

**Building recording of Kempsey Baptist
Chapel
Church Street, Kempsey
Worcestershire**

WSM 38566

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Introduction

Building recording was undertaken at Kempsey Baptist Chapel, Church Street, Kempsey Worcestershire (SO 8511 4918; Fig 1). This was undertaken at the request of Mark Donald of Severn Developments UK Ltd according to a brief provided by Worcestershire County Archaeology Service. The building recording (level 3) was undertaken in order to preserve the building by record in advance of its demolition and redevelopment (planning ref MH/07/1557).

This was to be accomplished by historic research, drawing and photography which would comprise high-resolution digital photography, all with suitable scales, of the following:

- all external elevations (elevation drawings of the late 20th century extensions were omitted for clarity)
- a plan or plans showing development and phasing of the chapel
- ¾ views of the chapel
- all internal room spaces
- details of any architectural or functional features relating to either the function or development of the chapel
- photographs illustrating the chapel's relationship to surrounding buildings and setting.

Documentary research

The non-conformist tradition

There were those who dissented from the established church before Henry VIII's break with the Bishop of Rome and the establishment of the Church in England (subsequently Church of England). The Puritan movement of the 17th century had to go underground and such organized communities as did exist fled overseas, mostly to Holland (Cox 1982). It was from the exiled English dissenting community in Amsterdam that the Baptist movement saw its beginnings through John Smyth, who had been an Anglican clergyman before fleeing there c 1608. Many of the early Baptist congregation returned to London and elsewhere, often to be arrested. Nevertheless, they quickly won recruits to their cause, particularly in the country.

It was this growing strength that ultimately brought about the passing of the Toleration Act of 1689 which gave the dissenters the right to provide their own places of worship and to meet there without fear of the law.

During the years 1689-1700 no less than 2418 buildings were registered as places of worship by dissenters. They were at first private houses but soon purpose-built chapels were erected and many were altered, enlarged or replaced in the late 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries.

The first group to organize themselves in Evesham were the Society of Friends or Quakers, who built their first meeting house in Cowl Street in 1677, more than a decade before the passing of the Toleration Act. The earliest record of a Baptist congregation in the borough of Evesham was in 1704 and a Baptist church was completed in Cowl Street in 1788. Many Baptist chapels were built in the neighbourhood of Evesham in the 19th century.

When families of 8 to 20 children were commonplace it did not take many decades for a large non-conformist community to build itself up and become able to support a place of worship of its own.

Except for the principal chapels in Evesham itself, the chapels of the Vale were mostly modest and externally had few notable ecclesiastical or architectural features. They were usually built of brick or stone and tiled with flat lintels or semi-circular arches over the windows and were normally twice as long as they were wide. There was usually very little interior decoration. The pulpit was often the only decorated feature.

In its heyday, however, the chapel was not just the place where you worshiped on a Sunday. It provided everything needed for social intercourse, such as recitals, songs and lectures. It was at chapel or church where you met your friends and had your social life. The only other choices were to stay at home or visit the public houses.

For most of the 19th century chapel was also the place where children went to learn to read and write and it was this venture into the field of free education that caused so much dismay to the established clergy, who saw considerable defections from their flock on that account. Reading, writing and arithmetic were still being taught in local chapel Sunday schools in the 1860s and ceased only after the Education Act of 1880 made weekday school attendance compulsory to the age of 10. In *Clayhanger*, Arnold Bennett, writing in 1910, painted a particularly vivid picture of the influence that charitable non-conformism could have.

Mr Shushions had saved them [from the Workhouse]...he escorted them back to their house, into which some fresh furniture had been brought...and [Darius knew that] a situation was waiting for his father and [Mr Shushions had] found a superb situation for Darius himself. All this because Mr Shushions, as superintendent of a Sunday School, was...interested in the...boy who had there picked up the art of writing so quickly.

