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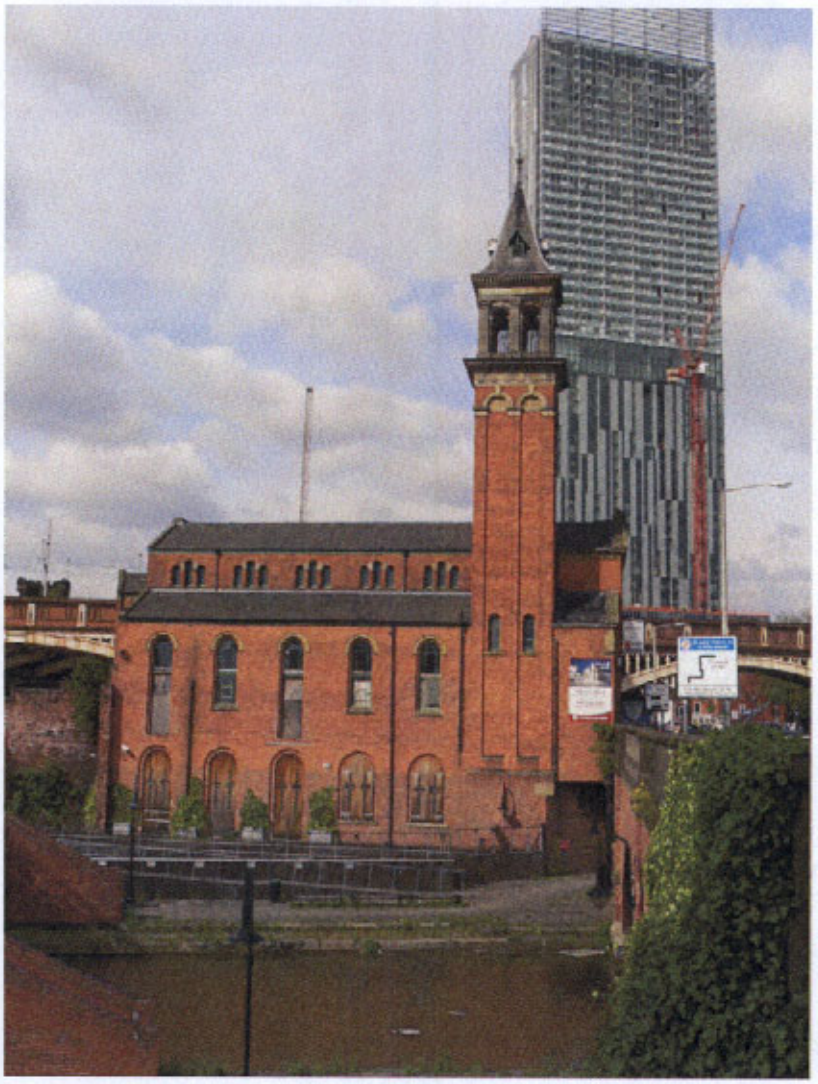
PPG 15 Statement

Knott Mill Chapel

378 Deansgate, Manchester



AHP Architectural History Practice

Knott Mill Chapel

PPG 15 Statement

Prepared for OMI Architects

by

The Architectural History Practice Limited

February 2008

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1.0 Introduction

This report was commissioned by OMI Architects of Manchester in June 2006 to accompany an application for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent for the conversion of Knott Mill Chapel to office use. The report, which sets out the history and significance of the chapel building and assesses the impact of the proposed alterations, was compiled by Neil Burton MA FSA IHBC of the Architectural History Practice Limited. The original report was revised in February 2008 to take account of some modifications to the original proposals.

