Historic Building Survey

Of

“The Hall”
The Former St Mary Steps Sunday Schools,
Stepcote Hill, Exeter.

By R.W. Parker

For Alexei and Ruth Janssen

RICHARD PARKER
HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING & INTERPRETATION

11 Toronto Road, St James, Exeter, EX4 6LE.
E-Mail: rwparker@btopenworld.com
Tel: 07763 248241
01392 423233

REPORT No. 2014.04

© Richard Parker. July 2014
## CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION  
   1.2 Method  

2. HISTORIC BACKGROUND  
   2.1 Prehistoric and Roman  
       *The Roman Military Fortress*  
       *The Roman Civil Period*  
   2.2 Saxon and Medieval; 500 to 1600  
       *St Mary Steps Church*  
       *Documentary research*  
   2.3 Post-medieval; 1600-1800  
   2.4 The 19th and 20th centuries; 1800-the present  
   2.5 Charity Schools in the Parish.  

3. BUILDING SURVEY  
   3.1 The Exterior  
       3.2 The Interior  
       *The furnishings of the hall and the folding shutters.*  

4. SUNDAY SCHOOLS AND CHURCH HALLS IN EXETER  

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENT  

6. CONCLUSION  
   ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS  
   SOURCES CONSULTED  
   DISCLAIMER
| Fig. 1 | Elevation of the former Sunday School building to Stepcote Hill and location of site. | Page: 1 |
| Fig. 2 | Artist’s reconstruction of the layout of the Roman military fortress at Exeter in c. 70 AD, (Jane Read, after Henderson & Bidwell, Exeter Archaeology, 2005). | 2 |
| Fig. 3 | Artist’s reconstruction of the layout of the Roman civil-period town at Exeter in the fourth century AD (Eric Haddon, after P. Bidwell 1980). | 2 |
| Fig. 4 | Extract from Benjamin Donn’s 1765 map of the city, showing the Westgate area. | 5 |
| Fig. 5 | A blocked doorway at the north-eastern corner of the nave of the church showing the relationship of the ground levels. | 6 |
| Fig. 6 | Extract from Braun and Hogenburgh’s map of Exeter, engraved in 1618, showing the church and West Gate. | 9 |
| Fig. 7 | Extract from Rocque’s 1744 map of the city showing the church, and the site of the hall outlined in red. | 9 |
| Fig. 8 | Late 19th- or early 20th-century photograph of Stepcote Hill prior to the slum clearances of the 1930s (EA collection). | 9 |
| Fig. 9 | Detail of a late 19th-century photograph of the houses on the western side of Stepcote Hill, showing a large double-gabled house or houses occupying the site of the later parish hall (Unknown photographer. The Isca Collection, Exeter). | 10 |
| Fig. 10 | Extract from John Coldridge’s 1819 manuscript map of the city showing the property as an undivided rectangle with a large detached rear building. | 13 |
| Fig. 11 | Extract from the 1876 OS 1:500 map sheet 80.6.22 showing the house divided into two separate units. | 13 |
| Fig. 12 | An undated late 19th-century drawing reproduced from a series of ‘Glimpses of Old Exeter’ in the Devon and Exeter Gazette for 16th February 1934. | 14 |
| Fig. 13 | Another undated late 19th-century drawing by ‘J.N’ showing the two gables of the house (DHC St Mary Steps Cuttings Folder). | 14 |
| Fig. 14 | Detail of the 1888 revision of the OS 1:500 map sheet 80.6.22, showing the house divided into two separate properties and alterations to the buildings at the rear. | 17 |
| Fig. 15 | George Townsend’s Drawing of the Ewings Lane School building of 1869, seen from Ewings Square. | 18 |
| Fig. 16 | School sites in the Parish of St Mary Steps and St Mary Major. | 18 |
| Fig. 17 | Extract from the Goad Fire Insurance plans of 1933, showing the hall after the clearance of the adjoining houses. | 21 |
| Fig. 18 | Extract from the 1951 1:2500 OS city plan SX 9192 showing the site after the slum clearance. | 21 |
| Fig. 19 | The eastern elevation of the hall forming the main façade to Stepcote Hill after restoration in 2014. | 22 |
| Fig. 20 | The unusual ceramic roof ventilator on the ridge of the roof. | 23 |
| Fig. 21 | W.G. Croump’s drawing of the inscription recording the laying of the foundation stone (Devon and Exeter Institution). | 23 |
| Fig. 22 | The steps from the main entrance to the yard, showing the change in levels. | 24 |
| Fig. 23 | The yard to the south of the hall showing the brick lavatory block and verandah, with the new vestry beyond. | 24 |
| Fig. 24 | View of the interior of the hall, looking east. | 26 |
| Fig. 25 | Detail of the impost blocks in the east part of the hall showing fluted pulvinated mouldings. | 26 |
Fig. 26  Detail of the impost blocks in the west part of the hall showing plain, pulvinated mouldings.
Fig. 27  View of the interior of the roof space looking east.
Fig. 28  The handsome hooded stone fireplace in the eastern part of the hall.
Fig. 29  Detail of the spiral stops and ovolo mouldings on the jambs of the eastern fireplace.
Fig. 30  Detail of one of the fretwork ventilator holes opening upon a system of concealed ducting above the ceiling.
Fig. 31  Adjustable furnishings for flexible use in the school chapel of St Raphael, Huccaby, Dartmoor.
Fig. 32  ‘Exon’ school desks, from an early Wippell’s catalogue.
Fig. 33  The shuttered screen dividing the chancel from the schoolroom at the school-chapel of the Good Shepherd, Oreston, Plymouth.
Fig. 34  The removable screen of 1882 dividing the chapel from the classroom at the school-chapel of St Stephen, Ashill, Devon.
Fig. 35  Folding shutters inserted in the 1930s to divide the chapel from the classroom at the school-chapel of the Holy Name, Gunn, Devon.
Fig. 36  Folding shutters still in use to provide a social area at the rear of St Margaret’s church, Topsham, Devon (20th-century).
Fig. 37  The earliest surviving Sunday School building in Exeter, of 1833, at Castle Street Independent Chapel.
Fig. 38  The Baptist Sunday schools of 1876 in Bartholomew Street, by George Packham.
Fig. 39  The Methodist Sunday Schools in Northernhay Street, designed by W.S. Croote in 1894.
Fig. 40  The St Leonards’ Sunday Schools and parish rooms in Roberts Road, constructed in 1889.
Fig. 41  The St David’s Parish Institute of 1905, possibly designed by W.D. Caroë.
Fig. 42  The Buller Hall of 1914-15 in St Thomas’ parish, showing an alternative ‘Old English’ treatment of the same basic design.
Fig. 43  The Toronto Road façade and main entrance of the St James’ Mission Rooms, Exeter, designed by Edward Warren and Octavius Ralling in 1902.
Fig. 44  The façade of the St James’ Mission Rooms towards Spinning Path.
This report presents the results of a building survey carried out at The Hall, Exeter, The former St Mary Steps Sunday Schools, Stepcote Hill, Exeter (SX 9176192277). The hall stands on Stepcote Hill, immediately to the north of St. Mary Steps Church, within Exeter’s historic West Quarter. The structure is a Grade II* Listed Building designed by the architect Edward G. Warren, which originally served as a charity school and parish hall connected with the adjacent church. After a long period of neglect during the 20th century, the hall was finally sold in 2007-8. It has recently been purchased by its current owners, Alexei and Ruth Janssen, members of a family of local philanthropists. The Janssen family are founders of a Community Interest Company ‘The Hall Exeter CIC’ whose aim is to restore the building to public use as a venue for social enterprise, cultural, artistic and educational activities.

This report has been produced in support of a bid for a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant towards the cost of the project, including the installation of appropriate kitchen and lavatory facilities and a fire escape in conformance with Fire Regulations. The project also aims to discover, interpret and present the history of the hall, of Stepcote Hill and of the West Quarter and to thus enable and facilitate the growth of community events and organisations as part of a general revival of cultural life in the West Quarter.

1.2 Method

The archaeological works on site were carried out in March 2014 by Richard Parker Historic Building Recording and Interpretation. The works sought to understand the fabric, development, significance and historical context of the building, and to establish the potential for the survival of any early archaeological remains. The works included a rapid archaeological survey of the building, including the production of a photographic record of the structure and a written description which forms the basis...
Fig. 2 Artist’s reconstruction of the layout of the Roman military fortress at Exeter in c. 70 AD, showing the approximate location of the current site circled (Jane Read, after Henderson & Bidwell, Exeter Archaeology, 2005).

Fig. 3 Artist’s reconstruction of the layout of the Roman civil-period town at Exeter in the fourth century AD showing roads within the late-Roman town walls converging on the current site (Eric Haddon, after P. Bidwell 1980).
of this report. Documentary research was also undertaken to establish the history of the site and the history of the establishment of the charity school. The report also includes an Impact Assessment aimed at assessing the effect of the proposed alterations upon the historic fabric and archaeology of the site. A structural condition survey is being undertaken separately. The archaeological survey was non-invasive and involved no stripping of existing surfaces or investigation of concealed or inaccessible fabric, though the roof voids were inspected. The conclusions presented in this report and the suggested phasing of the building are thus provisional and may need to be revised in the light of any future investigation or research work carried out in relation to the building and its environs.

2. HISTORIC BACKGROUND (based on research by Lucy Browne and R.W. Parker)

2.1 Prehistoric and Roman

The site lies not far from the northern bank of the river Exe as it passes to the south of the historic city, near the bottom of a small, shallow coombe from which there was easy access from the city centre to the river banks and the ford and bridges over the water. Access from other points was more difficult, since the land rises rapidly to the east and west of the site, where the medieval city wall now revets what may formerly have been a natural bank or cliff below West Street. Although it is possible that the steeply sloping ground in Stepcote Hill restricted the early development of the area, the proximity of the site to the river and ease of access to the bridges or fords over the Exe make it probable that the site was exploited from an early period. Unfortunately there has been very limited archaeological excavation in the area, and the character and state of survival of archaeological deposits in Stepcote Hill and West Street are not well understood. To the author’s knowledge no evidence of prehistoric occupation or activity has yet been identified in this part of the city.

The Roman Military Fortress

The site lies outside the boundary of the Roman military fortress, which was established on the site of an earlier Iron Age settlement in or before 50 AD (Allan 2005, 4). The layout of the fortress has been explored by archaeologists working for the Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit (later Exeter Archaeology - hereafter ‘EA’) since the 1970s and a number of observations have been made on nearby sites which suggest the archaeological potential of the area. A reconstruction of the legionary fortress based on these observations, painted by Jane Read and based on research by C.G. Henderson and P. Bidwell is shown at Fig. 2 (Jane Read / EA 2005). The ditches, banks and palisade of the south-western edge of the fortress were aligned roughly on the modern King Street at the top of Stepcote Hill, crossing Fore Street at this point and extending almost as far as the northern wall of the medieval city. The site thus lay outside the fortress defences, but this does not necessarily imply that the area was undeveloped. Excavations in the 1990s on the site of the ‘Picture House’ cinema in Bartholomew Street West revealed evidence of an extra-mural compound or annexe of Roman military date to the west of the fortress defences (shown in Fig. 2) and it is possible that there were other peripheral compounds and structures in the relatively well-defended areas between the fortress and the river (EA Archives).

