

# ECCLESIOLOGY TODAY



*Ecclesiology Today • Issue 54 • Summer 2017*

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ISSN: 1460-4213

Published 2017 by the Ecclesiological Society  
c/o The Society of Antiquaries of London  
Burlington House  
Piccadilly  
London  
W1V 0HS

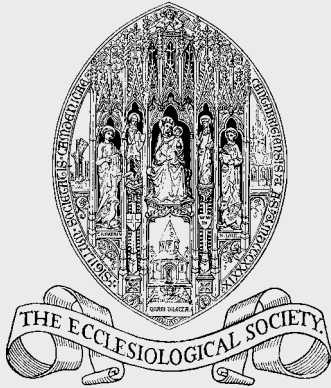
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Charity No. 210501.

[www.ecclsoc.org](http://www.ecclsoc.org)

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Printed in the United Kingdom by Henry Ling Limited, at the Dorset Press, Dorchester, DT1 1HD

*Cover image: The North Transept of Bromley Parish Church designed by J. Harold Gibbons, with sculpture by James Wedgwood. (Photo: Des Hill)*



*Journal of the  
Ecclesiological Society*

# Ecclesiology Today

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## Editor's letter

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Dear Fellow Member,

welcome to the fifty-fourth edition of *Ecclesiology Today*.

Architectural history and conservation are woven through this edition in equal measure. Richard Peats' fascinating new research into the church interiors of the great Victorian architect, G. E. Street, in the diocese of Oxford provides the context for a consideration of how and to what extent those interiors could be protected. Paul Velluet meanwhile makes a positive case for re-ordering and new design in Victorian churches, highlighting three recent schemes in London.

Robert Drake follows up his article in the last edition of *ET* on the twentieth-century architect, J. Harold Gibbons, with a closer look at six works spanning his career from the eve of the First World War to the aftermath of the second. An underlying theme of this article is the vulnerability of twentieth-century churches to harmful change and the importance of listing to their protection.

Another threat to churches – which sadly often features in our sister publication, *Churchcrawler* – is fire. Our final article in this edition describes the case of St Mary-at-Hill in the City of London which had one of the most glorious interiors of any City church before a fire nearly thirty years ago. A limited amount of restoration followed, but in this article Gavin Stamp argues that full restoration is still both desirable and feasible. I am grateful that he has also offered us the opportunity to publish his photographs of the church shortly after the fire, which form an important historical record of the event.

As ever, I would welcome contributions to future editions of *ET*. I am particularly keen to have more articles on medieval subjects. More details about how to contribute can be found at the back of the journal.

Nick Chapple  
editor@ecclsoc.org

# The church furnishings of George Edmund Street

Richard Peats

GEORGE EDMUND STREET (1821–81) was a very busy man. In the course of a 34-year career he designed around 153 churches and undertook many more restorations. The sheer quantity of his work poses a conservation problem. Many congregations wish to change the interiors of their buildings to allow them to be used more flexibly, involving the loss of Victorian fixtures and fittings. Given that Street restored or designed so many buildings it is unlikely that all of them can be retained in their current form and a way of assessing the relative significance of his interiors is needed so that sensible decisions can be made about their future. Key questions are: was Street personally responsible for the design of all the fittings in churches he restored or did he delegate to contractors or assistants; did he design fittings for each building individually or use a limited stock of standard designs; how well do his church interiors survive, should every complete example be treasured or are they still ubiquitous? The aim of this article is to explore these issues by looking at Street's work in the diocese of Oxford.

*Richard Peats is an Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas with Historic England covering Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, which happens to roughly equate with the diocese of Oxford. His interest in Street was piqued by encountering so many of Street's restorations as part of his work.*

## *Street in the diocese of Oxford*

Oxford Diocese is an ideal area to study Street as he was appointed diocesan architect in 1850, only six years after his first commission, and he held the post until his death in 1881.<sup>1</sup> As a result there is an unusually high concentration of churches that he designed or restored, spanning virtually his entire career. He was responsible for the restoration of 91 churches as well as the design of 23 completely new ones. All remain in ecclesiastical use bar three, representing 14% of the current stock of churches in the diocese. Restoration could mean anything from thorough repairs to almost complete rebuilding. In most cases the built fabric of the churches he restored largely retained its medieval appearance, with original work confined to small additions such as porches, organ lofts and vestries.<sup>2</sup> What nearly always changed radically were the interiors, where he normally removed all the fittings and replaced them with new, more ecclesiologically correct ones.<sup>3</sup> This thoroughness is unsurprising. Street was working at the front edge of the Gothic Revival. The churches he was commissioned to restore had suffered years of neglect and were fitted out in the standard manner of the eighteenth century, with box pews and galleries. These had become unacceptable to a new generation of incumbents.

## *Street's general approach to architectural detailing*

What is already known about Street's working practices suggests he was obsessed with architectural details and believed that they

were fundamental to creating a good building. His son records him as stating that:

Three-fourths of the poetry of a building lies in its minor details; and it is easier to design a cathedral with academical accuracy than to devise and work out a really fine idea in stained glass, or a true, vigorous, and beautiful treatment of a story or even of foliage, in the tympanum of a doorway.<sup>4</sup>

Where his office was engaged in a project, anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that Street himself would have been responsible for the design. George Gilbert Scott said of Street that ‘he can lay claim to his more personally than I can to mine, as he gives drawings, while I do my work by influence’.<sup>5</sup> Accounts by those who worked with Street also suggest that he exercised unusually tight control of the design process. One of his former pupils, Richard Norman Shaw, recalled that Street did all the design work himself and left nothing but merely mechanical work to his assistants, stating that: ‘I am certain that during the whole time I

*Fig. 1: Interior of St Mary's, Bloxham; east end. (Henry Taunt Collection CC57/00945, reproduced by permission of Historic England)*



was with him I never designed one single moulding'.<sup>6</sup> Another former pupil, quoted in Street's obituary in *The Builder* but who wished to remain anonymous, stated that Street would let his pupils draw up some designs but would almost invariably alter them in some way saying that it was 'not that your work is necessarily bad, but it must be mine'.<sup>7</sup> His son, A. E. Street, remembered that when designing the Royal Courts of Justice in London he would not willingly forgo making the design for even the smallest piece of enrichment, and would never allow a carver or ironworker to alter his designs.<sup>8</sup>

It seems incredible that even a man as industrious as Street could have had the time and energy to individually design the fittings for all of the churches he designed or restored. One is tempted to assume that the accounts of his assistants contain a degree of hyperbole or that the design of individual fittings was on occasion devolved to the contractors responsible, but surviving documentary evidence and an examination of the churches strongly suggests that Street himself designed bespoke fittings for all of them.

### *The restoration of St Mary's, Bloxham*

By happy chance one of his most complete restorations, that of the Church of St Mary, Bloxham (Fig. 1), of 1864–66, is one of the few where an ample archive pertaining to the restoration has been preserved. It was also typical in that the main impact on the character of the church was the new fittings. Furthermore, Street did not have a strong personal tie to the parish, there were no family connections, nor were the works part of a series commissioned by a particular patron who admired his work. It is therefore likely to be representative of his normal working practices.

