

Former Unitarian Chapel

Official list entry

Heritage Category: **Listed Building**

Grade: **II***

List Entry Number: **1157006**

Date first listed: **16-Sep-1952**

Date of most recent amendment: **12-Jul-2012**

List Entry Name: **Former Unitarian Chapel**

Location Description: Behind No.81 High Street, Marshfield, Gloucestershire.

Statutory Address 1: **79, High Street, Marshfield, Chippenham, SN14 8LT**

This List entry helps identify the building designated at this address for its special architectural or historic interest.

Unless the List entry states otherwise, it includes both the structure itself and any object or structure fixed to it (whether inside or outside) as well as any object or structure within the curtilage of the building.

For these purposes, to be included within the curtilage of the building, the object or structure must have formed part of the land since before 1st July 1948.

[Understanding list entries](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/understanding-list-entries/) (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/understanding-list-entries/>)

[Corrections and minor amendments](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/minor-amendments/) (<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/minor-amendments/>)

Location

Statutory Address: **79, High Street, Marshfield, Chippenham, SN14 8LT**

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

District: **South Gloucestershire (Unitary Authority)**

Parish: **Marshfield**

National Grid Reference: **ST7777273700**

Summary

79 High Street at Marshfield, Gloucestershire was built as a Unitarian place of worship in 1752. Reverend William Hazlitt was pastor from 1765-70. It fell out of use in the late-C19 and was converted to a reading room, and later became a Royal British Legion Hall. In 2012 it served community uses. The building retains its original galleries and wainscots, and an attached burial ground.

Reasons for Designation

The former Unitarian chapel at Marshfield is listed at Grade II* for the following principal reasons:

* Rarity: it is a relatively rare and intact example of a mid-C18 Unitarian meeting house, especially uncommon in the South-West region. * Architectural: a confident Classical design, befitting a mid-C18 nonconformist chapel. * Interior fittings: the high quality interior is a very good example of its type, particularly the distinctive C18 balconies and wainscoting. * Historical: the special interest of the building is elevated by its historical association with the nationally important figure of William Hazlitt Senior, pastor at the chapel from 1765-70, father of the famous essayist William Hazlitt, and founding pastor of the first Unitarian church in the United States of America. * Group Value: the retention of the attached burial ground and walls gives an additional sense of context to this place of worship.

History

Marshfield has a long history of religious dissent, and an Independent Presbyterian congregation (later the Unitarians) was meeting in the town by the late C17. The congregation had grown to around 300 by the start of the C18, and in 1752 two members bought a plot of land with a barn behind High Street called "The Seabourne

Tenement", for the purpose of building a chapel. The construction of the chapel was completed in that year. Between 1765 and 1770, Rev. William Hazlitt, father of the famous essayist of the same name, was pastor at the chapel. Hazlitt was succeeded by Rev. David Evans, however, after Evans' death in 1817, the chapel fell into decline. For much of the rest of the C19 the chapel was served by visiting preachers. The "Unitarian Chapel" is marked on the First Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1881, and by this time the congregation was in further decline, along with the fortunes of the town as a whole. The map clearly shows the front boundary wall and the burial ground to the rear.

By 1886 the chapel was converted to a reading room, and in 1898 it was sold to the Church of England. After a period of disuse the chapel was refurbished and reopened as a Reading Room and Institute in 1908. The building was sold in 1921 and served as a Veterans' Association thereafter, coming under the care of the Royal British Legion in 1931. In the C20 the building became known as the Old Meeting House. In the early C21, the building was still owned by the Royal British Legion, and was used by a variety of local community groups, including the Bath Unitarian Fellowship. Since 2020 the property has been a Private Dwelling

Details

A Unitarian chapel of 1752, with attached walls to the front and rear.

MATERIALS: the building is constructed of ashlar limestone with ashlar dressings. The roof is clay tile. The attached walls are rubble stone. The interior is fitted with timber wainscot panelling and galleries.

PLAN: the building is rectangular on plan. The main meeting area is a single space, except for an internal lobby inserted by the door and enclosed staircases rising to a gallery to each side.

EXTERIOR: the three-bay façade has a central double-door with a rusticated surround with keystone. To either side is a single, large, round-arched window with cill at mid-door height. Each window has a stone architrave and keystone, and the imposts of the arches join a stone band that wraps around the building. The windows have multi-paned timber sashes. There is a stone eaves cornice, below which is a centrally-positioned date stone, '1752', carved in relief. The corners of the building are dressed with chamfered stone quoins. The east flank has a small window above the stone band. The south elevation has the same fenestration as the façade, with an additional stone band at cill height. Above the upper stone band, between the windows, is a stone sundial with an iron gnomon. The west flank was not inspected. The hipped roof is steeply pitched and covered in clay pantiles.

Attached to the west corner of the south elevation is a burial ground wall, constructed of rubble stone with stone coping. It describes the rectangular extent of the burial ground and had a collapsed section at the south-west corner at time of listing. The east wall is reduced in height and partly rendered, and is not attached to the south-east corner of the meeting house. Within the burial ground is a C19 chest tomb, separately listed at Grade II. Attached to the east corner of the façade is a rubble stone boundary wall with stone coping. A gateway has stone piers to either side with carved capstones. The wall was probably realigned as part of the conversion of the building to a reading room in 1908. The remains of the east section of the wall may be incorporated into an attached outbuilding, and is attached to a tall west boundary wall with stone coping. It has a modern interior and an iron roof and is not of special interest.