The roadway from the western gate, or Porta Praetoria, of the fortress to the river crossing may well have passed close to the site. This gate was positioned slightly to the north-west of the modern Fore Street. Archaeological observations in 1995-6 during alterations at No. 141 Fore Street revealed the section of a Roman roadside ditch bounding the north side of the road leaving this gate (Parker 1996, Fig. 3). The position of the ditch in relation to the Porta Praetoria suggests that the road may have curved around towards the south and descended the hill at an angle to the fortress defences, passing close to the present site en route to the bridge or ford over the Exe. There may well have been roadside structures or ditches associated with this roadway.

The Roman Civil Period

Later in the Roman occupation, the town was expanded to include a much larger area, including the present site. The fortress defences were destroyed and new defences were erected in c.200 AD whose line is perpetuated by the present city walls. The western gate of the Roman civil-period enceinte probably stood on the site of the medieval west gate. During excavations in Rack Street in the 1970s a roadway was observed running roughly on the line of the demolished fortress defences, curving to the
west towards the new west gate. This road was lined with stone and timber buildings, and may have met other roads, including the future Stepcote Hill, at a junction in the vicinity of the present site (Bidwell 1980, 74-6; Figs 37, 42). Fig. 3 shows a reconstruction of the civil-period town as it may have looked in the 4th century, painted by Eric Haddon and based upon research by P. Bidwell (ibid.).

It is thus clear that the peripheral areas of the late-Roman town were developed with substantial buildings. The potential for the survival of Roman archaeological deposits on the present site is complicated by the topography and by subsequent activity. In the more densely occupied areas of the city the preservation of archaeological remains has often been adversely affected by terracing to create level building platforms or to excavate cellars. In these cases only deeply-cut archaeological features such as rubbish pits, ditches, cellars and wells are likely to survive. On the other hand, the terracing of sloping ground can also involve the dumping of earth to create raised house platforms and archaeological remains may also be deeply buried by dumping and accumulation of deposits through hillwash. Excavations in the area of Cricklepit Street in the 1974 and 1988-9 (Passmore 2009, 2) and at the Picture House in Bartholomew Street West have shown that the depth of archaeological layers in the western parts of the city can be considerable, particularly against the rear of the city defences, where the ground behind the city walls has been raised to the level of the wall walks, burying early archaeological features well below the modern ground surface (EA Archives, various sites).

2.2 Saxon and Medieval; 500 to 1600

After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th century the city declined and large areas within the walls may have been abandoned, though there is evidence that a major religious centre was maintained in the city. This lay at the centre of the walled area, on the site of the present cathedral Green, where successive late Roman and Saxon cemeteries and a large late-Saxon church (on the site of the medieval and Victorian parish church of St Mary Major) were excavated in the 1970s (EA archives). Very little archaeological evidence for the occupation of the peripheral areas within the city walls between the fifth century and the late Saxon period has been recovered, but it is probable that the Stepcote Hill served at this time as a route ascending the hill from the river crossing, via Smythen Street and Little Stile, directly to the western portals of the great Saxon church. Until the construction of New Bridge Street in the 1770s this was probably the principal route into the heart of the city and it is highly likely that the tenements lying along this route were exploited commercially from an early date.

Some idea of the distribution of the population of the city during the later Saxon period may be gained through the distribution of church sites within the urban area. In Exeter nearly thirty small medieval churches are known, the densest concentration of which lay within the Cathedral Close and along the four principal streets which still form the main circulation of the city. In the immediate vicinity of the present site the church of St Mary Steps still survives at the foot of Stepcote Hill and, close by stood the churches of Allhallows-on-the-Walls and St John (Fig. 4). The origins of these churches remain uncertain, as none has ever been excavated under modern conditions. Some may have originated as private chapels for wealthy landowners and others as votive churches or chapels, but it is probable that most of these churches served resident communities living in close proximity. The streets near the churches are thus likely to have been built up with housing and commercial premises, evidence of which may remain in the form of wells and rubbish pits.

_St Mary Steps Church_

St Mary Steps church has not been the subject of a modern archaeological survey and the date of its foundation and the sequence of development of its structure remain uncertain. The church is known to have existed in the 12th century because of its elaborately-decorated Norman font, but its origins are probably Saxon. Two late 12th- and early 13th-century lists of churches in Exeter survive, but neither mentions the church by its current name. These lists include a mandate of Bishop Marshall, dating from about 1200, identifying seventeen parochial chapels which were peculiar of the Dean and Chapter. A second list, of around the same period, is given in a grant of Peter de Palerna to twenty-eight parochial chapels on condition that they celebrated his anniversary in perpetuity (Rose-Troup 1923, 9; Cresswell 1908, 3). Both lists mention three churches dedicated to St Mary: St Mary Major, St Mary Arches and St Mary Minor. It is unlikely that ‘St Mary Minor’ and ‘St Mary Steps’ are identical, because St Mary Minor is thought to have stood in the cathedral close, in close proximity to St Mary Major, with which
Nicholas Orme has recently suggested that ‘St Mary Steps’ church should be identified with a ‘lost’ chapel dedicated to St Edward of Corfe, a Saxon royal martyr. Orme argues that the church may have had a double dedication to St Mary and St Edward, but that by 1262 Mary had completely eclipsed Edward (Orme 1996, 161). In later documents the church is known as St Mary *de gradibus* (of the steps) to distinguish it from the other churches in the city with the same dedication (Creswell 1908, 191).

Many of the surviving city churches stand at unusual angles to the streets and roads nearby, and almost all show some evidence of enlargement through the accretion of aisles and side chapels. St Mary’s church is oriented more or less correctly towards the east, at an awkward angle to both West Street and Stepcote Hill. The present building is trapezoidal in form, which suggests that the building has been enlarged from a smaller nucleus to the very limits of the available area. The original church may have been a smaller structure surrounded by a churchyard. It has traditionally been believed that, prior to the early modern period, the small parochial chapels of Exeter did not enjoy the right of sepulture, except in special circumstances; the burial rights and fees within the city being claimed by the cathedral (Cresswell 1908, 4). This argument can no longer be sustained. Recent archaeological works have exposed human remains on church sites in the city which are known to have ceased operation in the middle ages and which are unlikely to be connected with the cathedral cemeteries. Excavations by Exeter Archaeology at the corner of South Street and Palace Gate in the 1990s exposed charnel pits and disarticulated human remains which are probably associated with the former church of St James (demolished in the late 14th century). Recent excavations in the Castle yard have also exposed Anglo-Saxon charcoal burials which may be associated with an unknown church and cemetery obliterated by the construction of the Norman castle after 1086 (EA Archives). It is thus possible that the ground close to St Mary Steps church, including the present site, was at times utilised as a cemetery.
Fig. 5 A blocked doorway at the north-eastern corner of the nave of the church showing the relationship of the ground levels. The internal floor levels of the sanctuary may be close to the medieval levels; the floor of the hall (dashed) is partially terraced into and partially built up to a much higher level than the street. Thus there is potential both for the truncation and preservation of buried archaeological remains.

At present St Mary’s has a simple sub-rectangular plan consisting of a nave, covered with a ceiled wagon roof, a south aisle and a tower. The nave probably forms the nucleus of the present church but retains no visible features earlier than the 15th or 16th centuries. The east wall is constructed of red breccia, locally known as ‘Heavitree stone’, which is characteristic of late-medieval buildings in the city. The unusual angle of the east wall is respected by the late-medieval wagon roofs, which shows that the church had expanded to its present proportions by at least 1500. The east end probably represents a late-medieval replacement of an earlier chancel or sanctuary. It is pierced at its north-eastern corner by a doorway (Fig. 5), now blocked, which formerly gave access to the sanctuary from Stepcote Hill. This doorway shows that the floor levels of the church in the late-medieval period were probably at or near their present level, though there may have been a few steps down into the sanctuary. The north wall of the nave, bounding the shared yard on the south of the former parish hall, is of older, more mixed rubble masonry and may retain some of the earliest fabric in the building, though it has never been investigated archaeologically and there are no visible features which allow dating on stylistic grounds.

The nave lies some distance back from the street frontage in West Street and at a significantly higher level, and must presumably, prior to the addition of the south aisle, have been approached from the south through open ground, up a steep bank. The tower, south aisle and south chancel chapel of the church are all evidently later additions to the south of the original building, added in different phases which are distinguished by clear breaks in the south wall. The chapel stands over a vaulted undercroft
designed to raise its floor level with that of the church, but neither the aisle nor the base of the tower are known to have undercroft and the nature of the underlying ground, is not known. It is considered most likely that the chapel was the first addition to the nave, followed by the tower and finally by the two bays of the south aisle lying between them. Cresswell suggests a date for the addition of the aisle in 1462 when one Felicia Selman left money for her obit and towards the fabric of the church (Cresswell 1908, 121-2). The layout of early churches in the city would benefit from additional research and it cannot be assumed that the plan of St Mary’s was always a simple one. Excavations on the site of St George’s church, in South Street in the 1950s revealed that the late-Saxon church building had a complex plan, including a projecting transept or porticus on its southern side which was later absorbed into a medieval aisle (Fox 1952, 25-29, Plate XV). It is thus possible that the early church at St Mary Steps may also have had projecting elements lying under the present site.

Documentary research
St Mary Steps parish is poorly supplied with documentary material and few archaeological interventions have taken place within the parish. This is probably because the demolition of ‘slum’ property in the 1920s and 30s removed most of the historic buildings in the parish and because there has been little redevelopment of the area since. Fortunately some of the tenements in the area were held by large organisations such as the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral and Polsloe Priory (Parker 2002, 2) and some records for these properties do survive. The tenement now occupied by the hall formed part of the Exe Bridge Estate. This was a portfolio of property established in or after 1200 to provide an income for the maintenance of the newly-constructed bridge. The estate was administered by two wardens appointed annually by the City Chamber, whose accounts survive from 1343 to1711. These are now held at the Devon Heritage Centre in Sowton and have been in part transcribed by Paul Staniforth and Jannine Juddery (Exeter Archaeology Reports Nos 90.27, 90.30, 90.31 and 90.32).

The property in question can be identified in the Exe Bridge wardens’ accounts by its proximity to the church and by the fact that it paid a ‘chief rent’ (a small annual payment for the freehold of the property) of 2 shillings annually. The first mention of ‘the tenement next to St Mary Steps Church’ in the wardens’ accounts is in 1348-9 (Staniforth 1990, 8) and it appears again with the same description in the following year (ibid., 9). In 1350-52, for some reason, the property is recorded with a ‘defected rent’ of 3 shillings (i.e., the rent was for some reason not paid and an allowance was made) covering 2 years (ibid., 19).

