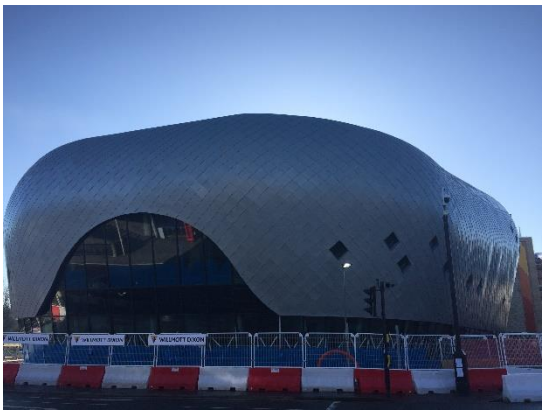
Architecture in your hometown.

Introduction.

After careful consideration I have chosen to compare the architectural style and form of Zion Baptist Church (1905) and Building C of the Taff Vale Redevelopment scheme (2020). Located just 4 miles apart, these buildings reflect how architectural style and form of communal buildings have changed in just over a century.

Zion Baptist Church
(Aneurin James, 2020)



Building C of the Taff Vale Redevelopment scheme (Aneurin James, 2020)

Context and historical background.

Ynysybwl is a village shaped by the impact of the industrial revolution and the opening of The Lady Windsor Colliery in 1884. Zion Baptist Church appears as a break in the continuous terrace façade of the village's main street, slightly set back with a gated forecourt. The Chapel was originally built in 1890 for the cost of £500 and later rebuilt in 1905 (D.J Rees, 1994) because the building was too small for purpose. In 1905 a gallery was added for the price of £2000, all construction was done by Williams Bros.

View of Zion Baptist Church in the landscape (Aneurin James, 2020)

Photograph of window detail (Aneurin James, 2020)

In comparison, Building C of the Taff Vale Redevelopment scheme is situated in a far more prominent and exposed position. Situated on the site of the old precinct, opposite Pontypridd's Old Bridge, the £38 million redevelopment forecast for completion in 2020 promises to provide a mixture of offices and leisure spaces including a gym and a library (Rctcbc.gov.uk, 2016). It will become an iconic building for Pontypridd, as was the old precinct formally of the same location. Demolished in 2011, (Katie-Ann Gupwell, 2018) it was once the centre of town life in the 1960s. The modern construction is commissioned by Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC, designed by Darnton B3 Architecture and constructed by Willmott Dixon. The building is set to be a breath of fresh air amongst the town's Victorian heritage.

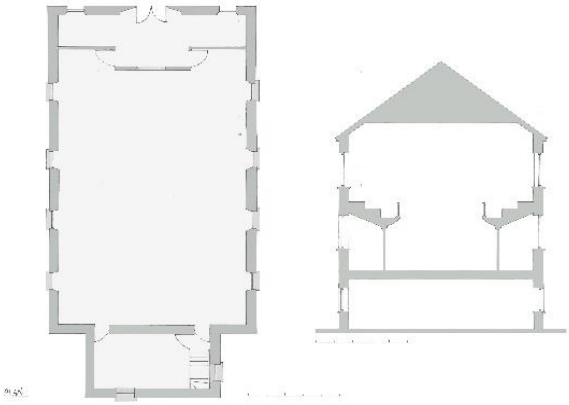
View of Building C from Old Pontypridd Bridge (Aneurin James, 2020)

View of Building C from nearby street (Aneurin James, 2020)

Plan and section.

