

Conservation in 1991

Selected Cases

by

MATTHEW SAUNDERS

ROOK LANE CHAPEL, FROME, SOMERSET

Rook Lane Chapel must rank as one of the most splendid Nonconformist chapels in the country. Its state of dereliction for the last twenty-five years has been a standing affront to everybody concerned and the Society was delighted to lend its moral support to the campaign launched in 1991 by the Somerset Buildings Preservation Trust and Mendip District Council to repair and convert it for concerts, plays, meetings, receptions and as an art gallery.

The first congregation met in nearby Rook Lane House following the ejection of the Nonconformist minister from St John's Church. After the passing of the Act

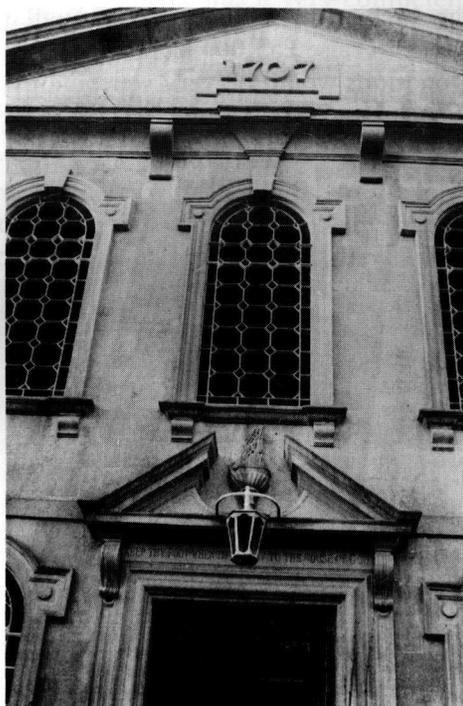


Fig. 1
Rook Lane Chapel, Frome, Somerset

of Toleration in 1689 it was decided to build a chapel on land leased from Mr Smith, owner of Rook Lane House. The chapel was completed in 1707 by James Pope who built at least two other chapels in Frome (Fig. 1). The idiom was a self-confident Baroque, more expected on a town-house than a chapel. Fig. 1 shows the flaming urn set within the cleft pediment. Internally the galleried space was dominated by two huge Doric columns with the entablature block carried around all four sides. By 1852 the chapel needed extensive restoration and the original cupola was replaced by a flat roof. In 1837 a school room was constructed at the rear and it was extended again in 1882. The chapel became redundant in the late 1960s when the small congregation merged with the Zion Congregational Church. By 1972 the building had been sold to a developer and in 1978 it was again sold. After a Repairs Notice had been served it once more changed hands, none of the owners being able to find a viable use for the building. It now lies stripped and vandalized; the fine plaster ceiling, the gallery, the pews, pulpit and memorial tablets have all gone. What is left will provide, after repair, an ideal space for the uses envisaged.

After acquisition by Somerset County Council, the building passed to the Preservation Trust. Work will begin in March 1992 and is expected to take twelve months. Then Mendip District Council will buy the repaired building and convert it for public use. Financial assistance has been offered by Somerset County Council and Mendip District Council. English Heritage has promised a substantial grant and the Architectural Heritage Fund will lend working capital. However, the Trust still needs to raise £55,000 from a public appeal, of which £37,000 is already promised. Donations would be very welcome to the Somerset Building Preservation Trust at 17 Ash Lane, Wells, Somerset, BA5 2LR. Cheques to be made payable to the Somerset Building Preservation Trust Appeal.