2.0 Early history of the area

Knott Mill was the name given in the nineteenth century to the area at the south end of Deansgate. The area occupies a loop in the river Medlock and has long been dominated by transport routes. From the late eighteenth century Knott Mill was the terminus of the Bridgwater Canal and in the nineteenth century it was crossed by the Rochdale Canal and a railway viaduct built for the Manchester South Junction and Altringham Railway. The present Deansgate Station, which stands on the viaduct and was opened in 1849, was originally known as Knott Mill Station and the name is still visible on the building. For most of the nineteenth century Knott Mill was characterised by a mix of warehouses, small industries and workers' houses. The Ordnance Survey map of 1849 shows the site of the present chapel building occupied by a large warehouse belonging to the Grocer's Company, part of which was demolished to provide the site for the chapel.



Fig. 1: The Bridgwater Canal Basin in 1807 by J C Nattes, with the Grocer's Warehouse in the background (Salford Art Gallery)

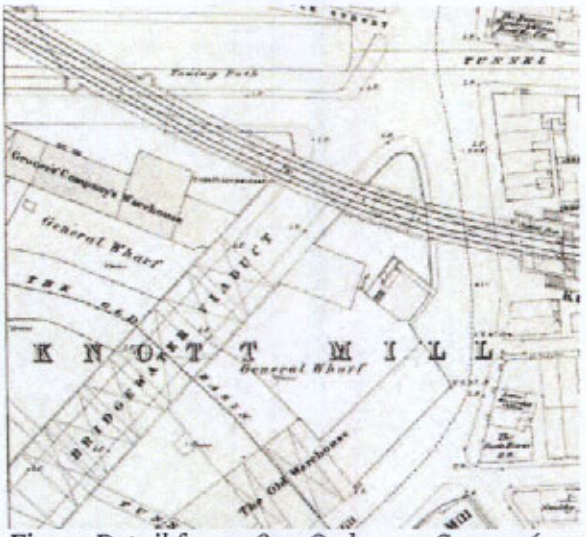

Fig. 2: Detail from 1850 Ordnance Survey (surveyed in 1849)

