

Grangetown Local History Society



Fact Sheet No. 8

Churches and Chapels

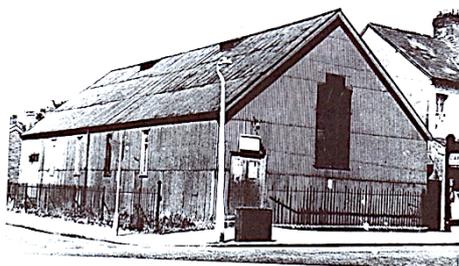
Ray Noyes

Churches and Chapels

The Iron Room

The very first 'church' was the so-called Iron Room¹, built in 1861 from tar-covered corrugated iron, by a builder by the name of Jones. It was situated on the western corner of Bromsgrove Street and Paget Street. It was the personal gift of Baroness Windsor. It was named St Paul's Church prior to the grand version that eventually replaced it. It was both a school and a church, and as such followed the tradition of schools being patronised and run by middle and upper class women.

Its first minister was a young curate, Mr J J Young, from Canton. It appears that he found this, his first appointment, rather daunting and struggled not only financially but emotionally to bring the Word to the impoverished and downtrodden of the area. He confided in a letter that he was finding things so difficult he was tempted to give up the job, before the hall had even been finished.



For one thing, although he had a building, it had nothing in it, except a few chairs, and he lacked the means to equip it. His letter (transcribed below), to Mr C E Burnand the Windsor's surveyor, illustrates his plight rather well. He wrote to him begging for help to provide a simple altar, a dais, a curtain and some chairs. Wishing to minimise the cost of his solicitation, he suggested the items could be made from deal wood. He also confides touchingly to Burnand about his personal difficulties:

April 12th 1861

My dear Sir

I want to ask you a favour in connection with the new School at Grange Town. As the room is to be used for a Church we shall want the necessary things to conduct divine worship. Would you kindly ask Lady Windsor to allow Mr Jones the builder to provide it with a small deal Pulpit, reading Desk and Communion Table which we cannot possibly do without.

I am sorry to be compelled to ask you to supply these things but we have no means whatever of obtaining them else. I have worked hard to scrape together sufficient money for the expenses of the school this year and am thankful that my efforts have been successful.

It is indeed a trying and uphill game² to work in such a place of such poverty as Grange Town. I am often almost induced to throw it up, as no curate without private means can ever continue long in it. I think the building will be complete next month.

Yours faithfully,

J J Young

¹ There is some evidence from the archive of the Baptist church that a wooden place of worship, erected on the present site of that church, may just have pre-dated the Iron Room. A sketch of the building is shown later when examining the Baptist church's history.

² The curate's underlining.

The curate's letter is one of few that reflects so emotionally the poor state of Grangetown's inhabitants. He is clearly almost at his wits end about the task that confronts him. Enlarged is the relevant sentence where he expresses openly his desperation at trying to look after his 'flock' that is suffering such poverty.

The curate's letter gives us a firm date for the completion of the Iron Room of May/June 1861. Mr Burnand promised he would do what he could for the curate, but always mindful of his employer's concern to keep costs down, he wrote to the Windsors assuring them he would not spend too much in doing so. Below is what he wrote to the baroness.

Cardiff, April 18th 1861

Dear Sir,

I have just returned from meeting Mr Young of the [Church] School Grangetown. I will design something that shall be as inexpensive as possible and be neat at the same time.

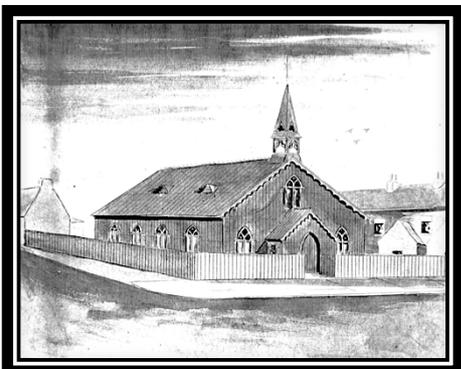
He wants some other things done - such as a curtain for the door behind the Communion Table - and having seats in the present school reassembled - I will take care not to incur any unnecessary expense in the matter.