A committee to oversee the restoration of the church was formed on 4 October 1862.<sup>9</sup> Progress initially appears to have been slow and little was achieved until March 1864 when Bishop Wilberforce wrote to the incumbent, William Hodgson, urging him to appoint a first rate ecclesiastical architect. He also encouraged the parish to undertake a more thorough restoration than simply repairing the roof and to apply to George Edmund Street for a plan. Wilberforce recommended Street on the basis that as diocesan architect he would do this at no other charge than his percentage as architect and that 'he is a first rate hand at dealing with old buildings'.<sup>10</sup> The committee took Wilberforce's advice seriously and acted quickly. Three architects – Street, George Gilbert Scott and William Butterfield – were considered and Street was selected at a meeting on 9 March.<sup>11</sup>

After this, progress was rapid. A faculty was granted on 26 September 1864 to:

Completely restore the roofs, clean and repair the walls and stonework, take up floors and replace in stone and tile, remove the organ and gallery, remove lower floor of tower, take away present seats and substitute them for the kind shown on plan, or others similar in section, alter level of floors, erect a vestry or organ chamber on north side of chancel and place an organ in it on the floor, either in said chamber or on floor of church between the south aisle and the Milcombe Chantry, restore the old screen to its ancient position, to erect a new pulpit and other necessary furniture including the litany stool, lectern, chancel stalls, altar and sculptured reredos over the altar and to erect an altar for daily prayer in the Milcombe Chapel.<sup>12</sup>

A specification was also drawn up by Street.<sup>13</sup> This included detailed instructions as to how the church was to be fitted out, which made clear that the chancel stalls, nave benches, altar and doors were to be executed in line with the architect's drawings. Unfortunately these drawings do not survive. Mr Chapman of Magdalen Bridge, Oxford is named in the specification as the carver for the stalls. The Bloxham specification also includes detailed instructions for the pattern of the floor tiling, illustrated with a sketch in the margin, and a further sketch outlining the form of the vestry screen (Fig. 2). A letter from the organ builder, J. W. Walker, to the Revd Mr Hodgson made it clear that Street was responsible for the design of the organ case,<sup>14</sup> while a letter from George Wood (Street's clerk of works) to Hodgson indicates that Street designed the altar frontal.<sup>15</sup>



Fig. 2: Detail of specification for the restoration of St Mary's, Bloxham showing design for the vestry screen. (Reproduced by permission of Oxford History Centre; M.S.S.D.D.Par. Bloxham. C8)

The fitting out of the interior did not take place exactly as specified, as a number of details were changed as works progressed. In their estimate of 14 September 1864 the builders, Kimberly and Hopecroft, gave alternative prices for executing the nave benches and chancel fittings in deal or oak.<sup>16</sup> Evidently oak was chosen for both and the specification amended in pencil accordingly. A letter from Street to Hodgson dated 9 March 1866 talks about altering the design of the reredos and the form of tiles for the floor. Decisions about the carving of the pulpit were particularly complex. A series of letters written between August and September 1866 indicate that tenders for the work were received from both the main contractor, Hopecroft, and from Street's favoured sculptor, Thomas Earp. Earp's quote was significantly more expensive and there was some debate as to whether to save money by leaving out the carving, which was resolved by Hopecroft carving the pulpit and Earp adding additional detailing at the cost of £10.<sup>17</sup>

### *Street's approach to church furnishings in the diocese as a whole*

Few other specifications survive but those that do show that the level of control exercised by Street at Bloxham was typical throughout the diocese. That for the restoration of nearby church of St Peter and St Paul, Deddington (Oxfordshire, 1868, in which Hopecroft was also contractor) contains a similar detailed description of how the floors are to be laid out and an instruction for all seats in the nave to be built in accordance with the architect's drawings.<sup>18</sup> Similar instructions relating to seating and floors are found in Street's specifications for the restoration of



Fig. 3: Church of St Simon and St Jude, Milton-under-Wychwood; Street's design for the chancel. (Reproduced by permission of Oxford History Centre; PAR173/11/Y/1-3)



St James's, Aston Abbots (Buckinghamshire), of January 1865,<sup>19</sup> the chancel of St Mary's, Shipton-under-Wychwood (Oxfordshire), dated July 1858,<sup>20</sup> and for St Michael's, Tilehurst (Berkshire) of 1854.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately the drawings referred to in these specifications rarely survive. The only examples of drawings for church fittings by Street in the diocese known to exist are those for the chancel furniture, font and pulpit at the church of St Simon and St Jude, Milton-under-Wychwood (Oxfordshire) (Fig. 3).<sup>22</sup>

Documentation relating to other churches in the diocese that he built or restored is sparse. Faculties are relatively common and set out the work to be done but do not record who was responsible for individual elements. The only other documents are correspondence which happens to have survived. Of the latter the most telling are Street's bill for works at All Saints, Middleton Stoney (Oxfordshire) of 5 November 1869 which includes £1, 1s for the design of the lectern;<sup>23</sup> and a bill for £137 for the chancel seats at St Peter's, Burnham (Buckinghamshire). This indicates that they were executed in wainscot oak according to Street's designs.<sup>24</sup> Undated correspondence from Street makes it clear that he personally supervised the design of the lectern, litany desk, pulpit, chancel screens, stalls, seats and flooring of the chancel of this church.<sup>25</sup>

A study of the fabric of the 114 churches in the diocese Street built or restored paints a similar picture. It is clear that the furnishings for each were nearly all designed individually for the building, as the same design is rarely repeated. The same design of a nave bench reoccurs only once: the Y-shaped bench he used at All Saints, Boyne Hill, Maidenhead (Berkshire, 1854–57), was repeated at All Saints, Nash (1857–58). Very occasionally he re-used a design for an altar rail. That used at St Andrew's, Great Rollright (Oxfordshire, 1852) was repeated at St Edward the



*Fig. 4: Church of St Mary, White Waltham; altar rail.  
(Photo: Richard Peats)*

Confessor's, Westcot Barton (Oxfordshire, 1856), while St Mary's, White Waltham (Berkshire, 1868–69), and St Laud's, Sherrington (Buckinghamshire, 1870), also share the same design (Fig. 4). Inevitably some are very similar, being variations on a theme. For instance the lecterns at the church of the Holy Trinity, Ascott-under-Wychwood (Oxfordshire, 1857–59) and All Saints, Chilton (Berkshire, 1859–60) are virtually identical, the only difference being that Ascott has openwork tracery around the bookrest while Chilton's is blind (Figs 5 and 6). The closeness in date and use in very different buildings suggests that this was a form that was on his mind at the time and which he liked, rather than a response to a specific context.

As a whole his interiors display a distinct family resemblance and have a particular look and feel which marks them out as designs by Street rather than selections from a catalogue or designs by a contractor. Nave benches tend to be simple and robust with

*Fig. 5: (left) Church of the Holy Trinity, Ascott-under-Wychwood; lectern. (Photo: Richard Peats)*

*Fig. 6: (right) Church of All Saints, Chilton; lectern. (Photo: Richard Peats)*







*Fig. 7: A selection of nave bench ends from churches designed or restored by Street. (Photo: Richard Peats)*

a bewildering variety of bench ends (Fig. 7). Fonts are relatively rare, as the medieval one was reused wherever it survived, and tend to be simple: figurative carving is rare and polychromy restricted to supporting shafts in the base (Fig. 8). Pulpits are a mix of timber and stone. Again figurative carving is rare but polychromy is relatively common (Fig. 9). Lecterns tend to be triangular bookrests rather than eagles (Figs 5 and 6). There is often a low



*Fig. 8: (top) Church of St Augustine, Westbury; font. (Photo: Richard Peats)*

*Fig. 9: (bottom) Church of St Mary, Bloxham; pulpit. (Photo: Richard Peats)*



*Fig. 10: (top) Church of St Olave, Fritwell; chancel screen.*  
(Photo: Richard Peats)



*Fig. 11: (middle) Street's chancel furnishings at their simplest at St Lawrence's, Milcombe.*  
(Photo: Richard Peats)



*Fig. 12: (bottom) More elaborate choir stalls at St Mary's, Bloxham.*  
(Photo: Richard Peats)



stone screen between nave and chancel, sometimes plain, sometimes enriched with mouldings or a band of quatrefoils. In the most elaborate of his interiors screens are topped with iron prickets, often forged by James Leaver of Maidenhead (Fig. 10). Choir stalls are always more elaborate than the nave benches and range from the very simple to richly decorated with elaborate frontals (Figs 11 and 12). Altar rails vary from simple timber post-and-rail with minimal decoration, to fantastic creations in iron and brass (Figs 4 and 13). Reredoses are present in 38 of his buildings and generally but not exclusively carved in stone.<sup>26</sup> Some have polychromatic mosaics with a central cross (Fig. 14)



*Fig. 13: (top) Church of St James the Great, Eastbury; altar rail.  
(Photo: Richard Peats)*

*Fig. 14: (bottom) St Peter's, Ilmer; the simplest of a group of mosaic reredoses with inlaid central crosses in north Buckinghamshire.  
(Photo: Richard Peats)*

while others feature architectural carving or biblical scenes (Fig. 15). The best are flanked by decorative panels of carved stone or tiles. Street's favoured sculptor for reredoses, fonts and pulpits was Thomas Earp. Earp had established an architectural sculpture business in Lambeth in the 1850s and worked with a number of leading architects including George Gilbert Scott, A. W. N. Pugin and S. S. Teulon. However, his collaboration with Street, which began in the mid-1850s and lasted until Street's death, was his strongest professional relationship.<sup>27</sup> Floors are generally of tile and get progressively more elaborate as one moves further east. Naves tend to be relatively simple, often with plain tiles in only two or three colours with decorative tiles and more elaborate patterns being introduced in the chancel and a further layer of complexity added in the sanctuary (Figs 16 and 17).