The form of non-conformist chapels

The Royal Commission for Historic Monuments in England have undertaken a countrywide survey of non-conformist chapels. This they have issued in fascicules based upon the pre-1974 local government boundaries. Chapels surveyed and described in the Buckinghamshire volume (RCHME-1 1986) vary considerably in size but, in their original form, are generally rectangular in form. Many show modifications and additions. These usually take the form of additional rooms which have clearly developed organically as needs changed or arose. For example, Amersham chapel (1779; SU 956 972), originally a simple rectangular and unheated building, was extended to the north-east to include a school room and vestry. Both of these rooms were provided with a fireplace. At Nash, the chapel (early 19th century; SP 781 344) again was originally a simple unheated rectangle, extended to the west to provide a small antichamber with a fireplace. A similar set of events appears to have taken place at Waddesdon (1792; SP 753 150), although the small antichamber was originally unheated. Almost none of the chapels surveyed and described in the Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire volume (RCHME-2 1986) can be compared in any way with the example at Kempsey (which is not mentioned). The best match in terms of form is at Alcester (c 1736; SP 092 575: Fig 6). This comprises a rectangular chapel of two storey height, formerly with a gallery (of 1817) at the north-east end. It was extended in 1817 to provide a two storey Sunday School wing with a hearth on the south-west wall. A vestry was subsequently built straddling the rear wall of the chapel and Sunday School.

The historic map evidence

The Baptist chapel at Kempsey is not shown on the Kempsey tithe map of 1840 (WCRO BA 248; s269/84: Fig 2) but it does appear on the Ordnance Survey map of 1885. This was too fragile to be copied but its configuration on this map is identical to that shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1904 (Fig 2). This shows a rectangular building with its long axis perpendicular to the street. There is a small extension on the south-east corner. The Ordnance Survey map of 1928 (Fig 2) shows no difference to this arrangement although the adjacent plot of land to the north-east, now appears to be part of the chapel grounds.

The Worcestershire Historic Environment Record

Many chapels, both Baptist and other denominations are recorded on the Worcestershire County Historic Environment Record. Finding clear parallels was troublesome (see below). However, individual features of the Kempsey chapel could be matched without difficulty. Both the Baptist chapel at Astwood Bank (WSM 0080) and the one in Broad Street, Pershore (WSM 5579) are built of red brick with slate roofs and the former is rectangular in plan. In addition, the Pershore chapel has a schoolroom, added in 1889. Finally, the Baptist chapel at Westmancote, Bredon (WSM 3334) has a baptistery in the floor, intended for total immersion.

Description of the Baptist chapel at Kempsey

(Phase 1: 1840-1885)

The original chapel comprised a rectangular building aligned north-west to south-east, with its longitudinal axis perpendicular to Church Street (Fig 3). It was built of brick in English bond with stone details and roofed with slate (Figs 4, 5, 7 and 8). Its principal entrance, a single width doorway with a pointed head, gave immediate access to a single, rectangular, ground floor space (Fig 9). There was another doorway, also of single width and with a pointed head at the southern end of the south-west elevation. The interior was probably open to the roof and, given the height of the building, it is likely that it had a gallery. No trace of this now survives. The building had three, tall, semi-circular windows on the south-western elevation (Fig 5 and 7) and probably four on the north-eastern elevation. The single windows in the north-western and south-eastern elevations had perpendicular tracery (Figs 4, 7 and 8) with the south-eastern window being the larger.

The roof structure is sophisticated. A conventionally constructed roof of the later 19th century comprised a number of roof trusses which carried purlins which in turn supported common rafters. This produced a strong but, both visually and literally, rather heavy form of construction. The roof structure of the Baptist chapel dispensed with roof trusses and purlins altogether. Instead, each common rafter was cross-braced to its opposite number, approximately one third up the length of each rafter (Figs 5 and 12) and rested directly upon the wall plate. This provided a much lighter form of construction in both senses of the word, as used above. It must have been clearly understood, however, that this form of construction alone was inadequate to resist the outward thrust upon the wall plate as steel tensioning bars were introduced in salient positions to resist this force.

(Phase 2; 1840-1885)

In phase 2 a small, single storey extension was built to the east on the south-eastern corner of the original chapel (Figs 3 and 10). This had a hearth at its eastern end and a single window placed asymmetrically on its north-western elevation. It is likely that the existing doorway in the north-western elevation (currently giving access to the Phase 3 extension) is original, mirroring the position of the window of the same phase.

(Phase 3; late 20th century)

A square stairwell was built in the corner between phases 1 and 2 in stretcher bond (Figs 3 and 11). This is associated with a first floor (Figs 3 and 12) which must have been inserted at the same time, the gallery being removed if it still existed. It is thought likely that the construction of the baptismal pool (Figs 3 and 13) is associated with this phase as well.

(Phase 4; late 20th century)

A single storey, rectangular extension was added, in stretcher bond, straddling the phase 2 and 3 extensions (Figs 3 and 14). A doorway providing access from the interior was inserted in the north-east wall of the phase 2 extension.