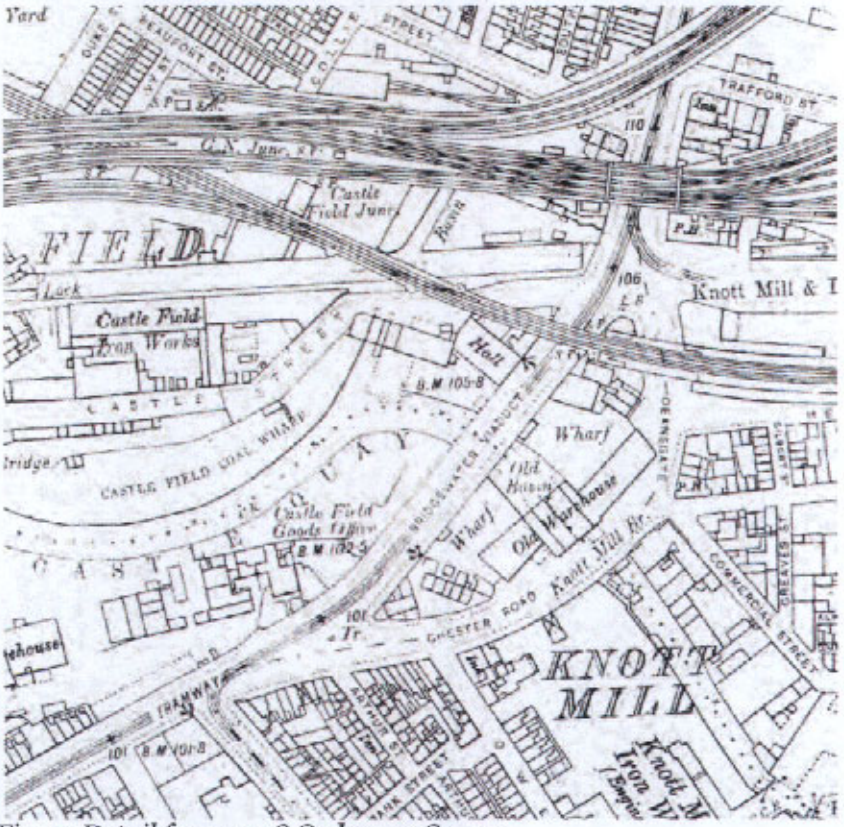

Fig. 3: Detail from 1908 Ordnance Survey

3.0 A Brief history of the Knott Mill Chapel

Areas like Knott Mill were a natural target for evangelising religious groups. One such group in Manchester was the Congregational Chapel Building Association, which lent money for chapel building to independent congregations at low rates of interest. In 1851 the Association agreed to lend the funds for building a new chapel at Knott Mill if a suitable site could be found. At first this proved to be a problem. A note in the original minute book of the congregation records that:

> So occupied was the land through the throng of business and of population, that tho' advertised for and searched after for some time, neither appropriate site nor fitting room could be obtained.... At length the agent of the Bridgewater Trust wrote a letter to [the Building Committee] offering the site upon which the present chapel stands.

The minute book also records that:

> The foundation stone was laid on the 22nd of October 1852 by Gyles Hadfield Esq. The builders were Hay McNish & McKeen, the architect was Mr Walters. The cost of the building was about £3,800.

The congregation chose as their first minister Mr John Rawlinson, who occupied the post until his retirement in October 1888 on the grounds of ill-health. The chapel minutes for this period are a record of ardent nonconformity with much criticism of errant members of the congregation. When Mr Rawlinson retired no new minister could be found and the congregation was disbanded 'for the purpose of facilitating an arrangement whereby the church at Chester Road may use the building as a mission hall.'

This bald statement in the minute book gives no clue as to the reason for disbanding, though it was not a particularly unusual event among the independent nonconformists.

After the dissolution of the original congregation, the records relating to the chapel building are very patchy. The building, now known as the Knott Mill Mission Hall, appears to have continued in use as a church hall until some time after the First World War, under the general auspices of the Congregational Mission Board for Manchester and Salford. There are references among the surviving papers to meetings of the Boy's Brigade and Sunday School in the building. By the mid 1930s the Knott Mill Chapel had become the Third Church of Christ Scientist and is shown as 'Scientist Church' on the 1934 Ordnance Survey. By the 1970s it had passed into secular use as an Auction Rooms. In more recent years the lower floor was converted into recording studios and a bar, while the upper floor was abandoned.

4.0 The original chapel building and later alterations

The site of the Knott Mill chapel is an awkward one, in the angle between the railway viaduct and the road viaduct, with a steep fall in the ground down to the river. The western end abutted directly onto the Grocer's warehouse and the south west corner of the chapel was canted to follow the line of the older building. The architect sensibly chose to concentrate all the ornament on the principal façade facing the main road, while the side walls are devoid of ornament and articulated only by the window openings. The building material is red brick, with some stone ornament on the façade.

There is no detailed account of the building of the chapel among the congregation's papers, nor any drawings. The first illustration of the building is as a marginal ornament to a map of Manchester and Salford published in 1857, which illustrated all the principal buildings of the town. This shows the building from the south east, with the principal front and the south front with its campanile, all much as they are today. The selection of the chapel for illustration suggests that there may have been some recognition at the time of its architectural interest.

The architect, Edward Walters, took as his inspiration for the exterior of the Knott Mill Chapel Italian models like Alberti's façade of Santa Maria Novella in Florence (1470s) and more particularly Andrea Palladio's San Georgio Maggiore in Venice (1565), whose façade, with its pedimented centre set forward from the lower half pediments over the side aisles and tall brick campanile, has distant but obvious echoes in Knott Mill, even though much of the detailing is typically nineteenth century and instead of the central door at San Georgio Walters provided the twin side doors typical of many nonconformist chapels.



