

UNITARIAN CHAPEL
CHAPEL LANE, BRADFORD, YORKSHIRE.
EPITAPHS AND MEMORIAL INSCRIPTIONS.

1719 to 1853

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INTRODUCTION

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The present Chapel stands upon a site previously occupied by an earlier building erected in 1719 which was surrounded by a Burial Ground in which a number of interments were made during the years 1719 to 1853.

The passing by Parliament of the Burials Act of 1852 caused the closing of the Chapel enclosure as a place of burial, for by that time Bradford had expanded largely, and further interment in what had by then become a central part of the town was doubtless considered insanitary, and the last burial took place in 1853, see No. 28 of the accompanying List.

Many of the graves were marked by slabs and tombs upon which were inscribed the usual details of names, dates of death, ages, etc. of the occupants, sometimes accompanied by tributes of affection and regard in the form of epitaphs and memorials.

Interments were also made within the building itself; and on the walls of the Chapel were memorial tablets of past Ministers and benefactors.

When the old building was demolished and the new Chapel erected in 1869, these graves were necessarily disturbed, and the gravestones and memorial tablets were dispersed. Some of them are still to be seen in the Chapel Yard leading to what was the Sunday School but which is now known as Channing Hall, and some upon the walls of the present Chapel, but the remainder have disappeared and are probably no longer in existence, and with them would have been lost much interesting information concerning the genealogy and family relationship of dead and gone worthies of Bradford, but for a fortunate discovery.

Amongst the papers and documents belonging to the late William Teale Kirk, erstwhile Trustee and Churchwarden of Chapel Lane Chapel, who died in 1910 in his 83rd year, was found a school exercise book which contained a series of diagrams showing the relative positions of the graves in the old burial ground, and complete details of the inscriptions on the stones and memorials, which from internal evidence was compiled during the years 1846 to 1853, for there is a note to the effect that in 1846 some of the inscriptions were becoming difficult to read on account of peeling.

It is not known who was the compiler of this interesting and valuable document.

The value of the document is the greater because the Chapel Registers do not record any Burials before the year 1768.

It should here be remarked that the Registers now preserved at the Chapel are not the Original Registers, but copies. The Originals Registers, of which there are three, namely, two volumes of Baptisms for the period 1730 to 1767 and one volume of Baptisms and Burials for the period 1768 to 1837, are in the custody of Somerset House, London, where they, together with Non-parochial Registers from other parts of the country, were lodged in support of the claims of Non-Conformist Chapels to be recognised as Public Places of Worship, prior to the passing of the Non-Parochial Registers Act in 1840.

According to this document, the first interment within the precincts of the Chapel took place in 1719 (see No. 44 of the accompanying List), which was the same year in which the first Chapel was built, and the last, as before stated, in 1853 (see No.28 of the List). The inscribed stone which covered the former is still to be seen in the present Chapel Yard.

By aid of the diagrams in the document, together with information contained in 'Historical Sketch of Chapel Lane Chapel' compiled and published in 1919 by Rev. A Cobden Smith, it has been possible to re-create an Approximate Scale Plan of the old Chapel and its burial ground; and from the lithographs and drawings preserved in the Vestry of the present Chapel, a description of its internal and external appearance has been made.

There were other interments in the Chapel Burial Ground besides those given in the accompanying List of Epitaphs, etc. These are indicated on the attached plan by elongated ovals, signifying occupied graves which had no inscribed slab or tomb-stone by which to identify the occupants, whose names must there-fore remain unrecorded.

The information to be derived from Epitaphs and Memorials on Tombstones is frequently of inestimable value to Genealogists and Historians, so it is well that this information concerning 18th and early 19th Century Members of the Unitarian Faith in Bradford should be rescued from the oblivion which seemed to threaten it.

J.B.HEWITT Engineer-Captain. R.N.

Clacton-on-Sea, 1938

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THE OLD CHAPEL.

Built 1719. Demolished and Rebuilt 1869.

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The building itself was severely simple in design, of a type very prevalent amongst the farmhouses and Halls of the district at the time of its building. Indeed, the materials for its construction came mainly from Howley Hall, near Batley, which was then in process of demolition.

It was rectangular in plan, with a low-pitched roof covered by stone tiles, and flat gabled ends. There was no chimney to break the straight line of the roof ridge, but a small finial crowned each gable. The windows were small, and mullioned and transomed. There were two doors on the northern façade, facing towards Toad Lane, now Chapel Lane, each of them screened by a projecting porch, the entrances to which were flanked by an Ionic Column on either side supporting an architrave. The space between the two projecting porches was guarded by an iron railing supporting an arched bar which carried a frame for holding a lantern. Inside the enclosure thus formed was the grave and tomb of the Reverend Nicholas Thomas Heineken, Minister of the Chapel 1817 – 1840 (see Nos. 77, 95 of the List).

Internally, the arrangement was rather that of a "Meeting House" than of a Church. A Gallery ran around the Western, Northern and Eastern sides, to which access was obtained by stairs just inside the doors. This gallery was supported on Columns.

The Western wing of the Gallery was the Organ and Choir Loft, and underneath was the Vestry.

The Pulpit was in the middle of the Southern side, and was reached by a flight of steps. Over it was a sounding board and below it a Reading Desk.

The body of the Chapel, except for an open space in front of the Vestry, was filled with box-pews, so arranged that there was an aisle leading from each door joined by a cross aisle running in front of the Pulpit.

The Chapel does not appear to have contained either an Altar or a Font. The diagrams alluded to in the Introduction indicate that the box-pew immediately in front of the Pulpit was a 'table-pew'. The table herein may have served the purposes of an Altar on which offertories and the vessels necessary for Baptisms and Communion Services could be laid.

The building appears to have been heated by a hot-water apparatus, for the diagrams show that a 'boiler-house' and a 'stove-house' abutted on the outside of the South wall of the Chapel. It is probable that this apparatus was not an original feature of the building, but a later addition.

The Chapel precincts were separated from Toad Lane by a high wall, in which was an imposing Gateway of substantial masonry pillars crowned with stone balls and carrying an iron grille gate.

From the Gate a 'flagged' way led direct to the Western Porch, and was continued right round the building.

In the North-western corner of the precincts there was a small building which served originally as a Sunday School. Later, a larger building for this purpose was erected on additional ground at the South-eastern corner. This building, modernised to suit present day requirements, is now known as "Channing Hall".

A line of Cottages backed on to the Eastern boundary of the Chapel precincts. It is probable that these Cottages were not in existence at the time of the building of the Chapel, for then Toad Lane, or Back Lane as it was sometimes called, was a rural byway leading through the meadows, or Ings, fringing the banks of the Bradford Beck, and providing a short cut for the inhabitants of the townships of Great and Little Horton to the Parish Church.

Likewise, the Southern and Western boundaries of the plot on which the Chapel was built were probably free of other buildings during the early years of its existence. But with the development of Bradford as an industrial town in the late years of the 18th Century and onwards, commercial and industrial buildings began to surround the Chapel, and when the time came for the demolition of the old Place of Worship it was closely beset, and there was very little margin of space about the new and larger Chapel when it was completed in 1869.