I remain, Dear Sir, your humble servant, (signed) CE Burnand.

To us this may seem rather penny-pinching, but if we read through the correspondence concerning both Grangetown and Penarth Docks, the theme of financial tightness is seen everywhere. Looking after the pennies seemed an obsession. Perhaps it was a Victorian one and not just a quirk of Baroness Windsor.

Other unusual places of worship

It appears from information that has recently come to light³, that the site of the Clive Street Baptist Chapel was first occupied by a timber structure as shown here. To date, little further archived information has been found.



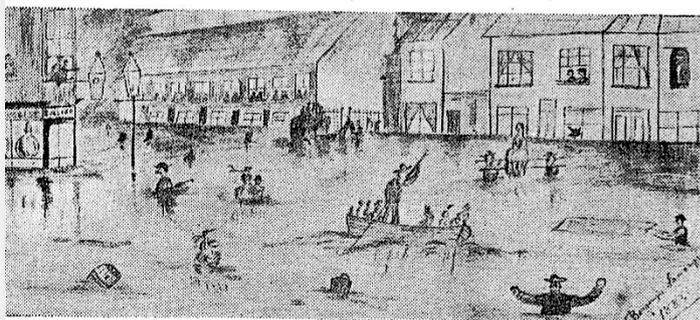
On Holmesdale Street there was a Methodist hall, the Windsor Hall. Constructed and financed by Mr Solomon Andrews, it had an evangelical congregation, the first minister being the eponymous Mr Heaven. Two of the prominent elders were a Mr James Buck and his father. James used the hall during the week as a private school and taught Sunday school on Sundays.

Once the Grangetown Board School opened, many of Mr Buck's pupils went there, where the fees were lower.

Some of these brethren, including our esteemed and gifted Brother Mr. James Buck, started a meeting in Grange in Thorney's Loft, Earl Street, Grangetown. I attended these meetings as a lad. Then Solomon Andrews built Windsor Hall, Holmesdale Street, and let it to Mr. James Buck who was a schoolmaster, and he conducted a day school there and

Education, however, was not the only connection between Mr Buck and the Board School. The foundations of the School were damaged by a major flood in 1883. It also had disastrous consequences for the mainly wooden buildings such as the Windsor Hall.

streets. I was caught in the flood about twelve houses from my home, I was soon up to my waist in water, but presently a tall, strong woman named Mrs. Perrott, rushed into the middle of the street, picked me up and carried me into her house, took off my wet clothes and put me to bed, she was a customer of my Mother who kept the Grocery Shop on the corner of Sevenoaks Street.



There was being held in Windsor Hall this night, special meetings conducted by Mr. Harries of Bedford, he was a very tall man and our Brother Mr. James Buck of Windsor Hall was much shorter. Mr. Harries carried our Brother Buck to his home. In the old Iron Room at the bottom of Paget Street, they were holding Harvest Festival Services and when the people came out, they also found themselves in the flood waters. This was to become a great event in my life as God used it to my conversion in Windsor Hall in 1884.

³ With thanks to Ray Shaw.

Ebenezer Chapel, Corporation Road



The building as it now stands was opened in October 1899 at a cost of £1,250 (£1.7 million today).

We have not only a detailed history of this chapel and its congregation, but also some interesting information about the state of the area in which it was eventually built.

In particular, we find that in 1899 the river Taff at high tide approached to within 20 yards of the chapel's front door. Literally just across the road. In fact, the front of the building is higher than the rear, because it is built on a flood dyke - otherwise known as Corporation Road.

When first built, the chapel had no houses anywhere near it, prompting one senior member of the congregation to consider it a folly, worried that no-one would want to worship on an island in such an isolated spot.

The following is a potted history of the chapel taken from its own published history, entitled 'A Century of Blessing'.

