A Report on the Former Methodist Chapel at Tolpuddle, Dorset

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1.
Nature of the Request

It is thought that an apparently late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century building on the north side of the main street in the village of Tolpuddle, Dorset (ST 795944), is a former Methodist chapel and that it was attended by several of the Tolpuddle Martyrs (Fig. 1). A freestanding structure, it sits immediately east of the so-called Martyrs' Cottage (gradé I), and is listed as grade as II* in its own right. The listings of both the cottage and the reputed chapel are due almost entirely to their connection with the celebrated Dorchester Labourers episode of 1834. The chapel appeared in the first edition of the English Heritage register of *Buildings at Risk* (1998), though the accompanying photograph in that document shows (erroneously) the later Methodist chapel in the village; it is correctly illustrated in the second edition of the register (1999).

Confirmation is required as to whether the structure in question was indeed a Methodist chapel, and whether or not it was used for worship by some or all of the Tolpuddle Martyrs. If so, when did the building pass out of religious use, and what is the relationship to the current Methodist chapel?

The Historical Analysis & Research Team is part of the Architectural Investigation section of English Heritage, based at Savile Row in London.

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2.
The Historical Context

On 24 February 1834, six farm labourers from the Dorset village of Tolpuddle were arrested on a charge of violating an Act (1817) which sought to prevent seditious meetings and the administration of unlawful oaths binding to secrecy.[1] The labourers in question were George Loveless (1797–1874), James Loveless (1808–73), James Brine (1813–1902), Thomas Standfield (1790–1864), John Standfield (1813–98), and James Hammett (1811–91). In specific terms, the warrant for the arrest was connected with a meeting held at the cottage of Thomas Standfield on 9 December 1833, during which the men had sworn an oath of secrecy to a 'combination'. In fact, the workers in question had done no more than form a 'friendly society' in late October 1833, and the 'illegal oath' taken at this and their other meetings was merely one of loyalty to a trade union.[2] Hitherto, of course, such workers with grievances to air regarding economic hardships or harsh treatment at the hands of landlords or employers had little real machinery to express or resolve their complaints.[3] But by the early 1830s, dozens of unions existed in the north of England and there was nothing in the formation of a friendly society which was in itself illegal. For the establishment in Dorset, however, such activities posed a threat of greater unionization. Already alarmed by the general agricultural unrest of recent years, the authorities moved quickly to stamp out a potential new round of difficulties.[4]

In the events leading up to the arrests, the meetings of the Tolpuddle Friendly Society had soon been brought to the attention of the local Justice of the Peace, James Frampton.[5] On 30 January 1834 he wrote the first of many letters on the subject to the home secretary, Lord Melbourne.[6] Beginning by telling his lordship that he had been requested to pass on the information by several magistrates of the divisions of Dorchester and Wareham, Frampton went on to say that:

> 'they have received information from various quarters ... that Societies are forming amongst the Agricultural Labourers in parts of these Divisions, in which the labourers are induced to enter into combinations of a dangerous and alarming kind to which they are bound by oaths administered clandestinely'.[7]

The magistrates' information applied to but a few parishes, notably Tolpuddle and Bere,

1 The Seditious Meetings and Assemblies Act (57 Geo. III, c. 19) had been passed in a panic year of suspected revolutionary plots. For the background to the arrests see Marlow 1971, 49–69; Citrine 1934, 1–8.

2 Marlow 1971, 1–48. See also the pamphlet written by George Loveless himself, entitled *The Victims of Whiggery*, Loveless 1837.

3 For the social and political background see, for example, Cole 1948, Dunbabin 1974, Groves 1981, and Pelling 1976.

4 The so-called 'Swing' riots over the winter of 1830–31 had, as *The Times* (17 November 1830) put it, set 'a dangerous precedent' for the establishment: see Hobsbawn and Rudé 1969; Marlow 1971, 32–37.

5 James Frampton (1769–1855) of Moreton in Dorset might be described as the archetypal establishment figure, not just in terms of traditional authority, but also with regard to the position of the established church. His father built Moreton House in 1744 and the church of St Nicholas in 1776, for which see Newman and Pevsner 1972, 300–01. Further background will be found in Marlow 1971, 55–83, *passim*, and Laski 1934, 150–52.

6 William Lamb (1779–1848), second Viscount Melbourne, had been appointed home secretary in the Grey ministry in 1830, and became prime minister himself in the summer of 1834. See *Dictionary of National Biography*, 11, 432–38; Laski 1934, 153–55; Marlow 1971, 51–55.

7 For the original Frampton Melbourne Correspondence, see British Library, Additional Ms. 41567L, with this letter at f. 121. A transcript of the is published in Trades Union Congress 1934, 172.

though it was said that 'nightly meetings have been held' in both places. Specific proof against the organizers or the time and place of the meetings was not yet available, though Frampton hoped this would soon come to hand. Melbourne's office replied on 31 January, saying that the magistrates had acted wisely, a comment which Frampton presumably took as encouragement to proceed.[8] By 24 February he had the evidence he felt was needed and the arrests were duly made. The trial began at Dorchester Crown Court on 17 March. At the very outset of the proceedings the judge, Mr Baron Williams, made his bias apparent to the grand jury.[9] Given the nature of the legal system at the time, it was almost inevitable that the men would be found guilty. They were convicted and sentenced to transportation for seven years.[10]

Within days, *The Times* quickly expressed the view of many when it wrote: 'This sentence, as regards the poor ignorant deluded men who are the objects of it, seems to us too severe'.[11] Initially, despite a huge demonstration by trades unions in London on 21 April, Lord Melbourne upheld the prosecution. The case was, nevertheless, to become a national issue, and the harsh nature of the sentences imposed on generally law-abiding and religious men were very widely condemned. Two years after their conviction, in March 1836, free pardons were granted to all six of the 'Poor Dorsetshire Labourers'.[12] After some delay, George Loveless was the first to arrive back in England in June 1837. Four of his companions followed in March 1838, though it was to be the summer of 1839 before James Hammett arrived home.[13]

After briefly returning to Tolpuddle, five of the men moved with their families to Greensted in Essex, to occupy farms bought for them with money raised through subscriptions. In 1844, however, the Lovelesses, the Standfields, and the Brines all emigrated to Canada. James Hammett, on the other hand, eventually returned to his native Dorset village where he lived until his death in 1891.[14] The six men have since come to be known as the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

8 British Library, Additional Ms. 41567L, f. 125, with a transcript of this reply from Melbourne's secretary published in Trades Union Congress 1934, 175.

9 It was at the opening of the trial that first mention was made of the 1797 Mutiny Act (37 Geo. III, c. 123), under which the labourers were to be convicted. The prosecution also resorted to a 1799 Act (39 Geo. III, c. 79) to underline its case. The complex legal arguments are discussed in Cripps 1934, and the court proceedings are described in Marlow 1971, 58–94.

10 For contemporary reports on the trial, see *The Times*, 20 March 1834, 3f–4b; *Dorset County Chronicle*, 20 March 1834. See also Loveless 1837; Marlow 1971, 70–94; Citrine 1934, 17–30; Cripps 1934.

11 *The Times*, 21 March 1834, 4, e.

12 The events from the trial to the pardon are covered in Marlow 1971, 119–204. See also Citrine 1934, 31–86.

13 The return, and the delays surrounding Hammett's passage are dealt with by Marlow 1971, 205–32.

14 Marlow 1971, 233–66; Citrine 1934, 93.

3.
The Methodist Connection

It is well known that a number of the Tolpuddle Martyrs were members of the Methodist church, and it is very important to remember the significance of this point in the entire episode. Indeed, George Loveless undoubtedly felt he was victimised as much for his Methodism as for any other reason. In his pamphlet of 1837 he wrote: 'I am from principle, a Dissenter, and by some, in Tolpuddle, it is considered as the sin of witchcraft'.[15] The same assertion was made by the *Morning Chronicle* a few weeks after the trial in 1834, when it wrote of Loveless being an object of persecution 'because he is a local preacher', and because 'persecution yet assails the poor Methodists of the country villages of the South and West of England'.[16]

Having emerged under the leadership of John Wesley (1703–91) in the early 1740s, at first the Methodist church operated within the Church of England. After Wesley's death it sub-divided into various groups, of which the most important were the Wesleyan Methodists and the Primitive Methodists. Only gradually were these different offshoots reunited, some in 1857, the rest in 1932.[17]

By about 1840 membership of the Methodist church in England had apparently reached more than 430,000.[18] In this context, it is not surprising to find that Methodism was already firmly established in Dorset by the first quarter of the nineteenth century. There were early centres in the coastal towns of Poole, Swanage and Weymouth, as well as inland at Shaftesbury and Sherborne. Little architecture of this early period survives, though one building of particular interest is a former chapel of 1793 in Poole.[19] It was a benefaction of Robert Carr Brackenbury of Lincolnshire, a friend of John Wesley, who played some role in the introduction of Methodism to Dorset. Eventually, the Wesleyans were the strongest branch of the church in the county, though their organization and structure was not greatly different from the Primitive Methodists.