The level of detailing within Street's interiors ranges from the very simple to highly complex. What marks them out as distinctively 'Streety' is the care that goes into every detail: even a simple chamfer generally terminates in a stop with flare. They are also characterised by a sense of robustness; his work always has a solidity and an angularity of form which gives it a distinctive and slightly ferocious muscular quality. This is a result of much of his decoration being created by combining medieval architectural details in a highly inventive way which is distinctly un-medieval. The result looks thoroughly Gothic but at the same time unmistakably nineteenth-century. A good example of this is the Lord's table at Holy Trinity, Ascott-under-Wychwood. Here a common fourteenth-century moulding profile has been turned on its side and used as a spandrel decoration in the top corners of each panel.<sup>28</sup> Another typical touch is the use of a wave-like stop to the chamfered corners of the legs which is often found on the column bases of his arcades.



*Fig. 15: St Mary's, Bloxham; one of Street's more complex, polychrome reredoses. (Photo: Richard Peats)*





*Fig. 16: (top) Church of St Mary the Virgin, Ivinghoe; nave floor.  
(Photo: Richard Peats)*

*Fig. 17: (bottom) Church of St Barnabas, Peasmore; chancel floor.  
(Photo: Richard Peats)*



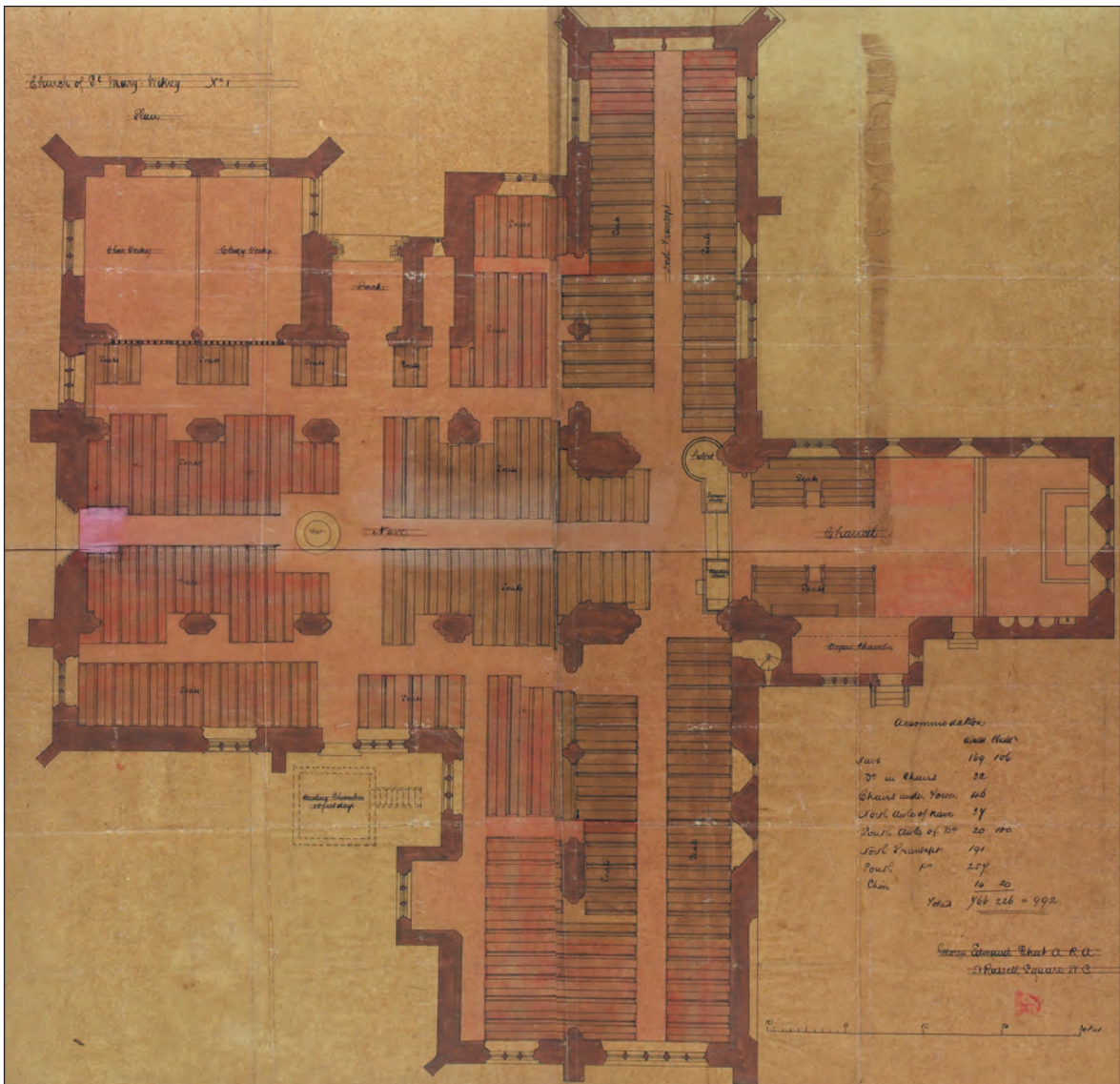


## *The survival of Street's work*

While it is probable that Street individually designed the fittings for almost all his churches himself, how well do they survive? Are all complete examples now so rare that this confers a higher level of significance on them or are they still common?

No church remains just as Street left it. It is rare for light fittings and heating apparatus to survive and every church has had some benches removed. This is unsurprising. As built or restored these buildings were packed with pews in order to accommodate as many of the population as possible, as is demonstrated by Street's plan of the restored St Mary, Witney (Fig. 18). Thinning-out of pews began in the later nineteenth century to create spaces

Fig. 18: Church of St Mary, Witney; plan as restored by Street.  
(Reproduced by permission of Lambeth Palace Library; ICBS06471a)



for side chapels and vestries and continued in the later twentieth century with removal to make space for children's corners, often in the aisles. Miniature children's benches were often the first to be removed and are now rare. In recent years the pace of change has increased. Church buildings are now seen as not simply places of worship for use on Sundays but community facilities which are expected to provide refreshments, lavatories and flexible space for a variety of activities. Recent research in the diocese by Becky Payne suggests that church buildings which have made available for use by the wider community tend to attract new members into their congregations and increase the number of people that value the building and are willing to help maintain it, so this trend is likely to continue.<sup>29</sup>

In order to provide these facilities it is usually necessary to take out at least some of the pews, and congregations often



*Fig. 19: (left) Church of St Mary, Salford; view into the chancel. (Photo: Richard Peats)*

*Fig. 20: (below) Church of St John the Baptist, Shottesbrooke; nave bench end. (Photo: Richard Peats).*



consider more radical re-orderings involving removal of all the pews and sometimes the chancel furniture as well. In the last 25 years six churches with interiors attributed to Street in the Oxford diocese have lost all their nave seating; similar work is or has been contemplated in four others. A further four have had faculty granted for the removal of areas of nave seating and proposals are afoot for similar works at thirteen more churches. Despite this a high proportion of Street's interiors (55, which is 50% of them) survive substantially intact. A further 24 (or 22%) survive partially intact whilst another 24 (22% of the total) only remain in a fragmentary state or have completely lost their interiors.