Commentary

With regard to non-conformist chapels and meeting houses, the one conclusion that can be drawn with certainty is that there is no consistent theme with regard to size or style of construction. This may be seen in the gazetteer produced by Cox (1982) and the RCHME volumes (1 and 2, 1986). Aldington chapel (SP 064 441) was a former farm building. Bishampton chapel (1844; SO 989 513) is a plain building that was probably built from a pattern book. It could easily be a small industrial building of the period. On a larger scale, the same can be said of Atch Lench chapel (1829; SP 033 508). By contrast, Blockley chapel (1835; SP 162 347) is of classical design.

Given the extraordinary variety apparent in non-conformist chapels there is little to be gained from any attempt to categorize them or to place Kempsey in some form of classification. The best that can be said is that the chapel at Kempsey featured, or probably featured, most of the characteristics usually associated with a small village chapel. It was rectangular (in its original manifestation) and built of brick. It probably had a gallery. It was extended three times. The first time, probably not long after it was built, was probably to provide a room for a Sunday School or a vestry. Subsequent extensions in the late 20th century were associated with the insertion of a first floor and a baptismal pool and the provision of toilets and, probably, simple catering facilities.

Bibliography

Bennett, A, 1910 *Clayhanger*

Cox, B G, 1982 *Chapels and meeting houses in the Vale of Evesham*, Vale of Evesham Historical Society

RCHME-1 1986 *Non-conformist chapels and meeting houses: Buckinghamshire*

RCHME-2 1986 *Non-conformist chapels and meeting houses: Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire*

Acknowledgements

The author would particularly like to thank Mark Donald of Severn Developments UK Ltd and Mike Glyde of Worcestershire County Council for their kind cooperation.

Archive

The archive consists of:

- 2 Annotated scale drawing
- 1 CD-ROM

Appendix 1: Location of Figures 7 to 14

Ground floor

Fig 8

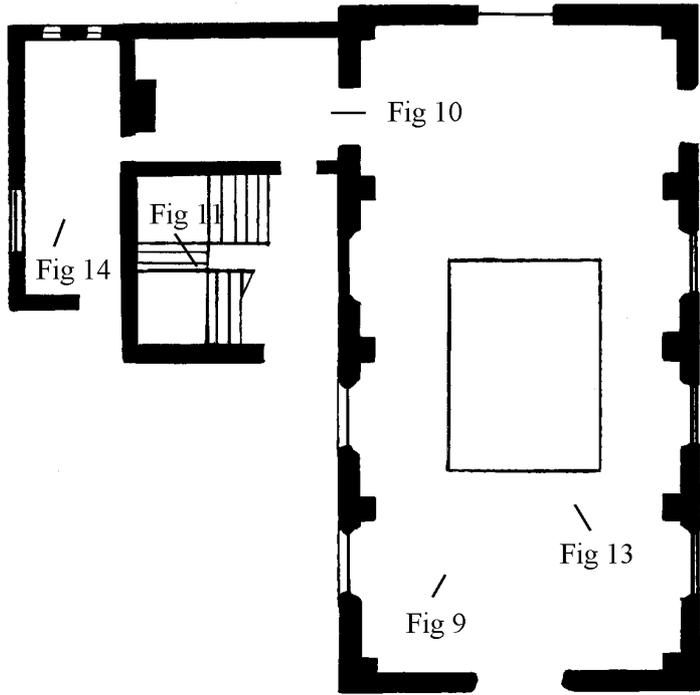
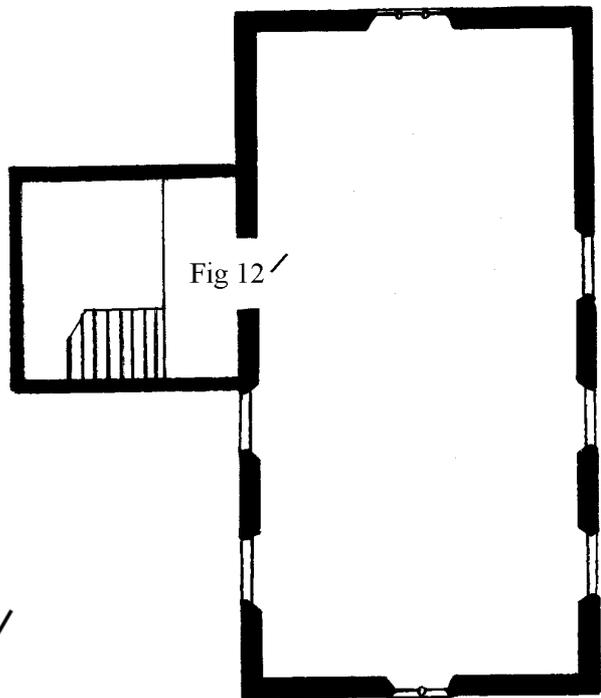


