres.⁵⁵ These secular provisions probably contributed to the gradual erosion of the mission's activities. Having played host to the Liverpool Philharmonic between 1933 to 1938, the secular concerts stopped in 1939. State sponsored initiatives usurped the role that Central Hall, and charitable social work had assumed. Liverpool suffered unemployment of up to twenty five per cent of the insured population during the Depression era. In the winter of 1931 – 2, Liverpool Council of Social Services established 30 'occupational centres' with a membership of 3, 000. A penny subscription gave access to a wide range of activities and these were sited closer to the districts where people resided.⁵⁶ While the Liverpool Mission continued to give assistance, the work was scaled back. The lodging houses, for example, were sold by 1929 although the mission held onto three mission halls.⁵⁷

During the Second World War all leases were cancelled so reducing finances. Appeals were made to the congregation to increase their giving but numbers were decimated because of evacuation. Worship continued despite this and the Hall was used as a canteen, rest room and transit hostel for the armed forces. The Central Hall remained intact, despite heavy air bombardment, but in a forlorn state. Maintenance ceased, rubbish accumulated in rooms and

⁵⁴ D. Caradog-Jones, *Social Survey*, Vol 3., 1934.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 278 - 279

⁵⁶ Ibid., 316 – 7.

⁵⁷ 'Statistical Summary of the Wesleyan Chapel and other Trust Property in the Liverpool Mission Circuit as reported at the Trustees Annual Meeting', 1871 – 1939', LRO 287 LMM/1/12.

those windows that weren't shattered were blacked out.⁵⁸ When the War ended, the Mission took stock. With money scarce, voluntary labour was employed in the clean up. As ever, lay staff never missed an evangelical beat and utilised the opportunity to try and convert those who, aside from helping repair war damage, did not otherwise attend church.⁵⁹

A new minister in 1944 insisted upon introducing a more reverent feel to the main hall on Sundays.⁶⁰ In came hymn books and proper provision for the sacraments but despite concerted efforts to attract congregations back, pre-war levels were never seen again. Membership was only 275 in 1958.⁶¹ The Liverpool Methodist Mission was trundling into misfortune with Central Hall the focal point and source of concern.

Liverpool's reports to Methodist Conference rarely published the general account or referred to membership totals. When the Liverpool District asked Conference to investigate the Mission's finances in 1955 a £26, 000 deficit came into public view.⁶² The Mission claimed that this was because of the financial support it offered to other churches in the district. Conference thought otherwise: the majority had accumulated between 1949 and 1955 when essential repair work was undertaken.⁶³ Stringent proposals to eradicate the debt were laid down by making economies in staffing and expenditure and, as Chapter Four discussed, a Central Missions Commission (CMC) set up to decide future policy regarding the provincial Central Halls.

Finding a Formula

The mid-1950s did not offer much hope for Liverpool Central Hall.⁶⁴ Its dilapidated condition meant that district gatherings preferred to rent the Philharmonic Hall, including the Methodist Conference of 1960, much to the irritation of the Mission.⁶⁵ Whole sections of

⁵⁸ A. L. Owen, *Exploits of A Hundred Years: A Brief History of the Liverpool Methodist Mission* (Liverpool: F. Lewis, 1975) 18.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁰ LMM, 'INVASION!' Annual Report, 1944, 4.

⁶¹ 'Report of the Liverpool Mission Commission', Conference Agenda, 1958, 415.

⁶² 'Liverpool Mission Commission', Conference Agenda, 1957, 475 – 77.

⁶³ Ibid., 475.

⁶⁴ 'Minutes of the first meeting of the Liverpool Mission Commission', 15 October 1956, Methodist Property Office, Box File No: 116; Property No: 018/05/08 (Herafter, MPO 116)

⁶⁵ 'Meeting of the Trustees of the Liverpool Central Hall Methodist Mission', 16 November 1958, LRO 287 LMM 1/4.

the premises were out of use, including the basement. The City Council planned to make the Renshaw Street area office rather than retail oriented meaning Central Hall was outside the main shopping centre. ⁶⁶ Uncertainty blighted the area. Population dispersal to ten district centres on the outskirts, along with proposed new towns in Lancashire and Cheshire suggested a city centre devoid of residents.⁶⁷ For the Methodists, it was undoubtedly tempting to follow people.

This was the policy of other denominations. The Church of England had closed thirty churches in the inner city and opened twenty on the outskirts.⁶⁸ The Roman Catholics were closing their Cathedral until the completion of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King (1967). No nonconformist church remained in the area, meaning Central Hall would be the only place of worship in the vicinity.

The Conference Commission was divided with some expressing the opinion that Central Hall had no place in the civic or religious life of Liverpool.⁶⁹ Members of the Mission argued to the contrary saying, 'Central Hall is not a Stonehenge or sentimental landmark but a lively centre of community service'.⁷⁰ The city surveyor concurred, singling it out for retention, in his consideration of places of worship within the scope of Liverpool's overall redevelopment.⁷¹ In the end, the Commission recommended keeping the Hall for an experimental period conditioned upon reducing debt. It was strongly felt that closure of a building of such perceived prestige would be tantamount to public admission that Methodism, in Liverpool at least, had failed.⁷² However, a substantial cash injection was needed to make the premises a realisable asset. The debt could be reduced by increasing lets to paying organisations but this needed premises in a reasonable state of repair and the JRBT provided Liverpool with £30, 000 to pay for renovation of the entrance hall and some decorative work: the first central mission to receive help from the funds specifically set aside to adapt them.⁷³

⁶⁶ F. J. C. Amos, *Places of Worship in Liverpool: A Study of their Organisation and Distribution* (Liverpool: City Planning Department, 1968), 1.

⁶⁷ 'Planning Policy Statement and Plan', Liverpool City Council, 1965.

⁶⁸ F. J. C. Amos, Places of Worship in Liverpool, 1968, 4

 ⁶⁹ F. I. Masser, 'The Analysis and Prediction of Physical Change in the Central Area of Liverpool' in R. Lawton and C. Cunningham, (eds.) *Merseyside: Social and Economic Studies* (London: Longman, 1970), 468 – 478.
 ⁷⁰ Liverpool Methodist Mission, *Annual Report*, 1959, 1.

⁷¹ F. J. C. Amos, *Places of Worship in Liverpool*, 1968, 6.

⁷² See, for example, the sentiment expressed by W. O. Phillipson in a letter to the JRBT, 3 December 1958, MPO Box. 116.

⁷³ Memorandum of a Visit to the Liverpool Mission made by the Representatives of the DCA, 22 December 1958; MPO 116.

When the deficit cleared in 1968 radical renovation was considered. The Home Mission Division (HMD) remained in favour of selling or redeveloping as commercial premises with a smaller space for the church inside.⁷⁴ However a report by a London surveyor deemed neither possibility financially viable.⁷⁵ When a new minister, Tom Jenkinson, arrived at the Mission in 1968, he persuaded the Property Division (PD) that his imaginative and charismatic ministry would raise membership and that a complete overhaul with the aim of attracting lettings was required. With the issue perceived as urgent and no other plans in the offing, it was sanctioned. Liverpool's case was pushed up the JRBT list, although its secretary, Paul Bartlett Lang, stressed that this was not at the expense of other schemes in Blackburn, Salford and Bristol.⁷⁶ A further £35, 000 was authorised towards an estimated cost of £60, 000. HMD provided £5, 000, leaving £20, 000 for the Mission to find towards the scheme. In 1974, there remained a debt of £7, 000 but the centenary anniversary of the Mission, held in 1975, provided the final impetus to clear it.⁷⁷

The scheme was carried out by Mr Thomas MacAuley of Patterson MacAuley and Owens, a firm specialising in church buildings. MacAuley was a Methodist lay preacher and member at the Central Hall. His plan demonstrated the belief that the only value of the main hall was as a concert venue. The capacity was reduced to 1, 000 and the platform extended to host a full size orchestra in order to be accessible to community groups who could not afford the Philharmonic Hall.⁷⁸ Asymmetrical windows, considered 'odd' were removed. The interior was colourful with new seats and carpeting to quieten noise. In the lower hall, the tiered seating and stage 'a relic of past usage' were removed.⁷⁹

The phased plan helped to spread costs but even when work finished in 1975 it was still thought to be inadequate. In order to make an atmosphere more conducive to worship, seating was reorder to create 'a Church in the Round' facilitating democratic discussion and,

⁷⁴ Letter from Herbert Simpson (DCA) to Donaldson and Son (Chartered Surveyors), 10 March 1969, MPO 116.

⁷⁵ Reply Letter from Donaldson and Son (Chartered Surveyors) to Herbert Simpson (DCA),13 August 1969, MPO 116.

⁷⁶ Letter from Paul Bartlett Lang (JRBT) to the Herbert Simpson (DCA), 21 November 1968, MPO 116.

⁷⁷ Letter from Herbert Simpson (DCA) to Brian W. Rogers, 10 April 1974; MPO 116.

⁷⁸ 'Multi-Purpose Church for a Revitalised City Centre', *The Methodist Recorder*, 23 March 1978, 12.

⁷⁹ A. L. Owen, Exploits of One Hundred Years, 1975, 44.

with its Pentecostal connotations, signalling a preference for charismatic worship.⁸⁰ The refurbishment also tapped into the music sub-culture of Liverpool. A 'Youth Music Centre' was established in the unused basement and each room named after a member of the Beatles. While the church relied on a congregation commuting from the suburbs, secular and social work organisations drew upon the immediate neighbourhood and the racial composition of these groups reflected the inner city experience.⁸¹

Outside sources of funding were attracted for this third modernization venture with most of the £34, 000 cost met by a job creation scheme. The Department of Education and Skills provided the wages for a full-time worker in the Music Centre. But the revitalization of the premises ensured conflict with the local ratings authorities who were increasingly inclined to consider the premises primarily commercial rather than religious.⁸² As a result, steps were taken to ensure that non-shop tenants were community organisations, such as trade union groups and the national blood donation service.⁸³

Admitting Defeat

Despite modernisation, the Main Hall remained underused. One minister complained that 'we have taken every opportunity to bit by bit make the buildings serve. But we are still left with a vast Main Hall "void" at the centre'.⁸⁴ Without a substantial worshipping congregation, the Hall was a metaphorical hole. Those remaining were close and centred around a charismatic ministry the Liverpool Holy Spirit Renewal Centre which acted as 'a counterculture in the Church against cold, formal, cerebral religion'.⁸⁵ During one fellowship meeting, a vision emerged that the Central Hall tower fell to the ground and went into the city like a ship. This signified to the congregation that they ought to go out into the city and evangelise.⁸⁶

Only two shop units at Central Hall were occupied. The Mission took over one to provide coffee with an informal drop-in service. To this, the generous congregation contributed $\pounds 2$,

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ LMM, Annual Report, 1968, 2.

^{82 &#}x27;Letter from George W. Dolbey (PD) to Tom Jenkinson (LMM), 28 February, 1977, MPO 116.

⁸³ 'Factors Causing Concern at the Present Time', Confidential Report to the HMD, October 1986, MPO 116.

⁸⁴ Letter from Ross Peart (LMM) to Kenneth Street (PD), 28 October 1986, MPO 116.

⁸⁵ 'Central Hall Methodist Church', Magazine of the Central Hall Methodist Church, August 1981, 10.

⁸⁶ 'Central Hall Methodist Church', Magazine of the Central Hall Methodist Church, March 1981, 10-11.

000 so that it was not wholly dependent on commercial sales alone. A life skills centre for the unemployed and a day care centre for the elderly received funding from the Department of the Environment. The church was also active ecumenically and the prominent building gave rise to an illusion of power.⁸⁷ Pioneering activities included joint Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist Services at each of the two Cathedrals and Central Hall.⁸⁸ At one point, Central Hall was under consideration as an ecumenical centre but the idea was never followed through.⁸⁹ While such activities were commendable in a city with a history of sectarian conflict and chronic deprivation, they could not generate the cash needed to keep the building in sound condition.

A long recession in the early 1980s hit Liverpool particularly hard with chronic unemployment.⁹⁰ Many businesses folded and Central Hall encountered problems with permanent leases, numbering three by October 1986. Liverpool Council had the basement and one shop. All were in arrears. The militant, Labour-led council was in economic disarray and it soon pulled funding from the youth club and a life skills class for the unemployed.⁹¹ They closed. The PD were forced to consider the retention of Central Hall as a concert venue and meeting place and in a letter to the Mission, their secretary expressed reservations

I cannot share the view that Methodism should retain such premises when such use is their major justification. Certainly, so far as secular use is concerned there is no loyalty or thanks should fashions change.⁹²

The large Edwardian building was perceived to be inflexible and, in the eyes of the PD, further renovation would be mere tinkering. They recommended its sale or replacement with new premises.⁹³ However, city centre redevelopment made the site was unattractive. Its shape, poor condition and grade II listing awarded in 1985 were deemed impediments.

In 1990, when the membership had shrunk to ten, the building was put on the market. Little interest was shown. By 1993, a company, 21st Century Properties, was set up and awarded a feasibility study grant by Liverpool City Challenge to assess the redevelopment potential of

⁸⁷ Personal Interview, 20.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Letter from Ross Peart (LMM), to Ken Street, (PD), 3 November 1986, MPO 116.

⁹⁰ C. G. Pooley, 'Living in Liverpool: The Modern City' in Ronaldo Munck, *Reinventing the City*?, 2003, 238 - 240. ⁹¹ For a commentary on the council see Richard Meegan 'Urban Regeneration, Politics and Social Cohesion:

The Liverpool Case' in Munck, Reinventing the City?, 2003, 53-79.

 ⁹² Letter from Kenneth Street (DP) to John E. Richardson (DHM), 19 November 1985, MPO 116.
 ⁹³ Ibid.

the building.⁹⁴ The preferred option was to continue as a mixed use site incorporating cultural businesses, student housing and services for workers and shoppers. The poor level of maintenance to the main fabric over the previous fifty years became clear: around $\pounds 2.4$ - $\pounds 3.6$ million was needed to address structural damage threatening the stability of the building.

Recycling

Eventually, it was sold to a private development company in 1995 for £180, 000. Methodist covenants on the use of a building restricted future use at odds with the ethical ethos of the Church. However, the building changed hands enough times to circumvent the caveat. It came into the ownership of Bob Burns, a local entrepreneur, who transformed it into a nightclub: Barcelona (Figures 8.15 to Figure 8.17). The architect, Dominic Gannon, was responsible for the art nouveau embellishments to the ground floor windows were influenced by Antoni Gaudi.⁹⁵ Bob Burns commissioned Gannon to be in charge of a further £1 million renovation in 2005 which saved the main hall. Two years later, in the run up to Liverpool's hosting of the City of Culture in 2008, Burns put it on the market for £6 million.⁹⁶ It now houses a number of independent clothing retailers who were forced to vacate their original home when compulsory purchased for the Liverpool Paradise One shopping centre. The Main Hall is still in occasional use for large gatherings and awards shows and the smaller hall has been re-opened as more traders relocate to the site. Listed status means that the City Council enforce a standard of maintenance and upkeep.⁹⁷

As long as the structure remains sound, the future of the Hall is secure and its architectural and social merit to the Liverpool landscape assured. Even the organ can still be played although access to the general public is restricted. The Merseyside Civic Society is currently campaigning to add Renshaw Street to Liverpool's thirty five conservation areas to preserve 'the architectural unity of this fine Liverpool Street'. ⁹⁸ Dr Peter Brown of the Department of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool commends the street as 'a unique example of a

 ⁹⁴ 'Central Hall – Feasibility Study', Liverpool: 21st Century City (Properties) L.T.D., January 1993, *MPO* 116
 ⁹⁵ Joseph Sharples, *Liverpool: Pevsner Architectural Guides* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2006), 230.

⁹⁶ 'Irish Pub Pioneer Calls Time with £6m Central Hall Sale', *Liverpool Daily Post*, 13 October 2006, www.liverpooldailypost.co.uk. Accessed, 4 January 2010.

⁹⁷ C. Griffiths (Buildings at Risk Officer, Liverpool City Council), *Email to the Author*, 26 September 2009.
⁹⁸ P. J. Brown 'Suggested Conservation Area based on Renshaw Street', Press Statement, Merseyside Civic Society, October 2009, http://www.liv.ac.uk/mcs/lfs/docs/renshawstpr091020.pdf. Accessed 22 December 2009.



Figure 8.15: Metalwork on the windows incorporated a redesign of the Liver Birds in the window, March 2008. Source: © Tony Shertilla.



Figure 8.16: Staircase metalwork, March 2008. Source: © Tony Shertilla.



Figure 8.17: The refurbished ceiling, 2008. Source: © Philip G. Meyer.

Liverpool street built in the city scale'. ⁹⁹ Having survived a period of crisis and potential demolition, Central Hall has found a new use and finds itself subject to architectural reappraisal although most people have long since forgotten its original purpose.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

Despite the ornate design, the Charles Garrett Memorial Hall would have blended into the secular commercial architecture surrounding it. Size and location to both city centre and residential areas enabled the Mission to perform a valuable social and community service even though this pushed it into debt. As church membership dwindled and the population left inner city for suburb, the value of the building was harder to maintain. Such opulent surroundings became burdensome and the cost of repairs further tarnished its image.

The Mission had to allocate an increasing amount of the building to secular uses. Paradoxically, the church tried to make itself more visible, following a more radical programme of worship in the premises but to no avail. With a financial system reliant on lettings and congregational giving, the Mission encountered more when a recession meant that post-industrial Liverpool was not a place where business or people could afford to be.

The decision to sell saved the building. The Church could never hope to meet the scale of work needed to keep it intact. Property developers, however, could find the funds and the flexible space has found new commercial uses and high monetary value. Its survival has occurred with a reassessment of Liverpool's architectural heritage and the building attracts attention such that may warrant its continued existence on a very distinctive Liverpool street.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ 'Central Hall', *Yo! Liverpool Community Web Forum*, www.yoliverpool.com/forum/showthread.php?3135-Central-Hall. Accessed 21 August 2008.

Chapter 9: Queen's Hall, Wigan (1907 – 8)



Figure 9.1: The Queen's Hall as it appeared in 1910. Source: The Wigan Methodist Mission.

Establishing a Mission

Midway between Liverpool and Manchester in the South Lancashire plain lies the town of Wigan. Awarded its Royal Charter in 1246, the economic base of this market town expanded into coal, cotton and iron during the industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Immigrants, attracted to the new employment opportunities, swelled the population from 41, 413 in 1801 to 239,399 in 1901. At the same time, the town centre underwent municipal and commercial redevelopment between1865 and 1905.¹

The Wigan Improvement Act (1874) widened and lighted streets and introducing electric trams. Many public buildings were built including the town hall (1867), a new market hall (1877), public library (1878) and a municipal and technical college (1903). Galleried arcades, shops, public houses and theatres congregated on King Street, the entertainment district. They followed contemporary architectural fashion in a variety of Victorian revival styles, often with a liberal amount of terracotta, manufactured at the nearby Bipsham Hall Terracotta and Brickworks in Billinge.

Church building tried to provide for a growing population, but could not keep up. The Wesleyan Methodists had built churches in most of the outlying districts but had only one church and a small mission hall in the town centre.² An unofficial census of religious attendance in 1905 showed that overall, there were only 60, 000 seats available for a population of around 200, 000 meaning that should they have desired to attend worship, 140, 000 people would be unable to do so.³ This situation needed remedying. The Wesleyans drew particular attention to 'drunkenness, gambling and pigeon flying with all its attendant vices' that were 'prevalent to an alarming extent.²

http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/data_cube_table_page.jsp?data_theme=T_POP&data_cube=N_TP op&u_id=10056767&c_id=10001043&add=N. Accessed, 28 July 2009.

¹ For general introductions to the history of Wigan see Mike Fletcher, *The Making of Wigan* (Barnsley: Wharcliffe Press, 2005); A. Mitchell, *Golden Years of Wigan* (Halifax: True North, 1998) and Bob Blakeman, *Wigan: A Historical Souvenir* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1996). The population figures relate to the whole borough, see 'Wigan: Total Population', *Vision of Britain Through Time*,

² 'Townships: Wigan', A History of the County Lancaster: Volume 4 (1911), 68-78.

http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=41380. Accessed, 28 July 2009.

³ 'The Wigan Wesleyan Mission: The New Central Hall', *Wigan Observer*, 5 May 1907, 6. ⁴ Ibid.

Thomas Walker, collector of facts, cited these figures at the stone laying ceremony for the Queen's Hall, the latest Central Hall development. The large religious and public hall in the centre of town was the result of Connexional support: Home Mission offered the services of a full-time minister to the Bolton Synod to kindle a revival in a town of its choosing. Wigan, they decided, would be the recipient since the local circuit was considered weak and unable to attract funds.

In 1904, the Revd. W. A. Harrison had arrived in Wigan to build a cause through the tried and tested means of outdoor preaching, prayer meetings and brass band marching. The nascent mission attained early success, especially among children. Gaining 600 members in two years indicated that a substantial revival was underway. Harrison soon hired the Hippodrome, a music hall on King Street, for Sunday services (Figure 9.2). Its Roman Catholic owner lent it on favourable terms as he was impressed by the work of the mission.⁵ What the mission thought of using an unwholesome venue is not said, but the practice was common and no doubt securing it for religion was a step in the right direction. Their friendly landlord was benevolent enough to advertise the religious services to his Saturday audiences and a neighbouring brewery allowed the Mission's adverts on its wall.⁶ The religious in the secular seems not such an odd mix.

As a Connexional initiative, an element of confidence was involved. Despite membership declining in relative terms to the total population, the Wesleyans claimed up to one quarter of English churchgoers and were confident that theirs was a national church.⁷ Its 'cathedral' was about to be built at Westminster and the Central Halls seemed to be successful. In 1905, Thomas Walker offered £5, 000 towards the building of a Central Hall in Wigan. With no failing Wesleyan chapels to provide suitable land, he and a deputation from the WCC and Home Mission were sent to secure a site. Requirements demanded a central location and they faced heavy competition in the small town centre.⁸ Fortunately, a Mrs Mullineux was willing to sell shops and cottages directly across from the Market Hall. These were purchased for

⁵ Muriel Guyler B. A., *The Wigan Miracles* (Wigan: Wigan Methodist Mission, c. 1960), 4.

⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷ In 1871, conference enacted a standing order changing the from a 'society' to a 'church'.

⁸ A Special Meeting of the Mission Committee', The Wigan Wesleyan Mission (Hereafter WMM), 10 April 1905. This equates to around $\pounds 1$ million today. Unless otherwise stated all archival material relating to the Mission is held at Queen's Hall.



Figure 9.2 The Mission initially hired the Wigan Hippodrome for Sunday services. Source: The Wigan Methodist Mission.

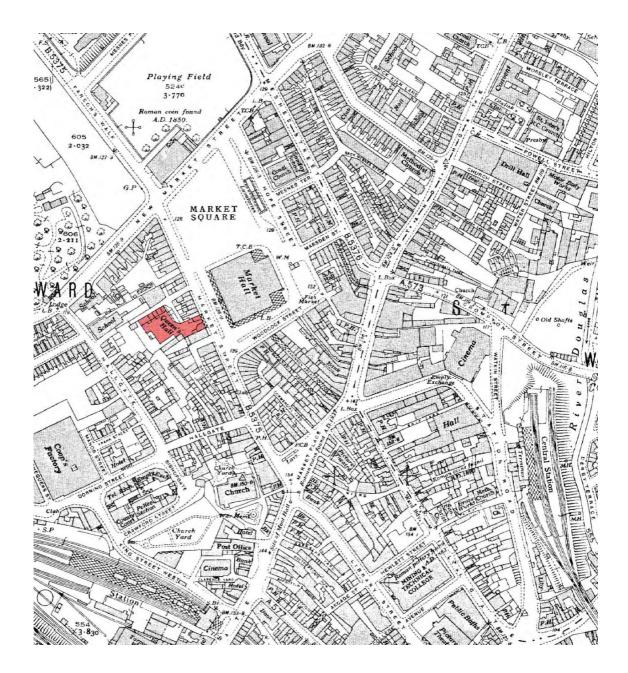


Figure 9.3: Map of Central Wigan showing the location of Queen's Hall. Source: © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2010) All rights reserved (County Series Map, 1938 -9; 1: 2500).

 \pounds 10, 200 along with a plot of land at the rear of which they acquired the freehold.⁹ It proved a judicious choice. Market Street was a main thoroughfare and a busy commercial street, with the market hall at one end and the tram terminus at the other (Figure 9.3).

A 'Remarkably Cheap' Solution

Financial considerations weighed heavy from the beginning. Between 1898 and 1911, the WCC sanctioned thirty two central halls. These escalated beyond estimated costs leaving heavy debts and continual fundraising. The Leysian, Birmingham and Edinburgh Halls had excited much debate at the WCC. All three required special funding arrangements: the Leysian Mission, estimated at £40, 000, cost £126, 000 in total.¹⁰

The Bolton firm of Bradshaw and Gass were responsible for the design for the Leysian mission. That complicated development was wrapped up in a sophisticated High Baroque style the firm were well-versed in.¹¹ While such finery was flaunted in the metropolis, it was not to be in Wigan. Bradshaw and Gass were awarded the commission, no doubt the connection with Thomas Walker governing the appointment, but Walker was a less than effusive patron by this time. Letters to the practice demonstrate a keenness to exercise effective financial control. Methodism, he prophesies:

is only at the beginning of this work, but it cannot bear the burden of these expensive buildings \dots smaller towns such as Rochdale, Burnley and Blackburn are bound to follow and we must show at Wigan what we can do.¹²

Walker had a clear idea of what would be done, throwing down the gauntlet to John B. Gass:

...in the building of these Halls much more attention is to be given to cost and the man who can give a Hall suitable in all points to the special kinds of work, and built substantially *without elaboration either inside or outside, at moderate cost, will be the man of the future.*¹³

⁹ MWCC, 15 April 1905.

