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**UNITED REFORMED CHURCH HALL
(former Congregational Sunday School)
WATER LANE
BISHOP'S STORTFORD
HERTFORDSHIRE**

Architecture, History and Significance

Historic Buildings Report, February 2022

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SUMMARY

This report, commissioned by the Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation (see Appendix 1), focuses on the United Reformed (formerly Congregational) Church Hall in Water Lane, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 2JZ. This was originally built as the Sunday School for the nearby Congregational Church; the building was begun in May 1914 and completed in April 1915 to designs by the architectural firm Spalding & Myers. For many years it was known as 'the Institute' and occupied a picturesque setting adjacent to the original course of the River Stort (culverted in the early 1970s and now Old River Lane). Changes undertaken in the 1930s, 1960s and 1990s altered the building's architectural integrity, but not its popularity as a venue for local people. The building has served as a much-used and much-valued community space for over a century. It is now facing demolition as part of East Hertfordshire District Council's Old River Lane redevelopment scheme.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Every effort has been made to seek permission for copyright material used. The author apologises for any errors or omissions and would be grateful if notified of any corrections; these will be incorporated in future versions of this report.

DATE OF RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION

A full site visit was undertaken on 15 November 2021 and research and writing was carried out thereafter, with a visit to Hertfordshire Archives & Local Studies on 30 November 2021. Further external and internal visits to the Hall were made in January and February 2022.

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Contents

Introduction and Background	4
The Historic Buildings surrounding the Hall	5
Note on Terminology	7
History	7
The Congregationalists in Bishop's Stortford	7
The Construction of the Sunday School	9
The Original Setting of the Sunday School	13
Architecture and Design	16
Use of the URC Hall	20
Changes and Improvements to the URC Hall	25
Description of the Building	31
Exterior	31
Interior	41
Changes to the Setting of the URC Hall	53
Summary of Significance	57
Architectural Significance	58
Historical and Communal Significance	61
The Future?	63
Appendix 1: Commissioning letter	65
Appendix 2: URC Hall bookings list, March 1999	66
Appendix 3: User groups, United Reformed Church and Church Hall, 2021	71
Endnotes	72

Introduction and Background

This report focuses on the history, architecture and significance of the United Reformed Church (URC) Hall between Water Lane and Old River Lane, Bishop's Stortford – it should be noted that the scope of this report does not include the condition of the building or its potential for future reuse. The report was initiated at the suggestion of local comedian Paddy Lennox, currently campaigning to save the URC Hall from demolition, in association with planning expert Yvonne Estop-Wood. The work was formally commissioned by the Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation in January 2022 (see Appendix 1). It aims to record the building's history and importance locally, regionally and nationally, irrespective of whether the building is retained in some form or demolished.

The URC Hall is situated in Water Lane, in the north part of Bishop's Stortford town centre, close to North Street, Bridge Street and the former Corn Exchange (Fig. 1). It falls within the Bishop's Stortford Conservation Area, designated in 1968 (amended in 1981, 1997 and 2014). Water Lane is an ancient roadway, in existence by Saxon times, and was one of two lanes which ran parallel with North Street (the other being Basbow Lane, to the west). Its name is believed to derive from its proximity to the original course of the River Stort – the land on the east side of Water Lane formerly ran down to the river and the town meads. In the medieval period, Water Lane was a slum area, but the rise of industry in this part of Bishop's Stortford – due to the presence of the river – brought higher-status and more widespread development.¹ Maltings were particularly common in this area, as with other land near the River Stort. The URC Hall now forms part of a cluster of good-quality historic buildings in Water Lane, dating from between the 16th century and the First World War (see *below*).



Fig. 1: Excerpt from Ordnance Survey (OS) map (revised 1939, published 1947), showing the URC Hall in context. The Hall is coloured red. The Corn Exchange and Market Square are to the south-west. (National Library of Scotland, Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC-BY-NC-SA] licence)

The URC Hall's site is part of a major planning scheme first put forward in 2010 by East Hertfordshire Council – the Old River Lane redevelopment project. This proposes the construction of a mixed-use scheme on the site of existing car parking to the east and north-east of the Hall, with demolition of both the council offices known as Charringtons House (on the corner of Old River Lane and Bridge Street) and the URC Hall. The Hall – acquired by East Herts Council in 2019 (along with the modern houses to the immediate south) – would make way for a reworked car park for Waitrose, while the area on the east is due to be redeveloped as an arts and cultural centre (with shops and restaurants facing onto Old River Lane, housing above and an arts and community building by Bridge Street). That said, formally speaking, the URC Hall lies outside of the Old River Lane development area, as set out in policy BISH8.²

The Historic Buildings surrounding the Hall

As noted above, the URC Hall forms part of a cluster of historic buildings along Water Lane, to the east of North Street (see Fig. 44). Apart from the Hall itself, all of the buildings which pre-date 1915 are included on Historic England's statutory list (the National Heritage List for England).

Especially closely related to the Hall is the United Reformed (former Congregational) Church of 1859-60, on the west side of Water Lane (listed Grade II; see Fig. 5). The Hall was built to serve the pastor and congregation which worshipped in this building and, in function and history, they are indelibly linked. Other historic buildings which form part of the same group are as follows:

- Number 16 Water Lane ('Guild House'), on the immediate west of the URC Hall, a timber-framed property of around the 16th century reworked in brick in the mid-1700s, with a post-war extension at its north-east corner. It is listed Grade II and now occupied by Mullucks estate agents (**Fig. 2**). This building was used in association with the adjacent Sunday School in the inter-war years and appears to derive its name from the Congregational Young People's Guild that was based here (see p. 20).
- Number 14 Water Lane, to the south-west of the URC Hall, which was originally formed of three timber-framed dwellings of the late 16th or early 17th century. The building was refronted in brick and extended to the rear in about 1840 (listed Grade II; **Fig. 3**).
- 'Water House', to the north-west, on the corner of Water Lane and what was formerly Brewery Lane. This is an early 19th-century house built of yellow stock brick (listed Grade II). It was formerly part of the complex of Hawkes Brewery, founded 1780 and once the town's largest employer.
- Numbers 15 and 9-11 Bridge Street, on the south of the Hall, now Coopers homeware store. These are both listed Grade II and are respectively a former malthouse of the mid-19th century (with former owner's house at the north-east) and a building with an early 17th-century core.

- The Star Inn, 7 Bridge Street, on the south-west corner of Water Lane, a public house of the late 16th or early 17th century, refronted in brick in the early 19th century (listed Grade II).



Fig. 2: The Guild House, Water Lane, with the west gable of the URC Hall and part of the Manse's wall on the left and 14 Water Lane on the right. (© Emily Cole)



Fig. 3: Looking north past 12-14 Water Lane and the Guild House (right) towards the Congregational Church (far left) and Water House (in the distance). (© Emily Cole)

The land to the immediate north of the URC Hall formerly contained another historic building, the Manse, and its grounds (see Figs 13-14). This house was opposite the Congregational Church but is believed to have never been used by the pastor or the congregation (the origin of its name is unknown). Although the Manse was said in the 1960s to be one of the earliest structures surviving in Bishop's Stortford – it seems to have dated back at least to the 16th century,

and like the Guild House was refronted in the 18th century – the building was demolished in 1966 to make way for a public car park.³

The area between the Manse and Northgate End had from 1780 formed part of the Hawkes & Co. Brewery, before being taken on by Benskin's Brewery in 1898 and by Ind Coope in 1916 (see Figs 1 and 4). It was used as a distribution depot until 1987 and in 1994 was redeveloped as a Waitrose supermarket, built of a single storey in yellow brick.⁴ At that point, the council car park on the site of the former Manse was given over to the use of Waitrose customers. Some of the trees and part of the 18th-century perimeter walling of the Manse survives, forming a division between the Waitrose car park and the land of the URC Hall. Neither the wall nor the URC Hall are listed, but both are included within the Bishop's Stortford Conservation Area mentioned above.

Note on Terminology

Over the course of its history, the URC Hall has been referred to by different names. As is discussed further below, it was the Congregational Sunday School at the time of its opening in 1915, becoming the Soldiers' Institute during the subsequent years of the First World War. In the period 1919-65, the Hall was generally known as the Water Lane Institute (or the Institute, Water Lane), before becoming increasingly termed the Congregational Church Hall from the mid-1960s.⁵ Finally – following the 1972 union of the Congregational Church in England and Wales with the Presbyterian Church of England – it became the United Reformed Church Hall. Throughout this report, the building has been referred to by the last mentioned (and current) name.

History

The Congregationalists in Bishop's Stortford

The URC Hall was built to serve Bishop's Stortford's Congregational Church, which – like many other Nonconformist churches in Britain – has a history extending back to the 17th century and the years around the Act of Toleration of 1689. The Bishop's Stortford congregation was founded in 1662 in Basbow Lane, near St Michael's Church. Aside from the Quakers, the Congregationalists were the earliest Nonconformist group to appear in Bishop's Stortford.⁶

By 1706 the congregation had adopted a barn in Water Lane as its place of worship; this was acquired in 1712 and replaced by a new meeting house five years later.⁷ In 1767 this in turn was demolished and replaced by a brick building, on the same site, but with additional land on an adjacent plot donated by the Pastor, Rev. John Angus (1724-1801). In 1805 a burial ground was added on the site of Angus's former residence, but this comparatively small graveyard had become too small by 1866 and was closed.

In 1858 the decision was taken to replace the Water Lane meeting house with a new building. This reflected both the poor repair of the existing chapel and the growing size and profile of the Bishop's Stortford Congregational Church. Costing a total of £2,500, the new church was begun in 1859 and opened in April 1860 (**Fig. 4**). It was designed to allow seating for 850 adults and had two galleries, the upper one providing space for 300 children. The building was designed by the firm Poulton & Woodman of Reading in a Romanesque style with Italianate details, built of yellow stock brick with stone dressings. It survives largely as built (**Fig. 5**), though was remodelled internally in the late 1920s to '30s, the 1980s and 2000-1. The church was listed Grade II in 1983.



Fig. 4: Detail of 1:2,500 OS map of Essex, 1897. The Congregational Church is the curved building on the corner of Water Lane and Brewery Lane, opposite the Manse. The site of the future Sunday School is at the bottom right, occupied by a malthouse. (National Library of Scotland, Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC-BY-NC-SA] licence)



Fig. 5: The Congregational (now United Reformed) Church, Bishop's Stortford, in 2021, seen from Water Lane, with Water House on the right. The church opened in 1860. (© Emily Cole)

The Construction of the Sunday School

As early as the 1840s, the need for a Congregational Sunday School in Bishop's Stortford had been felt. However, rather than building dedicated premises, it was decided to form an association with the British & Foreign School Society, founded in the early 19th century. A British School building was opened at Northgate End in 1840 (renamed Northgate School in 1902), with the majority of the construction costs funded by the Congregationalists.⁸

Nevertheless, the distance from the church itself soon proved inconvenient, the building was found to be 'not adapted to the modern methods of Sunday School work' and it became too small for the growing Congregational Sunday School.⁹

In 1896, major local landowner and Lord of the Manor Sir Walter Gilbey (1831-1914) gifted the Congregational Church the plot of land to the immediate south of their building – between the church and Dodd's Lane (see Fig. 4; Dodd's Lane, now Barrett Lane, is just visible at the bottom left). This was intended for a new Sunday School, but the site was found to be too small and was instead used as a garden and forecourt to the church.

In 1907, another opportunity presented itself – the site across Water Lane, to the south of the Manse, came onto the market. This was purchased by the Congregational Church for £900, as the result of efforts of church members including Alfred Slapps Barrett (1850-1933). As was stated on his death, Barrett 'chose the site for the Water-Lane Institute' and was a key player in raising the money for its purchase.¹⁰ At that time, the site contained a maltings with malthouse and kiln, connected to the rear of the Guild House (**Fig. 6**, and see Fig. 4). The site ran between Water Lane and the River Stort, this section of the river then being known as the millstream – named after the town mill, located to the south-east on Bridge Street until its demolition in 1895.¹¹



Fig. 6: Photo of 1903, looking south along the course of the River Stort, culverted in the early 1970s (now Old River Lane). The site of the future URC Hall is in the right foreground. (© The Francis Frith Collection – www.francisfrith.com, ref. 49765)

The Congregationalists immediately commissioned an architect to consider the site, John Slater, a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). At first, conversion of the existing buildings was the preferred option, but this was found to be unfeasible and in 1908 Slater was asked to prepare a plan and specification for an entirely new Sunday School. A shortage of funds proved an obstacle, however, and it was not until November 1912 – the 250th anniversary of the town's Congregational Church – that the Pastor, Rev. John Wood, inaugurated a building fund. In November 1913, a Building Committee for the Sunday School was established, with the new Congregational Pastor, Rev. T. Hywel Hughes, as Chairman.¹²

Work moved on apace – both in planning the new building and in raising funds for its construction. Consideration was given again to converting the malthouse for use, but in November 1913 it was agreed that the existing buildings should be demolished and the site cleared. This work was undertaken in January 1914, with materials including timber and bricks offered for sale (though the last portion of the old malting was only removed in early 1915). At the end of 1913, the architects for the new Sunday School – Spalding & Myers (*see below*) – were selected and final plans for the building were approved in April 1914. That same month, the local building firm of Joseph Day & Son was appointed for the job, along with a clerk of works. Plans for the site were aided by the donation of an additional strip of land on the south (by W. J. Gee of Windhill) in January 1914.

Work on the new building began in May 1914, but the foundation stones were only formally laid in a ceremony held on 15 July 1914 (**Figs 7 and 8**).¹³ The stones, seven in number, commemorated and were laid respectively by:

- Helen Mary, née Barnard (d. 1955), 'Mrs Samuel Ryder of St Albans', a former member of the Congregational Church and Sunday School;
- Miss Sarah Death (1827-1920), in memory of her uncle Woodham Death (d. 1889), formerly Deacon of the church;
- Rev. John Wood (1843-1915), Congregational Pastor from 1884 to 1910 and initiator of the Sunday School building scheme;
- Arthur Boardman (1838-1916), Deacon and Treasurer of the church and a local printer, bookseller and stationer;
- Alfred Slapps Barrett (1850-1933), Treasurer of the Sunday School;
- Rev. Thomas Hywel Hughes (1875-1945) in memory of Edward Beldam Johns (d. 1866), local philanthropist and long-standing church member;
- and John Boyten (d. 1934), scholar, teacher, Secretary and Superintendent of the Sunday School for a period of over 50 years.¹⁴

All but one of these foundation stones survive on the exterior of the building today – the exception being that commemorating Edward Beldam Johns (presumably removed as part of the late 1960s works) (**Fig. 9**). The stone laid by Mrs Ryder was the first to be unveiled and also bears the name of the Hall's architects, Spalding & Myers, and the builders, J. Day & Son.



Fig. 7: The ceremony celebrating the laying of the foundation stones at the new Sunday School in Bishop's Stortford, 15 July 1914 (looking north). (Courtesy of Tony and Margaret Trigg)



Fig. 8: Another image of the ceremony celebrating the laying of the foundation stones. The wall shown appears to be a remnant of the maltings on the site. (Courtesy of Tony and Margaret Trigg)



Fig. 9: The URC Hall's six surviving foundation stones, all on the north side of the building. (Courtesy of David Clough)

Various details were worked out over the course of 1914 and into 1915, as shown by the minutes of the Building Committee. For instance, it was agreed that the main entrance doorways (on the west) would be of wood rather than stone – due to the lower cost – and that balconies and iron balustrades would be provided at the rear of the building, on the river side.¹⁵ A pair of iron entrance gates was added on Water Lane, an ‘unclimbable iron fence’ was built by the Stort and a gas heating system was installed with radiators (manufactured by Messrs Haden & Sons).

By February 1915, the new building was nearly complete, although the ‘present uncertainty about the school being commandeered for the soldiers’ led the Congregationalists to leave the walls uncoloured and the woodwork with only a single coat of stain.¹⁶ It was said that some ‘had found that soldiers were not particularly careful with the walls, furniture and so on’.¹⁷ Furnishings, including chairs and tables for the schoolrooms and a piano for the platform, were purchased in February and March 1915.

