

Ystrad English Congregational Church Ton Pentre

Level 2 Historic Building Record



Richard Hayman

for

Taff Developments Ltd

August 2023

Crynodeb

Ym mis Awst 2023, comisiynwyd Richard Hayman i baratoi cofnod adeilad hanesyddol o Gapel Cynulleidfaol Saesneg Ystrad, Ton Pentre. Nid yw'r adeilad yn un rhestredig, ond y mae'n ased treftadaeth o ddiddordeb lleol. Amod o'r caniatâd cynllunio i droi'r capel yn un ar ddeg o fflatiau yw y dylid paratoi cofnod adeilad hanesyddol, sy'n gyfwerth â Lefel 2 Historic England.

Sefydlwyd Capel Cynulleidfaol Ystrad yn Nhon Pentre yn 1870 i ddarparu ar gyfer yr ymsefydlwyr o Loegr oedd yn gweithio yn y pyllau glo lleol, mewn cyfnod pan oedd poblogaeth cymoedd y Rhondda yn cynyddu'n gyflym. Cafodd y capel ei ailadeiladu yn ei ffurf bresennol yn 1884, ac ychydig iawn o newid a wnaed oddi ar y cyfnod hwnnw – gyda'r tu mewn yn cynnwys oriel tair-ochrog, ac islawr lle cynhelid yr Ysgol Sul. Caewyd yr adeilad fel addoldy yn 2020.

Mae'r adroddiad yn disgrifio hanes yr adeilad, a'r cyd-destun yr adeiladwyd ef ynddo. Mae lluniadau mesuredig ac arolwg ffotograffig wedi rhoi cofnod manwl o ffabrig y capel. I gloi'r adroddiad cyflwynir datganiad o arwyddocâd, sy'n amlygu pwysigrwydd y capel yn hanes crefyddol a diwylliannol Ton Pentre, a goroesiad ffurf bensaernïol a oedd yn nodweddiadol o addoldai anghydfurfiol yn ne Cymru ddiwydiannol y bedwaredd ganrif ar bymtheg.

Summary

Richard Hayman was commissioned to undertake historic building recording of Ystrad English Congregational Church, Ton Pentre, in August 2023. The building is not listed but is a heritage asset of local interest. A condition of planning permission to convert the church into eleven flats is that a historic building record should be produced, equivalent to Historic England's Level 2.

Ystrad Congregational Church was founded in Ton Pentre in 1870 to cater for incoming English settlers working in the local coal pits, at a time when the population of the Rhondda valleys was growing rapidly. The church was rebuilt in its present form in 1884 and has remained virtually unaltered since that time, incorporating an interior with three-sided gallery and a basement that housed a Sunday School. It closed for worship in 2020.

The report describes the history of the building, and the context within which it was built. Measured drawings and a photographic survey have recorded the fabric of the church in detail. The report concludes with a statement of significance, which highlights the church's importance in the religious and cultural history of Ton Pentre, and the survival of an architectural form that was characteristic of nonconformist places of worship in nineteenth-century industrial South Wales.

Ystrad English Congregational Church Ton Pentre

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I Introduction

Ystrad English Congregational Church stands at the junction of Church Road and Church Street, Ton Pentre, at SS 9715 9533 (fig 1). Planning permission has been given for conversion of the former church, which has been disused since 2020, to provide eleven flats (Rhondda Cynon Taf planning reference 22/0668/10). Condition 4 attached to the planning permission is that an historic building record, equivalent to Historic England’s Level 2, is made of the building before any alterations are made. This report, together with accompanying photographs and survey drawings, and the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) that preceded it, discharges that condition. It takes the form of archaeological building recording equivalent to Historic England’s Level 2 and was undertaken before commencement of building work.



Figure 1. Location plan.

The building is set back behind railings on Church Road and Church Street and has an area of lawn with overgrown shrubs occupying the corner of the site by the road junction.

The building is not a designated heritage asset and no previous study of the building is known, but there is a brief entry about the history of the building in the National

Monuments Record (NMR 10246). The building is also mentioned in *The Buildings of Wales* volume for Glamorgan (Newman 1995, 511).

2 Aims and Objectives

The purpose of the historic building record is to provide a written, drawn and photographic record of the building that is to be taken down. Level 2 is a 'descriptive' record and Historic England's guidelines specify that:

Both the exterior and interior of the building will be seen, described and photographed. The examination of the building will produce an analysis of its development and use and the record will include the conclusions reached, but it will not discuss in detail the evidence on which this analysis is based. A plan and sometimes other drawings may be made but the drawn record will normally not be comprehensive.

The other primary objective is to preserve by record what is to be lost, securing the long-term preservation of the information through deposition of the record and a summary written report with an appropriate depository. In this case it will be deposited with the Historic Environment Record administered by Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust, and the National Monuments Record administered by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

3 Methodology and Standards

The work has followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) Code of Conduct and adheres to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures* (CIfA 2016).

Historic England's guidelines, *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (2016), have been used as a basis for defining levels of recording. The Historic Building Record for this project is at Level 2.

A ground plan and elevations of the building was undertaken by Chamberlain Moss & King Architecture. The plan shows the general structure but not the specific openings at each level, which have been sketched in for reproduction in this report (see figs 24-26 and 31-32). Site inspection, including written descriptions and interpretation, and photographic record were undertaken by Richard Hayman on 16 August 2023, at which time the building was unoccupied. Access was possible to all of the interior, and to most of the exterior, except for the open space on the north side of the property, which is overgrown and prevented access to parts of the Church Street front. The historical background material relating to the site was derived from online and printed sources which are listed below in the references.

4 Historical Background

Industrial settlement of the Rhondda Valleys gathered pace in the second half of the nineteenth century, a consequence of the rapid growth of the sale-coal market and expansion of the railway network to serve it. In the area of Pentre and Ton Pentre, Bwllfa Level was opened in 1862 by Richardson & Carr, and was later expanded as Ton Colliery. It was situated on the hillside west of Ton Pentre settlement and was connected to the railway network running through the Rhondda valley by means of a tramway. On the opposite bank of the river two collieries opened in 1864 – Pentre by Curteis, Greenhill & Ware, and Bodringallt by Warner, Simpson & Company.

The rapidly growing migrant population was ill-served by the existing church of Ystradyfodwyg, serving a parish encompassing both Rhondda valleys and extending as far as Hirwaun. Ecclesiastical bureaucracy impeded the Established church's ability to accommodate the rapid influx of settlers. Instead there was a proliferation of non-conformist places of worship reflecting the geographical origin and culture of the new inhabitants, which included Welsh and English speakers.

Congregationalists/Independents were active in the Rhondda Fawr from the 1860s. The term Congregationalist defines English religious communities that are independent of any larger or higher institution. The denomination is found only rarely in Wales. Their more common Welsh counterparts are known as Independent chapels, or *Annibynwyr* in Welsh. The earliest of the causes in the mid-Rhondda was Siloh Chapel (now demolished), a Welsh Independent chapel founded in 1868 in Pentre. Members of the chapel were instrumental in the founding of an English cause in 1870, the Ystrad English Congregational Church, as well as the Bethesda Independent Chapel in nearby Bailey Street in 1876 (Kidger 2012, 103-4).



Figure 2. Ordnance Survey map, 1884.

The original Ystrad English Congregational Church was built in 1870 and is shown on the Ordnance Survey map published in 1884, the survey for which was conducted in 1874-5 (fig 2). A tablet on the front of the building was salvaged and placed on a new chapel which was

built in 1884. The date is inscribed on the building in four places (fig 3). The new building is shown on the subsequent Ordnance Survey maps from 1900 onwards (fig 4).

The chapel stands at the junction of Church Road and Church Street, a prominent position in the village which shows how it was established while the settlement was still developing. A cluster of churches and chapels here demonstrates how important were the religious communities of industrial Rhondda. Ystrad stands close to the church of St John, the medieval parish church, rebuilt and enlarged in the nineteenth century, but demolished to make way for a new church in 1985-7. Bethesda Independent Chapel, described above, stood close by on Bailey Street, while Hebron Baptist Chapel, also founded in 1870, stood opposite Ystrad on Church Street, but has now been demolished.