¹⁰ Almost \pounds 13 million today.

¹¹ Austen Redman, 'Bolton Civic Centre and the Classical Revival Style of Bradshaw Gass and Hope', 1997, 157 – 176.

¹² Letter from Thomas Walker to John B. Gass, 20 April 1905, BMA, ZBGH 460.

¹³ Ibid., My emphasis.

Austerity in architectural style here is driven by financial considerations as much as theological or aesthetic preferences. Adornments, be they secular or holy, cost money. With Connexional funds stretched over the amount of chapel building, they were considered to be unnecessary frippery. Nevertheless, cut-price Central Halls still had to be large enough to accommodate the various rooms required for mission work and be instantly recognisable as a public hall.

The main façade of Queen's Hall is a muted interpretation of Wren baroque. An eighty-foot terracotta clad tower signals the main entrance and, in the words of the architect, 'would hold its head up high' on the Wigan landscape.¹⁴ The initial drawings, shown in figure 9.4, indicated banded stonework in the central bay but this was later reduced to the first floor and the central segmented pediment was omitted in favour of an ingenious and cheaper composition that emphasised the cornice. Large dormer windows, of different sizes and styles, allowed plenty light into the building and added interest to the main façade. A cast iron canopy, sheltering the main entrance and two shops units, formed another decorative feature.

As at the Victoria Hall in Bolton, the narrow entrance concealed the extent of the accommodation behind. Mahogany doors led to a foyer with two pay boxes indicating that the hall would be used for both secular as well as sacred purposes. Beyond this was the all-important crush hall. As a place to wait before entering the main hall, its function gave rise to an 'opportunity for that social converse and personal influence so necessary in Mission work'¹⁵ with staff strategically placed to give a warm and friendly greeting should any newcomers enter.

The octagonal main hall, with its elegantly curving balcony, had a large platform as its central focus. Space for an organ was made should the Mission acquire enough funds to secure an instrument. A projection room for cinematic equipment was provided in the upper back gallery since the moving image had become an essential component of the evangelistic weaponry by this time. The theatre-like feel of the main worship space was cemented by including 1, 775 tip-up chairs, with space for hats underneath modelled on those at the Victoria Hall in Bolton and produced by the same firm, the cabinet makers David and Henry

¹⁴ John B. Gass, 'Address at the Foundation Stone Laying', 15 May 1907, BMA, ZBGH 436a.

¹⁵ WCCAR, 1907, 84.

Waddington. The planning of the main hall was so arranged that any preacher would be 'enrapport with the people; he can see every face except those on the platform, can speak directly and personally to all, and can be seen and heard in all parts.'¹⁶ Each person was to feel as though he or she were being personally addressed.

Cast iron columns carried the upper galleries and reached up to a vaulted dome in the same material. Latticed roof trusses made a decorative feature of the stripped back roof construction. The dark cream panelled walls and white modelled gallery front were intended to be 'rightly chaste'.¹⁷ Bright light was brought in through the many windows in muffled white, green and yellow stained glass. These, Messrs Cuniffe and Pointer of Manchester were instructed, had 'to be as cheap as possible.'¹⁸ The result was to be considered a light, bright and cheerful building despite the restrictions imposed on J.B. Gass regarding ornamentation and cost.

The problem of the irregular and sloping site was resolved with a similar remedy as that employed in the Victoria Hall, Bolton. Space underneath the main hall was used to provide a smaller hall, accommodating 750, primarily for Sunday school work. Adjoining this were class rooms with moveable screens to make the rooms sub-dividable to suit need. The site also afforded the inclusion of two floors of offices above the main entrance and there was space left over to build a block of six warehouses at the side running parallel to Market Street to provide additional rental income (Figure 9.5). These plans are the full articulation of the Central Hall type with business accommodation.

It cost £30, 167 in total, including the site. *The Wigan Observer* reported that businessmen had 'given careful thought to all details of the scheme regard it as a remarkably cheap one'.¹⁹ Gass paid tribute to the building committee singling out Harrison in his keen attention to plans and the progression of work. Many terse and frantic letters went back and forth between Committee, architect and contractors particularly when the non-delivery of roof trusses threatened to delay the project. The tone and range of letters in the archive, when compared

 $^{^{16}}$ Bradshaw and Gass, 'The Queen's Hall Description', (n.d.) $\,$ BMA, ZBGH 460 $\,$

¹⁷ 'The Wigan Wesleyan Mission: The New Central Hall', Wigan Observer, 18 May 1907, 6.

¹⁸ Letter from John B. Gass to Messrs Cunniffe and Pointer, Manchester, 6 November 1907, BMA, ZBGH 460

¹⁹ 'The Wigan Wesleyan Mission: New Central Hall', Wigan Observer 18 May 1907, 6.

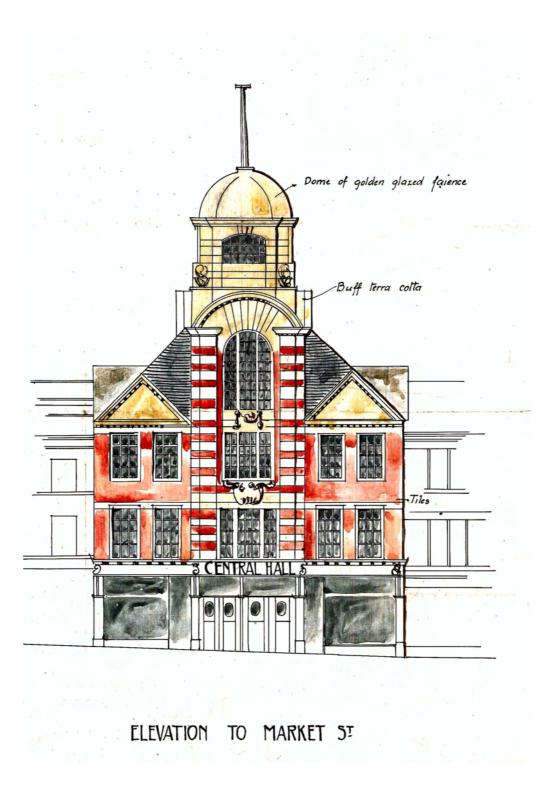


Figure: 9.4: Elevation drawing by Bradshaw and Gass. Compare with Figure 9.1. Source: Bradshaw Gass and Hope.

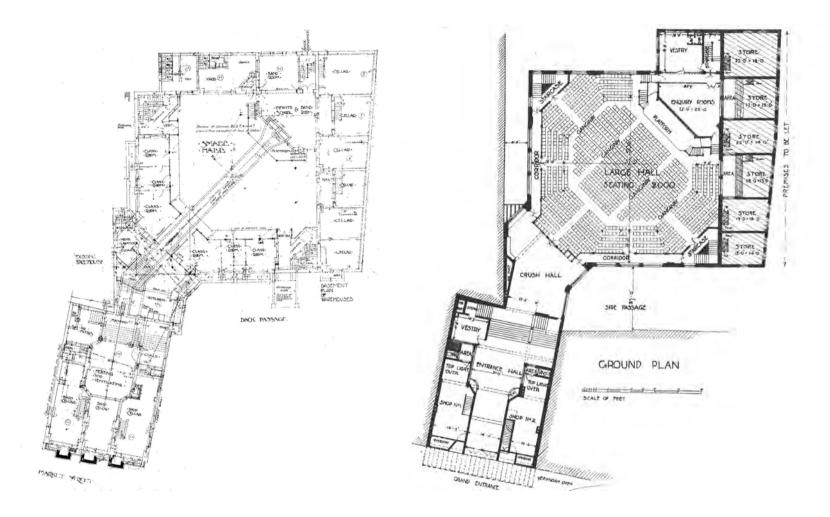


Figure 9.5: Basement (left) and ground floor (right) plans of the Queen's Hall. Source: Bradshaw Gass and Hope.

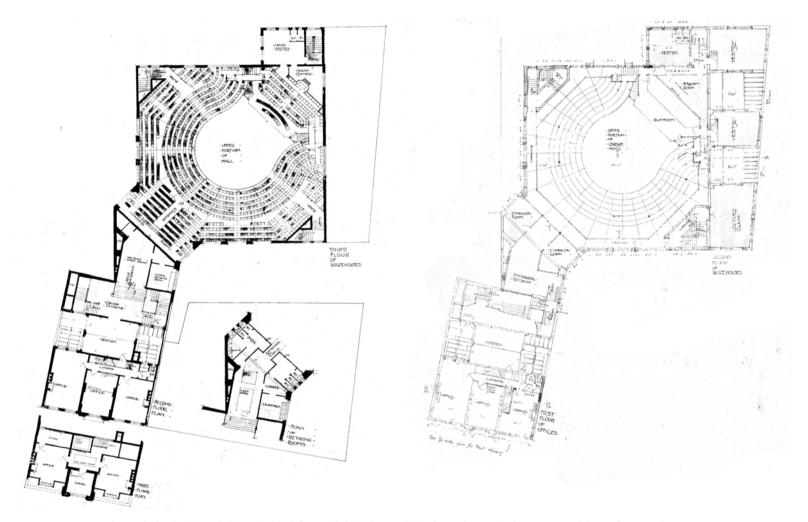


Figure 9.6: Gallery (left) and third floor (right) plans of the Queen's Hall. Source: Bradshaw Gass and Hope.

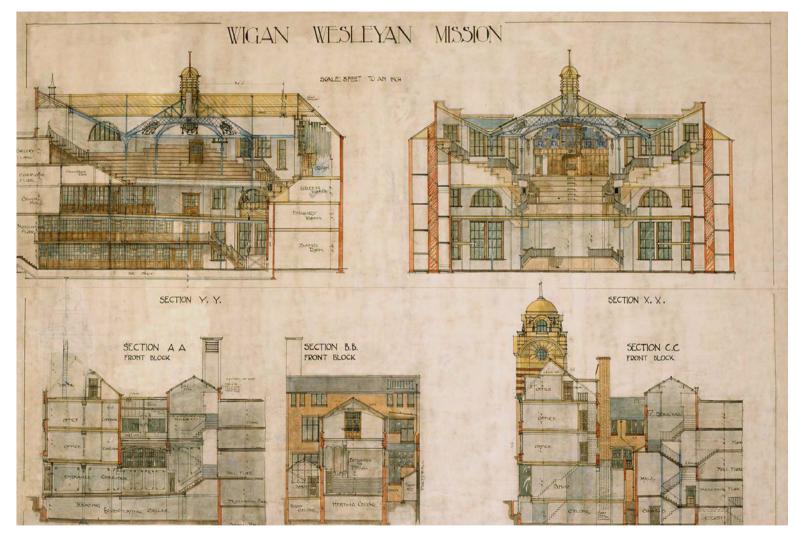


Figure 9.7: Sections through the Queen's Hall. Source: Bradshaw Gass and Hope.

to other halls the firm designed for the Wesleyans, is suggestive of continual supervisory interference from the Building Committee. What Gass thought is tactfully unrecorded.

To raise funds, the public function of Queen's Hall was emphasised. It would provide a wholesome meeting place away from the temptations of alcohol and other vices (Figure 9.7). Consequently, the Mayor of Wigan thought it would be 'a splendid thing for the purification of the town, and it would be a splendid thing for the moral as well as the spiritual life of the Wigan district'. In addition to local Methodists, appeals were made to 'friends of progress' in the town. Local magistrates, Samuel Melling, a bicycle manufacturer, and William Deakin, maker of jams and jellies, were joint treasurers at the Mission. Despite all these efforts, promised funds totalled £15, 700. Melling reported in 1909 that they were paying four per cent interest on the outstanding amount of £6, 300. It was not paid off until 1920: raising the total cost to £36, 966.²⁰

Prayer and Testimony

Existing Wesleyans were strongly discouraged from attending the religious services and secular activities aimed to attract the unconverted. They should be keen attendees of class meetings and devotional life. Harrison knew that novelty may attract Wesleyans from all walks of life. At pains to ensure that his burgeoning mission was not accused of appropriating bodies from other local churches, he made an early appeal:

If you are already a member of a Church or Sunday School we have no desire that you should join us. There will be no gain for Christ's Kingdom. You will want to see the Hall and show an interest in our work. You will have plenty of week-day opportunities and we will be glad to see you then, but please do not come on Sundays. We shall want all the room for men and women who have been doing without religion, who go nowhere, but will be glad to go to Queen's Hall.²¹

Spiritual activities sat alongside secular activities. Twenty three weekly devotional meetings, privileging prayer, fellowship and bible study, were complemented by recreation rooms, football and cricket clubs marketed with self-improvement as the aim. Girls could subscribe to their own club for one penny which provided a programme of lectures, concerts, social events, needlework and singing for both instruction and amusement. Men were addressed on a

²⁰ WMM, The Queen's Hall: Fourth Anniversary Report, 1909, 9.

²¹ WMM, The Queen's Hall: Second Anniversary Report, 1907, 8.

variety of topics, but always with religion or citizenship as a background theme. Habits of thrift were aimed at women who could subscribe to a savings club and the sick and maternity society. A general relief fund existed to be distributed in small amounts to the deserving poor, who also felt the benefit of an 'old clothes room' in the basement. While Wigan did not operate men's hostels and labour yards like the larger city missions, the men's recreation room was open every day, specifically aimed at the potentially idle unemployed.

Saturday tuppeny concerts showed variety performances and including humorous burlesque and common folk songs, advertised Sunday's religious services. A generous dose of Lancashire hot pot could be obtained for a further one penny. There is, however, no record of George Formby Junior ever performing there. The double entendres of this local Wigan entertainer, and favourite at the Hippodrome, were probably considered too risqué for Queen's Hall. For, in spite of the singing and sports, strict control over the use of the premises was exercised. This occasionally caused friction with younger attendees. In 1944, the youth committee queried a rule forbidding dancing. But the Leaders Meeting upheld the Methodist Conference Standing Order of 1943 which reinforced a ban on dancing on church premises.²²

The Mission always emphasised the religious intent in their ancillary activities. On a given night, people would pledge their conversion to Christ. These potential members were put 'on trial' and encouraged to attend fellowship meetings. Door-to-door visitations were a key follow-up. This was usually undertaken by the deaconesses who, armed with a list of names and a pen, worked fastidiously down a list noting the status of those visited. Examples of their comments include the disapproving 'beggars'; 'unstable'; 'unsatisfactory. Wants to be in the band' to the success of 'Florence' being 'invited to Thursday class – Allelluia!'.²³ Once converted, members would be encouraged to participate more fully in class meetings and to take a lead in the society.

Full membership entailed a significant commitment and a close watch was kept over conduct. A Mr Carrington and a Mr Grindley were expelled on account of some undisclosed

²² 'A Special Trustees and Leaders Meeting', WMM, 25 October 1908. The standing order referred to is detailed in *Minutes of Conference*, 1943, 155.

²³Muriel Guyler, The Wigan Miracles, 1960, 13-15.





THE LOWER HALL seats 750 Persons, and will be an ideal building for SUNDAY SCHOOL work as well as for special purposes. It is surrounded by many Class Rooms, which can be used either in conjunction with the Small Hall or separately.

Behind the Platform is the **INFANTS' SCHOOL**, which will also be available for a Band Room, Club Room, or other purposes:

Figure 9.8: Advertising Brochure for the Queen's Hall, 1908. The frontispiece highlights 'Concerts for the People' in a larger font size so emphasising this. Source: The Wigan Methodist Mission.

WIGAN MISSION,		
Sunday	School and Week-day Meetings held in	
School Lane	Mission Hall and Queen's Hall Building:	
ANNOT	INCEMENTS FOR THIS WEEK.	
SUNDAY, Oct. 20 1907.	 9-30 & 2-0 Sunday School. Young People invited 10-15 Lodging House Services. 11-0 School Lane, Mr. George Gorwood. 2-15 Band March, Prayer Meeting at the Hippodrome 3-0 REV, W, A. HAREJSON, Subject—"A Christian Hero." 4-15 Workers' Tea. 5 0, Workers' Prayer Meeting: 5-45 Band March and Procession. 6-30 Children's Mission Service, School Lane. 6-45 Rev. W. A. HARTISON. Subject—"Does Faith Save?" 8-30 Special Mission Service, School Lane. Mission Hall, Mr. George Gorwood 	
MONDAY, Oct. 21	 2-30 Women's Meeting, Sister Dorothy Hindle 7-45 Special Prayer Meeting for a Great Revival. 7-45 Choir Rehearsal, Queen's Hall Buildings. 7-30 Open-air Service, Lamberhead Green 	
TUESDAY, Oct. 22	 6-45 Junior Girls' Class. Leader : MISS PIGGIN. 8-0 Youths' Class, Queen's Hall, Mr. J. L. W. MOON. 8-0 Men's Meeting. Leader : REV. W. A. HARRISO 6-45 Boy's Junior Class. Leader, Mr. Arthur Mason. 	
WEDNES.,	7-30 Girls' Class, Queen's Hall, Miss Wall. 8-0 Class for Men and Women, Mr. Geo. Gorwood	
Oct. 23	7-30 Open-Air Service, Caunce Street.	
THURS., 24	 3-0 Class for Women. Rev. W. A. HARRISON. 7-0 Class for Girls. Leader: MISS KNELLER. 8-0 Class for Young Women, Sister Dorothy 8-0 Young Men's Class, Queen's Hall, MR. ROYLE 7-30 Open-air Service, Bottling Wood. 	
FRIDAY, 25	7 to 10 Men's Club, School Lane Mission Hall.	
SATURDAY 26	 7-15 Open-air Service near Mission Hall. 8-0 P.S.E. Christian's Merrie Meeting. 	
	9-30 & 2-0 Sunday School. Young People invited. 11-0 School Lane , MR. GEORGE GORWOOD 2-15 Band March Prayer Meeting at the Hippodrom	
SUNDAY Oct. 27	 3-0 Special Song Service. "The Harmonists Miss G. Taylor, Mrs. Gairn, Mr. F. Eyre, Mr. J. Stan Accompanist, Miss L. M. Johnson A.R.C.O., L.I.S.M Band March and Procession. 6-45 Rev. W. A. HARRISON, Subject : "The Belief of a Devil." 	

Figure 9.9: Weekly announcements sheets showing the range of activities. October 1907. Source: Wigan Methodist Mission.

discretion.²⁴ A policy was followed to make leaders of converts usually by making them stewards. This was believed to give responsibility, a sense of self-worth and reinforced the self-sufficiency of the congregation. In modern vocabulary, by giving converts positions of responsibility, they would be more likely to actively pursue goals for the mutual benefit of a common good. The policy also solved two problems caused by the size of the venue. Effective policing ensured safety and that everyone was seated and behaving. More benignly, stewards were the face of the mission extended the warm and homely feel of the premises by greeting everyone who entered the building, with each man addressed as 'brother' and newcomers being singled out for special treatment. Front entrance, side entrance, society and poor stewards found their numbers swelled when twelve aisle stewards joined their rank in 1918.²⁵

Monthly 'testimony meetings' were held in the main hall on Sunday afternoons and used the cinema projector and other images to illustrate tales of conversion. So, although the main hall space in Central Halls facilitated preaching, these meetings intended to offer additional evidence of the benefits of religion. It was thought that the working man would not respond to moralistic sermonising from preachers who were of a different class. So, at Wigan, converted miners spoke of religion as a saviour, often playing up tragic or comic elements.²⁶ Figure 9.10 shows an advert from the 1931 Annual Report with a powerful before and after image of Adrian Betham Senior or, 'The Drunken Carter'. Across all of the Missions these testimonics typically began by setting the scene of a terrible life then describing the conversion experience before providing the evidence of the better life chances that religion offered, typically with an emphasis on the wider benefits for the convert's family. In Adrian Betham's case, the story is made lighter with a discussion about the benefits to his horse.

While it was hoped that the mission would eventually expand into the warehouses this never happened and so the premises were rented out, often on favourable terms to charitable organisations.²⁷ So, amongst other organisations, the Provident and Clothing and Supply, City of Glasgow Friendly Society and the Wigan Photographic Society called Queen's Hall their home. The main hall became a multi-purpose local venue hosting school ceremonies, trade-union meetings and choral societies.

²⁴ 'Minutes of a Leaders Meeting', WMM, 5 July 1912.

²⁵ 'Minutes of a Leaders Meeting', WMM, 18 February 1918.

²⁶ Muriel Guyler, *The Wigan Miracles*, 1960, 5 – 7.

 $^{^{27}}$ There is no record of lettings at Wigan. But typically good causes paid 50% of the charge levelled for commercial organisations.

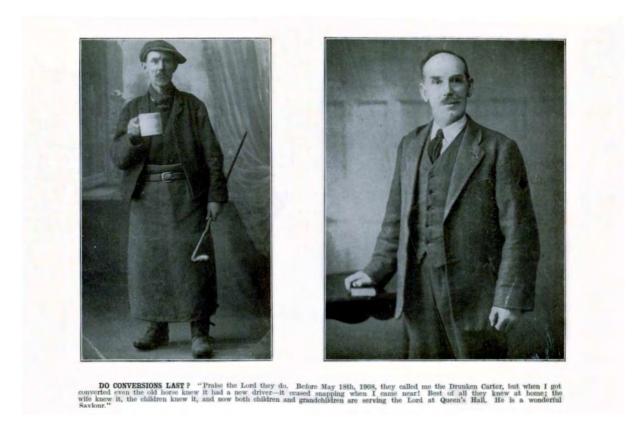


Figure 9.10: Do Conversions Last? A testimony advert from the 1931 Annual Report Source: The Wigan Methodist Mission.

The Mission claimed that ninety per cent of its membership was working class.²⁸ Anniversary appeals pointedly remark that the majority of the Mission's finance was contributed from its congregation. Subscription lists at the back of the anniversary brochures emphasised that the poor of the mission were not taking advantage but actively contributing to funds. This caused some difficulty in the Great Depression as Wigan's coal pits and cotton mills closed. During the year General Strike of 1926, congregational contributions declined by £100.

The most well-known account of interwar Wigan is George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) which gives a grim account of poverty amongst the unemployed miners. An illustrated article in *Picture Post* (1939) paints a more positive view. Despite an unemployment rate of thirty per cent, it shows a town rich in associational life.²⁹ These years witnessed Wigan Borough Council enacting town centre improvements resulting in many new educational and leisure premises as well as half-timbered mock Tudor shopping parades. The young were particularly encouraged to engage in keep-fit classes and outdoor activities in public parks and

²⁸ WMM, 27th Annual Anniversary Report, 1932, 6.

²⁹ Douglas MacDonald Hastings, 'Wigan', Picture Post, 11 November 1939, 4

recreation grounds. At the Queen's Hall, the Mission staff decided to set aside a room for meditation and devotional purposes in 1932. This 'secret place of prayer' aimed at privacy and would provide respite for unemployed members for 'in crowded houses they live and there is no chance for them of an inner chamber'.³⁰

'We could not carry on in this great building...without these valuable lets'.



Figure 9.11: The reinstated organ after fire damaged the original, 1955. Source: The Wigan Methodist Mission.

Recitals and opera became the favoured entertainment on a Saturday night. This made the lack of organ acute. Having paid off the outstanding amount on the building account in 1920, an organ fund was inaugurated in 1922. The economic depression reducing offerings and the fund was slow to build. By 1939, enough had accumulated to purchase and recondition a second hand organ from the Pavilion Theatre (Figure 9.11). Two things are important in the means by which the Mission shared news of this addition. Firstly, the length of time taken to generate the funds without borrowing became emblematic of dogged determination and reemphasised the importance of thrift and saving. Secondly, the specification of the organ was testament to the church being modern and up-to-date. The electropneumatic function and system of magnets, switches and a blower, it was pointed out at dedicatory services, was exactly the same as the organ installed at Westminster Abbey for the coronation of King

³⁰ WMM, The Queen's Hall: 27Anniversary Annual Report, 1932, 6

George VI.³¹ This addition cemented. Queen's Hall as a suitable venue for orchestral events. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Hall played host to renowned orchestras such as the London Philarmonic conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent and a recital by the pianist Leff Pouishnoff.³²

The beloved organ was destroyed in 1949 when an accidental fire ravaged the main hall. The external structure remained and normal activity continued in the lower hall. The reconstruction was undertaken by Bradshaw Gass and Hope to ensure that it was faithful to the original design. Insurance covered £25, 000 worth of damage but all lets were cancelled during the rebuilding period. The Mission expressed surprise and gratitude when £4, 500 was raised by well-wishers from outside of the Mission within three months of the fire. ³³ This shows its standing in the wider town. The disaster made the worth of such lettings patently clear. Owen Owen, the treasurer, commented that 'this [fire] brought to our notice that we could not carry on in this great building when in full use without these valuable lets'.³⁴

The social and cultural context from the time the mission had been established began to change. Queen's Hall faced stiff competition for its Saturday night concerts. In 1952, there were twelve cinemas in the town centre. For the Mission, this meant they fell behind in the entertainment stakes. As one annual report described:

the movies came and exalted the eye above the ear; the structure of tiered galleries, with gaudy glitter made good seats into bad seats...some of the new Cinemas began to bear the outward stamp of a temple. Within these palaces of pleasure a quieter furnishing and a new type of "half-gallery" made an appeal to a vast audience. To-day the amusement world centres in the cinema, not in the variety theatre.³⁵

Yet, Wigan's membership remained steady with numbers fluctuating from 400 to 500 between 1920 and 1969 (Table 9.1). These statistics should be approached with caution: while the mission lost only 86 members between 1952 and 1977, Sunday congregations

³¹WMM, 'The Opening of the New Organ', Souvenir Booklet, 3 April 1940,

^{1-4.}

³² Ron Hunt, 'Local Chronology', *Wigan Observer*, http://www.wiganworld.com/stuff/chrono.php?opt=chrono. Accessed 31 July 2009.

