

Ainsworth Unitarian Chapel, Ainsworth Village, Bury.

Statement of Significance and Heritage Impact Assessment Statement.

1 Background and Introduction

The proposal is to form a new WC and separate brew area within the Unitarian Chapel. The building is grade II* listed, is adjacent to other listed buildings and within the Ainsworth Village Conservation Area.

A heritage statement is required in support of the proposals in line with paragraph 200 of the NPPF 2023. Part of the paragraph states that *“In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting and the conservation area. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.”*

This statement has used information from Bury Council’s Appraisal and Management Plan for Ainsworth (2008) and History of Ainsworth Unitarian Chapel by Stephen Horrocks.

The proposed works are purely internal to the building but for a small extractor fan through an existing window. It will not have any impact on the significance of the wider conservation area but may affect the significance of the building and its immediate setting. This statement will therefore concentrate on the Chapel and its immediate surroundings.

2 Significance

2.1 History

The place name Ainsworth is first mentioned in the early 13th century, when land there was given to Cockersand Abbey by Roger de Middleton. The place name is Anglo-Saxon, derived from the word “worth” meaning enclosure; the prefix is thought to be the name of an early occupant. The village is sometimes referred to as Cockey Moor in historical documents, a name that is generally now taken to refer to the formerly unenclosed east side of the parish, on which some archaeological finds of Roman coins have been made. Cockley Chapel is marked on Saxton’s 1577 map and on John Speed’s map of 1610. The place name Ainsworth commonly occurs as a surname, and gave its name to the local Ainsworth family who during the 14th century were important land owners.

Until the industrial period, the principal occupation was small-scale farming. The historic rural settlement pattern in this part of Lancashire developed with larger villages interspersed with small farmstead groups or folds, such as Dearden Fold to the west of the village and Barrack Fold to the north. To generate additional income many farmhouses had loom-shops for weaving woollens. The open moorland of Cockey Moor surrounded the village, and was gradually enclosed during the post-medieval period; there are records of enclosure for glebelands in 1630, although the straight lines of field boundaries and lanes around the village reflect the relatively late date of enclosure; an enclosure order was made in 1812.

The first record of a chapel at Cockey Moor dates from 1515, and Camden refers to the building as “a chapel built of timber, beset round with trees”. The old chapel building was pulled down in 1831 and replaced with a new building in 1832, known as the “Chapel of Christ in Cockey, otherwise Ainsworth”. The village was historically a township within Middleton parish until it became a

separate ecclesiastical parish in 1867. There is a long history of religious dissent in the village, with the church building being used for non-conformist meetings during the 17th century. In 1662 the minister John Lever was “turned out”, taking some of the congregation with him; this led to the building of a dissenting meeting house in 1672 though the location of this first chapel is now unknown. This first chapel was built in 1715 and is now the Unitarian Chapel on Knowsley Road. Immediately to the north of the chapel a “Reform Club” was built in 1768 (now the old Stables), to provide accommodation and stabling for worshipers who lived away from the village. Hooks Cottage off Knowsley Road is dated 1773 lies to the south. Cottages on Greenside Street probably date from the late 17th and 18th centuries. The Duke William which is to the west of the chapel carries a datestone of 1737. These pre-industrial buildings are important to the character of the conservation area, but most of Ainsworth’s present buildings were built after the end of the 18th century.

The Unitarian chapel

2.2 Architecture and Appearance

The building was listed in 1985 the official list description as follows.

29.7.66 Presbyterian Chapel

GV II*

Inscribed in heavy pediment to doorway (supported by 2 piers): "Erected AD 1715. Enlarged 1773. Altered and repaired 1845". Rectangular, with 2 tiers of 3-light plain chamfered mullioned windows and gabled front. Interior has gallery on 3 sides and box pews.

Listing NGR: SD7629510322

The current building is of squat, solid symmetrical appearance in coursed stone with large stone quoins and a slate roof. It has two rows of four 3-light mullion windows with hood moulds along its north and south elevations; that to the south ground floor with a connecting stone string course. Its original stone roof slabs were replaced by slate in 1911. The roof has its original bell cote. The general interior and previous alteration of the building are as described below. The building is enclosed by a graveyard within stone walls and stone gate piers. Within the graveyard are three 18th century listed stone chest tombs. The original 1715 building had three sets of windows along the south and north elevations.