In 1390-91 2 shillings was paid for the ‘rent of the tenement which the parson of St Mary Steps lives in’ (Juddery 1990, 16) and it seems reasonable to assume that this is the same property since there is no other payment listed for a tenement next to the church. By 1400-1 the property is described as ‘the tenement in which the parson of St Mary Steps late lived’ but no new occupant is given (ibid., 22). In 1410-11 the wardens accounts identify the tenement ‘which the parson of St Mary Steps late lived in’ as ‘now of Stephen Grigge’ (ibid., 27). Grigge was the first of a family of that name who were to hold the tenement for nearly two centuries.

Stephen Grigge still held the tenement in 1440-41 (ibid., 27, 32, 41), but he had evidently died before 1450-51 since in that year his heirs paid the 2 shillings rent (Juddery 1990, 1). In 1489-90 the identity of the Grigge’s tenement with the present site is confirmed when the wardens record a payment of ‘2s from the heirs of Stephen Grigge for rent of a tenement on Stepcote Hill next the church of St Mary Steps’ (ibid., 13). By 1499-1500 the property is described as belonging to John Grigge, ‘now of Alphington’ (ibid., 17). If the Grigges were now letting the property to tenants, their names are not recorded. John Grigge held the tenement until his death before 1540 when he was succeeded by Thomas Grigge. Thomas is still recorded as owner in 1556-7 (Juddery 1990, 5), but by 1559-60 he had died and the 2 shillings rent was being paid by his heirs (Juddery 1990, 4). The Grigge heirs were still paying the rent in 1589-90, but the property ‘lying on Stripcoat hill next the Church of St Mary Steps’ is described as ‘now of Thomas Martyn, Tucker’ (ibid., 25).

The Martin (or Martyn) family were one of the most notable merchant families in 16th and 17th century Exeter, leasing the fulling mills outside the West gate (Stephens 1958, 136-7). The three Martin brothers, Nicholas, Thomas and William were much involved in local politics (MacCaffrey 1975, 36, 253). Thomas Martin had been one of the city Bailiffs in 1567 and 1576 and served as Mayor of the city in 1581 (Jenkins 1806, 131). Thomas is also recorded as the Master of the Guild and Company of Tuckers, Weavers and Fullers in 1583 (Youings 1968, 230). Thomas’s profession is variously given as
‘Tucker’ and ‘Fuller’ but he may also have been involved in property speculation, as he is recorded as purchasing properties to the west of St Mary Steps Church from William Hurst of Oxton in 1589 (Parker 2002, 2-3). Thomas was a considerable figure in the parish, being listed in the subsidy of 1577 as owing £4, 4s in tax ‘on goods’, the second highest rating in the parish. By the time of the subsidy of 1586 Thomas was rated highest in the parish, owing £6, 6s, and by 1593, £7 (Rowe 1977, 62, 68, 74). The will of ‘Thomas Martyr, of St Mary Steps, fuller’ with an inventory of his goods, dated 1597, survives in the City Archives at the Devon Heritage Centre (ibid, 74; ECA Orphans’ Court Probate Inventories. Thomas Martin No. 63). It is possible that this was the same Thomas Martin, though whether he lived in this house, or another elsewhere in the parish, remains unknown.

2.3 Post-Medieval; 1600-1800.

By the late 16th century the success of the woollen industry had brought great prosperity to Exeter and the streets and lanes in proximity to the quay and fulling mills were favoured areas for the residence of wealthy woollen merchants. The parishes of St Mary Steps, St George the Martyr and St John’s Bow, which included all the houses on Stepcote Hill, were by this time densely built up with housing. Some impression of the urban character of this part of the city in the medieval and early post-medieval period may be gained from historic maps and views of the city such as Braun and Hogenburgh’s map entitled Civitas Exoniae (vulgo Excester) urbs primaria in Comitatis Devoniae, engraved in 1618. This map and John Speed’s very similar map of 1611 are probably based on John Hooker’s late 16th-century view of the city. Braun and Hogenburgh’s map (Fig. 6) shows the church surrounded by tall, gabled houses presenting their gables to the street. The church conceals the site of the hall, behind, from view.

Later maps, such as John Rocque’s 1744 Plan de la ville et faubourgs d’Exeter tres exactement and Benjamin Donn’s Plan of the city and suburbs of Exeter, engraved in 1765, show the built-up areas as hatched or stippled, but do not distinguish individual buildings, apart from the churches, and do not show the property boundaries defining individual tenements (Fig 7). Archaeological observations and documentary research into the tenurial histories of properties in other parts of the city have shown that the urban fabric frequently developed through the subdivision of large, square, early medieval tenements into several narrower tenements with the character of early-medieval ‘burgage plots’. Developments of this kind may have been speculative, aimed at maximising the potential rental income by subdividing the property. Many sites were developed with either pairs of houses with plans forming a mirror image, as at Nos 41-2 High Street, or triplets or short terraces of similar houses like the medieval properties at 36-8 North Street (Thorp 2012, 220). More complex arrangements of buildings designed for multiple occupation are known, including No 5 West Street/15 Stepcote Hill, opposite the hall, which appears to have been designed to contain three self-contained units (Dunkely 1985, 36-8).

Generally, earlier medieval houses were low, of one or two storeys only, but these were often increased in height during the 16th and 17th-centuries by the addition of extra storeys and modified façades, until the original building was almost entirely obscured. This process has been observed in many parts of the city (Parker, forthcoming) and produced a richly-textured townscape characteristic of the old city.

The picturesque appearance of West Street, Smythen Street and Stepcote Hill prior to the ‘slum clearances’ of the 20th century is well known from 19th- and early 20th-century topographical drawings and photographs (Fig. 8). Many of the houses lining Stepcote Hill dated from the 15th to the 17th centuries and were originally built for prosperous merchant families such as the Griggs and the Martins. The houses were largely of timber-framed construction, though sometimes with party walls of stone, as can still be seen in a reconstructed house immediately opposite the hall. The houses on the western side of the street above the hall feature in many early photographs (Fig. 8). These were modest buildings of two storeys with jettied façades. Some of these were supported by curving or jowled-headed posts, suggesting a 15th- or early 16th-century date; others had jetties concealed by plaster coving, probably representing later modification of earlier façades.

The house or houses occupying the site of the hall seems to have been a far more ambitious building. An image of the building survives in the Isca Collection, and has recently been published (Thomas 2008, Fig 64). The photographer, date and the source of the photograph are not cited; however, the details of the costume suggest that the photograph may have been taken in c.1890, shortly before the demolition of the house for the construction of the Sunday Schools.
Late 19th- or early 20th-century photograph of Stepcote Hill prior to the slum clearances of the 1930s, showing the densely built-up urban fabric of timber-framed houses. (EA collection).

Fig. 7 Extract from Rocque’s 1744 map of the city showing the church, and the site of the hall outlined in red.

Fig. 6 Extract from Braun and Hogenburgh’s map of Exeter, engraved in 1618, showing the church and West Gate.
Fig. 9  Detail of a late 19th-century photograph of the houses on the western side of Stepcote Hill, showing a large double-gabled house or houses occupying the site of the later parish hall. The house has an 18th- or early 19th-century plastered frontage with paired sash windows, but this probably masks a timber-framed frontage of 16th- or 17th-century date (Unknown photographer. The Isca Collection, Exeter).
The photograph (Fig. 9) shows a large structure with a towering twin-gabled façade which, though divided into tenements, clearly originated as one structure serving either as a single house or a pair of houses. The building stood over a low cellar or semi-basement, accessed directly from the street by a low doorway. Ground-floor level appears to have been almost 2m above street level at the southern corner of the façade and probably several feet below it at the northern corner. It is not certain whether the cellar occupied the entire footprint of the building or just the southern part of the site, where the topography made accommodating the headroom easier. As the existing floor of the late 19th-century hall is a solid floor lying at a considerable height above street level, it is likely that the remains of at least the cellar floors and walls might survive buried beneath the existing floors.

The building was entered by a doorway set off-centre to the façade, beneath the northern gable, sheltered by an 18th-century bracketed porch. The porch appears to have sheltered two front doors, but this may represent subdivision of a much wider entry for the original house. On either side of the doorway the ground-floor rooms were lit by wide windows consisting of paired sashes of 18th- or 19th-century date. These almost certainly replaced large mullioned windows. The windows on both sides were fitted with sliding shutters moved on horizontal rails fixed above and below the windows, and pierced with circular oculi. Although these are obviously 19th-century additions their appearance in identical form to both sides of the doorway clearly demonstrates that both halves of the building had at one time been in common ownership.

At first-floor level, the southern part of the façade retained a projecting pent roof casting a deep shadow and extending half the depth of the porch. These pent roofs were a characteristic feature of 16th and 17th-century houses in the city, though none now survive. The northern part appears not to have a pent roof, but this is possibly because it had been removed during 18th-or 19th-century alterations to the façade. Above first-floor level the façade rose through three further storeys, including cocklofts in the gables, without any further jettying. This plain façade is suggestive of a mid 17th-century date when the architectural fashion in the city was for the suppression of jetties and other projecting elements. The façade had been remodelled in the late 18th- or 19th century and it is possible that decorative elements might have been removed or covered up. The paired sashes on each storey, for example, might have replaced bracketed oriel windows and the timber frame may originally have been exposed, decorated with elaborate mouldings, sgraffito decorations or covered with patterned slate hanging. In the area immediately above the porch a feature is visible, apparently recessed within the plaster and resembling a large area of missing render. This appears to have exposed decorative features with elaborate mouldings and is suggestive of decorative elements concealed behind the plain plasterwork.

Nothing else is known of the building, since it was entirely demolished in 1891-2 without any known archaeological survey. The scale of the building, rising four storeys above a basement, is comparable to some of the grandest houses in the city and there can be little doubt that this was the house, or houses, of some of the wealthiest merchants in the parish. The property may have been constructed as a very large single house, or, quite possibly, a mirrored pair of houses. Given the impressive scale of the house it is unlikely to have dated in this form from any earlier than the late 16th or mid 17th century. It is highly probable that this building had been constructed or extensively remodelled in the 17th century, possibly by a member of the Martin family, either as a speculative development or for their own occupation.

The documentary record in the Exe Bridge warden’s accounts continues to record a chief rent of 2 shillings for the house, but during the early 17th century the tenurial history becomes confusing, suggesting perhaps the sale or transfer of the property. In 1609-10 the rent for the property ‘lying on Stricoat Hill next the church of St Mary Steps’ was paid by the heirs of ‘Crudge’ (rather than ‘Grigge’?) and the property is further described as ‘late in the tenure of William Martyn, now of Thomas, son of the said William’ (Juddery 1990, 39). By 1620 the ‘heirs of Crudge’ were still paying the rent but the tenement was ‘late in the tenure or William Martyn but now of Thomas Fley’ (ibid., 45). Fley is not mentioned in the accounts again and by 1629-30 the Martin family are again in tenure, paying the 2 shilling rent themselves for a property now described as ‘sometime of Crudge’. The accounts first record a named resident, one Arthur Willinge, at this time (ibid., 51). Willinge appears in the Freemen’s List as a mason who began his apprenticeship in 1622 and was dead by 1657 (Rowe & Jackson 1973, 137 & 144). ‘William Martyn’ was still the principal landowner in 1639-40, though by this the tenement is described as that in which ‘Arthur Willinge late lived’ implying that Willinge had either left the property or died (Juddery 1990, 4). William Martin is recorded as ‘deceased’ in 1659-60 and the house as then
occupied by John Markes (Juddery 1990, 10-11). Markes appears to have died soon afterwards as the 1660 Poll Tax shows Susanna Markes, widow, paying 12d and the 1671 Hearth Tax records the Widow Markes paying on 3 hearths (Hoskins 1957, 61 & 78). This is a modest number of fireplaces for what may have been a large house, but it is of course possible that the Widow Markes was occupying only a part of the property. The Martin heirs continue to be identified with the property in the Exe Bridge Wardens’ accounts until after 1710, after which the accounts cease (Juddery 1990, 38).