³³ Owen Owen 'A Year of Learning', WMM, 45th Annual Report, 1949, 6-7.

³⁴ 'Minutes of the Leaders Meeting', WMM, 8 June 1949.

³⁵ WMM, After Twenty-Five Years: 1905 – 1930 (Wigan: J. Starr and Sons, 1930), 3.

Year	Membership
1910	472
1917	442
1927	-
1937	470
1942	430
1952	460
1967	415
1977	374
1987	206

Table 9.1: Membership Figures for the Wigan Methodist Mission 1910 – 1987.

Source: 1910 – 1952, 'Minutes of the Leaders Meeting', The Wigan Methodist Mission. 1967 – 1987, 'Central Mission Statistics', MARC 9863.

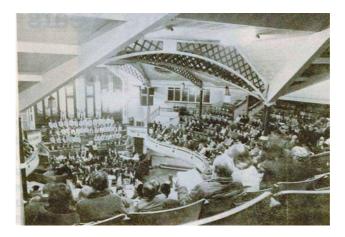


Figure 9.12: A service in the main hall with the exposed roof trusses. 1955. Source: The Wigan Methodist Mission.



Figure 9.13: View of the main hall and organ. Source: The Wigan Methodist Mission.



Figure 9.14: The old Crush Hall area where a friendly welcome would be extended, c. 1970s. Source: The Wigan Methodist Mission.

halved, from 300 to 150, between 1964 and 1977.³⁶ The way in which the congregation worshipped together also changed. A memorial chapel with pews, pulpit and cross was dedicated on the first floor in1959 and used for the regular administering of Holy Communion. In 1969, money raising activities were revised. Class meetings, the traditional method of fostering mutual fellowship and raising funds through membership dues, were on the wane. Leaders questioned whether those who attended out of loyalty to their fellow class members would remain engaged in wider fellowship. Partly, it reflects dissatisfaction at the previous generation's religious activity. A new minister, Richard Keen, expressed the sentiment in his first report in 1956:

If you'd have asked me twenty years ago what were the characteristics of a Mission I would have found it easy to answer. In my teenage experience they were large halls with tip-up seats which ran cheap concerts on Saturday nights and jumble sales on Monday afternoons. Those days have gone and most of us are not sorry.³⁷

The Mission remained at pains to emphasise the centrality of religious belief and worship in all manifestations of its work. The defence of this became an imperative, particularly when the Borough Council vision for central redevelopment found its way onto the minister's desk at Queen's Hall.

Indecision

Town centre redevelopment had been on the cards since 1961. Uppermost in the Council's mind was traffic, attracting different industries to shore up the town's depleted economic base and addressing inadequate council housing by constructing new estates.³⁸ It proposed a new market hall, bus station, retail units, offices and a bowling alley. Almost all of the property on Market Street was to be compulsory purchased to this end, the anticipation being that they could be accommodated in the new retail units³⁹ Queen's Hall, was earmarked for compulsory purchase (CPO). Compensatory measures typically paid market value for the

³⁶ See 'Central Mission Statistics', Records of Home Mission and Evangelism, MARC 9863, Box 1.

³⁷ WMM, Annual Report, 1956, 4.

³⁸ Mike Fletcher, The Making of Wigan, 2005, 158-161.

³⁹ County Borough of Wigan, 'Council Summons and Minutes of the Proceedings of the Council and Various Committees for the Month of March, 1962' (Wigan: Thomas Wall and Son, 1962), 1394 -6, Wigan and Leigh Archives (WLA).

land but church premises, by virtue of there being no general market demand for their provisions, are awarded an equivalent amount to build new premises on a different site.⁴⁰

Wigan's Anglicans and the Standishgate Methodist Church, who were to lose their Sunday school, tabled early objections to the plan.⁴¹ The Methodist Mission chose a pragmatic position. The perceived importance of their work entailed a written statement to the *Wigan Observer* detailing the demands of the threatened 'Cathedral of Methodism':

If it is impossible for us to stay where we are...then we would require that we were given an equivalent site within the central area of the town on which an equally significant building can be erected.⁴²

A stay of execution was granted when the resulting *Wigan Ultimate Aims Plan* (1966) focused resources on clearing housing and building new estates.⁴³ However, the potential CPO continued to linger in the background and the resulting uncertainty meant that the Mission could not tackle adaptation to the extent that their counterparts in Liverpool and Bolton did. Maintenance costs were rising: £10, 000 per year and exacerbated by the fuel crisis in the early 1970s. The Mission reported an increase of 250 per cent in the cost of oil between 1972 and 1974.⁴⁴ For this essential product they paid £150 per delivery. Tentative plans were made for refurbishing the Central Hall to modernise the heating system and return it to concert hall standards the JRBT as the potential funders. Before they could submit any proposals, the council revived its central redevelopment policy and the Mission abandoned the plans.⁴⁵

By the time central redevelopment was addressed, the Wigan Civic Trust was firmly established and consulted on any plans. In 1977 a questionnaire circulated amongst residents of Wigan to canvas their views on the topic of urban improvements.⁴⁶ Although comprehensive redevelopment remained the council's preference, they yielded to the

⁴⁰ Michael Malone, 'Compulsory Purchase in England and Wales', *International Legal Practitioner*, 5/2 (1980), 58–62.

⁴¹ Wigan Borough Council, 'Meeting of the General Purposes Committee, June 1963' (Wigan: Thomas Wall and Son, 1963), 258, WLA.

⁴² 'Wigan Methodist Mission', Wigan Observer, 20 September 1963, 12.

⁴³ The Council followed a policy of rehousing neighbours together. See Mike Fletcher, *The Making of Wigan*, 2005, 158.

⁴⁴ WMM, Faith! Hope! Charity Shop! 69th Annual Report, 1975, 7.

⁴⁵ 'Report on the Wigan Mission', The City and Town Centre Review Group, 9 March 1977, MARC 9863 Box 3.

⁴⁶ Mike Fletcher, *The Making of Wigan*, 2005, 158.

demands of users. Retrospectively, the Council boasts that delaying redevelopment meant that they could learn from the mistakes made by planners in other cities.⁴⁷ The town centre was designated a conservation area and public transport enhanced by building a ring road and providing a central bus station close to the newly refurbished shopping arcades and Market Hall. Queen's Hall, and the land behind it, would disappear, replaced by the bus station.

The Mission sought professional advice to lead negotiations with the council from 1979 onwards rather than passively accepting decisions.⁴⁸ Meanwhile the minister, Ron Charlton, generated vocal support amongst the general public in Wigan. Queen's Hall remained the only public hall of significant size in the area and the mission's policy of renting relatively cheaply to philanthropic causes meant that it was regarded as a valuable community resource.⁴⁹

Reinstatement

Anthony J. Grimshaw, an architect based in Wigan, became involved in negotiations between the Church and the local authority. Grimshaw was also secretary of the Wigan Civic Trust These skills were put to use brokering negotiations between local authority and church. It was pointed out that the planned bus station did not require the entire site. A line of demolition was agreed that demolished the main hall but kept the section fronting Market Street (Figure 9.15). When a figure of $\pounds 1$ million was suggested as just compensation for reinstating the church, the council agreed. Although, in 1984, some twenty two years after redevelopment plans were first mooted, the anniversary report is titled *This Year... Next Year... Sometime...?* which underlines the doubt that any plan would be followed through particularly when Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority refused to commit to the planned bus station.⁵⁰

In the end, the bus station was built and the compromise solution which allowed the Mission to retain some of the original building suited both planners and church. Smaller premises

⁴⁷ Wigan Borough Council, Wigan Town Centre: Conservation Area, Consultation Draft, 2008,

http://www.wigan.gov.uk/Services/Environment/HistoricEnvironment/ConservationAreaAppraisals.htm. Accessed, 27 June 2009.

⁴⁸ 'Report on the Wigan Mission', The City and Town Centre Review Group, 4 October 1980.

⁴⁹ Ron Charlton, *Private Correspondence*, 27 January 2010.

⁵⁰ WMM, This year...next year...sometime?: Anniversary Report, 1984, 3.

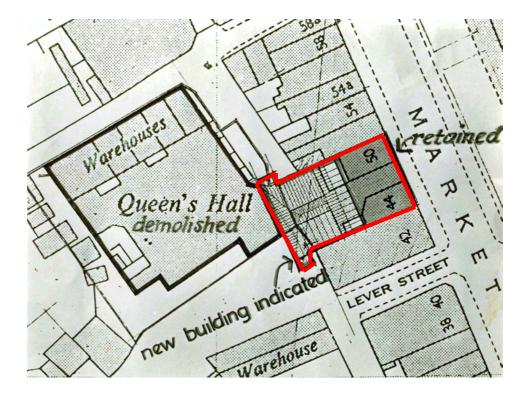


Figure 9.15: Plan showing the outline of the reinstated Church indicated in red. Source: The Wigan Methodist Mission.

were a boon for the Mission making overall management easier by reducing overheads. This was necessary when balanced against the loss of income from the warehouses, although the conversion of the shops into a church office and coffee bar entailed no great loss of income as one unit had been the Mission's charity shop.

The façade and tower were fully restored and cleaned. Three ground floor bays were awarded deliberately different designs. Grimshaw drew inspiration from his studies of shop fronts in Milan saying that:

Every one is totally different...and I think towns should be like that. When you introduce a supermarket into a town – that's the awful thing about it – there's this enormous band of sameness about it. So the idea was to do something different at each stage. 51

A coffee shop is in the postmodernist classical left hand bay creating a stone pediment with sloping bricks (Figure 9.16). Grimshaw claimed that the church office, on the right hand side, draws inspiration from Hans Hollein's Schullin Jewellery Shop (1974) in Vienna (Figure 9.17).

⁵¹ Personal Interview, 30.

This was also a nineteenth century building which included the addition of a layered façade with abstract design. In Wigan, Grimshaw incorporated the concept with a cruciform window pattern and horizontal bands of coloured brickwork that acts as a showcase for the work the church. At eye level, the primary function of the building received outward expression.

On plan, the central hall principal is inverted which brought it into line with Division of Property's view that theology should be the starting point for building with an emphasis on supporting the individual in the community.⁵² Religion is placed at the heart of the reinstated building (Figure 9.18). A community hall at basement level acts as a venue for meetings, school plays and other functions. At ground floor level the worship centre is visible from the pavement and internal glazed screens ensure that secular users of office space on floors one and two have it as their focal point also. By these means, the reinstated building 'serves to emphasise the importance of religious activities among the many uses which will be catered for'.⁵³

From the bus station, it is recognisably a church with two intricately layered stainless steel crosses are placed, one inside the main worship space, the other facing outside. A stained glass window, depicting the history of the mission and its relation to the industrial landscape, is placed in the east facing window onto the bus station (Figure 9.19). The light to it is obscured because neither the architect of the bus station nor the bus company could be persuaded to move a bus shelter, although a large lantern light in the roof directs sunlight onto the altar. Much consideration was given to the arrangement of the liturgical space and is testament to remarkable changes in Methodist forms of worship over the twentieth century.⁵⁴ The organ, a central feature in Central Halls, is lifted above the main worship space and placed in a stained oak case. Designed by the architect and built by George Sixsmith and Sons of Oldham, the complex lattice work is based upon an element of Arabic architecture known as mushrabiya, inspired by the architect's visit to Egypt. Baptismal font and pulpit are interchangeable allowing flexibility into the design and anticipating future changes in liturgical tastes. The budget stretched to bespoke oak furniture, again, made by George Sixsmith.

⁵² PD, So You Need a New Church, Do You? (Manchester: Manchester Central Hall, 1980).

⁵³ 'Queen's Hall Methodist Mission, Wigan', Church Building, 28 (Jul/Aug, 1994), 6.

⁵⁴ John Munsey Turner, Modern Methodism, 1998, 47 -60; DCA, A Methodist Church Builder's Decalogue, 1966



Figure 9.16: The postmodern rendering of the ground floor facade, January 2010. Source: Author.



Figure 9.17: The Schullin Jewellery Store in Vienna by Hans Hollein (1974). Source: © Thom MacKenzie.

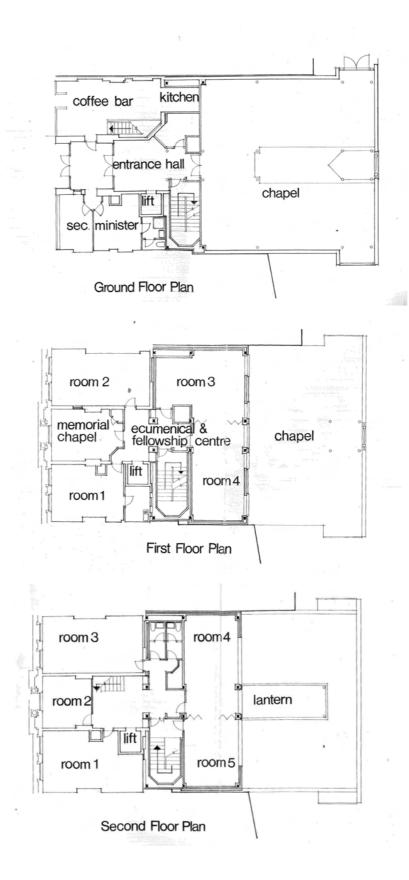


Figure 9.18: Plans of the reinstated building, 1987. The new chapel is in the former crush hall. Source: Anthony J. Grimshaw.

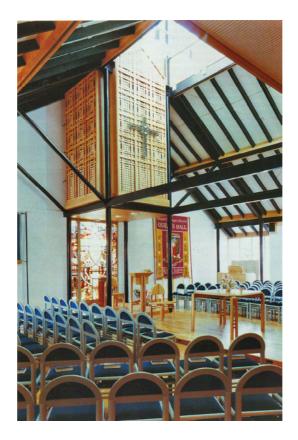


Figure 9.19: Interior photograph of the new worship centre, 1987. Source: The Methodist Church Property Office.



Figure 9.20: The stained glass window detail in the new worship centre. Source: The Wigan Methodist Mission.

The new worship centre bridged a gap between preaching and administering sacraments which could not be achieved in the over-large main hall, hence the development of a separate chapel space in 1959. ⁵⁵ Seating is provided for up to 300 worshippers, reflecting the reduced congregations. Those who did come to the newly opened hall were seated in closer proximity to one another. Their experience was one that enhanced fellowship and the intensity of worship. Even though the secular exterior remains, internally Queen's Hall has become increasingly like a normal Methodist chapel.

Bricks

New buildings gave security allowing the church to explore its purpose and mission. It does in a town that regularly scores high in the national indices for multiple deprivation. Numbers accessing drug and alcohol treatment are amongst the highest in the North West, with heroin addiction a recognised problem in the borough.⁵⁶ Instances of homelessness peaked in 1993 and have only marginally fallen since, a significant problem owing to a perceived lack of co-ordination among service providers.⁵⁷ The Wigan Mission has been able to contribute social service provision.

The Wigan Mission's 'Help Committee' runs a furniture and charity shop on alternative premises. In 2005, they added the Key Project to activities here and at the Queen's Hall. Providing support and advice to the homeless, it is the result of a state and voluntary sector partnership. However, tension existed between those using the church for religious and leisure purposes and those receiving social services help. As one interviewee bluntly said:

We had people coming in here with all kinds of problems. It was difficult to deal with here because we've got the coffee bar and a lot of old dears in, and children as well. So we needed somewhere that was near here but not in here, where they could come.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ WMM, Annual Report, 1988, 22.

⁵⁶ Corinne Harkins et al, *Review of Alcohol-related Harm in Wigan and Leigh* (Centre for Public Health: Liverpool John Moore's University, 2008)

⁵⁷ Anya Ahmed and Andy Steele, *Wigan Homelessness Research Study* (Salford: Salford Housing and Urban Studies Unit, 2002), 11 -13.

⁵⁸ Personal Interview, 16.

An opportunity presented itself by 2008 in a disused public house situated in an adjoining street. The words 'In God We Put All Our Trust', are inscribed on the Bricklayers Arms (now known as The Brick). It was owned by a Christian property development agency as part of their social housing portfolio.⁵⁹ So, the Mission, Wigan and Leigh Primary Care Trust and CRASH, a construction industry charity for the homeless, worked together to turn this disused space into a day centre. Significantly, the Mission chose not to buy the premises outright, for if the venture failed, they did not want to be left with unwanted property on their hands.⁶⁰ Their Edwardian forebears may not have recognised such a sentiment, considering freeholds a necessary asset.

Despite commencing operations at the Brick in 2008, it is the more prominently situated Queen's Hall that often remains a first port of call. As one user makes clear,

I thought all hope had gone, until last weekend when I plucked up the courage to go to the Queen's Hall on Market Street. There I met a lady who, on learning of my situation, told me to go to the Bricklayers Arms...this turned out to be quite possibly the best decision I've ever made.⁶¹

The future of the building seems secure. Working within limits and with other organisations, the mission perform a valuable social service to the homeless, going some way to justifying its existence. A close knit congregation is comprised of a range of ages. The offices are fully let and the premises are in use every day between eight a.m. until early evening. A full-time hall manager, a member of the church, is employed ensuring that maintenance and administration is professionally looked after.

So, the distinctive Baroque dome remains an important landmark in Wigan's townscape. In addition to its location in a conservation area, the remaining portion of the original Queen's Hall was awarded grade II listing in 1999 explicitly acknowledging its architectural contribution to the town. But this can be a double edged sword. In 2002, the Mission wanted to place an illuminated cross on the first floor dormer window. Planning permission was denied. The cross was interpreted as an advertising sign and so unacceptable given a policy

⁵⁹ Homelessness Set to Benefit from Pub Transformation', Wigan Today, 26 August 2005.

http://www.wigantoday.net/news/features_2_1947/homeless_set_to_benefit_from_pub_transformation_1_16 4227. Accessed 15 January 2009.

⁶⁰ Personal Interview, 16.

⁶¹ 'Rob's Story' (Anonymised Name of Client) quoted in Trish Green, *Annual Report of the Brick*, 2008/9, 10. Available at http://thebrick.org.uk/about_us.html. Accessed 15 January 2009.

restricting advertisements on listed buildings.⁶² Churches, it would seem, are to be judged by the same criteria as secular organisations.

Conclusion

The Queen's Hall represented a new development in the central hall programme. Wigan was made an exemplar of building to requirements for the cheapest price possible: money drove the move towards plainness but this coheres with the Wesleyan tenets of thrift and frugality. From this point onwards, the costs of Central Halls, barring a few in London and Bristol in the next chapter, was kept to f_{2} , 20, 000 - f_{3} , 30, 000, if not cheaper.

In effect, the façade and internal plan became all important. Although less ornate than previous central halls, the distinctive tower ensured that it became a landmark. The Mission also knitted itself into the social fabric of the town by creating spaces for both public and sacred meetings. Religiously, its congregation remained stable well into the 1970s. One can only speculate on why this is so. Compared to other case studies, Wigan Borough Council did not embark upon town centre improvements until much later. No other public hall was built, no dual carriageway driven through the town centre and, geographically, communities were kept together with new estates remained close to the town centre. This ensures ease of mobility with a distinctive central area as the focal point. It is tempting to conclude that this gives a partial explanation to endurance at least.

English Heritage has put Wigan's conservation area on its 'at risk' register, the Borough responded with its Heritage Strategy 2009 – 2013. This commits it to preserving the remains of Wigan's urban landscape and fostering local pride and identity through industrial heritage - a concentration that neglects the religious heritage of the town, including that of the Methodist mission. ⁶³ An insider's optimistic view suggests that Wigan 'is a revitalised town, where new and old live a comfortable marriage and modern buildings stand side-by-side with old historic treasures'.⁶⁴ For Queen's Hall this has entailed compromising with planning

⁶² Letter to Mr Ian Serjeant (MPO) from John Sloane (Planning and Development Department, Wigan Council), 23 October 2002.

⁶³ Wigan Borough Council, *Heritage and Capital Strategy for the Borough of Wigan 2009 – 2013*, 2009, 8; c.f. English Heritage at Risk, Press Release, Case Study: Wigan, 23 June 2009.

⁶⁴ Mike Fletcher, The Making of Wigan, 2005, 171.

proposals for the town as well as continually refreshing its mission and fashioning it in such a way that this old institution maintains continuing relevance.

Chapter 10: Bristol Central Hall (1924)

Even though [finance] is regarded at times as a necessary evil we feel that it is in this sphere in which the depth of spiritual experience can really be revealed. If God has done anything in our lives, it will show itself in the degree in which we give.¹

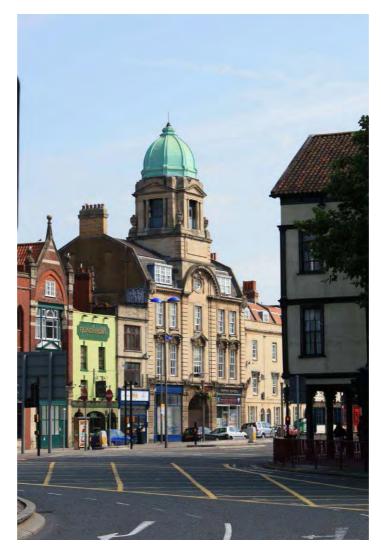


Figure 10.1: Bristol Central Hall, August 2009. Source: Author.

¹ 'Minutes of a Leaders Meeting', Bristol Methodist Mission (hereafter BM), June 1971. All minutes and annual reports, unless otherwise stated, are found at 'Records of Bristol Mission Circuit and Central Hall' *Bristol Records Office (hereafter BRO)*, 39603/1 – 48.

Finding an Appropriate Site

Bristol is the major city of South West England. In common with other towns and cities surveyed, its population grew rapidly in the nineteenth century based around its port. In the nineteenth century, the rich began to migrate towards the residential suburbs, such as Clifton and Redland. Even so, the working class remained packed in Victorian terraced housing built by the municipal council in the city's southern and eastern fringes. The commercial heart centred upon Wine Street and Castle Street with their mix of shops, offices, pubs and theatres that attracted crowds in the evenings. The Christian denominations fared a little better in Bristol against these competitors than they did in other urban areas. Almost fifty-three per cent of the population attended one of 198 places of worship in 1881. Of these the Wesleyans attracted a mere 7.4 per cent.²

In 1903, Conference appointed a district missionary to Bristol to remedy this. Open air meetings were conducted to establish a relationship with non-churchgoers. As membership grew, the People's Palace and Theatre Royal, both places of entertainment capable of holding upwards of two thousand people, were hired for Sunday services. These were soon crowded and because the secular premises attracted people, the Wesleyans formulated plans in 1908 to build a Central Hall. To this, the WCC promised $\pounds 5$, 000. However, prime city centre locations did not come cheap, leading one minister to curtly observe that '...a magnificent site had been offered. As the price was also magnificent no steps were taken to secure the site.'³ When a small site became available next to the city's premiere concert venue, Colston Hall, the Mission thought that they could rent the Hall and build administrative premises either side. However, they were outbid by a gas company.⁴ Meanwhile, they took over three failing downtown chapels in the hope that the evangelistic momentum would spread. By 1910, it was about to add a fourth. The Old Market Street Chapel and its associated burial ground were accessible from its eponymous street but the main entrance was concealed at the end of a lane on Redcross Street (Figure 10. 2).

² John Taylor and James Faulkner Nicholls, *Bristol, Past and Present: Vol. 2, Ecclesiastical History* (Bristol: James William Arrowsmith, 1881), 306 – 8.

³ 'Minutes of the Meeting of BM', 9 October 1908.

⁴ For the early history of the Mission, see C. J. Spittal, 'A History of Methodism in the Environs of Old Market Street, Bristol 1739 -1985', *Wesley Historical Society, Bristol Branch*, Bulletin 45 (1986), BRO Pamph/1165.

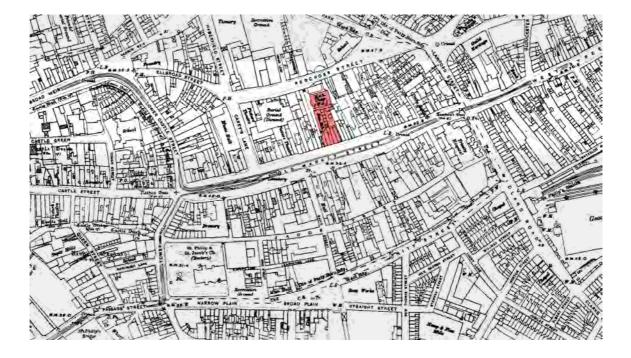


Figure 10.2: Map of Old Market Street, Bristol showing the site where the Central Hall would be built and the original road layout. Source: © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2010) All rights reserved (County Series Map, 1918; 1: 2500).