A congregation, led by a Mr Gale, had been formed in the very early 1800s. They met in an old wooden warship, one of Nelson's, HMS Thisbe. It was moored in the West Dock and used as a mission ship for dockworkers, pilots and boatmen. The congregation grew and became an enthusiastic one. Each Sunday an open-air service was held on the Pier Head, which drew large crowds.

Their next move was to rent two rooms in Eleanor Place which became known as the 'Seamen's Bethel Chapel'. One of the rooms was above a stable, but the atmosphere created by the horses below was reported as unpleasant, especially in the summer months. In a second, smaller room, a Mr James Buck set up a Sunday school; he also ran a small private school in his house in Holmesdale Street.

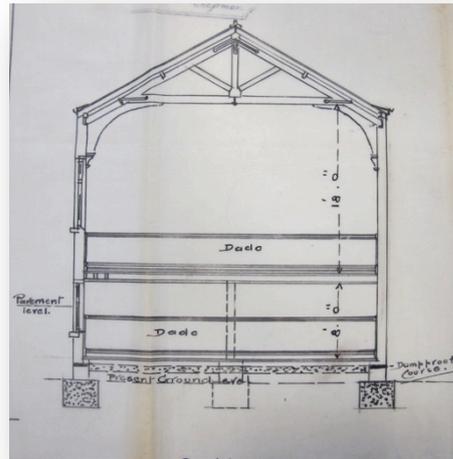
The success of the congregation led them to rent a second premises, in a house in Harrowby Street, adjacent to the old sea lock, near the exit of the Glamorganshire Canal. It became known as 'Aunty Ann's' because it was originally a shop and known locally as such. It was there that the first Mothers' Union meeting in Cardiff was held, by a Mrs Evans, who bought material for the women to cut out clothes and taught them to sew.

Aunty Ann's proved too small for their purposes and so they held an enlarged Sunday school at premises in Evelyn Street where two houses were knocked into one to provide a large enough space. In addition to this encouraging growth in the congregation, they began holding open-air services across Butetown and occasionally in Grangetown; although to reach it, they had to use a ferry, which operated in the location of the current Clarence Road Bridge.

It was clear that the success of the chapel and the increasing size of its congregation required a large hall. The use of Aunty Ann's shop and a stable could not accommodate their numbers.

Once it became known that Clarence Road Bridge was to be built, and that land would become available that side of the river, the elders of the congregation began investigating the construction of a large building, the one we see today.

Their discussions with the Windsor family's agent, C E Burnand, revealed that although on the east side of Corporation Road (the Taff side) the land was liable to flooding, the western side was available for building and would eventually contain some 600 houses.

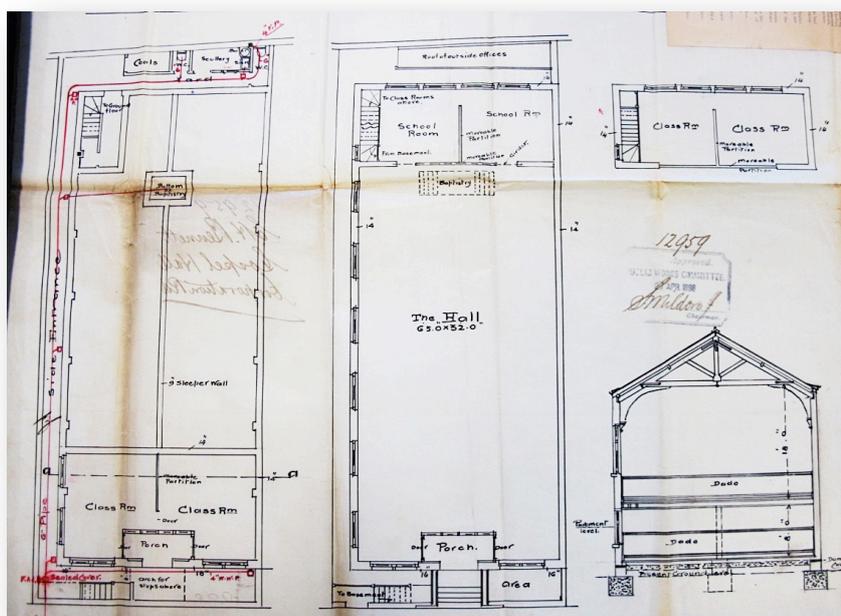


The initial design was to accommodate 500 people in a main hall. Work began in 1896, but was halted soon afterwards in order to create a basement, an afterthought. The elders felt that such a facility would be valuable for providing teas and informal meetings. The architect appears to have been surprisingly sympathetic and modified his drawings at a cost of only 15 shillings.