In 1756-8 the City Chamber made a survey of all their lands and properties and produced a series of maps now bound together in the Chamber Map Book (DHC, ECA Book 58). The entry for Map 15, property 24 (No. 55 in the Exe Bridge Rental) records: ‘John Williams, a Tenement on Stripcoat Hill adjoyning to Saint Mary-Steps Church, out of which is payable to the Mayor, Bailiffs, and Commonalty a Chief Rent of 2s. a year’. John Williams was a baker who was also leasing several other city properties (A.G. Collings, pers. Comm). Regrettably the Chamber Map Book does not show any detail.

2.4 The 19th and 20th centuries; 1800-the present.

Due to trade difficulties during the Napoleonic Wars and competition from the industrialised northern counties the cloth industry in Exeter went into decline during the early years of the 19th century. This, coupled with the cholera epidemics of the 1830 and 1840s, which hit densely-populated areas like the parishes of St John’s, St George’s and St Mary Steps with particular severity (Shapter 1849) and the flight of many of the wealthier families to fashionable new residential estates in the suburbs, led to the subdivision of many of the large mansions in formerly affluent parts of the city into separate dwellings. Landowners in the city frequently resisted improvements in these areas for fear of increasing the rates, and consequently these properties soon began to fall into decay.

The first map to show the buildings in any detail dates from the early 19th century. John Coldridge’s large manuscript map of the city, surveyed in 1819 and now kept at the DHC (Fig. 10) is the first to show the tenement boundaries in the city and to give any reliable information of the layout of the buildings. This map shows the footprint of the building north of the church as a single, undivided rectangle, which would seem to support the conjecture that the building was, at this time at least, a single property. The building has a wider front section and a narrower rear section, but unfortunately there is no information about its internal planning. At the rear of the site is a separate range, at a different alignment, which may have originated as a detached kitchen block, workshops or a separate dwelling. The name of the occupier is not marked on the map, though one name ‘Turner’ is recorded two doors up, on a large double-fronted house which is well known from early photographs.

In 1824-6 the church authorities considered the enlargement of the church by the addition of a north aisle, which would have necessitated the acquisition and demolition of all or part of the adjacent house. An application to the Incorporated Church Building Society for grant aid for the project, including plans by the architect Charles Hedgeland showing the church as it then stood and with the proposed extension, survive in the archive of the ICBS at Lambeth Palace (ICBS 00515 Folios 12FF). The new aisle would have occupied most of the site of the southern part of the house and had three large windows opening to the north which would clearly have had to look out onto open ground on the site of the rest of the building. The application was refused and the church was never enlarged as planned, perhaps because the rebuilding of both St Edmund’s church in the 1830s, and St John’s and Allhallows-on-the-Walls churches in c.1840 relieved the pressure on church accommodation. The provision of a chapel of ease for St Mary Major, St Mary Magdalen, in Rack Street, in 1861, may also have helped answer this need.

The only description of the house at this period is found in an entry in the Valuation of the Houses and Lands in the City of Exeter made by Messrs Rowe, Cornish and Hooper in 1838 by order of the Guardians of the Poor and the Improvement Commissioners (DHC B/EXE/336.22/ROW). This shows the occupiers of the property as ‘Dundridge, Berry, Kennedy and others’, the owner being Elizabeth Dundridge. Clearly the house was already in multiple occupation. The property is described as ‘A large front dwelling house, with workshops and garden situated in Stepcoite Hill, left up’ (being the first entry for Stepcoite Hill after ‘Westgate Street, left down’, thus placing it in the first plot beyond the church). The property had a gross value of £28 and a rateable value of £22, 10s. The next two properties are described as ‘small front tenements, back ditto and garden, front ditto’ with a gross value of £12 and ‘front dwelling house in tenements’, with a gross value of £22. These properties may or may not be part of the original house.
Fig. 10  Extract from John Coldridge’s 1819 manuscript map of the city showing the property as an undivided rectangle with a large detached rear building.

Fig. 11  Extract from the 1876 OS 1:500 map sheet 80.6.22 showing the house divided into two separate units, the demolition of the rear block and the provision of a narrow rear extension against the northern boundary.
Fig. 12 An undated late 19th-century drawing reproduced from a series of ‘Glimpses of Old Exeter’ in the Devon and Exeter Gazette for 16th February 1934, showing the large double-gabled house behind the church.

Fig. 13 Another undated late 19th-century drawing by ‘J.N’ showing the two gables of the house (DHC St Mary Steps Cuttings Folder).
The next reliable depictions of the house are found on the 1:500 OS map of the area, sheet 80.6.22, surveyed in 1876. This map (Fig. 11) shows the property divided into two sections of more-or-less equal size and may represent the subdivision of the original house to form two properties. The large rear building, presumably representing the workshops described in 1838, has been demolished and a smaller rear extension added at the rear of the northern half of the house, presumably to provide new service rooms for the subdivided dwelling. The garden area seems to have remained undivided and was perhaps shared, the lines shown lying parallel to the street being perhaps garden terraces.

The impressive scale of the building is brought home by two late 19th-century drawings of the church, seen from the south (Figs 12, 13), which show the twin gables of the façade of the house rising high above the roof of the nave. The first drawing (Fig. 12) shows an exceptionally large chimney stack, probably of brick, rising against the south wall of the house, which apparently contained six flues. The chimney stack probably implies division of the house into heated front and rear rooms on each of three floors, perhaps with unheated attics in the roof. There was presumably a comparable chimney serving the northern part of the house, but this is only hinted at beyond the roof ridges. A further drawing, less accomplished and detailed (Fig. 13) confirms the size of the chimney in relation to the twin gables of the house. Even very large houses during the 17th century tended to have a limited number of hearths. The 1671 hearth tax recorded very few residents within St Mary Steps parish having more than 2 or 3 hearths (Hoskins 1957, 78), and even in a very wealthy parish such as St Petrock’s most houses had fewer than 6 hearths (*ibid.* 70); it thus seems most likely that this chimney was an addition to the house, perhaps made at the time of its subdivision into tenements.

The Land Tax Assessments for the Parish of St Mary Steps for 1890-91 show the property in its last days, and at the time of its acquisition by the church authorities. These sources also provide names of the landowner and of the occupants of the houses:

**1890/91:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Assessment</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian and Surnames of Proprietors:</td>
<td>M. Callaway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian and Surnames of Occupiers:</td>
<td>SOPER [name not very legible but checked against other sources]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Names and Descriptions of Properties Charged:</td>
<td>House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sums Assessed and Exonerated:</td>
<td>[blank]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rentals or Annual Values Assessed:</td>
<td>1. 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sums Assessed and not Exonerated at 7/4 in the £</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Assessment:</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian and Surnames of Proprietors:</td>
<td>M Callaway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian and Surname of Occupiers:</td>
<td>Bruner, ?+ various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Names and Descriptions of Properties Charged:</td>
<td>House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sums Assessed and Exonerated:</td>
<td>[blank]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rentals or Annual Values Assessed:</td>
<td>2. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sums Assessed and not Exonerated:</td>
<td>£10/10 and a half</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**1892/93**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. 1 &amp; 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proprietors:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupiers:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Properties:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sums Assessed and Exonerated:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rentals or Annual Values Assessed:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Last columns as above |

**1895/96**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1: Proprietors:</th>
<th>Church Trustees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupiers:</td>
<td>Selves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Properties:</td>
<td>Schools etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sums assessed … Blank
Rentals … 32
Sums … not exonerated: 19/4

(2 Thomas Williams, House)

The 1891 census shows No. 15 Stepcote Hill housing Frederick Soper, labourer, his wife Sarah, charwoman and their five children. 16 Stepcote Hill houses 13 adults and children, the families of Charlie, George and William Sharland, and Edward Seaward, all in labouring occupations.

It appears the Church trustees purchased the house or houses from M. Callaway in the 1890s as part of the project of improving parish facilities and providing a new Sunday school adjacent to the church, but no reference to the acquisition of this land by the church has been found. The Parish of St Mary Steps Minute Book (DHC 4768A/99/PV 1) contains only brief notes, mainly of appointments of officers and nothing relevant to the site. The Parish of St Mary Steps Churchwardens’ Accounts (DHC 4768A-99/PW 8) and the title deeds of lands owned by the parish (DHC Exeter St Mary Steps 48/12/9/1 – 24) have also been checked without result. An article in the Western Times for the 15th November 1877 lists the owners of land affected by plans to clear slum tenements on Stepcote Hill. The names of the owners include: ‘Wm Honeywell, Thomas Davies, the Feoffees of St Mary Steps, John Taylor, Wm Gridland, Ed. Pearse, Mary Ann Cox, J Trimlett, R Sherman junr, John Sherman, Rd Sherman senr, Mrs Beedle, Mary Beedle, Rd Rowe and Charles Densham’. It is not certain whether any of these properties were identical with the property under consideration and, in the absence of any names corresponding with the land tax and census entries, it seems unlikely. The name Callaway is absent, though it is of course possible that he or she acquired the property after 1877. The DHC indexes for St Mary Steps (black folder: Parish Records), Name Index (St Mary Steps), itemizing conveyances, however, contain no references for the late 1880s or for the surname Callaway.

The 1888 revision of the OS 1:500 map sheet 80.6.22 (Fig. 14) shows the division of the house into two dwellings formalised with separate rear gardens. The extension to the rear of the northern house remains, and an extension has been added to the rear of the southern house also, in addition to a separate building in the south-western corner of the garden. The boundary between the two houses is shown dividing towards the rear wall of the main block in a manner that suggests that there had formerly been a wide entrance passage through the building but that this had been infilled to create two separate entrances. A small yard has been created against the north wall of the church to the east of the vestry, which seems to pertain to the church rather than the house.