Old Market is a broad thoroughfare at the eastern end of Castle Street. It had three cinemas as well as public houses, shops and a tram station which attracted many people at all hours of the day. It linked the city centre with Barton Hill, an impoverished area where various churches and philanthropic organisations centred their activities.⁵ Yet the chapel failed to attract worshippers. However, the location had potential, and it offered the Bristol Mission a compromise site for its mooted headquarters: not directly in the city centre, but close enough to a busy place. Having gained the assent of the Old Market Street Chapel's Trustees,⁶ the Mission opened a fund and appointed a building committee in 1911.⁷ Four shops and a cottage were purchased on Old Market Street ensuring the construction of an accessible entrance on a thoroughfare.

Plans were delayed because of the First World War and not revived until a dynamic minister, John A. Broadbelt, was appointed superintendent in 1922. He had already supervised the construction of Thornton Hall in Hull (1913) and King's Hall in Southall (1916).⁸ His biographer and successor, Maldwyn Edwards, regards him as a superb organiser, fundraiser and project manager who assumed the hands-on approach and was: 'interested vitally from the first specification to the putting in of the last brick. He believed that Minister, Architect and Clerk of Works ought to form a threefold cord.'⁹ Similarly, the Bristol author and journalist, David Foot, observed that 'in Broadbelt, Bristol had found a charismatic man for the times. There was considerable affection for him from ordinary people.'¹⁰ All of these qualities are brought to the Bristol project where he was assisted by some influential friends.

Development of Type

During his tenure at Hull, Broadbelt became acquainted with Joseph Rank, Thomas Ferens and the architect, Sir Alfred Gelder. All of these men were involved at Bristol. Gelder was introduced to the Mission as an 'East Coast Methodist', this seemingly more of a

⁵ M. Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century Bristol* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society, 2000); Bristol People's Publishing Project, *Bristol: As We RememberIit* (no publ. details, 1977), 23

⁶ 'Minutes of the Meeting of BM', 29 January 1909.

⁷ 'Minutes of the Meeting of BM', 1 December 1911.

⁸ The interior of the main hall and plans of Southall are almost identical to Bristol.

⁹ Maldwyn L. Edwards, John A. Broadbelt, Methodist Preacher... (London: Epworth Press, 1949), 27.

¹⁰ David Foot, 'Personalities? So Many of Them' in D. Harrison (ed.) *Bristol Between the Wars: A City and its People*, 1919 – 1939 (Bristol: Redcliffe Press, 1984), 64.

recommendation than his architectural work.¹¹ It was at this meeting that Broadbelt set out exactly what was needed.

Gelder was instructed to prepare plans for a Hall seating 2000.¹² The plans in figure 10.3 show three distinct sections to the building. At the rear is the graded Sunday school with rooms for each age group. As Chapter Three described, the architects Crouch and Butler had called for greater attention to be given to the position and design of Sunday schools. The size of the school at Bristol, with its careful arrangement of the rooms and the inclusion of a gymnasium and foreign missionary exhibition room, represents a development of the type. Central Halls built from 1918 onwards typically contained well thought out Sunday school accommodation on the graded system. However, this meant less space for the required smaller hall for district wide gatherings and meetings. So, when not in use, the 'intermediates' room doubled as the 'Hall of Mirrors'. It was dedicated to the war dead, held up to six hundred people and cost $\pounds 1$, 000 to furnish including the fine oak panelling below the dado rail (Figure 10.4).

The main hall forms a dodecagon in the central section, so placing worship activities and the preacher in the centre. The now ubiquitous tip-up seating was complemented by a skylight, roof windows and an abundance of electric lighting to ensure a bright and airy feel (Figure 10.5). A 1948 account of the mission described it 'with comfortable seats and...brilliantly illuminated; the opposite extreme to the stiff pews and dim religious light of a normal Church'.¹³ The contrast continued with the installation of projection equipment for the purpose of showing religious films after Sunday evening service and during the Saturday evening variety entertainment.¹⁴

The front block contained the administrative offices and meeting rooms on the first and second floors that were directly accessible at street level. Two shops are allocated either side of the front entrance over which a domed copper cupola rose higher than existing buildings on the street. The insertion of a five bay frontage with a central tower into the ordinary street

¹¹ 'Minutes of the Meeting of BM', 16 March 1922.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ A. Southon, *Ready for Anything: The Story of Edgar Bowden and the Bristol Mission* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1948), 74.

¹⁴ The written and visual record at Bristol Central Hall contains little information regarding the exact specification of the projection equipment.

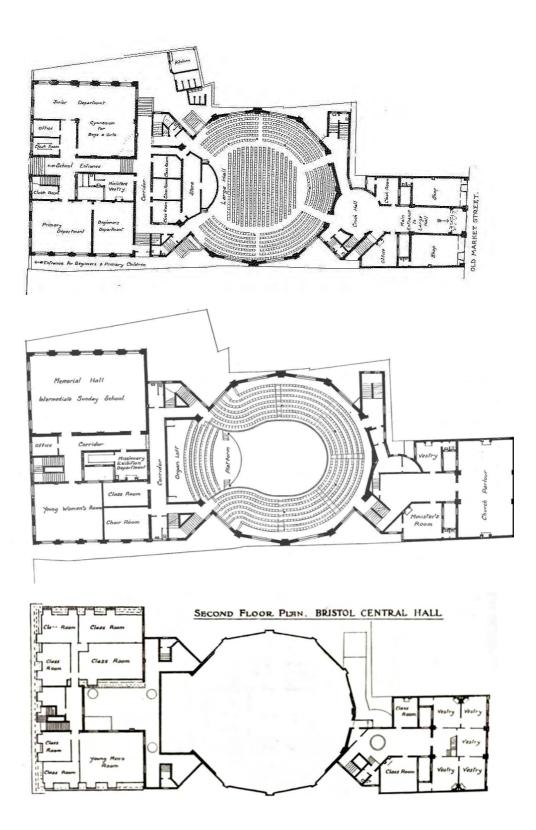


Figure 10.3: (Top to Bottom) Ground, First and Second Floor Plans of Bristol Central Hall. Source: The Romance of a Modern Methodist Mission 1922 – 1929, The New Room, Bristol.



Figure 10.4: The 'Hall of Mirrors' Source: Bristol Records Office



Figure 10.5: The main hall interior of Bristol Central Hall, c. 1970s. The curtains at ground floor level were a later attempt to make the main hall feel less large. Source: Bristol Records Office.

facade has already been seen at Wigan and Bolton. This design marked the buildings out where there was a narrow façade and little external decoration to indicate the religious function of the building.

At the opening ceremonies in 1924, the *Western Daily Press* thought that 'every bit of space has been used with economy and purpose' and 'when visitors are conducted over the building on Tuesday they will be amazed at the extent, completeness and comfort of the provision'.¹⁵ If cost is taken as a rule of thumb it should have been complete. At £56, 669, it exceeded original estimates of £38, 499. Joseph Rank's preferred method of encouraging local subscriptions by matching them pound for pound meant he gave £20, 000 in the first instance. The WCC delivered on their 1908 promise of £5, 000. Both Rank and Thomas Ferens, were engaged to speak at the opening services where Sir William Howell Davis, a successful local tanner and treasurer of the Mission, secured £2, 700 from 'friends'.¹⁶ Appeals were made to all Wesleyans and interested Christians in the area with the Hall marketed as a 'Church for the Workers' and a 'Home from Home' (Figures 10.6). Tactics used to squeeze money from the suburban middle class included posing questions such as 'does Redland have no responsibility for Old Market Street? Does Bristol Methodism have no responsibility for the Bristol Mission?' (Figure 10.7). ¹⁷

Despite these fund-raising efforts, almost £10, 000 of debt remained. Broadbelt continued to appeal to various parties to help balance the payments. However, he found resources stretched at the WCC who had authorised the construction of twenty-one Central Halls between 1921 and 1925.¹⁸ Rank was approached, yet again. His written reply makes clear that his resources were not limitless. While expressing sorrow over the debt situation, he said 'I am just afraid that you were a little inclined to spend money too freely on the furnishing of the Hall...I think that I have done as much for Bristol Methodism as I ought to'.¹⁹ Final accounts show that the debt was cleared by the first Anniversary in April 1925. However,

 ¹⁵ 'Opening Ceremonies of Bristol Central Hall', Western Daily Press, 26 April 1924, 5.
 ¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ BMM, Romance of a Modern Methodist Mission, 1922 – 1929 (Bristol: Bristol Central Hall, 1929).

¹⁸ Letter from Joshua Hornabrook (WCC) to John A. Broadbelt, May 25, 1925, 'Papers Relating to the Building and Furnishing of Bristol Central Hall', BRO, 37329/5/j.

¹⁹ Letter from Joseph Rank to John A. Broadbelt, 10 February, 1925, BRO, 37329/5/j.. For Broadbelt's view of their relationship see 'Address by the John A. Broadbelt', *Notes on a Memorial Service for the late Joseph Rank, Queen's Hall, Hull,* 17 November 1943, published by The Joseph Rank Benevolent Trust, http://www.ranktrust.org/joseph-rank2.htm. Accessed 15 November 2007.

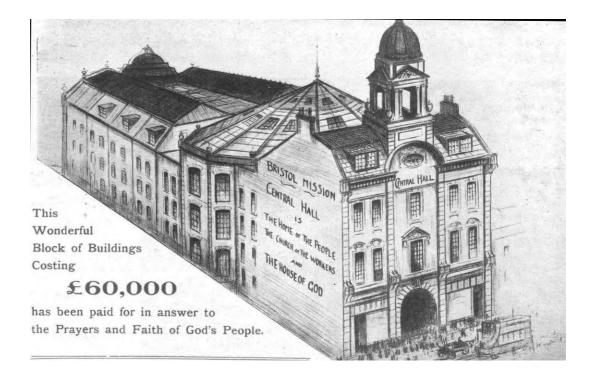


Figure 10.6: Adverisement printed to publicise the opening of Bristol Central Hall. Source: The New Room, Bristol.

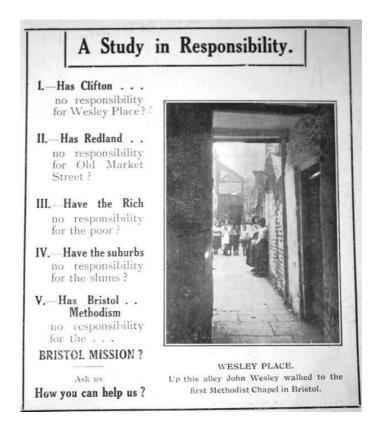


Figure 10.7: Advertisement of the Bristol Methodist Mission. Source: the New Room, Bristol.

local fundraising raised £4,000 at the most.²⁰ Although undocumented, it is probable that Rank did agree to provide the remaining sum. A later letter he wrote to Broadbelt reconsiders his previously tough stance:

Before I consider the matter further I should want to see a statement of expenditure and also the money already raised, i.e. a Balance Sheet showing what is required and how the money has been spent and raised towards the cost.²¹

The successful businessman was, of course, scrupulous where finances are concerned. Nevertheless, he offered advice and reassurance to Broadbelt and gave an image of a generous and gentle patrician. Such support was needed. As well as appeasing contractors awaiting payment, the minister had a potential court battle looming regarding a legacy given towards an organ. The verbal agreement was opposed by the benefactor's family but was happily resolved by 1927 allowing a rather magnificent organ, by R. Spurden Rutt and Co. of London, to be duly installed behind the platform.²²

Whatever methods resulted in realising the building fund target, the daily cost of running a mission resulted in the yearly accumulation of debts. In 1926, the rental income from both shops was £312 per year with the largest expenditure being staff wages (including a Director of Music), general maintenance, advertising and heating.²³ The deficit rose to just over £1, 000 by the end of that year.²⁴ Anniversary day appeals and fund raising bazaars were used to cover the shortfall.

'Real Sympathy and Comradeship'

Despite uneasy beginnings, congregations of two thousand people were soon in attendance at Sunday evening worship and more being turned away. Eventually, demand ensured that two evening services were held. By the Mission's own estimates, 50, 000 people had seen the

²⁰ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the BM', 4 September 1925. ²¹ Letter from Joseph Rank to John A. Broadbelt, 6 May 1925. C. J. Spittal, 'A History of Methodism in the environs of Old Market', 1986, also puts Rank's contribution at f_{25} , 000.

²² This cost \neq , 2, 650.

²³ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the BM', passim.

²⁴ 'Minutes of the Meeting of the BM', 2 December 1926.

winter Saturday night concerts during 1927 and over 8, 000 attended some form of worship during the week.²⁵

On site men were catered for with a Poor Man's Lawyer, a boot repair service and fellowship classes where:

upwards of two thousand men found a welcome change from standing in cheerless Labour Exchange queues, and tramping wet, cold streets, by turning into a well-warmed room at the Hall, where they were refreshed with hot coffee and cakes, and found real sympathy and comradeship.²⁶

The meeting was considered by the Mission staff to be entirely unorthodox with much singing and laughter. Alas, what the men thought remains unrecorded. A 'Women's Bright Hour', held every Wednesday, with crèche facilities for children, attracted up to 2, 000 women for tea, biscuits and fellowship (Figure 10. 8).²⁷ Its attendees enjoyed a visit in 1927 from Mary, the Princess of Wales.²⁸ A child welfare centre gave advice particularly to those women 'who lack experience and make many mistakes in the feeding and rearing of their children'.²⁹ All of these were held in the various meeting rooms of the Central Hall with strict management of time between church and other uses.

Legacies enabled the mission to purchase a holiday home in Nailsea for £2, 000. Named 'Rest-a-While', it served to give mothers a break from city life (Figure 10.9). ³⁰ Plans to establish a separate Men's Home and Labour Yard were dropped when the outlay surpassed the allocated budget of £2, 500.³¹ The financial model suffered during the depression of the 1930s when monetary contributions decreased yet demand for the facilities increased. These human and financial constraints limited social work and staff numbers were reduced in 1930 and again in 1936.

Finances were not helped when the local authority decided to rate the premises as a place of entertainment. The provision of projection equipment and the popular Saturday concerts

²⁵ Annie S. Swann, A Pictorial Report of the Bristol Wesleyan Mission; or A New Fairytale (Bristol: Bristol Central Hall, 1927), 2 – 3.

²⁶ BM, Annual Report, 1936, 10.

²⁷ Maldwyn L. Edwards, A Memoir of Lillian Davis Broadbelt, (London: Epworth Press, 1937), 15 – 19.

²⁸ Annie S. Swann, A Pictorial Report, 1927, 6.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Annie S. Swann, A Pictorial Report, 1927, 4.

³¹ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the BM', 26 March 1929.



Figure 10.8: The Women's Bright Hour. Source: Silver Jubilee Booklet, 1949.



Figure 10.9: 'Rest-A-While' in Nailsea. Source: Silver Jubilee Booklet, 1949.



Figure 10.10: Crowds gathered at the opening ceremony, 1924. Source: Bristol Records Office

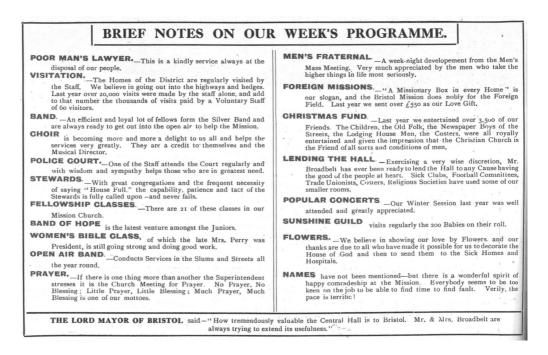


Figure 10.11: Advertisement for the weekly activities at Bristol. Source: The New Room, Bristol.

were, according to the mission, entirely for educational and religious purposes.³² Initially, the local authority only nominally rated the building for legal purposes but when local cinema traders threatened to boycott any firm supplying the mission with dramatic films, the council succumbed to the pressure.³³ To emphasise that the concerts were not a commercial enterprise and to circumvent the extra \pounds 120 per year, entry was without charge. However, the free-riding audience were not so benevolent when the collection plate went around during the interval and this a short-lived measure when the concert account ran into deficit.³⁴

Consolidation: 1939 – 1960

Throughout this period, Bristol's authorities were trying to deal with the twin problems of overcrowded housing and traffic congestion. Between 1919 and 1939, around 40, 000 people were estimated to have moved from city centre slums to the estates at St Philip's Marsh and Knowsley.³⁵ Work also began on an inner circuit road to take traffic away from the centre. The area around Central Hall became less residential and Sunday evening attendance fell below 1, 500 and Sunday scholars decreasing from 1, 000 to 200 by 1936.³⁶ People would still make the trip into the city centre especially for Sunday worship. One sanguine account from 1948 vividly describes the area:

Walking through the now deserted streets in the immediate neighbourhood of the Hall one had the impression almost of a dead city. Then, as the hour for worship approached, they came streaming in by bus or on foot from every quarter, and on special occasions the Great Hall was as crowded as ever.³⁷

The annual reports from the Bristol mission contained information that highlighted the anonymity afforded to worshippers. One minister claimed that: 'this is a real problem; how to bring those who come as casual worshippers into a full knowledge of their salvation in Christ, and how to bring them into the fellowship of the church itself'.³⁸ The membership figures

³² Annie S. Swann, A Pictorial Report, 1927, 3.

 ³³ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the BM', 22 October 1926.
 ³⁴ Ibid., 15 February, 1927.

³⁵ Peter Malpass and Jennie Walmsley, *100 Years of Council Housing in Bristol*, Report Prepared for Bristol City Council (UWE: Bristol, 2005). www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/cms-service/download/asset/?asset_id=21241026. Accessed 28 August 2009.

³⁶ BM, Annual Report (Bristol: Bristol Central Hall, 1936), 2.

³⁷ A. E. Southon, *Ready for Anything: The Story of Edgar Bowden and the Bristol Methodist Mission* (London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1948), 176.

³⁸ Ernest Odell, in BM, Annual Report (Bristol: Bristol Central Hall, 1948), 1.

Year	Membership
1928	1039
1938	437
1948	449
1958	408
1969	263
1979	135
1983	76

Table 10.1: Membership figures for the Bristol Methodist Mission.

Sources: 1923 to 1928, The Romance of a Modern Methodist Mission (1929); 1933 – 1958, MBMM, Volume One 1908 – 1944; 1969 – 1983, 'Central Mission Statistics', MARC 9863. stabilized until the late 1950s, as table 10.1 shows, but these can be a problematic indicator of church growth and vitality. The data on Bristol's congregations given to the Central Mission Committee (CMC) indicated that congregations varied enormously; between 600 and 1200 in 1960.

Much of central Bristol was obliterated during World War Two but Central Hall managed to survive with only broken windows and minor roof damage. It provided a rest centre and air raid shelters and the rear section of the premises was requisitioned as the Divisional Petroleum headquarters who erected large iron gates to protect petrol coupons from thieves. This arrangement lasted until 1950 when petrol was finally de-rationed.³⁹ The continuous occupation irritated ministerial staff because of their own lack of space.⁴⁰ In a remark verging on clairvoyance, the superintendent minister, Ernest Odell observed that:

It was impossible to continue with Sunday evening congregations without having the requisite weekday work in addition to make a real Church at the Central Hall. The weakness of the weekday work caused by lack of sufficient premises might well throw the Mission as a financial burden upon the Methodist District in the future.⁴¹

When hostilities ceased, the excellent acoustics and reputation for fine choral performances saw the premises in demand as a concert venue because Colston Hall had been destroyed. The trustees permitted this greater use by outside organisations but delegated discretionary responsibility to the minister.⁴² Extra revenue was soon spent on minor repairs and maintenance as well as complying with fire and safety regulations. The interior and exterior were cleaned and painted and the huge glass chandelier in the main hall removed. In addition to using advertising hoardings around the city, the Mission added the words 'Central Hall' and a neon cross on the exterior.⁴³ Extra rental revenue permitted evangelistic activity and the building of new premises in the housing estates of Knowle West and St Philip's Marsh. But when Colston Hall reopened in 1951 a lucrative source of finance ended.

³⁹ Letter from E. Benson Perkins (DCA) to C. J. P. Jenkins, Regional Controller (Ministry of Fuel and Power), 24 November 1947.

⁴⁰ Letter from Albert Hearn (DCA) to C.J.P. Jenkins, 10 September 1947. The DCA became involved on behalf of Bristol because the Methodist Conference was scheduled to be held their in 1948.

⁴¹ BM, Annual Report, 1948, 2.

⁴² Ron Hoar (ed.) A Good Ideal: The Story of the Central Hall, Bristol (Bristol: Bristol Methodist Mission, 1971), 46. ⁴³ Ibid., 51.

Fortunately, a local furniture retailer impressed by the Mission's work, donated a bombed city centre property. They decided to develop the site as speculative offices to provide a future income for activities. In 1956 Newbury Chambers opened but costs were in excess of the war damage compensation and so they reasoned that a ten year mortgage was a small hardship that would guarantee a comfortable provision in the future. The Trustees agreed for Marks and Spencer's to assume residence on a thirty year lease without a break.⁴⁴

The investment strategy was supervised by businessman and convert, Edgar Bowden.⁴⁵ A cash reserve had been raised by investing received legacies in savings bonds. The current account was balanced by revenue from property, assets and voluntary contributions, but this left no sinking fund for depreciation, redecoration and maintenance. For these, money was taken from the Trust Account which had a £4,000 deficit in 1963. The decision was then taken to use the cash reserve to balance the trust account.⁴⁶

Sunday evening worship suffered stiff competition when cinemas opened on Sundays during 1947. The superintendent minister, Ernest Odell, was well aware of the problem saying:

In the old days...many courting couples used to come to Central Hall, not necessarily because they wanted to worship, but because it was the only place in which they could go. Often they were drawn further into the circle and became members with us. Nowadays such people naturally gravitate towards the cinema.⁴⁷

The men's meeting ceased to meet and social work activities, such as a children's welfare department, stopped after the 1930s.⁴⁸ The surplus of space during the week was used to increase lettings. Precedence was given to charitable organisations such as Victim Support, Friends of the Earth and the Bristol Education Committee. ⁴⁹ The Mission were also open to sharing the premises with other Christian groups such as the Plymouth Brethren who were allocated space so long as they did not cover up the mission's own literature. The Church of Jesus Christ and the Latter Day Saints were, however, politely turned away. ⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Personal Interview, 18.

⁴⁵ See A. E. Southon, *Ready For Anything*, 1948.

⁴⁶ 'Minutes of the Trustees Meeting of the BM', 25 May 1966.

⁴⁷ Ernest Odell in the BM, Annual Report (Bristol: Bristol Central Hall, 1947), 1.

⁴⁸ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the BM', 6 February, 1936.

⁴⁹ 'Minutes of the Trustees Meeting of the BM', 2 January 1962.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Meanwhile, the Mission watched as the Corporation sallied forth with its plans for a radical redevelopment of central Bristol.⁵¹ The main focus of the *Development Plan* (1952) was to ease traffic congestion and build houses.⁵² There was little regard for the preservation of the existing urban fabric or complementary design, attributed by some historians to the fact that the Planning Office was directed by the City Engineer rather than the Chief Architect.⁵³ The city was separated into distinct zones with a brand new shopping precinct at Broadmead and an inner circuit dual carriageway would be built to serve ten radial roads that terminated in the city. Former shop owners in the Wine St/ Castle St area were relocated to Broadmead, even though they protested that discontinuity with their original location would harm custom.⁵⁴

The inner circuit road bounded the central redevelopment area and cut across Old Market Street at the intersection with Castle Street (Figure 10.12). Accessible via pedestrian walkways, malfunctioning escalators or subways, Old Market Street, in effect, became cut off from the city centre.⁵⁵ The local authorities prevaricated over whether it would be redeveloped as part of its proposals but decided to wait until the road was constructed. So, throughout the 1960s, the Mission faced the potential threat of compulsory purchase and plans for large scale alterations were put on hold.⁵⁶

By 1969, congregations had reduced to around three hundred.⁵⁷ Interviewees cite various reasons for the decline, the most common being television and poor but expensive public transport into the city centre and the physical isolation of Old Market Street. Particular mention was made of *The Forsythe Saga*, an immensely popular drama series that attracted eighteen million viewers during its second run in 1968.⁵⁸ Several churches, of various denominations, changed the time of service to allow congregations to watch it.⁵⁹

⁵¹ See J. Hasegawa, *Replanning the Blitzed City Centre: A Comparative Study of Bristol, Coventry and Southampton, 1941 – 1950* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), 17-19; John V. Punter, *Design Control in Bristol, 1940 - 1990* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press, 1990) and Andrew R. Tallon, 'City Profile: Bristol', Cities, 24/ 1 (2007), 74 – 88.

⁵² A. Pickard and H. M. Webb, *City and County of Bristol: Development Plan 1952* (Bristol: City of Bristol Planning Department, 1952.

⁵³ Punter, Design Control in Bristol, 1990, 33 and J. Hasegawa, Replanning the Blitzed City Centre, 1992, 19.

⁵⁴ Punter, Design Control in Bristol, 1990, 53.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 99 – 103.

⁵⁶ 'Minutes of the Trustees Meeting of the BM', 1962 – 1969, *passim* and also 'Minutes of the Leaders Meeting',10 September 1969 and 8 February 1970.

⁵⁷ G Sails et al, Bristol Central Hall Commission Report (London: Home Mission Division, 2 June 1969).