The area that is the subject of the proposed changes is the north corner of the east end of the narthex, that part added in 1773. This area is currently occupied by the sacristy/vestry and preparation room. The works involve the provision of a WC and sink separated from a new brew facility. The change will be achieved by new studded walls and fittings all with a plain finish. There will be no alteration to the building’s existing fabric other than the provision of a fan in the glazing within a mullion window. Please see the scheme drawing.

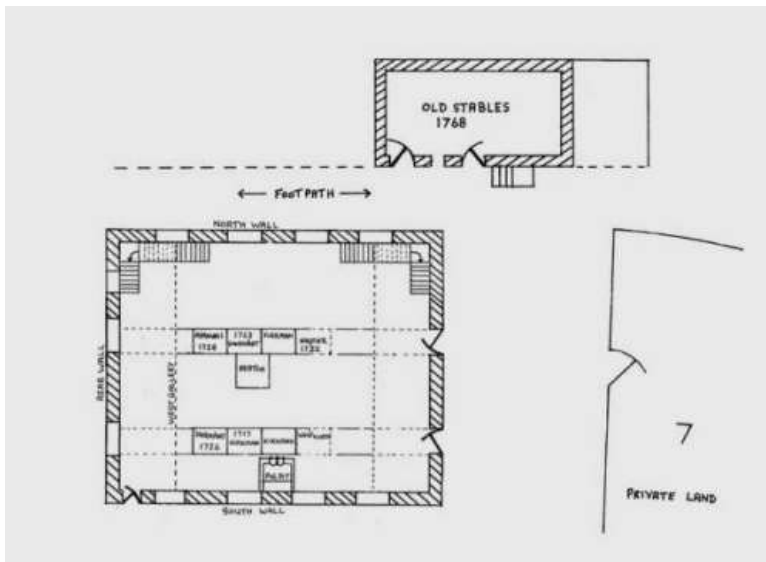


The narthex/entrance area



Existing sacristy

The 1773 Chapel Enlargement



This plan shows the extent of chapel enlargement in 1773

The chapel was enlarged in an easterly direction (on the right in the above plan), by adding the fourth 12-foot section, complete with matching windows and ceiling to three sections that already existed, thereby keeping the external symmetry. The two main entrance doors appear to have been repositioned in the new east wall and were still in line with the aisles. In the course of enlargement the east gallery appears to have been dismantled and complete with its staircase, moved and reassembled against the new east wall.

The Alterations of 1845

In 1845 the undersides of the galleries were lowered to allow the installation of the new organ and also extended inwards towards the centre of the chapel. The pulpit was then moved across to the centre of the north wall and a central bridging gallery constructed along the south wall to join up the two existing galleries. The result considerably increased the seating capacity of the chapel.

Literally squeezed in, the organ sits on the very base of the gallery behind the panelling and still almost touches the ceiling. Originally, the organ was powered by hand pumped bellows, operated by a lever that projected out of the right hand side of the organ. It must have been hard work during

long services for one poor member of the congregation! Today, the organ is “blown” by an electrically driven fan. At this time a new boiler house was built on the southwest corner to house the new heating ‘apparatus’. A small doorway in the southwest corner of the south wall was then ‘bricked up’ together with the two main doorways in the east wall and the small ground floor window in the rear wall.



A new central main entrance was then created in the east wall and the existing doors in-filled, complete with porch and a magnificent portico, topped with a stone acorn.

2.3 Other Listed Buildings within the Village Core

The listed buildings are in a group consisting of The Old Stables, Hook’s Cottage, Duke William PH and the tombs in the graveyard. All are listed grade II. The Old Stables stand adjacent to the chapel immediately north across a narrow track. The Duke William stands to the west of the chapel and Hook’s Cottage to the east. Bearing in mind the very limited nature of the external alteration proposed to the chapel only The Old Stables could be affected by the change.