Unfortunately, having already dug out and built the foundations for a single-storey building, those works could not be removed and had to be were incorporated into the new and more substantial two-storey foundations, as a result leaving wide reinforcing ledges running around the inside of the basement, which are there today.

However, as we can see from the plan, the basement then had a headroom of only eight feet, which when allowing for structural elements made it feel rather cramped.

When the chapel opened, the congregation numbered sixty-one people.



St Paul's Church

This was the Windsor family's church in many ways. They had long foreseen the construction of a Church of England place of worship, beginning with the Iron Room in 1861.

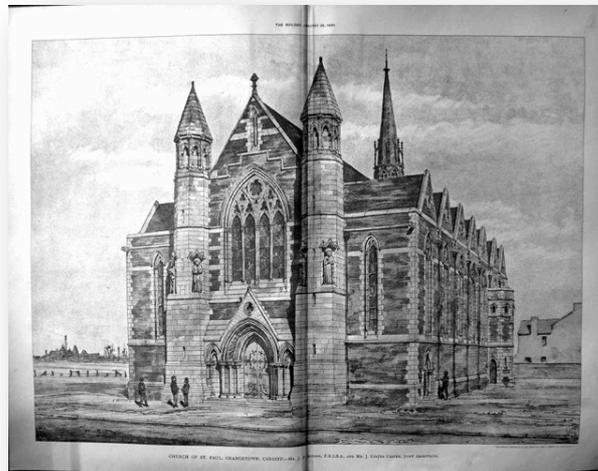
St Paul's was to be an altogether more substantial building and they hired a famous Arts and Crafts architect to design it: a John Coates Carter, aided by J P Seddon.



Very little archived material has been found on the details of the church, except for some sketches such as the one shown below - which is a pity, because the church is impressive for its size and location. The spire shown in the original drawing was not constructed.

It sits within approximately an acre of ground and is recognised as being one of Carter's finest buildings⁴ being accorded a Grade II listed status. Its construction was unusual: the walls consist of Pennant rubble with Staffordshire sandstone dressing. Some elements used a novel form of concrete, consisting of concrete mixed with pebbles, crushed brick and sandstone chippings. The crushed brick was easily available from the Windsor's brick works.

The budget for the building (in 1890) was a nominal £4,000⁵, all of it provided by Lord



Windsor, the initial works beginning in 1888. The foundation stone was laid in 1889 and the Bishop of Llandaff consecrated the building in 1902.

The Iron Room that had served as St Paul's until that time then became the church hall.

⁴ Pevsner's 'Buildings of Wales'.

⁵ £5.6 million today using project cost deflator.