⁵⁸ Personal Interview, 24; DC, Private Correspondence, 16 February 2009.

⁵⁹ Dominic Sandbrook, White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties (London: Abacus, 2006), 445 -6.

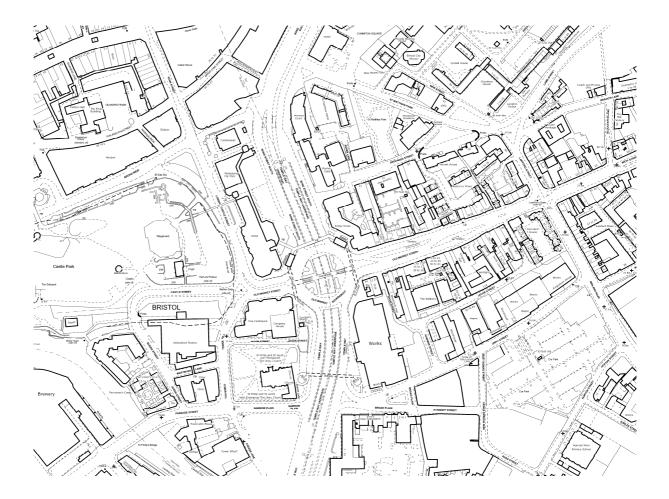


Figure 10.12: Contemporary Ordnance Survey Map showing the road layout. Source: © Crown Copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service.

Bristol was one of the places scrutinised by the Central Mission Committee (CMC) which Conference had authorised to visit annually. Its last report was given in 1963 when the Hall had been valued at \pounds 150, 000 but municipal dithering over the future redevelopment of Old Market Street changed Bristol's situation. The trustees described the situation as 'static'.⁶⁰ Planning blight meant the area gained an unsavoury reputation after most local traders relocated to Broadmead. In 1969, the CMC provided another in-depth report and summarised Bristol's situation as follows:

The sad fact is that the extensive central redevelopment scheme stops a few yards short of our premises – up to the new arterial road – and that no satisfaction can be obtained from the Corporation regarding the future of Old Market. At the time of the Bristol conference in 1959, Old Market was a busy thoroughfare full of thriving properties, but now many of these premises are empty and dilapidated.⁶¹

The holiday home in Nailsea was sold in 1967. The proceeds were invested to yield £600 per year but this was soon swallowed up was to maintain the Central Hall: at a running cost of £4, 000 per year.⁶² This figure did not include Mission activities nor one-off repairs, such as the dry rot discovered in 1970. The high ceilings, cornices and mouldings all contributed to the inflated cost of maintenance and the CMC thought that the main hall should be demolished.⁶³ Even to reduce its size would be fruitless since 'the only advantage would be psychological: the large shell of the auditorium (as well as the rest of the premises) would remain.'⁶⁴ Three strategies for shrinking the premises were clear: sell the whole site or, in recognition that a living church remained, sell either the front section onto Old Market Street or the rear block towards Redcross Street.

Since the main hall and entrance area would be the most attractive to potential buyers, the CMC proposed selling these. Worship could then take place in the Hall of Mirrors, the one room in a good state of repair. The drawback was that visibility on a main thoroughfare would be lost but similar projects had already been tried at Tooting and East Ham. The proposal was not well-received by church leaders who believed retaining a presence on Old Market Street was in the Mission's long term financial interests. The trustees and the minister mooted the possibility of working with a private redevelopment company but were strongly

^{60 &#}x27;Minutes of the Trustees Meeting of the BM', 20 May 1958 - May 16, 1983 passim

⁶¹ G. Sails et al, Bristol Central Hall Commission Report, 1969, 1.

⁶² G Sails et al, Bristol Central Hall Commission Report, 1969, 1

⁶³ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 4.

advised against this. The CMC's Connexional overview taught them that while private developers made flattering overtures only one scheme, in Worcester, had ever reached a successful conclusion.⁶⁵

Castles in the Air

There is no doubt that sooner or later we shall be in a position where we can capitalise on our site. 66

Property developers kept their eye on Old Market Street during the 1970s. Bristol's office building boon, between 1959 and 1964, showed no sign of slowing down.⁶⁷ Figure 10.13 shows the principal land owners on the street: the Mission, EMI and Bristol Municipal Charities.⁶⁸ EMI were keen to exchange the site of the King's Cinema, now showing porn movies, with the Mission. Central Hall would be demolished and offices constructed towards the rear of the site. EMI agreed to provide £726, 000 towards a new worship centre complete with the all-important entrance to Old Market Street. In 1974, all leases came up for renewal in Central Hall. With redevelopment in the offing, the Trustees decided to renew them, on a reduced rent, for one year.⁶⁹

They did not anticipate an impending financial crisis. As the scheme neared agreement, Britain entered into sharp economic decline and property prices fell. EMI considered that almost $\pounds 3/4$ million was too expensive in relation to the 24, 100 square foot they would receive.⁷⁰ In addition, the local planning department changed its policy to conserve the urban fabric and attract residents back towards the city centre.⁷¹ The new planning officer indicated that permission for the scheme was unlikely unless the proposal included thirty per cent residential accommodation. Progress was further delayed by

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁶ 'Minutes of the Redevelopment Committee', Bristol Central Hall, 16 March 1973.

⁶⁷ Punter, Design Control in Bristol, 1990, 41.

⁶⁸ Bristol Municipal Charities coordinated local philanthropic organisations. See John V. Punter, *Design Control in Bristol*, 1990, 33.

⁶⁹ 'Minutes of the Trustees Meeting of the BM', 9 November 1973.

⁷⁰ Letter from Revd. Ron Hoar (minister) to Members of the Redevelopment Committee, 19 February 1975, appendix to 'Minutes of the Redevelopment Committee, Bristol Central Hall', 1973 – 1979.

⁷¹ John V. Punter, 'Development Interests and the Attack on Planning Controls', *Environment and Planning A*, 25/4 (1993), 521 – 538 and John V. Punter, 'The Long-term Conservation Programme in Central Bristol, 1977 – 1990', *The Town Planning Review*, 62/3 (1991), 341-364.

preservation orders and restrictions on office developments. Given this, EMI pulled out in 1976 leading the Mission to conclude 'that these premises would remain unless the Bristol Mission did something themselves'.⁷²



Figure 10.13: The ownership of land. Source: Drawings prepared by Leonard Massneh and Partners, 1978. Source: Bristol Central Library.

Circuit steward and architect, Allan Isaacs, drew up plans which ignored most of the advice of the CMC. The main hall and rear of the premises were to be demolished to make way for sheltered housing: a solution adopted at Bermondsey in 1964. In principle, Bristol's planning department were in favour of any proposition that preserved the distinctive domed cupola.⁷³ However, the undocumented costs of embarking upon a scheme were so prohibitively expensive it was abandoned. Between 1976 and 1980, three different proposals were considered, all involving demolition of the main hall. However, lay members of Church Council rejected the schemes. In order to sell part of the premises, they wanted to acquire land on either side based on the observation that 'if any part of the premises is to keep and increase its value, it will be the front section (in our view). Therefore it would be to our advantage to increase the amount of building we have on the frontage'.⁷⁴

⁷² 'Minutes of Church Council of the Bristol Methodist Mission', 7 December 1976.

⁷³ BM, 52: Anniversary 1975 (Bristol: Bristol Central Hall), 2.

⁷⁴ See 'Central Hall Redevelopment: Proposals of the Superintendent Minister and Church Stewards supported by the Circuit Stewards' appendix to 'Minutes of a Meeting of the BM', 7 December 1979.

Finances were less easy to generate. The Bristol District and the PD doubted that redevelopment of the front section could be supported by the sale of the rear and refused to sanction any proposal until it was sold.⁷⁵ At one meeting Isaacs reminded them of what was at stake: 'development is all around us, we hold the key on this side of Old Market. We have the prime site and desperately need to do something if we are going to stay.'⁷⁶ They felt that they were somehow losing out financially and 'no one seems to know exactly what grants were available'.⁷⁷ There are two volumes of minute books relating to meetings of church members who composed of the 'redevelopment committee' which testifies to the duration and importance of any the subject to the Mission's members.

Bristol City Council began to address the urban decay of the area which was dirty with underused pedestrian spaces.⁷⁸ The colourful mix of seventeenth to nineteenth century buildings were under threat of demolition but Bristol Civic Society successfully pushed for listing of various buildings. Old Market Street was designated a conservation area in 1979.⁷⁹ Redevelopment proposals aimed to rehabilitate the distinctive façade with commercial use at street level and residential at the rear in order to re-introducing mixed use space back to the area.⁸⁰ The report singled out the entrance of Central Hall with its:

...fine architectural character, irreplaceable in today's economic climate. The building's importance is much increased by the copper cupola which surmounts it, visible from many parts of the town and in particular as part of the view when entering Bristol from the east. ⁸¹

However, the main hall had:

...outlived its original purpose and the Redcross St block would be difficult to convert; while both, because of their bulk, overshadow adjoining land and inhibit its future development for residential use. Demolition would therefore seem a reasonable step, with

⁷⁵ Ian Lunn (Chairman of the Bristol District), 'Bristol Methodist Mission, Policy for the Redevelopment of Central Hall' appendix to ''Minutes of the Redevelopment Committee, Bristol Central Hall', 28 November 1980.

⁷⁶ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees of the BM', 23 September 1982.

⁷⁷ 'Minutes of Meetings of Church Council, BM', 15 January 1981.

⁷⁸ Bristol Evening Post, 13 January 1977, 12.

⁷⁹ Bristol City Council, Old Market, Conservation Area 16: Character Appraisal, (2008), 1.

www.bristol.gov.uk/conservation. Accessed 14 August 2009.

⁸⁰ Leonard Masseneh and Partners *Bristol Castle and the Old Market Area* (Bristol: Leonard Masseneh and Partners, 1978), 5.

⁸¹ Leonard Masseneh and Partners, Bristol Castle, 1978, 19.

the aim of providing additional land for housing and enabling rear access to some Market Street frontages. $^{\it 82}$

The superintendent, Roy C. Allison may have disagreed by drawing attention to the social work performed by the mission. When the last remaining tenant of the shops was declared bankrupt in 1978, he proposed that both units be used for mission purposes. A charity shop and a welfare advice centre were opened.⁸³ Neither was intended as a profit-making enterprise but a way of putting unused space to benevolent use.⁸⁴ Allison managed to double income through internal lets to $\pounds 8$, 364 between 1978 and 1980 mainly to charitable organisations including Victim Support and a Cyrenean Day Centre for the homeless. Membership of the over-60s club, Silver Links, attracted 300 to a weekly fellowship meeting. During this period, his aim was to increase the visibility of the Church and highlight the levels of poverty in Bristol.⁸⁵ But the condition of Central Hall acted as a barrier to attracting long term lets that may have eased financial worries: Avon County Council decided that they would not rent the rear premises because of the repair required.⁸⁶ Dry rot continued to spread in the main hall, but was not dealt with because of impending demolition.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, the congregation longed for a hospitable place to worship. This cold and poorly cared for building was far from the warm, homely atmosphere of old. Minor alterations in 1971 created the illusion of a smaller main hall by hanging curtains from the balcony to floor level and a moveable pulpit was built by the caretaker.⁸⁸ But, as one interviewee recalled: 'it was pathetic to see so few people in the ground floor in the centre seats'.⁸⁹ Eventually they moved to the Hall of Mirrors for Sunday worship. For five months, a sub-committee debated 'the important question of the position of the pulpit, communion table and rail' concluding that they must 'be made more permanent, i.e. not be moved from week to week'.⁹⁰ For a congregation mired in an uncertain future, the wish for stability and permanence is mediated through these implements.

⁸² Leonard Masseneh and Partners, Bristol Castle, 1978, 19.

⁸³ 'Circuit Meeting and Circuit Consultation Minutes of the BM', 21 September 1984.

⁸⁴ Roy Allison, Bristol Mission: Alongside the Poor (Bristol: Bristol Central Hall, 1984), 4.

⁸⁵ Personal Interview, 18.

⁸⁶ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees of the BM', 5 September 1979.

⁸⁷ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees of the BM', 4 February 1982.

⁸⁸ 'Minutes of the Leaders Meeting of the BM', 10 September 1969.

⁸⁹ Personal Interview, 24.

⁹⁰ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees of the BM', 5 September, 1979.

In 1981, the local council made a tempting proposition. They would give the Mission three additional shops on Old Market Street in exchange for the main hall and rear premises. Church Council approved the offer.⁹¹ The Joseph Rank Benevolent Trust (JRBT) indicated that it would match what the Mission could raise, pound for pound.⁹² A subsidised feasibility study was proposed by Bristol City Council but the Mission could not find the £1, 000 required. The JRBT could only provide funds if a definite scheme was in place.⁹³ Likewise, Methodist Church funds could only be accessed if money was in hand.⁹⁴ The possibility of selling the financial investment of the Newbury Trust was explored, but nothing could be done until the lease expired in 1986.⁹⁵ The City Council opted to plough on with its plans without the Mission.

Other circuits in the Bristol district became more vocal about the financial drain of Central Hall. However, Connexional spirit becomes lost as they were unwilling to stomach any suggestion that the Mission be attached to another circuit.⁹⁶ In November 1984, another Central Mission Committee visited Bristol with the express purpose of advising closure.

Church Council ceded defeat.⁹⁷ Sixty-one years after opening, the last services were held on 28th April 1985. The minister felt let down by Connexional and district bodies. The decision to refuse a loan he thought to be disingenuous given the concurrent 'Mission alongside the Poor' initiative. In a speech given on the eve of closure, Allison pointed out that:

When I opened my 'Mission alongside the Poor' mail from the Home Mission Division, I found that the first paper was a lecture given by Professor Peter Townsend, the guru of academics studying poverty, and his theme was poverty in Bristol. And what area does he select for studying poverty? The three wards of St Paul's, St Philip's and Baston. And which Methodist Churches are situated in this ward? Only one – the Central Hall –which we are about to close.⁹⁸

However, the head of the Home Mission Division believed the fault to lie with Church Council who could not contemplate giving up the Old Market Street entrance. In a letter to

⁹¹ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the BM', 7 December 1979.

⁹² 'Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees of the BM', 10 September1980.

⁹³ 'Minutes of the Redevelopment Committee, Bristol Central Hall', 19 May 1977.

⁹⁴ 'Minutes of the Meetings of Church Council, BM', 7 October1983.

⁹⁵ 'Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees of the BM', 10 Sept 1980.

⁹⁶ 'Circuit Meeting and Circuit Consultation Minutes', 7 December 1979; 4 February 1980.

⁹⁷ 'Minutes of Church Council, BM', 7 October 1983.

⁹⁸ Roy C. Allison, Typed notes of a speech given to District Synod, April 1985, courtesy of the author.

the minister of Victoria Hall, Sheffield who made a similar complaint about the lack of Connexional support, English claimed that 'in the case of Bristol I believe the Division was much too patient over the years when the superintendent refused to accept good schemes.'⁹⁹

A Different Meaning

The Hall was eventually sold in 1987 for £169, 976 to a firm of London developers, Nelson Homes. The main hall was demolished to create an inner courtyard and car park to serve the the Redcross and Old Market Street portions which had been converted into private flats (Figure 10.14). All stonework, windows and roof were repaired and the shop units rebuilt in a style in keeping with the period.¹⁰⁰ Despite the large building, many people are unaware of its original function as a place of worship. Even now, Bristol City Council's policy document on the *Old Market Conservation Area* (2008) considers it as 'the last surviving of three popular entertainment venues in the Old Market.'¹⁰¹

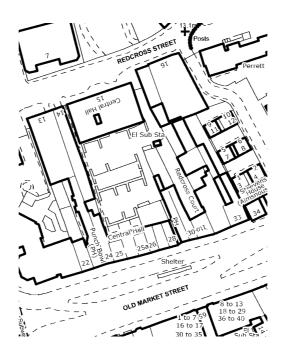


Figure 10.14: The Central Hall after conversion to flats. Source: © Crown Copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service (1: 1250).

⁹⁹ Letter from Donald English (Home Mission Division) to Frank Thewliss (Minister at Victoria Hall, Sheffield) 11 November 1986. Part of the 'City and Town Centre Review Group', MARC 9863, Box 3.

¹⁰⁰ Bristol City Council, City Development, 'Application for Conversion', 87/03865/F

¹⁰¹ Bristol City Council, Old Market, Conservation Area, 2008, 15.

At present, the area remains cut off from the city centre and the council admits that residential developments were ill-thought out. ¹⁰² Despite efforts towards regeneration, there is little natural surveillance and the premises are massage parlours or nightclubs with little natural surveillance. It is a street regarded as uninviting and threatening.¹⁰³ The old Central Hall and its accessible public spaces, open to all regardless of status, is now private territory.

Conclusion

Perhaps Bristol Central Hall should not have been built to accommodate 2, 000. The downtown chapels the mission acquired in the early twentieth century were failing because of the removal of the middle-classes to the suburbs. Lessons clearly were not learned. The implications of municipal slum clearance, began in 1919, were not fully understood during the early period and did not seem to matter as the Hall attracted large crowds.

Its subsequent history is one of inadaptability. The premises were not adequately used as a source of income, particularly when the church no longer needed the space. Generally, Central Halls that remain in existence do so because they managed to maintain an adequate amount of income to cover maintenance costs. This means letting to professional outside organisations and dealing with the consequences of repair and maintenance. This was delayed at Bristol because of imminent redevelopment. While, efforts were made to increase lettings in the late 1970s, it was not sufficient to generate the requirements of repairs and funding for redevelopment. One other point seems worthy of note. The larger Halls, in Manchester and London, were able to call upon alternative sources of funding, but at Bristol, the committee seemed information poor, unaware that forging partnerships with other organisations could provide capital for rebuilding by converting part of the premises. In the end, the scale of the work could only be undertaken by a private property developer. While the redevelopment into flats has maintained the distinctive frontage, what was once an important public amenity is now in private hands.

¹⁰² Ibid., 31 – 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Chapter 11: Archway Central Hall (1934)



Figure 11.1: Perspective view of Archway Central Hall, 1934. By George E and K. G. Withers. Source: WCCAR 1934.



Figure 11.2: Archway Central Hall, July 2009 with truncated tower. Source: Author.

Introduction

Of the six case studies, Archway Central Hall is the youngest and the only one in London. It was inaugurated post-Methodist Union and is the last hall to have a capacity exceeding one thousand. In design, it signifies the end of the original Central Hall type including, as it did, a flood lit cross above the entrance tower. This case study is also useful to examine the particular historical circumstances in London Methodism, which had a separate funding structure from the provincial missions and was spared the scrutiny of Conference between 1960 – 1988. As we shall see, it had significant population and planning problems to address.

Archway Road is the main route linking Central London to the North of England. It borders the eastern side of Highgate Hill which descends through Upper Holloway into central London. The development of Archway Road, and its feeder, Junction Road, in 1813 facilitated the migration of the affluent from London towards suburbs. One account of the area in the early twentieth century recalled no buses or trams and that 'it was a classy neighbourhood too...nearly everyone kept a maid.'¹

The Wesleyans understood the strategic importance of junctions for maximum advertising opportunities and the original Archway Road Chapel was built where five roads met. It offered a full programme of associational activities as befitted a thriving middle class population including bible classes, mothers' meetings, the Wesley Guild, Boys' Brigade and choral concerts.² As London became congested, low cost workers housing was developed in the surrounding area to accommodate residential overspill from St Pancras. Those who could continued to migrate to the garden suburbs beyond Highgate Hill. The map and aerial photograph figures 11.3 and 11.4 illustrates the road layout at this time.

Population movement was assisted with the development of the High Barnet section of London Underground between 1907 and 1939. A tube station, called Highgate, opened across from the chapel.³ Around 1925, the repair and upkeep of the Wesleyan chapel was becoming a burden to its existing congregation, now reduced because of the demographic

¹ Mr Fred Sargant, 'Archway Central Hall, Highgate', Hornsey Journal, 16 November, 1934, 24.

² John Ellis, Archway Methodist Centenary, 1864 – 1964 (London: Archway Central Hall, 1964), 3.

³ Latterly the station became known as 'Archway' and the area, usually considered as Upper Holloway took on this name. See S. Morris and T. Mason, *Gateway to the City: The Archway Story* (Hornsey: Hornsey Historical Trust, 2000) and John Ellis, *Local Lore*, Loose leaf volume, 1979 – 1984 held at Archway Methodist Church.

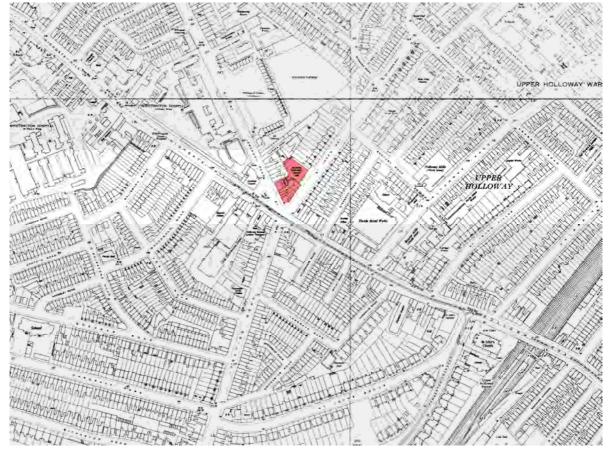


Figure 11.3: Archway Central Hall (indicated in red) at the junction of five roads, Source: © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2010). All rights reserved. (National Land Survey, 1953, 1: 2500).



Figure 11.4: Aerial photograph showing Archway Central Hall c. 1936. Source: Archway Methodist Church.

change. Concern was also expressed over traffic noise interfering with Sunday worship.⁴ A new building was needed to regenerate interest.

After 1925, the freeholds of five shops were acquired on St John's Way, adding to premises already owned on Flower Mews. At some point between 1925 and 1930 it was decided that Archway should have a Central Hall to reach the mainly working class area.⁵ This followed the geographical trend of the London Central Halls discussed in Chapter Three. The early missions were predominantly located in the south and east. These were typically large social work enterprises with several peripheral Halls grouped around a main centre. By the late 1920s, the London Mission began targeting money towards building in the London County Council (LCC) cottage estates at Dagenham and Becontree as well as catering for those who moved north and westwards to Hillingdon, Yiewsley and Enfield.⁶ The Hall at Archway was the solution to the continuing problem that population movement posed to the Methodist Church.

A limited architectural competition took place with George E and K. G. Withers of London awarded the commission. George Withers, born in 1873 in Clapham, practiced with Charles Bell, the designer of the South West London Hall in Bermondsey (1898), and collaborated with Bell and Percy Meredith at Plumstead (1903). After setting out on his own he designed a range of commercial buildings including factories, hotels and a small number of chapels for the Wesleyans. His son Kenneth later partnered him. The RIBA Library has no information on the firm and the *Builder* merely records that 'the death has taken place of Mr George E. Withers, F.R.I.B.A, C.C. at the age of 71'.⁷ Withers' is one of many commercial architects who shaped Britain's urban landscape yet remain overlooked.

Charles Hulbert was the minister appointed to oversee the building of a Hall in 1932. He had been at seven Missions prior to Archway, a career that began in 1904 under the tutelage of Samuel Collier at the Manchester and Salford Mission . He had clear ideas about the

⁵ Mr Charles Morley, 'Evolution', *Invitation to the Opening Services of Archway Central Hall*, November 1934, 12. Unless otherwise stated the archives are held at Archway Methodist Church.

⁴ The Methodist Recorder, 22 November 1934, 5.

⁶ Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (London: Random House, 2008), 25 – 36. The WCCAR contains an overview of the siting of these London buildings in its Annual Reports. For a review of operations see 'Map of Methodist Church and Sites in the London Area: including the Story of the London Mission' (Westminster: Cook, Hammond and Kell, 1955), MARC 2291.

⁷ The Builder, 168, 27 April 1945, 327.

evangelistic nature of the work. In 1927, he fired a warning at the anniversary of Eastbrook Hall in Bradford which indicated that there was a retreat from evangelism and a tendency to minister to existing members. 'Our Central Missions have been going on for twenty-five years,' observed Hulbert, 'and are in danger of becoming churches which have settled down'.⁸ His biographer alleges that he demanded that the trustees provided a Central Hall, detached from the Highgate Circuit, and with authority invested in him to direct activities adding social work to a range of associational activities.⁹ Hulbert gathered statistics from the Health and Education authorities on neglected children and poor housing conditions to prove his belief that an aggressive mission would have an effect on the area.¹⁰

The first planning application was refused because the LCC anticipated future road widening and required the building line to be set back by fourteen feet on Archway Road and six feet on St Johns Way.¹¹ With planning approval granted in 1933, operations commenced and advertisements were placed on the scaffolding to advertise the number of seats and shop accommodation to let (Figure 11.5).

Opened in 1934, the exterior of Archway Central Hall is thoroughly typical of contemporary commercial developments. Perhaps Charles Hulbert was showing his age when he enquired what style the building would be. The usual answer of 'renaissance' or 'gothic' was not forthcoming. Instead, Withers pithily replied: 'there is no style of particular style of architecture, we have adopted the modern style which is in keeping with present day costs and steel constructed buildings'.¹²

While resolutely secular in style, indeed reminiscent of an Odeon cinema, the main entrance tower was surmounted by a stone cross that would be floodlit during the evening. This symbol of Christian faith dominated the building and is the first reference to a sacred symbol on a Hall that is not a later addition. When the tower was truncated in 1956 because of defective

⁸ Quoted in Kenneth Hulbert, *Passion for Souls: The Story of Charles H. Hulbert, Methodist Missioner* (London: Epworth Press, 1959), 78.