Fig. 4: Detail from 1857 Illustrated map of Manchester & and Salford



Fig. 5: San Georgio Maggiore, Venice

The interior is much less Italianate. It follows the conventional chapel pattern with timber galleries on three sides, supported on iron columns. An upper tier of columns supports the handsome open timber roof. The gallery fronts are more Gothic in detail than Italian, and the tall round arch of the organ chamber has neo-Norman detailing, although the round window above it has an Italianate flavour.

It is clear from passing references in the congregation minutes that the building was designed with several school rooms on the lower floor and a galleried chapel space above. In 1855, three years after the opening of the building, it was agreed to raise funds for the purchase of an organ and in 1860 the church was 'beautified' or re-decorated and a new organ installed by Mr Francis Booth of Wakefield. The organ was placed behind the pulpit within a chamber which opened into the main chapel-space by a tall Norman arch. It is not clear whether the organ chamber was an original feature or was constructed in 1860.

In 1898, by which time the building had become a mission hall, various minor alterations were made to the interior, of which the most significant was the formation of a new room in the deep part of the gallery behind the main façade. The height of this enclosed space can probably be judged by the existing white paintwork, which extends to half the height of the upper windows on the main façade. The ground floor space beneath the new room was apparently known as the Board Room, with the Boys Brigade Room at basement level. At this date also the pine fronts of the galleries were painted and varnished light oak colour

Few other alterations to the building are documented, although it is clear that some have taken place. The Manchester City Council Building Control files record only that new lavatories were installed in 1948 while the building was used by the Christian Scientists and that the conversion of part of the basement for use as recording studios was carried out in 1992 to the designs of Les Fowey.

The upper windows on the main façade now have metal frames, as have those facing the railway viaduct. This must be an early or mid twentieth century alteration. Presumably all the windows originally had timber frames, like those surviving on the lower part of the main front and in the clerestorey. The glazing pattern of the metal windows presumably follows the original. In recent years the cills of two of the chapel windows and three of the school room windows on the river-side have been lowered to floor-level.

The internal arrangements have clearly been much altered. The original basement arrangement has been completely lost through modern alterations. The original tall iron columns supporting the ceiling beams still survive, although it is not certain that the present position of the columns is the original one. There are seatings on the beams which suggest a different arrangement. Nor is it possible to deduce the original arrangement of the space on the ground floor behind the main façade At present the space is divided from the main chapel space by a hardwood and glass partition, which looks like early or mid twentieth century work, although it copies the detailing of the gallery fronts and was probably made for the building. Traces of an earlier, though not necessarily the original, partition following a different line are visible on the floor.

Contained within the space are the beams supporting the gallery; these beams are carried on cast iron columns, some now partly encased in later partitions, and the ends of the beams are finished with moulding and were clearly intended to be seen. It is difficult to put a likely date on the present arrangement of the space, but some of the work at least is probably post-war.

Inside the chapel, the arch of the organ chamber has been walled-up. The gallery now continues across the arch. It seems unlikely that this was the original arrangement since the gallery hides the moulded bases of the large arch in a way which was clearly not intended. The date of the gallery extension is unknown. The pews in the main space and galleries have been removed, and the galleries have been partially levelled.



Fig. 6: The principal south-east elevation fronting Deansgate and the Bridgewater Viaduct



Fig. 7: The south-west elevation, facing the river



Fig. 8: The north-west elevation, showing the organ chamber and vestry room



Fig. 9: The north-east elevation facing the railway viaduct



Fig. 10: Interior, with the arch of the former organ chamber



Fig. 11: Interior facing towards Deansgate, showing the deep rear gallery and the open timber roof.



Fig. 12: The west gallery, showing the timber levelling



Fig. 13: Detail showing the gallery built across one of the bases of the organ chamber arch



Fig. 14: Detail of partition between foyer and main chapel space



Fig. 15: One of the gallery beams and supporting columns in the foyer, encased in a later partition

5.0 The Architect: Edward Walters (1808-1872)

Edward Walters was born in London, the son of John Walters, an engineer and surveyor who designed several London churches. On his father's death in 1821 Edward entered the office of Isaac Clarke and subsequently that of the architect Lewis Vulliamy (where he was the contemporary of the designer Owen Jones) and then that of the engineer John Rennie.