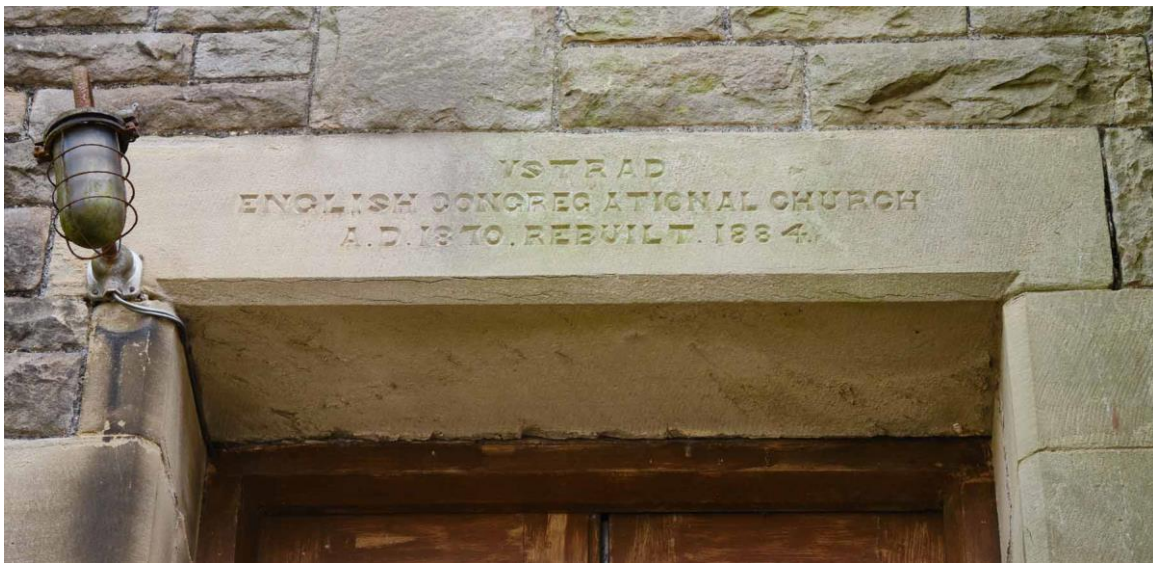


Figure 3. Date inscription above main entrance.



Figure 4. Ordnance Survey, 1900. The map shows Hebron and Bethesda Chapels, St John's Church and the Workmen's Institute at the junction of main roads in the village.

Members of the congregation remained stable for over a century.

	Members	Sunday scholars
1906	246	149 + 110 adults
1911	208	210
1914	180	
1915	180	
1916	180	
1917	167	
1918	163	
1921	163	148
1931	150	160
1937	135	125

Membership totals compiled from the Royal Commission of 1910 and denominational handbooks/yearbooks (Kidger 2012, 251, 373)

The chapel closed for worship in 2020.

5 Building Description

5.1 The Site

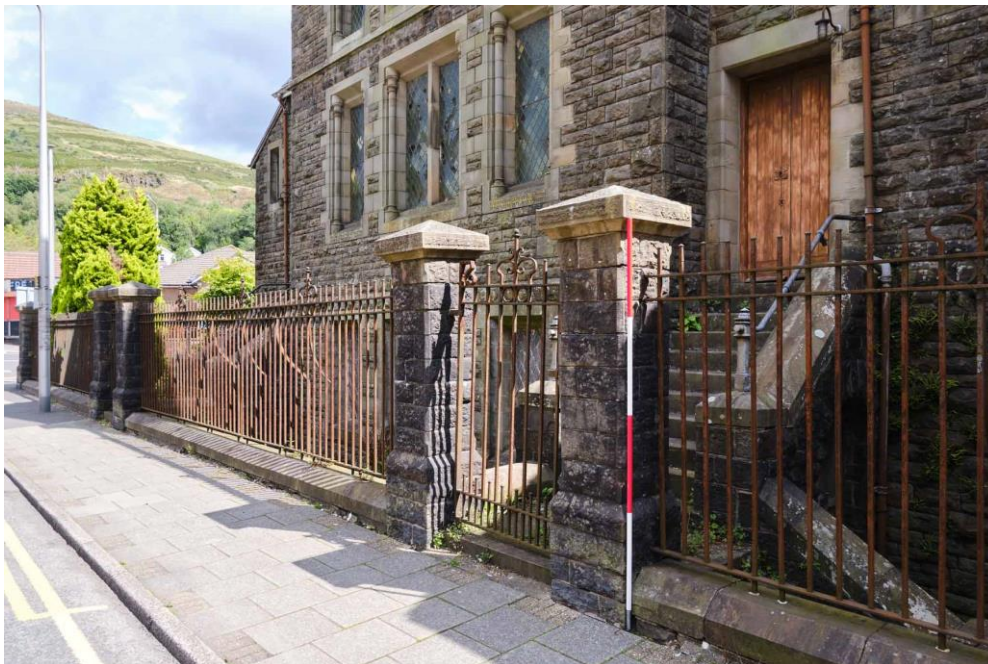


Figure 5. Gate piers, gates and railings to Church Road.

The chapel faces Church Road and is therefore built at an angle to Church Street and its line of buildings. This has created small yards on the north and south-east sides of the plot. The property is bounded by cast-iron railings on a dwarf wall. Gate piers flank the two entrance in the Church Road front, and the railings along Church Street terminate at similar piers to a gate to the back yard (fig 5). These gate piers are square with pyramidal caps. The gates

are in similar style to the railings, which have simple spear finials and intermittent crown-shaped finials. There are also intermediate piers in two pairs at the northern corner of the site, where Church Street meets Church Road. The railings to Church Road terminate in a modern brick pier that abuts the boundary of the neighbouring property, Elias Court.

Steps, with flanking walls and simple railings, lead up to the two entrances on Church Road, where there are also steps at right angles to basement level, which is below street level on Church Road (fig 6). Beneath these entrance steps are round-headed doorways to the stair towers at basement level. The doorway on the right-hand (W) side is blocked.



Figure 6. Steps to main entrance and basement doors, Church Road front.

5.2 Exterior

The chapel has a gable-end entry, typical of the late-nineteenth century, facing Church Road and is built of local Pennant sandstone, with Gothic detail, under a slate roof with clay ridge tiles. The chapel has a basement storey, which housed the Sunday School, stair towers set slightly back on either side of the entrance front, and a plan that incorporates shallow transepts. Treatment of the stonework varies. To the Church Road front it is laid as snecked, rock-faced stone with freestone dressings. At ground, gallery and basement levels is a two-light window flanked by single-light windows (fig 7). At ground-floor level there are nook shafts but the windows are square-headed. At gallery level is a sill band and the windows also have nook shafts and are pointed. The central window has Y-tracery. These windows all have diamond-pattern leaded lights, with some coloured glass. Beneath the apex is a two-light vent, pointed with Y-tracery. In the basement there is a similar arrangement of

two-light flanked by single-light windows, but the windows are square-headed, unadorned and have diamond-pattern cast-iron glazing bars.



Figure 7. Church Road front.

There are foundation inscriptions on the sills of two ground-floor windows. These read:

This stone was laid by Mrs EH Davies
of Brynheulog, Pentre, 23 October 1884

and

This stone was laid by Mrs DS Thomas
of The Bazaar, Ystrad, 23 October 1884

The entrances are set back to the right and left, in gabled stair towers which are set at right angles to the main front, and which also have lean-tos. Each doorway has double boarded doors. On the lintel above the left-hand doorway is an inscription (see fig 3):

Ystrad
English Congregational Church
AD1870. Rebuilt 1884

Plain windows above the doors have diamond-lead panes, with coloured glass.

The Church Street front is of secondary importance. It is built of rock-faced stone but openings have yellow-brick dressings incorporating thin keystones and there is a blue-brick sill band at ground-floor level. The openings are original but many of the windows have been replaced (fig 8). To the right is a tall stair window. To its left are single windows under cambered heads in basement and at ground-floor level, but the gallery window is pointed and is beneath a gable that breaks the eaves line. Beneath the gallery window is a tablet salvaged from the original building and set up on the new building, with the date of the new

building added (the stonework is partly eroded and the new date is no longer legible) (fig 9).
It reads:

Ystrad
English
Congregational
Church
AD 1870
Rebuilt ...

The transept has two windows, taller and pointed at gallery level, to the left of which is the rear stair tower, lower than the main chapel and beneath a lean-to roof.



Figure 8. Church Street front.



Figure 9. Tablet salvaged from 1870 chapel, in Church Street front.