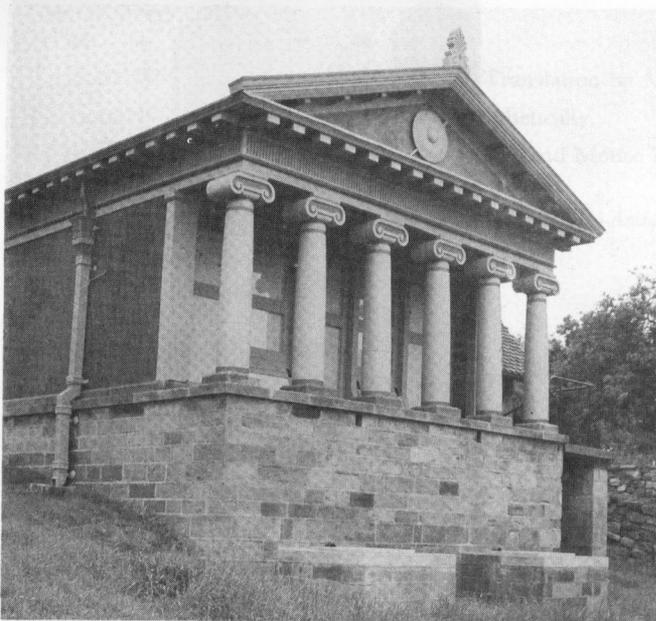


Fig. 2

The Pig Sty, Fylingthorpe,
Fylingdale, North Yorkshire

THE PIG STY, FYLINGTHORPE, FYLINGDALE, NORTH YORKSHIRE

The Architectural Heritage Fund (17 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AW) gives loans at advantageous rates to Building Preservation Trusts and kindred bodies to repair historic buildings of many different sorts. One such is The Pig Sty. This extraordinary building, looking like a Post-Modern essay of the last ten years, dates from the 1880s, having been built over a period of three years by Squire Barry of Fyling Hall (Fig. 2). It contains two small sties and was intended to provide accommodation for two pigs whose attendants were to be housed in a pair of neighbouring cottages. Its original use lapsed at the beginning of this century and the building fell into a very poor state of repair. It has now been taken on by the Landmark Trust who have restored and converted it to provide a holiday cottage. The pigsty itself will be the living room with the stone troughs retained *in situ*. Splendid views of Robin Hood Bay can now be obtained through the portico. The building, Grade II listed, was repaired by Martin Stancliffe at a total cost of £380,984, £100,000 of which came in the form of an AHF loan and £40,000 from English Heritage (under Section 3A).

THE CUSTOMS HOUSE, TRAFFORD ROAD, SALFORD, GREATER MANCHESTER

The Customs House, built in 1903, is one of only two of the remaining dock buildings that served Salford Quays (Fig. 3). The unknown architect was a very competent conjurer with the then fashionable Edwardian Baroque, producing a design which, although symmetrical in composition, is anything but in the balancing of its detailing. The central three bays match exactly, as do the two main chimneys, but the two pavilion gables most certainly do not. One large tripartite window lighting the principal internal space is answered in the other cross-wing by a giant chimney splitting two pedimented windows. On the ground floor three windows with eared architraves have as their counterparts two larger windows without ears, transomed rather than sashed. Where one might expect the bellcote and flagpole to be placed centrally, they adorn the northern wing.

In October 1987 proposals for the widening of Trafford Road were approved by Salford City Council. One of the affected buildings was the Customs House, listed Grade II and owned by the Council. The latter resolved to seek to retain the building by rolling it back physically, out of the building line of the road. However, in



Fig. 3

The Customs House, Trafford Road,
Salford, Greater Manchester

subsequent investigation it transpired that this option would cost £1.5 million and although the Society argued strongly for retention we were not supported in this case by English Heritage and demolition consent is likely.

ST PETER'S CHURCH. STEPNEY, LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

St Peter's was designed by the architect Edward Blore (1787–1879). St Peter's came relatively late in his career (1837–8), some ten years or so before Blore retired in 1849. By that time he had built up an extensive practice both as a country-house architect and as a designer and restorer of churches. Blore developed an enthusiasm for Gothic architecture in his early years spent at Stamford and began his professional life as an antiquarian draughtsman. He was one of several architects employed by Sir Walter Scott to design his great house at Abbotsford and was taken on by the Government in 1832 to complete Buckingham Palace after the dismissal of John Nash. He also carried out various works at Windsor Castle and Hampton Court; from 1827–49 he was Surveyor to Westminster Abbey. The great William Burges, architect of Cardiff Castle, was among his pupils.