In 1832 Rennie sent Walters to Constantinople to supervise the building of a small arms factory and other works for the Turkish government. He remained in Turkey for five years, and returned home in 1837 in company with his friend W H Barlow, later the Chief Engineer to the Midland Railway Company, who had also been working in Constantinople. Together they visited Malta, Sicily, Calabria, Naples, Rome, Florence and Pisa; they then took ship at Leghorn for Marseilles and travelled through France by way of Paris, arriving in England in January 1838. It is clear from the appearance of some of his later buildings that Walters was also familiar with the architecture of Northern Italy, but there seems to be no record of a visit to this part of the country.

While in Constantinople Walters met Richard Cobden, who suggested that he leave London and establish himself as an architect in Manchester. Despite his excellent London connections through family and friends, Walters took Cobden's advice and moved to Manchester in 1839. At first he found it difficult to obtain major commissions in the city, although Cobden employed him to design a new warehouse in Mosley Street. During the 1840s most of Walters's work consisted of schools, chapels and modest suburban houses. Among the chapels attributed to him in his obituary are the Union Chapel (1841), the Granby Row church and Broughton Road chapel (1842), St Andrew's Free Church in Oxford Road (1844), chapels and schools at Darwen and Bolton (1845), Oldham Road chapel and Stockport chapel (1849) and the Knott Mill Chapel (1852). Although this was a period of active church building, Walters designed nothing for the Church of England and is said to have 'held himself aloof from the established church'.

Walters was a Liberal in his political sympathies. This may have helped him to obtain building commissions from the Manchester merchants who were committed to the principal of Free Trade. In 1851 he designed a new warehouse at the corner of Aytoun and Portland Streets for Messrs Brown & Co. in the form of an Italian *palazzo*. The building attracted immediate attention as a later memoir of Walters records:

> We remember the surprise and wonder excited by, we think, his first great warehouse, the one built for Messrs. Brown & Co at the corner of Aytoun-street and Portland-street: the style was new; there was a freshness and purity about it which quickly took hold of men's minds and the building of Italian warehouses became almost a rage' (*The Manchester Critic*, 16 December 1872).

Two years later Walters was commissioned to design the Free Trade Hall in Peter Street, on the historic site of the Peterloo Massacre. This splendid Italianate building, described by Sir Nikolaus Pevsner as, 'perhaps the noblest monument in the Cinquecento style in England', consolidated the fashion for Italianate buildings in Manchester and the reputation of Walters as one of the city's leading architects for the next decade until his retirement from business in 1865.

Walters died in Brighton in 1872. The *Manchester Critic* commented that 'Mr Walters has passed from among us, respected by all with whom he came in contact and leaving the mark of his genius in lasting monuments in the streets of Manchester'. In particular, his introduction of the Italian palazzo style for the great warehouses which once lined the streets of central Manchester, and are still conspicuous, helped define the particular character of the city in its mid-nineteenth century hey-day.

6.0 Assessment of significance

The Knott Mill Chapel has considerable architectural significance as a work of Edward Walters, one of the leading architects of the mid-nineteenth century in Manchester. Walters's particular contribution to the town was the use of the Italianate style for its commercial and public buildings. The Knott Mill chapel appears to have been his only religious building in this style. The use of the Italianate manner for religious buildings was not wholly unknown in the middle of the nineteenth century. Other examples are St Mary and St Nicholas Wilton by Thomas Henry Wyatt (1841-5) and St Raphael Surbiton (1846-7) and Christ Church St Albans (1850-1) both by Charles Parker. But Italianate was nevertheless an unusual choice at a time when Gothic was the norm. Both of Walters's other surviving listed chapel buildings, the Belgrave Chapel at Darwen and the Congregational Chapel in Wellington Road North, Stockport, are Gothic.