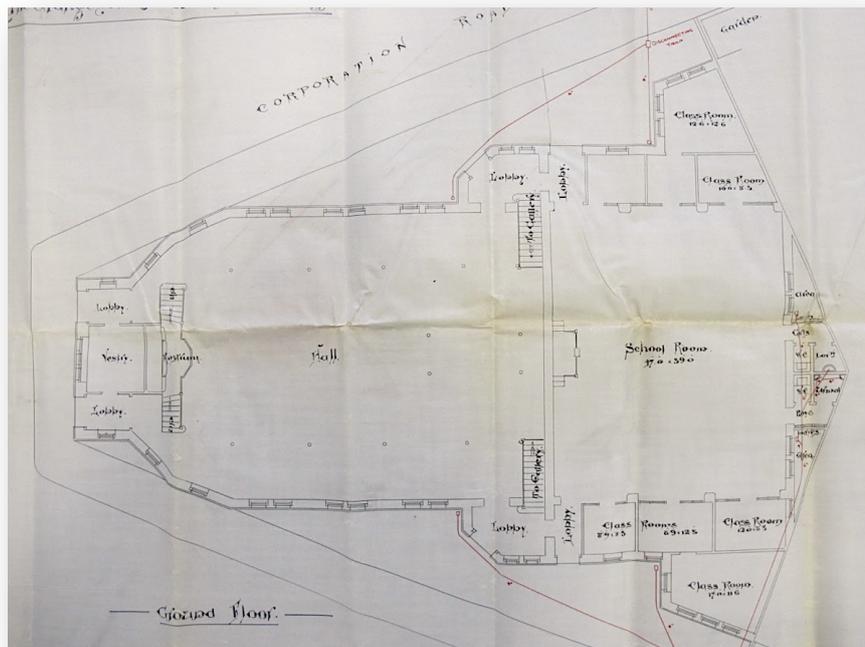
The Grangetown Forward Movement Mission Hall

This grand and imposing hall was built in 1895 on the intersection of Paget Street, Corporation Road, Clare Road and Penarth Road. As its name suggests, it was not simply a place of worship, but provided practical examples of its Christian 'mission' to help the poor.



It began in a tent in 1893 and moved to this very large building in 1895. In fact, it appears that it may have been far too large to have been affordable. So much so that it ran into serious debt. As a desperate measure, a bazaar was held in 1899 in order to raise money towards paying off the remainder of a large debt of £2,000 out of the total of £3,352 (£4.7 million today) it had cost to build.

By 1894, it was one of four such 'missions' in Cardiff and fifteen of them outside the town. By 1899, the number in Wales reached 35, with 20,000 members. They were part of the Calvinistic Methodist movement.



The plans for the building show a very ambitious construction as though the initial congregation was expected to swell hugely with new members. Not only was the building itself luxuriously appointed, with no expense spared as to its materials, but it was voluminous.

Above is a plan of the interior of the building, from which we can see just how large was the main hall, to which we must add substantial galleries and, behind the hall, several rooms for the Sunday school and a large 'School Room' measuring 37' x 39'. Behind the building, making use of its unusual shape, were two small gardens. There were extensive balcony arrangements, accessed from both sides of the chapel, together with side annexes to the building.

Siloam Welsh Baptist Chapel



The chapel was built in 1902, just three years after Ebenezer. The congregation was formed in 1859 and had been meeting at an address in Mount Stuart Square, Butetown.

The congregation was very successful at attracting people to its services, so that their early premises quickly became too small. A new home was needed and, just like the Ebenezer congregation, they looked across the Taff at plenty of building land that was being offered for sale with planning permission and, it was hoped, free from flooding.

The lease on the land was between the Marquis of Bute and a handful of trustees, including two ministers. Their names and (some unusual) occupations are listed here:

Baptist Ministers: Charles Davies and Morris Roberts-Jones

Solicitor - Levi Arthur Harris

Coal Trimmer - Thomas Howells;

Foreman - Benjamin John;

Councillor - John Davies;

Grocer - John Thomas;

Shipwright - Jonadab [sic] Lloyd

Berthing-man - James Lewis

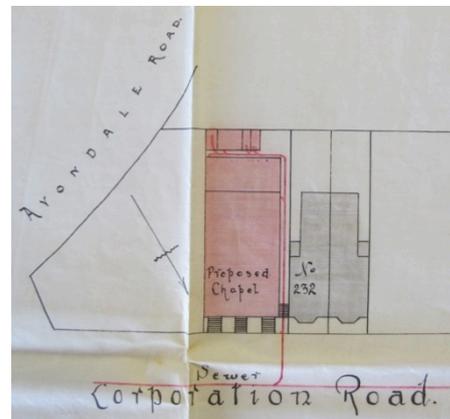
Police Sergeant - Edward W Roberts

Ship's pilot - David Jenkins

Sanitary inspector - Jenkins Williams

Blacksmith - James Edwards

Coachbuilder's manager - Thomas George Thomas



These men were described as “Protestant Dissenters of the Denomination of Particular Baptists”. Together they commissioned a building that would rival their close neighbour, the Ebenezer chapel. The initial design for the front elevation is shown on the next page.