*Fig. 21: Church of St Philip and St James, Oxford; the east end c.1870 showing Street's original reredos. (BB68/08814, reproduced by permission of Historic England)*



### *Assessing the significance of Street's church interiors*

Unfortunately it would be too simplistic to assume that the 55 relatively complete examples are the most significant. Some, such as St Mary, Salford, Oxfordshire, are complete but rather dull. The benches are very plain, as are the chancel furnishings and pulpit (Fig 19). Some buildings have been greatly altered but include individual elements of a very high quality which arguably make them more important than a complete but routine example – for instance the church of St John the Baptist, Shottesbrooke, Berkshire, which has been greatly altered but contains one of Street's finest polychromatic stone pulpits and a set of particularly fine benches (Fig. 20). In others, such as St Nicholas, Hedsor (Buckinghamshire), Street's restoration has now been overlaid by a later restoration by Hepworth,<sup>30</sup> leaving little more than a font; but this contributes to what is nevertheless a remarkable Victorian interior.

*Fig. 22: Church of All Saints, Boyne Hill, Maidenhead; general view.  
(AA79/01739, reproduced by permission of Historic England).*





Fig 23: Church of All Saints, Brightwalton; view from the south aisle. (AA79/01739, reproduced by permission of Historic England)



Fig. 24: Church of St Mary, Fawley; view of east end. (AA79/02088, reproduced by permission of Historic England)





*Fig. 25: Church of St Mary, Westcott; view of east end. (BB018586, reproduced by permission of Historic England)*

In my view there is a relatively small group of Street's interiors of particular significance. The surviving complete interiors of the churches he designed are of importance as they form part of a coherent whole in a way that a restoration cannot and tend to have all the characteristic elements of a Street interior described above. Of the 23 churches Street designed in the diocese, sixteen (70%) survive with their interiors largely intact. Unfortunately the most spectacular of these, the Church of St Philip and St James, Oxford is no longer in ecclesiastical use and now hosts the library of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. Despite this, the interior survives remarkably well. As built, the nave was filled with chairs rather than benches. Street's spectacular font, screen and pulpit survive as do some excellent choir stalls (albeit obscured by shelves). The reredos, while dramatic, is an addition by Burlison & Grylls of 1882–85.<sup>31</sup> The remains of Street's rather simpler design can be found behind it (Fig. 21). Street's other masterwork in the diocese, All Saints, Boyne Hill, Maidenhead, remains in use but has been altered (Fig. 22). The nave was extended by A. E. Street in

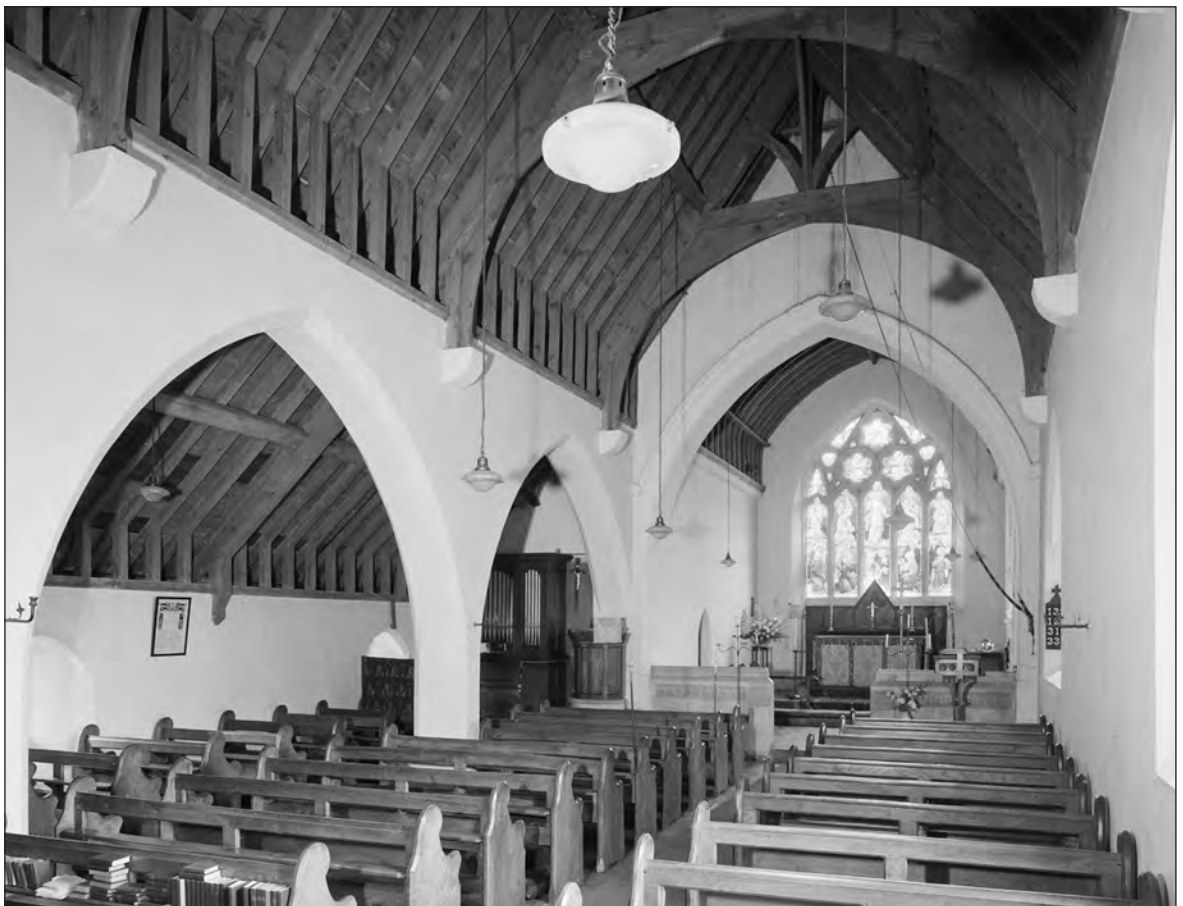


Fig. 26: Church of St James the Great, Eastbury; interior looking east. (AA014792, reproduced by permission of Historic England)



1910–11 and alterations to the chancel, which involved bringing the screen forward and adding the canopies to the western two pairs of choir stalls, probably took place at the same time.<sup>32</sup>

Two of his best country churches, All Saints, Brightwalton and St Mary's Fawley (both in Berkshire) also have excellent furnishings and have been very little altered (Figs 23 and 24). The outstanding quality of both is due to the generous patronage of the Wroughton family for both buildings.<sup>33</sup> Both include all the classic features of a Street interior and their woodwork in particular displays his characteristic robustness and inventiveness. Other interiors of Street's new churches are not as rich but sometimes the simplicity is of interest in itself. At St Mary's, Westcott (Buckinghamshire), the aggressive simplicity of the building as a whole forms an essential part of its aesthetic (Fig. 25). The plainness of his earliest church in the diocese, St James the Great, Eastbury (Berkshire), must partly be driven by budget (it only cost £1000),<sup>34</sup> but the interior is also entirely in keeping with the barn-like simplicity of the building as a whole and is a perfect response to the downland village in which it sits (Fig. 26).

*Fig. 27: Church of All Saints, Nash; interior looking east. (AA014590, reproduced by permission of Historic England)*



All Saints, Nash (Buckinghamshire), while probably the plainest of all his churches (where the context could have justified something more elaborate), demonstrates just how inventive Street could be even when constrained by a very tight budget (Fig. 27).<sup>35</sup>

There is also a small group of particularly well furnished restorations which are of particular value. The finest and most complete is undoubtedly St Mary's, Bloxham. This has a degree of richness to the decoration only found in his best work and all the classic elements of a Street interior are present apart from the low screen; instead the medieval screen has been carefully restored (Figs 1, 9, 12 and 15). Also of note are St Mary's, North Leigh (Oxfordshire), which has a particularly unusual stone screen supporting a medieval painted rood; All Saints, Soulbury; St Michael's Stewkley and All Saints, Wotton Underwood (all in Buckinghamshire). There are a number of others where only the chancel survives but this is of particularly high quality. The best of these is St Barnabas', Peasemore (Berkshire), where Street's exceptionally rich chancel was added onto an earlier nineteenth-century nave which retains its original pews (Fig. 28). At

*Fig. 28: Church of St Barnabas, Peasemore; detail of chancel. (Photo: Richard Peats)*





*Fig. 29: Church of St Mary, Purley-on-Thames; view into the chancel.  
(BB83/05977, reproduced by permission of Historic England)*





*Fig. 30: Church of the Holy Trinity, Ascott-under-Wychwood, detail of medieval bench ends.  
(Photo: Richard Peats)*

St Mary's, Purley-on-Thames (Berkshire), a very fine chancel remains while the nave fittings have been lost (Fig. 29).