It is the east end of the church towards Deansgate, with its Italian front and campanile, which is of most architectural significance. The other elevations are much more utilitarian. The interior, although a good surviving example of a galleried mid-nineteenth century nonconformist chapel, with a handsome timber roof, is not so unusual, and parts of the interior, particularly the basement storey and the entrance foyer, have suffered considerable alteration and their original character has been lost.

The chapel also has some historic significance as a representative of the buildings serving independent nonconformist congregations, which were once much more common in central Manchester. In this case, the congregation does not appear to have contained any people of national or local distinction.

The building is properly listed at grade II. A copy of the list description is given in Appendix 1, (the date of building given is incorrect).

7.0 The present proposals

The current scheme by OMI Architects proposes the conversion of the entire chapel to office use. This would entail some minor alterations to the exterior of the building and a more radical alteration to the character of the interior, where a new pod would be inserted into the main galleried chapel space.

Office conversion probably offers the best route for the preservation of the building. Although part of the basement was used as recording studios from 1992 until recently, and part was briefly and unsuccessfully used as a bar, the main chapel space has been out of use for nearly fifteen years. Many redundant chapels have been converted to serve community uses, but the costs of conversion are substantial. When the building was recently offered for sale on the open market the only interest was from those proposing residential or office conversion. Residential conversion would

in all likelihood destroy the internal character of the building, while an office conversion of the kind now proposed keeps subdivision to a minimum.

7.1 External impacts

On the main façade facing Deansgate there would be no major alterations, but one of the door steps would be lowered to allow level access from the street, the three large twentieth-century metal windows of the central section of the façade would be replaced with modern double-glazed units with the same glazing pattern as existing, and a new glazed canopy would be placed over the principal right hand entrance door.

On the river front, new stone transoms would be inserted into the two lowered windows on the line of the original cills and the steel windows would be replaced by new double-glazed units with the same glazing pattern. The basement windows would have new windows with square panes and the modern timber decking in front of the façade would be removed and the elevation of the building made good.

On the North West elevation an existing window opening at ground floor level would be considerably enlarged to form a new entrance with a new porch in a modern idiom, which has been designed to reflect the boundary line of the former Grocer's warehouse. This elevation is not conspicuous and is of little architectural interest. The proposed new porch is modest in scale but makes a firm architectural statement which would enhance what is at present clearly a utilitarian back elevation.

The North East elevation facing the railway viaduct is wholly concealed from public view. It is proposed to enlarge two of the existing aisle windows to form doorways giving access to a landscaped open space which will also serve as a bicycle store. This would bring into beneficial use a space which at present is filled with service ducts and rubbish.

Overall, the impact of the proposed works on the exterior of the building would be minimal. The only new works would be the replacement of existing metal windows with new double glazed units with the same glazing pattern and the forming of a new entrance with an external porch on the north-west elevation. These would have no adverse effect on the character and special interest of the listed building. Indeed, the likely effect of the refurbishment would make a positive improvement in the external appearance of the chapel.

7.2 Internal impacts

The basement floor has lost its original character through a series of twentieth century alterations. The current proposal is to remove the existing partitions, creating a large space, retaining the existing iron columns supporting the ceiling, and inserting a mezzanine gallery over about one third of the floor area.

At ground floor level, the existing foyer/entrance hall space would be completely re-organised. This space has no clearly-defined historic character, but is the product of repeated alterations, none of special architectural interest. The new space would have a modern character although all original features would be retained and made more visible. Later partitions, including the twentieth-century wood and glass screens between the foyer and the main chapel space, would be removed, which would expose to view the original iron columns and ornamental gallery beams. The existing plaster ceilings with their coves would also be retained, as evidence of what may have been the original room layout in this part of the building. There would be some alterations

to the floor level with the formation of an access ramp down from the main entrance and a new platform lift connecting the basement and ground floors.

