

GroveLands Church

William Roland Howell

William Roland Howell (1867-1940), designed Grovelands Baptist Church around 1870. He was born in Reading and lived and worked there for most of his life. By 1882 he was articled with the Reading practice of Cooper, Son and Millar; he received extra artistic training at the Reading School of Art (1882-1887). In 1890 he went into partnership with the son of his former employer - John Omer Cooper, a prominent local Baptist. Between 1891-1905 Cooper and Howell became well known as one of the leading firms of architects in the district. He bought out his partner and setting up in independent practice in 1905. Its successor practice continued to trade as Howell Freeman and Batten until the 1980s.

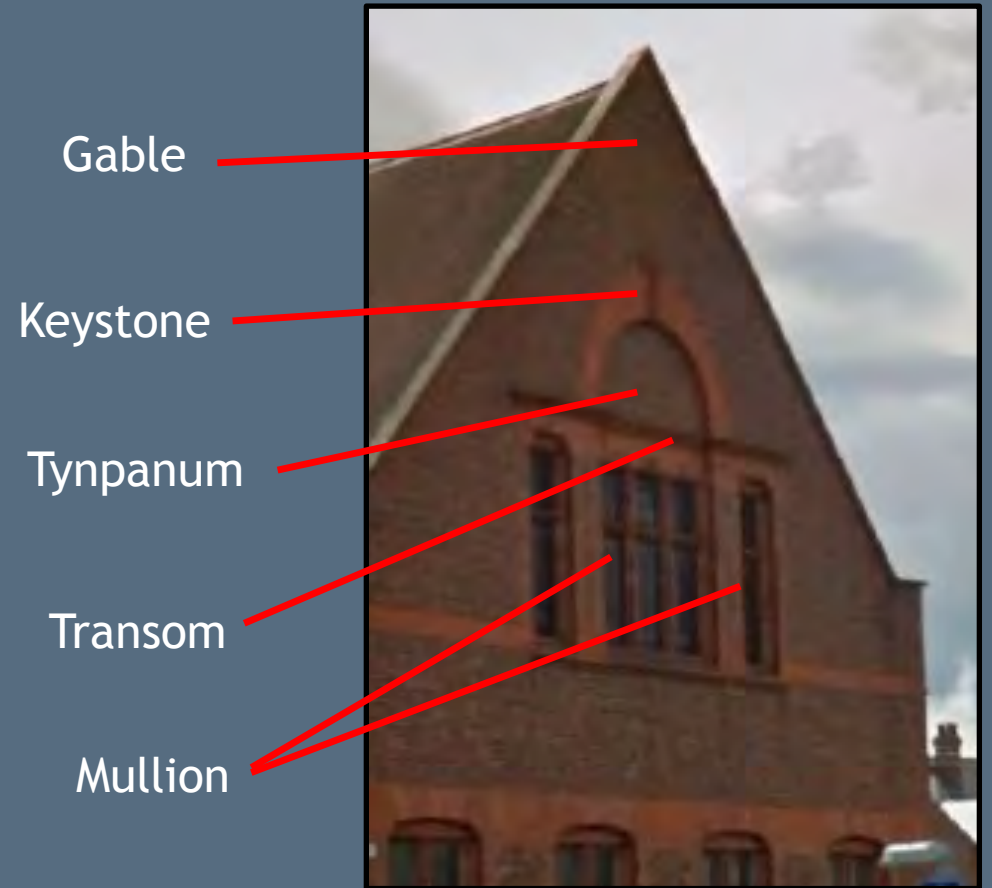
He was responsible for a number of buildings in Reading, from his monumental Gothic Art Gallery and Library extension to the Town Hall (facing Valpy Street) 1897 and other municipal buildings of 1894-7 through to a faience-clad Art Nouveau shopfront of 1905 at 8 High Street (both listed at Grade II) which was Jacksons's former Boot Shop and is now used by Oxfam. He also designed numerous schools, factories, banks, hospital buildings, public houses and private houses in and around the town. William Roland Howell was a prominent figure in borough and county life, serving on Reading Council.

Architectural features

There are two buildings on the site: the main chapel of 1899 at the corner of Oxford Road and Wilson Road, and a smaller hall to the south, probably built as a Sunday school.

The building itself is made of red brown brick with terracotta tiles in an Arts and Crafts-influenced Free Renaissance style, and tiled roofs. A steep gabled roof of red tile covers the main worship space. A gabled roof has two slopes that lead to a raised point on a flat wall.

On the west gable, above four small two-paned windows, is a 'Venetian window' with a mullion-and-transom (a bar that separates a door from a window next to it or above it) topped with tympanum (a semi-circular decorative arch over an entrance, door or window) with a carved central keystone.



History

Grovelands Baptist Church founded in 1879 by Arthur Warwick (1854 -1925) and Martin John Sutton (Arthur Warwick), partners in Reading firm Suttons Seeds.

The builders were Collier & Catley, making it possible that the bricks for Grovelands chapel came from Collier's Grovelands brickworks.

The Grovelands Baptist Church, 553 Oxford Road building, opened in 1899. It is on the corner where Wilson Road connects with Oxford road, near to Wilson Primary School.



History (continued)

The development of the western end of Reading's Oxford Road began in 1877 with the construction of the Brock Barracks, one of a large number of new military 'depots' established under the provisions of the Registration of the Forces Act of 1871, which aimed to encourage infantry recruitment by allowing soldiers to serve in their own county regiment rather than being drafted further afield.

There was at that time no church in the area, and in 1879 two Anglican laymen, the brothers Arthur Warwick and Martin John Sutton, founded a mission hall in Grovelands Road East (now Wilson Road) as a place of worship and recreation for the soldiers. A few years later this operation was taken over by Reading's long established Baptist community.