The key to all Methodist organization was the 'circuit', at one time a group of house and barn meetings around which itinerant visiting preachers would travel to hold services. Later, local men were trained and appointed preachers, but they continued to belong to a circuit and moved around an area according to a 'circuit plan'. As more churches were built, and as the organization strengthened, circuit boundaries were modified and new circuits created. To begin with, the Tolpuddle area would have been situated within the Weymouth circuit, though from 1831 the village was located in the new Dorchester circuit.

Although there is some confusion among the secondary sources, it is generally held that the Methodists among the Martyrs were George Loveless and his younger brother James,

15 Loveless 1837, 10. There is more context on Loveless's Methodist beliefs in his pamphlet entitled *Church Shown Up*, Loveless 1838.

16 This appears in the *Morning Chronicle* for 2 April 1834. At the time of the centenary celebrations, a representative of the *Methodist Times and Leader*, 6 September 1934, wrote: 'it is still a matter of doubt which was regarded the greater crime — forming a trade union or being members at the [Methodist] chapel'.

17 For the general context, see Davies, George and Rupp 1965–83; Morris 1989, 425–27

18 This figure is taken from Hempton 1984, 12. The figures given in Dolby 1964, 118, are 200,000 plus members across Britain by the 1830s, with 340,000 by 1848. See also Currie, Gilbert and Horsley 1977; Walker 1973.

19 Stell 1991, 103–34, and 105 for the chapel at Poole.

together with Thomas Standfield and his son John.[20] Three of them were not only members of the Methodist church, they were also accredited local preachers. The names of George and James Loveless, for example, appear on the Weymouth circuit plan of 1830 in just this capacity.[21] Moreover, there is further evidence in the brief character sketches sent by James Frampton to Lord Melbourne on 29 March 1834. In Frampton's letter, James Loveless was described as 'a Methodist Preacher', as was George Loveless. It was said of Thomas Standfield that he 'preaches occasionally', and John Standfield was also said to be 'a Methodist'.[22]

So much is clear, but it is far more difficult to establish a link between elements of the Methodist creed and any form of overt radicalism in the Tolpuddle area in the early nineteenth century.[23] None the less, George Loveless's religious beliefs were clearly at the root of his actions in and before 1834.[24] And, it is worth recording, that the man who became the Tolpuddle Friendly Society's corresponding secretary, George Romaine, was also a Methodist preacher and the proprietor of a meeting house.[25]

In sum, a pre-1834 date for the reputed chapel would not only establish it as one of the earliest Methodist buildings to survive in the county, it would be of far greater significance in identifying it as the building in which several of the Tolpuddle Martyrs both worshipped and preached.

Elsewhere in the village, on its eastern fringes, there is a somewhat later Methodist chapel, still used for occasional services (Fig. 2). The northern façade of this building carries a date inscription of 1861, with a second inscription giving a restoration date of 1957. As outlined in more detail below, a memorial arch in honour of the Tolpuddle Martyrs was erected in front of this later chapel in 1912.

20 James Brine and James Hammett were members of the Church of England, with no convincing evidence that either ever embraced Methodism. Some sources claim Brine converted to the Methodist church whilst in Canada, but see Marlow 1971, 17–20, 225–32, 244, 246.

21 DCRO, NM2: S19/M1 1/4.

22 British Library, Additional Ms. 41567L, f. 161, with a transcript of Frampton's letter published in Trades Union Congress 1934, 181.

23 On this topic generally, the older works are Wearmouth 1937; Wearmouth 1959. More recently, see Hempton 1984.

24 See the comment on this in Marlow 1971, 14–18, and the point is also made by Wearmouth 1937, 269. 'Methodism', Wearmouth argued, 'cannot escape some share of the responsibility for the conduct that brought these men to prison and transportation'.

25 Romaine was from Bere Regis and is described as a Methodist preacher in the letter from James Frampton to Lord Melbourne, dated 5 March 1834. See the transcript in Trades Union Congress 1934, 175–76; the original is British Library, Additional Ms. 41567L, f. 141. See also, Marlow 1971, 42–44, and Wearmouth 1937, 254–70, where there is more on the context of Methodism and its links to the agricultural trade unions.

4.
The Building Described

The reputed chapel stands on the north side of the main road (until recently the A35), approximately 200 yards (183m) from the green, towards the eastern end of the village (Fig. 1). It is a freestanding structure, but sits immediately adjacent to the celebrated Martyrs' Cottage — the cottage once occupied by Thomas Standfield in which the unionists met, and where the fateful meeting of December 1833 took place (Fig. 3).[26] Of rectangular plan, and orientated north to south, the building measures some 31 feet long by 20 feet wide (9.6m by 6.2m). It would undoubtedly have been a modest structure for a chapel, though this would not have been unusual for the early nineteenth century. The gables are on the long axis, with the north-west corner in particular running into the natural slope which climbs from this side of the road. As first built, the 'chapel' was almost certainly of one storey. The loft insertion and alterations to the roof are likely to date to the second half of the century.

The walls are built largely of cob, a material still much in evidence in the cottages of south Dorset. Here — as is often the case — they are set on a brick base or plinth, itself incorporating some flint in regular decorative courses, especially on the south side. There are original brick dressings, later brick blockings, weatherboarding in the gables, and the roof is of so-called double Roman tiles.

In the south elevation (Fig. 4), the brick and flint plinth is raised by four courses at the quoins. The bulk of the wall is cob, though the gable apex is weatherboarded with the eaves forming a shallow hood. The plinth was originally broken by a central doorway, now blocked, but with a later window of two six-pane openings in the upper half. Above this, an inserted doorway with brick jambs and a boarded door *may* replace an earlier opening. The base of the northern elevation is almost entirely lost into the natural slope and later terracing on this side, but there is no firm evidence for a brick plinth (Fig. 5). Apart from the weatherboarded gable apex, the wall is almost entirely of cob. Centrally, just below the base of the weatherboarding, there is a short, pointed-arched window featuring simple brick dressings, now blocked (fig. 6).

The west elevation is largely covered with vegetation (Fig. 7), though the principal features can be readily made out. On this side, the brick plinth reflects the natural topography, stepping up in level for the northern one-third of the building. At the junction of the two levels, there is a blocked window opening with a shallow segmental head. Finally, in the east elevation (Fig. 8), the brick plinth maintains its level for the full length of the building. There is a blocked window, of similar form to that in the west façade, though this example is positioned towards the southern end of the building. A central doorway with a wooden lintel was broken through the plinth during the later alterations.

Inside, the brick and cobble floor, currently hidden, is probably an insertion.[27] The loft, also inserted in a secondary phase of use, is arranged in three bays supported on four principal beams. Above, the three-bay roof was at one time supported on three king-post trusses with tie beams (Fig. 9). Only the northernmost truss retains its original form; the two remaining trusses were truncated (fig. 10), with long braces rising from the wall heads apparently introduced as part of the modifications.

26 In James Frampton's letter of 29 March 1834 (Trades Union Congress 1934, 181), Thomas Standfield was described as 'the owner of the House in Tolpuddle where the meetings of the Union were held'.

27 This point is made in the listing entry, DOE 1987/89

5.
Documentary Research

Hitherto, it would seem that nothing approaching a full or considered view of this building has appeared in the published sources. The appropriate inventory of the Royal Commission on Historical Monument, for example, mentions it as a late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century barn, but with no further detail.[28] The *Buildings of England* volume for the county makes no reference to it at all,[29] neither does it include an account of the mid-nineteenth-century Methodist chapel in the village. Of greater surprise, there is no mention of the building under Tolpuddle in Stell's otherwise comprehensive work on the chapels of south-west England, despite coverage of numerous other redundant examples.[30]

In an amendment to the published list for West Dorset (1989), however, the building is given quite definitely as a 'former Methodist chapel', with 'local Methodist society records' given as the source.[31] Thereafter, the chapel appears in the English Heritage register of *Buildings at Risk* (1998–99).[32]

Despite any failure there may have been to appreciate the true nature and significance of the building in the general literature, this is by no means a reflection of understanding within Dorset, within the Methodist church, or in the trade union movement. In the material which the Trades Union Congress publishes for the Tolpuddle Martyrs' Museum, for instance, it is consistently identified as the earliest Methodist chapel in the village — namely the chapel attended by the Tolpuddle Martyrs themselves. In addition, photographs of the building appear in various publications where it is referred to as the 'Martyrs' Chapel', or similar.[33] But nowhere are there detailed sources quoted for such assertions, and it is certainly reasonable to seek some form of firm documentary evidence before reaching any conclusions. Fortunately, just such confirmative evidence has come to light. This not only establishes that the building was indeed a Methodist chapel, it also introduces a much stronger link between several of the Martyrs and this specific structure.

Until very recently, it was thought that all material of historic interest once held by the Dorchester Wesleyan Methodist Circuit had been deposited with the Dorset County Record Office,[34] and this deposit certainly provides several key pieces of information. One document, for example, contains a copy of information set out in the 1818 title deed.[35] Other relevant documents which refer to the building as the 'original' 1818 chapel feature in a bundle concerning a proposed restoration of the building in 1989.[36]

28 RCHM(E) 1970, 290.

29 Newman and Pevsner 1972, 426–27.

30 Stell 1991, 131. A search of the English Heritage National Monuments Record archives at Swindon has failed to locate additional background material of any substance.