INTERIOR: the entrance leads into an inserted internal lobby constructed of timber. A door to the left leads into the main hall, which is lined with timber wainscoting. At the east and west ends are full-width, timber galleries supported by stairs on the north corners, which are also encased in timber panelling. The wainscots and the gallery fronts are moulded. At the centre of the south wall is an interruption in the wainscoting where a stone slab is set in the timber plank floor, the base for a former pulpit. Other stones set in the floor elsewhere are C20 supports for a snooker table. The east gallery had a modern inserted kitchenette, and the hand-worked timber structure is visible behind the gallery front. Each gallery has three recessed arches in the outer wall, formed by square stone columns with square capitals under round arches. The left and central arches in the west wall have window openings. The ceiling has a moulded cornice and a central gas light fixing with leaf mouldings.

This list entry was subject to a Minor Amendment on 12 October 2023 to amend the name, address and details in the description and reformat the text to current standards

Legacy

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

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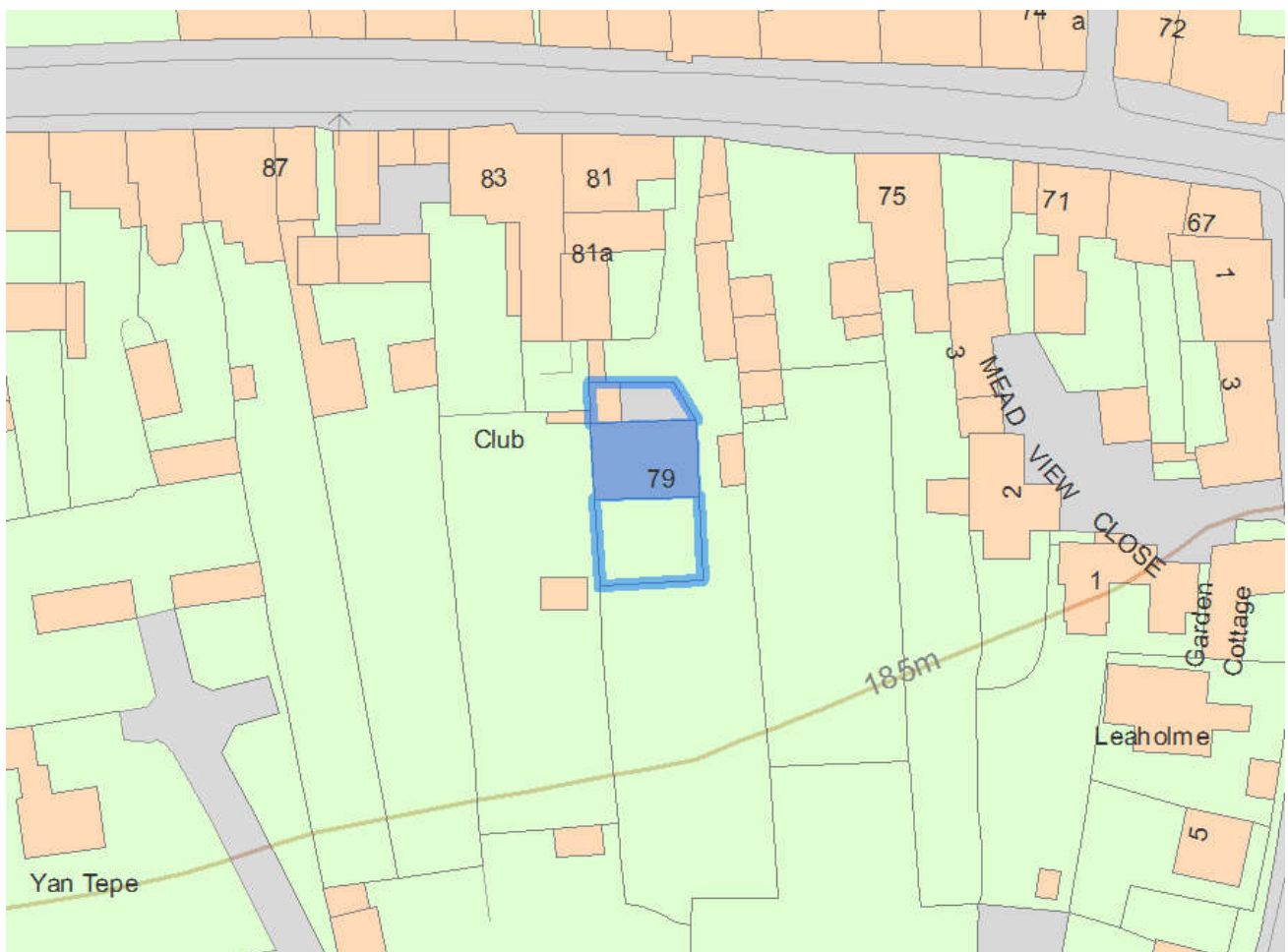
Sources

Websites

William Hazlitt (1737-1820), accessed from <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/95498?docPos=1>
(<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/95498?docPos=1>)

Legal

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.



Map

This map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale.
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End of official list entry



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