⁹ Ibid., 87 – 90.

¹⁰ Ibid., 93.

¹¹ Planning Application, Archway Central Hall, Islington MetB: Building Act Case File, 14 July 1931, LMA, GLC/AR/BR/22/BA/068854.

¹² Letter from George E. and K. G Withers to Revd. Charles Hulbert, 18 May 1933.



Figure 11.5: The new hall under construction, c. 1934. Source: Archway Methodist Church.



Figure 11.6: Archway Central Hall, c. late 1930s Source: Archway Methodist Church.

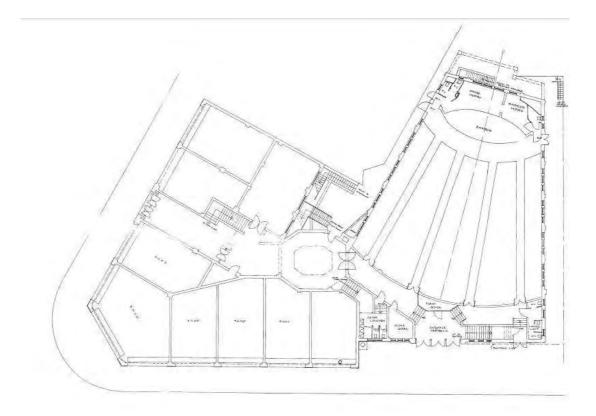


Figure 11.7: Ground Floor Plan of Archway Central Hall, 1934. Source: Archway Methodist Church.

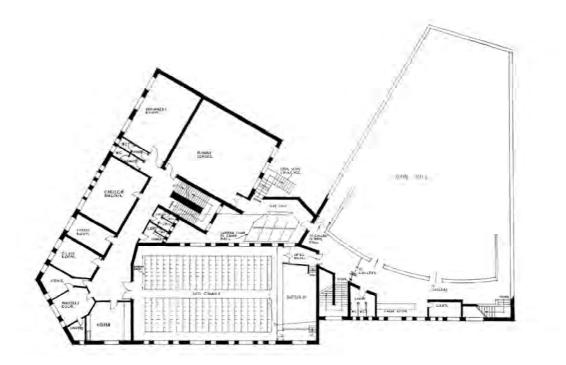


Figure 11.8: First Floor Plan of Archway Central Hall, 1934. Source: Archway Methodist Church



Figure 11.9: The Prayer Chapel, c. 1940. Source: Archway Methodist Church.

construction, the cross had to be removed. Three trustees withheld their approval until assured that this would be remedied and it was replaced by a neon equivalent.¹³

On plan, the eventual building comprised of eight self-contained shops at ground floor level with administrative functions and ancillary accommodation (Figure 11.7 and Figure 11.8). The exterior cross is complemented by a ground floor prayer chapel, small and simply furnished with chairs, an altar and a cross (Figure 11.9). The inclusion of these sacred symbols reflects a shift in the idea of Central Halls. Despite Hulbert's protestations to the contrary, Central Halls had become churches where the provision of distinctly sacred space to cater for the regular faithful was imperative. This chapel was easily accessible from the left of an irregular shaped octagonal crush hall with a large lantern light in the roof. This octagon is the key area of the building, linking all spaces in what is a complex plan. To the first floor level is accommodation for the ancillary church activities: Sunday school, administrative offices, caretakers' accommodation and a lower hall seating 500.

The Sunday school occupied three large rooms divided between primary, intermediate and senior departments. Here, the main religious function was made evident with murals on the walls painted by the artist Henry E. Tidmarsh. He was a Wesleyan local preacher and Sunday school teacher and well-known for his depiction of street scenes in London and Manchester.¹⁴ The extensive decoration included sixteen panels on the theme of discipleship in the intermediates room with additional paintings showing, amongst others, John Wesley, George Fox, St Paul and St Augustine. Fourteen panels of the life of Christ decorated the beginners room. Unfortunately, subsequent redecoration has painted over these and no visual record remains. An example of his work at the High Barnet Sunday school indicated 'a bold and challenging presentation of the Social Gospel' by a man who held strong Socialist principles.15

¹³ 'Report on the Water Tower, Archway Central Hall', Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustees of Archway Central Hall (herafter TMA), 19 September 1956.

¹⁴ Tidmarsh illustrated W. A. Shaw, Manchester Old and New (London: Cassells, 1894) as well as drawing many watercolours of London street scenes. London Guildhall Library showed a retrospective of his work at the Museum of London in 1992. See Ralph Hyde, The Streets of London: Evocative Watercolours by H. E. Tidmarsh (London: Red Scorpion Press, 1993) and Geoffrey E. Milburn, 'A Methodist Artist Rediscovered: H. E. Tidmarsh, 1855 – 1939', Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, 49 (1994), 208 – 221. ¹⁵ Milburn, 'A Methodist Artist', 1994, 221.

The main hall is designed to be entirely separate, so that when rented out church work was not interfered with. Designed for both worship and entertainment, it boasted a full sized cinema screen winched up and down as required and the modest entrance on St John's Way had its own ticket office and cloakrooms. This became known as the 'cinema' part of the building.¹⁶ A horse-shoe shaped balcony on three sides could be suggestive of the early Methodist preaching houses but the brown leatherette tip-up seating gives it the secular Central Hall feel (Figure 11.10). Equally, the position that the Methodist Church was modern and up-to-date continued. The traffic noise was addressed by insulating the walls with a high density fibrous board marketed as 'tentest'. This, the Chapel Committee proudly announced, had been used during the construction of the BBC Broadcasting House (1932).¹⁷

Even the church organ resembled the world of commercial design. One reporter from *The Methodist Recorder* documents his surprise, saying that: 'I have never seen a church in which the console only was visible, as in a modern cinema, and the rest, was hidden behind a screen.'¹⁸ Built by William Hill & Son and Norman & Beard it incorporated pipework from the former Archway Road chapel organ and was completely enclosed in a teak chamber. The tonal openings were protected by teak louvres and held in an open position by a system of fusible links.¹⁹ Concealing the pipework in a chamber was done to comply with LCC safety regulations regarding cinema organs.²⁰ Figure 11.11 shows the camouflaged organ which is very distinct from the traditional church organ arrangement in most of the other Central Halls.

The bright main hall had a high ceiling rising within the skylight to form a rectangular coved recess. Contemporary accounts describe the cream tiling and teak woodwork as having 'a quiet dignity'.²¹ English Heritage prefers 'bland and perfunctory', making particular reference to 'a scrolly, vaguely Grecian motif' along the front of the balcony.²² Most of the corridor walls were tiled, as figure 11.11 depicts. An early magazine of the mission pokes fun at its copious use, saying that:

¹⁶ Personal Interview, 1.

¹⁷ Methodist Chapel Committee (Formerly Wesleyan), Annual Report, 1934, 161.

¹⁸ The Methodist Recorder, 22 November 1934, 5.

¹⁹ Building Act Case File 3467, Letter from William Hill and Son and Norman and Beard LTD, 20 June 1934 to the Clerk of the LCC.

²⁰ Richard Gray, 100 Years of Cinema Architecture in Britain (London: Lund Humphries, 1996).

²¹ Methodist Chapel Committee, Annual Report, 1932, 162.

²² National Record of Monuments, English Heritage, NBR File No: 77301, 1989, 4.



Figure 11.10: Tip-up seats in the main hall. Source: NMR 18626



Figure 11.11: The main hall, Archway. Source: NMR 18618.



Figure 11.12: Tiling in the Hallway. Source: NMR 18622.



Figure 11.13: Crowds gather at the opening of Archway Central Hall, November 1934. St John's Way entrance. Source: Archway Methodist Church.

During the early days of the Central Hall, before our people had got really used to it, all sorts of amusing ideas existed as to what it really was. It is on record that several people from time to time passed the swing door with their towel around their necks, asking which way to the swimming bath.²³

Creating a Community

When Revd. C. Ensor Walters of the London Mission spoke at the opening services, he was keen to emphasise that Archway Central Hall was as every bit as sacred as Westminster Abbey. Cheers at the end of his speech indicated to the *Methodist Times and Leader*: 'that was the best sign in all that happened, for it meant that people were there who were not accustomed to the forms of worship'.²⁴ Some were less than happy with the building. A former worshipper, who left Archway for the more upmarket Jackson's Lane nearby, complained that: 'the old Church was a striking landmark, taking second place only to the Archway Tavern but the new building...did not however, leave such a characteristic mark on the landscape'.²⁵

Joseph Rank presided at the evening meeting of the opening service reminded the audience on the need for financial prudence. Rank, the treasurer of Tooting Central Hall, advised that:

In this Mission you must study economy. It is easy to spend money, and not so easy to get a hold of it. You will need your pennies to keep this Hall going. It is costly to run Mission-Halls.²⁶

Rank had a slightly more vested interest than mere pennies. An initial no-strings-attached \pounds 10, 000 donation to the building fund was later augmented to \pounds 35, 000 to ensure the Hall opened without debt. Stipulations were attached to this two-thirds contribution to the overall cost of \pounds 66, 106. Shop rents were entirely given over to the London Mission Committee from which Archway received an annual \pounds 500 grant.²⁷ In the manner of the thrifty and successful businessman he was, Rank ensured not only an income for Archway but for all of London

²³ 'Things Seen and Heard at Archway', The Archway Chronicle (magazine of the mission), February 1939, 30.

²⁴ The Methodist Times and Leader, 22 November 1934, 3.

²⁵ Alf Dewney, 'The Church on Archway Corner', Islington History Journal, August 1991, 8.

²⁶ The Hornsey Journal, 16 November 1934, 24.

²⁷ Letter from Lawrence O. Brooker, (Archway Central Hall) to Robinson Whittaker, (London Mission Committee), 7 March 1951. There remained a £20, 000 debt after receiving £3, 000 from the London Mission and £500 from other Connexional funds. See Charles Hulbert, 'Schedule for New Chapel to the Methodist Chapel Committee', 1 March 1935.

Methodism. Archway continues to give the London Mission the shop rents but successfully negotiated a 50 per cent share in 1954.²⁸

Social work on the scale of missions in the south and east end of London was not embarked upon. The services of a sympathetic lawyer were secured once a week to provide advice for the poor. A number of church members formed the twenty-eighth branch of the 'League of Good Samaritans' to exercise Christian charity to the needy. Members had a secret password and sign. Applicants for help were rigorously assessed to prove claims for deserving cases. The first began in 1910 at the Oxford Road Methodist church in Manchester. There was no denominational barrier and by 1939, thirty lodges existed, mainly in the north of England. The Archway lodge closed in 1963 due to lack of members.

Other activities capitalised on what Archway Road Chapel had offered with a network of selfimprovement guilds, bible classes and district visitations. Members were encouraged to be politically active by joining the League of Nations Peace Union.²⁹ Saturday afternoons were given over to a children's cinema showing a mixture of cartoons and educational films, known locally as the 'two penny rush'. Saturday evening concerts provided a mixture of variety acts and ended with a talkie film as the page from the weekly activities letter in figure 11.14 shows. The strong choir at Archway were well-known in Methodism for their regular choral performances both at worship and on Saturday evenings. Receivers were encouraged to pass hymn sheets onto neighbours as a form of word-of-mouth advertisement.

By 1943, however, there were complaints that on Sundays that the Hall looked much as it did on Saturday and so the Trustees authorised the purchase of a cross, vases and different coloured curtains to give a more reverential feel to worship.³⁰ The need to make the Central Hall feel more like a church carried on into the 1950s when the lettering on a new canopy was revised to read 'Archway Central Hall' at the front and 'Archway Methodist Church' at the side.³¹ Placed in a residential area of London, Archway drew upon surrounding streets for its congregation and after Charles Hulbert left, the pattern of use conforms to a typical suburban church.

²⁸ TMA, 19 March 1957.

²⁹ Donald Soper, preacher and pacifist, was ministering at the nearby Islington Central Hall. See Brian Frost *Goodwill on Fire*, 1996, 34 – 41.

³⁰ TMA, 20 April 1943.

³¹ TMA, 1 May1957.

PEOPLE'S POPULAR ENTERTAINMENTS

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31st, at 7 p.m. Another "Celebrity" Night.

> First appearance at Archway Hall of FRANCIS RUSSELL

(The Eminent Welsh Tenor of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, B.B.C. Concerts, Royal Choral Society's Concerts, Queen's Hall "Proms.," Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales, etc., etc.),

> Supported by OONAH MAIRS (Soprano, B.B.C. Concerts, etc., etc.),

BRYN GWYN and GEORGE THOMAS In Single Numbers and a Diverting Sketch,

NORMAN MAJOR (Entertainer), In Two Examples of the Educated Hand.

At the Grand Piano - - REGINALD BRIGDEN

CINEMA PICTURES

PEACE, PEACE, PEACE

The world still cries out for PEACE. And if the League of Nations did not exist, the people's poignant cry would certainly be for such a League.

If the League of Nations has not always succeeded, it has been because it has lacked support, not in theory, but in practice. Your practical support is needed through the League of Nations Union, which has not, and will not, cease its efforts.

Membership of the League of Nations Union need only cost you I/- per annum. Please join the Archway Road branch at the Central Hall. Honorary Secretary, T. H. Hancock.

N.B.—Look out for the great meeting on December 6th. Please enroll me as a member of the League of Nations Union.

Address

Name

Sum enclosed, 1/-, 3/6, 5/-.

Figure 11.14: Page from the weekly activities newsletter at Archway Central Hall, 1936. Note the encouragement to join the League of Nations. Source: Archway Methodist Church.

And we are gay and very peacoful here. We feel the strain, and often we grow weary, We miss our quiet homes, we long for sleep, And we remember happy days gone over, And wish our loved ones back with longings deep. Yet never do we suffer faith to falter, Nor lot the fiame of courage over die, Our hearts are loyal always to our country, Our love is stedfast still to One on high.	Archway A.R.Shelter.
We know tho hand outstretched above to shield us, And we are gay and very peacoful here. We feel the strain, and often we grow weary, We miss our quiet homes, we long for sleep, And we remember happy days gone over, And wish our loved ones back with longings deep. Yet never do we suffer faith to falter, Nor lot the flame of courage over die, Our hearts are loyal always to our sountry, Our love is stedfast still to One on high. And though the clouds are dark and thick around u We see the distant hill-tops fluched with fire, And we are sure that Love will rise in glory And trample hate and evil in the mire; For one glad day this war will all be over, And ye shall sing in happiness and peace, And joy shall surge around us like an ocean,	Where night by night from peril we are free, O happy friendship knitting us together And making of us one glad family.
We miss our quiet homes, we long for sleep, And we remember happy days gone over, And wish our loved ones back with longings deep. Yet never do we suffer faith to falter, Nor lot the flame of courage over die, Our hearts are loyal always to our country, Our love is stedfast still to One on high. And though the clouds are dark and thick around u We see the distant hill-tops fluched with fire, And we are sure that Love will rise in glory And trample hate and evil in the mire; For one glad day this war will all be over, And we shall sing in happiness and peace, And joy shall surge around us like an ocean,	We are not shaken by one throb of fear, We know the hand outstretched above to shield us,
And we remember happy days gone over, And wish our loved ones back with longings deep. Yet never do we suffer faith to falter, Nor lot the flame of courage over die, Our hearts are loyal always to our country, Our love is stedfast still to One on high. And though the clouds are dark and thick around u We see the distant hill-tops fluched with fire, And we are sure that Love will rise in glory And trample hate and ovil in the mire; For one glad day this war will all be over, And ye shall sing in happiness and peace, And joy shall surge around us like an ocean,	
And wish our loved ones back with longings deep. Yet never do we suffer faith to falter, Nor lot the flame of courage over die, Our hearts are loyal always to our country, Our love is stedfast still to One on high. And though the clouds are dark and thick around u We see the distant hill-tops fluched with fire, And we are sure that Love will rise in glory And trample hate and ovil in the mine; For one glad day this war will all be over, And we shall sing in happiness and peace, And joy shall surge around us like an ocean,	
Yet never do we suffer faith to falter, Nor lot the flame of courage over die, Our hearts are loyal always to our country, Our love is stedfast still to One on high. And though the clouds are dark and thick around u We see the distant hill-tops fluched with fire, And we are sure that Love will rise in glory And trample hate and ovil in the mire; For one glad day this war will all be over, And we shall sing in happiness and peace, And joy shall surge around us like an ocean,	
Our hearts are loyal always to our sountry, Our love is stedfast still to One on high. And though the clouds are dark and thick around u We see the distant hill-tops fluched with fire, And we are sure that Love will rise in glory And trample hate and evil in the mire; For one glad day this war will all be over, And we shall sing in happiness and peace, And joy shall surge around us like an ocean,	Yet never do we suffer faith to falter,
Our love is stedfast still to One on high. And though the clouds are dark and thick around u We see the distant hill-tops fluched with fire, And we are sure that Love will rise in glory And trample hate and ovil in the mire; For one glad day this war will all be over, And we shall sing in happiness and peace, And joy shall surge around us like an ocean,	
We see the distant hill-tops flushed with fire, And we are sure that Love will rise in glory And trample hate and evil in the mire; For one glad day this war will all be over, And we shall sing in happiness and peace, And joy shall surge around us like an ocean,	Our love is stedfast still to One on high.
And trample hato and evil in the mire; For one glad day this war will all be over, And we shall sing in happiness and peace, And joy shall surge around us like an ocean,	
For one glad day this war will all be over, And we shall sing in happiness and peace, And joy shall surge around us like an ocean,	
And joy shall surge around us like an ocean,	For one glad day this war will all be over,
And Troodom, or usin and brownerhood increase.	
	And irocada, truch and brotherhood increase.

Figure 11.15: The words of the Archway Shelter Hymn. Source: Archway Methodist Church.



Figure 11.16: The words of the Archway Shelter Prayer. Source: Archway Methodist Church.

Local histories of the building indicate that the days of the 1500 seat venue being full were ended when war was declared in 1939.³² Popular concerts ceased although the Archway Choral Society continued to stage performances of Handel's Messiah, despite air raid threats. Worship and clubs continued on a much reduced basis but the disparate network of members received communication in a series of 'war time letters' written by ministers. In a basement, requisitioned by Islington Borough Council as an air raid shelter, the minister (also the local air warden) taught up to 600 people the words of 'The Archway Air Raid Shelter Hymn' and a prayer before lights out (Figures 11.15 and 11.16). Spirits were kept high and the Revd. James MacKay wrote morale boosting letters to the dispersed congregation. The idea of Hallas-entertainment is a continuing theme throughout mission literature. MacKay describes the shelter:

Our air raid shelter is the most popular thing in North London at the moment! Large crowds gather outside every night waiting to come in. It looks like the pit entrance to a popular play, and we actually have a queue of artistes doing turns outside the Hall!³³

After 1945

After the war, congregations did not recover to pre-war levels and membership gradually declined through the 1950s and 60s (See Table 11.1). The cine-projectors were sold in 1946 because of the difficulty in securing films, although the screen remained.³⁴ However, Archway was able to capitalise on youth work through the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs (MAYC) – the result of a less formal approach to youth work by Jimmy Butterworth at Clubland Methodist Church in Walworth during the 1920s. In 1943, Methodist conference brought together various strands of Sunday school and the Wesley Guild into a new youth department. This was designed to be casual with membership open to all regardless of religious persuasion.³⁵

³² John Ellis, Archway Methodist Centenary: 1864 – 1964 (London: Archway Central Hall, 1964); Idem., Fifty Years at Archway Central Hall: Golden Jubilee Commemorative Brochure (London: Archway Central Hall, 1984). There is no data on congregations.

³³ James MacKay, 'War Time Letters', 13 September 1940.

³⁴ TMA, 1 October 1946.

³⁵ On the history of the MAYC see Mark K. Smith, 'Methodism and Youth Work', *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education*, 2003, www.infed.org/features/methodism_youth_work.htm. Accessed 21 July 2009.

Year	Number of Members					
1934	632					
1944	-					
1954	537					
1964	434					
1974	186					
1984	161					

Table 11.1: Membership Figures at Archway Central Hall, 1934 – 1984.

Source: 'Minutes of the Leaders Meetings, Archway Methodist Church, 1934 – 1984'

MAYC reached its prime during the 1950s with some 3, 400 clubs and a membership of 110, 000.³⁶ At Archway, the work used six rooms up to four times a week for creative classes, sports and games. Members of the club were encouraged to adopt leadership roles and there were attempts to connect it to the life of the church. Sunday nights ended with a prayer although the majority of the eighty to ninety youth club members chose not to stick around. The core cadre who became church members describe the mix of church elders and young people. One former member, now a Methodist minister in rural Wales, indicated that most of his weeknights were taken up in activities offered at the Hall:

In some senses it was not unlike a Catholic upbringing...you go to a Catholic school, a Catholic Church, a Catholic club...if you're busy doing that you are not busy doing something else and for me Archway Central Hall provided that sort of all-embracing social experience.³⁷

Most of the people who contributed information about Archway in the 1950s and early 1960s met their future spouses through using the premises. For these, social capital was developed through engaging with like-minded people also uninterested in drinking alcohol.³⁸

However, the stable and active congregation was dismantled during the 1960s. The youth club petered out as members moved out of London. Membership in the other clubs declined

³⁶ John Munsey Turner, Modern Methodism, 1998, 75 – 6.

³⁷ Personal Interview, 12.

³⁸ Personal Interview, 12; Personal Interview, 13; Personal Interview, 14; Personal Interview, 15.

as members died without attracting new recruits. Archway was to undergo significant material and social change.

Road Networks and London County Council

In their Highway Development Survey of London (1937), Charles Bressey and Edwin Lutyens identified the congestion at the Archway Road junction as one of eleven singled out for mention.³⁹ They believed that it could be solved by a roundabout, although they anticipated that the erection of new premises on the site were likely to cause resistance. War put an end to any redevelopment. By 1951, the LCC affirmed the need to develop a road network by extending thirteen arterial main routes into London, linked by an inner circuit route. However, with priority given to housing shortage, money was concentrated here.⁴⁰ When the Greater London Council (GLC) eventually superseded the LCC, their remit included a supposition that the primary road network plans were revived.⁴¹ Archway Road was widened to a dual carriageway and the intersection at Archway tube station became a gyratory roundabout system with north and south bound access separated by a traffic island (Figure 11.17 and Figure 11.18).

The creation of the gyratory system did not manage traffic congestion. By 1973, the Department of Transport pushed on with plans to create a six- lane motorway out of the A1 and leading straight into central London. The plans met significant local protest, particularly from the Highgate Society, a civic group established in1966.⁴² By 1984, these radical local protesters had the backing of Islington Borough Council and the GLC. The latter had been in favour of the project but political tensions between a Conservative administration in central government and the GLC led by the Labour Party entailed a change of policy at County Hall. In total, there were four public enquiries, the last of which held in Archway's Main Hall between 1983 and 1985.

³⁹ Charles Bressey and Edwin Lutyens, The Highway Development Survey, 1937 (London: HMSO, 1938), 11.

⁴⁰ London County Council, Administrative County of London Development Plan, First Review 1960, County Planning Report, London County Council, 1960.

⁴¹ Michael Hebbert, London: More by Fortune than Design, 1996, 74 -77.

⁴² J. Richardson, *Highgate Past* (London: Historical Publications, 2004), 136 – 7 and J. Stewart, 'A Road Can Be Stopped!', Briefing to the Road Block Organisation, May 2005,

http://www.roadblock.org.uk/resources/roadsvictories.pdf. Accessed 21 July 2009.



Figure 11.17: Construction work begins on the gyratory road system, January 1969. Source: Archway Methodist Church.

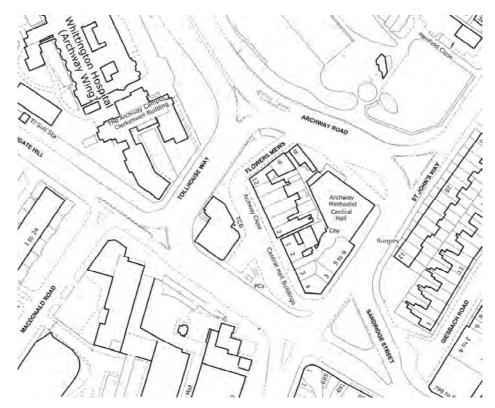


Figure 11.18: The Archway Road Gyratory, 1: 1250. Source: © Crown Copyright/database right 2009. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service.



Figure 11.19: The top photograph was taken c. late 1940s depicting Sunday school children playing on the roof. Source: Archway Methodist Church.



Figure 11.20: The Boys Brigade, 1976. Source: Archway Methodist Church.

This long-running dispute meant that the area suffered planning blight over an uncertain future. However, the steady income from the main hall being used further replenished the accounts of the church. Despite the costs of maintaining the premises, Archway remained solvent. Eventually, the road scheme was quietly dropped in 1990 having got no further than the Archway Road Bridge.⁴³ It would not be the last time that local residents joined forces to oppose official plans for the area.

In effect it stranded the building on a traffic roundabout. Access via a subway system was stopped in 1998 when the Highways Agency closed it after a record twenty-six robberies in two months.⁴⁴ From the tube station, pedestrians are obliged to traverse three roads, with traffic signals, rather than take a direct route across Highgate Hill. Most interviewees say the building work did not interfere with their attendance at the Hall, but even today, the manager of one of the shop units claims that a frequent comment is: 'I know you are there but it's just too far to cross that road.'⁴⁵ While it may not be the determining factor in declining congregations, the creation of the gyratory undoubtedly affected patterns of use.