31 DOE 1987/89

32 In the first edition, English Heritage 1998, 22, the photograph in fact depicts the mid-nineteenth-century chapel. This is corrected in the second edition, 1999, 30.

33 See, for example, Trades Union Congress 1934, 164, and the *Methodist Times and Leader*, 30 August 1934.

34 The collection is DCRO, NM2. This is referenced in the search room as 'Catalogue of the Methodist Records of the Dorchester Methodist Circuit' (1993). The records for the Weymouth and Dorchester Wesleyan circuits run from 1796 to 1932. For context, see DCAS 1995.

35 DCRO, NM2: S19/TS 3/2. The details were apparently copied from the original deeds in 1898.

36 The bundle is DCRO, NM. 2: S19/TS 5/1. There is further comment on this episode below.

As a consequence of the present researches, however, the circuit archivist has located two more highly significant documents, one a release and the other an indenture — both of them dated 1818 — which together provide the hard evidence required.[37] It is the indenture which is of greatest interest in this context, since among the signatures of twelve Methodist trustees there are the names George Loveless and Thomas Standfield. The content makes it clear why the piece of land in question was acquired. It was said to have been:

> '... so purchased for the purpose of erecting a chapel for use of the preachers who are members of Methodist Conference as established by the late Rev. John Wesley ...'.

The plot of land was described as:

> ' ... containing some 40 feet from East to West and 30 feet from North to South, together with the said buildings or chapel whereon erected, with their appurtenances, bounded on the South by the highway or Main Road, on the East by a building the property of William Brine, Yeoman, on the North by a field and on the West by a yard, the property of ... R Standfield and in the occupation of Josiah Argyle'.

A subsequent clause reads:

> '... in case at any time hereinafter the Society of Methodists usually assembling at the said chapel shall be dissolved, or become extinct, or if in recognition of any Act of Legisture or otherwise fail then the Trustees have authority through the Superintendent Preacher to sell the said chapel by public sale or by private contract and any monies resulting shall be dispersed to other Societies or causes at the discretion of the Trustees and the Superintendent Preacher, or applied to a larger new chapel building, if appropriate'.

Yet further confirmation of the chapel's origins, coupled with very telling insights into the position of Methodism within the county at this time comes from a newspaper report published in the *Salisbury Journal* for 19 October 1818 (Fig. 11).[38] The report concerns events which took place on 13 October and reads (in full):

> **Rioting and Persecution** — On Tuesday last, a Methodist Chapel was opened in the village of Tolpuddle, Dorset, and a number of persons accompanied the Ministers from Weymouth on the occasion. During the Evening Service, when the chapel was much crowded, some little disturbance was made on the outside, but peace was soon restored. About 8 o'clock, when the Ministers and their friends were preparing to return, a mob of about 100 persons were found assembled near a chaise and another carriage, which were in attendance to convey them. These persons behaved in a most turbulent manner. A lady belonging to the Ministers' party, before she could get into the chaise, was pushed down a bank into the road; the horses were much frightened by the tumult and noise, and the driver was for a considerable time unable to proceed. The ladies were under the necessity of walking a great distance, exposed to the most brutal insults. For more than two miles, in a

37 These two documents were discussed in a letter of 7 July 1944, sent from the Methodist Church Department for Chapel Affairs to the Rev. J. E. Gilbert in Dorchester (DCRO, NM2: S 19/TS 3/2). It was said that: 'We understand that the old chapel has fallen into the hands of the Squire, though we still have the deeds'. The writer felt that the deeds were 'really only of historical interest ... [as] the deeds of the chapel attended by the Tolpuddle Martyrs'. He proposed they be deposited at Manchester, though the Revd Gilbert was invited to suggest the 'right course'. In fact the two documents were returned to Dorset. Mr K. J. Salt has very kindly tracked these down in the circuit safe, where they have apparently been stored — their significance perhaps not fully realized — since 1945. Both documents have now been deposited with the other circuit material at the Dorset Record Office: NM2.

38 This source has been traced from a brief entry in the relevant Royal Commission inventory file, now with the English Heritage National Monuments Record Centre (Swindon). The *Salisbury Journal*, a weekly newspaper, is still published. The copy for 19 October 1818 has been searched by Mr Michael J. Marshman (local studies librarian for Wiltshire County Council). The report on Tolpuddle does not, for some reason, appear in the Trowbridge reference library paper copy of this date. Mr Marshman has eventually located it in a microfilm copy, of the same date. He has suggested the possibility of two editions of the newspaper.

> very bad road, the drivers, horses, and carriages, were pelted by the mob, with stones, mud, &c.; the windows of the chaise were broken, and even the side of the chaise was pierced by a stone: one lady who rode by the side of the driver had a severe blow on her head: and at Piddle Town, two miles from Tolpuddle, the driver received a blow in his neck, of which he is now confined, and which, had it not been for a large neck-cloth, would probably have proved fatal. Mr. Bailey, of the Golden Lion, Weymouth, to whom the chaise belongs, has effected five guineas reward for a discovery of the offenders.[39]

The existence of a chapel at some location within the early nineteenth-century village also comes to light through several documents specifically related to the events of 1834. In his pamphlet of 1837, for example, George Loveless referred to the fact that men had earlier been 'persecuted, banished, and not allowed to have employ if they entered the Wesleyan Chapel at Tolpuddle'.[40] Even more convincing of the chapel, and of the Martyrs' connection to it, is the content of James Frampton's letter of 29 March 1834. In his character description of Thomas Standfield, Frampton not only cites him as the owner of the house in Tolpuddle in which the meetings of the union took place, but 'also of the Methodist Meeting House there, where he preaches occasionally'.[41]

As for the precise siting of the chapel — aside from further information on dating — we might turn to two maps held at the Dorset County Record Office. To begin with, though somewhat stylized, a map showing the manor of Tolpuddle about 1800 appears to depict a row of cottages (plot p 2) fronting the village street in the location of the Martyrs' Cottage (Fig. 12).[42] There is a freestanding structure running at right angles to the rear, but there is nothing in the position of the chapel to the immediate east. On the relevant Tithe map, however, completed for Tolpuddle in 1843, in addition to the row of cottages seen within plot 93, there is a separate structure noted (94) in just the right location for the chapel (Fig. 13).[43] The Tithe Apportionment, bound with the map, provides the necessary identification of the building. It is noted as a '*Methodist Chapel*', occupied by '*The Wesleyan Society*', in the ownership of '*Themselves*' (Fig. 14).

In sum, the evidence suggests that even if there were a congregation of Wesleyan Methodists in Tolpuddle before 1818 they were not meeting in a purpose built structure. In that year, with the support of the Methodist church authorities, a small chapel was built on a plot of land adjacent to the cottage of Thomas Standfield. Two of the Tolpuddle Martyrs were actually trustees of the chapel, and at least four of them must have worshipped within it. Two or three of the Martyrs' were regular preachers to the congregation.

Following the episode of 1834, during which the Methodist church seems to have offered little or no support to the unionists,[44] the original Tolpuddle chapel continued in use through until at least 1843. Thereafter, it is difficult to establish its precise fate, though it is worth mentioning that there appears to be no record of a Methodist chapel in Tolpuddle in

39 Though it may be impossible to provide evidence to confirm the point, it seems likely that the mob was raised by establishment figures concerned with the rising tide of Methodism. As pointed out in Wearmouth 1937, 263, the formation of a village Methodist society meant the organization of 'a body of people independent of the squire, parson, and landlord'. Conflict was the result in many cases.

40 Loveless 1837, 10.

41 Trades Union Congress 1934, 181.

42 DCRO, D1/11,092B.

43 DCRO T/Tol.

44 The question of the lack of support from official Methodist quarters is an interesting one, but it is not easy to illuminate. There is some comment in Marlow 1971, 123, and the point is made in the *Methodist Times and Leader* for 6 September 1934. It is difficult to place too much faith in the dramatised documentary set out in Rattenbury 1931.

the Ecclesiastical Census Returns of 1851.[45] Indeed, the Methodist archives at the Dorset County Record Office reveal that by the late 1840s there may already have been plans for the construction of a new chapel on a site situated near the eastern fringes of the village, though that land conveyancing and the property deed were not settled until 1862.[46] The property deed of 19 August 1862 refers to:

> 'a piece or parcel of Ground formerly part of a Close of Ground called Church Close situated at Tolpuddle in the County of Dorset and heretofore in the Occupation of ... William Hammett. And which piece of ground is bounded on the North by the Turnpike Road running from Dorchester to Wimbourne and on the South East and West by other land belonging to the said William Hammett being in depth from North to South sixty three feet and in breadth from East to West twenty eight feet and contains in the whole One hundred and sixty six square yards or thereabouts ...'.

William Hammett, together with several other parties, including the Rev. John Allin of Dorchester (superintendent preacher), were intent on building:

> 'a Chapel or place of religious worship with such appurtenances as may be thought convenient for the use of people called Methodists'.

