

Salem United Reform Church

Salem Place, Hunslet Road



SALEM CHAPEL

Opened by the Independents in 1791
is the city centre's oldest surviving chapel.
Its distinctive bow front was added in 1906.
The celebrated ministries of the Revds Parsons,
Hudswell, Smith and Wrigley, and Guntrip
sustained a vibrant chapel life;
closure only came in 2001.
Leeds United FC was founded
here in 1919.

Historical Information
Leeds Civic Trust Blue Plaque

Salem Chapel

The only surviving 18th century Dissenting chapel in Leeds, Salem opened in 1791 but the building looked different from the one we see today. Described by the Leeds Guide of 1806 as 'a large handsome building', its five-bay exterior in the fashionable neo-classical style was composed of two pedimented doors on the ground floor each flanked by round-headed windows. Above a plain string course were five square-headed windows with a cornice, small pediment and balustraded parapet. The three sides of windows of the building repeated the fenestration arrangement of the front elevation. No images of the original interior have survived but written texts tell us that it was filled with high narrow pews capable of seating near a thousand people. As in all Non-Conformist chapels, the pulpit was the main focus of the interior and an organ was located in a gallery at the west end over a clock.

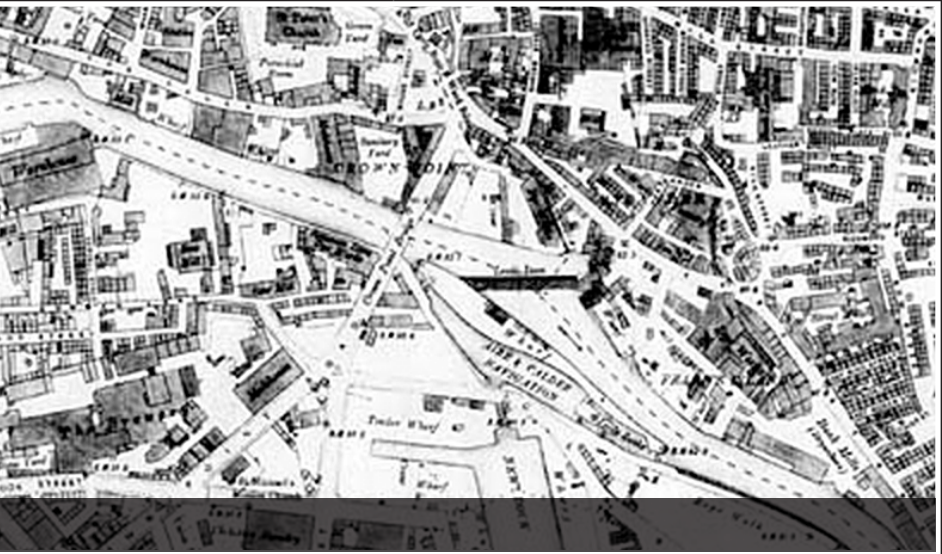
Origin of the chapel

The origin of the Salem congregation originally styled 'Independents' rather than the more familiar 'Congregationalists', goes back to 1756 when amongst an array of Presbyterian-inclined sects, they worshipped in the White Chapel located in a back street opposite what was to become the site of Salem. Locations on the edge of town were usual for Dissenting chapels in this period when there was still official discrimination against Non-Conformists, and their congregations were drawn from skilled artisans, shop-keepers and other tradesmen who lacked the means for expensive sites and buildings. Although well away from the fashionable parts of town when Salem opened it was still set amongst open fields and Meadow Lane and Hunslet Lane were narrow country roads undisturbed by traffic. Salem's first minister was the Rev. Edward Parsons who ministered to the chapel for over fifty years and was according to a contemporary, 'A man of great energy of character, of very superior mental powers, of masculine eloquence, decidedly evangelical in his views on the gospel yet practical and experimental in presenting and enforcing them'.

LEEDS SALEM R.U.F.C. **YORKSHIRE SHIELD WINNERS** **4TH FEBRUARY 1950**



S.Ingram, S.Gbbins, A.Newton, R.Aylesbury, A.Lindley, A.Clayton, A.Foggett, S.Healey,
 R.Simpson, T.Speight, S.Makin, P.Simson, J.Newton, S.Foreman
PHOTOGRAPH BY A.GREEN



Although Salem had none of the social pretensions that characterised East Parade Chapel, Hudswell was Salem's second long-serving minister, retiring in 1866 after a ministry of thirty-four years. There had always been a Day School and Sunday Schools at Salem but in 1864 the foundation stone for the new Salem Schools was laid on the north side of the chapel. The cost of this Italianate building which is still standing, was £3000 including the price of the land. The Schools could accommodate a thousand scholars, there was one large room for between 400-500, an infants school for 150 and seven classrooms.

After Hudswell's retirement, the fortunes of Salem went into steep decline. Surrounded by back-to-back houses and industrial buildings and with trams trundling past between Leeds and Hunslet, the narrow Puritanism which prevailed at the chapel had little appeal for the local working classes. Although membership remained at a figure of about 263, many of these members lived at a distance from the chapel and rarely attended its services. In these unpropitious circumstances, the Congregational Council recommended that Salem should be closed. However instead of closure, in 1891 there began one of the great historic ministries of Leeds Non-Conformity when Bertram Smith and Frank Wrigley began their experimental joint pastorate at Salem. Smith and Wrigley had been students together at Rotherham Congregational College and had been much influenced by the Yorkshire Congregational Union's 'Forward Movement' of the 1880s which recognised that what was needed was an aggressive missionary policy based on working class needs and culture. At a time when the minister at Headingley Hill Congregational Chapel received a stipend of £500, Smith and Wrigley received only £250. Their talents and interests nicely complimented each other: Wrigley was the more academic and a better preacher whilst Smith was the more socially aware, interested in political economy and a great organiser. It says something of the character of the man that advising a minister who had been invited to speak at the Salem's Women's Meeting, he told him 'Make them laugh, make them laugh'. Despite these differences, the two men were united by an intense friendship and a commitment to theological modernism and the social gospel.