2.5 Charity Schools in the Parish.

Prior to the education acts of the 1870s the churches were the prime movers in providing education for the poorer classes, and many schools were operated on a charitable basis, the salaries of the teachers being augmented by additional income from fee-paying pupils. During the 18th century the parish of St Mary Steps had operated a public school, which taught its pupils to read and spell and the principles of the Christian religion. Ten children were paid for from the proceeds of a charity administered by the Rector, and twenty more children paid for by their friends and relations. The school is mentioned in the returns to a questionnaire sent to the clergy of the Diocese by Bishop Nicholas Clagget in 1744 (Hoskins 1960, 85, 87), but its location is not known, neither is this charitable foundation mentioned by Jenkins in his description of the parish and its charities in 1806. It is possible that the school may have been temporarily defunct or that it was simply overlooked by Jenkins, whose survey of the western parishes is noticeably less detailed than those of the eastern parts of the city (Jenkins 1806). A school in the parish was also operated by the dissenters, but even less is known of this (Hoskins 1960, 87).

Many Church of England parishes before and after 1870 maintained their schools according to the system of the National Society (Church of England) for Promoting Christian Education, founded in 1811, and these schools are the origin of most modern Church Schools. Such schools often required the payment of a small fee for each pupil and attendance was compulsory, but the schools were mainly supported by voluntary contributions and providing suitable buildings and even paying the salaries of teachers could be extremely difficult. Buildings or sites for the construction of schools might be donated
Fig. 14 Detail of the 1888 revision of the OS 1:500 map sheet 80.6.22, showing the house divided into two separate properties and alterations to the buildings at the rear.

by a benefactor, or the schools might utilise pre-existing buildings in private ownership. Due to financial constraints the ‘National Schools’ and their Nonconformist equivalents the ‘British Schools’ generally operated a monitory system where older pupils had some responsibility for teaching the younger pupils, under the supervision of a master or mistress. ‘Ragged Schools’, aimed at the very poorest classes, operated in the same way but did not charge an admission fee. The boys, girls and infants in these types of school were usually segregated and taught separately, often in separate buildings, but only where resources allowed. In many schools different classes and sexes were separated by no more than a curtain. This allowed the whole school to be assembled for prayers as well as allowing the school building to be available for other uses, such as entertainments, prize-givings, rallies and missions.

In addition to the National and British schools the operation of Sunday schools by Church of England parishes and Dissenting congregations was a major feature of 18th-, 19th- and 20th-century education. Many Sunday schools were charitable foundations run by boards of trustees, with a degree of independence from the parish church or chapel. In these cases the rector or minister might simply serve as the chairman of the trustees by virtue of his office. Changes in the incumbent and in the trustees, or changes in the administration of the school or sources of funding made some such schools difficult to administer and, for want of teachers, pupils, funds or enthusiasm, they might be short lived. Even the ownership of the school buildings could be subject to rapid change. After 1870 many existing church schools continued to be run as voluntary schools. Others were taken over by the school boards and, after 1902, by Local Education Authorities. After this time redundant buildings designed for boys, girls and infants were often re-assigned to different groups and renamed accordingly, making the history of 19th-century school buildings extremely complex and difficult to trace in historical records.

There appears to be no published record of a National School in St Mary Steps parish. Robert Bovett’s 1989 survey of Devon Schools makes no reference either to an ancient charity school or a National School in the parish, though he does note the establishment of a Temporary Board School for
Fig. 15 George Townsend’s drawing of the Ewings Lane School building of 1869, seen from Ewings Square. The school was possibly constructed as a Ragged School but may have been operated as a Sunday school from around 1872.

Fig. 16 School sites in the Parish of St Mary Steps and St Mary Major. The St Mary Steps Sunday Schools (1896) are highlighted in red, the Rack Street Ragged Schools (1846) in orange, the two Ewings Lane school buildings in green (1869) and yellow (date unknown, by 1876) and the Rack Street Infants Schools, on Preston Street (1859) in blue.
infants in Ewings Lane in 1872 in place of ‘an existing school or at least an existing building’ (Bovett 1899, 112-113). Ewings Lane lay within the parish of St Mary Steps, running between the Higher and Lower leats between West Gate and Ewings Square. A school named ‘Ewings Lane School’ is recorded in a drawing by George Townsend, dated October 1869 (DHC Drawings medium B/EX P&D 6539). This drawing shows a red brick, Victorian Gothic building of two storeys occupying the corner of Ewings Lane and Ewings Square and bearing the inscription ‘school’ (Fig. 15). The Victorian building clearly pre-dated the education acts and the establishment of the School Board in the city. It may have been constructed for the Exeter Ragged Schools, which had been founded in 1845 in Rack Street. A new building for these schools is recorded in the Exeter Flying Post as having been built in Ewings Lane in 1869 at a cost of £500 (Bovett 1889, 124) and this date matches that of Townsend’s drawing. If this was the case the building did not long survive as such; the school may have failed for a lack of support or funding. In 1872 the Ewings Lane schools were let to the school board and, after new school buildings were provided in Exe Island, constructed in 1873 to designs by John Johnson, Architect (Croup 1933-40, 183), the School Board transferred all the pupils from Ewings Lane to the new premises on the Island (Bovett 1889, 113). After this date, street directories of the city suggest that the school in Ewings Lane was operated as a Sunday School only (ibid., 124), though this may have been run from different premises since the 1869 building seems to have been vacated by 1876. By the time the 1876 map of the area was surveyed, a school for boys & girls is shown in an entirely different position, near the middle of the south side of Ewings Lane rather than at the corner, where the 1869 building remains recognisable, but is not labelled as a school. Either of these premises may have housed the precursor of the parish Sunday Schools on Stepcote Hill. The reason for the apparent abandonment of the 1869 School building only seven years after its construction is unclear. Both the 1869 building in Ewings Lane and the school building on Exe Island survived into the 1960s, but both were demolished soon afterwards for the construction of Western Way.

The provision of the new Sunday Schools in St Mary Steps parish on a new site in Stepcote Hill may have been motivated by a desire to provide a multi-purpose building, adjacent to the church, which could be made available for social as well as educational uses. The Exeter Memories website, citing 19th-century newspaper sources, records that the original concept of a dual-purpose building came from the Revd. Cecil Square, Incumbent of St Mary Steps in 1888. Initial support for the scheme came from the Church of England Working Mens’ Society and from fundraising activities including concerts and bazaars. The appeal for funds was masterminded by the rector and by a committee of trustees formed for the purpose. By 1891 the site had been acquired at a cost of £300 and sufficient funds had been raised for construction of the hall to begin (http://www.exetermemories.co.uk The Hall, Stepcote Hill). The list of Incumbents and Priests in Charge of St Mary Steps, now hanging in the church, records ‘Earnest Square’ (sic.) as incumbent between 1888 and 1891, so the hall is likely to have been brought to completion under his successor, Henry Plantagenet Burdett, incumbent between 1891 and 1934.

The ceremony of the laying of the foundation stone of the new hall is reported in the Exeter Flying Post for the 15th October 1892, having taken place on the 13th of October. The stone was laid by Lady Stafford Northcote after a church service and the ceremony was followed by a meal at the Vicars’ Choral Hall in South Street. The foundation stone is highly worn, but a transcription of the inscription made in the early 20th century (Fig. 21) records the names of H.P. Burdett as Rector, O.A. Bodley and P. H. Brock as churchwardens, Edward G. Warren as the architect and Geo. L. Stile as the Builder (Croup 1933-40). Fundraising for the project appears to have been slow and newspapers for the period 1893-1895 contain reports of successive events and meetings including a meeting held ‘to promote the completion of the building’, reported in the Exeter Flying Post for 14th July 1894. There may have been difficulties with the contractors, or the work may have been interrupted for a period, since the Exeter & Plymouth Gazette dated 4th December 1895 records the ‘acceptance of the tender of Messrs Westcott, Austin and White, rather than Mr Stile, by the Sunday School and Parish Rooms Committee’ for the completion of the buildings. The Bishop of Exeter finally opened the new Sunday Schools on 14th September 1896 (Exeter Flying Post, 19th September 1896). During the construction of the hall the opportunity was taken to construct a new vestry in the yard adjacent to the church.

The new School Building appears on the Goad Fire insurance map of 1933 labelled as ‘Sunday School and Club’, the map also showing the staircase descending from the yard outside the south wall and the small lavatory block alongside it (Fig 17). The lavatory block is shown as square; however, later
20th-century maps (Fig. 18) seem to show a change to the layout of the lavatory block, which is now shown as trapezoidal. This change might be related to the addition of a new organ in the chancel of the church, housed within a projection on the north wall which projects into the yard. Although the map evidence seems to imply that the projecting organ chamber was added after 1933, this is very unlikely to be the case. The projection opens into the church by two Gothic arches, one wide and one narrow, which are clearly identifiable on the 1876 OS map. The organ chamber is most likely to have been added in the 1860s, during the restoration of the church, at which time the western gallery was demolished and the gallery organ, which had been rebuilt and enlarged in 1834 by William Brooking, but which is recorded as having been damaged by fire, was replaced by a new organ, built by Henry Dicker in 1868, (Browne 2005, 240, 241). The chamber on the north side of the chancel is clearly designed for a large organ and it is probable that it was provided for this purpose. It is thus likely that the Goad maps are inaccurate in their detail and that the lavatory block was constructed on an unusual plan. The removal of the organ to the chancel and provision of an appropriate organ chamber would be in keeping with contemporary trends in liturgy which, especially in High Church contexts, required a liturgical choir in the chancel accompanied by an appropriate instrument. The character of most of the west-quarter churches in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, like many churches in slum parishes, was distinctively High Church and Anglo-Catholic. Contemporary newspaper reports show that Allhallows on the Walls, St Olave’s and St Mary Steps churches were already controversial in their liturgical practice by the 1870s and that these parishes busied themselves with mission work among the poor of the city, for which facilities such as the new hall would have been extremely useful.

The hall continued to serve as a combined parish hall and Sunday school during the first half of the 20th century and during this period became a noted social centre for west-quarter people. During the early years of the 20th century, however, the ancient dwellings of the west quarter were increasingly identified and condemned as slum properties and, by stages, were acquired by the local authority for slum clearance. The process began in the 1920s and continued into the 1970s, largely without any archaeological observations of the buildings, despite their acknowledged historic interest. The vast majority of the medieval and post-medieval west quarter was summarily demolished at this time. Only four buildings were retained and restored as examples of the historic housing of the area, including the two houses at the foot of Stepcote Hill, the ‘House that Moved’ and one further house in King Street. This latter house was unfortunately later damaged in an air raid and subsequently demolished.

The former residents of the area were rehoused in new local-authority housing schemes in Wonford and later in the Cowick Lane area. Only limited new housing was provided by way of replacement, including the local Authority housing in Preston and Coombe Streets and the Church Army houses in Stepcote Hill, providing housing at a much lower density than previously. No archaeological investigations were undertaken on the sites of the demolished houses and large areas of the formerly densely-built-up area were left undeveloped as gardens, or thrown into the street for road widening. These areas have great archaeological potential.

The depopulation of the west quarter had an immediate effect on the life of the churches of the city which, starved of congregations, began rapidly to decline. St Mary Magdalen was closed in 1933 and demolished in 1939; St John’s church was closed and demolished in 1936, the tower surviving into the 1950s; Allhallows on the Walls was closed in 1938 and demolished in 1950; St Edmunds was demolished in the 1970s, following a long period of disuse and damage by vandalism and arson. Parish reorganisation in the 1970s and later, when the Parish of Central Exeter was created, tended to blur the distinctive qualities of the churches. St Mary Steps alone has continued as a parish church, largely due to the long incumbency of Prebendary Michael Moreton, who was appointed Rector in 1959 and is still active at St Mary Steps today, 55 years later.