William Hammett, given in this document as a 'builder', was certainly related to the Tolpuddle Martyr, James (d. 1891), probably as a first cousin.[47] Indeed, following his return to Tolpuddle, James Hammett is known to have taken up work as a building labourer, and was most likely employed by his relations.[48]

On 8 November 1862, the Wesleyan Chapel Committee agreed to sanction the purchase of the new Tolpuddle chapel so long as the cost would not exceed £210.[49] In fact, William Hammett and his brother John erected the building for £170, with the total figure raised to £192 3*s*. 4*d*. by other incidental costs.[50] The chapel was opened for divine service by the Rev. Mr Richards on 1 January 1863.

Just why it was felt necessary to build a new chapel is not made clear in the surviving documents. Although it is tempting to try and draw out some connection with the Martyrs' incident, the evidence does not provide anything positive by way of support. On the contrary, it may simply have been a response to the resurgence and growing strength of the Wesleyan community in the village. The original building was clearly rather small, and there may well have been a need for additional space within a new chapel more fittingly reflecting the mid-nineteenth-century aspirations of Methodism.[51] Neither documentary sources, nor the surviving physical evidence within the 1862–63 chapel, indicate the transfer of practical or liturgical fittings from the old to the new building. It is unfortunate, too, that nothing survives to inform us if — under the terms of the 1818 deeds — the older chapel was sold and the monies applied to the 'larger new chapel building' (see above, p. 10).

45 PRO, HO 129/275 (Dorchester). This suggests, of course, that the chapel had fallen out of use by this date.

46 That the origins of the plan went back to 1849 is implicit in DCRO, NM. 2: S19/TS 3/1.

47 A family tree compiled from various sources is held in the library collections of the Trades Union Congress at the University of North London. This shows the fathers of William Hammett and James Hammett as brothers.

48 Marlow 1971, 19–20, 233–66, and Lean 1984.

49 DCRO, NM. 2: S19/TS 2/1.

50 DCRO, NM. 2: S19/TS 2/1.

51 On which see, Dolbey 1964, 116–69.

Despite one reference to James Hammett being 'a devoted member of the chapel',[52] it seems unlikely he actually worshipped in this building. On his death in 1891, he was to be buried in a corner of the parish churchyard, the grave now marked by a simple headstone of 1934 by Eric Gill (Fig. 15).[53] Meanwhile, the Martyrs who had emigrated to Canada in 1844 had become active members of the Methodist church within the communities where they settled. Thomas Standfield and George Loveless, for example, were involved in the building of the first church at Siloam (London) in Ontario, and James Loveless was the caretaker of this church through until his death.[54]

In Tolpuddle itself, the strength of the new chapel community through into the early twentieth century is confirmed by the surviving information on 'seat rents'[55]. And then, in 1908 — to honour the Martyrs — the Methodist circuit initiated an appeal to erect two cottages for the aged of Tolpuddle, and also to endow a scholarship at Ruskin College for agricultural workers. Unfortunately, although the appeal was supported by the Trades Union Congress, the proceeds failed to reach the targets set. Instead, a memorial arch was erected in front of the 1862–63 chapel, unveiled by the Rt. Hon. Arthur Henderson MP in 1912 (Fig. 16).[56]

By the 1950s, with community numbers continuing to fall, the chapel had become seriously dilapidated. As the date tablet on the entrance façade confirms, it was extensively renovated and restored in 1957. The cost, which amounted to approximately £2,000, was raised almost entirely by the work and efforts of the then superintendent minster, the Rev. R. Douglas Moore.[57] Sadly, however, regular members of the community have been lost and services have become less frequent.[58] This said, in July of each year an important memorial service is held as part of the Tolpuddle festival and rally organized by the Trades Union Congress.

52 The quote is from the *Methodist Times and Leader*, 30 August 1934.

53 Newman and Pevsner 1972, 426. In Portland stone, the inscription reads: 'James Hammett Tolpuddle Martyr Pioneer of Trades Unionism Champion of Freedom'. Dr David Peace, who has compiled a catalogue of Gill's memorial sculpture, confirms the attribution but is unsure of the context in which the stone was cut.

54 Citrine 1934, 91–92; Marlow 1971, 233–66.

55 DCRO, NM. 2: S19/TS 2/1.

56 See DCRO, NM. 2: S19/MI 1/4, and Marlow 1971, 267–69. Henderson was himself a Methodist and was later to become the first Labour man to hold cabinet office.

57 DCRO, NM. 2: S19/MI 1/3.

58 Since 1970 there has been just one regular member.

6.
The Original Chapel Interpreted

By the late 1780s, as Dolbey suggests,[59] there were three very common characteristics in Methodist rural chapels: 'simplicity of form and plan, neatness of appearance, and local materials'. Across all parts of the countryside, these simple characteristics were to endure well into the following century. Meanwhile, after John Wesley's death in 1791, in the fast-growing towns and cities of early Victorian Britain, Methodist chapels gradually became much larger; they also took on greater architectural pretensions. However, despite a widespread geographical distribution, the large urban chapels of this period show a remarkable consistency of plan. Most are simple rectangles, generally with five-bay fronts, and with galleries on three or sometimes all four of the internal sides.[60]

Against these urban developments, as noted, from the 1790s through to around 1850, numerous smaller Methodist chapels continued to be built in rural areas. Often unpretentious, and lacking any distinctive attributes which a professional architect may have introduced, they can appear severely functional in character. Local tradition and craftsmanship, generally operating in a context of financial constraint, combined to produce a stream of simply constructed, plainly designed and austerely furnished buildings. The Tolpuddle chapel of 1818 may be seen as very much a near-perfect example of this type.

There were two fundamental plan forms for such small chapels at this time, one based on a broad rectangle and the other on a long rectangle.[61] The broad rectangular plan was essentially a legacy of the dissenting meeting house tradition, invariably featuring an entrance on one long side, and with the pulpit near the centre of the other. In contrast, plans arranged in terms of a long rectangle sometimes have the entrance in one of the long sides though in other cases it appears in a short side, depending on the shape and accessibility of the site. But the pulpit is always in the centre of a short side. Some of these chapels had galleries, though this was not universal. It seems, too, that such simple planning was by no means restricted to the Methodists. The Ebenezer chapel at Cripplestyle in Dorset, for example, is of a very similar style and layout.[62]

The Tolpuddle chapel of 1818 is best seen as one of the long rectangle plans seen in numerous Methodist chapels in rural areas. Moreover, the use of local and traditional building materials in its construction fits well with the characteristics outlined by Dolbey. The chapel would have been entered by way of the now-blocked doorway in the centre of the south (short) façade (Figs 17 and 18). Facing this only doorway, at the north end of the building, the pulpit must have been placed under the pointed-arch window in the gable. Although no accurate measurements are available, there may only have been room for a single-decker pulpit, and from here the whole service would have been taken and the sermon preached. In front of the pulpit, a comparatively small railed space would have accommodated a Communion table. South of this, there could have been a few box pews for the senior members of the chapel, and beyond simple benching extending for the remaining length of the building as far as the doorway. The bench pews would have been set out on an east to west alignment, though it is difficult to be sure if the lack of symmetry in the planning of the lateral windows was reflected in the pattern of seating, or if it was

59 Dolbey 1964, 96.

60 For general context, see Jones 1914; Brooks and Saint 1995.

61 Dolbey 1964, 169–70.

62 See Stell 1991, 104–06 for details.

related to some other liturgical function.

The blocked lateral windows themselves were almost certainly original features. Several courses of brick dressing may have continued up from the plinth to the sill level, and above this wooden frames possibly housed paned lights. The pointed window in the north gable is also likely to be an original opening and it might well have been mirrored on the south side. Of greater interest perhaps is the question of the initial roofing arrangements over the chapel. It is possible that the present modified king-post trusses do not belong to the build of 1818. Indeed, the weatherboarding sitting on top of deliberately flat cob walling in either gable suggests at least one phase of modification. Given that it is by no means unusual to find chapels of this date with hipped roofs,[63] there seems a very strong possibility that this was the arrangement at Tolpuddle. As elsewhere, thatch would have been a natural roofing material in such a design. The king-post trusses could belong to those alterations made to the building when it passed out of religious use, coinciding with the loft insertions. As further confirmation of the changes at this time, it is worth noting that one of the beams supporting the loft is set in the brick blocking of the west window (Fig. 19). Two of the roof trusses were apparently modified in another phase of change.

63 Examples will be found in Stell 1991, 30–31, 104–05, and Dolbey 1964, 96–97.

7.
Recent Developments

Study of the local Methodist society records at Dorset County Record Office,[64] together with correspondence from the current Dorchester circuit archivist,[65] reveal several more recent developments concerning the site.

It seems that in December 1988 a planning application was made for the possible construction of four houses on or near the site of the 1862–63 Methodist chapel in Tolpuddle. An approach was made to local circuit to see if a sale of the chapel was feasible. This was considered by the circuit, and — after consultation with various other parties — it was resolved to look into the possibility of reinstating the 1818 chapel using the proceeds of the sale. By April 1989, the local Methodists had the support and agreement of, among others, their own property authorities, the Methodist Historical Society, the Agricultural Workers Union, Puddletown parish, and the county planning office. Drawings had been put forward for the incorporation of the 1912 memorial arch into the rebuilt chapel.[66]

At the time of the first planning application round, in May 1989, the scheme was turned down as 'not conducive to the area of conservation', and because of 'poor access to main road'. Subsequently, the owner of the original chapel was seeking a sale price of £45,000, and conversion costs were estimated at a further £35,000, amounting to a much larger figure than the Methodist church could justify. The project was shelved in December of that year.