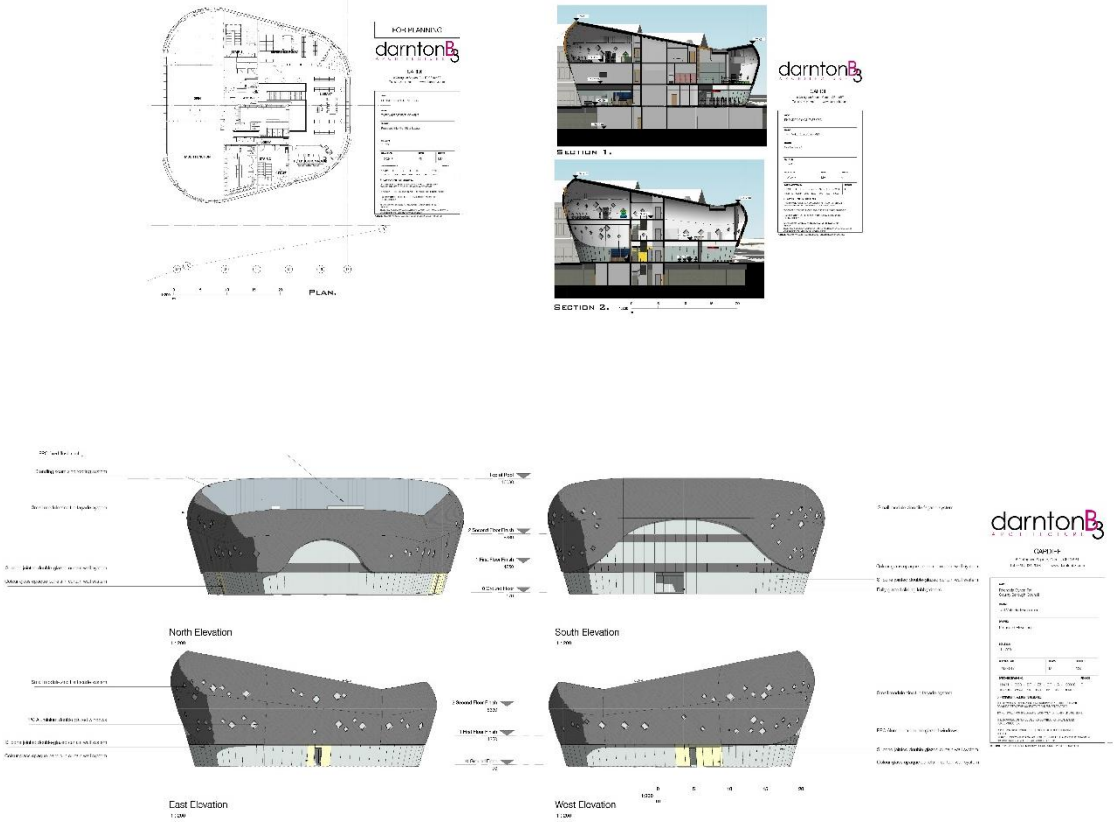
As shown in the plan, section and front elevation, symmetry is a constant theme throughout the structural layout of Zion Baptist Church. The plan shows a porch and Minister's room, with the section showing the lower level vestry. The Church is a detatched building with large windows on ground and first floor gallery level, allowing natural light to flood into the building. The section shows a cut through the main structural elements of the building and emphasises the volume of space enclosed in the structure. This provides a single open plan double height public space. The first floor gallery allows for further seating, ensuring all the congregation can view the minister and engage in the service.

Front elevation drawing (Rita-Jane Parker, 1990)



Plan and Section drawing (Aneurin James, 2020)

Unlike the Church, the new development is asymmetrical in form with a flowing, Hadid esque, aesthetic. Having said this, there are organised elements to the shape of this building shown clearly by the elevations. The elevations show a constant outer shape along the north/south and east/west axis. Upon examination of the section, it is evident that the structure will encapsulate smaller internal spaces than the Church. This allows for many more intimate areas suitable for various purposes rather than one main open space.



Plan, Sections and Elevations of Building C (Darnton B3 Architecture, 2017)

Materials and light.

Zion Baptist Chapel is an example of load bearing masonry construction, that conveys the impression of strength and stability emphasised by its symmetrical façade. The use of masonry is also in keeping with the neighbouring terrace houses, typical of Welsh coal mining villages. It allows the Church to somewhat blend into the masonry façade of the street, despite its shape and larger form. The choice of materials was blue pennant stone walls and Welsh slate tiled roof. All materials were sourced locally and were suitable for providing a strong weatherproof building.

It's hard to imagine how effectively lit Building C will be after completion due to the lack of large windows to some of the internal spaces. Having said this there is a large glazed area on the south elevation allowing maximum light penetration and possible solar gain. Natural lighting of the library is provided by a roof light and the semi-circular window on the northern

elevation, that allows for consistently good quality light whilst its modest size minimises heat loss on this elevation.

Where the Church uses masonry, building C is a steel framed construction with an external timber envelope clad with prefabricated tiles. Modern construction methods and materials in this instance have made this building possible. During the construction of building C, the timber skin was left exposed to the elements and showed signs of deterioration before the final cladding tiles were fixed. It is somewhat questionable whether building C will enjoy the longevity of Zion Baptist Church.

Use.

Both buildings are examples of buildings erected for communal use. Unlike many other Chapels and Churches in the village that have since been converted into storage facilities or dwellings, Zion Baptist Church remains in use as a Chapel. Its plan, typical of chapels constructed during that time, allows the building to be used effectively. The plan also allows the space to be used for a multitude of uses and it's possible that the church will find another use in future. The symmetrical layout of windows allows the building to be used without the aid of artificial light during the day. The large volume and hard surface finishes allows for excellent acoustic properties which enhances the use of the building as a place of worship. Unlike the Chapel, Building C of the redevelopment provides a series of bespoke spaces specific to different uses. Building C allows for a variety of activities to take place simultaneously whereas the church tends to be used for one activity at any given time.

Conclusion.

To conclude, whilst both buildings were built with public use in mind, the construction methods and aesthetic qualities are vastly different. The classical design of the church has allowed for an honest architectural reflection of its intended use. Whereas Building C would lead many people to expect inspiring internal spaces, but, the internal layout does not fulfil this promised potential. Once construction is complete perhaps it would be more appropriate to comment on the overall effectiveness of this building, but the study of its plans suggests that some of the spaces will have a lack of identity and perhaps the architect has missed the opportunity to create something truly special.

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