From around 1959 the parish began to lease the hall to a local theatre troupe, the Exeter Drama Company, who converted it into a small theatre by constructing a stage and proscenium arch at the western end of the hall. At about this time, presumably during the re-ordering of the chancel of the church, Dicker’s 1860s organ was removed and stored in the hall, under the stage (Preb. Michael Moreton, pers comm.) before being disposed of and replaced with a smaller instrument acquired from a Roman Catholic chapel in East Devon (ibid.). The Exeter Drama Company continued to occupy the hall until 2008. By this time, all the trustees of the original Charitable Trust founded to own and manage the building having died, and left no traceable successors, the decision was taken to formally wind up the charity and the building was finally sold into private ownership.
Fig. 17  Extract from the Goad Fire Insurance plans of 1933, showing the hall after the clearance of the adjoining houses, labelled as Sunday school and Club.

Fig. 18  Extract from the 1951 1:2500 OS city plan SX 9192 showing the site after the slum clearance, and possible changes in the footprint of the buildings in the yard area.
Fig. 19 The eastern elevation of the hall forming the main façade to Stepcote Hill after restoration in 2014, showing the relationship of the building with the adjacent church.
3. BUILDING SURVEY

3.1 The Exterior

The main façade of the hall (Fig 19) is a very attractive composition which is carefully designed to respond to the awkwardly sloping site. Although the body of the building is covered with a very large pitched roof this does not terminate at the street frontage in a massive, oversided gable, which might appear too dominant, but is suppressed and hipped back behind parapets to either side of the façade. In the centre of the façade a *risalito* or *avant-cors* formed by the recession of the side bays extends the ridge line beyond the main hip to end at a hipped gable rising higher than the parapets and crowned with a decorative cornice. The façade is constructed of red bricks laid in Flemish bond, enriched with classical elements formed of rubbed and moulded bricks. The architectural style might be described as Flemish Renaissance or ‘Artisan Mannerist’. At a low level the wall is unornamented, but to either side, above a certain level, it is recessed above a plinth of moulded bricks to express the central *risalito*. This contains two tall casement windows with rubbed-brick flat-arched heads with bold, moulded keystones also constructed of moulded brick. Above is a frieze below the cornice of small shallow panels surmounted by an egg-and-dart moulding and a modern gutter. The two side bays feature short, arched-headed windows with moulded imposts and rubbed-brick arches. Above this is a cornice of moulded bricks and a parapet with ramped corners. The moulded string course, window sills, arched window heads and all other architectural detail is carried out in orange brick. The hipped slate roof is crowned by a ball finial. On the ridge of the roof is a most unusual ceramic ventilator in the form of a cylindrical turret pierced by ‘arrow loops’ and crowned with a conical roof pierced by gablets (Fig. 20). This is a very rare feature, imitating medieval ceramic smoke-louvres. Three other examples of very similar if not identical design are known from the Victorian church of St Edward the Confessor at Wiggaton near Ottery St Mary. A smaller example of a different design may be seen at the Masonic hall in Ashburton. These ceramic roof decorations are probably of Bridgewater manufacture, and it is possible that the design might be identified in 19th-century catalogues of the Bridgewater Brick and Tile Manufactory, or those of similar firms. At the corner of the hall, near the main entrance, is a foundation stone with an inscription recording the date of the laying of the first stone. The inscription is now much worn, but was fortunately recorded by W.G. Croump in the early 20th century, whose record is reproduced here (Fig. 21).

The northern wall of the hall facing up Stepcote Hill originally butted against earlier buildings, including a small 15th-century house which appears to have been removed in the 1920s. This wall is
Fig. 22  The steps from the main entrance to the yard, showing the change in levels.

Fig. 23  The yard to the south of the hall showing the brick lavatory block and verandah, with the new vestry beyond.
rendered and, according to the map evidence, contains an offset towards the rear of the site. It may contain earlier fabric relating to the adjacent properties, though it has been faced internally with 19th-century bricks and none of the external fabric is now visible.

The entrance to the hall is in the south elevation, approached by a flight of five slate steps. This area was formerly closed by wrought-iron gates, which do not survive. There appear to have been two phases of gates; one, at the second step, having sockets for pivots which still remain, showing that the gates had at least two leaves and opened outwards. A second pair of gates formerly stood at the fourth step. These clearly bolted at the centre and must also have had two leaves. These were secured by iron cleats built into the wall of the church and of the hall. It is uncertain which of these gates was primary to the building. The stairs ended at a small landing or platform closed to the west by a screen wall pierced by a further doorway; this has a square-headed opening and was formerly crowned by an ornamental iron lamp-holder for a large oil lamp. The lamp has been removed for restoration but will be reinstated, along with a set of gates, at the completion of the project.

The doorway in the screen wall opens upon a steep stairway of blue lias or grey limestone steps descending to the yard lying between the hall and the church (Fig. 22). At the head of the steps are a pair of double doors set within a wide arched opening of red, rubbed bricks, very finely coursed and pointed with white lime mortar. The original panelled timber tympanum of the doorway remains in position but the doors are modern replacements probably dating from the 1950s or later. A chimney formerly rose to the west of the entrance, but this does not survive, and appears to have been capped with a gabled roof. The hall is lit by three south-facing windows. One, in a very severely decayed state, has a broad, chamfered stone sill and a flat-arched head of orange/red brick voussoirs. The window has a pair of two-paned lower casements below a pair of our-paned overlights. Above this is a chamfered string course which acts as a corbel table for a thickening of the wall below the eaves.

To the west, beyond the roofs of the lavatory blocks, is a second window. This also has a stone sill, doubling as the lintel of a doorway opening upon a steep staircase descending to the yard. The brick window head is slightly arched and is not of the orange rubbed bricks featured elsewhere, though there is no evidence to suggest that this window represent a modification. The door hangs in an ovolo-moulded frame and has five panels; the two panels being raised and fielded, and the upper three panels simply glazed to maximise the light in the hall. The character of this door may give some idea of the style and appearance of the original doors at the main entrance to the building. To the west of the doorway is a further chimney, truncated at roof level and finally a small window with two two-paned sashes an arched head.

The small, narrow yard lying between the church and the hall forms the main fire exit for the both the church and the hall (Fig. 23). This area lies more or less level with the floor of the church and is thus at a level much lower than the floor of the hall and of the street level in Stepcote Hill. As a result of these changes in levels the space is partly filled by two staircases, one descending from a doorway in the south wall of the hall and the other from the platform outside the main entrance to the hall. At the eastern end of the north wall of the church the projection serving as an organ chamber with a recess alongside it for hand pumping the organ. Much of the remaining space is taken up with a pair of lavatories, built on an unusual polygonal plan designed to avoid conflicting with the organ chamber and with a verandah erected along the rear wall of the church, supported by a row of timber posts. At the western end of the yard is the vestry of the church, lit by a high window and entered by a doorway alongside the north wall of the nave.

The lavatories are secondary to the main structure of the hall; they are not bonded into the walling. The vestry is also an addition; it was added in 1895 only three years after the construction of the hall and very probably before its completion; it is probable that the two outbuildings are contemporary. The lavatories are divided into two units which may have provided either two water closets or a water closet and an urinal. They may well have been designed to serve both boys and girls separately.
Fig. 24 View of the interior of the hall, looking east, showing the austere use of materials balanced by a boldness in the architectural features, particularly the large hooded fireplace and the pulvinated impost blocks supporting the roof trusses.

3.2 The Interior

The interior of the building has been cleared of the partitions and enclosures which had been inserted after its conversion to a theatre and is now, once more, a single large volume. The simplicity of the space is balanced in the quality of the architectural detail which is all robust and bold in character (Fig. 24). The interior walls are entirely of exposed red brick, the north and south side walls of the hall being divided into six bays by large projecting brick pilasters crowned with moulded stone impost blocks; the
three in the three eastern bays being decorated with pulvinated fluted carvings (Fig. 25) and the two pilasters in the western part with plain pulvinated mouldings (Fig. 26). The difference in detail may reflect the fact that the hall could originally be divided into separate classrooms by folding shutters, though there is no visible evidence of the screen or partition by which this was achieved. The west wall is also of bare brick, pierced by rows of small sockets which may be connected with the stage and proscenium arch structure erected here in the 1950s by the Exeter Drama Company. The east wall has high-level windows with a moulded timber cornice or rail running around at window-sill level, 2.78m above the floor; this rail may formerly have continued around the hall. The internal decorations of the hall appear to have been extremely plain. There is no evidence of wall plaster, timber cladding or any other decorative treatment, not even a boarded dado to the lower part of the wall as sometimes appears in similar church hall or school buildings. It may be that these finishes were avoided because of a fear that timber or plaster finishes might harbour vermin. That the internal brickwork in this building was originally displayed is perhaps confirmed by the treatment of the arch over the entrance doorway, where the red brick voussoirs are in a contrasting colour and are carefully tuck-pointed with white lime mortar; these must have been designed to be displayed.

The decorative quality of the interior is largely due to the details of the roof, which is partially concealed by a close-boarded ceiling beneath which the trusses and structural timbers are expressed as decorative elements (Fig. 24). The roof is supported by five substantial trusses resting upon the impost blocks on top of the pilasters. The feet of the trusses are seated in large metal shoes tied together by iron tie rods linking the feet of the rafters to a central moulded timber underlying the collar beams. The timbers below this are chamfered and decorated with stepped ogee stops. Above the ceiling the trusses are of king-post form with expanded bases to the king posts supporting diagonal braces to the centres of the principal rafters (Fig. 27). There are two levels of purlins on each side of the roof, that at collar
Fig. 28 The handsome hooded stone fireplace in the eastern part of the hall showing the robust Gothic/early Renaissance detail mixed with modern tiling and a cast-iron grate. The cast-iron fire hood shown at the base of the grate is an unrelated importation. The wall ventilator box is shown alongside.

Fig. 29 Detail of the spiral stops and ovolo mouldings on the jambs of the eastern fireplace. These decorations reference late-medieval and early post-medieval architectural details from local buildings.

Fig. 30 Detail of one of the fretwork ventilator holes opening upon a system of concealed ducting above the ceiling linking these vents to the two chimneys and allowing control of the ventilation.
level being square set, and a moulded eaves plate at the wall tops. The boarded ceiling is pierced at intervals by decorative fretwork ventilator holes (Fig. 30).

Above the ceiling the ventilator holes are linked by wooden ducts which converge on the two former chimneys in the south wall. The ducts were operated by a series of flaps opened and closed by cords passing through holes in the ceiling and secured to double-pronged cleats attached to the walls of the hall. Ventilation at a lower level was regulated by boxes fitted to the walls on either side of the two fireplaces with openings into pierced air vents with decorative top grilles and knobs which rotate flaps hidden within the boxes. One of these boxes, severely damaged by damp, remains in place (Fig. 28), but the others have been removed.