In February of 1999, however, the local Methodist authorities were approached by another individual who is apparently keen to follow up the possibility of restoring the original chapel.[67] In the meantime, one significant change in planning terms within the village is the construction of a bypass. There may be less grounds for turning down a future planning application on the basis of a busy road.

As for the structure itself, it clearly stands in a very sad state of disrepair, with the ground storey used for haphazard storage (Figs. 19 and 20). The present owner is the same gentleman with whom the Methodist authorities were in negotiation in 1989.[68]

64 The bundle of fifty-seven documents on recent developments is DCRO, NM. 2: S19/TS 5/1.

65 This is Mr K. J. Salt. His letter on this subject is dated 20 March 1999.

66 There is no clear record of English Heritage involvement at this time, though the amendment to the published list for West Dorset is dated July 1989.

67 This is Mr Roger Chiswell, 107 Delhi Road, Enfield, EN1 2LY, but there is no further background at this stage.

68 This was confirmed by Mr Pickering, the former curator of the Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum.

8.
Summary of Findings

In summary, the building listed as grade II* in the 1989 amendment to the West Dorset list (serial number 15/200) was indeed a Methodist chapel, built in 1818. It was also the chapel used for worship by at least four of the six Tolpuddle Martyrs, and three of them may well have preached from its pulpit. The continued existence of this chapel can be confirmed through to 1843, and it may well have remained in use until a new village Methodist chapel was built in 1862–63. As such, the building is of real and very great historical interest.

At the trial in March 1834, George Loveless (the Martyrs' spokesman) wrote a few words on a piece of paper and handed them to the judge before sentence. They read:

> 'We have injured no man's reputation, character, person or property; we were uniting together to preserve ourselves, our wives and our children from utter degradation and starvation'.

Within the trade union movement, these words continue to symbolize the dignity and nobility of working-class organization. They appear, too, on the memorial arch of 1912 which stands at the front of the 1862–63 chapel. Any plans which may emerge to move this arch to the site of the original building would need careful and sympathetic handling.

Apart from the historical significance of the site, the simple and austere architecture of the chapel should not be underestimated. It is an example of a small rural Methodist building with its roots in the pioneering aspirations of this branch of nonconformism. With a more detailed analysis of the surviving fabric, it may well be possible to draw more positive conclusions on the original structural and liturgical features. Such a study, with a plan and suggested reconstruction, might well help to inform and steer any proposal for conservation or even conversion.

9.
Acknowledgements

The local Methodist circuit archivist, Mr K. J. Salt, has been extremely helpful in the preparation of this report, especially in tracking down the 1818 deeds of the chapel. The staff at the Dorset Record Office gave generously of their time, as did Christine Coates, Librarian for the Trades Union Congress collections at the University of North London. It was Mr Michael J. Marshman who kindly went to the trouble of making a copy of the valuable report from the *Salisbury Journal*. My colleague, Richard Lea, found time to discuss the form of the building and prepared the sketch illustrations based on our assessment.

10.
Photographs

Thirty-five prints taken by David Robinson, including the former Methodist church, the present church, and items from Dorset County Record Office:

Exterior of Former Church:	13 views
Interior of Former Church:	6 views
Martyrs' Cottage:	3 views
Present Methodist Church:	5 views
Gravestone of James Hammett:	1 view
Detail of 1843 Tithe Map:	5 views
Detail of 1843 Tithe Apportionment:	1 view
Detail of Map of Tolpuddle (about 1800):	1 view

One set on Out County file, with a second set sent with report to Bristol office.

11.
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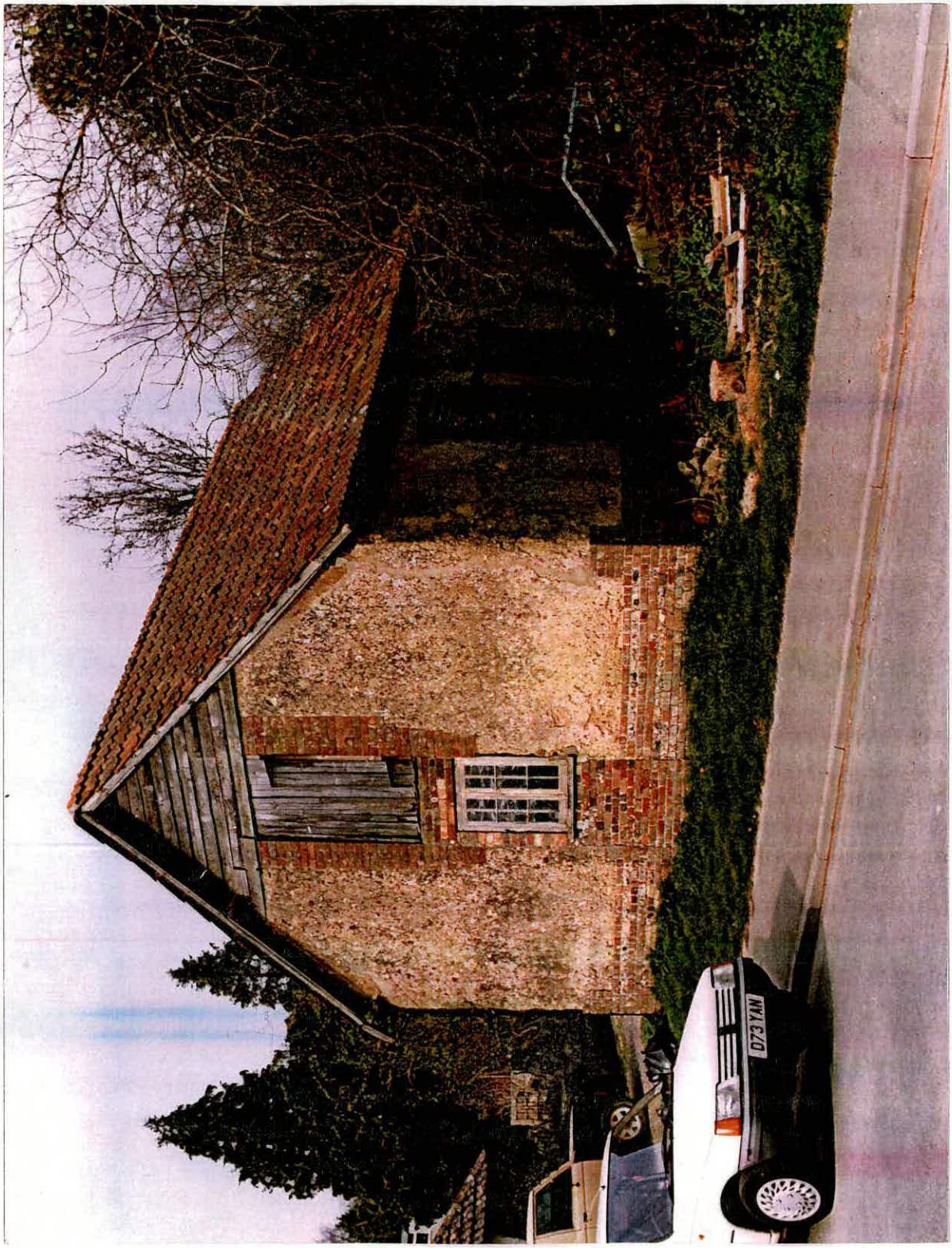


Fig. 1: A general view of the 'old chapel' (1818) seen from the south-east. It was built largely of cob, raised on a brick plinth.