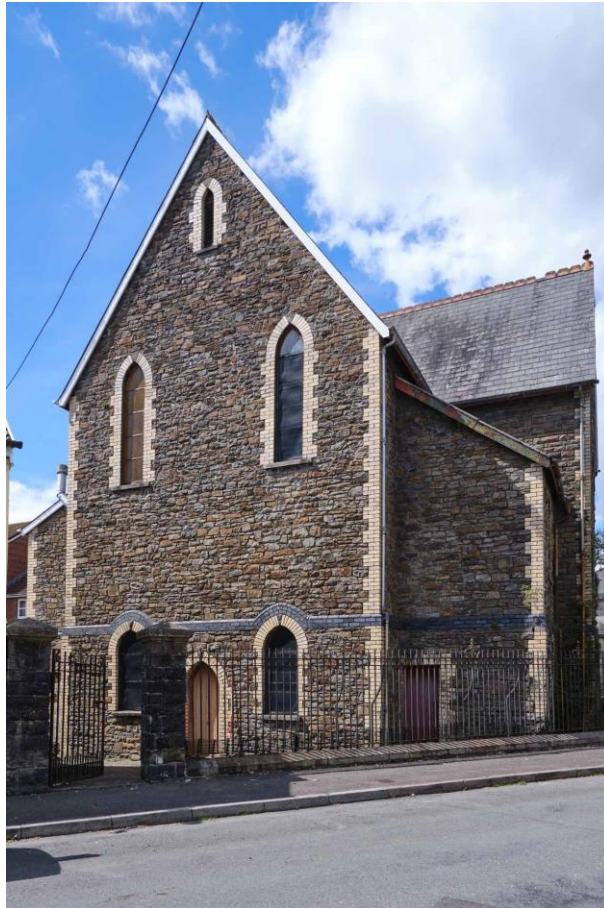


Figure 10. Rear (south-east) front.

The rear of the building faces an enclosed yard on the south-east side of the building. It is built of random rubble with yellow-brick dressings and blue-brick sill band (fig 10). The ground level is lower here and the building is entered at basement level. The sill band is carried over the arches of two pointed basement windows, between which is a pointed boarded door. Above there are two pointed windows, flanking the position of the organ, and a pointed vent below the apex with wooden louvres. Set back to the right is a boarded door to the rear stair tower. Set back on the left side is a small added brick lean-to under a corrugated iron roof, with boarded door in the end wall.

The south-west wall is enclosed by neighbouring houses and their gardens and was therefore never prominent. Its structure and fenestration matches the Church Street front and the fabric is rubble stone visible where the roughcast has fallen away in places.

5.3 Interior

The main entrances open into small vestibules with half-glazed doors that open to the stairwells. These have open-well stairs with turned balusters and newels. The main chapel has a roof four bays, with one-bay transepts, comprising arched-brace ribs on moulded corbels, rising to collar-beam level, behind which there is a boarded ceiling (fig 11). The ribs form an X-shape over the pulpit. Small cast-iron vents are in square panels.

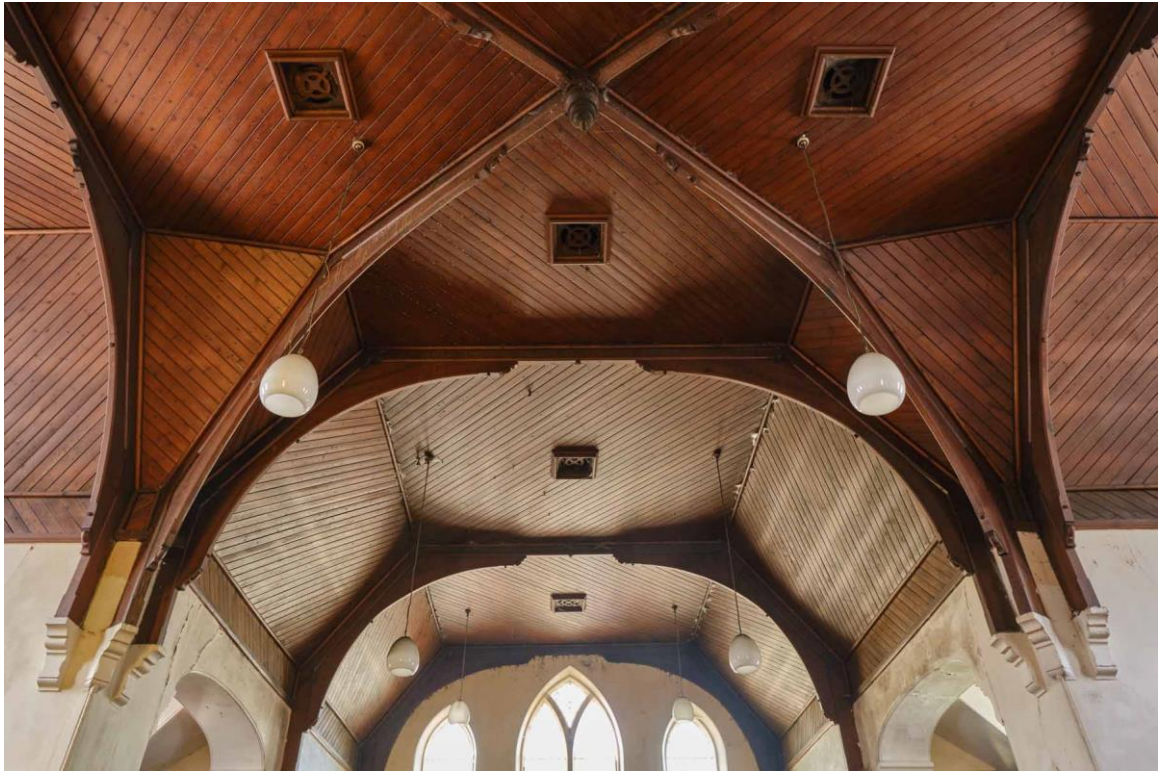


Figure 11. The chapel roof, viewed from the pulpit.



Figure 12. Interior, viewed from the back of the gallery.

There is a raked gallery on three sides (figs 12, 13). The side sections are supported on a thick plain pier which also defines the aisles that provide access to the seating. It has a boarded front on a moulded cornice. The clock opposite the pulpit is a modern addition.

Between the top of the stairs and the transepts each side has a moulded elliptical arch, on moulded responds, an a pointed arch through which access was gained to the gallery pews in the transepts (fig 14). Original panelled doors have been retained, which have decorative brass and ivory handles (fig 15).



Figure 13. Interior, viewed from the pulpit.

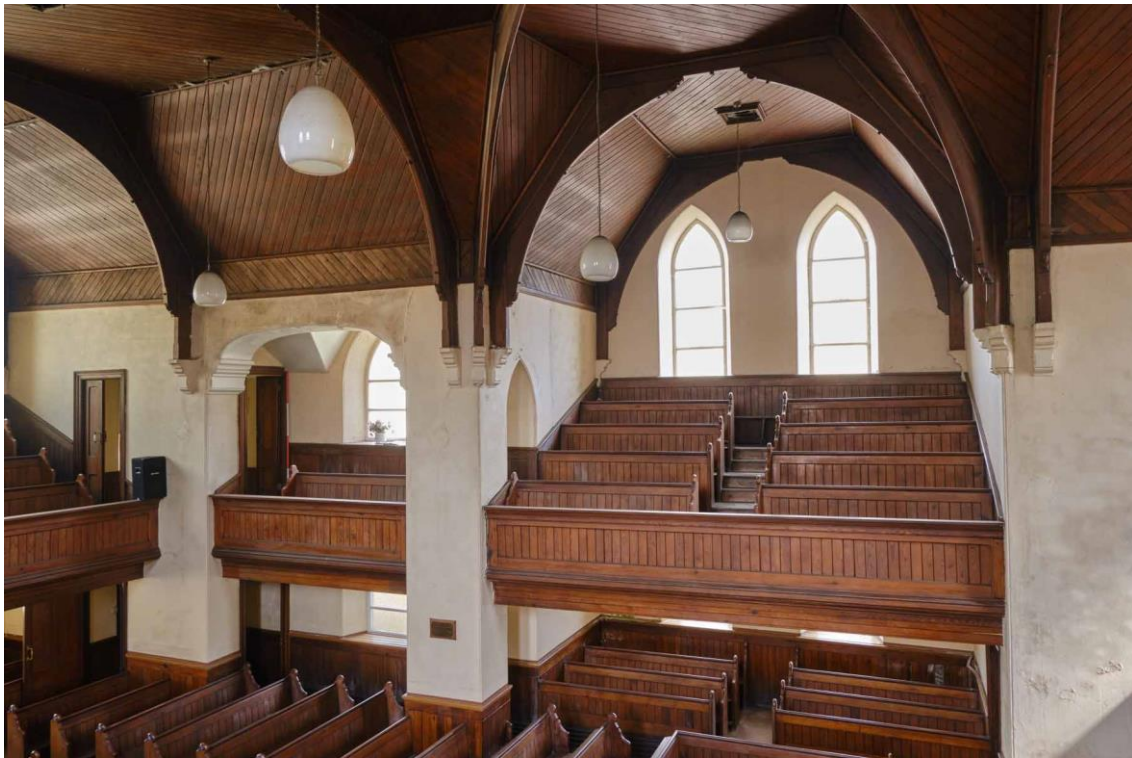


Figure 14. Gallery on the north-east side.