Fig 7

First floor

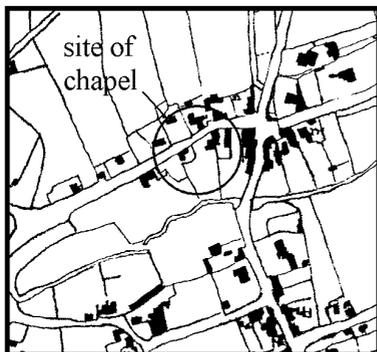


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15m

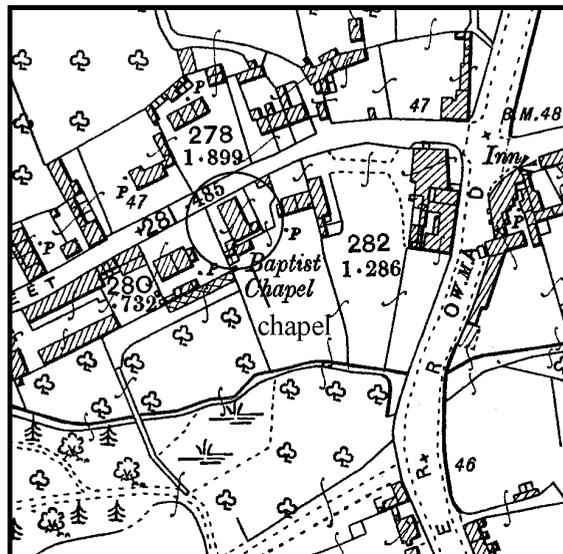


Tithe map of 1840



not to scale

1904



1928

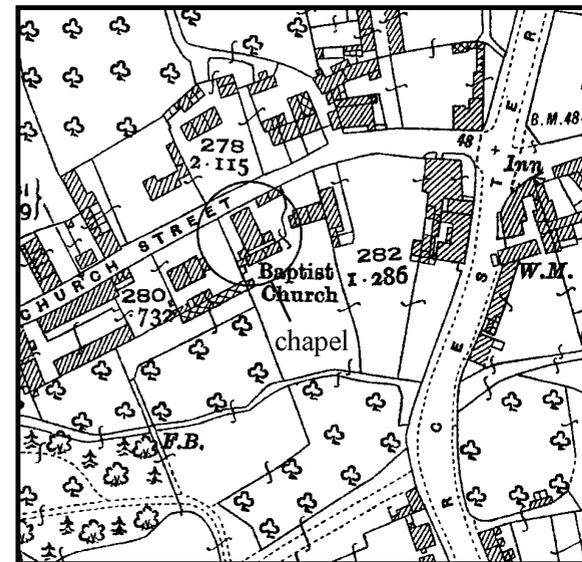
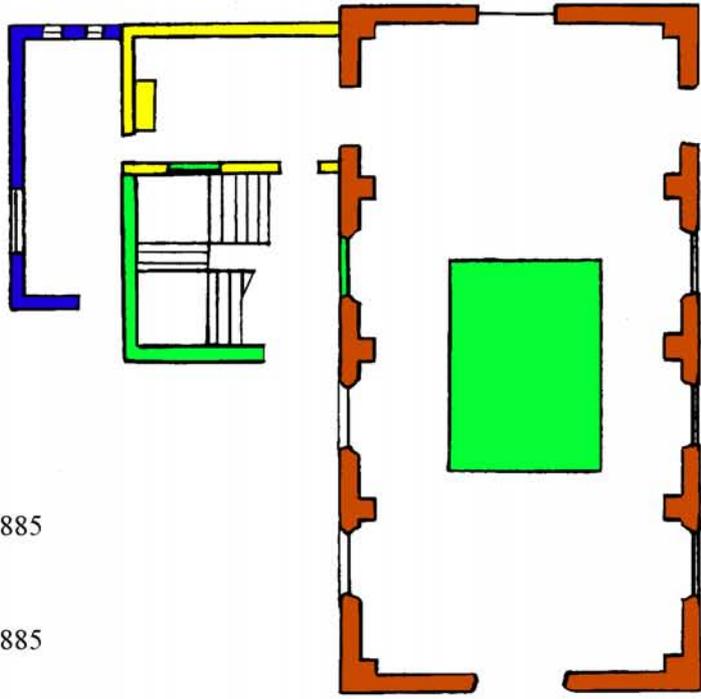