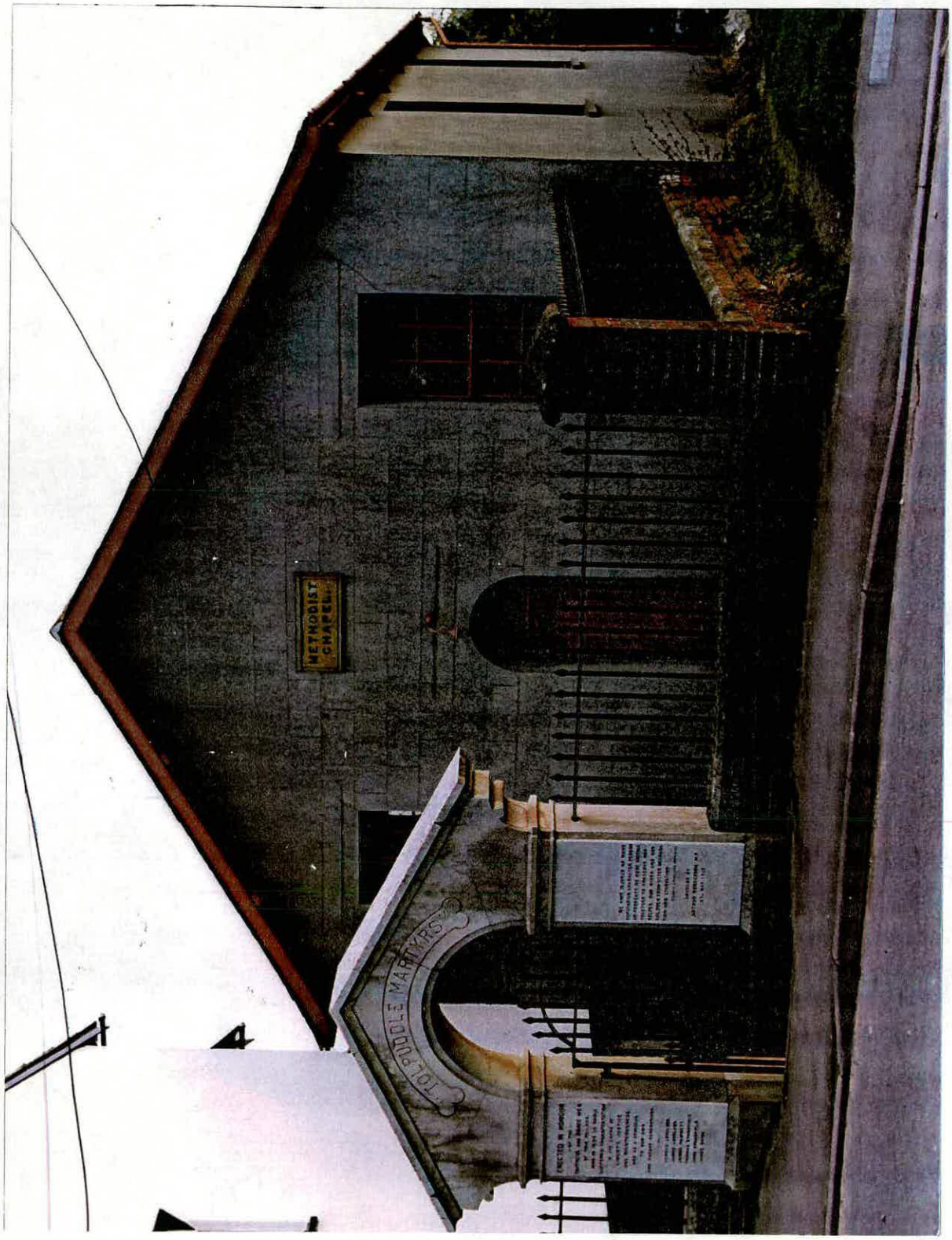


Fig. 2: Tolpuddle Methodist chapel, built in 1862–63 (with date tablet 1861), restored 1957. The arch in the foreground was raised as a memorial to the Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1912.

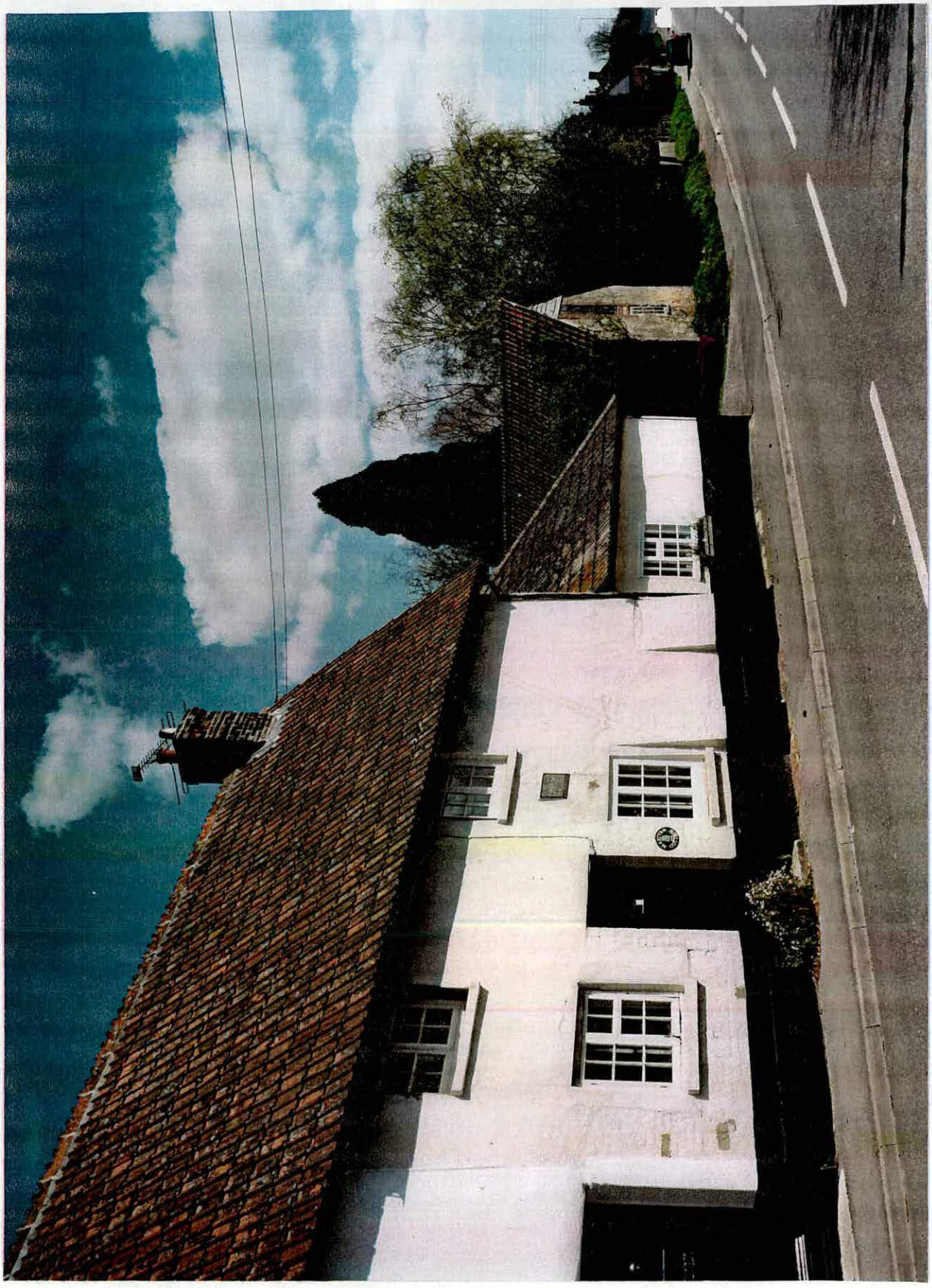


Fig. 3: The Martyrs' Cottage, Tolpuddle, a grade I listed building. This was the home of Thomas Standfield, a Methodist who was said to 'own' the chapel in the village. Meetings of the Tolpuddle Friendly Society were held in the house, including one in December 1833 which led to the arrest and subsequent transportation of the six so-called Martyrs.
(*English Heritage, 2K/00869 AA003441*)

Fig. 4: The south elevation of the chapel, showing a blocked doorway at the centre, and the position of a possible window opening above.