Coupled with physical redevelopment of the area was a changing population demographic. Figures 11.19 and 11.20, taken around thirty years apart, demonstrate this change in the composition of youth groups. A 1977 study of migration patterns in London found that migrants from Islington tended to be young, white, working class families.⁴⁶ By the mid-1960s, the area was becoming multi-racial with African and Afro-Carribean families moving in. The construction of three housing estates to the West and North of Archway Central Hall also contributed to population flows in and out of the Borough.

Racial tensions were high in the late sixties amongst a disaffected black youth drawn to the Black Power Movement.⁴⁷ To this came a former missionary in Ghana, John Beech, to his first ministerial post in the UK. He was part of a set of evangelic white ministers who aimed to build up inner city and new town areas through the black community.⁴⁸ Beech began by

⁴³ A. Martin "London's Most Hated Road", The Evening Standard Magazine, 17 November 1995, 24-5.

⁴⁴ The Islington Gazette, 26 February 1998, 6.

⁴⁵ Personal Interview, 13.

⁴⁶ N. Deakin and C. Ungerson, *Leaving London: Planned Mobility and the Inner City* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 95–105.

⁴⁷ See J. Williams, Michael X: A Life in Black and White (London: Century, 2008), 56 - 61.

⁴⁸ See pp. 168 - 9 above. On multi-racial churches and white ministers see Heather Walton, *et al*, A Tree God Planted, 1985, 49 - 50.

teaching religious education at a local school in 1969. One class were given the task of discovering the history of Archway Central Hall and the boys enquired about the possibility of a youth club on the premises. This was agreed and up to 18, 000 square foot of space attracted 600 West Indian youngsters. Beech and his Deaconess, Sister Evelyn, regularly disarmed youths of hatchets and knives as well as clamping down on the use of drugs.⁴⁹

During this time, Beech worked closely with prominent black community leaders and was called to give evidence before a House of Commons select committee on community relations. The work was supposed to be religious, but the numbers were so large there was little opportunity for evangelism although the mothers of two boys became regular worshippers.⁵⁰ The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) eventually provided the support of fully trained staff and a number of ILEA grants contributed to the modernisation of the premises, including the conversion of the former billiards room into a youth club with separate entrance. The youth club was forced to close in 1973 when bus drivers threatened to withdraw the service between Tottenham and Archway because of bad behaviour.⁵¹

Few of those who attended Sunday worship during this period recall this. Church activities appear to be entirely separate from outreach work although the ministerial team were sensitive to the potential disruption to the weekly activities of the Church.⁵² In any case, worshippers had more pressing concerns. In a later overview of the situation, Beech outlined the problem:

An ageing congregation occupying not more than nine per cent of the seats...grossly inflated membership figures and almost a decade of deficits on the Mission Account had produced some anxiety among the leaders. Many were convinced that being placed on a traffic island in the middle of the A1, together with the deterioration of the premises and the migration of members, would precipitate closure of the Mission.⁵³

The main hall gallery was roped off to encourage worshippers closer together. At a cost of $\pounds 10$ per day to heat, the Hall was thought expensive and detrimental to fostering fellowship.⁵⁴ Trustees and leaders considered several options for the site, including a women's hostel on the

⁴⁹ The Hornsey Journal, 1 September 1972, 21.

⁵⁰ TMA, 25 January, 1971.

⁵¹ 'Angry busmen may cut 41 route on Monday', *The Hornsey Journal*, 18 August 1972, 32; 'Youth club closes for one month in 'disturbance row', *The Hornsey Journal*, 13 January 1973, 44.

⁵² John Beech and Evelyn Brown, 'Development of work with young people of Caribbean origin, 1969 - 1974', Appendix to the TMA, 16 November 1975.

⁵³ John Beech, 'The Church on the Freeway', Appendix to the Leaders' Meeting, 12 February 1975.

⁵⁴ TMA, 22 October 1976.

site of a demolished main hall.⁵⁵ In the end, the scale of the work was considered to be too large for a small ministerial staff and congregation but the treasurers and minister display considerable knowledge about various state and voluntary grants that could be accessed. After several months of debating various proposals, they decided to keep the main hall for occasional use and lettings.

In 1969, to designs by Nye, Saunders and Partners of Guildford, the floor was levelled and the ground floor tip-up seating removed. A fixed wall was added underneath the balcony to create a separate worship centre at the back of the main hall. A more sober assessment of likely congregations is reflected in the seating accommodation for 148 and it was plainly furnished with a communion table, rail and panelling in cedar. Important additions included a hymn book cupboard – further material indication that, as with Wigan, the new worship space signalled the evolution from Central Hall to church. Its plainness also made it 'adaptable to whatever new forms of worship may evolve under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.'⁵⁶

The London Mission Committee provided two thirds towards the £9, 000 cost with the remainder funded from the Anniversary collection and donations through careful advertising of the new plans with detailed costs for the benefit of the wider church membership (Figure 11.21). The worship centre was regarded as a more appealing and inviting place. One former member approved of the setting saying: 'yes, the worship centre was good. It modernised us, it brought us together and we could hear easily, we could also fill the place with sound. It was also sad to see 'church' empty and filling with dust'.⁵⁷ A Trustees Meeting minutes indicates that a trial service in the Main Hall in 1974 'had not been favourably received'.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ TMA, 5 May 1969.

⁵⁶ Archway Central Hall, 'How to Build a Worship Centre for the Seventies', Funding Brochure, (c. 1970), 2.

⁵⁷ CD, Personal Correspondence, 13 May 2009.

⁵⁸ TMA, 2 December 1974.

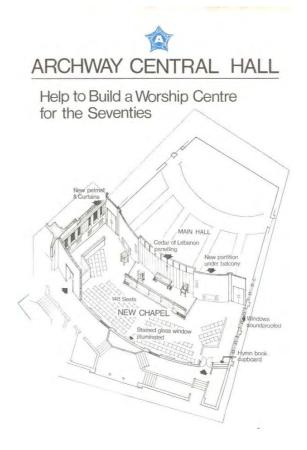


Figure 11.21: The creation of the worship centre as displayed on the funding brochure. By Nye, Saunders and Partners of Guildford, 1969. Source: Archway Methodist Church.



Figure 11.22: Rev John Beech and Sister Evelyn Brown in the new worship centre, c. 1971 Source: Archway Methodist Church

Why create a new Chapel?

... TO SERVE THE PRESENT AGE!

The design and layout of the Main Hall was out-moded. Excellently built, but in the cinema style of the nineteen thirties, it no longer expressed our understaning of community or worship.

Apart from the period up to the war, the Main Hall has been too large for normal require-ments and present day congregations find it almost impossible to achieve warmth of spirit or a true sense of participation. In view of the rising costs of heating and maintenance the Trustees and a specially appointed Building Committee concluded that the Hall should be re-structured to meet the needs of the present time. time

HOW WILL THE NEW CHAPEL HELP?

It will be warm and quiet, dignified, modern, well lit.

It will provide a superb setting for formal and traditional worship, yet be adaptable to what-ever new forms of worship may evolve under the guidance of the Spirit.

After the new Chapel is built, the Main Hail will still be an imposing auditorium, but with a warmer, friendlier atmosphere.

STANDARDS?

In our planning we felt that the standards of design, lurnishing, heating and lighting should not be lower than we desire for our own homes or expect to find in other public buildings. We feel that the scheme achieves this standard and we believe that people will find it a pleasure to worship in comfortable surroundings which are themselves a demonstration of the importance we place on the worship of God.

THE COST?

The total scheme will cost not more than £9,000.

Of this, the Department of London Mission, having faith in the work here and sharing our conviction that God has a great purpose for us in this strategic centre, has generously promised to provide two thirds.

Will you help to provide the remaining £3,000?

You can show your faith in the Gospel and encourage the work of God in this area by giving whatever you are able to the building fund. To help you decide the scale of your contribution, here are some prices:

help you declue ins		ox Jores		too mereral.	, marte		and has	inceres.	1000
Communion Table	2		+1+	+++	+1+		199	×11	£37
Sanctuary Chairs	each	4441							£38
Font	444			+ 44	14.24		1444		£28
Reading Desk	1000			+54	100	+==	1.00	1.01	£21
150 Chairs each								£5	128.

THE OPENING

The Re-opening and Dedication has been arranged for Tuesday evening, May 12th.

Please make a note of the date and bring your friends to share our rejoicing,

PRAY

In preparation for the Opening and Dedication we ask all our friends to pray with us: that the work will be satisfactorily completed

that the total cost will be provided

that the Dedication will be a time of great blessing

that God will use the re-structured premises to draw many worshippers to this Church-

REMEMBER!

In your giving and praying, remember the promise of scripture: "Bring the full tithes ... and prove me says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not ..., pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Malachi 3:10).

Please send your gift to :

THE REV. JOHN BEECH, ARCHWAY CENTRAL HALL, ARCHWAY CLOSE, LONDON, N.19

Figure 11.23: Advertising Brochure to raise funds for refurbishment. Source: Archway Methodist Church.

Sharing the Premises

Meanwhile, as the church retreated into a smaller area, the internal spaces were rented out with greater frequency to outside organisations. Whatever the fate of the main hall was to be, the consensus amongst church leadership was 'that every effort should be made to increase its versatility and scope for both church and letting purposes.'⁵⁹ This aim was realised because of the lack of community facilities on the nearby housing estates. The flexible space at Archway Central Hall was in diverse use by a variety of voluntary and statutory organisations.⁶⁰ The prayer chapel and intermediates school room were offered to Islington Borough Council (IBC) for their social services department in 1971. This added to the residency of the IBC Library in two shop units between 1946 and 1972. ⁶¹ Part of this also meant political meetings - whether or not the trustees were aware, an incongruous photograph of a meeting of the ANC Communist Party shows a portrait of Karl Marx overlooking the platform (Figure 11.24).⁶²



Figure 11.24: Undated photograph (c. early 1970s) of the main hall when in use for an ANC meeting Source: Archway Methodist Church.

⁵⁹ TMA, 9 February 1971.

⁶⁰ 'Minutes of a Leaders' Meeting, Archway Central Hall', 17th April 1975.

⁶¹ TMA, 17 March 1969.

⁶² The ANC also rented the 8 Flower Mews Property.

Archway keeps a one hundred per cent share of income from internal lettings. As these rose, prudent treasurers channelled extra income towards building up a repairs reserve.⁶³ It showed a balance of \pounds 55, 452 in 1983 even after refurbishment to the entrance. It was during this work that the crush hall, or octagon, was entirely redecorated resulting in the removal of original features such as the ticket office and cream faience tiling that is one of the reasons cited by English Heritage for its refusal to list the building in 1989 despite praising the multi-functional planning.⁶⁴

This careful accountancy and managing of church activities was a burden falling on an increasingly elderly constituent. Many had retired to the suburbs or countryside. The property stewards, who looked after maintenance, were aging and found travelling stressful. They felt that the committee work was not shared by the ethnic minority elements of the congregation who brought with them a different view of church organisation.⁶⁵

Several meetings became heated and tempers flared. Indeed one of the stewards records meetings ending in acrimony:

...probably caused by the increasing inability of the ageing committee to shoulder many of the burdens now being imposed by a building which is also showing signs of age and consequent need for greater attention. 66

By 1987, church leadership voted to switch to the professional quinquennial building surveys favoured by the Church of England. In 1997, the poor state of the Main Hall was revealed to require immediate attention, costing an £260, 000. This exceeded the amount of money in the reserve fund and, on balance, the work involved in maintaining and letting the premises was too much for the human and financial resources available. ⁶⁷ It was put on the market in 1997 and sold four years later to a firm of property developers for £700, 000, approximately £409 per square metre.

⁶³ There remains a culture amongst the treasurer and trustees at Archway to use the reserve only when emergency repair work needs to be addressed. Contrast this careful stewarding of accounts with the situation at Liverpool in 1956.

⁶⁴ English Heritage, National Record of Monuments, NBR File, 77301, 1989 (revised 1992), 3-4.

⁶⁵ See trustees meeting ; but see Walton et al for an alternative assessment.

⁶⁶ Letter from John Howard (Property Committee) to Ron Frost (Leader of the Boys Brigade), 14 March 1988.

⁶⁷ See TMA, 14 February 1987.

Today

162 members moved to a new worship centre on the site of the small hall in 2001 (Figure 11.23). The option of renovating two shops on St John's Way, including the Church-run charity shop, and the octagon was preferred because of the direct access to street level.⁶⁸ This was first mooted by John Beech in 1969, but not followed because of the decision to retain the main hall.⁶⁹ The option was difficult to plan with offices and toilet facilities placed in the basement which required significant structural change amounting to £350, 000. The existing small hall on the first floor was relatively simple to refurbish and decorate for one third of the cost. The Boys Brigade who had met on the site since 1917 were forced into the basement gymnasium.⁷⁰ A stained glass window, a memorial to the former treasurer and member, Norman Sargent, was installed at the back of the room having gone on the journey with the congregation from old prayer chapel through two worship centres. However, the first floor site means that the church is inconveniently situated deep within the building. Currently, church leaders remain thoughtful of ways in which the church could be made more accessible, open and recognisably a church perhaps by reconsidering the provision of access through the charity shop.

Up until the 1960s, the Church provided for social, cultural and leisure uses. Today, it remains well-used but primarily by letting to outside organisations. The second floor is entirely rented by the University Bible Fellowship, a Korean evangelical group. Their presence is indicative of an overall increase in South East Asian evangelicals in London. ⁷¹ A variety of dance, exercise and play groups meet regularly in the old Sunday school rooms and the hallway is periodically used to stage art and community exhibitions.

The main hall remains undeveloped but still a site of controversy. In 2001, IBC teamed up with BDP, one of the largest architectural practices in the UK, and proposed the redevelopment of the entire area including the demolition of Archway's main hall to make way for student housing and a supermarket. The active local residents association, the *Better*

⁶⁸ Archway Methodist Church, 'Proposed Development of a New Worship Centre', Appendix to the 'Minutes of the Property Committee', 19 June 1996.

⁶⁹ TMA, 18 November 1968.

⁷⁰ See the letters between Ronald Frost and John Mason dated 16 June 1996 and 22 June1996; Appendix to the 'Minutes of the Archway Methodist Church Council Meeting', 24 June 1996.

⁷¹ Islington Strategic Parnership, *Islington Borough Profile*, (Islington: Islington Borough Council, February 2008), http://www.acct.org.uk/files/Islington%20Borough%20Profile%20Feb%2008.pdf. Accessed, 21 July 2009.

Archway Forum (BAF) successfully lobbied for plans to be dropped in order to refurbish existing buildings, protect independent traders and promote the cohesion of the local community. During March and April 2005, they consulted eight focus groups. Several of these 'said they liked the small scale nature of the area'. Three in particular singled out 'The Archway Close and its shops...as very attractive...there was a sense of community and...that the shops were friendly to their customers'.⁷²

This vigorous local opposition was helped by architects, designers and academics. During 2007, BAF organised a symposium to generate support with high profile attendees such as Ricky Burdett, of the London School of Economics, and Sir Terry Farrell, to bolster support. Farrell pointed out that: 'London rose out of a series of towns and villages...placing Archway in with all these other lost towns around London is a critical part of building and retaining the community'.⁷³ The scheme was dropped.

Current plans for the main hall will retain it and allow it to continue to add to this sense of community. Local architect and member of the Highgate Society, Adrian Beetham waived his usual fees to draw up plans.⁷⁴ In a move typical of the solution other Central Halls adopted in the late-1960s, his proposals introduce a new floor at gallery level to become a performance space for theatres groups (Figure 11.25). It is a solution similar to that the Beetham used for the Quaker headquarters in Euston. The rest of the premises will be mixed use: incorporating public facilities and meeting rooms with commercial income such as providing a cafe. As a final flourish the flat roof, with its now redundant high chimney, will become a camera obscura with views across central London.

It is a proposal whose success is hinged on reconfiguring the gyratory road system – one of the last to remain in existence in the capital - to reconnect pedestrian access to Archway Close.⁷⁵ Transport for London have a policy of returning to two-way traffic where possible but at Archway, their plan was thought to be 'over-ambitious and with projected costs...regarded as

⁷² 'Report of the Better Archway Forum Focus Groups on the Archway Redevelopment', *Better Archway Forum*, 2005, http://www.betterarchway.info/BAF%20Focus%20Groups%20Report%201.pdf. Date accessed: 23 July 2009.

⁷³ 'Designers set up group to fight BDP's Archway plans', *Building Design*, 22 September 2006 and 'Archway rethink as BDP exits', *Building Design*, 8 June 2007, 4.

⁷⁴ Personal Interview, 31.

⁷⁵ Islington Borough Council, 'Archway Development Framework', *Supplementary Planning Document*, 13 September 2007, 25.

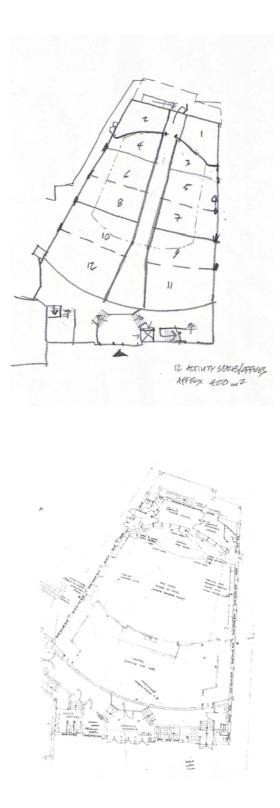


Figure 11.25: Plans to introduce a new floor level at gallery and creating a further tier of meeting rooms or offices below. Source: Adrian Betham Associates, July 2009.

prohibitive' however, 'it will happen sometime'.⁷⁶ This promises tangential benefits for the existing church in the ancillary premises who are open to close collaboration if BAF's plans are realised.

Conclusion

Archway Central Hall built up a working class community attracted by the club facilities and opportunities it offered. However, population movement and changing cultural tastes threatened stability. Through the long term ministry of John Beech, the Hall provided a hospitable environment for incoming immigrants. The construction of the gyratory road system, however, cut it off from pedestrians in the area and changed patterns of use.

Careful supervision of finances and early recognition that viability meant increasing lettings have ensured a modicum of financial stability. As with the Victoria Hall in Bolton, the main hall is the largest venue of its size in the area. However, its continuing maintenance proved one burden too many for the Church to administer. Selling it eased the liability and allowed the church to remain on site and fully explore its role in premises of manageable size. Although the main hall remains unused, the idea of it continuing as a public resource predominates and appears to assure its future: for the time being.

⁷⁶ Adrian Betham, *Email to the Author*, 9 June 2009.

PART FOUR

Chapter 12: Conclusion

'There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents' (Luke 15.7)

The Characterisation of the Building Type

When Revd. Dr. Henry J. Pope was asked to write the preface to the first annual report of the Manchester and Salford Wesleyan Methodist Mission in 1888 it would not have taken him too long to form an opinion. From his desk in the Chapel Committee offices on the second floor of Central Hall in Oldham Street, he had a perfect vantage point to consider the busy mission in the adjoining rooms. Pope was moved to write that:

There is, however, one thing worse than the sight of an empty Chapel in a poor and crowded neighbourhood, and that is the sale of the property and the abandonment of the work. And when this is done to secure the proceeds for building or adorning a new Chapel in a well-to-do suburb, the humiliation is complete. Happily, this is not often done, and any tendency in that direction has lately received an effectual check.¹

The success of that Mission averted any embarrassment and not only arrested Methodism's drift to the suburb but led to the establishment of their most prominent architectural expressions. As the preceding chapters show, the willingness to experiment with architecture grew out of the problem that the modern city posed to religious groups. Central Halls are the material embodiment of a social gospel that aimed to make religion relevant to city life. In form, they wilfully expressed urban modernity by adopting the language of everyday street architecture.

Monographic research into the building type has offered a pathway into the character of a faith organisation. Chapter Three identified the unique characteristics of these public and sacred buildings while Chapter Four traced their changing meanings. Presenting this exploratory investigation in a chronological manner highlights three major themes. Firstly, contrary to conventional historiography, the Wesleyan Methodists had a distinctive relationship with their buildings and offered more to the urban landscape than being 'plain'.

¹ MSM, The First Report of the Manchester and Salford Wesleyan Mission, 1888 (Manchester: Foulkes, Hall and Walker, 1888), 5.

Central Halls may have been 'open air preaching with the roof on' to evangelise through the power of words and music but the analysis undertaken here suggests that there is more to these church buildings beyond seeing and listening to the preacher. As unconsecrated space, they were designed to accommodate secular uses. Unlike most churches, the halls were heated, ventilated, well-lit, provided with toilets and refreshment facilities – and in every respect created for comfort. External elevations and interior spaces were designed to a high standard of quality. At Chatham, the *Methodist Recorder* played down the extravagance of the crush hall by informing its readership that: 'on this fine corridor art and skill have been lavishly expended. The ceiling is handsomely moulded; the walls are covered with a composition inset with mother-of-pearl (Start not dear reader, this opulence has been acquired on special terms).'²

Secondly, Methodism's urban mission shared with the Kyrle Society, People's Palaces and the University Settlements an ideal of aesthetic uplift that could bring this beauty 'home to the people'. The Wesleyans aimed to prove that their religion was part of a progressive and socially responsible society which they could prove through the medium of the Central Hall.

Lastly, the view from the ground in the late Victorian city is one of co-operation and moderation of denominational rivalry. Key ministers and lay men talked together, preached at each other's chapels and broadly agreed that the city could cultivate irreligious sentiments. Although rivalry existed, Mark Smith's consideration of the religious life of Oldham and Saddleworth in the Victorian period is right to point to the 'evangelical consensus' in the face of cross the board perceived religious indifference.³ Their greatest competitors were socialism, the public house and music halls. Consequently their tactics did not radically differ from other religious missions. The Wesleyan contribution was distinctive because of the access to human and financial resources in the wider church which took mission work onto the main thoroughfares in a very public statement of its intentions.

Even so, what one generation bequeaths to another is not always a gift readily received. In 1967, Robert Currie published an article entitled 'Were the Central Halls a Failure?' to which he concluded that they did little to stimulate growth in a Church that was already in relative decline and, if anything, they recruited suburban residents. He considered the social work to

² The Methodist Recorder, 27 February 1908, 2.

³ Mark Smith, Religion and Society in Industrial Oldham and Saddleworth, 1994, 229 - 242.

be paternalistic and largely 'external to the lives of the poor'.⁴ Currie was writing against a backdrop when the Central Missions were perceived as being a burden to the Connexion and the secularisation thesis was receiving its clearest exposition: religion had failed and was inexorably in retreat.

If one judges only by statistics of membership then the Central Halls would be regarded as a failure. Their establishment did not halt the decline of the Methodist Church. Whether or not their members came from other Methodist Churches or not depends on the case. At Bolton we seen a tightening of the membership requirements to prevent this yet such large congregations were undoubtedly swelled by existing Methodists. A more detailed analysis of the district level statistics, of the kind that Clive Field has done at the national level, was considered to be outside the scope of this thesis but future work may shed light on this.⁵ On the other hand, the argument of this thesis is that a focus upon membership misses the wider cultural contribution of the Central Halls.

They were intended to be open and entertaining centres for evangelism as well as centres for social witness and assembly halls. They attracted and engaged with the poor and whether or not their attendees became eventual members or even attended the Central Hall for religious purposes. The question should be 'Would Methodism today have such a distinctive emphasis on urban outreach were the Central Halls not built?' One suspects not. Maurice Halbwach's points to the constraining aspects of collective memory:

The group not only transforms the space into which it has been inserted but also yields and adapts to its physical surroundings. It becomes enclosed within the framework it has built. The group's image of its external milieu and its stable relationships with its environment becomes paramount in the idea that it forms of itself, permeating every element of its consciousness, moderating and governing its evolution.⁶

The Central Halls shaped the Methodist response to the city and their continuing commitment to help the socially and spiritually impoverished. The Urban Theology Unit, established to train lay and student ministers and the *Mission alongside the Poor* programme are

⁴Robert Currie, 'Were the Central Halls a Failure?', 1967, 2.

⁵ Clive Field, 'Joining and Leaving British Methodism since the 1960s' in Leslie Francis and Yaacov Katz (eds.) *Joining and leaving Religion: Research Perspectives* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2000), 57 – 85.

⁶ Maurice Halbwach [trans. Francis Ditter and Vida Ditter] *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper Row, 1980), 130.

both direct descendents from the Central Hall movement. Collectively, the Methodist Missions that continue today often play an important role in their communities. They have drawn upon the sound business principles of their ancestors who were flexible enough to look towards secular sources to justify the experiment. So, some missions have managed to adapt the interior and successfully exploit the versatility of the premises. Even where this has the tendency to cause conflict, such as allowing alcohol to be served at Westminster, it is not commercial endeavour for commerce's sake. Rather, as Samuel Collier cleverly supervised at the Manchester and Salford Mission, all revenue is reinvested back into the buildings and for furthering the religious and social work of Methodism.

Discussion of the Case Studies

The case studies build upon these themes and are presented sequentially. Each case marks a subtle development of the building type and its activities. They trace the biography of the building and show the way in which social, cultural and geographical changes were responded to – in very different ways – by the Methodist Missions. It is on these two points that the major comparisons and conclusions can be drawn.

