

# James Fenton (1805 - 1875)

## Architect, Surveyor and Engineer

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James Fenton left his mark on Chelmsford in the mid nineteenth century. He was an accomplished designer of chapels and fine classical domestic buildings, was responsible for laying out New London Road and its cemetery and implemented the towns infrastructure of mains water and sewerage. His work is of significant local importance due to its architectural and historic interest and his strong association with the town of Chelmsford. Many of his remaining buildings have statutory protection as listed buildings or through inclusion within designated conservation areas.



**Bellefield 1840s**



**Thornwoods 1848**

James Fenton was born in Reading in 1805 but established his practice as an architect in Chelmsford, where in 1830 he married the daughter of John Copland, a wealthy non-conformist solicitor. He specialised in designing chapels for non-conformist congregations evident at Chelmsford, Billericay and Ingatestone, he may have been responsible for Chapels in Beccles, Suffolk (1836), Landham, Dorset (1841) and Castle Hedingham (c1842), Essex which closely resemble his recognised works.

Fenton began his career specialising in workhouses. He was commissioned in 1836 to prepare a study of options to extend or relocate the Chelmsford workhouse and was retained by the Dunmow Union Guardians from 1835 as consultant on alterations to their parish workhouses.

Fenton lived above a shop at 2 Tindal Square on his arrival in Chelmsford, until building his first family home at 79 Springfield Road in 1834.

In 1839-43, with two of his Copland relatives, as partners, Fenton developed a large area of land on the south side of Chelmsford. The company also included other local professionals, putting them in a unique position for the time to offer financial and architectural services and brick supplies. Through secret bidding they managed to acquire all of the plots fronting what is now known as New London Road.