Figure 15. Gallery door handle.

There is no set *fawr*. The pulpit is set within a railed enclosure, which has turned balusters and shaped newels (fig 16). Similar detail is found in the flanking steps to the pulpit. The pulpit itself is faceted, and is decorated with blind pointed arches over quatrefoil panels. Pine pews have shaped ends and are numbered with small enamel plates on the ends (fig 17). Gallery pews are not numbered, following the convention that the gallery was used by children and chapel visitors.

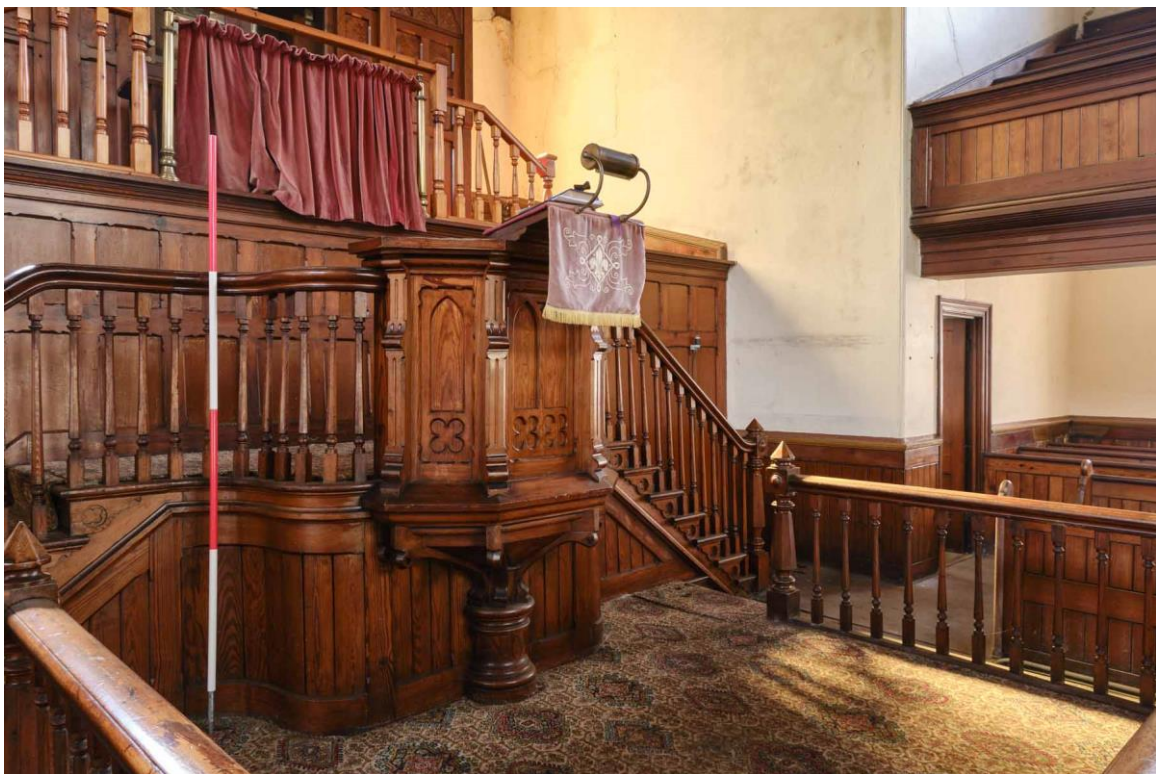


Figure 16. Pulpit and railed enclosure.



Figure 17. Pews, with shaped and numbered ends.

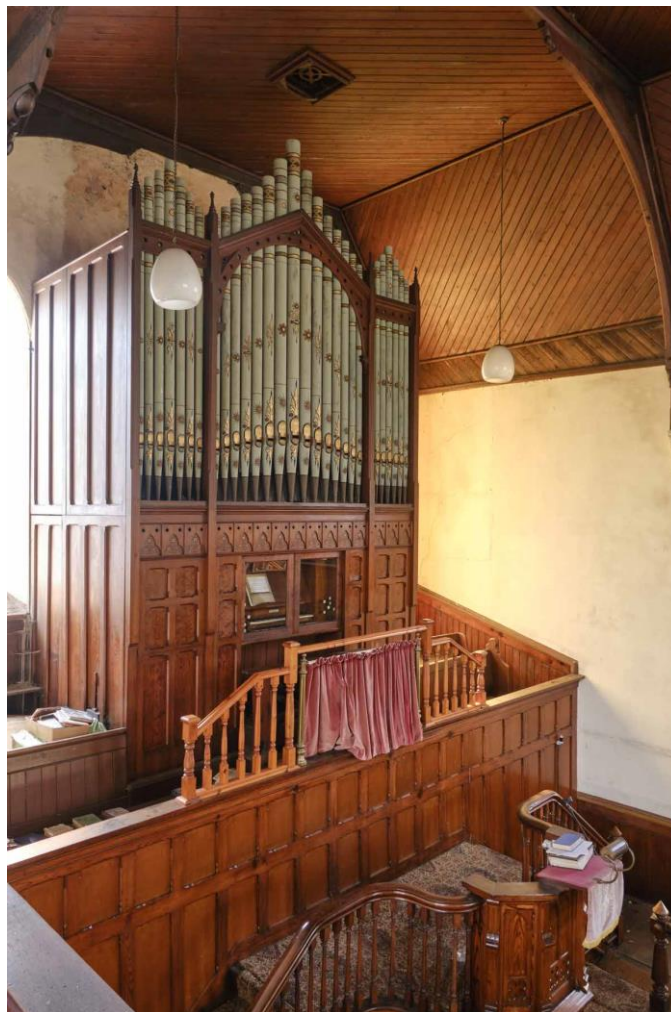


Figure 18. The organ, by James Conacher & Sons of Huddersfield.

In the raised section behind the pulpit is the organ (fig 18). There are also pews here, but they appear to have been truncated to make way for the organ, which therefore appears to be an addition to the chapel, probably before 1914. The organ was manufactured by James Conacher & Sons of Huddersfield. The panelled organ case is decorated with a frieze of trefoil arches and the pipes have been painted.



Figure 19. The vestry fireplace.



Figure 20. Rear stairs to basement.

There is a small vestry at the rear on the right-hand side of the pulpit. This has a blocked fireplace and, like the remainder the chapel, a boarded wainscot (fig 19). On the left-hand side, at the rear, is the rear stairs, an open-well stair similar to the main stairs. It provides access to the organ and pews behind the pulpit, as well as down to the basement, where there is an in-built cupboard below the stairs (fig 20).



Figure 21. Basement with cast-iron posts supporting the ground floor.



Figure 22. Basement, with partition to inner room.

In the basement, the entrance lobbies from the front and rear entrances have flagstone floors. The remainder is mainly floorboards. There is a large basement room in which pairs of cast iron posts support two spine beams that carry the ground floor (fig 21). Around this room are half-glazed panelled partitions, incorporating doors, that open to inner rooms on the north-west and north-east sides (fig 22). On the west side there is a modern kitchen, including a kitchen extension below the vestry, and a toilet in the position of the north-west stairwell. The basement doorway in the rear (south-east) wall opens to a storage area, which has a concrete floor. There is a rubble-stone wall between the storage area and the main basement room which has a shallow-projecting plinth and may be the back wall of the original 1870 chapel.

6 Statement of Significance

The significance of heritage assets is measured against agreed heritage values, as set out in Conservation Principles published by Cadw (2011):

- **Evidential value:** This derives from those elements of an historic asset that can provide evidence about past human activity, including its physical remains or historic fabric.
- **Historical value:** An historic asset might illustrate a particular aspect of past life or it might be associated with a notable family, person, event or movement.
- **Aesthetic value:** This derives from the way in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from an historic asset. This might include the form of an historic asset, its external appearance and how it lies within its setting.
- **Communal value:** This derives from the meanings that an historic asset has for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory. It is closely linked to historical and aesthetic values but tends to have additional or specific aspects.