Other churches that should be singled out as being of significance are those where individual fittings of particularly high quality survive. The quality of Street's work seems to have been very consistent within a building so these tend to be churches which have been reordered, leaving only a few elements. The best example is the already mentioned church of St John the Baptist, Shottesbrooke.

A final group of particular value are those that demonstrate Street's approach to medieval fabric and furnishings. While his restorations could involve substantial renewal of medieval stonework, as for example when St Lawrence, Milcombe (Oxfordshire) was almost completely rebuilt,<sup>36</sup> this was generally because the condition of the building was so poor that rebuilding

was the only reasonable option. He also had a prejudice against Perpendicular work typical of his generation which is demonstrated by the replacement of the east window at the church of St Peter and St Paul, Wantage (Oxfordshire) with a Decorated example,<sup>37</sup> but his treatment of medieval furnishings seems to have been very careful. Where he found existing medieval seating, such as at St Michael's, Steventon (Oxfordshire), and the Holy Trinity, Ascott-under-Wychwood (Oxfordshire) this was always restored and replicated (Fig. 30). While he seems to have removed what were probably medieval chancel screens at St Michael's-at-the-Northgate, Oxford (1854) and St Peter's, Drayton (Oxfordshire, 1855), early in his career, these were normally carefully restored, as at Bloxham.<sup>38</sup> One of the most interesting examples of his approach to medieval fabric is at the Church of St Michael and All Angels, Warfield (Berkshire). Here Street not only carefully restored the fifteenth-century screen in the north aisle but reconstructed the chancel screen and reredos based on surviving fragments of the original.

### *Conclusion*

All Street's interiors which survive at least partially intact are of architectural and historical interest. The most remarkable form one end of a continuum ranging from the spectacular to the simple rather than constituting a discrete group and it is difficult to define a boundary between those interiors which should be preserved at all costs and those where a greater degree of flexibility is appropriate. Further analysis is needed to determine more clearly where those in the middle of this continuum stand in the canon of Street interiors and to understand how Street's approach to fittings compares with that of other great architects of the period. At present the best approach to assessing an interior when change is proposed is to compare it to the best of Street's work, as exemplified by Bloxham and his most mundane, which is arguably Salford, and make a judgement about which the building in question is closer to.

Assessing the work of George Edmund Street is hampered by the fact that he is the greatest Victorian architect who has not had a major study devoted to his life and work (his son's biography, while containing much useful information, is hardly a dispassionate assessment). While frustrating – as it is difficult to get to grips with his vast output without a guide to show the way – this does have its benefits: it forces the researcher to engage with Street's buildings and writings first hand, which leads to a deeper appreciation of his work.

## Notes

- 1 Victorian Society *G E Street churches in the diocese of Oxford* (n.d.)
- 2 In the diocese of Oxford this was the case for 66 (73%) of his restorations.
- 3 Fieldwork suggests that the vast majority of his restorations in the Oxford diocese (78%) involved the complete removal of fittings and refurnishing of the church. That complete refurnishing was his default approach is confirmed by the standard wording of the surviving faculties associated with Street's restorations which was to "remove the whole of the present pews and sittings and substitute new and open sittings". Examples of faculties bearing this formula include St Britius', Brize Norton (Oxford History Centre: MS.Oxf.Dioc.papers: c.1746); St John the Baptist', Burford (c.1753); St James', Cowley (c.1955/1); St Olave's, Fritwell (c.1826); St Ebbe's, Oxford (c.1931/1) and St Michael's, Oxford (c.1944) to name but a few.
- 4 A. E. Street, *A Memoir of George Edmund Street*, (1888), 87.
- 5 Street, *Memoir*, 136.
- 6 Joseph Kinnard 'G E Street, the Law Courts and the Seventies', in P. Ferriday (ed.) *Victorian Architecture* (1963) 228.
- 7 *The Builder* vol. LXI (1881), 779.
8. Street, *Memoir*, 136.
- 9 Oxford History Centre, M.S.D.D.Par.Bloxham C.16, Minutes of church restoration committee.
- 10 Oxford History Centre, M.S.D.D.Par.Bloxham C.16, Bishop Wilberforce's letter to Revd Hodgson dated 2 March 1864.
- 11 Oxford History Centre, M.S.D.D.Par.Bloxham C.16, Minutes of church restoration committee.
- 12 Oxford History Centre, M.S.D.D.Par.Bloxham C.16, Copy of Faculty dated 26 September 1864.
- 13 Oxford History Centre, M.S.D.D.Par.Bloxham C.16, Street's specification for the restoration.
- 14 Oxford History Centre, M.S.D.D.Par.Bloxham C.16, letter from J. W. Walker to Revd Hodgson dated 6 August 1866.
- 15 Oxford History Centre, M.S.D.D.Par.Bloxham C.16, letter from George Wood on behalf of Street dated 20 October 20 1866.
- 16 Oxford History Centre, M.S.D.D.Par.Bloxham C.16, Estimate from Kimberly and Hopecroft dated 14 September 1864.
- 17 Oxford History Centre, M.S.D.D.Par.Bloxham C.16, letters from George Wood on behalf of Street dated 27 August, 3 September and 7 September 1866.
- 18 Oxford History Centre, PAR86/11/2/Y/2.
- 19 Buckinghamshire Records Office, PR7/6/5.
- 20 Oxford History Centre, PAR236/11/A1/1.
- 21 Berkshire Records Office, D/P 132/6/4.
- 22 Oxford History Centre, PAR173/11/Y/1-3.
- 23 Oxford History Centre, MSS.D.D.Par.Middleton Stoney.c.4.c.
- 24 Buckinghamshire Records Office, PR31/3/7-19.
- 25 Berkshire Records Office, D/P182/28/40/6.
- 26 As Anthony and Susanna Branfoot point out Street's liberal use of reredos in small country churches such as Fawley and Brightwalton is a little at odds with Ecclesiological Society guidance, which recommended that they were only used in large churches. Anthony and Susanna Branfoot 'The old and the new: influences and style in the work of G. E. Street in Berkshire' in Elliot, J. and Pritchard, J. (eds) *George Edmund Street A Victorian Architect in Berkshire* (1998), 29-45 (p.33)
- 27 'Thomas Earp', *Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain and Ireland 1851-1951*, University of Glasgow History of Art and HATHI, online database 2011
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- 29 Becky Payne, 'Challenges facing congregations undertaking major projects', *Ecclesiology Today*, 51 (January 2015), 55-72 (p.55).
- 30 Nikolaus Pevsner and Elizabeth Williamson, *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire*, (1994), 380-1.

- 31 Jeniver Sherwood and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), 297–8.
- 32 Geoffrey Tyack, Simon Bradley and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Berkshire*, (2010), 368–70.
- 33 Pevsner, *Berkshire*, 208–9, 305.
- 34 New Churches, *The Ecclesiologist*, 12 (1851), 150–152 (p.150).
- 35 Pevsner, *Buckinghamshire*, 573.
- 36 Oxford History Centre, OHS: MS.Oxf.Dioc.papers; c.1894, draft faculty dated 23 May 1859.
- 37 Pevsner, *Berkshire*, 587.
- 38 Oxford History Centre, MS.Oxf.Dioc.papers; c.1944, petition for faculty for the church of St Michael, Oxford dated 27 May 1853; Pevsner, *Berkshire*, 276.