It contains a number of differences when compared with its present day condition, but retains a large and elaborate central window flanked by two others and side doors.



Its pulpit area was not elaborate. Fixed bench seating was provided, the floor sloping downwards towards the pulpit, which was an unusual feature.

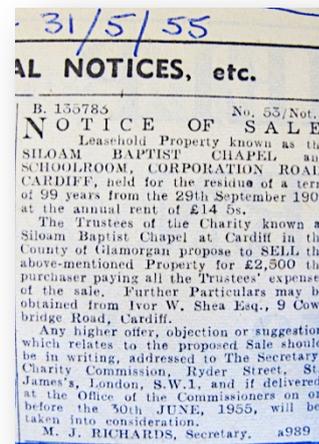
A low-ceilinged basement was also provided.

In 1906 the chapel received authorisation granting the chapel's ministers permission to carry out marriages.

Although the chapel functioned for over fifty years, the congregation gradually reduced to a point where it was unable to carry on. In June 1954, the trustees applied to put the chapel, as an organisation, into administration.

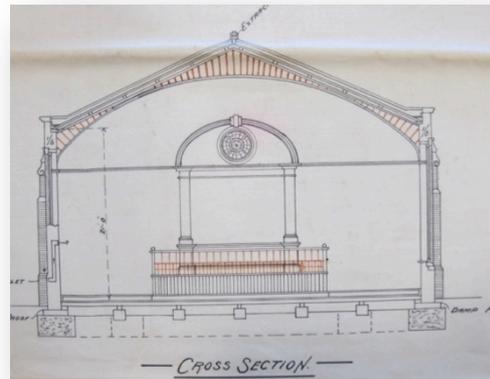
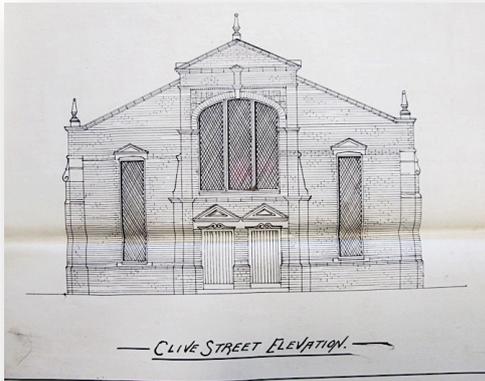
It was put up for sale and an offer was received from the Salvation Army to buy it for £2,500. The sale was completed in April 1955 and continues to this day as a Salvation Army building. A sister church then opened in Llanrhymney in 1958, just three years after the closure of the Grangetown one. At its opening, the minister there felt that:

"In giving the new church in Llanrhymney the name Siloam, it is felt that the spirit of the old church in the dockland area has been transferred to Llanrhymney."



Grangetown Baptist Chapel, Sunday School and Hall

The original Clive Street Grangetown Baptist Chapel was situated on the corner of Worcester Street and Clive Street. It was then a single building. The first chapel opened in 1865, making it the earliest major public building in Lower Grangetown. Shown is the front elevation and preaching platform area of the original building.



When the new central chapel was built later, the original chapel was used as a hall and kept this feature, including the central decorated window. What was not kept was the baptismal pool, which was moved into the new central chapel building.

The three buildings in the photograph below show the three stages of growth of the facilities: from the original place of worship on the right, followed by the construction of the grand central chapel which is still used today, and finally the construction of the Sunday School on the left, which incorporated the immediately adjacent house.



The central chapel and Sunday school buildings communicated with each other, enabling children, for example, to leave the main chapel at a suitable point in a Sunday service and go into the school for teaching. The original chapel on the right remained an independent building.

We can see some differences of detail from the photograph above, notably the entrance doorways, which were eventually constructed to the sides of the front of the building; but the essential

style was maintained.