Ystrad English Congregational Church has strong evidential value. The fabric of the 1884 building has survived virtually unaltered. It is built using Pennant sandstone, the characteristic building material of industrial South Wales. The interior has a conventional layout for the period, focused on the pulpit and with a gallery on three sides. Its numbered pews in the main chapel, and unnumbered pews in the gallery where children and visitors customarily sat, is also typical of the period. The organ is also a prominent feature, of a sophistication characteristic of a period when music was a significant cultural force in South Wales. The chapel retains an integrated Sunday School in the basement, also used for other purposes.

Chapels proliferated in the Rhondda valleys when collieries were opened for sale coal in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ystrad English Congregational Church was one of the earliest and, by its prominent position on the main road through the village, a position usually taken by commercial premises, testifies to the importance of the chapels in the religious and cultural development of the coal-mining communities. It stands at a junction where the

Church of St John, the former Hebron Chapel and the Maindy and Eastern Workmen's Institute (now The Phoenix) were also built, making it the cultural hub of the village. Likewise its large seating capacity marks it as one of the important cultural focal points in the village. The integrated Sunday School in the basement reflects the importance of religious instruction in nonconformist congregations.

The chapel has a restrained architectural treatment but has definite aesthetic value. It is a bold landmark building, tall enough to command the road junction (and to have competed with the parish church before it was taken down and replaced in 1985-7). Decorative treatment is kept to a minimum, but there is a clear hierarchy to the exterior of the building, expressed mainly in the treatment of the stonework, with Church Road as the main front, Church Street as the second front, the other two as utilitarian and less visible. The interior is likewise restrained in its aesthetic treatment, but again there is a clear hierarchy with the most obviously decorated elements being the pulpit and the organ, the two key foci for the congregation.

Its strong communal value is derived from the use by the local congregation for 150 years, but also in its importance for hosting significant life events such as weddings and funerals.

7 References

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8 Archive

Written Scheme of Investigation (pdf)

Report (pdf)

77 Digital photographs (tif format)

Catalogue of Photographs (Excel format)

2 Survey drawings (pdf format)

Appendix I: Digital Photographs



YstradECC2023_001.tif



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Image number	Description
YstradECC2023_001	Church Road front, looking S
YstradECC2023_002	Church Road front, looking S
YstradECC2023_003	Basement windows, Church Road front, looking SE
YstradECC2023_004	Steps and right-hand doorway, Church Road front
YstradECC2023_005	date inscription over left-hand doorway, Church Road front
YstradECC2023_006	foundation inscription below left-hand window, Church Road front
YstradECC2023_007	foundation inscription below right-hand window, Church Road front
YstradECC2023_008	Church Street front, looking SW
YstradECC2023_009	detail of Church Street front with stair tower to R, looking W
YstradECC2023_010	inscription tablet on Church Street front looking W
YstradECC2023_011	SE front, looking NW
YstradECC2023_012	basement doorway & windows, SE front, looking NW
YstradECC2023_013	transept windows in SW front, looking NE
YstradECC2023_014	windows in SW front looking NE
YstradECC2023_015	angle of NW (Church Rd) and SW fronts, looking SE
YstradECC2023_016	steps to L-hand entrance, Church Road front
YstradECC2023_017	steps to L-hand entrance, Church Road front, looking E
YstradECC2023_018	basement entrance below entrance steps, looking S
YstradECC2023_019	basement steps, Church Road front, looking N
YstradECC2023_020	blocked basement doorway below entrance steps, looking E
YstradECC2023_021	gate piers & railings, Church Road front looking E
YstradECC2023_022	gate piers & railings, Church Street front looking N
YstradECC2023_023	detail of finial to railings, Church Street front
YstradECC2023_024	interior looking SE
YstradECC2023_025	interior looking SE from gallery
YstradECC2023_026	interior looking NW from pulpit
YstradECC2023_027	interior looking W
YstradECC2023_028	interior, gallery looking NW from pulpit
YstradECC2023_029	gallery looking N from pulpit
YstradECC2023_030	interior looking S from gallery
YstradECC2023_031	gallery SW side, looking S from gallery
YstradECC2023_032	gallery SW side looking W from gallery
YstradECC2023_033	gallery NE side looking N
YstradECC2023_034	organ looking S from gallery
YstradECC2023_035	organ looking E from gallery
YstradECC2023_036	organ, detail of arcaded drieze
YstradECC2023_037	organ, detail of pipes
YstradECC2023_038	pulpit and railed enclosure, looking E
YstradECC2023_039	pulpit and railed enclosure, looking S
YstradECC2023_040	pulpit, looking SE
YstradECC2023_041	detail of door furniture, ground floor
YstradECC2023_042	detail of door furniture, ground floor
YstradECC2023_043	detail of door furniture, gallery

YstradECC2023_044	roof, looking NW
YstradECC2023_045	roof bay over pulpit, looking NW
YstradECC2023_046	doorway into vestry, looking SE
YstradECC2023_047	vestry fireplace, looking E
YstradECC2023_048	NW gallery stairs from ground floor, looking SW
YstradECC2023_049	NW entrance vestibule looking NW
YstradECC2023_050	NE gallery stairs from ground floor, looking NE
YstradECC2023_051	NE entrance vestibule, looking NW
YstradECC2023_052	stair to organ loft, looking SE
YstradECC2023_053	passage and archway in NE gallery, looking SE
YstradECC2023_054	example of gallery door, looking NE
YstradECC2023_055	pews in NE transept looking N
YstradECC2023_056	pews in ground floor looking W
YstradECC2023_057	example of a pew end, looking SW
YstradECC2023_058	example of a pew end, looking NW
YstradECC2023_059	example of a numbered plate on pew ends
YstradECC2023_060	brass commemorative plaque on the NE wall
YstradECC2023_061	remnant of painted panel on the SW wall
YstradECC2023_062	stair in NE stair tower, from basement to ground floor, looking E
YstradECC2023_063	rear stair from basement to ground floor, looking SE
YstradECC2023_064	basement looking W
YstradECC2023_065	basement looking N
YstradECC2023_066	basement looking E
YstradECC2023_067	basement looking S
YstradECC2023_068	basement room to NW, looking W
YstradECC2023_069	basement room to NW, looking E
YstradECC2023_070	basement room to NE, looking S
YstradECC2023_071	basement lavatory below NW entrance, looking NW
YstradECC2023_072	basement kitchen looking NW
YstradECC2023_073	basement kitchen below vestry looking S
YstradECC2023_074	basement store room looking W
YstradECC2023_075	basement store room ceiling looking W
YstradECC2023_076	view looking W down Chapel Street
YstradECC2023_077	view looking S from Bailey Street



Figure 23. Direction of exterior photographs.