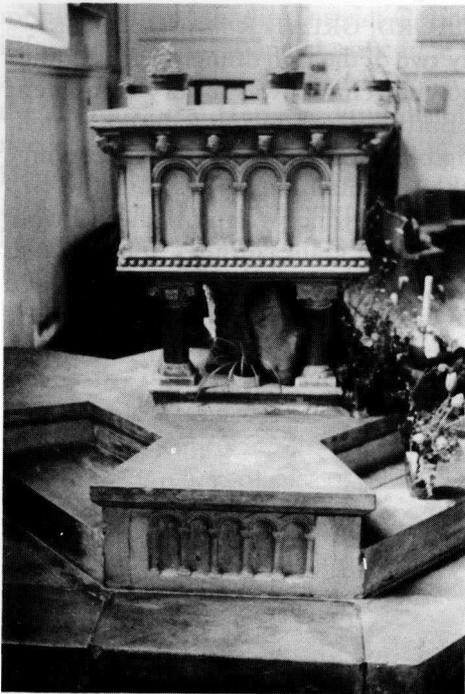


Fig. 4
St Peter's Church, Stepney,
London Borough of Tower Hamlets

St Peter's would not have appealed to Burges, being in a rather paper-thin Neo-Norman. Moreover, the interior is largely modern following bomb damage. Nevertheless, the Norman is carried through with consistency and employed, as the photograph shows, for the blind arcading on the font and on its plinth, breaking into Gothic for the little supporting colonnettes (Fig. 4). The church also forms an historically-related group with the Sunday School and the vicarage and other ancillary

buildings, all of which appear to be by Blore. Only recently the St Peter's Conservation Area was designated in order to protect the complex, which would clearly be rendered largely meaningless by the demolition of the church.

In light of this, and the capacity of the church to lend itself to conversion we opposed a Draft Redundancy Scheme issued by the Church Commissioners providing for total demolition and were supported in that by the London Division of English Heritage. The London Diocesan Advisory Committee has recommended that the font be salvaged if demolition goes ahead.

ST MICHAEL'S, BALDHU, CORNWALL

Built to serve the employees of mines (Baldhu means The Black Mine) which never came into being, St Michael's stands in open country five miles west of Redruth (Fig. 5). There appears to be some confusion as to who was the designer. An article in *The Ecclesiologist* reviews the building as if constructed by William White but he does not seem to have been the only hand involved, the Reverend William Haslam (who also designed St George's Church, Truro) probably having a say as well. The date is 1848. As the Council for the Care of Churches writes 'Baldhu Church is a simple building which achieves dignity through excellent proportions and details'. The idiom is Ecclesiological Cornish Decorated. As so often in that county two long roofs run parallel, one over the nave and chancel, the other over the south aisle and chapel. A keen eye for detailing is shown in the varied tracery to the windows and the massive iron hinges of medieval intricacy to the porch door. In the good Victorian churchyard which retains a number of yew trees, evergreen shrubs and rhododendrons, there is a memorial outside the south chapel wall to William, better known as Billy, Bray (died 1868), a local preacher with the Bible Christians for forty-three years. He was an important figure in the history of Cornish Nonconformity and his chapel (a plain square building with a pyramidal roof) survives in the parish about half a mile west of the church.

In August 1991 the Church Commissioners published a scheme for the demolition of Baldhu. The Society has urged that the search for a new use should continue.

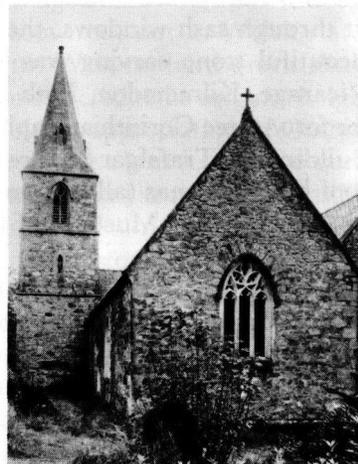


Fig. 5
St Michael's, Baldhu, Cornwall



Fig. 6

Royal Exchange, City of London

ROYAL EXCHANGE, CITY OF LONDON

A £37 million scheme to heighten Sir William Tite's Royal Exchange of 1840 by two storeys was completed in the summer of 1991. The architect, Colin Christmas, of the Fitzroy Robinson Partnership, used the precedent of Michaelangelo's additional storey to the courtyard of the Palazzo Farnese in Rome. Within the internal courtyard the two storeys are contained within one Corinthian arcade, the bottom floor being lit through sash windows, the top floor by the lunettes over the aedicules (Fig. 6). Beautiful stone carving was carried out by Mel Morris Jones, based at the Old Vicarage, Kilmersdon, Bath BA3 5TA; Architectural Carvers are also responsible for forty-three Corinthian capitals in Portland stone for the recently completed Grand Buildings in Trafalgar Square. The new coved, compartmented and richly-coloured roof by Christmas (all in fibreglass), was based on an engraving of Pennethorne's now demolished Museum of Geology.