## VIEWPOINT: Re-ordering the Victorian church: some reflections on the challenges of meeting the needs of the worshipping community in historic settings

Paul Velluet

PROPOSALS FOR THE RE-ORDERING of Victorian churches and of other historic churches which include significant Victorian fabric and features have attracted the interest of members of the Ecclesiological Society over many years as well drawing in the direct involvement of the Diocesan Advisory Committees (DACs) of the Church of England and the Historic Churches Committees (HCCs) of the Roman Catholic Church (and the parallel bodies within the other major denominations) and normally involved the active engagement of English Heritage – now Historic England – (and the relevant agencies elsewhere in the UK) and the national amenity and conservation bodies. In some major cases such proposals have attracted controversy, not only at a parish or local level, but at a national level, and led to the formal opposition of bodies such as the Victorian Society. In many other cases, such proposals have promoted lively debate and discussion at the DAC and HCC level and have required extensive consultation, discussion and amendment before faculties or other formal approvals have been recommended and granted.

For the most part, the cases which have attracted significant concern or controversy have been those which involved proposals for the complete or substantial removal of the liturgical arrangements, fixtures or fittings inherited from the nineteenth century, or for their extensive alteration. Sometimes such proposals have included changes which have clearly militated against the survival of the finest features of such churches or seriously detracted from their overall architectural integrity and character. At other times such proposals have been realised without harming the overall architectural or historic interest and significance of the respective churches, or have off-set such harm by the provision of major improvements to the respective churches.

In the section of the publication *Saving a Century: The Victorian Society, 1858-2008* titled 'Places of Worship', the editors noted that 'Liturgical reform – inspired by the Second Vatican Council in the Roman Catholic church – led to internal reorderings that resulted in fine furnishings, often the work of the very best designers of the time, being mutilated or discarded' and that 'today the Victorian Society is more often concerned with harmful alterations or the removal of Victorian seating rather than

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proposals to demolish church buildings'. In a further section of the publication titled 'Abonoclasm', the editors noted that 'Unfortunately, in the 1960s, there were many clergy who hated screens and wished to clear them out of their Gothic churches in the cause of liturgical reform, the Victorian Society had to fight – in vain – for several important screens which were works of art in their own right – not least one by Pugin himself' and rightly referred to the regrettable loss of Scott's choir screens from Salisbury and Hereford cathedrals and Pugin's screen from St Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham.

The Victorian Society is clearly to be commended in working across the years for the effective protection of Victorian churches of particular interest and significance and their liturgical arrangements, fixtures or fittings, and for drawing attention to their continuing cultural significance. However, for many outside the Society, there has been a perception – sometimes justified – that the Society and other conservation bodies are resistant to change to Victorian churches and their features in principle, whatever their particular merit or lack of merit, and that the Society and other conservation bodies seriously undervalue the liturgical and other needs of worshipping communities today. Certainly, such an impression has been and continues to be reflected from time to time in the responses to consultation made by the Society and other conservation bodies in response to largely uncontentious proposals by parishes planning the re-ordering of their churches.

Although the Victorian Society can be rightly commended for promoting the value and significance of the best of Victorian church architecture in such excellent publications as *Churches 1870–1914* – the third volume in the Society's *Studies in Victorian Architecture and Design* – and whilst it should continue to challenge those proposals which will demonstrably damage the interest and significance of churches, there is an increasing need for the Society and other conservation bodies to demonstrate fuller recognition of the legitimate interests of those who have direct, legal and financial responsibility for the repair, maintenance and management of historic churches, and, importantly, fuller recognition of the liturgical and other needs of the worshipping communities who provide the means for their continued use and Christian witness at the heart of diverse local communities across the country.

In this connection, English Heritage/Historic England is to be commended for its publication, *New Work in Historic Places of Worship* (last revised in 2012) and for presenting a position which balances soundly assessed conservation interests with meeting legitimate liturgical and other needs. Similarly, the Ecclesiological

Society is to be commended for the publication in 2011 of its sound and well researched 500-page study, *Pews, Benches and Chairs: Church seating in English parish churches from the fourteenth century to the present*, which focuses upon congregational seating in Church of England churches across the centuries with the aim of informing intelligent debate and discussion regarding proposals for the removal of pews and the relative merits of pews, movable benches and chairs. As members will be aware, the publication usefully provides a series of relevant case-studies as well as chapters on assessing the importance of Victorian and other congregational seating, on the key steps for considering changes to church seating, and on why pews matter in the first place.

For too long, perhaps, the debate about re-ordering of Victorian churches, has tended to revolve exclusively around potentially contentious proposals for the removal of pews, screens and choir stalls, rather than on upon the fundamental liturgical, pastoral and social factors that are driving worshipping communities – particularly in the Church of England – to pursue proposals for shared use of churches; for placing the altar or holy table at the heart of the Eucharistic gathering, or making an existing altar more accessible to the laity both physically and visually; placing the font in the body of the church and enabling the laity to gather around it; enhancing accessibility and flexibility of use; and providing ancillary facilities that might be reasonably expected in any other building used for public gatherings. Whilst few, if any, would contemplate a radical re-ordering of an All Saints', Margaret Street or a St Augustine's, Ramsgate, there are many Victorian churches across the country where the particular interest and significance of their fabric, features and internal planning are of a substantially lesser order, and where intelligent, sensitive and well considered change could be contemplated, planned and implemented, in addition to the provision of improved heating, lighting and seating.

An irony in the situation is that the distinct liturgical arrangements of many Victorian Anglican churches, planned and implemented in conformity with the prevailing values of the time – generally the ever-shifting and sometimes questionably-based principles prescribed by the Cambridge Camden Society and others – have generally posed much greater challenges for those seeking to accommodate current liturgical and other needs, than those of medieval and later churches. The provision of deep chancels raised above the level of the nave and aisles and separated from the nave by robust chancel screen-walls; the location of fonts on multi-stepped bases located in confined spaces in the aisles; and the filling of naves and aisles from end to end with bench-pews fixed to raised, wooden pew platforms, are features which

frequently militate against the realisation of even modest measures to provide for the needs of worshippers and clergy today.

This is not to suggest that in some situations, entirely sound and intelligent solutions to meeting current liturgical needs cannot be achieved which may well provide for the retention in situ, or with modest adjustment, of an existing high altar, font, chancel screen or communion rails, whilst introducing a free-standing altar or holy table in the nave and movable seating in the form of benches or chairs arranged around that liturgical focus. Similarly, if the particular interest and significance of the existing bench-pews in the nave are of such an order to merit their retention, sufficient space might be secured to provide for other uses in the aisles, or the pews made moveable and placed as required on a new, appropriately paved floor.

Anyone wishing to understand the thinking that lies behind a number of more radical re-ordering schemes in Anglican and some Catholic churches proposed or carried out in recent years might usefully refer to Canon Richard Giles much read *Re-pitching the Tent: Reordering the church building for worship and mission* of 1996 and his *Creating Uncommon Worship: Transforming the liturgy of the Eucharist* of 2004. However, it is reasonable to suggest that in relation to the re-ordering of most Anglican churches today, with the exception of those which adhere to a strongly evangelical position, a very much more sensitive and conservative approach to re-ordering prevails; such as that commended by the Revd Dr Canon Peter Doll in his still highly relevant articles ‘Postmodernity and the reinterpretation of sacred space’ published in the December, 1998 issue of *Church Building* and in his ‘The pilgrim people of God – every Sunday’ published in the 12 October 2007 issue of the *Church Times*. Remarkably, unlike the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, the Church of England publishes minimal guidance on re-ordering. Sound and sensible advice was provided in a 4-page chapter titled ‘Space to celebrate: The liturgical aspects’ by the Very Revd Michael Perham included in the Council for the Care of Churches’ *Church extensions and adaptations* of 2002 – now out of print. Today, the only current guidance published by ChurchCare is the very modest advice included in the 2-page Guidance Note: *Reordering – Alterations and Extensions* of May, 2013.

For those wishing to understand the thinking that lies behind most re-ordering schemes in Catholic churches proposed or carried out in recent years, the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales’ *The Parish Church: Principles of Liturgical Design and Reordering* and *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* of April, 2005 provide essential background.