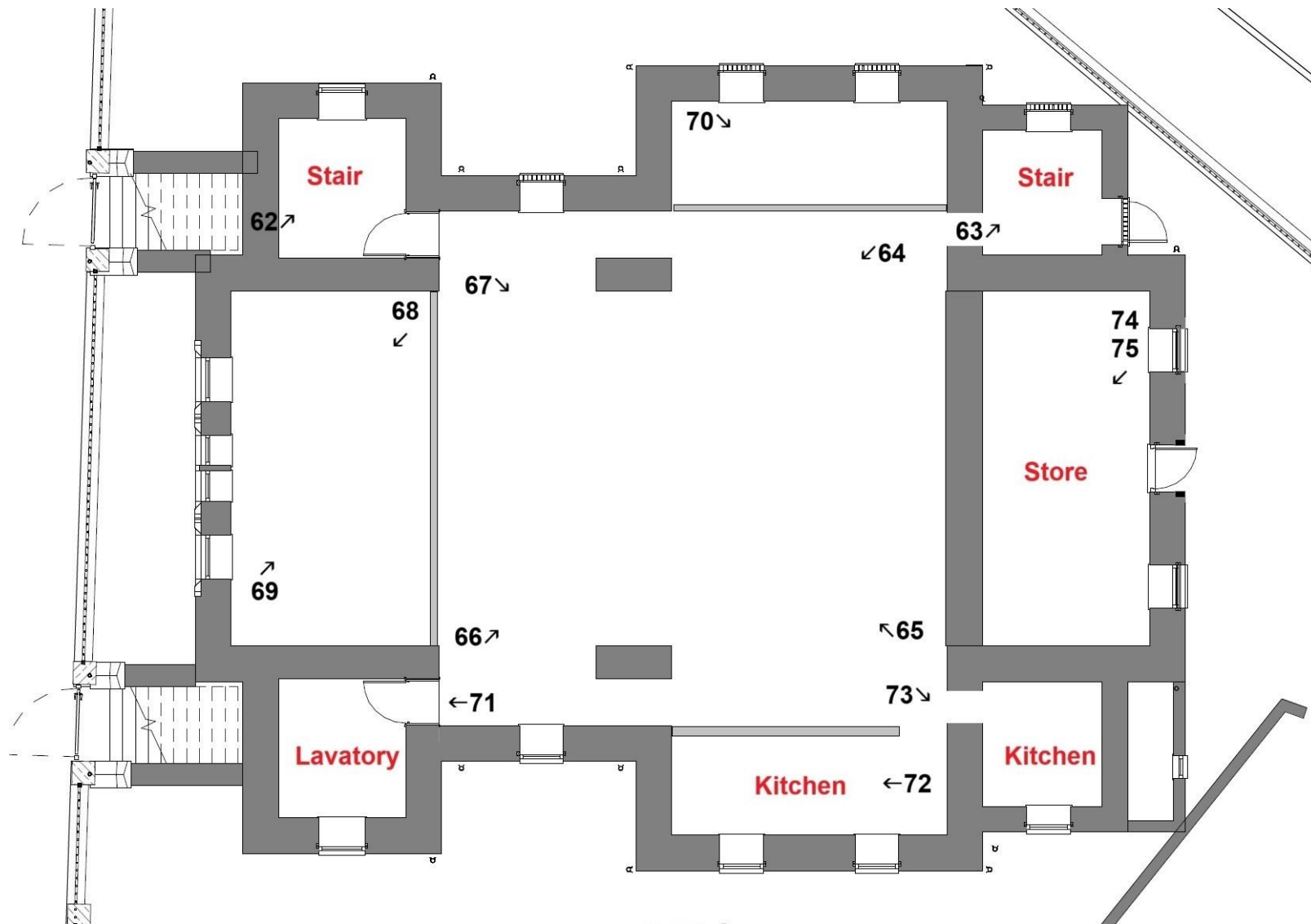


Figure 24. Direction of basement photographs.

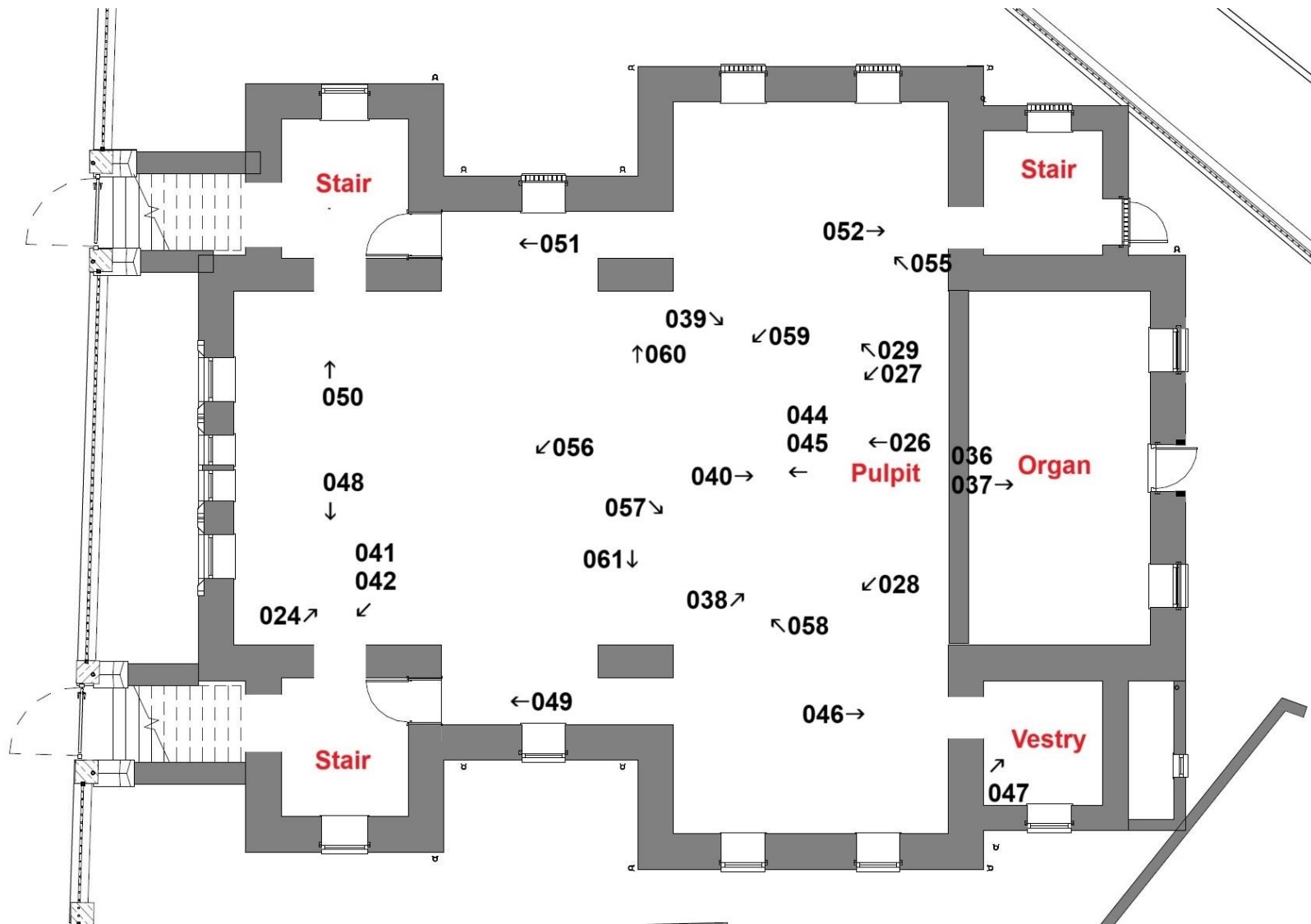


Figure 25. Direction of ground-floor photographs.