Fig 2: Historic mapping

Ground floor



-  Phase 1: 1840-1885
-  Phase 2: 1840-1885
-  Phase 3: late 20th century
-  Phase 4: late 20th century

First floor

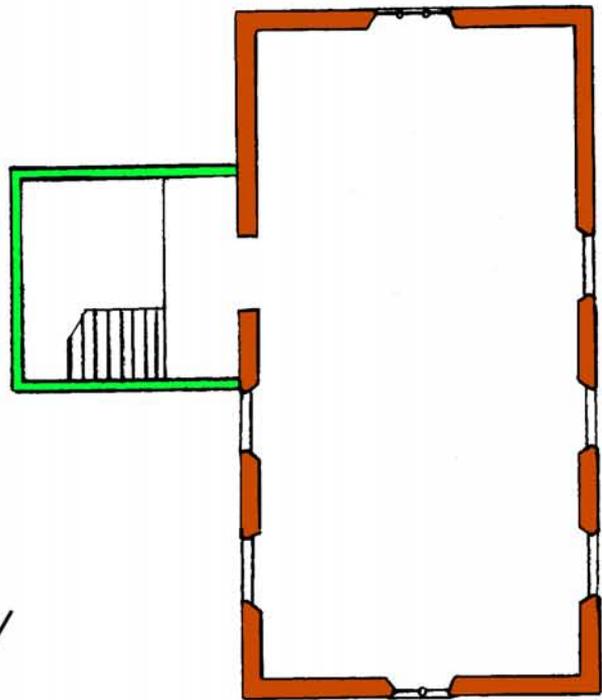


Fig 3: Floor plans showing phasing

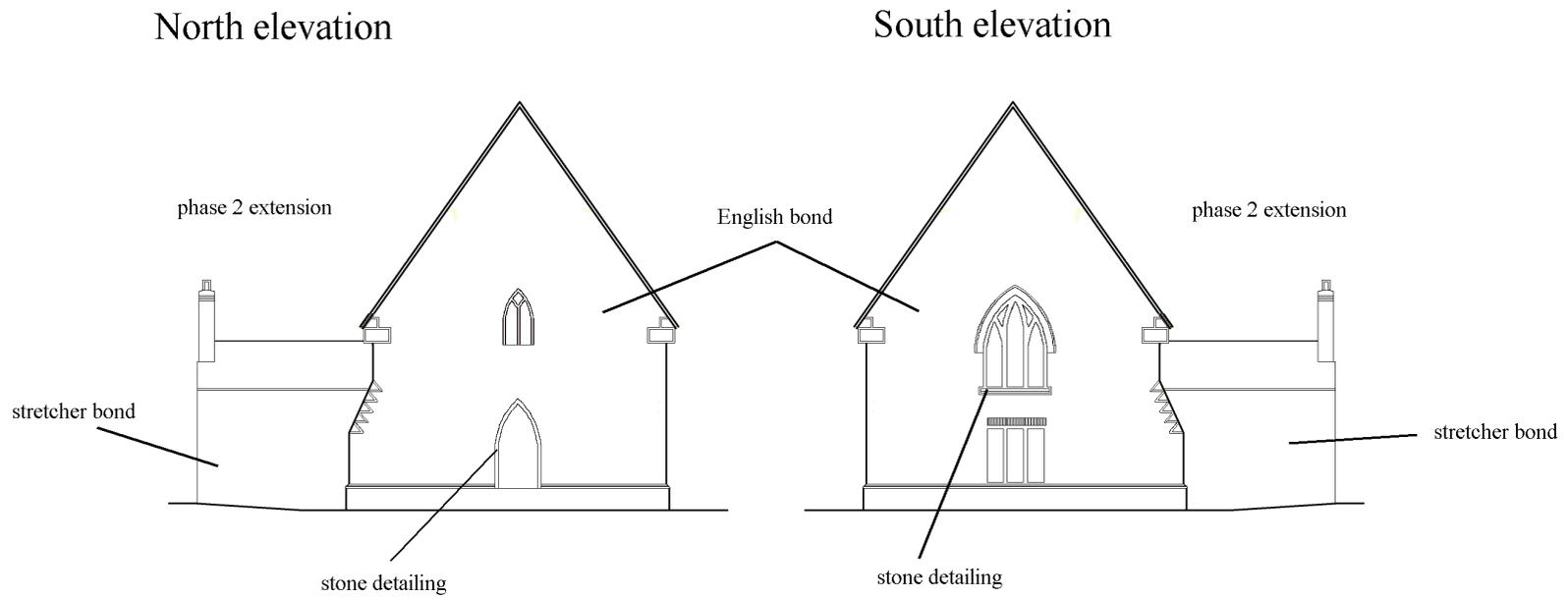


Fig 4: North and south elevations

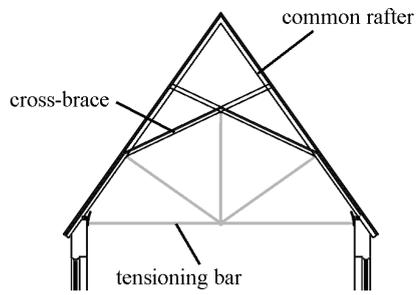
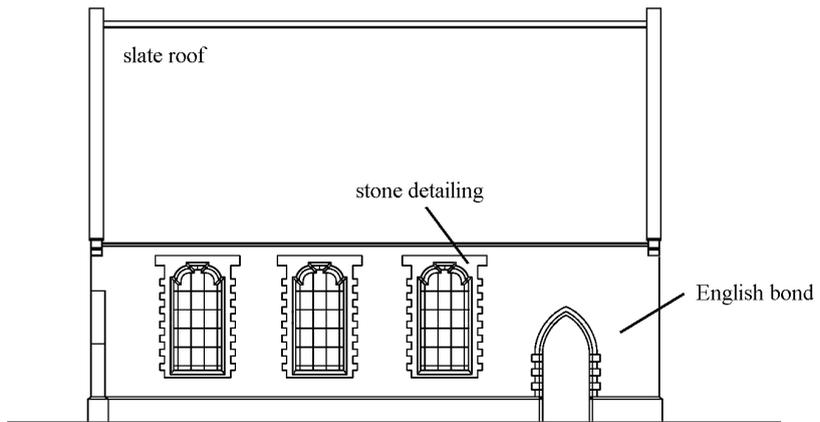
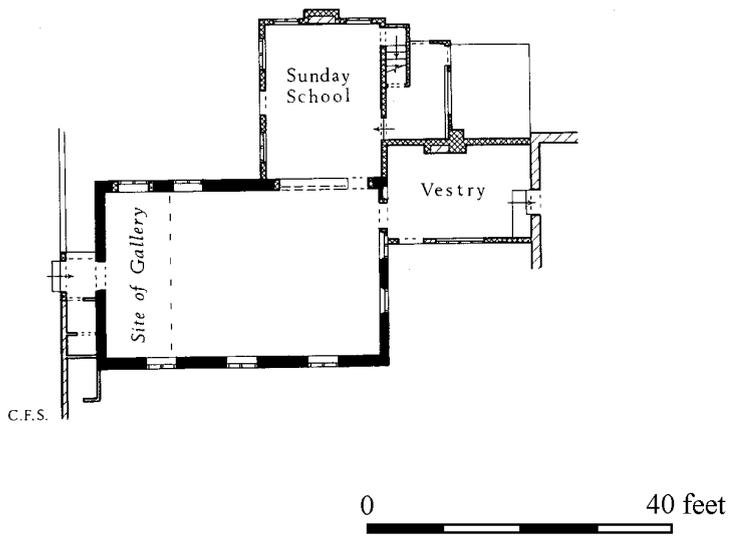


Fig 5: West elevation and section of roof structure



Former Baptist chapel, Alcester
after RCHME 1986

Fig 6: Comparative material-Alcester Baptist chapel



Fig 7: North-west and south-west elevations



Fig 8: South-east elevation



Fig 9: Interior of main hall



Fig 10: Phase 2 extension



Fig 11: Phase 3 extension



Fig 12: Phase 3 first floor



Fig 13: Phase 3 baptismal pool



Fig 14: Phase 4 extension



Fig 15: General view from north-east



Fig 16: General view from south-west