The new Sunday School was finally opened, at a total cost of just over £3,000, on 15 April 1915 – by which time Britain was immersed in the First World War. The *Herts & Essex Observer* published an article celebrating the occasion and the completion of what it termed ‘the new Assembly Hall and Sunday Schools’.¹⁸ As is discussed further below, the new building boasted a double-height central hall along with four large and 12 small classrooms on two floors. There were plans for possible extension to the west at a future date, to be enabled through the demolition of the Guild House (acquired by the Congregational Church for this purpose); the newspaper article on the opening noted that the result would be ‘one of the finest Sunday Schools in the Kingdom’.¹⁹

The Original Setting of the Sunday School

It is difficult today to appreciate the setting of the URC Hall in the early 20th century; the changes to this part of Bishop’s Stortford, largely undertaken in the late 1960s and early 1970s, have been dramatic (see pp. 53-57). Until 50 years ago, the original course of the River Stort ran parallel to and east of Water Lane – roughly on the line of the current Old River Lane (**Fig. 10**, and see Fig. 4). The river then continued northwards, past Hawkes Brewery and the old cattle market at Northgate End, then ran to the east of Rye Street. One story tells of a couple of local women who lived in Rye Street and often travelled to the Congregational Church by boat.²⁰

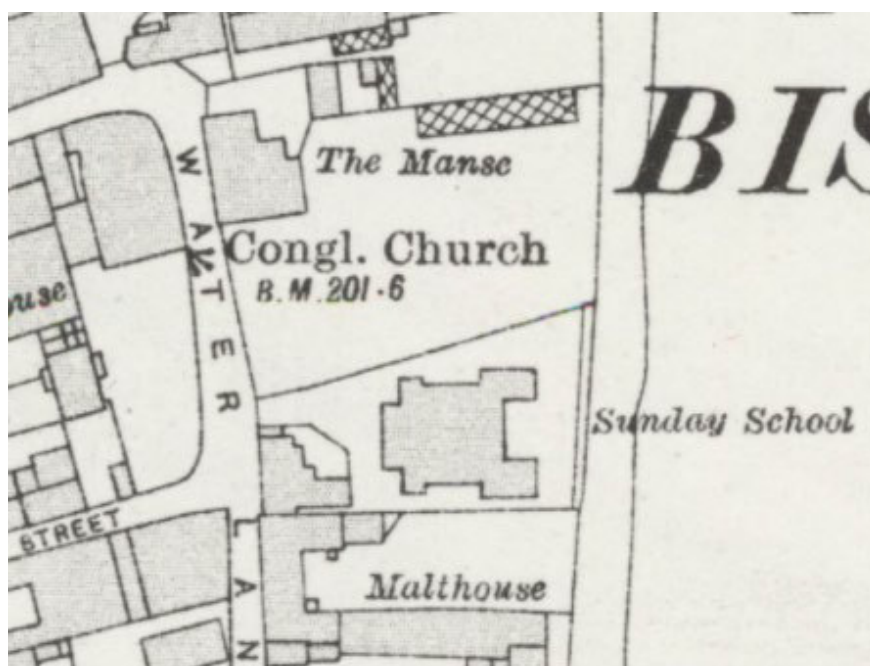


Fig. 10: Detail of 1:2,500 OS map of 1921 showing the Sunday School completed in 1915. The wide strip to the building's east represents the original course of the River Stort. (National Library of Scotland, Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC-BY-NC-SA] licence)

Between the river and the grounds of Waytemore Castle – to the east of the URC Hall site – were water meadows, marshland or ‘meads’, known for being extremely picturesque (**Fig. 11**, and see Figs 1 and 71). There was no road dividing this landscape at that period – the present Link Road (or Linkway) was built only in the late 1960s. At the time of the Hall’s opening in 1915, it was noted that the balconies on the building’s east gave ‘charming views over the river, the Town Meads and the ruins of Waytemore Castle, with All Saints’ Church, Hockerill, in the distance’.²¹ A painting believed to have been produced to mark the opening of the Hall gives an idea of the site at that time (**Fig. 12**).



Fig. 11: Photo of 1899 looking south-west across the town meads towards what is now Old River Lane. The site of the future URC Hall is on the right – occupied by the prominent maltings set between groups of trees. (© The Francis Frith Collection – www.francisfrith.com, ref. 44282)



Fig. 12: View across the meads looking south-west towards the Congregational Sunday School, with St Michael’s Church beyond. This work is believed to have been painted to mark the opening of the new building in 1915. (Courtesy of Roger Pryer; source: www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide6/the-manse/, acc. 19 Nov. '21)

To the north of the URC Hall was the Manse, a historic building with its own grounds. The origin of its name is unclear; the manse of the Congregational Church was elsewhere in the town, in Warwick Road, by at least the early 20th century. The Manse was surrounded by a high brick wall, part of which survives, forming the boundary between the URC Hall and the Waitrose car park. The house itself fronted Water Lane, while to the east extended gardens running down to the River Stort, with greenhouses on the north, adjacent to the Hawkes Brewery (**Figs 13 and 14**, and see Figs 4 and 10).²² To the south of the URC Hall was an area of open land which formed a garden to 14 Water Lane (see Fig. 62), while south of that was a complex of malshouses, dating largely from the 19th century (the surviving portion forms the present Coopers store).



Fig. 13: View north along Water Lane looking towards the Manse and the brick walling enclosing its grounds. In the foreground are 14-16 Water Lane (on the right) and a former malthouse (on the left), demolished in the late 1800s. (Courtesy of Paul Ailey; source: www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide6/the-manse/, acc. 19 Nov. '21)



Fig. 14: A mid-20th-century photograph of the Manse in Water Lane, with Water House on its left. The Manse was demolished in 1966. (Source: Historic England Archive, AA50/06866)

Architecture and Design

The URC Hall was designed by the architectural practice Spalding & Myers, which by 1914 had offices in London (at 36-7 King Street, Cheapside; later at 12 New Court, Lincoln's Inn) and Cambridge (7 Downing Street; later St Andrew's Street). The lead architects of this firm were Reginald Henry Spalding (1877-1945) and Norman 'Toller' Myers (1881-1956). Spalding had entered private practice in 1900 with Spalding & Spalding, was joined by Myers by 1909 and went into sole partnership with Myers in 1910, at which point the firm was renamed once again. The pair – who both became Fellows of the RIBA – continued to work together as architects and surveyors until Spalding's death in 1945, at which point Myers was joined in practice by the younger architect W. B. Attenbrow and the firm became Spalding, Myers & Attenbrow.

Spalding & Myers were known in particular for their housing and Nonconformist church buildings. Designs by the firm included: Pinner Baptist Church, London (1909-10); Water's Almshouses, Cambridge (1913); Shirley Baptist Church, Southampton (1914-15); the Gardiner Memorial Hall, Burwell, Cambridgeshire (1915; see Fig. 68); houses in Stanley Road, Cambridge (1919); the Congregational Church in Cherry Hinton, Cambridge (1926-8; **Fig. 15**); Sandy Baptist Sunday Schools, Bedfordshire (opened 1929); Grantham Baptist Church, Lincolnshire (1929-30); houses in Barrow Road, Cambridge (1930-5); Highbury Congregational Church, Cheltenham (opened 1932); St Columba's



Fig. 15: The Congregational Church in Cherry Hinton, Cambridge, now the Greek Orthodox Church of St Athanasios, designed by Spalding & Myers and built 1926-8. (© David Hilton)

Presbyterian Church, Coventry (opened 1932); and Greenleaf Road Baptist Church, Walthamstow, London (1949-50).

In 1931, with regard to the Highbury Congregational Church, it was noted that Spalding & Myers was 'a firm that has for some years past specialised in the erection of free churches in many parts of the country', many of them designed in the Romanesque style.²³ After the death of Myers in 1956, Attenbrow continued to work on buildings of this type – for instance, designing Rotherhithe Free Church in London (opened 1960).

Comparatively plain exteriors with a lack of ornament were typical of the firm's work. In 1931, it was said that the proposed Presbyterian church in Coventry would be 'of brick with a tiled roof, designed in a plain and simple style, reliance being placed on general proportions and material, rather than on ornament, to give a dignified effect'.²⁴ This followed architectural guidance of the time; for instance, in an article on Sunday schools published in 1914, a writer recommended that buildings should be simple, dignified and durable, with the 'notable absence of flimsy ornament'.²⁵

For the Sunday School at Bishop's Stortford, Spalding & Myers produced a plain building with Neo-Georgian components (see *below*). In plan it was

designed as a large rectangular block with short 'arms' projecting on the east (see Fig. 10).²⁶ At the centre was placed a spacious hall, lit by dormer windows from the roof and a large arch-headed window on the east; a gallery around the main hall's upper level was reached by two staircases. Around the hall, on the north and south sides, were 12 small classrooms (six on each floor level). There was also a single-storey kitchen/pantry/boiler house block on the west, four large classrooms (two on each floor) in the projecting 'arms' or pavilions and rather meagre toilet accommodation on the east.²⁷

It is clear that Spalding & Myers were aware of developments in Sunday school architecture at the time, and the Bishop's Stortford building must have been considered an ideal facility for its date. In having a central hall as well as separate classrooms, the plan of the URC Hall met, for instance, the recommendations set out by Bishop John H. Vincent: 'Provide for togetherness and separateness; have a room in which the whole school can be brought together in a moment for simultaneous exercises, and with a minimum of movement be divided into classes for uninterrupted classwork'.²⁸

From the widely popular 'Akron plan' for Sunday schools – first developed at the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Akron, Ohio, USA (1866-7), and used at buildings including the Sunday School at the Union Chapel, Islington, London (1876-7) – there was an increasing move in the early 20th century towards plans built to serve the 'graded method' of teaching. This meant holding graded lessons to suit particular age groups rather than teaching children in larger classes; the five main Sunday school departments were primary (ages 6-8), junior (ages 8-12), intermediate (ages 12-15) and senior (age 15+).²⁹

Architectural guidance was issued regarding all of these areas of a Sunday school, while in England the National Sunday School Union launched a loan system to encourage new architecture and in 1926 published a handbook written by two architects, *Modern Sunday School Buildings*.³⁰ All classrooms were to be well ventilated and bright, and it was considered particularly important that rooms for younger children were cheerful, airy and warm, were on the ground floor (with no steps or changes of level) and were ideally served by a cloakroom and near to toilets. Classrooms had to open independently from a hall or from the exterior – rather than from another classroom. More permanent partitions were seen as ideal – rather than the curtains and light-weight screens used in many Akron-planned Sunday schools. Emphasis was also given to the importance of different entrances (separating age groups and sexes) and the inclusion of a large hall. The latter was to be capable of use for sports and games as well as musical, entertainment and social events, ideally with a high ceiling and gallery and a stage for amateur dramatics and speeches.

South-east was seen as the ideal aspect for classrooms, especially for the beginner and primary departments, while the first floor or upper storeys were seen as most suitable for seniors and possibly intermediates. Larger classrooms were well-suited to younger students and the need for class collaboration, but separate smaller rooms were seen as preferable for older

pupils. These could also be used as a library for scholars or teachers, a teachers' vestry and/or a room for the superintendent.

Published guidance included plans, some of which resemble the Bishop's Stortford Sunday School in their overall arrangement (**Fig. 16**). Clearly, Spalding & Myers made efforts to ensure their new building was up-to-date in its approach and its details. For instance, each classroom at the Bishop's Stortford Sunday School had its own access from the main hall or gallery (while the two large ground-floor classrooms could also be accessed from outside), each was well lit and well ventilated, and the main hall answered the need for a larger area for general assembly, including addresses by the Sunday School superintendent. The larger classrooms were indeed placed on the east, while two separate entrances on the building's west side provided access for younger/older students or girls/boys as well as ensuring adequate fire exits for those using the central hall. The plan provided flexibility and answered the differing needs of the Sunday school departments.

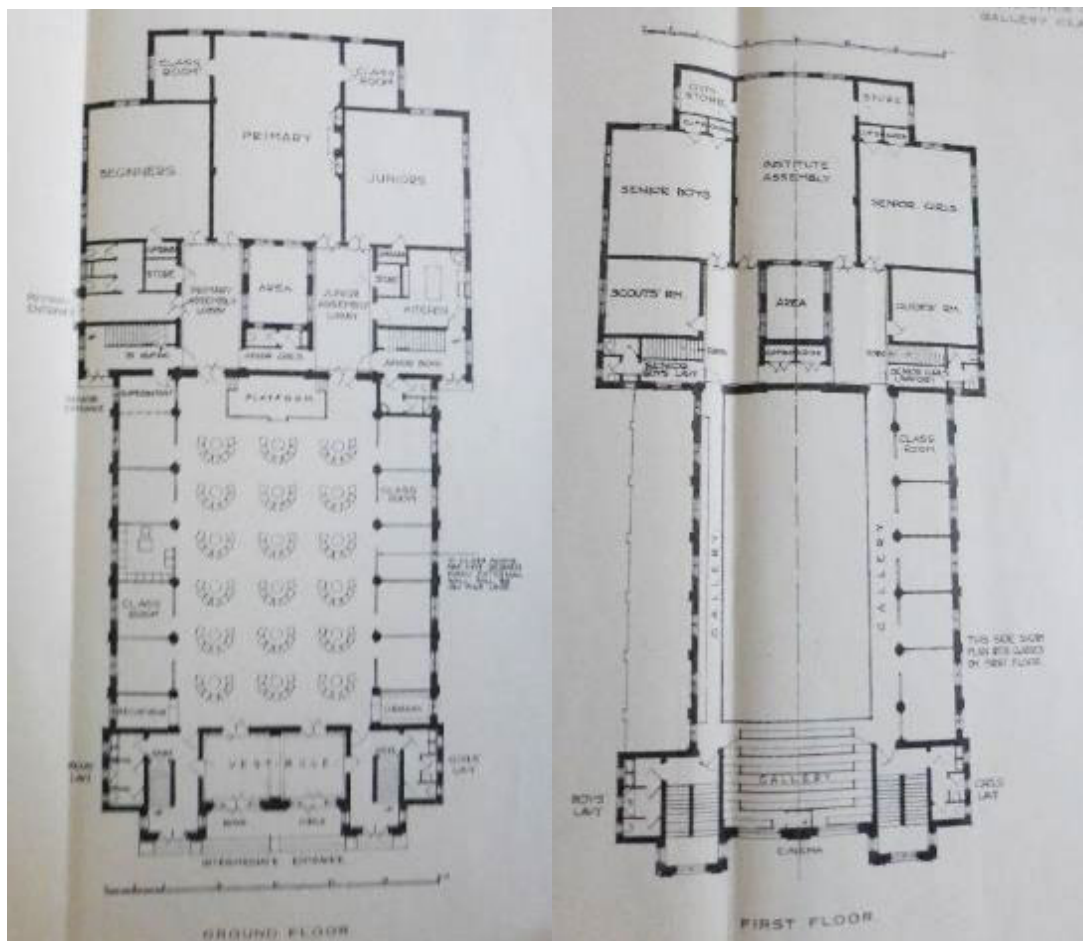


Fig. 16: Ground- and first-floor plans of a Sunday School planned for 750 children, published in H. F. Murrell and R. M. Pigott, *Modern Sunday School Buildings* (London, 1926). The arrangement has similarities with the original plan of the URC Hall.

Use of the URC Hall

As had been intended at the time of the opening of the Congregational Sunday School, the building was soon offered up for use as a social and cultural centre for troops – the major contribution the Bishop’s Stortford Congregational Church made to the war effort. By 1916 the building was known as the ‘Soldiers’ Institute’ (or ‘the Institute’ for short).³¹ Little is known about the exact use the soldiers made of the structure during the war years, but it certainly brought in revenue – in 1918, for instance, the income raised by the Soldiers’ Institute was £132 (through events such as concerts, a ‘rummage sale’ and payments for games and baths), though expenditure on the venue reached the same figure (spent on fuel, refreshments, purchase of a piano, etc.).³² The building ceased to be used by soldiers after 1918, but the name ‘the Institute’ stuck, being universally used in reference to the URC Hall until the 1960s.

It would be impossible to detail all the events staged at the URC Hall during the 20th century, or the many uses it was put to. Of course, the Sunday School (renamed the Junior Family Church in about 1938) was the main focus (**Figs 17 and 18**). Like most other Sunday schools of the time, this comprised beginner, junior, intermediate and senior departments, and by 1926 had 197 scholars on the register, with 29 teachers, officers and helpers.³³ By the following decade the number had declined but was still high, with just over 100 children on the register, plus a teaching staff of 25.³⁴ During the Second World War, the number increased as the Sunday School took on numerous evacuated children, sent to Bishop’s Stortford from further afield.³⁵

The Sunday School was linked with the Congregational Young People’s Guild (known as the Young Worshippers League in the 1920s), which by the 1930s numbered 25-30 children, with Sunday afternoon sessions as well as weekday evening activities including games, singing, sewing and gymnastics.³⁶ From 1933 until the end of the Second World War, the Guild was based in the adjacent property on the west of the URC Hall, the Guild House (see Fig. 2).³⁷ By this point, the plan to demolish the Guild House and expand the Sunday School had clearly been abandoned.