ST AUGUSTINE'S CHAPEL, TONBRIDGE SCHOOL, KENT

In 1988 the beautiful late nineteenth-century school chapel at Tonbridge (Fig. 7) was devastated by a fire that destroyed the glass by Christopher Whall, the reredos by Martin Travers, and badly damaged the War Memorial of bronze and alabaster by Henry Wilson. So fierce was the conflagration that the very stability of the massive outer walls was called into question and the upper parts of both the east and west



Fig. 7
St. Augustine's Chapel,
Tonbridge School, Kent

gables had to be demolished soon after. Most of the stone window tracery was lost. The initial reaction was to build a new chapel designed by Richard MacCormac, now President of the RIBA, a designer of great skill and sensitivity. The design was outstanding although there was considerable controversy over location and the question mark it posed over the remains of the original chapel. That scheme was eventually dropped and in August 1991 Donald Buttress, now Architect to Westminster Abbey, published a scheme to rebuild and remodel the fire-damaged shell. The new tracery is to be in a simplified Perpendicular and the roof recovered, not in Welsh slates as before, but in blue-black Penrhyn slate banded with Westmorland green slate. The west elevation (shown on the drawing) is to be reconstructed to its original height but with alterations that reflect Donald Buttress's scholarly appreciation of Gothic. The whole of the larger west window and everything above eaves level have gone and need to be rebuilt. New bricks are to be used matching the old as nearly as possible with horizontal bands of stone masking the transition from old to new materials. The lower part of the old window opening is to be built up with stone and brick and in the large rectangular stone panel it is intended to place an incised lettered inscription commemorating the original Chapel, its completion, destruction, and reconstruction. At the East End the window tracery is simplified, more rectangular or reticulated than the curvilinear original which it was felt it would be more costly to reproduce. The compartments of the new tracery beneath standard cusped heads and small transoms have been devised to accommodate a number of fine panels of stained glass

by C.E. Kempe of c. 1910 from the extensive collection of salvaged glass which Mr Buttress has built up over the years. Internally, the appearance will be less elaborate than the predecessor although the plans indicate the use of panelling and stencil work, twin ambos (or pulpits) and a unified composition at the east end incorporating the new tracery, glass and reredos. The original covered hammer-beam roof is to be replaced by a plainer portal frame in steel, with alternating designs, one with a system of tie-rods and the other with mild-steel brackets like Gothic upswinging braces from which lighting is suspended.

88-104 WEST STREET, SHEFFIELD

This early nineteenth-century group in the centre of the city offers one of the last reminders of the Little Meisters workshops which provided the main setting for Sheffield's cutlery industry in the first years of the Industrial Revolution (Fig. 8). The proposal is for replica rebuilding but the sense of buildings altered and extended over the years can so easily be ironed out in such a process. The frontage onto West Street is remarkably unaltered, retaining many of its original lugless sash windows and on the ground floor of Mortons an unpretentious and original Classical shop-front. The buildings were not particularly well constructed and this fact and the rather hand-to-mouth repairs over the years have undoubtedly led to a repairs crisis, but to answer that by total demolition does seem a drastic over-reaction.