The hall appears to have been lit by gas lights, for which the piping still remains attached to the underside of the ceiling, with short returns at intervals for the supplies to hanging gasoliers. The form of these fixtures is unknown.

An outstanding feature of the interior is the stone chimneypiece surrounding the fireplace in the eastern part of the hall (Fig. 28). This has a very large sloping hood over a moulded lintel and jambs with handsome roll mouldings surrounding a square-headed opening decorated with double ogee mouldings. The stops at the base of the jambs are stepped run-outs terminating in incised spiral scrolls (Fig. 29). Although very plain, this is clearly based on late-medieval or early Renaissance examples. The spiral stops are a most unusual motif in late 19th-century work and may be derived from 15th-17th-century buildings in West Devon and the South Hams. The opening is infilled with plain red tiles and a cast-iron insert with a low, segmental-arched head. The western fireplace is much simpler with a plain brick arched opening. It clearly never had a stone chimneypiece like that to the east but must formerly have had either a timber or a slate surround. The slate hearth remains and traces of the brick infilling but there is no evidence of the chimneypiece. It is probable that this was removed in the 1950s when the stage was constructed. The fireplace may have had a cast-iron grate or, alternatively, may have served a freestanding stove. No evidence of such a fixture now remains. These two fireplaces seem to have been the only means of heating the hall and there is no visible trace of a wet heating system with radiators and underfloor ducting.

The floor of the hall was of parquet blocks overlying concrete. The parquet blocks had been removed and stored at the time of the survey in order to investigate the possibility of inserting underfloor heating. Although there were discontinuities in the concrete screed under the floor, including a clear break in the flooring crossing the hall at about the mid point, the significance of this break is uncertain and the removal of the original floor surface has removed any evidence for grooves, sockets or scars or any trace betraying the position of the screen of folding shutters allowing the division of the building into two classrooms.

The remains of a secondary porch or gallery structure near the doorway probably represent a 1950s or later alteration made for the Exeter Drama Company and it seems likely that the original hall was simply one large open volume. Following the removal of modern accretions and after the removal of later paint layers from the walls, the appearance of the interior, with the exception of the folding shutters, is now probably very close to its original form.

The furnishings of the hall and the folding shutters.
Many 19th-century schools and other institutional buildings were divided by temporary, removable partitions, but very few now survive. At their most basic, such partitions were merely curtains, as at the St James’ National Schools of c.1845 in St James’ Road, where the boys’ and girls’ classrooms were separated by curtains (Parker 2004, 15). Curtains were also used at the Episcopal Charity Schools of 1861 on Mount Dinham, designed by George Cummings for one of the most prestigious of the city charity schools (ibid., 21) and therefore we should not assume that they were simply a cheap option. As schools developed and grew the number of classrooms often multiplied. Later partitions were more solid to ensure better protection against noise; these often took the form of full height glazed screens with lower sections formed of sliding or folding panels. Screens of this type remained in use into the 1980s at the former St Thomas Girls’ Board Schools in Union Street, designed by R.M. Fulford in 1872-3, and may still remain in place in some Devon schools. The screen at Stepcote Hill cannot have risen the full height of the building as there is no provision for such a partition in the ceiling and it is likely that it was designed to separate the lower part of the room only, with an open void above.
Several different types of folding or sliding shutters were used in 19th-century church and school buildings, particularly in the small mission churches, known as ‘school-chapels’, which were designed to provide multi-functional facilities. These buildings served both as places of worship and as schoolrooms. They were often fitted with screens or shutters dividing the chancel or sanctuary, which was reserved for worship on Sundays or feast days, from the schoolroom in the body of the building. These buildings were not consecrated but, instead, licensed for public worship, allowing the schoolroom section of the building to be used more flexibly than a consecrated church for teaching, social events and entertainments in addition to worship. Schoolrooms were sometimes fitted with adjustable furnishings which could easily convert from school desks to work tables or pews. Very few such buildings survive unaltered and none in their original use. Probably the best surviving example locally is the school-chapel of St Raphael at Huccaby on Dartmoor, which retains its adjustable furnishings intact (Fig 31). The desks at Huccaby were made by George M. Hammer of London, but similar furnishings, known as the ‘Exon’ school desk, were manufactured by Wippells of Exeter (Fig. 32) and it is not unlikely that the hall in Exeter was furnished with adjustable school benches of this kind.

The best surviving example of a school-chapel screen is at the school-chapel of the Good Shepherd, Oreston, near Plymouth, designed by W.H. May in 1886, where the partition takes the form of a Gothic rood screen with a central doorway surmounted by a plain cross. This screen was closed on school days by means of horizontally sliding shutters which opened to either side of the chancel arch (Fig. 32). A more complicated partition, partly glazed and with removable panels rather than folding shutters remains in position at the school-chapel of St Stephen, Ashill, Devon, designed by R. M. Fulford in 1882, separating a classroom in a transeptal wing from the main body of the chapel. The school-chapel of the Holy name at Gunn, Swimbridge, Devon of 1873 has folding shutters separating the transeptal classroom from the chapel proper (Fig. 35), and these open and shut like a concertina, running in a groove in the floor and in a fixed top rail above. The use and effect of these folding shutters in a church interior may still be experienced at St Margaret’s, Topsham, where the west end of the church was cleared in the 20th-century and is now closed off by an enormously long folding screen which concertinas in the same manner as the screens at Gunn (Fig. 36). These examples may give some impression of the type of folding shutters formerly at the hall in Stepcote Hill.
Fig. 32 ‘Exon’ school desks, from an early Wippell’s catalogue.

Fig. 33 The shuttered screen dividing the chancel from the schoolroom at the school-chapel of the Good Shepherd, Oreston, Plymouth.

Fig. 34 The removable screen of 1882 dividing the chapel from the classroom at the school-chapel of St Stephen, Ashill, Devon.

Fig. 35 Folding shutters inserted in the 1930s to divide the chapel from the classroom at the school-chapel of the Holy Name, Gunn, Devon.

Fig. 36 Folding shutters still in use to provide a social area at the rear of St Margaret’s church, Topsham, Devon (20th-century).
Fig. 37  The earliest surviving Sunday School building in Exeter, of 1833, at Castle Street Independent Chapel.

Fig. 38  The Baptist Sunday schools of 1876 in Bartholomew Street, by George Packham.

Fig. 39  The Methodist Sunday Schools in Northernhay Street, designed by W.S. Croote in 1894.

Fig. 40  The St Leonards’ Sunday Schools and parish rooms in Roberts Road, constructed in 1889.

Fig. 41  The St David’s Parish Institute of 1905, a church hall in a bold Classical style with superimposed pediments, possibly designed by W.D. Caroë.

Fig. 42  The Buller Hall of 1914-15 in St Thomas’ parish, showing an alternative ‘Old English’ treatment of the same basic design for a church hall.
4. SUNDAY SCHOOLS AND CHURCH HALLS IN EXETER

Many of the larger and more prosperous churches in Devon were operating Sunday schools by the late 19th century. Sometimes these utilised existing school buildings, but where finances permitted, a separate Sunday school building might be constructed. Later in the century these facilities might be elaborated into ‘parish institutes’ consisting of a large hall with ancillary rooms where adult education, sales of work, dances and social events and lectures and rallies for suitable causes could be accommodated. Nonconformist congregations were arguably better at providing these facilities than Anglican congregations, and sometimes integrated them into one single, purpose-built church building, as at the Heavitree Congregational church in Fore Street, Heavitree, where F.J. Commin’s large building of 1902 contained a church, lecture hall and classrooms all within one large, red-brick Gothic structure. More usually, in both Anglican and Nonconformist contexts a strong sense of the sacred purpose of the church building, which should not be put to profane use, demanded a separate structure with a distinct architectural identity, separate from that of the church itself.

Among the earliest purpose built Sunday schools to survive in the city is the two-storey Sunday school building of 1833 adjacent to the former Castle Street Independent Chapel in Little Castle Street, Exeter (Fig. 33). This is a detached building in the former churchyard, and resembled a National school of the period in that it was designed with classrooms for boys and girls on two storeys lit by high, round-arched windows. Apart from these broad and high windows it is indistinguishable from an ordinary domestic or commercial building; it is now a restaurant. A more ambitious and architecturally distinguished Sunday school was added adjacent to the 1817 Baptist church in Bartholomew Street in 1876. This building was designed by the architect George Packham. The red brick elevation with arched windows and incised foliate decoration appears unrelated to the structure behind it and may well be a façade added to an earlier building (Fig. 38). The character of the interior is unknown and it is now in secular use. At the corner of Maddox Row in Northernhay Street is a fine late 19th-century Sunday school building designed in 1894 by the architect W.S. Croote. These schools were attached to ‘Providence Chapel’, a former meeting of the Plymouth Brethren which was in use at the time by a Methodist congregation. The buildings are in a kind of free ‘Queen Anne’ style with prominent coved cornices above walls of pale cream brick (Fig. 39). These schools are now in use as offices.

Although many Sunday schools operated in Exeter’s historic centre, the only other city centre Anglican church known to have constructed a purpose-built Sunday school building during the 19th century was St Paul’s in Paul Street. Their Sunday school building occupied a narrow court off Paul Street and was already in existence by 1876. It was a simple brick structure with tall, square-headed windows; the only architecturally ambitious element being a large arched porch. This building survived into the 1960s but has since been demolished. Later in the century a number of the large suburban parishes constructed church halls, some of which also served as Sunday Schools. These remain among the most attractive buildings in the suburbs of the city, though very few are now in use for their original purpose.

One of the most substantial combined Sunday school and church hall buildings was constructed in Roberts Road in 1889, to serve the suburban parish of St Leonard. This is a very handsome ‘Queen Anne’ revival building with two large classrooms linked by a central wing, with tall, square-headed windows and red brick walls with coved plaster cornices and a little spirelet (Fig. 40). The architect is unknown but the foundation stone records that the hall was given in memory of George William Petter, formerly patron of the living, by his family.

Perhaps the grandest of the parish halls erected in the city was the St David’s Parish Institute in Haldon Road (Fig. 41). The building was constructed in 1905 and appears to have utilised an existing house as the nucleus of a complex of buildings including a large hall with a classical frontage featuring superimposed pediments and three tall, arched windows. The architect of the building is not known but it is possible that W.D. Caroë, who had recently rebuilt the parish church and was still engaged in providing furnishings, may have been responsible. In St Thomas parish the former church hall, known as Buller Hall, is a similar structure of high architectural quality dating from 1914-15, again by an unknown architect, and now converted into flats (Fig. 42). The Holy Trinity Church Halls and Sunday Schools in Friars Gate of 1913, are another distinguished early 20th-century community building, now in use as a theatre. A later, but very attractive church hall for Emmanuel parish, dating from the 1920s, survives in Emmanuel Road, St Thomas, now converted into theatre workshops.
Fig. 43 The Toronto Road façade and main entrance of the St James' Mission Rooms, Exeter, designed by Edward Warren and Octavius Ralliing in 1902.