Fig. 17: Christmas party at the Bishop's Stortford Sunday School, about 1949. The photo seems to have been taken in the large classroom at the north-east of the ground floor. (Courtesy of Tony and Margaret Trigg)



Fig. 18: Children of the Bishop's Stortford Sunday School gathered in the main hall for a Christmas party, 1961. Note the original internal doors and windows of the small classrooms. (Courtesy of Tony and Margaret Trigg)

The URC Hall was also utilised by the Congregational Church more broadly; for instance, for evening services and meetings of the Church Literary & Social Union. In particular, it was used as the base for the Water Lane Dramatic Society, founded by the Bishop's Stortford Congregational Church in June 1933.³⁸ By 1936, the Society was described as being 'full of vigour', its public performances raising much needed income for Congregational Church funds and charitable institutions (**Fig. 19**).³⁹ It was reformed in 1949, following the Second World War.⁴⁰ As is noted below, the existence of this Dramatic Society led to various changes to the Hall. Over time, the membership of the group became more diluted – at first it was solely made up of members of the Congregational Church – and in the late 1980s it was renamed the Water Lane Theatre Group. The group ceased to use the URC Hall in about 1996, was renamed again in 2007 (becoming the Water Lane Theatre Company) and is now based at the South Mill Arts Centre.

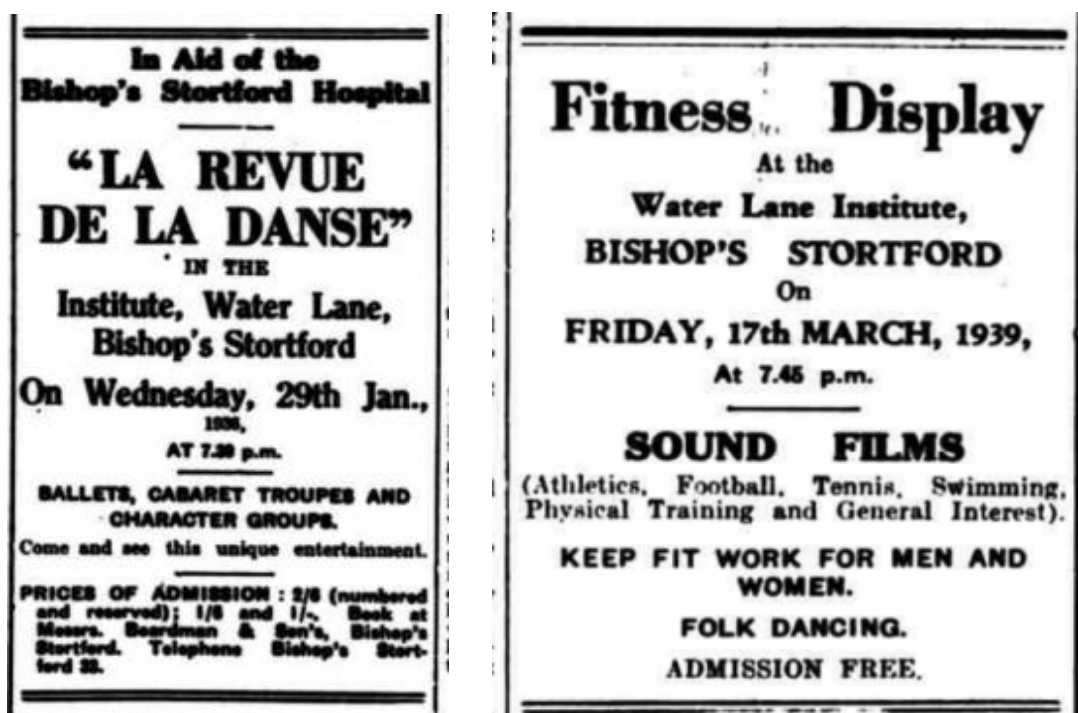


Fig. 19: The cast of a Water Lane Dramatic Society production, *Murder at the Vicarage*, on the stage in the URC Hall in 1955. (Courtesy of Tony and Margaret Trigg)

Use of the URC Hall was by no means confined to Congregational groups and events. The venue was responsible for raising much-valued income for the church, and for most of the 20th century had its own trustees, secretary and caretaker.⁴¹ Historic newspapers detail hundreds if not thousands of events held at the Hall including concerts, plays, public meetings, wedding receptions, talks, blood donation sessions, fitness demonstrations, jumble sales, Christmas fairs, carol services, sales, exhibitions, dances, film showings, table tennis tournaments, debates, flower shows, dog shows, prize-givings and social evenings (**Figs 20 and 21**) – though the church's reluctance to allow sale of alcohol on the premises would have been off-putting for some. One local recalls watching the Queen's coronation on a large television specially set up in the

Hall for the occasion (in 1952), while another remembers a youth club held there regularly in the 1960s.⁴²

The Hall also served as a base for the town's infant welfare centre and as a venue used frequently by local schools, MPs, councillors, societies and groups. These included the League of Nations' Union, local Scouts, Guide's and Brownies troops, the British Legion, the Bishop's Stortford Cricket Club, the Bishop's Stortford Concert Club, the Women's Friendly Society, the Bishop's Stortford Camera Club and the Bishop's Stortford & District Beekeepers' Association.⁴³ From 1921, 'the Institute' was also the base of Waterside preparatory school, which used two classrooms in the building before moving to larger local premises in 1924.



Figs 20 and 21: Excerpts from the *Herts & Essex Observer*, 25 January 1936, p. 4 (on the left), and 11 March 1939, p. 4 (on the right), advertising events held at the 'Water Lane Institute'. (Courtesy of Mirrorpix)

Accounts of the various events held in the URC Hall make clear that the size of the building was one of its great advantages. Audiences regularly numbered up to 200 people. For instance, 'upwards of 180 people gathered in the Water Lane Institute for tea' to welcome a new Congregational pastor in 1933, 150 members of the Women's Friendly Society attended a New Year's Eve party at the Hall in 1936 and in 1939 the East Herts Girl Guides held a meeting in the Hall attended by over 300 people.⁴⁴ The main hall in the building was, with its gallery, designed to seat 450 children, while the classrooms held a further 304 scholars (40 each in the four large classrooms; 12 each in the 12 smaller classrooms).⁴⁵

This level of capacity made the venue a rarity in Bishop's Stortford. There were many other church and school halls in the town in the 20th century, but very few could hold numbers of this type. Most significant was the Public Hall or 'Great Hall' to the rear of the working men's club in South Street (roughly on the site of the present no. 16). This large timber structure apparently began life at the Royal Agricultural Society international exhibition in Kilburn, London, held in 1879; it was moved to Bishop's Stortford later that year (**Fig. 22**).⁴⁶ The hall could seat the vast number of 800 people and was used for most of Bishop's Stortford's major events until it was demolished, along with the club, around late 1937.⁴⁷ There was also the drill hall off the Market Square (built 1906) and Long's (later Simmons) Ballroom, just to the west of the Congregational Church; built in 1920, this had a capacity of 500 and was very popular locally until its demolition in the 1980s.



Fig. 22: Detail of 1920 aerial photograph, with South Street running south-north on the right. The Great Hall is at the centre left of the image, behind the working men's club. It was erected here in 1879 and demolished in 1937. (© Historic England, ref. EPW001740)

However, the loss of the Great Hall in 1937 was sorely felt and undoubtedly use of the URC Hall – with Long's – increased as a result. Campaigns for the erection of a new public hall for Bishop's Stortford were initiated in 1950 but were slow to get off the ground – the ultimate result of these efforts, the Rhodes Memorial Hall at what is now South Mill Arts Centre (the extended birthplace of politician Cecil Rhodes), was opened only in 1963.⁴⁸ In the intervening years, the URC Hall took on even greater significance as a focus for Bishop's Stortford's social and public life.

Changes and Improvements to the URC Hall

Naturally, given its high level of use, the URC Hall was regularly repaired and updated over the course of the 20th century. Already, by 1928, the architect R. C. Foster (of the Essex-based firm Foster & Tooley) was reporting the need for urgent repairs and painting.⁴⁹ In the following year – by which time a redecoration scheme was underway at the adjacent Congregational Church – the Congregational Ladies' Working Party proposed the urgent need for updated cloakroom/toilet accommodation, and began to raise money for an 'Institute Cloakroom Building Fund'.⁵⁰ Events such as a 'June Fayre' were staged by the Ladies' Working Party in 1930 (**Fig. 23**) and by 1931 the fund totalled around £110.



Fig. 23: Excerpt from *Herts & Essex Observer*, 21 June 1930, p. 4. The event was held to raise money for cloakroom/toilet improvements at the URC Hall ('the Institute'). (Courtesy of Mirrorpix)

In the financial year 1931/2 the fairly significant sum of £80 was spent on repairs at the URC Hall, the architects being Tooley & Foster and the builders Messrs E. Markwell.⁵¹ These works involved the alteration and expansion of the original toilets on the east sides of the 'pavilion' classrooms, near the river. It is known that, by the early 1940s, there was an open-topped urinal and toilet cubicle by the north-east classroom, and this was presumably at least partly a reworking of the 1930s.⁵² The men's toilet provision was demolished in the remodelling of 1967-8 (see **Fig. 40**). The cloakroom accommodation as extended at the south-east for girls/women seems to have been more substantial, judging by the 1938 Ordnance Survey map (**Fig. 24**). From having two equally sized pavilions on the east as originally constructed, by this point the Hall had a larger block at its south-east. These toilets were accessed from the outside only.⁵³

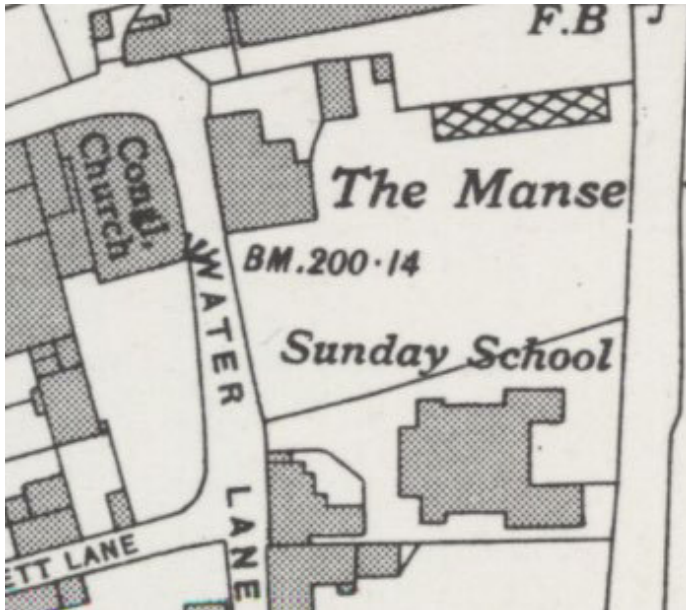


Fig. 24: Detail of the 1:2,500 OS map of Essex, revised 1939 and published 1947. (National Library of Scotland, Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC-BY-NC-SA] licence)

The south-east pavilion, as altered in the 1930s, appears to survive largely intact today. The fire escape staircase, with its metal balustrade, looks to date from this decade, and there are still toilet cubicles in this area (**Fig. 25**, and see Fig. 45). The brickwork of the single-storey part of the pavilion – in plain stretcher bond like that used in the 1960s work – also appears to date from the 1930s, as does the three-light window on the extension's east face.⁵⁴ It must have been at this time that both the original balconies were taken down.⁵⁵



Fig. 25: View of the south-east pavilion of the URC Hall, with the expanded toilet accommodation and fire escape seemingly created in works of 1931/2. (© Emily Cole)

Clearly further changes were made to the URC Hall in the years immediately following. In late 1933, a redecoration of 'the Institute' was proposed, including a new larger 'platform' (stage) and redecoration and electric light installation in the main hall, four large classrooms, staircases, lobbies, kitchen and the platform itself, 'for entertainment purposes'.⁵⁶ The ceiling in the hall was also whitened, except for the roof beams.⁵⁷ One of the probable drivers for these works – or at least the stage element of them – was the creation in June 1933 of the Water Lane Dramatic Society, a theatre company founded by the Congregationalists which used the URC Hall as its base.⁵⁸

In the 1934 expenses account, money spent on the 'Institute Renovation' totalled the comparatively large figure of £94 12s 2d, while a further amount of just over £32 was spent on the 'Institute Platform'.⁵⁹ It may have been at this time that the stage remembered by one church member (born in 1934) was installed. By 1940 at the latest, the central hall had a fold-down 'platform', operated by a wheel placed on the exterior of the building's east wall.⁶⁰ This stage could be lowered and raised as required, and when not in use stood flat against the hall's east wall. Movable beams holding the stage curtains were attached to the gallery on each side, scenery could be placed against the wall at the stage's rear (see Fig. 19) and the neighbouring large classrooms were used as dressing rooms.

Evidence implies that this arrangement was refined or altered a few years after the Second World War. In November 1950, the *Herts & Essex Observer* wrote about the forthcoming performance of the comedy *The Lady of Edinburg* by the Water Lane Dramatic Society – the company's first full-scale production since its reformation in 1949. A journalist stated that 'Hugh Joscelyne, who is stage manager, tells me that the Institute's stage has been improved considerably, and a new proscenium arch has been built at a cost of about £17'.⁶¹ The form of the stage after these changes is not clear.

The most significant alteration to the stage is known to have taken place in 1960/61. According to one of the team responsible for this work, a rear wall for a new stage was built to the east of the east façade and then the lower part of the original east wall was demolished.⁶² This work involved the removal (or blocking up) of the base of the existing arch-headed window, and produced an entirely new, permanent stage, with a reasonably deep backstage area (**Fig. 26**, and see Fig. 35). Double doors were built at the rear of the backstage, accessible from the car park (see Fig. 45), but these were found to cause a draught in the main hall and were filled in around the early 2000s. The outer wall is now fully rendered.



Fig. 26: View showing the stage created in 1960/61. (© Emily Cole)

This extension radically altered the architectural effect of the URC Hall from the east, and infilled the originally open area between the two corner ‘pavilions’. The first OS map to show the altered footprint of the building dates from 1968 (**Fig. 27**). At the sides of the stage rear, the formerly exposed brick of the inner walls of the pavilions was simply left unpainted. Doorways were inserted providing direct access from the rear of the stage to the large classrooms contained within the pavilions on each side (**Fig. 28**, and see Fig. 45). These continued, as in previous years, to be used as dressing rooms during events.⁶³



Fig. 27: Detail of 1:1,250 OS map of 1968. By this point, the URC Hall had been extended to the east, but the changes of 1967-8 are not indicated. Also by this date, the Manse (to the north) had been demolished to make way for a car park. (© and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2022). Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024.)



Fig. 28: The north side of the backstage area, showing one of the doorways created in the works of 1960/61. The brick wall was formerly external. (© Emily Cole)

After this, the next major phase of works undertaken at the URC Hall was that initiated in 1967. This was coeval with changes to the Hall's setting (see pp. 53-57), and was partly the result of a relationship between the Congregational Church and St Michael's, the parish church of Bishop's Stortford. In March 1967, the vicar of St Michael's announced that the church was in negotiations with the Congregationalists, with the aim of identifying how the two churches could share the URC Hall.⁶⁴ St Michael's was short of space of adequate size, despite pushing ahead with plans to convert the infants' school in Apton Road to a parish centre. The vicar noted that relations between the two churches were 'extremely good' and 'he hoped that they would be able to return some of the kindness shown by the Congregationalists by giving them financial assistance, to the plan to extend and improve the facilities at Water Lane Hall'.⁶⁵ Apparently the local Catholic church was also involved; a plaque unveiled in the URC Hall's extension in 1968 commemorates the contribution made by St Michael's, the Building Industry Youth Trust 'and many others'.⁶⁶

Plans for an extension of the Hall were prepared in 1967 by Mr J. C. Wetherall from the architectural department of G. E. Sworder & Sons auctioneers, Bishop's Stortford.⁶⁷ The budget allocated to the work – which involved the creation of a new first-floor 'assembly room' of 600 sq. ft – was £5,000, though the ultimate cost was £6,500.⁶⁸ Work was underway by 5 January 1968; a newspaper article of that date told of the discovery during building works of an article about the Hall's opening, enclosed in a stone jar behind one of the foundation stones (the one commemorating John Boyten; see Fig. 9).⁶⁹ This phase of work also involved the remodelling of the north-east pavilion, the creation of a new external staircase, new toilets on the north of the ground floor and the insertion of a toilet and lobby on the first floor, within one of the original small classrooms (**Fig. 29**).

