

Gloucester Methodist New Connexion Church

A recent planning application to demolish the “Fad & Faded” building in Worcester Street, Gloucester, has revealed a “lost” Methodist church.

Substantial parts of the Victorian building remain, including Gothic style windows. The church was used in the first part of the 20th century as an art studio. Following alterations in the 1930s it became a garage, tyre depot and furniture showroom. The Civic Trust's Planning Appraisal Panel wants to see the 1930s facade to Worcester Street retained, and other remains incorporated in any new building – in a similar way to what was left of the Tanner's Hall next door.

The New Connexion denomination of the Methodist church was founded in 1797 in Sheffield and spread rapidly to other parts of the country.

Its inspiration was Rev. Alexander Kilham, who left the Wesleyans saying they were too prescriptive and gave clergy and congregations little say in church policy.

Despite Kilham's death, one year later, progress was maintained throughout Britain as well as in China, Australia, Canada and Ireland. More dissenters joined in the 1850s, and, in 1857, the chapel was built in Worcester Street, Gloucester, which became the mother chapel for others in surrounding towns and villages. William Booth, a New Connexion minister, almost certainly preached there. He later left to form the Salvation Army.

The chapel's ministry was short lived because, in 1897, it closed following moves to reunite the Methodist church which led to the late lamented Northgate Methodist Church becoming the mother church.

In 1907 membership of the New Connexion nationally was 40,000 with 2,000 ministers. In 1909 the faction formally returned to the fold when The United Methodist Free Church was founded.

When the chapel closed in 1897 it became the art studio of Alderman Charles Poole, of Gloucester, whose family were in show business. In the chapel they produced giant hand painted canvasses depicting famous scenes such as great waterfalls, naval battles and well-known stories from folk lore.

Illuminated by “magic lantern” slides, Poole's Myriorama, was a pioneering form of visual entertainment touring the town halls and corn exchanges of Britain.

The chief artist of the canvasses was Arthur Rogers, whose son, Ernest, later became manager of the Hippodrome cinema in Eastgate Street, (now the new Primark) as the family moved its interest into music hall, silent films and then the “movies.”

In 1892 Pooles began operating the Albert Theatre in the old Booth Hall, next to the Shire Hall in Westgate Street, later changing the name to the King's Theatre. It was a cinema until just after the Second World War.

In 1903 Pooles began managing the Theatre Royal and Opera House (lately Poundstretcher) in Westgate Street. It was later re named the Palace Theatre.

The Hippodrome was Poole's largest cinema in Gloucester. It was spectacularly destroyed by fire, but rebuilt, and sold to the Rank Organisation in 1956.