Records in Kelly's Directory (continued)

In the 1903 Kelly's Directory (A book of people listed with their address), we can see Grovelands Baptist Church connected with the Barracks on Oxford Road with the name Mortimer, Alfred Jas.

Below, we can see that Grovelands Baptist Church is listed as 553 Oxford Road in the 1907 Kelly's Directory with no mention of a church.

This tells us that record keeping was a little haphazard and that Alfred Mortimer is associated with the building at that time.

551 Dawson Chas. Thos. baker
GROVELANDS BAPTIST CHPL
553 Mortimer Alfred Jas. gro
Depot Barracks, 49th Regi-
mental district; Princess
Charlotte of Wales' (Royal
Berkshire Regiment);
49th Regimental dis-
trict; 3rd battalion
(Royal Berkshire Militia)
TOWN SUB-POST, M.O. &
T.O. (Barracks)

Street, Twyford S.O
Mortimer Alfred James, 553 Oxford
road, Reading
Mortimore A. M. Paley st. Maidenhd

Records in Kelly's Directory (continued)

In the 1915 Kelly's Directory, the church is listed under Wilson Road rather than Oxford Road as Grovelands Free Church.

Just under the Grovelands Church entry, we see Wilson Road Primary School.

	Wilson road.
	553 Oxford road.
	WEST SIDE.
	GROVELANDS FREE CHURCH
oil	26 Eustace Alfred, photogrphr
	WILSON SCHOOL (Council school)
er	130 Hunt William, shopkeeper
r	154 Perry Arthur, insur. agent
	EAST SIDE.
o.'s	1A, Adams Frederick Charles, wheelwright
lrs	1 Pocock Albert, cab owner
pres	33 Bacon Miss Ada, shopkeepr
ers	89 Paterson Miss

A snap-shot of Groveland's Church

A group photograph taken outside the Groveland Baptist Church Bazaar in Oxford Road, Reading.

This photograph was taken for the Berkshire Chronicle, March of 1938, but was not published.



Plans for re-development

In 2019, The Gate Christian Community planned to demolish Groveland Baptist Church to make a new building complex. They made a planning application to Reading Borough Council.

- Plans included:
 - Retail spaces with street frontage
 - Commercial suites
 - Residential units
 - An auditorium with seating and amenities for large groups
 - Conference facilities
 - Dedicated areas for religious activities
 - A community café/restaurant



Proposed Redevelopment of Reading Community
Church site at 553 Oxford Road, Reading, RG30 1HJ

624.67
Visualisation: North West Corner Aerial View

Plans for re-development (continued)

They Aimed to encourage an increase in community use, where the isolated, lonely and vulnerable have a safe environment to interact with others.



Proposed Redevelopment of Reading Community
Church site at 553 Oxford Road, Reading, RG30 1HJ

624.68
Visualisation: East Elevation Aerial View

Community Concerns

In March of 2019, Reading Chronicle and Berkshire Live reported Reading Borough Council rejected the Gate's plans for re-development.

Local residents on the Oxford Road, and Councilors, celebrated the decision.



Quotes from the community

Mrs Thomas, 37, of Wantage Road, said: "The meeting was very nerve racking, it was a very intense session.

"I'm very happy that the council have done a thorough job in their investigation.

"Some of them weren't all on board to reject the plan but changed their minds after their investigation into the historic value of the property, and the detrimental effect the demolition would have.

"That's why I'm happy.

"It's not something I look out my window at but it is part of West Reading and it's been there for 120 years.

"I've been inside it and it's an amazing space."

- Berkshire Live, 8th March 2019

Quotes from the community (continued)

"In the old toilet building [in Oxford Road] they managed to convert it in to a flat.

"There's lots of need for community space in the area, they could turn it into that, or housing, I'm certainly not against it being turned into something but I don't want it knocked down.

"I wasn't able to use it because of poor maintenance. It's a tough call.

"They [the church] are not tending to it as much as they used to and I'm afraid they're going to leave it to ruin so they can get their way."

- Berkshire Live, 8th March 2019

Quotes from Councilors

Councillor Karen Rowland voted to refuse the application, speaking after the meeting she said: "The unfortunate thing I find about this is that they wanted to remove that building.

"I consider it too important of a part of Reading's heritage to grant the felling of this building.

"It was a difficult decision because we are eager for community benefits of a hall and the flats.

"But it didn't seem what they offered would replace in value a heritage asset of great importance."

- Berkshire Live, 8th March 2019

Quotes from Councilors

Cllr Ed Hopper spoke in favour of the application, arguing the church will deteriorate in the future.

He said: "If we refuse this it's going to continue to deteriorate.

"What is going to be left there is a locally listed pile of bricks because it is going to fall down.

"I hate seeing buildings like that go but I don't like seeing buildings like that just be left there to fall to the ground."

- Berkshire Live, 8th March 2019

The future of Groveland Church

The Gate Christian Community had actually received planning permission in 2013 but did not start work on the demolition and their permission to do the work 'timed out'. This meant they had to apply again in 2019.

The refusal may mean that they apply again in the future or they may feel that they should sell the property.

What do you think will happen to Groveland's Baptist Church building?



Activity: Debate

What do you of the Gate Christian Community's plans for Groveland's Baptist Church? Plan a 5-minute argument for what to do with Groveland's Baptist Church.

Choose one of the following arguments to support or make one of your own.

- The church should be knocked down for a new development
- The church building should be preserved and used by the community

Discuss your argument with the class. Give your classmates the opportunity to ask questions at the end.

Once everyone has given their argument, the class should vote for who they agree with.