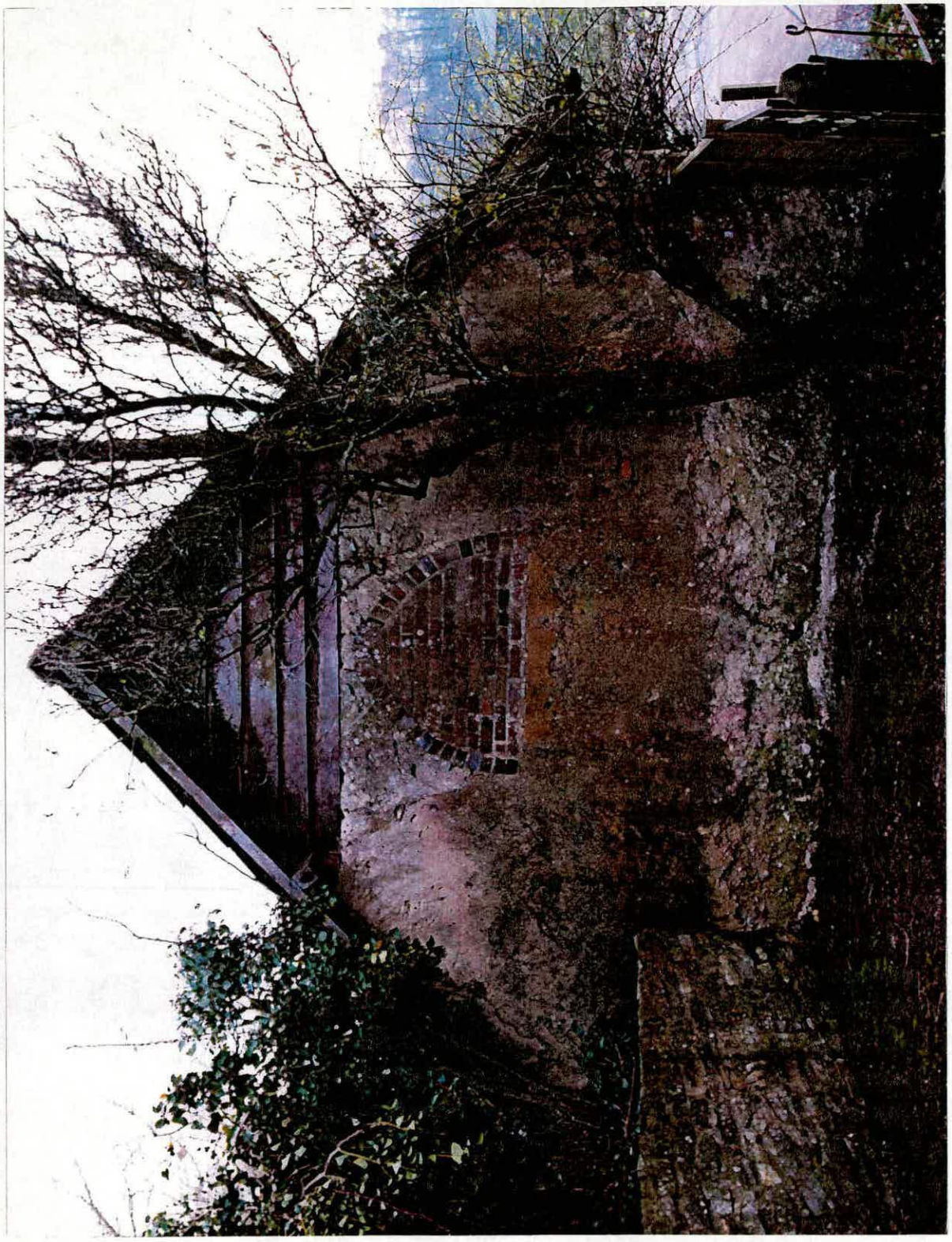


Fig. 5: The north elevation of the chapel, with a single blocked pointed window below the weatherboarded gable.

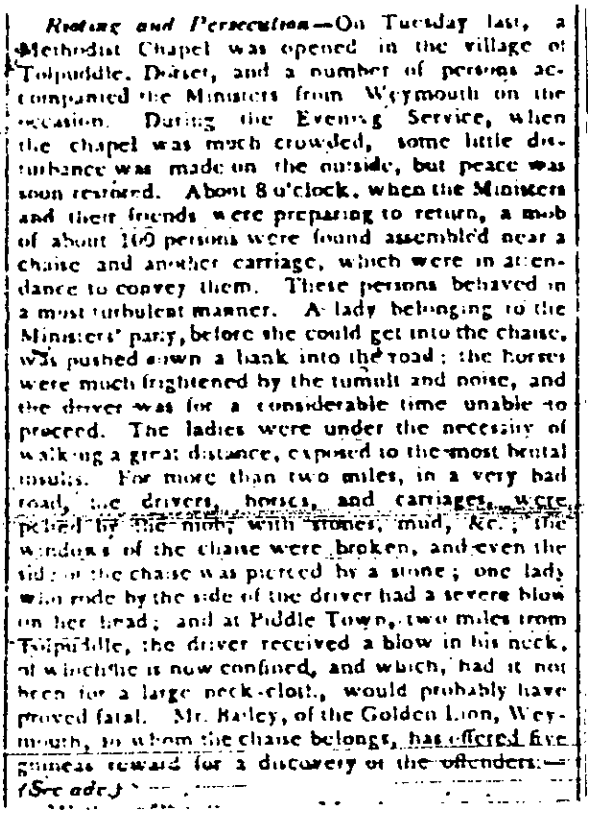
Fig. 6: Detail of the blocked window in the north wall of the chapel. The weatherboarding may reflect a secondary reroofing of the building.

Fig. 7: The west elevation of the chapel. The brick plinth steps up at the north (left) end, where there is also a single blocked window.

Fig. 8: The east elevation of the chapel, showing the blocked widow and a later doorway inserted after the chapel fell out of ecclesiastical use.

Fig. 9: The loft space within the chapel, showing the full king-post truss at the north end and one of the truncated trusses.

Fig. 10: Detail of one of the truncated king-post trusses of the former chapel roof.



Rioting and Persecution—On Tuesday last, a Methodist Chapel was opened in the village of Tolpuddle, Dorset, and a number of persons accompanied the Ministers from Weymouth on the occasion. During the Evening Service, when the chapel was much crowded, some little disturbance was made on the outside, but peace was soon restored. About 8 o'clock, when the Ministers and their friends were preparing to return, a mob of about 160 persons were found assembled near a chaise and another carriage, which were in attendance to convey them. These persons behaved in a most turbulent manner. A lady belonging to the Ministers' party, before she could get into the chaise, was pushed down a bank into the road; the horses were much frightened by the tumult and noise, and the driver was for a considerable time unable to proceed. The ladies were under the necessity of walking a great distance, exposed to the most brutal insults. For more than two miles, in a very bad road, the drivers, horses, and carriages, were pelted by the mob, with stones, mud, &c.; the windows of the chaise were broken, and even the side of the chaise was pierced by a stone; one lady who rode by the side of the driver had a severe blow on her head; and at Piddle Town, two miles from Tolpuddle, the driver received a blow in his neck, of which he is now confined, and which, had it not been for a large neck-cloth, would probably have proved fatal. Mr. Bailey, of the Golden Lion, Weymouth, to whom the chaise belongs, has offered five guineas reward for a discovery of the offenders.—

(See adv.)

Fig. 11: Extract from the *Salisbury Journal* for 19 October 1818, reporting the opening of the Methodist chapel in Tolpuddle in the previous week.
(*Trowbridge Reference Library, Wiltshire County Council*)

Fig. 12: Map of the parish of Tolpuddle, Dorset, about 1800.
(*Copyright: Dorset County Record Office, D1/11,0928*).

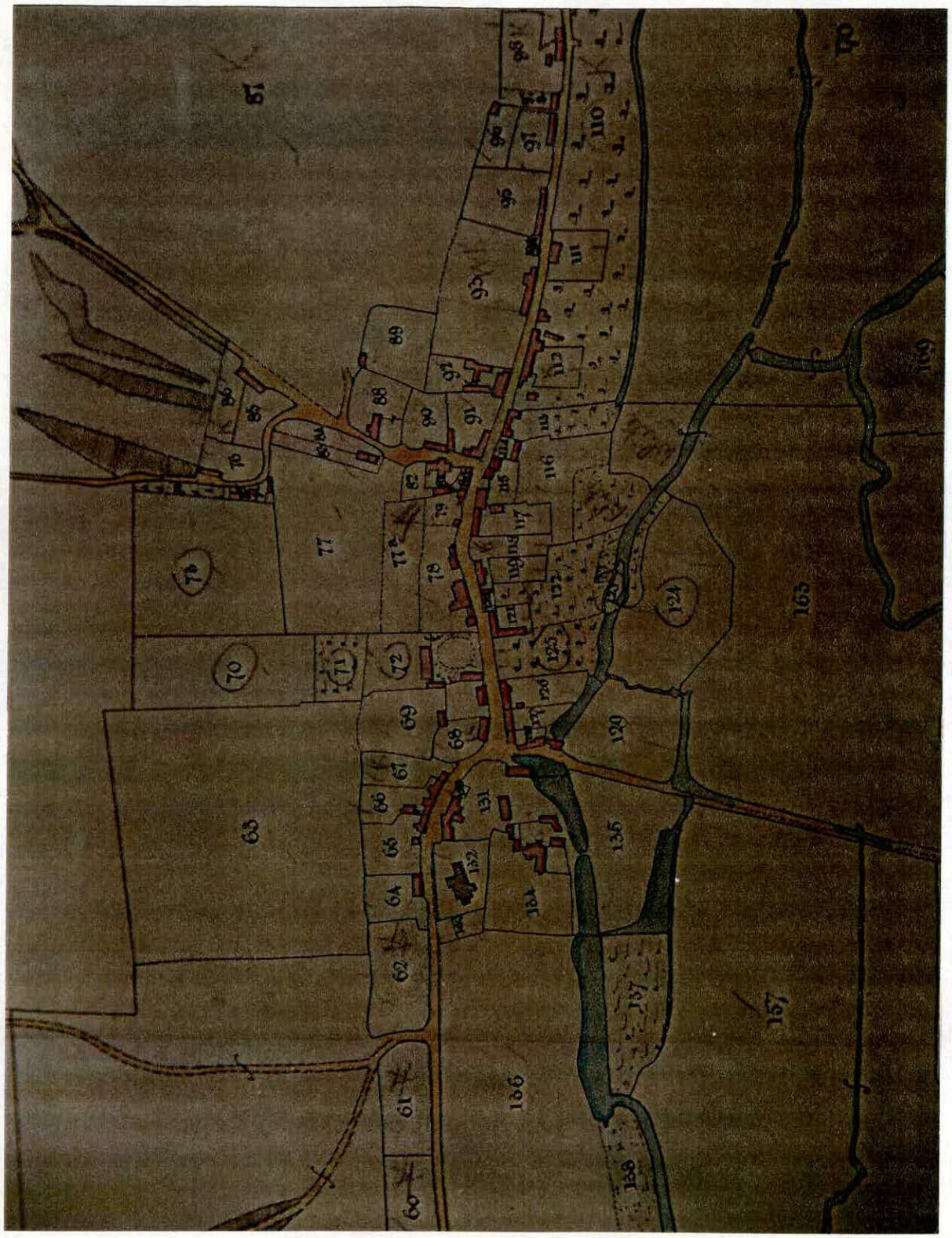


Fig. 13: Tithe Map for Tolpuddle, Dorset, 1843. Within Plot 93, 94 is identified as a Methodist chapel.
(*Copyright: Dorset County Record Office, T/Tol*).