When a sound relationship has been established between Parish client and appointed architect, the particular liturgical and

other needs of the Parish and its community have been properly identified and clearly defined, and the particular architectural and historic interest and significance of the church and its features have been properly identified and clearly defined, there is no reason why an intelligent, sensitive and well considered scheme of re-ordering change cannot be developed and put forward for consultation and decision – not least, in relation to a Victorian church.

Such a discerning and balanced approach is reflected in an increasing number of schemes today, particularly in the three projects illustrated here.

### *St James's Church, Sussex Gardens, Bayswater, W2*

The present grade II\* listed church designed by G. E. Street and built in 1882 replaced an earlier church designed by John Goldicott and George Gutch of 1841–43. Street reversed the orientation of the earlier church.

The re-ordering of the church by Molyneux Kerr Architects forms an integral part of a larger project which includes the construction of ancillary accommodation below the church. The re-ordering of the church has provided for the creation of a generously proportioned, raised, marble-paved platform (Fig. 1) – square on plan with a free-standing altar at its centre – in two of the four bays of the nave at its liturgical eastern end, the provision of underfloor heating below a new, paved floor, and the re-lighting of the interior, whilst leaving the Victorian pulpit in situ and the chancel little changed. The fine bench-pews have been reinstated into the nave and aisles but made movable and re-orientated in a more spacious arrangement.



*Fig. 1: St James's Church, Bayswater.  
(Photograph by Molyneux Kerr  
Architects)*

### *Church of St Thomas of Canterbury, Rylston Road, Fulham, SW6*

The present grade II\* listed church was designed by A. W. N. Pugin and built in 1847–48. The open timber roof and an arcade of six bays run continuously through nave and chancel. Contrary to Pugin's wishes, the division between nave and chancel has only ever been effected subtly by the modest raising of the floor and by the introduction of piers without capitals in each of the nave arcades that separate the four arched bays of the nave from the two arched bays of the chancel. The upper part of Pugin's carved reredos serving the former high altar remains in situ.

The re-ordering of the church and the introduction of the beautiful, painted and stencilled decoration (Fig. 2) undertaken by Martin Goalen of Academy Projects forms an integral part of a larger project which has included the construction of a new Parish Room, sacristy and kitchen attached to the west end of Pugin's Presbytery and linked through a cloister to the north side of the church. A free-standing, stone altar has been provided in the centre of a new, tile-paved platform in the chancel – modestly raised above the nave, with new steps providing access to the tabernacle set in the east wall, screened by a new, carved, stone screen immediately behind the sedilia. In addition to the re-lighting, the church has been re-paved in tiles and re-seated with new, movable bench-pews.

### *Church of St John the Evangelist, Ladbroke Grove, W11*

The present grade II listed church, cruciform on plan, was designed by J. H. Stevens and G. Alexander and built in 1844–48. The secondhand eighteenth-century organ had been relocated from the west gallery to the south-east chancel aisle and the choir moved to the chancel in 1873; the galleries in the north and south transepts removed in 1929; a large, carpeted dais installed in the crossing in the 1960s; and the bench-pews in the nave removed subsequently. However, the reredos serving the high altar designed by Aston Webb added in 1890 remained in situ.

The re-ordering of the church by Ablett Architects forms a major part of an overall scheme which also includes the creation of a large, level space in the gallery with glazed-in rooms to each side, the creation of a meeting-room, toilets and a kitchen in an oak-panelled space below the gallery at the west end of the nave (Fig. 3), and improved accessibility. The re-ordering comprises the removal of the 1960s carpeted dais; the provision of a free-standing nave altar with a Laudian cover located on a generously proportioned, tile-paved platform at the entry to the chancel and new marble steps added at the east end of the nave; the re-location





*Fig. 2: Church of St Thomas of Canterbury, Fulham. (Photograph by Richard Davies)*



*Fig. 3: Church of St John the Evangelist, Ladbroke Grove.  
(Photograph by Jonty M. Sexton)*



of the original font to the west end of the nave on axis between the north and south porches; the relocation of the organ into a free-standing position in the north transept and the provision of a handsome new organ-case in oak and walnut fronting the crossing; the reinstatement of the pulpit to its original position; and the creation of a new chapel in the south transept. The re-seating of the nave with new, movable benches was undertaken at an earlier stage.

*This article is adapted from the article 'Providing space to celebrate' published in the July 2016 issue of The Victorian – The magazine of the Victorian Society.*

## J. Harold Gibbons – a closer look at some of his churches

Robert Drake

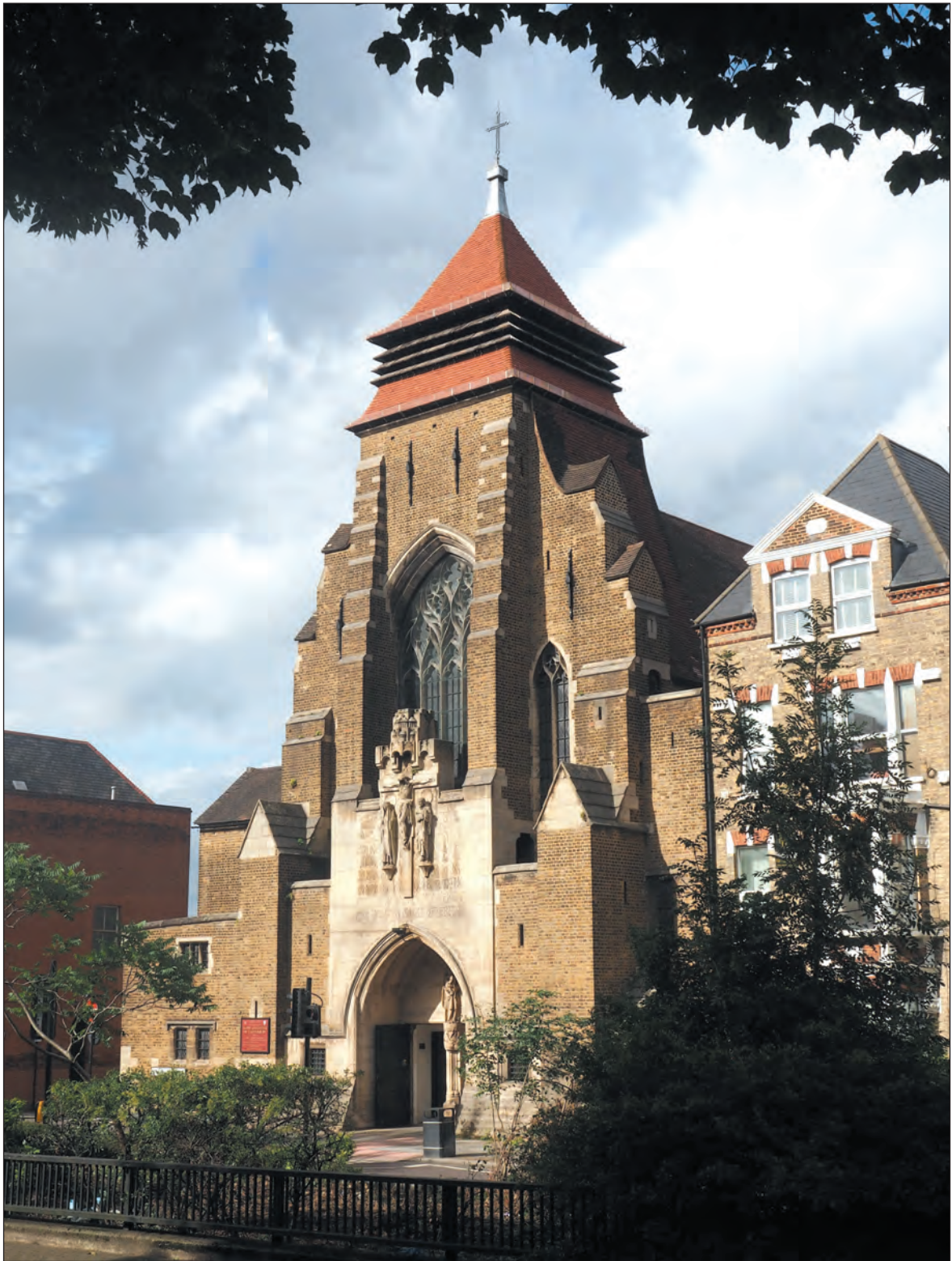
THIS IS A SEQUEL to my article in *Ecclesiology Today* 53 which introduced the twentieth-century architect J. Harold Gibbons. In the following pages I take a closer look at some of his most important works from different stages of his career. Six churches or religious buildings have been selected for this closer scrutiny: two works from the earlier part of his career – one an addition to a notable late nineteenth-century church in north London, the other a priory for Anglican nuns in the East End; three churches from the height of his career in the late 1920s and 1930s when he was much in demand for new churches, which exemplify his mastery of form; and finally the rebuilding of a bomb-damaged town church with significant Gibbons fittings and where he is commemorated.