The experimental venture at Manchester was plain and undistinguished with a small and unobtrusive entrance. At Bolton, we see a civic expression of Wesleyan intention with a large domed cupola. With Baroque flamboyance as the prevailing architectural fashion in the Edwardian period, J. B. Gass offered an ostentatious and ornate building at Liverpool, typical of the Central Halls of this period. Escalations in cost called for greater restraint at Wigan yet this is coupled with the desire for something civic. Bristol represents the development of type – the confident use of a narrow street frontage with a central tower and dome to make it a landmark. At Archway, we see a reversion: the full institutional church, with provision for sacredness yet in a plain and highly commercial building with the full complement of eight shops. All of their architects looked to other Central Halls as well as drawing upon modern forms and architectural fashions that made them appropriate additions to their locality.

The case studies recount the differing trajectories of decline and their variations demonstrate that buildings can be powerful documents of social change. Central Halls are excellent examples of this particularly because of the compressed time period between rapid expansion to their demise. As the Missions became smaller and the Methodist Church less evangelical, the secular building was modified with attempts to indicate the religious function and provide for sacramental worship. This openness to adaptation shows that declining congregations do not inevitably result in closure. Manchester and Archway have managed to adapt the interior and successfully exploit the commercial potential of the premises. At Bolton, the Methodist Mission benefits from its location in a town with a strong tradition in theatre and the arts that can make use of a main hall of its size. Bristol and Liverpool are examples of the traditional narrative that Robin Gill proposes: eventually building maintenance is a drain for dwindling congregation. Equally, these two cases also prove that the buildings can be easily adapted to suit new uses which preserve the integrity of street architecture. As Kevin Lynch maintains: 'the best environment is one in which there are both new stimuli and familiar reassurances, the chance to explore and the ability to return.'⁷

The Missions were dependent upon funding from the voluntary contributions of members and local philanthropy. The mismatch between their outgoings and incomings was responded to in different ways by each case. At Manchester, this was achieved by making the building work in service by increasing the number of lettings to provide rental income that could be utilised throughout the circuit. Similarly, this commercial mindedness was also seen at Archway. On the other hand, Liverpool and Bristol could not generate enough cash by these means particularly because of their location but also through a failure to substantially redress their respective maintenance issues.

The changing nature of church and local government relations, particularly over building issues, is also highlighted in each case. The secular state increasingly erred upon the side of treating the Missions akin to their competitors by rating them. However, the establishment of the Welfare State did not make church-based philanthropy wholly redundant. At Archway, Liverpool and Bristol, local councils used the premises until they could afford to build their own. In all of the cases, the Missions reduced the welfare component of their activities but also developed it in new ways. In smaller towns such as Wigan and Bolton, where church members often play an active and prominent local role, due consideration is given by their local council. More recently, they have been able to take advantage of the increasing recognition given to the work of faith-based charitable organisations to forge fruitful

⁷ Kevin Lynch, What Time is this Place? (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1972), 204

partnerships on the premises. While a sustained analysis of the exact relationship between church and local government was beyond the aims and objectives of this thesis, the archives are intact enough to await examination by a more sociologically minded researcher.

As the case studies testify, there was little discord between the sacred and secular from the point of view of the Central Missions. Their aims were more subtle than merely appropriating secular practices in the face of decline and unbelief. Religion – or the Methodist word of *fellowship* - was at the forefront of all activities. To varying degrees the case studies show that their size and versatility made them more likely to be widely used than a typical Methodist Church. Liverpool's minister's vestry, usefully located next to the stage, easily doubled as a 'green room' for performers before the Saturday night entertainment. Equally, this gave a theatrical flavour to Sunday services which used hymn sheets, programmes, lighting and platform to blur the divide between worship and entertainment. In his work on New Age spirituality, Julian Holloway has shown how the sacred takes on many forms and works in the everyday beyond the traditional spaces of institutional religion.⁸ Yet, the Methodist Central Halls are indicative of the varied features of institutional religious buildings. The typology of these public and sacred spaces therefore refashions the sacred/profane dichotomy.

A significant finding that became most apparent during the case study research was the planning system and its effects upon geography and mobility that substantially changed the fortunes of Central Halls. The versatility of the premises was constrained only by the ethical constraints of Methodist ownership, and by considerations of ratings liabilities should local authorities choose to categorise them as a place of entertainment as well as a religious building. Bristol and Archway show clearly that wider changes in the built environment changed the nature of the church. Perhaps the explanation for the relative resilience of Bolton and Wigan resides partially in their smaller scale and a slower pace of urban morphological change. Manchester and Liverpool may not have directly experienced physical change but subtle shifts in planning policy meant that their immediate areas became less focused on retail, which caused significant funding problems for both.

⁸ Julian Holloway, 'Make-Believe: Spiritual Practice, Embodiment and Sacred Space', *Environment and Planning A: Society and Space*, 35 (2003), 1961 – 1974.

Recent scholarship highlights the prevalence of a 'popular' and 'diffusive religion' in the early twentieth century despite widespread decline in organised religion. Jose Harris, Peter Yalden and Simon Green have expanded on the development of an 'associational ideal' in which the churches generally were 'active promoters of a new kind of associational life based on the division of groups according to age and gender.'⁹ Central Halls were not exceptions to this and each case study details the significant contribution made to the associational culture of Britain's cities. Generally, their activities became less church-based as the century progressed. Equally, the case studies show that this is not an even trend. Bolton and Wigan are both examples where the Central Hall remains a significant gathering place for a wide variety of both religious and secular groups. Archway's main hall, now in private hands, is subject to sustained intervention by local pressure groups to ensure that it retains a public use. Conversely, at Bristol, the city council admits that it was a mistake to allow too much residential private development back into a city street.

The Case Award

Chapter Two discussed the level of involvement by the Methodist Church Property Office. The bearing that this association has had in the design and form of the project is immense. Many of the visual sources, which can usually be expensive for the historian to procure, are the result of this partnership. The complete access to their archives as well as the dossier of contacts that began the research process has enabled a much richer picture to emerge than might otherwise have been possible. This was particularly helpful to the non-Methodists who were the academic partners in the research team. The relationship provided the material to unpack the production and consumption of these public sacred spaces Presenting the life biography of each case study building has brought to light the various actors involved in the design of Central Halls as well as the means by which individual congregations and the Connexion attempted to adapt them to changing social, cultural and technological circumstances.

By drawing upon a range of methods we have seen how the buildings worked and followed the pragmatic and innovative adaptation of Methodism towards social outreach activities and

⁹ Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1970 – 1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), 166; Peter Yalden, Association, Community and the Origins of Secularisation, 2004; S. J. D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline*, 2003.

retaining a public relevance in British cities today The research has engaged directly with the Methodist Church and the local communities who develop, maintain, manage and use these buildings in a range of settings. Each case study provides a practical consideration of how he Central Hall was staffed, funded and used and how the balance of the sacred and secular elements changed over the course of the twentieth century. They demonstrate that small congregations can co-exist with other organisations in a way which has tangible benefits for the church community. Consequently, they may well be of interest to faith organisations today who may wish to open up their buildings to the wider public.

A Future Research Agenda

There are four ways in which the typology of Methodist Central Halls charts a future research agenda. Firstly, many of the conclusions are tentative since there is a paucity of literature on the architectural form of Christian missions and, indeed, their specific efforts to target the working classes. The methods used would be valid in other contexts or with alternative organisations. Future comparative work may well lead to more insights about the relationships between religion and buildings and social work over the twentieth century and throughout the industrialised countries. The first experiments and successes of the Wesleyan Central Missions drew admirers from other country, yet we do not know how the building type filtered through to other organizations. It also neglects the global circulation of the building type. At least one Central Hall exists in Sydney in Australia. We have seen that the Manchester and Salford Mission drew admirers from the United States but was the idea ever imported there?

Secondly, this thesis has touched upon previously untapped sources of documentary evidence. The archives relating to the Methodist Church Property Office provides rich detail on their changing strategies for chapel building at a national level. The Connexional Home Mission archives and local churches offer an abundance of unused quantitative and qualitative data through which religious change in twentieth century Britain can be explored from a number of disciplines.

Thirdly, as the authors of *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles* highlighted, reasons for church growth or a failure to retain members can be external to the

denomination in as much as there are theological reasons.¹⁰ Too often the focus is solely on cultural explanations. Callum Brown alluded to the affect of material change in his earlier work on religious growth and decline in which he states that 'the state-organized great migration seems to have been a vital demographic ingredient in that process' but he fails to follow through the argument in his recent scholarship.¹¹ Road layouts, population movement and the design of church buildings all have their effect, as Rex Walford found in his consideration of Church of England's expansion in Middlesex during the inter-war years.¹² As Chapter Four discussed, the Methodist Church followed a policy of moving where the people to the suburbs. Yet, there remains very little literature on the suburban religion – in any aspect. If anything, a well-designed study that traces the move from urban to suburban religion – and where it failed to recruit or not – may serve to refine our models of religious change in the twentieth century. What this thesis should demonstrate is the central importance of the built environment to religious expansion, decline and countenance.¹³

Finally, the history of Methodist Central Halls demonstrates that religion continually transforms and adapts. Although they are a remarkable and distinctive category of religious building, this thesis shows how their history poses general issues. Their multifunctionality, user-friendliness and outreach activities make them the predecessors for many aspects of modern faith spaces. The social, cultural and theological histories of any faith can be interpreted through its buildings. Central Halls may be unusual examples but the methods employed in this thesis are widely applicable. The lasting impression is one of astonishment that a story so full of insights had not been previously researched. New types and transformations are all around us, and most remain undocumented as building types.

An age which is, arguably, less religious may find it difficult to appreciate this legacy to the urban landscape, the people who commissioned them, and the concern for all types of people who used them. Those that survive today testify to an age of religious confidence and the capability of their buildings to endure. They were staple occurrences on the British high street and their domes and towers proudly announced their presence yet concealed their

¹⁰ Robert Currie et al, Churches and Churchgoers, 1977, 56 – 100.

¹¹ Callum G. Brown,' Religious Growth in Urban Societies' in Hugh McLeod (ed.) *European Religion in the Age of Great Cities*, 1830 – 1930 (London and New York, Routledge, 1995), 239 – 62 (quote, 258). Compare with Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 2009.

¹² Rex Walford, The Growth of New London, 2007.

¹³ One important exception is Robert Proctor 'Churches for a Changing Liturgy: Gillespie, Kidd and Coia and the Second Vatican Council', *Architectural History*, 48 (2005), 291 – 322.

function. The Methodist Church may have to sell all of their buildings and in the course of writing this conclusion the society in Edinburgh have decided to sell their Central Hall. In which case it is hard not to recommend that they remain in public use, ideally in the social service of the wider city in order that future generations may come to learn what these buildings once meant.

Appendix One: Tables of Central Halls

Name	Location	Architect	Year	Fate	Listing
Bethnal Green Central Hall	London	Unknown	-	Bombed	-
Bishop Street	Leicester	Conversion	-	-	-
Bow Central Hall	London	Unknown	-	Bombed	-
Bridgeton Central Hall	Glasgow	Unknown	-	Demolished (CPO)	-
Dorset Gardens	Brighton	George E. Withers (Conversion)	-	Methodist Church	-
London Street, Greenwich	London	-		Bombed	-
Longton Central Hall	Stoke-on- Trent	Conversion		Methodist Church	-
Lycett Central Hall	London	Conversion	-	Unsure	-
Skillbeck Street Central Hall	Leeds	Unknown	-	Demolished (CPO)	-
Stratford The Grove	London	Unknown	-	Unsure	-
Oxford Place	Leeds	Danby and Thorpe	1896 - 1903	Methodist Owned	Grade II
Manchester Central Hall	Manchester	George Woodhouse/ Woodhouse and Morley	1886	Methodist Church	Conservation Area
Bridgewater Hall, Hulme	Manchester	Unknown	c. 1888	Demolished	-

Table 1: List of Wesleyan English, Welsh and Scottish Central Halls

Name	Location	Architect	Year	Fate	Listing
Wesley Hall	Manchester	Unknown	1888	Demolished	-
Victoria Hall	Manchester	Walter R. Sharp	1897	Demolished	-
South London Central Hall	London	Charles Bell	1898	Main Hall Demolished	-
People's Hall, Ipswich	Ipswich	Eade and Jones	1899	Part Religious Use, part Private Flats.	-
Victoria Hall (Greenwich)	London	James Weir	1899	Demolished	-
Victoria Hall	Bolton	Bradshaw and Gass	1900	Methodist Church	Grade II
Wesley Central Hall	Portsmouth	J. Jameson Green	1900	Replaced by Fratton Road.	-
Edinburgh Central Hall	Edinburgh	Dunn and Findlay	1901	On Sale	Grade B
Westgate Hall	Newcastle	Joseph Crouch and Edmund Butler	1901	Sold. Privately Owned.	Grade II
Birmingham Central Hall	Birmingha m	Ewan and J. Alfred Harper	1903	Sold	Grade II
Plumstead Hall	London	Bells, Meredith and Withers	1903	Demolished	-
Springfield Hall	London	Unknown	1903	Demolished	-
Wesley Hall, Lower Sydenham	London	Ewan and J. Alfred Harper	1903	Methodist Church	-

Name	Location	Architect	Year	Fate	Listing
Eastbrook Hall	Bradford	W. J. Morley and Son	1904	Sold. Exterior Saved.	Grade II
Bromley Central Hall	London	Gordon and Gunton			-
Leysian Mission Hall	London	Bradshaw and Gass	1905	Sold. 'Imperial Hotel'	Grade II
Linacre	Liverpool	W. J. Morley and Son	1905	Methodist Church	Grade II
Queen's Hall	Hull	Gelder and Kitchen	1905	Demolished	-
The Charles Garrett Memorial Hall	Liverpool	Bradshaw and Gass	1905	Sold. Privately Owned.	Grade II
East Ham Central Hall	London	Gordon and Gunton	1906	Demolished	-
Clarence Street	Swindon	Unknown	1907	Unsure	-
East End Mission, Stepney	London	Weir, Burrows and Weir	1907	Sold. Main Hall Demolished	-
Hartington Street	Barrow-in- Furness	Henry T. Fowler	1907	Sold	-
King's Hall	Bolton	Bradshaw and Gass	1907	Demolished	-
King's Hall	Nottingham	Unknown	1907	Unknown	-
Queen's Hall	Wigan	Bradshaw and Gass	1907	Part Demolished Methodist	Grade II

Name	Location	Architect	Year	Fate	Listing
				Church	
Chatham Central Hall	London	Gordon and Gunton	1908	Demolished	-
Paisley Central Hall	Paisley	Watson and Salmond	1908	Methodist Church	Grade B
Victoria Hall	Sheffield	Waddington, Son and Dunkerley/ W. J. Morley	Son and Church unkerley/ W.		Grade II
Albert Hall	Nottingham	A. E. Lambert	1910	Conference Venue	Grade II
King's Hall	Hull	Gelder and Kitchen	1910	Demolished	-
Tooting Central Hall	London	Gelder and Kitchen	1910	New Build Methodist Church	-
Wesley Hall, Crookes	Sheffield	W. J. Hale	1910	Methodist Church	Grade II
Albert Hall	Manchester	W. J. Morley and Sons	1911	Public House	Grade II
Edmonton Central Hall	London	Cheston and Perkin	1911	New Build	-
Kingsway Hall	London	Gordon and Gunton	1911	Sold. Demolished . Rebuilt as a Hotel.	-
Prospect Hall	Bradford	W. J. Morley and Sons.	1911	Sikh Gurdwara	-
Thornton Hall	Hull	Gelder and Kitchen	1911	Bombed	-

Name	Location	Architect	Year	Fate	Listing
Westminster Central Hall	London	Henry Lanchester and Edwin Rickards	1912	Methodist Church	Grade II*
New Dock Mission Hall	Manchester	Arthur Brocklehurst	1914	Demolished	-
King's Hall, Southall	London	Gelder and Kitchen	1915	Methodist Church/ Shared	-
Queen's Hall	Blackburn	Bradshaw and Gass/ Arthur Brocklehurst	1922	Demolished	-
Tonypandy Central Hall	Tonypandy	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co.	1922	Demolished	-
Carlisle Fisher Street	Carlisle	Arthur Brocklehurst	1923	For Sale	Grade II
Maryhill Central Hall	Glasgow	Gelder and Kitchen	1923	Sold. Community Centre.	-
Bristol Central Hall	Bristol	Gelder and Kitchen	1924	Sold	-
Queen Street	Scarboroug h	George Withers	1924	Methodist Church	-
Mare Street Hackney	London	Gordon and Gunton	1925	Sold	Conservation Area
Southampton Central Hall	Southampto n	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co.	1925	Community Church	-
Southfields Central Hall	London	Gelder and Kitchen	1925	Demolished	-

Name	Location	Architect	Year	Fate	Listing
The Thomas Champness Memorial Hall	Rochdale	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co.	1925	Community Church	-
Wesleyan Central Hall, Attercliffe	Sheffield	W. J. Hale	1925	Sold	-
Hirst Central Hall	Ashington	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co.	1926	Demolished	Grade II
Central Hall	Bargoed	Arthur Brocklehurst	1927	Unsure	-
Devonport Central Hall	Plymouth	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co.	1927	Unsure	-
Eastney Central Hall	Portsmouth	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co.	1927	Unsure	-
Eastney Central Hall	Portsmouth	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co.	1927	Unsure	-
Yiewsley Central Hall	London	Gelder and Kitchen	1927	Demolished	-
Becontree Central Hall	London	George E.Withers	1928	Demolished	-
Fratton Road (Replacement)	Portsmouth	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co.	1928	New Build	-
The Ideal	London	Weir, Burrows and Weir (Conversion)	1928	Bombed	-
Burnt Oak	London	Smee and Houchin	1929	Unsure	
Central Hall	Barking	Gordon and Gunton	1929	New Build	-

Name	Location	Architect	Year	Fate	Listing
Islington Central Hall	London	Gelder and Kitchen	1929	Demolished	-
Walsall Central Hall	Walsall	Arthur Brocklehurst	1929	Methodist Church	-
Dagenham (Heathway) Central Hall	London	Gelder and Kitchen	1930	New Build	-
Uxbridge Central Hall	London	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co.	1930	Demolished	-
Billingham Central Hall	Stockton- Upon-Tees	T.W.T. Richards	1931	Demolished	-
Aspley Estate	Nottingham	Sutton and Burnett	1932	-	-
Redhill Central Hall	London	George Baines and Son	1932	New Build Methodist Church	-
Slough Central Hall	Slough	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co.	1932	Demolished	-
Springhead Hall	Wednesbur y	Unknown	1932	Unsure	-
Swaythling Central Hall	Southampto n	Herbert Collins	1932	Shared Church	Grade II
Methodist Central Hall	Chester	Arthur Brocklehurst (Conversion)	1933	Unsure	-
Methodist Central Hall	Gateshead	Arthur Brocklehurst (Conversion)	1933	Demolished	-
Methodist Central Hall, Leith	Edinburgh	McLennan and Cunningham	1933	Sold	-

Name	Location	Architect	Year	Fate	Listing
Warwick Lane	Coventry	Charles 1933 Redgrave		Methodist Church	-
Archway Central Hall	London	George E. and K. G Withers			-
Queen's Hall (Hayes End)	London	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co.	1934	Unsure	-
Regent Road Methodist Hall	Salford	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co.	1934	Demolished	-
Carbrook Central Hall	Sheffield	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co.	1935	Sold	-
Central Hall	Grimsby	Arthur Brocklehurst	1936	Sold	-
Deneside	Great Yarmouth	Arthur Brocklehurst and Co. (Conversion)	1938	Baptist Church	-
Burbank Central Hall	Hartlepool	Former UMC renamed a Central Hall.	1939	Sold	-
Plymouth Central Hall	Plymouth	Mssrs A. N. Cole (Conversion)	1939	Methodist Church	-
Queen's Hall, Battersea	London	Perriam and Sons	1945	New Build Methodist Church	-

Notes to Table 1.

- The Main Sources of Information are the Wesleyan Chapel Committee Annual Reports, 1886 1938; The Decennial Statistical Returns for 1940, 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000 and the A2A Database, The UK Archives Network, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/default.aspx.
- 2) Source of Listing Information: Listed Buildings Online, English Heritage, http://lbonline.englishheritage.org.uk/SearchForm.aspx.

- 3) Data Relates to the English, Welsh and Scottish Central halls
- 4) Year given in italics is the year that the case was returned as complete to the Chapel Committee. This gives and indication to the date of opening but may not be exact.
- 5) Information as correct at time of publication. Any errors are the author's own.

Table 2:	List of Irish	Central Halls.
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Name	Location	Architect	Year	Fate
Cork Central Hall	Cork	Robert Walker	1889	Sold. Retail outlet
Dublin Central Mission,	Dublin	-	1893	Methodist Church
Abbey Street				
Clooney Hall	Londonderry	-	1894	New Build
Grosvenor Hall	Belfast	Young and	1926	New Build
		McKenzie		

Notes to Table 2.

 Compiled from the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, Ireland http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/Surveys/Buildings/ and Eric Gallagher, At Points of Need: The Story of the Belfast Central Mission, 1889 – 1989 (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1989).

2) Year given in italics is the year that the Mission was founded not date of building.

Name	Location	Denomination
Birmingham,	Birmingham	Primitive
Bristol Road	_	Methodist
Bradford Central	Bradford	Primitive
Hall, Manchester		Methodist
Road		
Central Hall	Wigan	Primitive
		Methodist
Central Hall,	Keighley	Primitive
Alice Street		Methodist
Conference Hall	Birmingham	Primitive
		Methodist
Southsea	Southsea	Primitive
		Methodist
St George's Hall,	London	Primitive
Whitechapel		Methodist
Thompson	Sunderland	United Methodist
Memorial Hall		

Table 3: List of Central Halls by other Methodist denominations

Notes to Table 3.

- 1) Information on the Primitive Methodist Halls courtesy of Colin Dews.
- Anon. Memories: Being an Historical Survey of the Many Sided Institution Known as the Thompson Memorial Hall (Sunderland: R. L. Rutter, 1923)

Appendix Two

Examples of letters sent to former ministers and follow-up letters to former worshippers.

(1) Letter to Ministers

Angela Connelly Department of Planning and Landscape 1st Floor Arthur Lewis Building University of Manchester Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL Telephone Number: 07767***** Email Address: angela.connelly-2@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Dear Revd. [Minister]

I am a PhD student at the University of Manchester currently researching the architectural and social history of Methodist Central Halls. The Methodist Church Property Office are partners in the project and your details were kindly past on to me from them.

I understand that you were the minister at the [Name] Mission between [Yr] and [Yr]. I was hoping that you would be kind enough to agree to be interviewed about your time at the Mission. If not, I was hoping that you might be able to respond to the list of questions that accompanies this letter. These mainly concern the building but there are some wider questions about the operation of the Mission.

My contact details are above should you wish to arrange an interview or respond to the attached list of questions. Of course, I understand if you do not have the time to respond but many thanks for your time in reading this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Miss A. M. Connelly (Enc)

Questions

- 1) How would you describe the Mission during your time there?
- 2) Think of your experiences at other churches. In what way did the design of the Central hall affect your use of it?
- 3) What changes did you make to the Central Hall while you were there (e.g. new paint, furnishings, decorations)? Why did you make these changes?
- 4) How would you describe the characteristics of the people that came to the Central Hall to worship? For example, what did they work as, did they come with anyone else? Age? Gender?
- 5) What was the relationship between social work and evangelism? Were they distinct?
- 6) Why do you think congregations declined?
- 7) If you had other staff what was your relationship to them?

(2) Example Follow-Up Letter sent to former worshippers.

Angela Connelly, Department of Planning and Landscape, 1st Floor Arthur Lewis Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL Telephone Number: 07767***** Email Address: angela.connelly-2@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Dear [Name]

I am a PhD student at the University of Manchester currently researching the architectural and social history of Methodist Central Halls. The Methodist Church Property Office are partners in the project. In January 2008, we placed an article in the *Methodist Recorder* requesting information. Following this, your details were kindly passed on to me from []. I understand that you were at the [Name] Mission. I was hoping that you would be kind enough to agree to be interviewed about your time there. If not, I was hoping that you would be able to respond in writing. If so, I have attached a list of questions. These mainly concern the building but there are some wider questions about the operation of the Mission.

My contact details are above should you wish to arrange an interview or respond to the attached list of questions. Of course, I understand if you do not have the time to respond but many thanks for your time in reading this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Miss A. M. Connelly (Enc)

Questions

- 1) How would you describe the Mission during your time there
- 2) Think of your experiences at other churches. In what way did the design of the Central Hall affect your use of it?
- 3) What changes were made to the Central Hall while you were there (e.g. new paint, furnishings, decorations)? What did you think of these changes?
- 4) How would you describe the characteristics of the people that came to the Central Hall to worship? For example, what did they work as, did they come with anyone else? Age? Gender?
- 5) The Mission you were part of undertook a wide range of activities. Were you involved in these? Why did you become involved and how much of your time did it take up?
- 6) Why do you think congregations declined?
- 7) What was your relationship to the ministerial staff?
- 8) If you stopped worshipping at the Central Hall could you explain the reason that you ceased to attend.

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Not all of the bibliography is cited in the main body of the thesis but it includes the works used during the three year project. In addition, a list of websites is contained at the end that provided sources of information for the project. See the footnotes for specific references.

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