Fig. 14: Detail of the Tithe apportionment for Tolpuddle, Dorset, 1843.
(*Copyright: Dorset County Record Office, T/Tol*).

Fig. 15: Grave of James Hammett in the churchyard of St John's, Tolpuddle, with headstone of 1934 by Eric Gill.

Fig. 16: Memorial arch outside the 1862–63 Methodist chapel at Tolpuddle, erected in 1912 to commemorate the Martyrs.

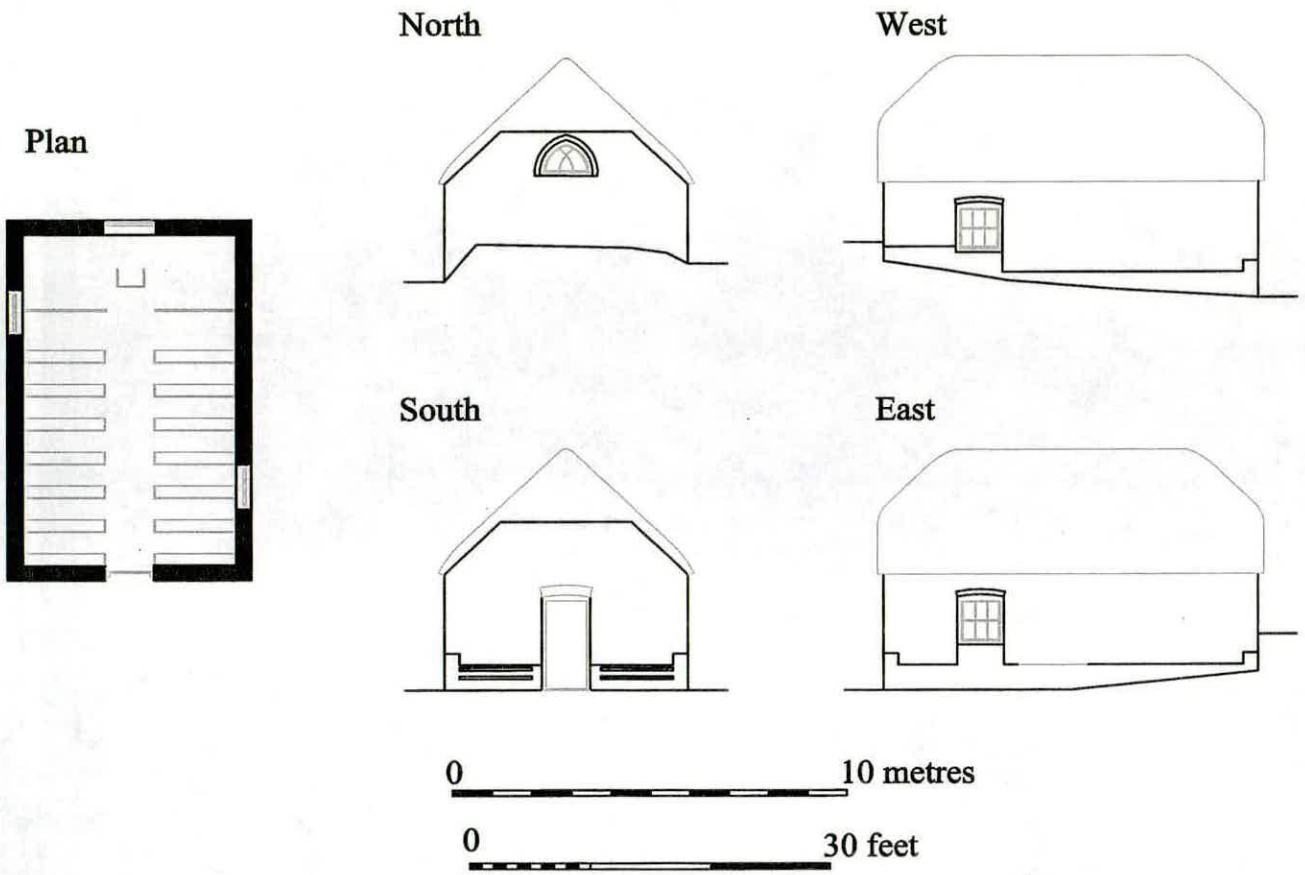


Fig. 17: Sketch plan and restored elevations of the chapel. The conjectural elements, including a suggestion of the possible pew arrangements and the roof form, are shown in grey.
(*Richard Lea, Copyright English Heritage*)

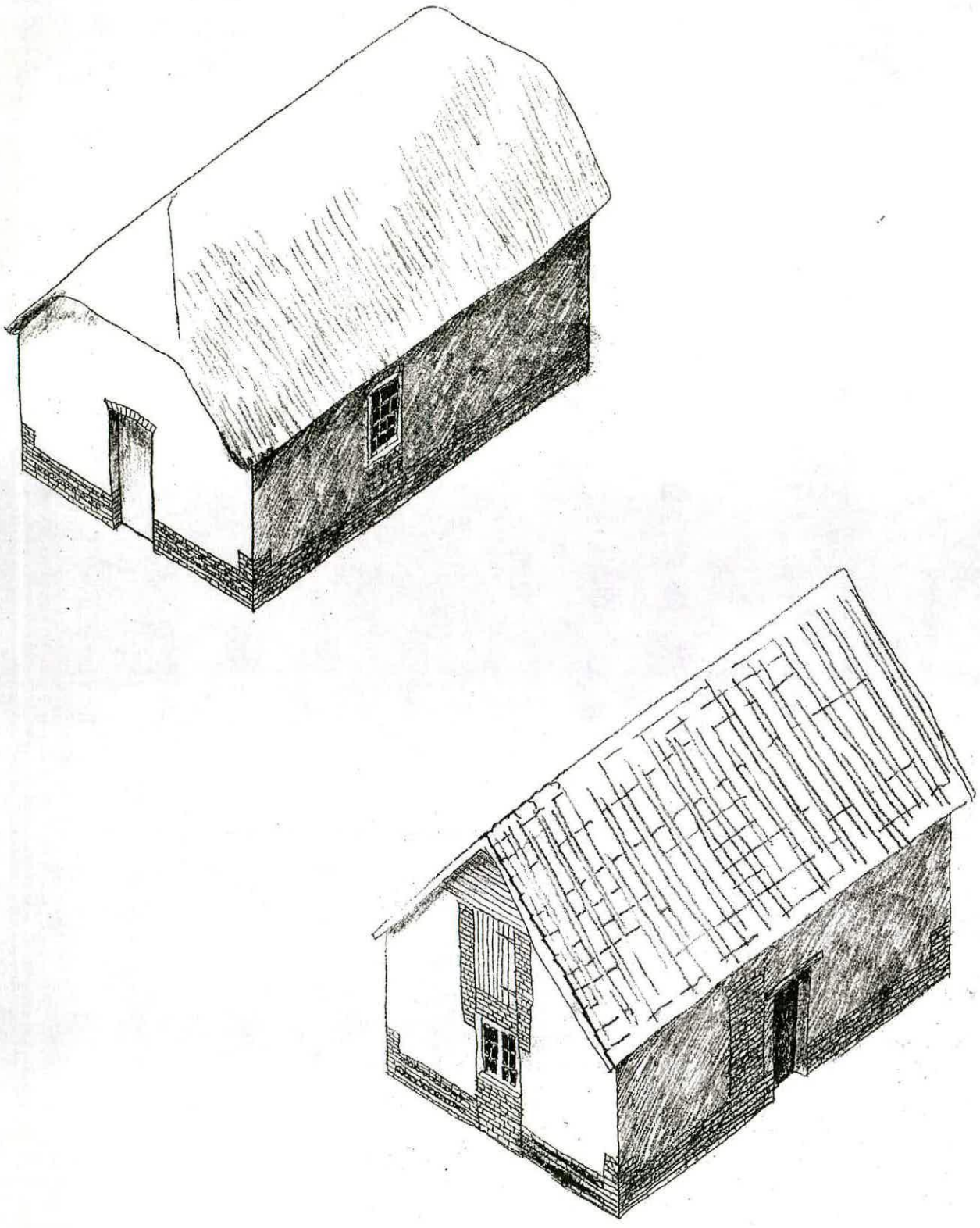


Fig. 18: Sketches to show (below) the current form of the chapel and (above) a proposed reconstruction of the original 1818 arrangements.
(*Richard Lea, Copyright English Heritage*)

Fig. 19: Interior of the chapel, looking north-west, showing several of the beams inserted to support the loft.

Fig. 20: Interior of the chapel, looking south-west, showing one of the later beams and the steps to the loft.