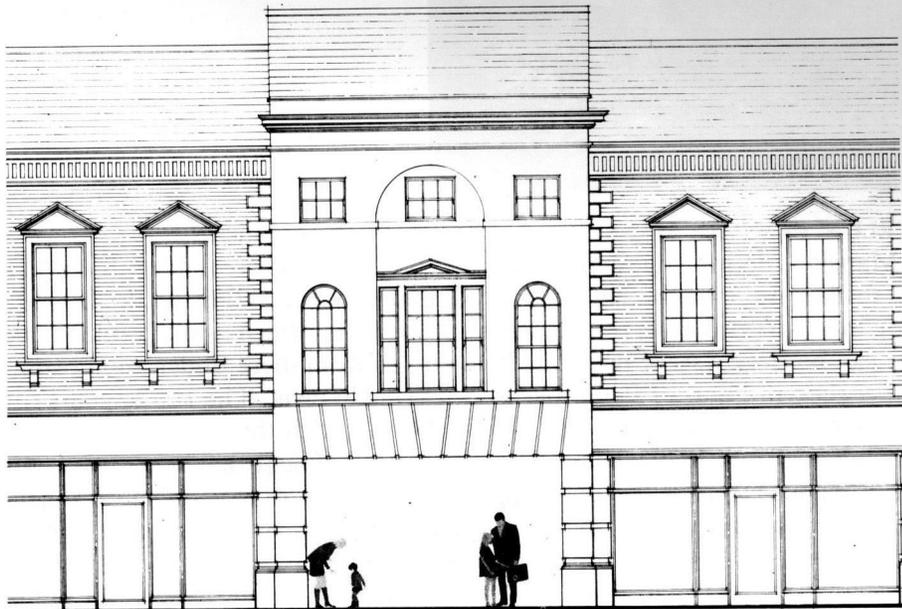
Fig. 8

88-104 West Street, Sheffield



Fig. 9

Shopping Mall, High Street/Market Place, Doncaster, South Yorkshire
Above: before reconstruction; Below: after reconstruction



SHOPPING MALL, HIGH STREET/MARKET PLACE, DONCASTER, SOUTH YORKSHIRE
 The Society was consulted on several occasions in the course of 1991 over a scheme for a substantial redevelopment of a backland site in the centre of Doncaster affecting a number of listed buildings including 50/51 Market Place, a cool Adamesque design of the late eighteenth century. It was originally proposed for total demolition. Now the architects, Jackson & Calvert, propose not only to retain the front elevation (the ground floor providing an entrance to the Mall) but to put back the lost glazing bars in the bottom sashes of the first-floor windows and introduce balancing wings on the sides of the two unlisted buildings on either side. On the other frontage on the High Street, they intend a further run of 1990s Classical centred on the huge approximation of a Venetian Window (Fig. 9).

Classicism, even if a decidedly Mannerist form, is fast becoming the common currency of many development schemes in areas of historical sensitivity.



Fig. 10
 Castell Y Van (Van Mansion),
 Caerphilly, Glamorgan

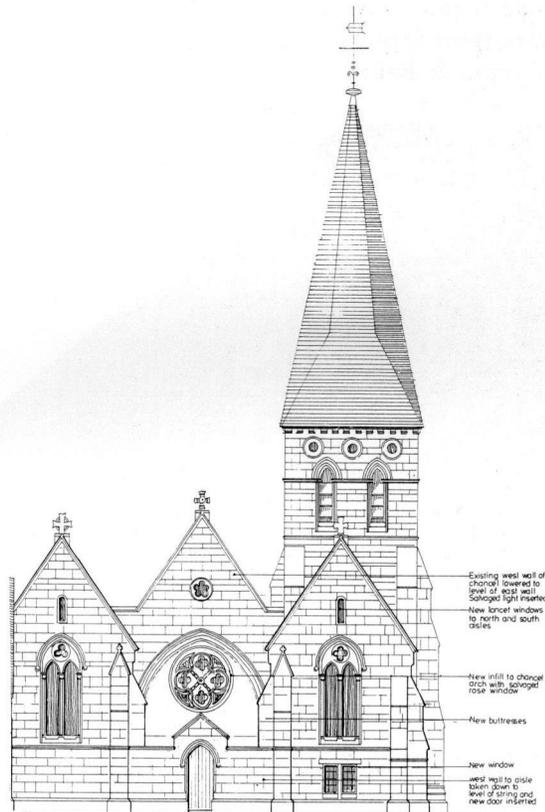
CASTELL Y VAN (VAN MANSION), CAERPHILLY, GLAMORGAN

Van Mansion, dating mainly from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, is one of the largest houses of that period in Glamorgan. It was built by the Lewis family reusing much dressed stone from Caerphilly Castle, on which twelfth century masons' marks can be clearly seen, the stone being taken from there under an agreement in 1583 between the Earl of Pembroke and Thomas Lewis. The site appears to have been abandoned by the Lewis family by 1736 although the main house was in use as a farmhouse until 1970 when it fell into disrepair (Fig. 10). The cottages adjacent to the gatehouse were occupied until the 1920s.

The exquisite drawing by Peter Smith, former Secretary of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, in his book, *The Great Houses of Glamorgan*, shows in Drawings *a* and *b* the present ruinous state.