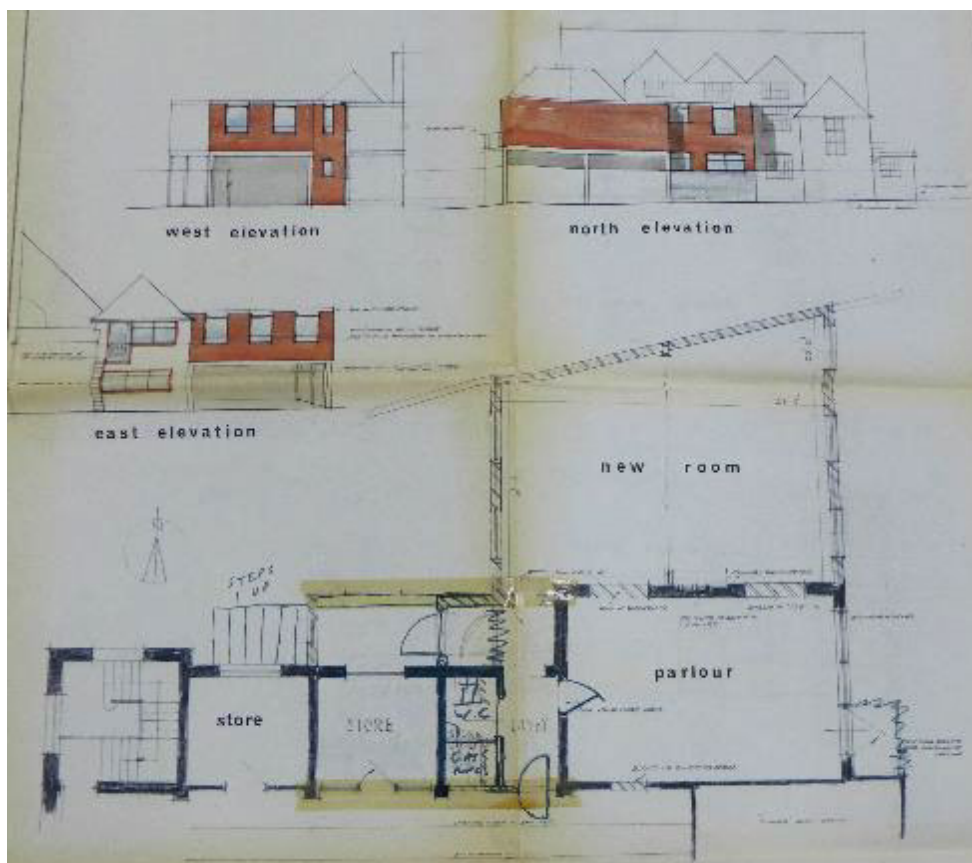


Fig. 29: Plan of 1967 showing the proposed first-floor north extension to the URC Hall, in elevation and plan. (Hertfordshire Archives & Local Studies, Hertfordshire County Council, NR12/7/8)

In his report, Wetherall referenced the Congregationalists' desire for 'complete modernization of the existing kitchens'.⁷⁰ This was initially intended to form part of the phase of works involving the 'new room', but money was too tight. Wetherall recommended the replacement of the boiler with a new (smaller) model and the repositioning of the wall between the kitchen and the boiler house (adding around 8 ft to the length of the kitchen). On his plan, he also noted – on the hall side of the new toilets – 'existing partitions remodelled & faced on hall side with vertical pine board'.

All of this shows that the work of 1967-68 – seemingly extended into the years 1968-70 – included changes to the URC Hall's kitchen, boiler house and hall. The outer (west) face of the single-storey kitchen block shows signs of having been rebuilt as part of these works. The present ground-floor panelling in the hall also dates from this time (replacing the half-height panelling visible in Fig. 18), as does the projecting service hatch to the kitchen (see Fig. 54). It must have been at this point that the original glazed doors and internal windows to the classrooms (see Fig. 18) were replaced or covered over, for the existing ground-floor panelling goes right up to the doorways.

Of the significant changes undertaken to the building within the 20th century, the most recent has been the reworking of the gallery in the central hall. As

built, this was stepped; an article of 1915 refers to the hall's gallery on three sides being arranged 'on two levels for the greater convenience of the audience'.⁷¹ Documents of 1914 refer to the gallery rail being around 32 inches (81 cm) in height; there are also references to gallery balusters (which were stained and varnished to match the colour of the doors to the upper classrooms).⁷² The gallery was supported on cantilevers in order to avoid the need for pillars in the lower part of the hall and had tiered seating on two levels, as in many church galleries (though chairs were movable rather than fixed). This arrangement is recalled by various local people – one church member has told how, in about 1944, his young friend got his knees tightly wedged in between the narrowly spaced gallery balusters while watching American servicemen perform a pantomime on the stage; it took a while for him to free himself.⁷³

The reworking of the original arrangement was undertaken in 1994.⁷⁴ This involved the levelling of the gallery floor by infilling the outer step down, boxing in the existing gallery balusters and the creation of a new gallery 'rail' or edge (solid, rather than pierced or balustraded). Due to the removal of the outer step, the new rail had to be positioned at a greater height than its predecessor. The general style of the gallery edging, with contoured sections on the west, recalls Art Deco design (see Figs 49-50).

Description of the Building

Exterior

The URC Hall, like contemporary Sunday schools and other buildings designed by Spalding & Myers, is of a plain style, with little ornament. Overall, the building's style is what can be described as vernacular revival – it includes various features that were popular in domestic revival architecture of the time, including dormer windows and tile-hanging, but also has Neo-Georgian details.

The Hall is built mainly of red brick, though the west gable end of the main block is of yellow brick (**Fig. 30**). Additionally, the original areas of red brick – laid in English bond (alternating courses of stretchers and headers) – are punctuated with darkened, almost black headers (making the work of 1914-15 easy to identify). The bricks are known to have been made nearby, at J. Day & Son's brickfields in Rye Street.⁷⁵ The roof of the building's main block rises to a steep pitch at the centre (aligned east-west) and is punctuated by three dormer windows set beneath tile-hung gables on the north and south sides (**Fig. 31**). The lower sections of the building (the pavilions to north- and south-east and the staircase compartments) have hipped roofs, with deep overhanging eaves. The eaves are decorated with brackets on the outer sides (north and south respectively) of the stair 'towers'. Throughout, the roof appears to be laid with the original clay tiles. In general style and materials, the Hall was clearly purposely designed to blend in with the historic buildings which surround it, including the Grade II-listed Guild House and 14 Water Lane, as reworked in the 18th and 19th centuries.



Fig. 30: The west (entrance) elevation of the URC Hall, with corner entrances and projecting single-storey kitchen block at the centre. There were unexecuted plans to extend the building on this side. (© Emily Cole)



Fig. 31: The Hall from the south, showing well-preserved features including clay tiles, dormer windows with tile-hung gables above, eaves brackets, windows and chimneys. (© Emily Cole)

As noted earlier in this report, until the creation of Old River Lane in the early 1970s, the URC Hall would have been accessed solely via Water Lane on the west (where there were formerly entrance gates). Hence the main entrance doors to the Hall are on this side, north-west and south-west, framing a single-storey block containing a boiler house and kitchen.⁷⁶ However, in terms of design and impact, this elevation has the appearance of a lesser façade – it is plain and functional, apart from the entrance bays. These form a pair, with classically detailed, Baroque-style timber doorcases (**Figs 32-33**).⁷⁷ Each contains its original double entrance door, topped by a large fanlight and projecting flat-topped canopy; each canopy is supported on large console

brackets and decorated with modillions. Above the doorcase on each side is a single *oeil-de-boeuf* or bullseye window – an oval, set horizontally, with the surrounds decorated with clustered tiles at the four cardinal points.



Fig. 32: The main (north-west) entrance doorcase and stair compartment, designed in the Neo-Georgian style. (© Emily Cole)

The centre of the west elevation is dominated by the triangular gable end of the hall; this has a red brick top section and an off-centre chimneystack serving the boiler (the boiler house is at basement level). Ventilation holes are formed by a decorative triplet in the gable end's apex, as on the east elevation. The projecting single-storey block at the centre of the west façade is original work of 1914-15, though it has been altered. There are two original foundation stones embedded on the block on its north side (see Fig. 9). The window above these looks to be original, as does the doorcase (if not the door itself) to the boiler house on the south. The west face of the single-storey block is now rendered and appears to have been remodelled as part of the works undertaken in the late 1960s.⁷⁸



Fig. 33: The south-west entrance, with the projecting block containing the kitchen and boiler house on the left. The doorway on the far right provided external access to the large classroom in the south-east pavilion. (© Emily Cole)

Overall, the design of the Hall's west elevation has an unfinished appearance. This almost certainly relates to plans for a subsequent extension. As noted above (see p. 13), in 1915 it was intended that the building would be extended to the west, involving the demolition of the adjacent Guild House, acquired by the Congregationalists. The architects appear to have designed the west façade with this in mind; presumably, the kitchen block would have been demolished and an extension built out from the central part of the west wall, with the entrance doorways retained to each side.

The URC Hall's east elevation is quite different in character, or at least was as originally designed. Although access to the building was from the west, as noted above, the east façade was most visible – facing as it did the River Stort and the meads beyond, in an open position. Its original form is well shown by the painting believed to have been produced to celebrate the Hall's opening in 1915 (**Fig. 34**, and see Fig. 12). The east elevation was symmetrical, with a central gabled section and two pavilions projecting slightly forward on either side. The overall composition had the sense of a principal elevation, designed to be seen.



Fig. 34: Detail of painting reproduced as Fig. 12, believed to date from 1915. It records the original form of the URC Hall's east front. (Courtesy of Roger Pryer)

The central block resembled an 18th-century chapel in terms of its design. It was dominated by a single large arch-headed window in its upper part, lighting the hall within.⁷⁹ To either side were flat-headed windows, while on the ground floor there appears to have been one or possibly two doorways (one is visible in Fig. 34, and seemingly another in Fig. 62). Alterations seem to have been undertaken here in the 1930s (including the removal of lower doorways and windows), then the appearance of this central block was radically altered by the extension of the stage in 1960/61. The back part of the stage, filling a single-storey block, now covers the whole ground floor; its rendered exterior – textured and decorated with modern pargetting – projects out even beyond the original pavilions (**Fig. 35**).



Fig. 35: The URC Hall seen from the north-east, with the stage extension of 1960/61 towards the centre (painted cream). (© Emily Cole)



Fig. 36: The upper part of the URC Hall's east gable, showing high-quality original work of 1914-15. (© Emily Cole)

However, above, the quality of the original work can still be appreciated (**Fig. 36**). The upper part of the arch-headed window, with its keystone, remains. Also surviving is the decorative ventilator at the apex of the gable and the attractive decorative brickwork edging the gable, including dentils; this decorative brickwork continues inwards as the base of an open pediment. The relieving arches and tops of the now infilled flat-headed side windows can also just be glimpsed.

The east pavilions have hipped roofs. As is shown in the painting of about 1915, the first floor of each pavilion originally had a triplet arrangement, formed (as now on the south-east) by a central door and two flanking windows. The doorways led out on to balconies, bounded by white-painted metal railings; these were supported by a slight projection of the ground floor. Although this is not clear from the painting of about 1915, the fact that toilets were located in these areas is known from other sources (see p. 18) and from the reminiscences of locals. The arrangement is confirmed by the presence of original brickwork on the south side of the south-east pavilion, extending about 1m from the main block and including a small window (**Fig. 37**). The ground floor of the north-east pavilion was rendered and altered in the late 1960s, so any obvious trace of similar original work has been lost.



Fig. 37: The single-storey section of the south-east pavilion, showing the area of original brickwork (in the area of the window) which once supported a balcony above. This block was altered and extended in the 1930s. (© Emily Cole)

In the pavilion on the south-east, the ‘cloakroom improvement’ work of 1931 (see pp. 25-26) seems to have involved the extension of the ground floor to provide additional toilet/cloakroom accommodation. The 1930s brickwork is of stretcher bond, like that of the 1960s phase. The left doorway on the east façade and a small window on the south have since been infilled (see Figs 25 and 37). Internally, a window survives on the north of this pavilion, at ground-floor level, behind a surviving toilet cubicle. It obviously once looked onto the recessed, open area in front of the central block, and there was originally a window in a similar position in the north-east pavilion.

The north-east pavilion has been altered more extensively than its equivalent to the south (**Fig. 38**). In 1967-8, an extension was built in this area: a new 'assembly room' was built at first-floor level, projecting out to the north and supported by piers (see Fig. 29 and pp. 29-30).⁸⁰ As was noted in 1968, the architect, J. C. Wetherall, 'avoided the problem of losing car parking space' by placing the new room at this upper level and thereby allowing cars to pass beneath.⁸¹ The work of this phase also included the removal of a chimneystack and the refenestration of the existing north-east pavilion; it now has metal-framed pivot windows of a similar form to those in the extension block. A difference in the brickwork at the centre, however, reveals the location of the former first-floor doorway, probably infilled (and the balcony removed) in the 1930s. Certainly, the original arrangement in this area had changed before the 1940s, though a urinal/toilet block for men/boys survived until 1967 (see Fig. 40).⁸²



Fig. 38: The east elevation of the north-east pavilion (altered in 1967-8) and the projecting 'new room' (built in the 1960s phase of works). (© Emily Cole)

The north façade of the URC Hall is partly hidden from view by the historic boundary wall, the mature trees and the 'new room' extension, though the roof and dormers remain readily visible, even from a distance (**Fig. 39**). The areas of original brickwork can, as elsewhere on the building, be identified by the presence of the blackened headers and use of English bond. The original areas of this elevation are towards the west – most of the remainder was altered in the late 1960s. However, notably, this façade does still include four of the original foundation stones of 1914, some of them clearly reset (see Fig. 9). One appears to have been lost (that commemorating Edward Beldam Johns) and was presumably removed as part of the 1960s remodelling.



Fig. 39: The north façade of the URC Hall viewed from within the ‘new room’, with a mixture of original work of 1914-15 and alterations undertaken in 1967-8. The Guild House can be seen in the distance. (© Emily Cole)

The 1960s work involved the addition of the new first-floor meeting room but also a single-storey projection to the immediate west, providing new toilet accommodation (**Fig. 40**) – both areas are built of bricks set in stretcher bond. An external staircase was added here at the same time, leading up to the flat roof of the new toilet block (**Fig. 41**). Two new entrance doors were provided at first-floor level, at the head of the staircase (on south and east) – this meant the new room could be accessed without the need to pass through the main building. The balustrading which edges the staircase and the flat roof is typical of 1950s/60s design, though is now becoming quite a rare survival nationally. The first-floor new room itself is lit by three windows on the east and two on the west (see Figs 29 and 38). It projects right up to the former wall of the Manse – this section of the wall was actually rebuilt in the late 1960s, in order to accommodate the room’s supporting piers.

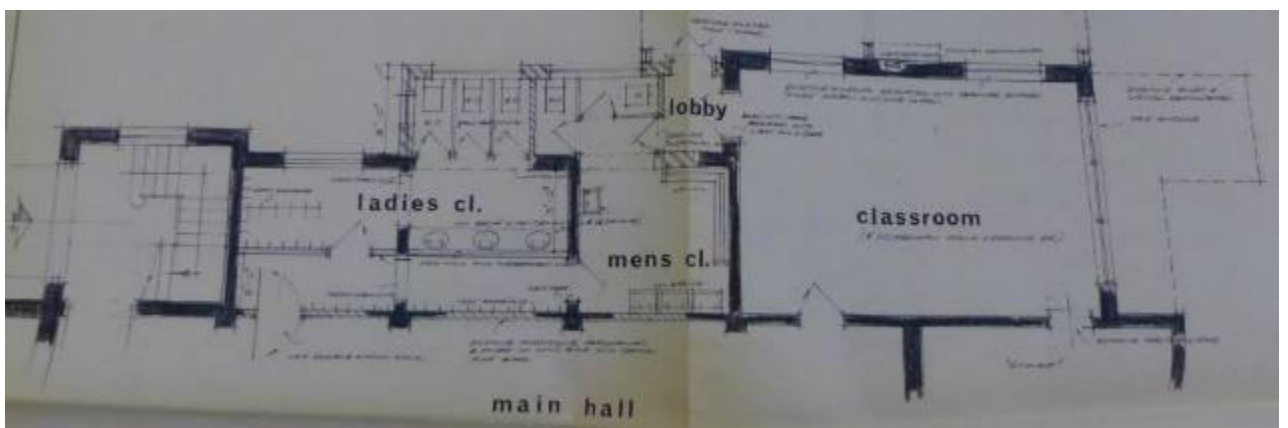


Fig. 40: Detail of 1967 plan showing proposed new toilet accommodation on the north side of the ground floor, between the existing staircase and large north-east classroom. The position of the earlier men’s toilets (demolished as part of these works) is shown on the far right. (Hertfordshire Archives & Local Studies, NR12/7/8)



Fig. 41: View looking east, showing the external staircase, projecting toilet block and new assembly room added in 1967-8. (© Emily Cole)

The north elevation of the north-east pavilion was also altered in the late 1960s. This is clear from plans of 1967 but also from a newspaper article of 1968, which states that a foundation stone of 1914 was removed on the URC Hall's north façade 'to make way for a door from the new extensions to the old hall'.⁸³ The stone, originally laid by John Boyten, was then reset (**Fig. 42**). The brickwork and windows of this area are original but were also reworked in the late 1960s, when supporting piers were added to carry the new first-floor room. A plan of 1967 states that the ground-floor north windows were to be replaced 'with obscure glazed "fixed" metal windows (wired)'.⁸⁴



Fig. 42: The north side of the north-east pavilion as it appears today, after the remodelling of 1967-8. A foundation stone was reset in this area (left of central pier) and a new doorway inserted (right of photo). (© Emily Cole)

Finally we come to the URC Hall's south elevation; this is now the least visible façade of the building but also the least altered. It survives as built – retaining its original brickwork, windows and deep eaves, with the staircase block at the south-west breaking slightly forward of the wall plane (**Fig. 43**, and see Fig. 31). The central part of the elevation consists of three window bays (which all lit small classrooms) and there are an additional two window bays on the south side of the south-east pavilion, set either side of a chimneystack. There is an original doorway on the return (west) side of the pavilion (see Fig. 33) – an external and internal entrance to each of the large classrooms within these pavilions was stipulated by the Congregationalists in January 1914 (in line with contemporary Sunday school planning advice), but that on the north was altered and enclosed by an extension in the 1960s.⁸⁵



Fig. 43: View along the URC Hall's south elevation, looking west towards the Guild House. This side of the Hall is particularly well intact. (© Emily Cole)

Interestingly, the south façade of the URC Hall, with the roof and dormer windows above, is well shown in a 1928 aerial photograph of Bishop's Stortford (**Fig. 44**). Originally, beyond a boundary wall, it faced an open, partly wooded area to the south – the garden of 14 Water Lane – and then a malthouse beyond. The houses now in this area were built only in the 1990s and have darkened the building on this side, as well as hidden it more completely from public view.