The plan overleaf shows the proposal to modify the original chapel so as to provide it with a number of classrooms along its sides, so that it can act as a school as well as a hall for societies and clubs.

The generous balcony, not shown in the above cross-section but can be seen on the large plan below, was also kept. Even with the construction of the side classrooms, the open space (labelled as 'Sunday School') was still substantial, measuring 47' x 27'. It is interesting to note that a seat was provided at each entrance door for a 'door keeper' and these seats and double doorways were conserved. The plans for the proposed new central chapel are shown

the new main building. This time, the two new buildings could be tied together and linked.

Plans for the new Sunday school show that it was an ambitious building, comprising not only a large hall upstairs, but also numerous reading rooms and even a kitchen. Linking the two adjacent buildings by a rear alley made it possible to provide food for special occasions such as at the Harvest Festival, the children's Christmas party and so on. There was a spacious second or attic floor used mainly for the storage of equipment such as that required for the Whitsun Treat.

The architect for the work was a Mr J Ward of Turners the builders, Mr Turner being a philanthropic supporter of the project. It was he who signed off the design and its completion on behalf of the chapel's trustees.

Below is shown a Whitsun Treat, probably at Swanbridge or Lavernock, circa 1912.



St Patrick's RC Church

Grangetown's first Roman Catholic Church was on the site of the present St Patrick's School in Upper Grangetown. The building on Pentrebane Street was completed in 1930.

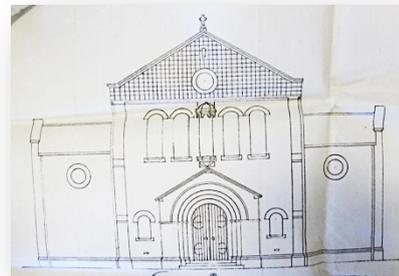
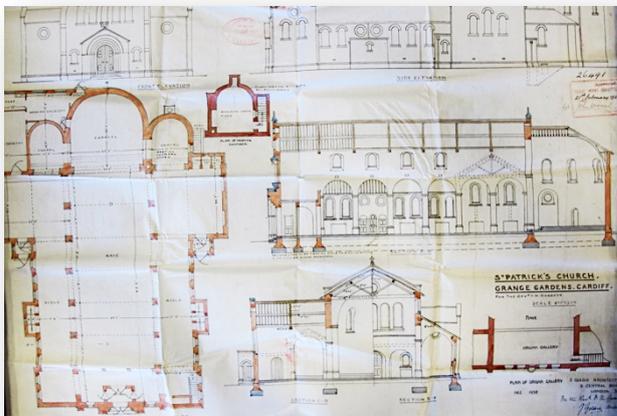
Its design incorporated a number of classical elements, some resembling Eastern (almost Moorish) elements as can be seen from the large plan below.

As is common in RC churches, a chancel was provided behind the high altar and two adjacent chapels. In this case, all three elements have rounded walls and incorporate a number of arched elements: over windows, for example, as well as over the main doorway.

The front entrance uses multiple curves but is otherwise plain. No external structural stonework is present, the whole building, including the priest's house behind it, being in red brick with yellow brick patterning.

If we look at the front elevation, it can be imagined that the curved lintels and rounded windows and doorways are reminiscent of Middle Eastern designs.

The planning application dated 12th January 1929 shows that the height of the building to its eaves was to be thirty feet, a relatively modest height. It shows the owner to be the Rev F U Gasset, living already at the presbytery on Grange Gardens. So we know that the church post-dates the presbytery. Being such a late building in terms of Grangetown's history, we are



fortunate that formal building inspections took place, all of them archived and dated, offering us detailed insights into the construction work.

Work began on 27 February 1929 and proceeded apace. Drains were laid and tested by the summer, but then work all but ground to a halt 'for the want of bricks'. The problem was that high quality facing bricks had been specified and these were proving difficult to obtain. Even so, the rate of progress was impressive.

The roof was being constructed by August 1929 and plastering of the inner walls was well advanced in October. The final inspection took place on the 14th March 1930 and the service of consecration took place on the seventeenth of March that year, just fifteen months after the planning application.