The Old Stables were constructed in 1768 when the chapel Trustees acquired an adjacent piece of land on the north side of the chapel measuring 18 yards by 6 yards. On it they erected a three-story building with a yard. The ground floor was a stable for horses and the two floors above were sitting rooms and “other apartments for the ease and convenience of such of the said congregation, whose respective places of abode are remote from the chapel.” An old fashioned mounting stock, used when mounting horses, can still be seen next to the old stable door. The listing description for the Old Stables reads “*Late C18. Coursed rubble. Three storeys. Two flat-mullioned windows with hood bands to those on lower floors. Door with massive flush lintel. Mounting block to right of door. C20 wing to rear. Said to have been formerly used as Unitarian Chapel*”. There is probably some doubt about the last statement. The Stables, like the Chapel, is a visually strong building though in this case it has been substantially extended. However, the original part of the Old Stables is close to the area of the chapel window.

2.4 Summary of Significance

The chapel is a significant building in terms of its history and architecture. The current building is of squat, solid symmetrical appearance in a simple strong design with a prominent entrance. It has remained largely unaltered since the works of 1845. Its early 1715 date and the documented changes in 1773 and 1845 tell an interesting story of the building. It is a key part of religious non-conformity in Ainsworth. It is a strong building both externally and internally that can accommodate

some change without architectural or historical damage. The area where change is proposed is plain and does not currently add a great deal to the building's special qualities.

3 Proposals and Impact on Significance

The proposed works are minor and but for the fan in the glazed opening have no impact on the building's exterior. The internal changes are modest and do not challenge in any way the significance of this listed building. This comment is made even though the building is clearly grade II* quality. The changes are an important addition to a building that is struggling to stay in active use. The small external change close by The Old Stables will not affect its setting. There will be no impact on the wider Ainsworth Conservation Area. The significance of the building and its setting will be not be harmed by the proposed works.

4 Complying with National and Local Policies

Section 16 (2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that: 'In considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works the local planning authority or the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.' The 2023 National Planning policy Framework (NPPF) and local planning policies in the Bury Unitary Development Plan 1997 implement this requirement.

The relevant policies are paragraphs 202 to 221 of the NPPF (2024), and EN1/2, EN2/1, EN2/2, and JP-P2 of the local plans. The most relevant being :

210. In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness*

212. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

The Council's relevant policy for listed buildings is:

In considering applications for Listed Building Consent, the Council will have regard to the following criteria:

- a) the impact of the proposal on the historic fabric of the building;*
- b) the relationship of any extension to the Listed Building in terms of its height, size, design, and roofscape;*
- c) the need to protect the setting of the Listed Building;*
- d) the impact of associated ancillary facilities and infrastructure works.*

The Council's relevant policy for conservation areas is:

'EN2/2 - Conservation Area Control. Development within a Conservation Area will only be acceptable if it preserves or enhances the special character or appearance of the area. In considering proposals for development in Conservation Areas, regard will be had to the following criteria:

- 1 the nature of the development in terms of its bulk, height, materials, colour, design and detailing;*
- 2 the relationship between the proposed development and the architectural and visual qualities of the surrounding area.*

The LPA's policies are still as listed above, and JP-P2 was adopted as part of the Places for Everyone Plan in March 2024 and this contains more general policies as follows :

Particular consideration will be given to ensure that the significance of key elements of the historic environment which contribute to Greater Manchester's distinctive identity and sense of place are protected from harm. These include historic town centres, places of worship, historic transport routes including the canal network, industrial buildings and structures including textile mills, farmsteads and other sites, buildings, and areas of identified archaeological, architectural, artistic and/or historic value. Development proposals affecting designated and non-designated heritage assets and/or their settings will be considered having regard to national planning policy.

This statement details the impact of the proposal. It meets the planning authority's objectives a to c on listed buildings above and 1 and 2 for conservation areas. It should therefore meet any tests for the more general requirements of the NPPF and JP-P2 for protection of significance. The implementation of the proposal will add an important facility to the chapel without damaging in any way the significance of any listed buildings or the Conservation Area.

M Nightingale Dip TP, Dip Arch Con.
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