Fig. 44: Detail from aerial photograph of 1928, showing the URC Hall from the south-west. Also visible are the buildings on Water Lane (running bottom right to left), the grounds of the Manse (top left) and the meads (top right). (© Historic England, ref. EPW001742)

Interior

The plan of the URC Hall is dominated by the double-height space at its centre – the large hall intended to be used for ‘assembly and meeting purposes’ (**Fig. 45**).⁸⁶ This is aligned east-west, measures around 50 ft (15 m) long by 30 ft (9 m) wide and rises through the building’s full height; as noted above (see p. 23), the hall, with its gallery, was designed to seat 450 children. The room is still remarkably light, and was previously even more so. It is lit by gabled dormer windows (three on each side, north and south) which form a kind of clerestory (**Fig. 46**). It was once also fully lit by the large arch-headed window and two flanking windows on the east side – the side windows were blocked and the size of the arched window was reduced in 1960/61 (see *below*) – while additional light filtered in via the glazed classroom doors and internal flanking windows. The hall’s ceiling is flat and lined with its original matchboard panelling. Across the width of the roof run tie beams, supported on each side by diagonal struts. Strengthening cleats have been added at the west end in more recent decades, to prevent the roof ‘spreading’.⁸⁷

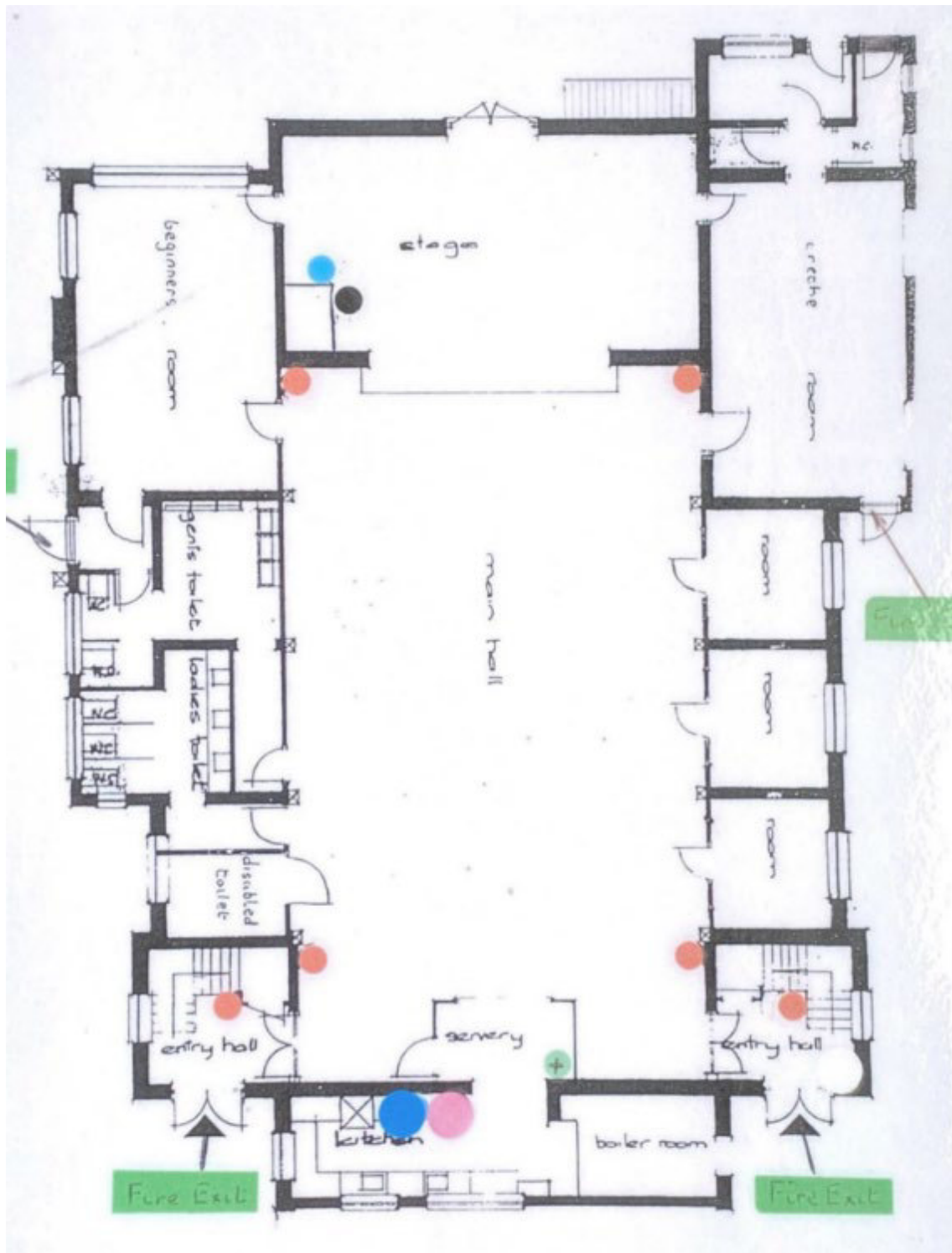


Fig. 45: Modern ground-floor plan of the URC Hall, on display in the building itself. North is to the left.



Fig. 46: The main hall of the URC Hall, looking east. The present stage was created in 1960/61 and the edging to the gallery dates from 1994. The doors opening off the hall formerly led to classrooms. The hall floor and ceiling are original. (© Emily Cole)

The main entrance to this large room was always via the two stair compartments on the west (and especially that at the north-west; see Fig. 32). On the north and south sides of the hall were classrooms – three on each side on the ground floor and three more on each side at first-floor level (a total of 12). Each of these was intended to house 12 Sunday School scholars, though some probably had alternative uses as well, such as a library for pupils and a teacher’s vestry. The classrooms were divided by partitions and on their inner sides had glazed doors and internal windows, providing borrowed light to the main hall (see Fig. 18).⁸⁸ According to two former scholars and teachers of the Sunday School, pupils would start off in the large classrooms (*see below*) and would then split into smaller groups for sessions in these 12 classrooms. Groups were separated into boys and girls, with the beginner and junior departments downstairs and the primary and senior departments upstairs.⁸⁹



Fig. 47: View looking south into one of the former small classrooms opening off the ground floor of the main hall. (© Emily Cole)

The three small classrooms on the south side of the hall survive intact and are now used as storerooms (**Fig. 47**). The equivalent classrooms on the north survived until 1967-8, when they were replaced by the existing toilets and the original doorways from the hall were altered/blocked up. Plans show that the west and central rooms were to contain the women's toilets (see Fig. 40). As built, the arrangement was actually slightly different, with most of the west classroom used as a store. The men's toilets were placed within the former east classroom. Both sets of toilets extended into a new projection on the building's north side. Via a new lobby and doorway, the men's toilets were given direct external access as well as direct access to the large room in the north-east pavilion. Around the early 2000s, the room used as a store has been converted into a disabled toilet and baby change area. The adjacent 1960s lavatory interiors survive well (**Fig. 48**).



Fig. 48: The women's toilets as created in 1967-8, on the north side of the central hall. (© Emily Cole)

On the east side of the hall that was originally a raised 'platform' or small stage. This projected into the hall, with its back formed by the building's east wall (which was designed by the architects to be 'in keeping' with the window above).⁹⁰ In December 1914, the Congregational Building Committee agreed to have side extensions to the platform placed on runners.⁹¹ The platform's original size is indicated by the fact that it was covered by 7 sq. yards (around 6 sq. m) of linoleum.⁹² On at least one side of the platform – and possibly on both – it is likely that there was an entrance vestibule, accessed via the doorway(s) on the building's east façade (though, if they existed, these doorways had gone by the 1940s).⁹³



Fig. 49: The central hall looking east, showing the alterations undertaken in 1960/61 to create a new recessed stage. The gallery rail dates from the mid-1990s. (© Emily Cole)

As noted on page 27, the platform – which originally bore a piano and harmonium – was reworked and modernised in the redecoration scheme of 1934. By the 1940s, it took the form of a fold-down stage, controlled by a wheel on the exterior of the east wall (see Fig. 19). When not in use, it was covered by the stage curtains, attached to the gallery by beams.⁹⁴ The present stage arrangement was created in 1960/61 (**Fig. 49**; see pp. 27-28). As part of these works, part of the arch-headed window was blocked, the lower part of the original east wall of the central block was entirely removed and a new wall was built forming the rear of the new backstage area (see Fig. 26).

For most of the 20th century, the main hall had a gallery of two levels, with a balustraded gallery rail or edge (see p. 31). This arrangement was replaced in 1994 – work which involved the levelling of the gallery floor and the creation of a new gallery rail, boxing in the original balusters – meaning that there is no trace of the stepped gallery today (**Fig. 50**). However, the surviving blind arcades around the gallery are original, along with the matchboard panelling covering the lower part of the walls (**Fig. 51**, compare with Fig. 18).



Fig. 50: View of the main hall, looking west. The present gallery edging dates to a reworking of 1994, but the original balusters apparently survive within. (© Emily Cole)



Fig. 51: View east along the south side of the gallery. Until the mid-1990s, the gallery contained tiered seating on two levels. (© Emily Cole)

At the west end of the main hall, opposite the stage, there has always been a kitchen and pantry, located in a projecting single-storey block. The need for refreshments for the Sunday School pupils and for events held in the building was foreseen from the outset, and in 1921 clear reference was made to providing midday meals for pupils at Waterside school during its time in the URC Hall.⁹⁵ The south part of the projecting block formed part of the boiler house, while the kitchen was to the immediate north. The existing large opening between the kitchen and the hall and the traces of double hinges indicate the former presence of double doors for service (**Fig. 52**).



Fig. 52: Former doorway between the kitchen and the main hall, with double hinges visible on the right. The existing servery dates to the late 1960s. (© Emily Cole)

In the late 1960s phase of works, the kitchen was modernised (see p. 30). This involved the installation of a new boiler, the reduction in size of the boiler house and the enlargement of the kitchen (**Fig. 53**). A new projecting servery was also built as part of these works (**Figs 54 and 55**). The servery is entered by a door on its north side and has a roller shutter covering the hatch. The servery, and the whole ground floor of the hall, was then (in about 1969/70) covered with vertical pine boarding (see Fig. 50). In more recent times, the paint has been removed, giving the boarding a somewhat incongruous appearance.



Fig. 53: The kitchen at the west end of the hall, looking north. This area was reworked in the late 1960s. (© Emily Cole)



Fig. 54: The serving hatch inserted at the west end of the hall in the late 1960s. (© Emily Cole)



Fig. 55: The Congregational 'Young Wives' Group' (founded 1958) at the new servery in the URC Hall, about 1970. (Courtesy of John and Margaret Trigg)

Overall, although the main hall of the building has seen a fair degree of alteration, there are many features remaining. For instance, the space retains its original dimensions, wooden block flooring made of pitch pine, the ceiling and roof beams, the dormer windows, upper part of the arch-headed east window and all the classrooms on the south side. Additional original features are thought to remain beneath later blocking – such as the gallery balustrading and possibly the internal windows to the sides of the classroom doors. Even the radiators appear to be original work of 1914-15 (or possibly the 1930s).

As has been noted earlier in this report, the two pavilions on the east of the URC Hall were designed to accommodate four large classrooms – two on each

floor; each classroom measures around 23 ft (7 m) by 15 ft (4.5 m) and held 40 children. Evidence from a local church member shows that these were used in the following way, at least by the 1940s: the ground-floor room at the south-east housed the beginners department (that is, the youngest children; it was later a crèche); the room above that, on the first floor, accommodated the primary (or junior) department; the ground-floor room at the north-east housed the junior (or intermediate) department; and the room above it accommodated the senior department (that is, the eldest of the scholars).⁹⁶

One of the large classrooms was fitted out for use as the church parlour in 1915, containing items including an oriental carpet, armchairs and a clock.⁹⁷ By at least the 1940s, the church parlour was located in the room used by the seniors and this was probably always the case; a former scholar of the Sunday School has described it as 'posh'.⁹⁸ The room is still known as the parlour today (see Fig. 60).

The large classrooms were originally heated by gas stoves; the chimneystack on the south-east survives, with the fireplace in the first-floor room (**Fig. 56**). On the east side of the ground-floor rooms there were toilets – these were for boys/men on the north and girls/women on the south. They were accessible only from the exterior; presumably the doorways in the west walls of the large ground-floor classrooms provided an easy route.⁹⁹ The lower classrooms opened directly off the main hall, while the large upper classrooms were accessed via the staircases and gallery and had doorways on their east sides leading to balconies (see Fig. 34). As has been stated (see p. 14), these balconies originally offered fine views over the town meads and also ensured maximum ventilation – something considered important in Sunday school classrooms (**Fig. 57**).¹⁰⁰



Fig. 56: The interior of the first-floor south-east classroom, with coved ceiling and original fireplace on the left. This room is now a church office. (© Emily Cole)



Fig. 57: The present view out of the upper south-east room, looking towards the town park and Waytemore Castle. This prospect has changed radically since the URC Hall's completion in 1915. (© Emily Cole)

All four of the large classrooms have now been modernised (**Fig. 58**), though the coved ceilings of the first-floor rooms remain and the south-east room also retains its fireplace, noted above. The interior of what appears to be the ground-floor classroom on the north-east is shown in Fig. 17, indicating that the original doors to the hall were glazed, like those of the small classrooms, and that the rooms had picture rails and half-height panelling. The balconies of the large upper classrooms seem to have been removed in the works of the 1930s, though the room at the south-east still has a doorway leading out to a flat roof (with iron railings and external staircase added in the 1930s; see Fig. 25). The large classrooms on both levels of the north-east pavilion were altered as part of the works of 1967-8.



Fig. 58: The modernised interior of the ground-floor classroom in the south-east pavilion. The door towards the centre of the photo provided direct access to the exterior, an arrangement recommended by guidance of the time. (© Emily Cole)

The upper floor of the URC Hall is accessed by two stone staircases; these are both on the building's west side, in matching vestibules to north and south of the projecting kitchen block. The staircases, designed to be fireproof, are accessed by the Georgian-style doorcases on the Hall's west elevation and are in their original, early 20th-century form, with slender balusters and polished timber handrails (**Fig. 59**).¹⁰¹ Each stair compartment is lit by a large rectangular window on its outer side and a bullseye window on the west.



Fig. 59: The north-west staircase, which like the staircase at the south-west survives in unaltered form. (© Emily Cole)

The staircases open directly onto the gallery of the hall and provided access to the classrooms at this level – the two large classrooms in the pavilions as well as the six smaller classrooms on the north and south sides of the hall (**Fig. 60**, and see Fig. 51). The doorways to the six classrooms were set in blind arcading around the gallery's edge and would originally have been set behind the gallery seating. Some of the classrooms have now been unified to create larger spaces. For instance, this is the case with the west and central classrooms on both the south and the north sides of the hall, with new panelling inserted (or original panelling reused) (**Fig. 61**). On the south, the doorways of the west and east classrooms survive, while on the north, only that to the central classroom remains.

