

A brief guide to...

# Salem Chapel

Vicarage Road, East Budleigh, Devon, EX9 7EF

## *History & Background*

Built in 1719 by dissenting Presbyterians, Salem Chapel is an early example of a nonconformist chapel constructed following the 1689 Act of Toleration. Funded and built by the independent congregation themselves, Salem has an idiosyncratic design, notably in the construction of its roof.

The land for the building was donated by local landowner John Pounceor, while the squires of nearby Otterton, the Dukes family, contributed local stone for its construction. Presbyterianism was therefore clearly a movement that attracted a range of believers across the social spectrum. The chapel was a member of the Exeter Assembly, which approved and ordained ministers and offered financial assistance to poor congregations in Devon, and from Assembly records it is clear that Salem Chapel was active in the theological debates of the time regarding issues such as predestination and the nature of the Trinity. This activity led to the congregation changing from Presbyterian to Independent in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, most likely following the dismissal of Mr Clark, a minister 'whose preaching was

tainted with the principles of Arianism [a movement that thought the Son was subordinate, rather than equal to, God the Father]'. Samuel Leat, despite being minister at Salem for 39 years, was never paid by the congregation, suggesting only a limited appreciation of his ministry. On his death in 1817 his wealth was found to be significant, and it is unknown whether this was down to an inheritance or illegal means. smuggling was rife along the Devon coast, and it is certainly possible that Leat was involved – the vicar of the Anglican church in East Budleigh, Ambrose Stapleton, was at the centre of a smuggling operation until 1852.

Leat's ministry saw the first changes to the fabric of the chapel, when a gallery was added in 1810, and extended in 1814. In 1836 further work was undertaken, and the central column replaced. A schoolroom for Sunday school was built in 1851, which at its height had twelve teachers teaching sixty children.

## *The Exterior*

The chapel is built from Devon red sandstone and rubble, and, while it may have originally been limewashed, is now



Tradition: Presbyterian  
Built: 1719  
Congregation active until: c.1980  
Listing: II\*  
Grid reference: SY070851  
Modern facilities available  
Tel: 01395 445236, 445648 or 446189

## *Transport*

Salem Chapel is north of East Budleigh near Bicton Cross. Parking adjacent is very limited, but you can park along Vicarage Road and there is a public car park near the parish church.

The nearest rail stations are Exmouth (5 miles) or Exeter (12 miles).

An hourly Stagecoach Devon bus service no. 157 from Exmouth bus station to Sidmouth stops by the chapel. Visits by prior arrangement with the keyholder.

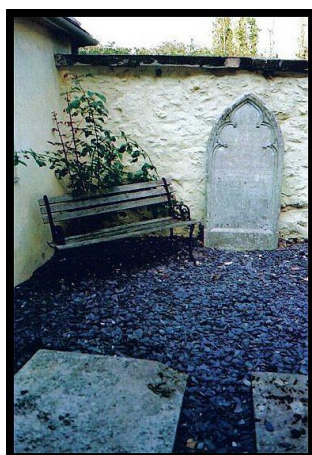
plastered. The front of the building was heavily remodelled in 1836, with the original central door filled in, and the windows converted into doorways. A small oval window used to be where the date stone is now. The windows on the north and south sides of the chapel remain in their original state. The square roof, too wide to be supported by a single beam, is instead constructed out of four A-frame ranges supported by a single steel and wood column that can be found inside the chapel. Originally made of wood, the column has

been replaced twice in the chapel's history – once in 1836, with iron, and again during its restoration in 2004, with steel.



*The column under repair*

During the restoration a small lead purse was found between the post and the stone at the foot of the column containing a mix of coins from the reign of George II and William IV. To continue the tradition, a new pouch was placed under the steel column. Between the vestry and the schoolroom is a small burial ground, which may have once been larger.



*The burial ground ©pastremains.co.uk*

### *The Interior*

In common with many other nonconformist chapels, the focal point of the simple interior is the pulpit, facing which is a single column of pews.



*The pulpit*

An elders' pew is identifiable immediately facing the pulpit by the way in which it is separated from the rest of the seating.



*The pews from the pulpit*

A three-sided gallery with decorated panel fronts and contemporary box pews dates from the early nineteenth century, and looks down towards the pulpit – the raised nature of which would allow the preacher to address both ground and gallery with equal ease. Graffiti inscribed by generations of children to use the chapel can be found on the backs of some of the pews.



*The view from the gallery*

### *Subsequent History*

In the 1980s the chapel came to be owned by the Assembly of God, and was then sold to a private owner who seriously neglected it. In 1996 the

perilous condition of the chapel – the roof of which was on the verge of collapse - was brought to the attention of the Historic Chapels Trust by local people who had championed its restoration, and it was transferred to HCT's care in 1998. A £700,000 repair programme began in 2004, encompassing the introduction of modern facilities, repairs to the gallery and floors, and the replacement of the central post, and was completed in 2006.

### *New Uses*

The chapel and adjoining room are now available for secular uses, co-ordinated by an active local committee. Recent events have included concerts, meetings, displays, lectures and exhibitions. Salem is also available for weddings, blessings and memorial services. Contact us for more information.



*An event at the chapel*

### *Further Reading*

Victoria Nutt, *Salem Chapel: A History and Guide* (London, 2008)