The 1912 Renovation of Salem

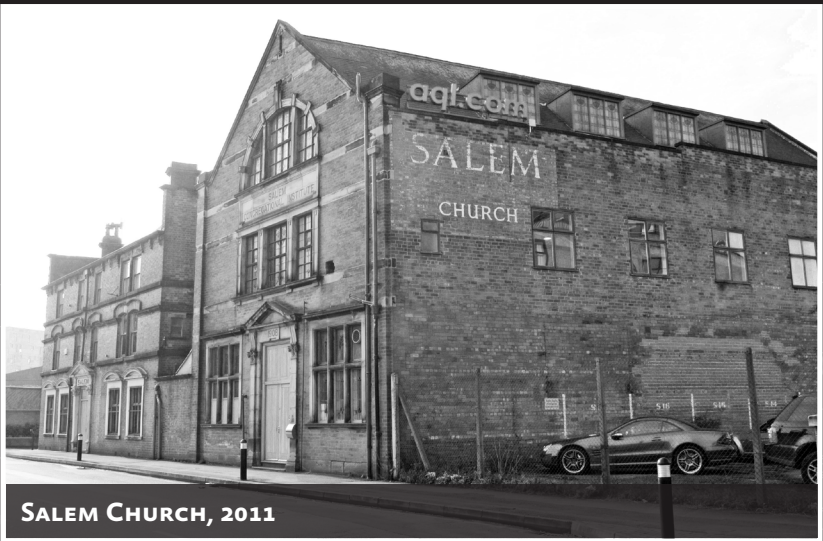
In a pamphlet published in 1912 entitled '21 Years in a City Church', the ministers wrote that their first task on coming to Salem was 'to educate the church in the missionary idea and programme, to adapt its services and methods to meet the needs of the great industrial population of South Leeds. Specifically this involved:

- Clearing the debt of £800 on Salem's Schools
- The abolition of pew rents
- The organisation and furnishing of an Institute for young people
- The establishment of a great meeting for men on Sunday afternoons

To prepare for this venture at Salem, a visitation programme was organised with printed literature about the nature of the transformation Smith and Wrigley hoped to realise. Each visitor had an allotted district and called at each house for three consecutive weeks prior to the opening of the chapel's new programme of activities. The first Men's Sunday Afternoon Meeting was held in October 1893, the speaker was Theodore Taylor who had started a co-partnership and profit-sharing scheme at his woollen mill at Batley. Six hundred men attended. Every September for the next forty-five years, volunteers with the ministers personally visited 10,000 houses to give a personal invitation to the meetings and by the end of the century the membership of what became known as the Salem Brotherhood reached over a thousand, a figure maintained until the onset of the Second World War (the peak figure for membership in 1925 was 2,000). With the Men's Meeting firmly established Smith and Wrigley turned their attention to the women of the community: a Women's Bible Class began on Sunday afternoons, and 'Pleasant Monday Evenings' were held for women and their families. There were sewing circles, a ladies' orchestra and outings to the countryside.



SALEM CHURCH, 2011



SALEM CHURCH, 2011

Modern Day Salem

After a joint pastorate of thirty-five years, Smith and Wrigley retired in 1929. Many wondered whether the Salem spirit of humanised spirituality could survive their departure but perhaps against the odds it did survive, in part because of the appointment of the remarkable Rev. Harry Guntrip. Guntrip who has been called 'one of the great psychoanalytical immortals', began his ministry in 1934. During the 1930s the chapel began to cater for the special needs of the unemployed, and perhaps because of difficulties at home and internationally, Guntrip was more directly political than any of his predecessors. For example he gave a series of twelve lectures on Communism, Fascism and Christianity which led to regular current events discussion groups on Wednesday evenings. Collections were made for the victims of the Spanish Civil war and there were regular house-to-house collections to support two hundred Basque children who were living in Scarborough. Guntrip began a Psychology discussion class dealing first with an exposition of what Psychology is, followed by talks on its practical application to emotional problems like fear, anxiety, shyness etc. Uniquely he regarded psychological healing as part of his Christian ministry. In 1937 another new activity was the Salem Parents Association for young married couples with children (a creche was provided for the children). During the Second World War the Rev Guntrip became a part-time lecturer in Psychology at the Leeds Medical School and although offered a full-time position, he felt it inappropriate to leave his flock at a time of national crisis. Once the war was over however he did resign to become a full-time lecturer and writer in psycho-analytic theory.

For much of the 20th century, Salem had managed to stem the drift away from religion but the slum clearance schemes of the post-war years increasingly stripped the chapel of its local community and the chapel closed in 2001.

One of Salem's most famous reverends, Harry Guntrip, who held the last ever sermon at the Chapel in the 1950's, was also a published author of many psychoanalysis studies and books during World War 2. He was renowned for his work on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which aql continue to be actively involved in. aql are personal sponsors of Simon Buckden, a PTSD suffering veteran who is currently running 100 marathons in 100 weeks to raise awareness of the disorder.