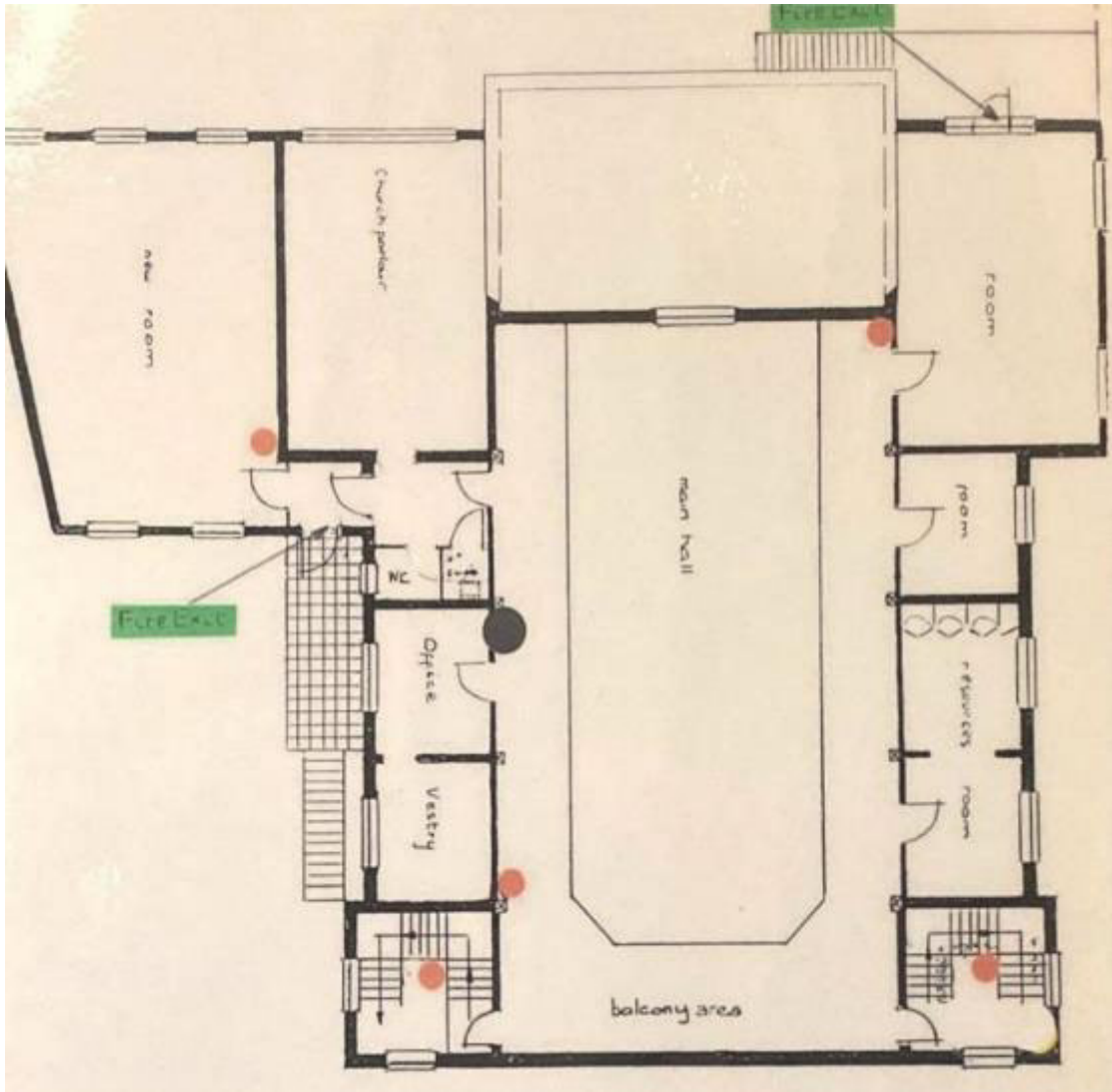


Fig. 60: Modern first-floor plan of the URC Hall, on display in the building itself. North is to the left.

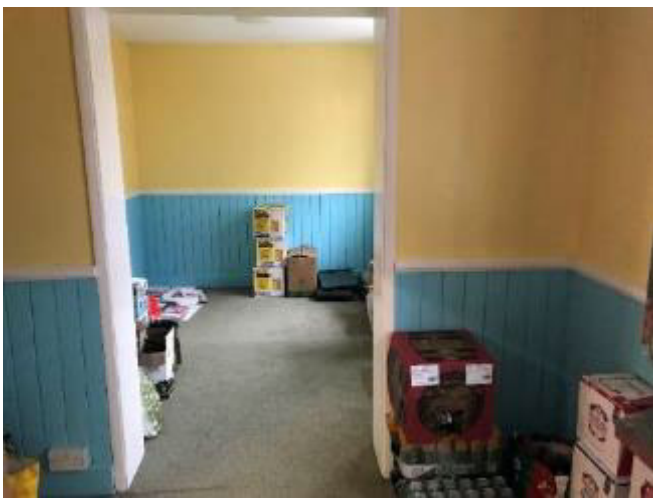


Fig. 61: The now-unified central and west classrooms on the south side of the hall gallery. (© Emily Cole)

The easternmost classroom on the north side of the gallery was converted to a toilet, kitchenette and lobby in the works of 1967-8 (see Fig. 29). At that date, a doorway was added connecting the gallery with the 'new room' in the projection to the north and also with the external staircase. Additionally, the north-east upper classroom was altered: its north windows and chimneystack were removed, the original doorway from the gallery to the classroom was blocked and a new door was inserted in the room's west wall, leading to the lobby. The new assembly room added in this phase of works is wedge-shaped, due to the line of the boundary wall, and measures around 9 m (30 ft) by 6 m (20 ft). It is lit on two sides (east and west), with a doorway at the south-west leading to the external staircase. The room, with the adjacent toilet and north-east classroom/church parlour, form a discrete 'unit' suitable for separate use from the main building – and this is the way it is used today.

Changes to the Setting of the URC Hall

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw radical changes to the URC Hall's setting. Until this time, the Hall was accessed solely from Water Lane on its west. On the east was a small gravelled area running down to the River Stort (**Fig. 62**). With the rise of motor vehicles from the inter-war years onwards, this was reworked at least partially as car parking.¹⁰² Historic photos show no signs of a path running adjacent to the west side of the Stort. The closest footbridge over the river was northwards, beyond the grounds of the Manse.

On the opposite side of the Stort, the meads were gradually built up. By 1943, the land adjacent to Bridge Street had become car parking, while there was a Red Cross Centre on the north, roughly on the site of the present Causeway car park. This was replaced by an entertainment centre known as the 'American Hostel', opened in January 1944 and built by the American Red Cross, directly across the water from the URC Hall.¹⁰³ This building catered for the many servicemen stationed at the nearby Stansted air base during the Second World War and took the form of a sprawling wooden single-storey structure (**Fig. 63**). It had the 'facilities of a first-rate hotel', providing accommodation for 300 'residents'.¹⁰⁴ After the war, the building was acquired by the local education authority for use as a secondary school and also housed public facilities including the library. It finally closed in the mid-1960s and was demolished shortly afterwards, making way for additional car parking space.



Fig. 62: Detail of aerial photograph taken in 1928, looking north-west. The URC Hall is at the centre of the image, set back from the River Stort, with the meads below. (© Historic England, ref. EPW022356)



Fig. 63: 1950s photograph looking west from the castle, with the former American Hostel on the bottom right. The URC Hall is just beyond the area of the image, towards the top right. (Courtesy of Dave King; source: www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide8/linkway/, acc. 26 Nov. '21)

The greatest period of change for the URC Hall's setting began in 1966. In that year, the historic Manse – to the Hall's immediate north-west (see Figs 13-14) – was controversially demolished at the behest of the council, despite protests from local people.¹⁰⁵ The house and its grounds made way not for a new building scheme but instead, in 1968, for 'the Manse car park'; following the construction of a Waitrose supermarket to the north in 1994, this became the Waitrose car park. As has already been noted, the original wall of the Manse was retained on the south, by the URC Hall, together with some of the trees from its grounds.

Greater changes to the URC Hall's setting were to follow. Earliest to be initiated – an idea 'in the air' from 1963 and given the green light in 1965 – was the diversion of the River Stort from its old course through the town centre.¹⁰⁶ The original river was culverted and a new course created further east, diverting the Stort through the grounds of the town park and Waytemore Castle (**Fig. 64**). This radical move helped to reduce flooding in the town centre and created more development land in the core of Bishop's Stortford. Work was underway by September 1966; the new course had been completed by 1968, though the culverting of the Stort's old course was not complete until 1971/2. Following the creation of Old River Lane – slightly to the east of the original river course – additional land was provided to the URC Hall on the east; this was used to expand the car parking provision.

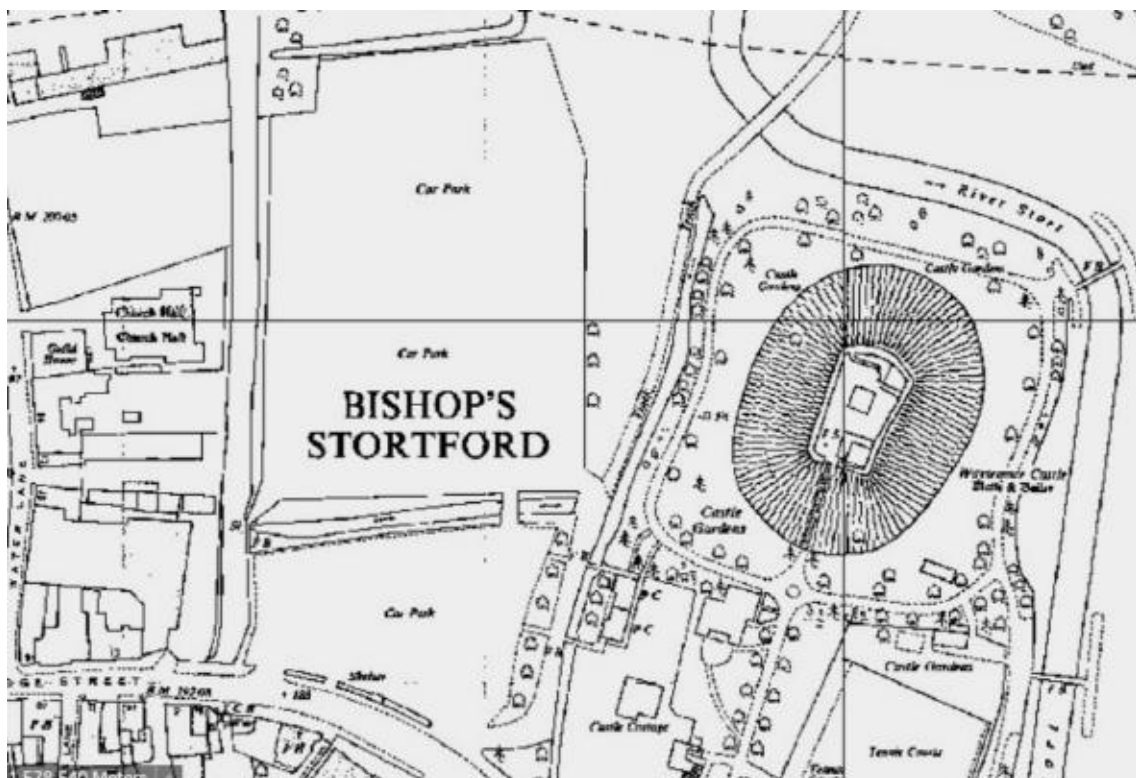


Fig. 64: Detail of OS map of 1968 showing the original course of the River Stort before culverting (towards the left, running east of the URC Hall) and the new diversion around Waytemore Castle (on the right). (© and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2022). Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024.)

In 1967, the Bishop's Stortford Town Redevelopment Scheme was announced.¹⁰⁷ The first stage of this saw the reuse of the town centre land freed up by the diversion of the River Stort. It involved the construction of the Jackson Square shopping centre and a multi-storey car park, between South Street and the Causeway, along with the building of new council offices and library. Architects for the redevelopment was the firm of Tooley & Foster (who had worked at the URC Hall in the inter-war years). Work began in 1972 and was completed in 1974 (though Jackson Square was heavily refurbished in 1991).

Another development of this time was Charringtons House on the corner of Bridge Street and the Causeway, an office complex built as the headquarters of Charringtons, a leading coal and fuel-oil distribution company. Begun in 1971, the imposing red brick block was completed in 1973, when more than 250 staff moved in (**Fig. 65**).¹⁰⁸ Part of the building was used by the local council, while they also had dedicated new offices on the immediate west, completed in late 1972 (**Fig. 66**).¹⁰⁹ The office building on the west was subsequently demolished and the council moved more fully into Charringtons House, especially following the relocation of Charringtons in 1999.



Fig. 65: The office block named Charringtons House, built in 1971-3 on a site to the south-east of the URC Hall. The road in the foreground, Old River Lane, roughly follows the original course of the River Stort. (© Emily Cole)

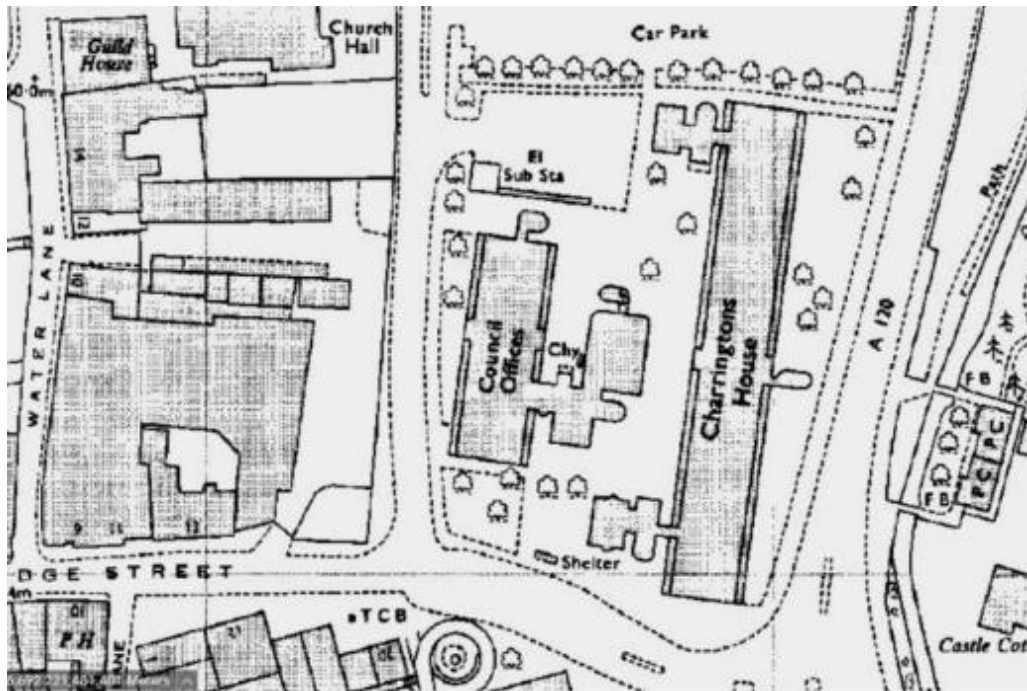


Fig. 66: Detail of OS map of 1975 showing the plot of land to the south-east of the URC Hall as redeveloped as Charringtons House and offices for the local council. The URC Hall is near the top left. (© and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2022). Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024.)

Meanwhile, on the east of the Charringtons House site, a new road was created in 1969-70 – known as Link Road (or Linkway). This joined the Causeway and Northgate End and provided a traffic bypass around the historic core of the town centre. Around the same time, on the west side of Charringtons House and the council offices, the Stort was culverted and Old River Lane created, an entirely new thoroughfare. Then as now, this new road was a cul-de-sac, leading only to car parks (the former Manse car park on the west and the Causeway car park on the east, both created in the 1960s).

This modern landscape is what largely remains today, except for the demolition of the former council offices and the addition of the Waitrose supermarket – built in 1994 to the north of the URC Hall. The construction of this supermarket involved the demolition of part of the former Hawkes Brewery complex to the north.

Summary of Significance

The URC Hall has strong ties with all four ‘heritage values’ set out in the document *Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance*, issued by English Heritage (now Historic England) in 2008. These four areas are as follows:

- evidential value (providing evidence about the past);
- historical value (illustrating associations and connections with the past);
- aesthetic value (indicating the ways in which people regarded design and other sensory stimulation);

- communal value (linked to the meaning a building or place has for people).¹¹⁰

These four heritage values will be referenced in the summary given below.

Architectural Significance

The URC Hall is an important part of the historic group of buildings on Water Lane – forming a clear character area within the broader Bishop’s Stortford Conservation Area (**Fig. 67**, and see Fig. 44). In terms of its history, use and ownership, the Hall is linked in particular with the Grade II-listed Congregational Church and the Grade II-listed Guild House, the latter run in the 1930s and ‘40s as part of the Congregational Sunday School and still owned by the church today. However, in terms of its building materials and style, the URC Hall is also linked to other Grade II-listed buildings in Water Lane, such as 14 Water Lane and Water House (see pp. 5-6). Since a malthouse and kiln was demolished in 1914 to make way for the URC Hall, its site is historically and functionally linked with those to the south, accommodating buildings including the current Coopers. Although this cluster of buildings surrounding the URC Hall all pre-date 1900, the Hall is only slightly less historic (for example, it was begun only 54 years after the Congregational Church); notably, it is the only one of the group which is unlisted. In terms of ‘aesthetic value’ (see *above*), the Hall shows us that harmony of design for this group was an important consideration when the building was conceived in 1914.