Design and conservation

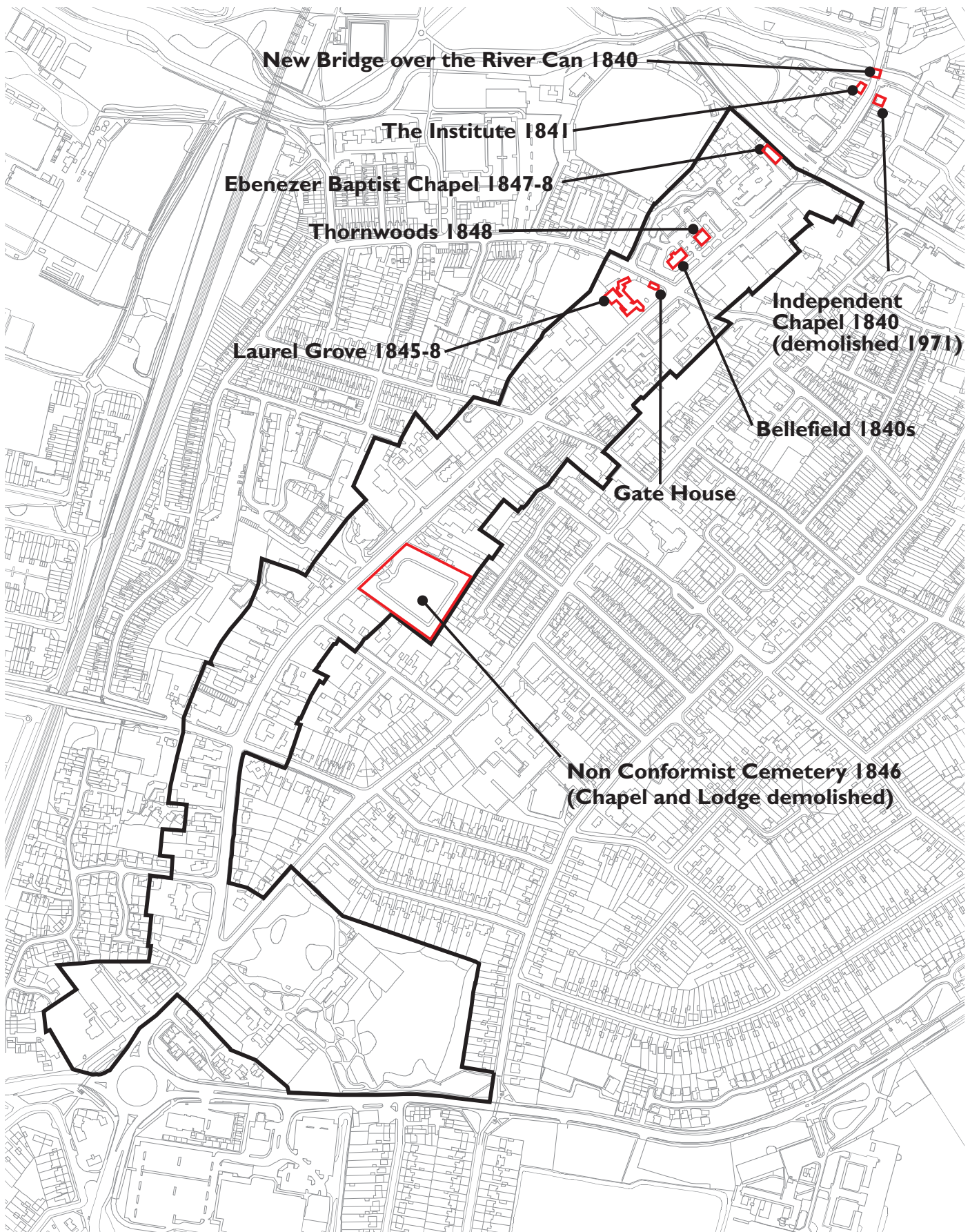
01245 606294

michael.hurst@chelmsford.gov.uk



2003-2004  
Quality of the Built Environment

# Fenton's Buildings in New London Road



 New London Road Conservation Area

Restrictive covenants placed on the land required, amongst other things, the use of white brick or stucco for the elevations, at least a 6 meter (20') set back from the road and a minimum price of £400 for detached houses and £350 for semi detached houses. This helped to give the uniform arcadian character of the street. The feeling of a grand ceremonial approach to the town, along a wide, tree-lined avenue bordered by large mansions with an open green setting front and rear remains today.

Fenton designed the elliptical cast iron bridge to carry New London Road across the River Can. Fenton also designed some of the large mansions in the suburbs of Chelmsford, including his own house Laurel Grove and those for his brother's in-law, John and Albert Copland (Thornwood and Bellefield). All these buildings were built in a classical style in white brick manufactured locally.

In 1850 Fenton was appointed Surveyor to the newly-formed Chelmsford Local Board of Health, in preference to the younger and inexperienced Fredrick Chancellor. He planned and executed a major water supply and sewage system for the town. This brought about significant improvements in local health and sanitation. In 1857 Fenton resigned to take up a similar post with the Croydon Health Board.

Some time between 1865 and 1869 Fenton and his wife Emma moved from Croydon To Brixton. In 1875 fenton died and is buried in the non-conformist cemetery in New London Road, which he had designed in 1846.

Known examples of his work in Chelmsford are:

- Independent Chapel, New London road, 1840 (demolished 1971)
- The development of New London Road, 1840-48
- The 'New Bridge' over the River Can, 1840
- Ebenezer Baptist Chapel, New London Road, 1847-8
- Non Conformist Cemetery, New London Road, 1846 (Chapel and Lodge demolished)
- Thornwoods, New London Road, 1848
- Laurel Grove and Gatehouse, 108 New London Road, 1845-8
- Bellefield, New London Road, 1840s
- The Institute, New London road, 1841
- 79 Springfield Road, 1834



***Burial site of James Fenton in the non-conformist cemetery New London Road***



***Independent Chapel 1840 (Demolished 1971)***



***New bridge 1840***



***Ebenezer Baptist Chapel 1847-8***



***Non Conformist Cemetery 1846***



***Laurel Grove 1845-8***



***Laurel Grove Gatehouse 1845-8***

Other examples of his work of interest are:

- Independent Chapel, Billericay, 1837
- Congregational Chapel, Ingatestone, 1840
- Congregational Church, Marlow, Buckinghamshire, 1840

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