

HISTORIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT

THE OLD CHAPEL - TR210NN

The Old Chapel is listed on the Historic Environment Register for Cornwall and The Isles of Scilly.

HER Number: 7806
Name: OLD TOWN - Post Medieval nonconformist chapel

Summary

A disused Wesleyan Methodist chapel built c1860, closed 1930 and converted to a house.

Grid Reference: SV 9148 1041
Parish: St Marys, St Marys, Isles of Scilly
Protected Status: None recorded
Other References/Statuses
Cornwall PROJECT ID: JG
Primary Record No. (1985-2009): 7806

Monument Type(s):

NONCONFORMIST CHAPEL (19th Century to Unknown - 1860 AD)

Full description

A disused Wesleyan Methodist chapel, Old Town. Built c1860 formerly with tall windows in west front, entrance to right and steeply pitched roof. Closed 1930 and converted to a house with altered roof line and fenestration. Recorded on both the 1st and 2nd Edition 1:2500 OS Maps (b1, b2). Listed in Stell (b1).

<1> Ordnance Survey, 1880s, 1st Edition 1:2500 Map (Cartographic materials). SCO4048.
<2> Ordnance Survey, 1900s, 2nd Edition 1:2500 Map (Cartographic materials). SCO4050.
<3> Stell, C, 1991, An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels, p 57 (Bibliographic reference). SCO4485.

Recent History.

A number of alterations have occurred to the building since its original use as a Wesleyan meeting hall. The building was rendered at some point before the 1990 when we have evidence of the latest round of renovations of the building. The previous tall ecclesiastical windows will have been removed as evidence in the planning record indicates that during renovations of the front elevation, concrete lintols were discovered over the ground and first floor window openings, together with large areas of 'patching up' along its length. Natural slate was used to cover the lintols and patchwork and allowed for the removal of the render to the ground floor, which was in a better condition. An arched recess was discovered during the removal of the render and a new ecclesiastical style window was reinstated. The single storey porch was converted into a garage at some point in the past. This was reinstated as the main entrance to the building. It is believed that this was the original entrance into the chapel.

The rear conservatory and front elevation slate cladding were approved in 1990 (19.6.1990, ref 3083) along with the garage.

The upper floor and Dormas were approved in 1993 (09.12.1993, ref P.3600).

It appears that the upper floor glass conservatory was added some time before this but was not part of the original Chapel.



Pre 1990



Post 1990

It may appear to have an historic element to its interiors, however, the Iroko Panelling to the ground floor living room was rescued from the Fanti (a wrecked ship) and installed by the owner at the time, Roy Mitchel, as was the herringbone flooring which is believed to be salvaged from the Holgate Hotel. This work was carried out in the nineties.

The Old Chapel is mentioned a number of times in the Isles of Scilly Museum publication 'A History of the Non Conformist Churches on the Isles of Scilly' by David P Easton

Relevant parts are extracted here.

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As well as their chapel in Hugh Town, the Methodists had smaller ones at Holy Vale and Old Town. These were first built in about 1815, or shortly after. Driver claims that they were both built sixteen years before 1833, i.e. 1817. Other records give 1815 and 1819 as the years for Holy Vale and Old Town respectively.³⁴ Although Holy Vale Chapel is generally reckoned to have opened in 1815, if it is the same 'meeting' house that a Holy Vale Methodist allowed Jeffery to use on his preliminary visit in November 1814, it was clearly opened earlier. Holy Vale was registered with the Bishop of Exeter – then a legal requirement as a 'dissenting' place of worship – in 1816, but date of registration is no guarantee that a chapel was erected that year. Old Town built about the same time was never registered. The fact that Old Town was not registered at the same time as Holy Vale – which would have been the natural thing to do if they had been built at the same time, as Driver's survey states – suggests that it was built later than the other one and, so, a date of 1819 is quite likely. Driver states that Holy Vale chapel was six perches in extent and had been built for £40, the same cost as the one in Old Town, which was only three perches in size. Their seating capacity was 124 and 100 respectively.³⁵ Old Town and Holy Vale/Maypole and Hugh Town would have been the three largest settlements on St. Mary's. Quite why a chapel was built at Old Town is not clear when it was, comparatively, so close to Hugh Town. James says that 'services were first conducted in an untenanted dwelling-house, and afterwards a chapel was built.'³⁶

The other two Wesleyan chapels at Holy Vale and Old Town underwent alterations during the nineteenth century. The first of these was renovated, probably in 1862.⁸⁰ The Old Town chapel was demolished and rebuilt in 1868.⁸¹ This appears to have been because the original was in a poor state and dangerous,⁸² but also to accommodate more people. Quite why this was done is unclear. Old Town never seems to have been extensively used. Even allowing for the greater population in Old Town at that time it seems superfluous; a view echoed by James twenty-two years after it was rebuilt. 'The new building, though small, is an imposing structure, altogether out of proportion to the requirements of the place.'⁸³ Presumably services were at one time held in Old Town, but by the end of the century these seem to have been limited to mid-week. The Religious Census of 1851 states that there were no services at Old Town on that Sunday. Part of the problem may have been that the Wesleyans only had one minister stationed on the Islands and often no Local Preachers. This would have prevented them consolidating their work in the two smaller St. Mary's chapels, but also made them unable to follow up their sporadic efforts on Tresco and Bryher. Holy Vale often, but not consistently, had Sunday afternoon services, as well as mid-week services. It was common practice for Methodist churches to have mid-week preaching services – a custom that lasted until after the Second World War. The absence of a second minister or local preacher was probably also the reason why it was 'probably the only circuit in Methodism without a circuit plan'.⁸⁴

In the twentieth century the chapels at Holy Vale and Old Town were little used. There were usually Sunday afternoon services at the former, but little at the latter. In 1911 it was unanimously agreed to that 'steps should be taken for the sale of the Old Town Chapel'.¹⁰⁷ Nothing appears to have been done, for in 1928 the

Chairman reported that Mr Hill, the U. M. Pastor, was willing to work with him in the matter of re-opening Old Town chapel on week days. The scheme was commended and an opening was proposed as soon as lamps for the chapel could be provided.¹⁰⁸

Obviously, if there was no lighting in the building, it must have been unused for some while. It was reopened and was in use until the late 1930s. Circuit accounts refer to

money paid to a Mr Treneary for repairs to the building.¹⁰⁹ Mrs Emma Roberts remembers attending mid-week services there on Tuesday evenings in the same decade.¹¹⁰ The chapel entrance was from the road at the western end, with a gallery across the building and the pulpit at the other, eastern, end. There is no record of its disposal, but the lease seems to have been given up at about the beginning of the War. It is surprising that it lingered in use for so long. As has been noted, even in the previous century, it appears to have been considered superfluous. Holy Vale also had weeknight services, on a Friday, and services on Sunday afternoons, although how regular these were, latterly, is not clear. It was finally sold by the Circuit in 1955.

The building has been radically altered since it was abandoned as a chapel. It can be argued that the building is now in a significantly better state of repair than it has been for a number of years since it was abandoned, especially since the major renovations of the 1990's.

However, the building no longer bears any resemblance to the chapel it once was. This proposal aims to improve on the work carried out in the 90's to replace, with more sympathetic and robust design, the aesthetically and practically deleterious later additions to the building.

The following images show the works as carried out between Jan 1989 and July 1990.