Fig. 67: View looking north-west showing the historic setting of the URC Hall. The building is on the right, with the rear of the Guild House and part of 14 Water Lane on the left. (© Emily Cole)

It is clear from historical accounts and the surviving fabric that the URC Hall, as originally designed and constructed, was a building of high quality – constructed by a local company (J. Day & Son) with materials which were, in many cases, sourced from the local area (including the bricks, made at the Day brickfields in Rye Street). The Hall's architects, Spalding & Myers, were well established and well respected, especially for their Nonconformist architecture. The majority of the other structures designed by the firm appear to remain intact, well used and well valued. For instance, this is the case with the Gardiner Memorial Hall in Burwell, another building completed in 1915 (**Fig. 68**). This Hall is currently being refurbished, with new facilities to include toilets, kitchen, windows, platform lift and an extension to the stage.¹¹¹ Greenleaf Road Baptist Church in Walthamstow (built in 1949-50) is another structure designed by the firm which is currently being refurbished (by Tooley & Foster architects).



Fig. 68: The Gardiner Memorial Hall, Burwell, Cambridgeshire. Like the URC Hall, the building was designed by Spalding & Myers and completed in 1915. (Source: www.burwellparishcouncil.gov.uk/Gardiner_Memorial_Hall_-_Refurbishment_36616.aspx, acc. 12 Dec. '21)

In comparison to many other Sunday schools and church halls of the time – including those designed elsewhere by Spalding & Myers – the Bishop's Stortford Congregational building appears to have been ambitious, reflecting the size and relative wealth of the congregation; the Bishop's Stortford Congregational Church was one of the largest and most prominent in the region. As has been noted, its Sunday School catered for a comparatively substantial number of children, and there were originally plans for future expansion (which never came to pass). The building is far larger and more imposing, for instance, than the Gardiner Memorial Hall.

In terms of 'evidential value', the URC Hall is particularly notable in reflecting and realising contemporary guidance about the architecture of Sunday schools. It represents an ideal Sunday school of the time, and is therefore instructive at a national level. As has been shown, adequate space was provided in the

Bishop's Stortford building for the different Sunday school 'grades' or departments, comprised of classrooms of different size, aspect and status. The architects also included the large hall recommended by the Sunday School Union and others, and even a kitchen/boiler room. For its time, the building was unusual in being so all-encompassing. A survey of 1908 revealed that no more than 50% of Congregational Sunday schools in Britain had reasonable accommodation – the most the majority could offer was a separate room for primary-level pupils.¹¹² Even as late as 1970, 25% of Sunday schools in the country still did not have graded classrooms.¹¹³

Despite the various changes undertaken at the URC Hall – especially those of the 1930s, 1960s and 1990s – the building's original plan form can still be well read and understood. This is especially the case on the Hall's south side, where the classroom arrangement survives largely as built. However, these phases of alteration have undoubtedly left a significant mark on the building as it survives today. The Hall has proved, architecturally, to be a victim of its own success – due to the high level of use of the building, both by the Congregationalists and others, there has been a greater need than usual for adaptation and modernisation.

Most unfortunate, even damaging, to the building's original design has been the block created in 1960/61 on the east façade to provide for the new backstage area. The work undertaken appears to have been of low cost and low quality, and dramatically changed the building's impression when seen from the east. The full impact of the original design of 1914 cannot be appreciated today, due to this extension – and also the extended sanitary accommodation of 1931 and (to a lesser degree) the alterations undertaken in the 1960s. However, at the same time, these changes led the Hall to become more user-friendly, more capable of housing large performances and more popular with the local community – they therefore have a strong element of historical and communal value.

Those responsible for the changes of the 1930s and 1960s cannot have known that, in future years, the 'rear' (east) façade of the URC Hall would become the part of the building that would be most visible. With the culverting of the Stort and the creation of Old River Lane and adjacent car parking in the 1960s to '70s, the Hall came increasingly to be viewed from the east – and it is this aspect that dominates today (**Fig. 69**). Many locals and visitors to Bishop's Stortford may be entirely unaware of the fine building at its core, or the high level of survival of the south elevation, for instance (today hidden by 1990s houses on the adjacent plot). From the north, the building is partly screened from view by the historic wall and mature trees of the former Manse, while changes on the west have diminished its impact – for example, the removal of the original entrance gates, the rear extension of the Guild House and the replacement of the original gravelled grounds with expanses of tarmac, set with parking spaces and usually filled with cars.



Fig. 69: The URC Hall as it is most widely viewed today, from Old River Lane and the Causeway car park. (© Emily Cole)

Given these circumstances, the interior of the URC Hall – even with the various changes of the 20th century – comes as a remarkably pleasant surprise. The main hall retains the space, character and many of the details of the original phase of work, while other areas like the stair vestibules survive largely intact. Even the post-war alterations have their own character and interest; features like the toilets and external staircase are notable survivals at a time when post-war architecture is increasingly under threat.

In terms of the local context, the URC Hall is also of note. It should be viewed alongside buildings such as Holy Trinity Church Hall off South Street (1852), the Methodist Church in South Street (1902-3; designed by Jordan & Gunton) and the former Baptist Sunday School/Church Hall in Portland Road (1928; now a children's nursery). The Methodist Church once had a Sunday School at its rear. This began life as a reused iron schoolroom before being rebuilt and extended in the 1920s, but was engulfed by a church extension in the early 1980s.¹¹⁴ It was far smaller and less ambitious than the URC Hall, and does not survive. As purpose-built structures, both the Methodist and the Baptist Sunday Schools were later in date than the Congregational School in Water Lane. There is no doubt that the URC Hall was the largest and most notable Sunday school built in Bishop's Stortford, and it holds its own among the town's national schools also – having a particularly close link with that at Northgate End, where the Congregational Sunday School was based between the 1840s and the First World War.

Historical and Communal Significance

Above all, the URC Hall is notable for its significance within the history of Bishop's Stortford and has very strong historical and communal value, as defined by English Heritage/Historic England (see *above*). The building is associated with some of the town's most notable historical figures – including Alfred Slapps Barrett, Sarah Death and John Wood (all described in Violet

Sparrow's *Yesterday's Stortford* of 1982). It is also connected with many of the town's businesses, including Clement Joscelyne of Market Square (which provided the Hall's furnishings), J. Day & Son (builder of the Hall, a firm which still exists) and Sworders (responsible for the design work of the late 1960s).

For a period of around 60 years (1915-75), the Hall – under its moniker 'the Water Lane Institute' – was used on a regular basis for a stream of events, classes and other functions, including lectures, classes and celebrations. Some of these events were of particular local significance – for instance, it was at the URC Hall that the Chairman of Stortford District Council convened in 1951 a public meeting to 'put before townspeople' the proposals for a new public hall, a scheme which led to the building of the Rhodes Memorial Hall.¹¹⁵ In common with other Sunday schools and indeed with churches nationally, there has been a decline of URC usage since the 1980s, with the Sunday School ('Junior Church') finally ceasing to use the URC Hall in 2014 – exactly 100 years since the building was begun. However, in recent decades and right up to the present day, the Hall has remained much in demand – both by the United Reformed Church and others (see Appendices 2 and 3).

Especially worthy of note in a local context is the use of the URC Hall as the 'Soldiers' Institute' during the First World War and also its use by the Water Lane Dramatic Society, founded by the Congregational Church in 1933. Today this is the Water Lane Theatre Company, the only amateur theatre group in Bishop's Stortford.

On account of the size and stature of the Bishop's Stortford Congregational Church and Sunday School, and the URC Hall's high level of community use, it has been well known to generations of people from the town and the wider area. Through the events still held at the Hall, including coffee mornings, comedy nights, children's classes and sports sessions, the venue continues to be well loved, though few are probably aware of its rich and interesting history (**Fig. 70**).



Fig. 70: The URC Hall in use for a comedy night staged by Paddy Lennox in 2022.
(© Emily Cole)

Very few other surviving buildings in Bishop's Stortford town centre can claim such breadth, longevity and high level of use – for instance, the hall at the South Mill Arts Centre is more recent (opened in 1963), while venues like the Great Hall in South Street and Long's Ballroom in North Street have been demolished (in 1937 and the 1980s respectively). The former drill hall (of 1906) survives in the Market Square, as do town centre school buildings such as the former St Michael's School in Apton Road (1818, rebuilt 1832; now a day centre) and old Northgate School at Northgate End (1840; now a young people's centre). However, these always had a more limited and more focused function than the URC Hall, and would not have been known by such a broad range of the local community.

The Future?

In recent years in particular, the URC Hall has been poorly maintained and run down – reflecting in part the planned Old River Lane redevelopment scheme and also refurbishment and planned expansion of the United Reformed Church. As noted earlier in this report (see p. 5), the Hall has been proposed for demolition, along with the 1990s houses to its south, to enable a new development and to provide compensatory parking for Waitrose, in return for a transferral of land elsewhere on the site. Due to this uncertain future, many clubs and classes have been forced to leave the Hall and make alternative accommodation arrangements.

To demolish such a historic and high-quality building, to make way not even for another structure but simply for car parking, seems short-sighted. Once lost, the URC Hall will be gone forever, taking with it over a century of history and community spirit, and the east side of Water Lane will be irrevocably changed. The cluster of historic buildings in this area will lose one of their number – and one which makes a significant impact to the streetscape and the wider conservation area.

The remit of this report has not been to consider the structural condition of the URC Hall or possibilities for reuse. However, it is worth emphasising again that it is of significant architectural and historic interest in a local, regional and even national setting, and preservation and adaptation would be the ideal future course. In this sense, the building can be seen as an opportunity and not a constraint for the development of Old River Lane. In many ways, the level of alteration undertaken at the Hall gives it even greater potential and flexibility – many areas of the building could be reworked without detracting from the historic components of the structure.

As has been noted above, other buildings by the Hall's architects – such as the Gardiner Memorial Hall in Burwell – have been the subject of successful refurbishment schemes. Possible restoration of the URC Hall's east elevation would be an especially exciting step; the building has an adaptable plan that would make change like this entirely possible, and restoration of this side of the building would no doubt astonish locals who have barely noticed the architectural impact of the Hall before. Perhaps conversion to the arts centre proposed as part of the redevelopment scheme is even worth considering – especially given the building's flexible, large capacity space.

Whether or not such reuse options are explored remains to be seen, but if this building is to be lost, the people of Bishop's Stortford at least have the right to know what they are losing. If demolition is decided upon, it is recommended that, as a minimum, a full and thorough recording of the structure should be carried out and the historic building materials salvaged.



Fig. 71: Early 20th-century view looking south-west across the town meads towards the town centre. This area changed radically in the second half of the 1900s and is now the subject of the Old River Lane redevelopment proposals. (Author's collection)

Appendix 1: Commissioning letter

Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation

Registered Charity Number R264557

www.stortfordcf.org.uk



Dr Emily Cole

Bishop's Stortford
Herts CM23

Bishop's Stortford
Herts CM23

23 January 2022

Dear Dr Cole,

Ref: Water Lane United Reformed Church Hall, Water Lane, Bishop's Stortford

On behalf of Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation (BSCF), thank you for your time recently to give us a little information about the present Water Lane United Reformed Church (former Congregational Church) hall, including some of its significant architectural features and history, and its part in the town's civic and social history since it was completed in 1915.

Following our meeting I looked for an entry about the hall and its associated features in the Bishop's Stortford Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (see https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Bishops_Stortford_Conservation_Area_Appraisal_updated.pdf). This is the only formal document BSCF understands covers buildings and other physical items of note in the town's Conservation Area, and their preservation. To my surprise and concern I found there is no entry for the hall – as well as several other buildings of note, such as the URC church itself.

In view of this, East Herts District Council's Old River Lane (ORL) development, and that development's possible impacts on the hall, as well as other items within the hall's curtilage BSCF is very pleased to commission you to prepare a report about them. As discussed we should be pleased if the report will include information about their:

- development and architectural history; and their
- civic and social history, including their place alongside similar buildings in the town.

We should also be pleased if the report will assess the merit of keeping the significant features and suggestions for how they might be thoughtfully repurposed within the locality as well as the context and objectives of the ORL development, rather than lose them, such as happened to the Congregational Church Manse in the 1960s, to become what is now part of Waitrose's car park.

Please advise me when such a report can be available and please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss anything, require any specific support from BSCF or have any suggestions or questions about the suggested scope of the study and/or the contents of the report.

Yours sincerely

Paul Dean
Chair
Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation
stortfordcf@gmail.com
www.stortfordcf.org.uk
www.facebook.com/groups/CIVICFED/

Appendix 2: URC Hall bookings list, March 1999

(courtesy of Margaret Neville) Abbreviations: New: new room (north extension); Hall: main hall; Beginners: north-east ground-floor room; Parlour: north-east first-floor room

BISHOP'S STORTFORD UNITED REFORMED CHURCH BOOKINGS FOR MARCH 1999

Week 1 1st Mar – 6th Mar 1999

Day	New	Hall	Beginners	Parlour	Church
Mon Morning	Music Tree 9.00-6.00	Aerobics 10.00-11.00			
Afternoon			Kumon Maths 3.30-6.00		
Evening	CR Bridge 7.00-10.00	Sawbr Bad. 8.00-10.00	Raj Yoga 7.30-9.30		
Tue Morning	Music Tree 9.00-6.00	Aerobics 10.00-11.00			
Afternoon		Keep fit 12.45-2.00 U3A Line Dancing 3.15-4.15			
Evening		Brownies 6.00-7.15 W.L. Table Tennis 7.30-10.30		ASLEF 7.00-10.00	
Wed Morning	Music Tree 9.00-6.00	Aerobics 10.00-11.00			
Afternoon		Post natal 12.00-1.00			
Evening		Judo 5.00-7.15 church Badm 7.30-10.00	Bridge Club 7.00-10.00		
Thu Morning	Music Tree 9.00-4.00	Coffee Morning 9.30 - 12.30	Music Tree 9.00-1.00		
Afternoon			Kumon Maths 3.30-6.00		
Evening	Church Emaus 8.00-10.00	Karate 7.00-10.00			
Fri Morning	Music Tree 9.00-1.00	U3.A keep fit 9.30-10.30 10.45-11.45	Music Tree 9.00-1.00		
Afternoon					
Evening		UK Indep. Pty 8.00-10.00		A.A. 8.00 - 10.00	
Sat Morning		Chiropody Clinic 9.00-5.00			
Evening					

Week 2 7th - 13th Mar

Day	New	Hall	Beginners	Parlour	Church
Sun afternoon		Elders Party 4.00-5.30			
Mon morning	Music Tree 9.00-6.00	Aerobics 9.45-11.15			
afternoon			Kumon maths 3.30 – 6.00pm		
Evening	C.R.Bridge Club 7.00-10.00	Swbridgwth Badminton 8.00-10.00	Raj Yoga 7.30-9.30		
Tue Morning	Music Tree 9.00-6.00	Aerobics 9.45-11.15			
afternoon		Keep Fit 2-3			
evening	Ladies Fellowship 8-10	Brownies 6.00-7.15 Water Lane Table Tennis 7.30-10.30			
Wed morning	Music Tree 9am - 6pm	Aerobics 10.00 – 11.00			
afternoon		Post Natal 12.00-1.00			
evening		Judo 5:00-7:15 church badminton 7.30-10.00			
Thu morning	Music Tree 9am – 4pm	Coffee Morning 9:30 – 12:30	Music Tree 9.00-1.00		
afternoon			Kumon Maths 3.30 – 6pm		
evening	Church Emmaus 8-10	Karate 7:00 – 10.00		Springfield Res. Assoc. 8 – 10	
Fri morning	Music Tree 9:00-1:00	U.3.A Keep fit 9:30-10:30 10:45-11:45	Music Tree 9.00-1.00		
afternoon					
Evening				A.A. 8:00 - 10:00	
Sat morning			Chiropody clinic 9 – 5		
afternoon					
evening					

Week 3 14th - 20th March

Day	New	Hall	Beginners	Parlour	Church
Sun afternoon					
Mon morning	Music Tree 9am - 6pm	Aerobics 10:00-11:00			
afternoon			Kumon Maths 3.30 - 6		
Evening	C.R. Bridge club 7:00-10:00	Sbridgewor Badminton 8.00-10.00	Raj Yoga 7.30-9.30		Finance Meeting 8.00-10.00 (Lounge)
Tue Morning	Music Tree 9am - 6pm	Acrobics 10.00 - 11.00			
afternoon		Keep Fit 1:00-2:00 U 3.A Line Dancing 3.15 - 4.15	Church Scrabble 2 - 3pm		
evening		Brownies 6.00-7.15 WL Table Tennis 7.30-10.30			Elders Meeting 8 - 10 (Lounge0
Wed morning	Music Tree 9 - 6	Aerobics 10:00 - 11:00			
afternoon		Post Natal 12.00-1.00			
evening	YMCA Meeting 8 - 10	Judo 5:00-7:15 Church Badminton 7.30-10.00	Bridge Club 7 - 10pm		
Thu morning	Music Tree 9am - 4pm	Coffee Morning 9:30 - 12:30	Music Tree 9.00-1.00		
afternoon			Kumon Maths 3.30 - 6pm		
evening	Budgie Society 7.30 - 10.30	Karate 7.00-10.00		Church Emmaus 8 - 10	
Fri morning	Music Tree 9:00 - 1:00	U.3.A Keep Fit 9:30-10:30 10:45 - 11:45	Music Tree 9.00-1.00		
afternoon					
evening				A.A. 8:00 - 10:00	
Sat Morning			Chiropody Clinic 9 - 5		