The reconstruction of the main block is by Raymond Jenkins of Langton Court at Llantrisant and is now well advanced (Architects, Quorum Associates), one of the largest and most ambitious projects of its kind in the Principality. He now proposes, as Phase II, to rebuild the medieval dovecote. This was one of the largest dovecotes in Britain before its partial collapse in 1944, having over 1,000 nesting boxes. It was approximately eleven metres in diameter. The proposed reconstruction is intended to rebuild the dovecote completely including the reconstruction of the potence and the stone domed roof. In his *History of Caerphilly* of 1990, Henry Lloyd claimed that the dome was referred to as early as 1380. As only about an eighth still stands, the reconstruction is exciting some controversy and the Society has suggested that any rebuilding must retain the existing fabric and that there may be an argument for reconstruction to be carried out on an adjacent but different site, thus allowing the existing remains to be left intact and consolidated. The latest news is that listed-building consent for the reconstruction has been refused.

Fig. 11
All Saints, Highgate, Hawkhurst, Kent



ALL SAINTS, HIGHGATE, HAWKHURST, KENT

All Saints was constructed in 1860–61 to the designs of Sir Gilbert Scott and at the expense of the incumbent, the Reverend H.A. Jeffreys and his sister. His biographer, David Cole, regards it as Scott's best small church of the middle period. The style is a careful mixture of English and French (Fig. 11).

Although the building is sound, it has been declared redundant. Local resident and architect, Robert Chitham, formerly of English Heritage and now of Chapman Taylor, has prepared a controversial scheme, which the Society finds difficult to accept, of controlled ruination and conversion. The nave roof is to be taken off and the central gable of the west end demolished, its wheel window resited in the new retaining wall blocking up the chancel arch. The latter is to remain otherwise undisturbed as a chapel, but the aisles are converted into housing (with the retention of the important Ward & Nixon stained-glass window) and extra housing, rather in the manner of almshouses, runs between the north elevation and the road, one of them unfortunately obscuring the elaborate Early English blind arcading on the chancel exterior.

ALL SAINTS, BARTON STREET, GLOUCESTER

This has not been a good year for Sir Gilbert Scott for another of his churches. All Saints was proposed for demolition by the Church Commissioners in August 1991. Cole regarded All Saints, built in 1875, as possibly Scott's best late church. It has important fittings with ironwork by Potter, tiling by Godwin and stained glass by Clayton & Bell.



Fig. 12
Havelock Mills, Bridgewater Street,
Manchester

HAVELOCK MILLS, BRIDGWATER STREET, MANCHESTER

Brian Blayney, A.R.I.B.A., F.L.I., defended this important complex of silk mill of *c.* 1800 and cotton mill of 1843 at a lengthy Public Inquiry in August (Fig. 12). The massively severe exterior (reminiscent of the important early mill at Ancoats, admired by Schinkel and visited by Engels) prepare the visitor for a functionalism executed internally with precision. The later mill retains huge Accrington flags of 6ft x 5ft and 4in thick, each weighing half a ton, forming the floors over cast-iron beams supported on 9in brick jack arches. Cast-iron tension brackets strengthen the timber beams. There are some polite references as in the remaining Doric columns supporting the beam engine and in the external rusticated door surrounds. Generally, however, this is the sort of building to warm the heart of Sir James Richards, an unadorned expression of faith in The Functional Tradition. Permission to demolish was granted in November.

ST MARY'S CHURCH, TAUNTON, SOMERSET

Martin Stancliffe continues to prove himself one of the ablest of all our conservation architects. His reputation is such that, although based in York, he was chosen to design extensions to the exceptionally important late fifteenth-century parish church of Taunton (Fig. 13). His original proposal for a detached structure in the churchyard was frustrated in squabbles over the glebe land but the circumstances that have forced him to provide an attachment to the church itself have brought forth one of the most self-confident and yet natural extensions to a medieval building for many a year. Some may cavil at the bay window to the east and the equivalent in timber looking into the chancel as being too secular, but they offer a chance for a carpenter and mason to excel and are intended to light spaces given over to partly secular functions, such as a meeting room.