Fig. 44 The façade of the St James' Mission Rooms towards Spinning Path, showing the complexity of the planning of the building.
One other building of this type in the city deserves mention, particularly as it was also the work of Edward G. Warren, in collaboration with another architect. The St James’ Mission Rooms in Toronto Road, St James, built for a very high-church parish in eastern Exeter, were constructed in 1902 on a very difficult site lying between Old Tiverton Road and Blackboy Road, with entrances both from Toronto Road and Spinning Path. The site was so closely bounded by other buildings that the architectural character of the building could not help but be highly eccentric. The building appears to consist of three or four parallel halls or classrooms culminating to the south in a three-storey tower. Each of the halls is expressed towards the alley off Toronto Road by a shaped gable decorated with bands of free stone, and there is a massive round-arched entrance porch with alternating stone and brick voussoirs. The façade towards Spinning Path is austere, except at the very summit, where it breaks into scrolls, stone banding and a plaque bearing the legend ‘St James Mission Rooms’. The legend on the foundation stone records that it was laid ‘To the Glory of God and for the work of the Church in this parish’ and that the joint architects were ‘Octavius Ralling and Edwd. Geo. Warren’. This building, now in use as a Moose Hall is, as far as the author knows, the only other building in Exeter by Edward G. Warren.

Warren was also responsible for reseating St Paul’s church Honiton in 1904 (Cherry & Pevsner 1989, 494). The surviving seats at St Paul’s are plain panelled open benches with rather unusual decorative scrolling to their tops which may represent cut-down and reused elements of the original box pews. These benches may reflect the architect’s interest in the Classical tradition rather than the free (or archaeologically-correct Gothic) often employed by Edwardian architects and craftsmen, such as Harry hems and Herbert Read, for contemporary church furnishings. No other works by this architect have been identified as part of this project.

5 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The proposed alterations to the hall involve the removal of all the 1950s accretions to the interior of the hall, and the creation of a new structure at the east end to provide new lavatories and kitchen facilities as well as a possible gallery for exhibitions and displays. The rest of the hall is to remain open; the walls and decorative stonework stripped of later paint and decorative finishes and restored in all essentials to its original appearance. The addition of the kitchen and lavatory facilities will inevitably have an impact on the open volume of the hall but it is difficult to see how these facilities could be provided in any other way and, as the hall was originally divided by a low partition of folding shutters, it is arguable that a low division or partition within the hall is entirely in keeping with the original conception. The proposed use of the hall as a social and community space is also remarkably close to its original function and may perhaps be considered an ideal use for such a structure. The main impact upon the historic fabric of the works so far has been the removal of the parquet flooring but as a new heating system is necessary this intervention was perhaps inevitable. Excavations or trenching beneath the floor might conceivably disturb buried remains relating to the very large and little known historic house which formerly stood here, not least in the northern part of the site, which may not have been cellared. There is also a strong possibility that rubbish pits, wells and other deeply-cut archaeological features might survive beneath floor levels in the western part of the hall.

Fire regulations demand an improved fire exit and it is proposed that this will be achieved by the creation of a new fire escape on the south side of the hall, with storage facilities underneath. This will occupy much of the present courtyard between the hall and the church and will necessitate the demolition of the existing lavatory facilities. These, though probably nearly contemporary with the hall, are of negligible importance or interest archaeologically. A new lavatory for the use of the church is proposed, approached from a doorway in the organ chamber, and sheltered under the existing verandah. These alterations will be all but invisible from the street, church or hall and are likely to have little impact on the historic fabric and can only represent a gain for the users of both the church and the hall. Again, the possibility of buried remains relating either to the medieval church or the domestic buildings previously occupying the site should be considered if any groundworks are proposed in these areas.
6. CONCLUSION

The St Mary Steps Sunday School is one of the finest purpose-built Sunday school buildings to survive in the city. As many of the city Sunday schools either occupied existing buildings, or were crammed into congested sites at the rear of other buildings, besides being generally built to tight budgets provided by fundraising and charitable donations, very few had elaborate architectural treatment. Early and mid 19th-century charity schools were relatively basic in design, at the very best utilising a simplified Gothic or ‘Old English’ style. Very often the most elaborate element in these buildings were the roof structures which, by the 1850s and ’60s, were often based on the arch-braced open roofs of medieval buildings. The planning of such buildings was initially extremely simple but was to grow more complex over time as additional classrooms and storage and washing facilities were required.

By the late 19th century a strong interest in the community involvement and social improvement of the poor led to the provision by churches of all denominations of very attractive and carefully designed community facilities. Many of these buildings were deliberately distinguished in both materials and architectural style from the nearby church buildings, in order to communicate their use as secular structures. At St Mary Steps the frontage to Stepcote Hill allowed a rich architectural treatment which demonstrates the pride the parish felt in charitable works among their community. The façade is a particularly good example of the late 19th-century ‘Queen Anne’ revival, when Classical motifs were used freely in the spirit of the Flemish Renaissance or Artisan Mannerist styles of the 17th century. In the early 20th century, as at the St David’s, Emmanuel and Trinity halls, the classical style was to predominate and, though now no longer in use as halls, these remain some of the most attractive and impressive buildings in their neighbourhoods.

Church halls and other community buildings are a much under-appreciated strand of late Victorian and Edwardian architecture. Many are under threat of total loss as the churches seek to reduce their financial burdens by divesting themselves of buildings they regard as ‘redundant plant’, expensive to maintain and run, and an added administrative complication in modern parish life. Of the magnificent Edwardian church halls and Sunday schools described above only the St Leonard’s hall remains in its original use, and even that has been to a certain extent supplanted by a new structure adjoining the church. The conversion of the other parish halls and Sunday schools to domestic or office use has too often led to the subdivision of their interiors and the loss of the great open volumes, covered with elaborate roofs, which were formerly such an impressive feature of these buildings. At St Mary Steps Sunday School the current proposals for the reinstatement of the hall as a social and community facility, may ensure the preservation of its open volume and continued public access, and will ensure that the building continues to bear witness to the commitment of the 19th-century church to education, wholesome entertainment and social improvement. After nearly sixty years of very low level maintenance, bordering on neglect, the hall is now in sounder condition than it has been for half a century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was commissioned by Alexei and Ruth Janssen, the current owners of the hall. The archaeological work was carried out by Richard Parker Historic Buildings Survey and Interpretation. The Documentary work was undertaken by Richard Parker and Lucy Browne. We are grateful to Tony Collings for his help and advice regarding the documentary work, and to the staff of the Devon Heritage Centre and the Devon and Exeter Institution. We are also extremely grateful to The Janssen family for their hospitality on site and for their support during the production of this report.
SOURCES CONSULTED

Unpublished Sources

D&EI  Devon and Exeter Institution.
Croump, W.G. 1933-40 ‘Mural monuments and other items of historical and general interest to be seen in the Streets of Exeter’. Bound volume of drawings.

DHC  Devon Heritage Centre
ECA (Exeter City Archives) Orphans’ Court Probate Inventories. Thomas Martin No. 63
Cuttings: Exeter/Churches/St Mary Steps.
4768A/99/PV1 St Mary Steps Minute Book
4768A-99/PW8 St Mary Steps Churchwardens’ Accounts
indexes for St Mary Steps (black folder: Parish Records), Name Index (St Mary Steps)
Drawings medium B/EX P&D 6539. Drawing of Ewings Lane Schools by G. Townsend, October 1869

EA, (Exeter Archaeology) Unpublished Reports.

Published Sources

Allan, J. 2005 An Introduction to the Roman Legionary Fortress at Exeter (Exeter).
Bidwell, P. 1980 Roman Exeter, Fortress and Town (Exeter).
Bovett, R. 1989 Historical Notes on Devon Schools (Exeter).
Cresswell, B. F. 1908 Exeter Churches: Notes on the history, fabrics and features of interest in the churches of the Deanery of Christianity, Devon. (Exeter).
Exeter Flying Post: 15th October 1892; 14th July 1894; 19th September 1896.
Exeter & Plymouth Gazette: 4th December 1895.
Haddon, E. 1980 Reconstruction of the Roman Civil Period Town, based on research by C.G. Henderson and P. Bidwell.
Hoskins, W.G., 1960 Two Thousand Years in Exeter (Chichester).
Jenkins, A. 1806 *The History and Description of the City of Exeter and its Environs, Ancient and Modern*. (Exeter).


Orme, N. 2006 *English Church Dedications with a Survey of Cornwall and Devon*. (Exeter).


Rowe, Cornish & Hooper 1838 *Valuation of the Houses and Lands in the City of Exeter by Order of the Guardians of the Poor and the Improvement Commissioners* (Exeter).

Shapter, Dr. T. 1849 *The History of the Cholera in Exeter in 1832* (London).


Thomas, P. 2008 *Exeter’s West Quarter and Adjacent Areas* (Exeter).


**Map Sources**

Exeter City ‘Chamber Map Book’ 1756-8 (DHC, ECA, Book 58).

John Speed: c.1611 x 2 (Excester; DHC reference: MM B/EXE/1611/SPE).

George Braun c.1618 *Civitas Exoniae (vulgo Excester) urbs primaria in comitatis Devoniae*. DHS reference: OM B/EXE/1618/BRA),

George Braun, original c.1618, unidentified re-engraving 1800 (*Civitas Exoniae (vulgo Excester) urbs primaria* ... DHS reference: MM B/EXE/1618/1800).


Benjamin Donn, 1765 (*Plan of the city and suburbs of Exeter*) DHC reference: PM B/EXE1765/DON.

J Britton, 1805 (Exeter engraved by J.Roper from ... J.Hayman ... to accompany the Beauties of England and Wales - Scale bar 24mm:80) DHC reference: MM B/EXE/1805/BRI).

John Coldridge’s 1819 map of Exeter (DHC reference: PM B/EXE/1819/COL OS 1:500 Map sheet LXXX.6.22, 1876

OS 1:500 City Plan LXXX.6.22, 1888

OS Sheet No. 80.6 2nd Edition 1:2500 1905

Chas. E Goad, 1933 (*Goad plans. - Scale 88 feet to 1 inch. Exeter*)

Plan SX 9192 A 1:2500 (1951) x 2

**Websites**

[http://www.exetermemories.co.uk](http://www.exetermemories.co.uk) the Hall, Stepcote Hill (last accessed 24th July 2014).

DISCLAIMER:

This report has been prepared for the use of Alexei and Ruth Janssen and their professional advisors and should not be used or relied upon for any other project or purpose without the prior written authority of the author. Richard Parker Historic Buildings Recording and Interpretation accepts no responsibility or liability for the consequences of the use of this document for any other persons or purpose other than that for which it was commissioned. Any person/party using or relying on the document for such other purposes agrees, and will by such use or reliance be taken to confirm their agreement to indemnify Richard Parker Historic Buildings Recording and Interpretation for all loss or damage resulting therefrom. No copies, in whole or in part, may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, without the prior written authorisation of Richard Parker Historic Buildings Recording and Interpretation. © Richard Parker Historic Buildings Recording and Interpretation July 2014