The campanile houses the main staircase serving the basement, ground floor and gallery. The stair appears to be original and would be retained as the main stair access from ground to first floor.

In the main chapel space at ground floor level two windows on north-east side would be cut down to form entrance openings to new landscaped open space and bicycle store in the angle between the chapel and railway viaduct.

The spaces under the galleries would remain open as office space. The central part of the chapel space would be filled by an irregularly-shaped meeting-space, forming the lowest level of a three-storey 'pod' loosely occupying the centre of the building but clearly distinct from it. The 'pod' would be partly enclosed and partly open to the main chapel space and would be served by its own internal stair. At first floor level, the central meeting space would fill most of the space between the galleries; the galleries would be retained and their fronts would remain visible. New openings would be made in the gallery fronts to allow direct level access to the pod. The upper part of the round-headed arch to the former organ chamber would be unblocked and the arch made good. A new lift would be provided within the former organ chamber space serving ground first and second floors.

The central pod would have a second floor level enclosed by glazed balustrades and extending across through the arch of the organ chamber to connect with the lift shaft. The open timber roof would remain unaltered.

The visual impact of the new works in the main chapel would be considerable and would certainly change the character of the principal space. On the other hand all the existing original elements of the interior would be retained and would be visible, the new work would be clearly distinct from the old, and all the new work would be reversible. The clear separation of the new central 'pod' from the galleries would still allow the original volume to be read as a single space.

8.0 Conclusion

The former Knott Mill Chapel is currently out of use. It is apparently in fair condition, with no major structural defects, but empty buildings are prone to more rapid decay and more vulnerable to vandalism than occupied buildings. It would certainly help the preservation of the historic fabric if the whole building could be brought back into use.

Churches and chapels are notoriously difficult buildings to convert to other uses, partly because of the large open spaces and partly because of the desirability of retaining historic features like galleries and structural ornament.

In this case the principal importance of building lies in the main front and in the overall composition with the campanile. These will be unaffected by proposals.

The interior is of some interest as a mid-nineteenth century chapel interior, but has already suffered some alteration. The original pews have been removed and the galleries have been levelled. The foyer space has been much altered by later partitions. The basement space, which was formerly schoolrooms, has entirely lost its historic character through repeated alteration.

The proposed new work will change the character of the main space by filling the centre with a frankly modern structure, but the structure is reversible, all the existing original elements would be retained, nothing of value would be lost and the interior space would still be readable. The proposal is an original solution of considerable architectural interest in its own right, which would give the building a viable new use and should be given listed building consent.

Sources and bibliography

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Appendix 1

MANCHESTER

SJ8397NW DEANSGATE
698-1/30/113 (West side)
20/06/88 No.378
Artingstalls Auctioneers

GV II

Former Congregational Chapel, subsequently auctioneer's premises. 1858, by Edward Walters; altered. Red brick (part of facade now painted blue), slate roofs. Italianate style. Gable to road. Nave and aisles which incorporate porches at the front ends, with tall square tower rising from south aisle behind porch, all over a basement storey (probably originally the schoolroom). The gabled east front has a 3-bay pedimented centre with pilasters, coupled round-headed windows at the lower level and tall round-headed recessed windows above, with carved imposts and glazing with coloured margin panes, a saw-tooth band above the windows, and bracketed cornice to the pediment which contains a crude wheel window. The flanking porches have round-headed doorways with elaborate moulded surrounds including panelled pilasters with carved capitals, and round-headed panelled double doors with glazed top panels; and panels above the doors with oculi in wreath surrounds. Campanile tower with pilasters making 2 very tall blank arches in each side, a prominent cornice, square belfry of stone with coupled round-headed openings, and short slated spire with lucarnes, the roof swept over the eaves. South side has 5 round-headed windows on each floor, all with margin panes and the upper with stone surrounds to the heads, and a clerestory window of 3 small stepped round-headed lights. Interior not inspected.

Listing NGR: SJ8333097528