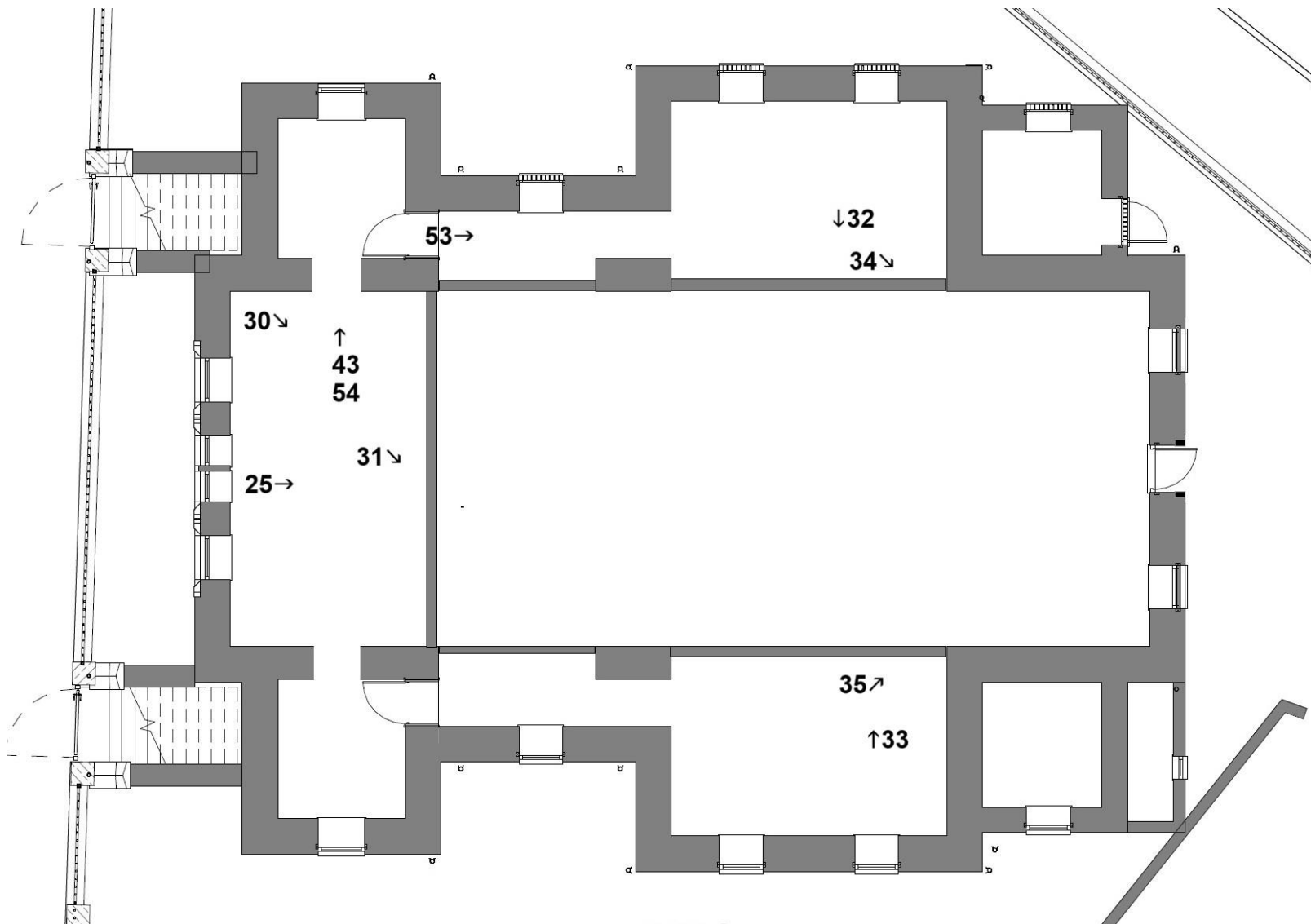


Figure 26. Direction of photographs taken from the gallery.

Appendix 2: Survey Drawings



Figure 27. Church Road (north-west) front.



Figure 28. Church Street (north-east) front.

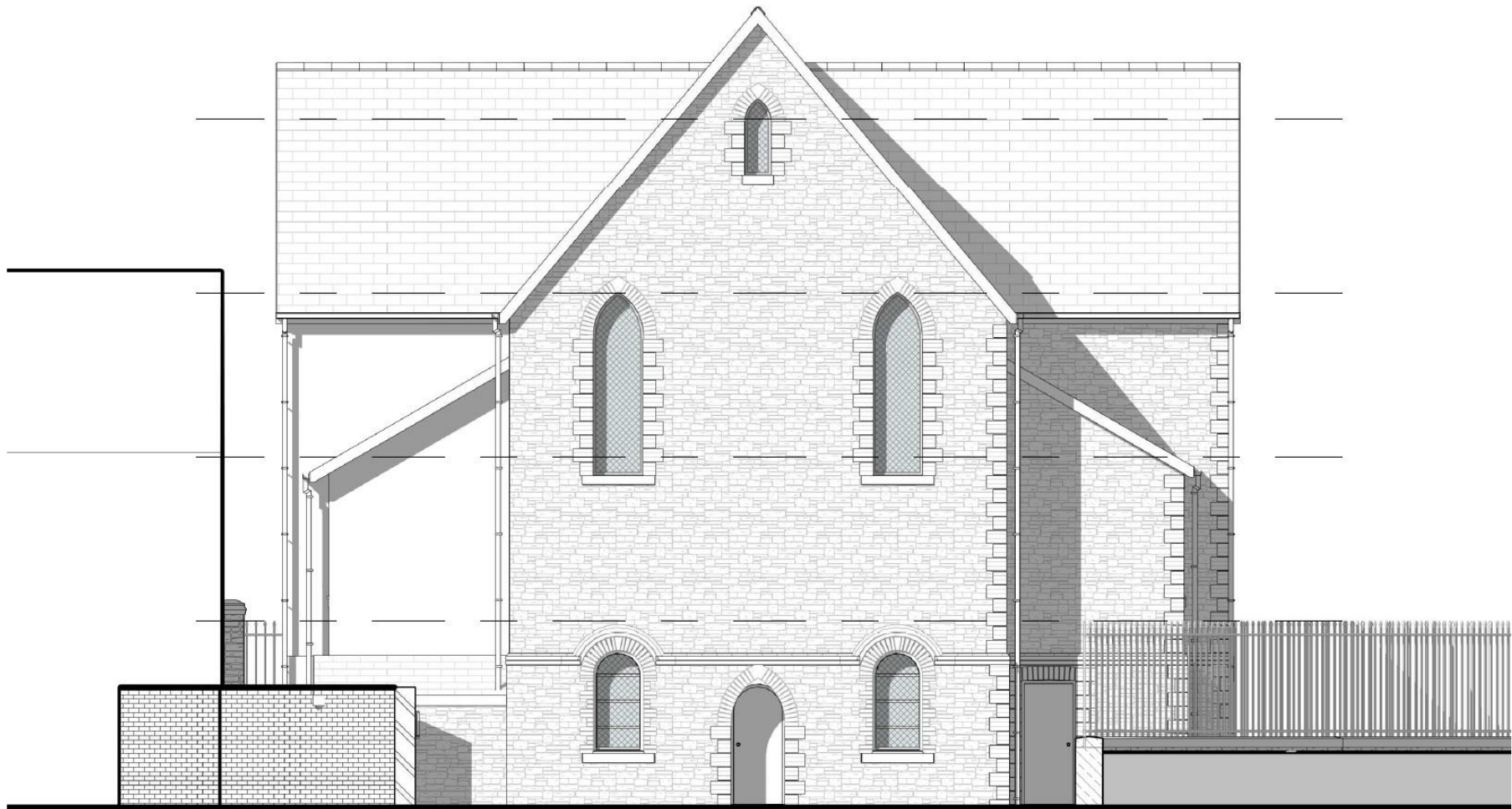


Figure 29. South-east front.



Figure 30. South-west front.

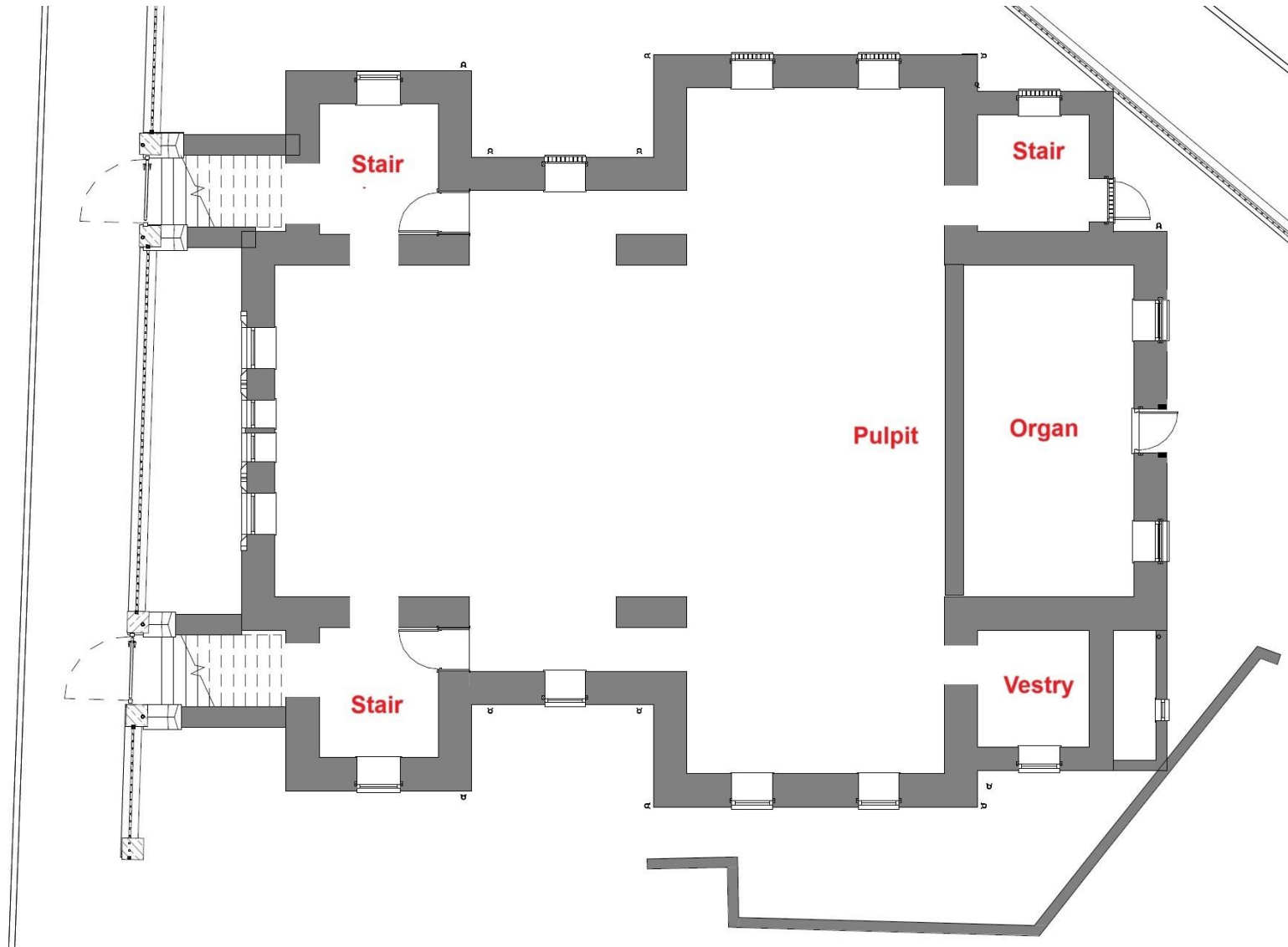


Figure 31. Ground plan.