Week 4 21st - 27th Oct

Day	New	Hall	Beginners	Parlour	Church
Sun Morning					
Sun evening					
Mon Morning	Music Tree 9am - 6pm	Aerobics 10.00-11:00			
Afternoon			Kumon Maths 3.30 - 6		
Evening	CR Bridge Club 7.00-10.00	Sawbr. Badminton 8.00-10.00	Raj Yoga 7.30-9.30		
Tue Morning	Music Tree 9am - 6pm	Aerobics 10.00 - 11.00			
Afternoon		Keep Fit 1.00-2:00 U.3.A Line Dancing 3.15 - 4.15			
Evening	Ladies Fellowship 8 - 10	Brownies 6.00-7.15 WL Table Tennis 7.30-10.30			
Wed Morning	Music Tree 9 - 6	Aerobics 10.00 - 11:00			
Afternoon		Post Natal 12.00-1.00			
Evening		Judo 5.00-7.15 church Badminton 7.30-10.00			
Thu Morning	Music Tree 9.00-4.00	Coffee Morning 9.30 - 12:30	Music Tree 9.00-1.00		
Afternoon			Koman Maths 3.30 - 6pm		
Evening	Church Emmaus 8 - 10pm	Karate 7.00-9.30			
Fri Morning	Music Tree 9.00-1.00	U 3 A 9.30-10.30 10.45-11.45	Music Tree 9.00-1.00		
Afternoon					
Evening				A.A. 8.00 - 10.00	
Sat Morning		Oxfam Hungerlunch 10 - 4	Chiropody Clinic 9-5		
Afternoon					

EVENING

RUBY WEDDING

ANN.
6-12

Week 5 28th – 31st March

Day	New	Hall	Beginners	Parlour	Creche
Sunday Afternoon					
Mon Morning	Music Tree 9 – 6pm	Aerobics 10 – 11			
Afternoon			Koman Maths 3.30 – 6pm		
Evening	C.R. Bridge 7-10	Swbridworth Badminton 8.00-10.00 (END)	Raj Yoga 7.30-9.30		
Tue Morning	Music Tree 9 – 6pm	Aerobics 10 – 11			
afternoon		Keep Fit 1 – 2			
evening		Brownies 6 – 7.15 WL Table Tennis 7.30-10.30			
Wed morning	Music Tree 9 - 6	Aerobics 10.00-11.00			
afternoon		Post Natal 12 – 1pm			
evening		Judo 5 – 7.15 Church Badminton 7.30-10.00 (END)			
Thu morning					
afternoon					
evening					
Fri morning					
afternoon					
evening					
Sat morning					
afternoon					
evening					

Appendix 3: Uses and user groups, United Reformed Church and Church Hall, 2021 (with numbers of people and frequency)

(listed in Design and Access Statement relating to application to extend and alter the United Reformed Church, Water Lane, Bishop's Stortford, July 2021, p. 19, application no. 3/21/1948/FUL, <https://publicaccess.eastherts.gov.uk/online-applications/>)

- Church Worship (45; weekly)
- Prayer Group (6; monthly)
- After Sunday Worship-Coffee (26; weekly)
- Weekday Coffee Mornings (32; weekly)
- Church Meetings (35; quarterly)
- Elders Meetings (10; monthly)
- Finance and Property Group Meetings (7; 2 x monthly)
- Lent Study Group (6; annual for 6 weeks)
- Ministers Vestry (2; weekly + random)
- Church Office (3; daily)
- Seniors Lunches (12; monthly)
- Ladies Fellowship (12; monthly)
- Saturday Bric a Brac Stall (50; weekly)
- Church Choir Practice (90; seasonal)
- Annual Bazaar (8; annual)
- Street Pastors Base (30; weekly)
- Funeral Wake (varies; occasional)
- Bishops Stortford Choir (80; weekly)
- Community Choir (100; weekly)
- Harmonaires Choir (80; monthly)
- Toddlers Groups (10; 4 x mornings)
- Kumon Extra Tuition Classes (20; Mon/Thurs PM)
- Alcoholics Anonymous (30; 3 x weekly)
- Pilates (20; weekly)
- Sports Discussion Group (-; monthly)
- Sainsbury Veterans (110; 10 x p.a.)
- U3A (50; 4 x weekly)
- Bridge Group (12; 2 x monthly)
- Charities Discussion Group (20; as and when)
- Children's Parties (30; as and when)
- 1 to 1 advice (-;-)
- Brownies Meetings (26; weekly)
- Cubs Annual Event (220; annual)
- District Brownies Annual Event (120; annual)
- Small Instrumental Groups (8; as and when)
- Bishop's Stortford College Instrumental Group (28; spring term).

Endnotes

- ¹ www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide6/the-manse/ (acc. 19 Nov. '21)
- ² https://cdn-eastherts.onwebcurl.com/s3fs-public/documents/District_Plan_07_-_C_5_-_BISHOPS_STORTFORD_BISH_POLICIES.pdf, p. 65 (acc. 6 Feb. '22)
- ³ www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide6/the-manse/ (acc. 19 Nov. '21)
- ⁴ <https://www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide6/water-lane/> (acc. 6 Feb. '21)
- ⁵ There are still instances, however, of the building being named 'the Water Lane Institute' through to the early 1970s; see, for example: *Herts & Essex Observer*, 1 December 1972, p. 23
- ⁶ www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide14/baptist-church/ (acc. 26 Nov. '21)
- ⁷ This and the subsequent historical information about the URC Church in Bishop's Stortford is based on the following sources: www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide6/water-lane/#united-reformed-church and www.waterlaneurc.org.uk/history/ (acc. 25 Nov. '21); Hertfordshire Archives & Local Studies (HALS), NR12/1/2; HALS, NR12/2/1; HALS, NR12/7/7; HALS, DP/21/29/29
- ⁸ HALS, NR12/7/1; www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide7/old-northgate-school/ (acc. 6 Dec. '21)
- ⁹ HALS, NR12/7/1
- ¹⁰ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 24 June 1933, p. 5
- ¹¹ For the conveyance of the Water Lane property and a plan of its arrangement in 1907, see: HALS, NR12/1/2
- ¹² The papers of this Building Committee survive in: HALS, NR12/7/1
- ¹³ A slightly different image of the laying of the Sunday School foundation stones is included in: Violet Sparrow, *Yesterday's Stortford*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1982), p. 45
- ¹⁴ It was stated, on Boyten's death, that 'Few can point to such a fine record of Sunday School service as that of the late Mr John Boyten ... Mr Boyten was was connected with the Bishop's Stortford Congregational Sunday School, which he entered as a scholar in 1863. For a long period of years he held the office of superintendent, succeeding Mr Joseph Crisp, and he gave himself unsparingly to the work. He was in a very real sense "the children's friend" and found his great

[happiness] in promoting their well-being': *Herts & Essex Observer*, 6 January 1943, p. 4. Boyten, with his colleague Miss C. E. Nash, resigned from the Sunday School's superintendency in 1925: HALS NR12/2/1

¹⁵ HALS, NR12/7/1

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 1 May 1915, p. 5

¹⁸ HALS, NR12/7/1

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Tony Trigg, pers. comm. (18 Feb. 2022)

²¹ HALS, NR12/7/1

²² See: www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide6/the-manse/ (acc. 19 Nov. '21)

²³ *Cheltenham Chronicle*, 31 October 1931, p. 1

²⁴ *Coventry Herald*, 3 April 1931, p. 7

²⁵ Herbert Frances Evans, 'The Sunday-School Building and its Equipment', *The Biblical World*, vol. 44 no. 3 (September 1914), p. 159

²⁶ Our understanding of the building's original plan is based on Building Committee minutes and articles on the Sunday School's foundation and opening: HALS, NR12/7/7; *Herts & Essex Observer*, 18 July 1914, p. 5; *ibid*, 1 May 1915, p. 5. Unfortunately, no copies of the original or early plans have been discovered.

²⁷ In the account of the opening of the Sunday School, it was noted that 'In the rear [i.e. east] of the buildings there is the necessary sanitary accommodation, and over the sanitary block on the east front there are balconies which give charming views': *Herts & Essex Observer*, 1 May 1915, p. 5

²⁸ Evans, 'The Sunday-School Building and its Equipment', pp. 154-5

²⁹ For more on the Akron plan and the architectural background of Sunday schools, see: eds John T. McFarland and Benjamin S. Winchester, *The Encyclopedia of Sunday Schools and Religious Education* (New York, 1915), vol. 1, pp. 28-56

- ³⁰ See: Philip B. Cliff, *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England, 1780-1980* (Redhill, 1986), p. 221; H. F. Murrell and R. M. Pigott, *Modern Sunday School Buildings* (London, 1926)
- ³¹ *Essex Newsman*, 23 December 1916, p. 4
- ³² HALS, NR12/7/7
- ³³ *Ibid*, NR12/2/1
- ³⁴ *Ibid*, NR12/2/2; *Herts & Essex Observer*, 15 July 1933, p. 5; *ibid*, 29 February 1936, p. 2
- ³⁵ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 16 March 1940, p. 5
- ³⁶ *Ibid*, 15 July 1933, p. 5; *ibid*, 29 February 1936, p. 2
- ³⁷ HALS, NR12/2/2; *ibid*, NR12/2/4. The Guild House was renovated by the Congregationalists in 1933: HALS, NR12/7/7
- ³⁸ HALS, NR12/2/1
- ³⁹ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 29 February 1936, p. 2
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 10 November 1950, p. 5
- ⁴¹ HALS, NR12/7/7
- ⁴² Comments posted on Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation Facebook page, November 2021
- ⁴³ Church members recall the existence of a small surgery/clinic next to the women's toilets on the ground floor of the URC Hall's south-east pavilion. This was entered from the outside and apparently related to the infant welfare clinic.
- ⁴⁴ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 1 April 1933, p. 5; *ibid*, 18 January 1936, p. 4; *ibid*, 10 June 1939, p. 2
- ⁴⁵ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 18 July 1914, p. 5; *ibid*, 1 May 1915, p. 5. The article describing the laying of the Hall's foundation stones in 1914 mentions a planned provision of 4 large classrooms and 16 smaller ones. However, the article on the opening makes clear that only 12 smaller classrooms were built. By the late 1960s, the URC Hall was licensed to accommodate 300-350 people: HALS, NR12/7/8

- ⁴⁶ See: www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide15/working-mens-club2/ (acc. 25 Nov. '21)
- ⁴⁷ For the sale, see: *Herts & Essex Observer*, 31 October 1936, p. 2. According to the website above, the final event was held at the Great Hall in December 1937.
- ⁴⁸ For the original proposals, see: *Herts & Essex Observer*, 5 January 1951, p. 1. For the Rhodes Memorial Hall as built, see: *Herts & Essex Observer*, 1 February 1963, p. 19, and *ibid*, 20 September 1963, p. 17
- ⁴⁹ HALS, NR12/2/1 and see NR12/7/7
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid* and NR12/7/7
- ⁵¹ *Ibid*, NR12/7/7
- ⁵² Tony Trigg, pers. comm. (18 Feb. 2022). Trigg, born in 1934, was a pupil at the Sunday School from a very early age, and later taught there.
- ⁵³ *Ibid*; Mary Turner, pers. comm. (20 Feb. 2022). Like Tony Trigg, Mary Turner was born in 1934 and attended the Sunday School from a very young age, later teaching there.
- ⁵⁴ Plans of 1967 show this part of the building had already been extended by that point: *ibid*, NR12/7/8
- ⁵⁵ According to Tony Trigg (see above), the balcony of the north-east pavilion had certainly gone by the late 1930s/early 1940s.
- ⁵⁶ HALS, NR12/2/1
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid*. The total cost estimated in June 1934 was £108.
- ⁵⁸ For the founding of the Dramatic Society, see: HALS, NR12/1/2
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid*, NR12/7/7
- ⁶⁰ Tony Trigg, pers. comm. (18 Feb. 2022)
- ⁶¹ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 10 November 1950, p. 5
- ⁶² Tony Trigg, pers. comm. (18 Feb. 2022)
- ⁶³ HALS, NR12/7/8
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 24 March 1967, p. 5

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Tony Trigg, pers. comm. (24 Feb. 2022)

⁶⁷ The plans and related report survive at: HALS, NR12/7/8

⁶⁸ Ibid; *Herts & Essex Observer*, 5 January 1968, p. 1

⁶⁹ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 5 January 1968, p. 1. When the works were completed, a new time capsule was embedded in the walls of the building.

⁷⁰ HALS, NR12/7/8

⁷¹ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 1 May 1915, p. 5

⁷² Ibid, NR12/7/1

⁷³ Tony Trigg, pers. comm. (18 Feb. 2022)

⁷⁴ Peter West, pers. comm. (24 Feb. 2022)

⁷⁵ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 1 May 1915, p. 5

⁷⁶ The recommendation was that any hall of this size have a minimum of two entrances and exits, rather than just one: Evans, 'The Sunday-School Building and its Equipment', p. 177

⁷⁷ The possibility of using stone for these doorcases was explored in 1914, but rejected due to cost: HALS, NR12/7/1

⁷⁸ The fenestration in this wall had long caused problems. Even during construction, the Congregationalists asked the architects to make the kitchen window larger, but this was said at the time to be structurally impossible: HALS, NR12/7/1. In the expenses account for 1932, payment was made for a 'window to kitchen': *ibid*, NR12/7/7

⁷⁹ A window of this type had been stipulated by the Congregationalists. The Building Committee for the Sunday School asked in January 1914 for the 'east window to be as big as possible': HALS, NR12/7/1

⁸⁰ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 5 January 1968, p. 1

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Tony Trigg, pers. comm. (18 Feb. 2022); HALS, NR12/7/8

- ⁸³ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 5 January 1968, p. 1; HALS, NR12/7/8
- ⁸⁴ HALS, NR12/7/8
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid*, NR12/7/1
- ⁸⁶ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 1 May 1915, p. 5
- ⁸⁷ Peter West, pers. comm. (24 Feb. 2022)
- ⁸⁸ The Congregational Building Committee enquired in 1914 about the possibility of erecting movable partitions instead of doors, but this was never taken forward – and by then was an out-dated approach: HALS, NR12/7/1
- ⁸⁹ Tony Trigg, pers. comm. (18 Feb. 2022); Mary Turner, pers. comm. (20 Feb. 2022)
- ⁹⁰ HALS, NR12/7/1
- ⁹¹ *Ibid*
- ⁹² *Ibid*
- ⁹³ Tony Trigg, pers. comm. (18 Feb. 2022)
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid*
- ⁹⁵ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 10 September 1921, p. 5
- ⁹⁶ Tony Trigg, pers. comm. (18 Feb. 2022)
- ⁹⁷ HALS, NR12/7/1
- ⁹⁸ Tony Trigg, pers. comm. (18 Feb. 2022)
- ⁹⁹ HALS, NR12/7/8
- ¹⁰⁰ Evans, 'The Sunday-School Building and its Equipment', pp. 166-170
- ¹⁰¹ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 1 May 1915, p. 5
- ¹⁰² In 1930, reference was made to flowers in the grounds of the Water Lane Institute. These were possibly located in the north-west area, but may also have been on the east: *Herts & Essex Observer*, 8 November 1930, p. 8

- ¹⁰³ For more information about the American Hostel, see:
www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide8/linkway/ and www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/ww2-introduction/ww2-1944/ (acc. 26 Nov. '21)
- ¹⁰⁴ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 8 January 1944, quoted in websites above
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 5 August 1966, p. 1
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 25 June 1965, p. 6
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 17 March 1967, p. 11
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 27 July 1973, p. 13
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 3 November 1972, p. 1
- ¹¹⁰ <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-principles-sustainable-management-historic-environment/conservationprinciplespoliciesandguidanceapril08web/> (acc. 25 Feb. '22)
- ¹¹¹ [www.burwellparishcouncil.gov.uk/Gardiner Memorial Hall - Refurbishment 36616.aspx](http://www.burwellparishcouncil.gov.uk/Gardiner_Memorial_Hall_-_Refurbishment_36616.aspx) (acc. 12 Dec. '21)
- ¹¹² Cliff, *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England*, p. 221
- ¹¹³ Ibid, p. 286
- ¹¹⁴ Joy Cornell, *Bishop's Stortford Methodist Church 1903-2003*: <https://www.bsm-church.org.uk/ourchurch.htm> (acc. 6 Feb. 2022)
- ¹¹⁵ *Herts & Essex Observer*, 5 January 1951, p. 1; *ibid*, 4 May 1951, p. 1