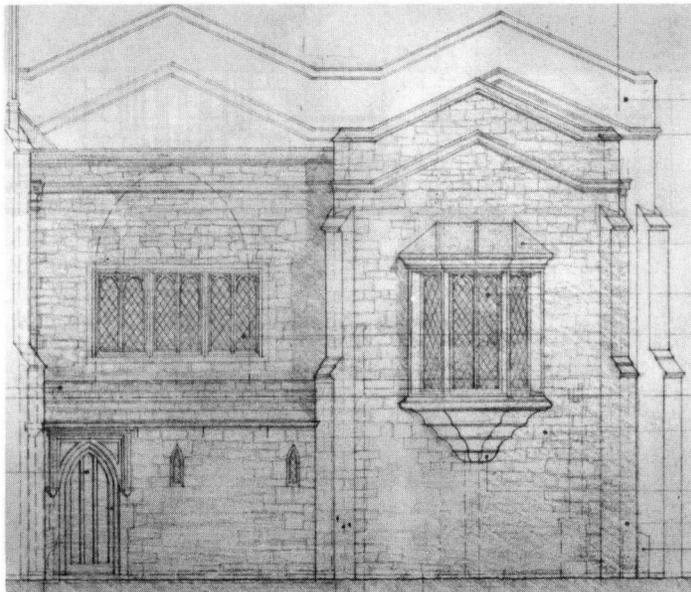


Fig. 13
St Mary's Church,
Taunton, Somerset

THE DALTON PUMPING STATION, COLD HESLEDON, DURHAM

The Society strongly opposed an application to demolish this very fine example of Waterworks Gothic of 1866 and consent was refused (Fig. 14). The building, now disused, is owned by the Sunderland and South Shields Water Company which argues that it is too costly to maintain. They defend themselves by pointing to the similar structure and pumping engine run as a working museum with their blessing by the Ryhope Engines Trust but this is a double edged argument. It would be inconsistent to conserve one listed building then destroy another. One good action does not licence an objectionable one.

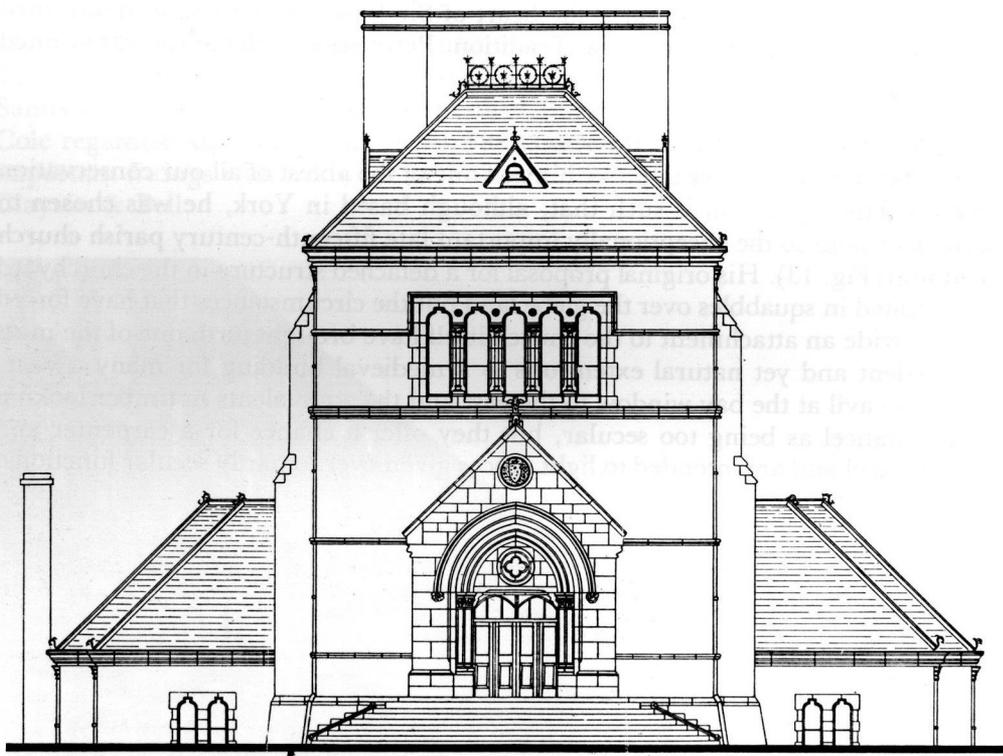


Fig. 14

The Dalton Pumping Station, Cold Hesledon, Durham

WEST COTTAGES, WHALLEY ROAD, SIMONSTONE, LANCS.

The Society strongly opposed an application in February to demolish this group of seventeenth-century cottages and consent was not forthcoming (Fig. 15). The buildings lie within an estate which does not want to release them—a common problem—but the damage that they have suffered is largely superficial and limited to the eminently expendable modern porch. The new roof in concrete tiles is not especially attractive but it does serve its functional purpose.



Fig. 15
West Cottages, Whalley Road, Simonstone, Lancs