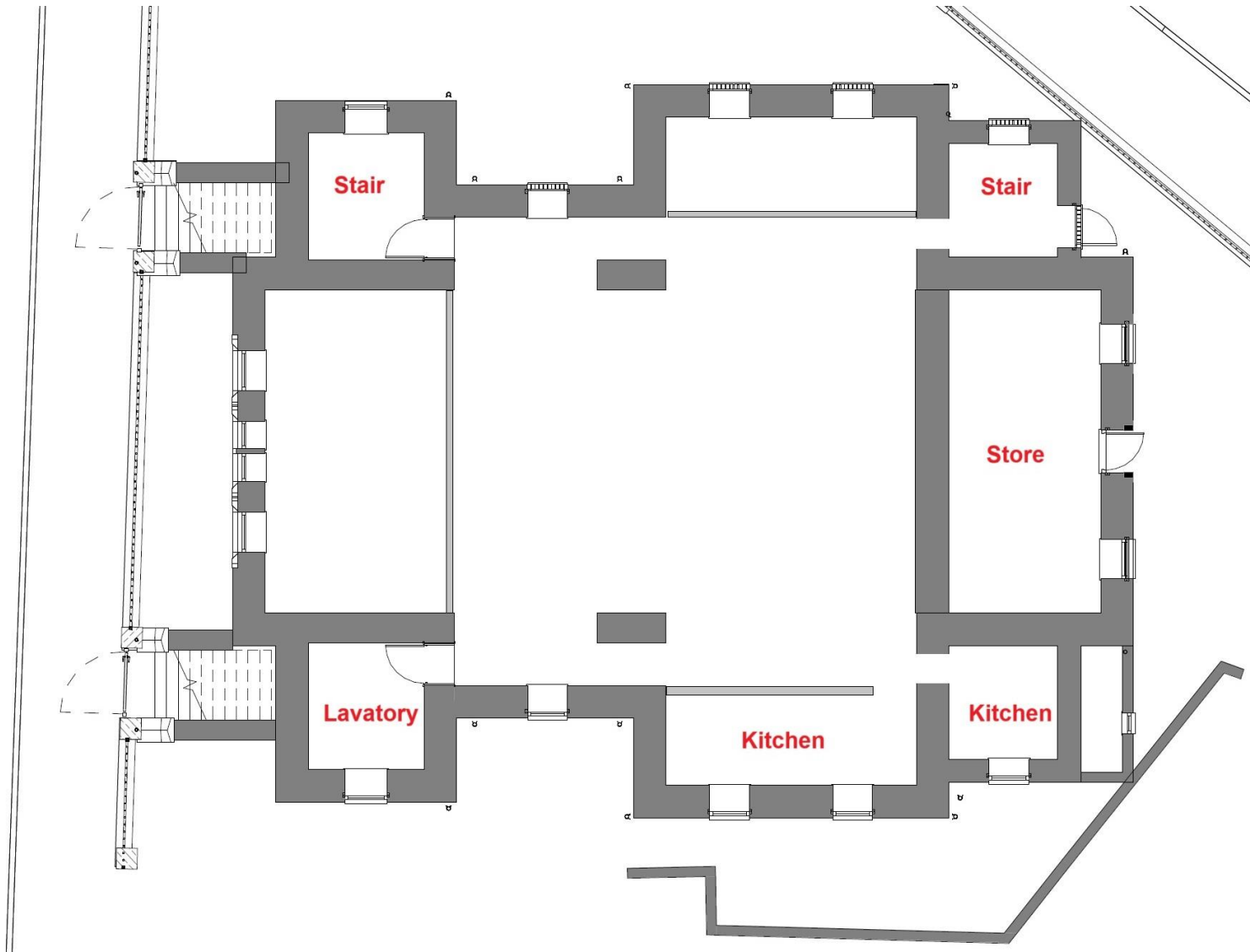


Figure 32. Basement plan.

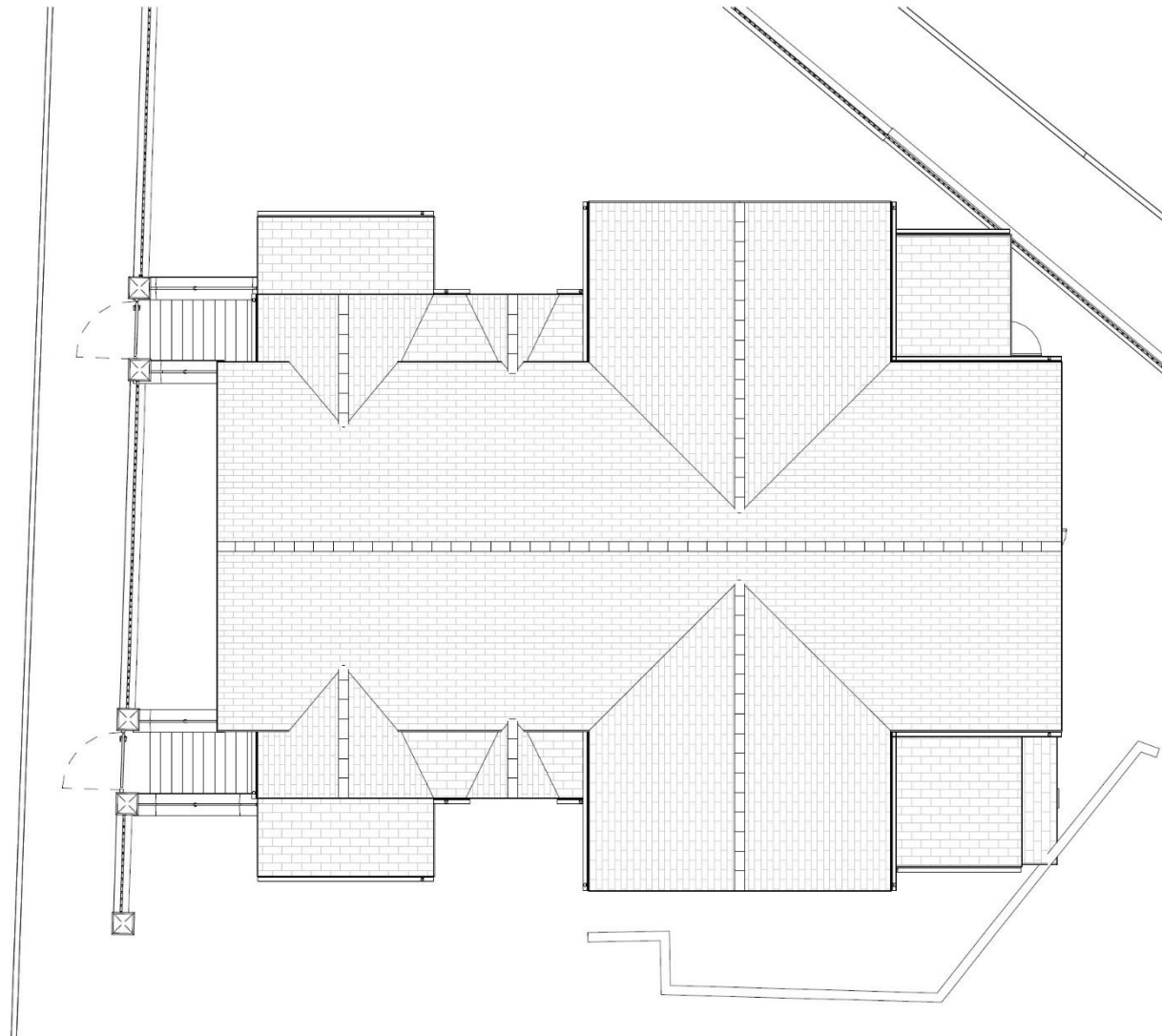


Figure 33. Roof plan.