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### *St Augustine of Canterbury, Archway Road, Highgate*

In a prominent position on the Great North Road in Highgate, north London, J. D. Sedding built an austere church for Anglo-Catholic worship in 1884–87, which was completed after his death by his partner Henry Wilson. However, Wilson's later plans for the west end of the church were never carried out and in 1910 a competition was held to find an architect to complete the project. The competition was won by Gibbons, who designed a dramatic street frontage influenced by Wilson's design (Fig.1). Built in 1914–15, it is one of Gibbons' most elaborate elevations, with a pagoda roof, flamboyant tracery in the West window and a stone rood above the entrance (Fig.2) by Dorothy Rope, elder sister of Gibbons' frequent collaborator on stained glass, Margaret Edith Aldrich Rope.

After a fire in 1924 destroyed the roof and most of the fittings, Gibbons was called back to rebuild the east end of the church. The basic lines were retained but he did make some changes, creating a low-ceilinged chapel to St Michael in the south aisle. Adrian Gilbert Scott subsequently contributed a baroque high altar in 1938. This was always a church for High Anglican ritual, which Highgate native John Betjeman described as 'one of the best furnished in London'.<sup>1</sup>



*Fig. 1: The west front of St Augustine's, Highgate. (Photo: Robert Hradsky)*



Such were the ingenuity of Gibbons' designs for the West end that it featured in the *Architects' Journal* as 'the week's detail', a regular feature which demonstrated Gibbons' attention to detail in an Arts and Crafts manner.<sup>2</sup> In the same issue of the journal, the architectural commentator P. M. Stratton described Gibbons' work here as typical of the Gothic Revival and commends his new baptistery with its inter-play of arches and mouldings drawing in the eye subtly. Gibbons' mentor Temple Moore's dictum was that Gothic must be designed 'from inside out' and this principle was followed at St Augustine's in its remodelling by Gibbons.

Stratton focused on St Michael's chapel, designed originally as a children's chapel under a low, blue painted ceiling. Children's chapels were popular in the inter-war period, the best-known examples being perhaps those designed by Edward Maufe at St Thomas, Hanwell, and at Guildford Cathedral. Plaster figures of the Virgin and Archangel Gabriel made by Dorothy Rope for children to handle survive intact on the window sill and her sister Margaret designed several stained

Fig. 2: Detail of the carving by Dorothy Rope above the west entrance to St Augustine's, Highgate. (Photo: Robert Hradsky)





glass windows including a charming nativity with cherubs rather than human figures. A *tondo* of the Virgin and Child in the south aisle looks similar to those by Wilson at Kemsing in Kent and Welbeck Abbey chapel, but is more probably by Dorothy Rope. However, these features complement Wilson's earlier work in the Lady Chapel and make for a coherent, well-crafted interior which probably deserves upgrading from its current grade II listing to grade II\*.

### *Priory of St Saviour's, Yorkton Street, Haggerston*

This was a commission Gibbons received after adding a clergy house and hall in to St Augustine's church which stood opposite, in 1926–27. This Priory, for the nuns of the Order of the Society of St Margaret (founded by John Mason Neale in the 1850s) is a little known work mostly by Gibbons,<sup>2</sup> adding to earlier conventual buildings by C. H. M. Mileham, which were replaced in 1976 by a residential wing by Laurence King. The prime mover was the Mother Superior, 'Mother Kate', although not actually built until after her death in 1923. The east end of the chapel is expressed on the Yorkton Street elevation which is of red brick, with a pyramid-topped tower, a carved Crucifixion scene (sculptor not known) and Gibbons' characteristic open bellcote rising behind.

The long narrow chapel (Fig.3) with its sense of enclosure communicates the atmosphere of High Anglican monasticism in the inter-war period, with its small stained glass windows by Margaret Rope at high level along the south side. The most arresting feature of the interior is the raised Blessed Sacrament Chapel behind the high altar. It was one of Gibbons' first raised chapels, made more striking by a painted and gilded vault, elaborate gates by William Bainbridge Reynolds, a Virgin and Child statue by Martin Travers and a later canopy over the altar by Laurence King.

Gibbons added the Mother Kate homes to the convent in 1939–40 as almshouses, the first occupants of which were parishioners made homeless by the Blitz. The nuns still occupy the Priory and continue their work in the East End but members of the public can join them for prayer. The complex is locally listed, but has recently also been put forward for statutory listing, as a rare survival of an East end priory working with the disadvantaged.



*Fig. 3: Interior of the chapel of the Priory of St Saviour, Haggerston. (Photo: Robert Drake)*

*St Francis of Assisi, Charminster Road, Bournemouth*

This is one of Gibbons' finest churches in terms of scale and fittings, and the first one where he really finds his stride on an expansive site. The church is on a slight eminence and is reached through a wide courtyard with clergy accommodation to the right and parish hall to the left, all part of a careful composition which includes a dramatic campanile to draw one's eye to the church.

The architectural quality of the church is perhaps explained by it being a linked foundation of St Stephen's, Bournemouth, J. L. Pearson's masterpiece of 1892. St Francis' was paid for by

Helen Reckitt (of Reckitt and Colman starch manufacturers) for full Anglo-Catholic ceremonial. It was she who apparently insisted on Gibbons as architect, despite the cost. Her death soon after completion of the church, however, seems to have deprived Gibbons of the chance to build the hall and clergy housing (which were carried out by local architects Mackenzie and Philips) and a convent to the north apart from an arcaded walkway. A mission building, Alverna House, now a hostel, was built on the site in 1964.

The church was built in 1929–30. Over the entrance to the church a narrow strip of lead at eaves level shows a dove (representing Dove Brothers who were the builders) and, to the right, a gibbon (rebus for the architect), as well as squirrels and birds symbolic of the life and work of St Francis. Inside there is an impression of light and drama in the plain, unpainted, roughcast interior (Fig.4). The large semi-circular arch north of the high altar, so typical of Gibbons, seems particularly

*Fig. 4: View from the west gallery of St Francis, Bournemouth. (Photo: Alwyn Ladell)*





dramatic here. The Lady and Blessed Sacrament Chapels are arranged in high narrow spaces, recalling his mentor Temple Moore's St James, Clacton-on-Sea.

The Altar is of Hopton Wood stone, with a Purbeck slab table top and yellow Siena marble front. Six wood-gilt Renaissance style candlesticks stand on altar, two of which were apparently brought from France by Gibbons in the First World War and the other four which were copied from them. Over the altar is a striking wooden baldacchino or ciborium (Fig.5) then an 'advanced' feature in an Anglo-Catholic church and the first in a Gibbons' church. Plans to paint and gild it were never carried out and it retains its undercoat of a sombre buff-grey colour.

A purpose-built, stepped-down baptistery in the north-west corner has been replaced by toilets and the Norman font, apparently found by Gibbons in a Welsh church, has been placed at the head of the south side of the nave where the

*Fig. 5: Detail of the ciborium at St Francis, Bournemouth. (Photo: Alwyn Ladell)*





pulpit was formerly located. The choir was placed in the West Gallery (Fig.6) in best Anglo-Catholic tradition, so as not to obstruct ceremonial at the east end of the church. Work by the local artist Nina Somerset (whose best-known work is at Edward Shearman's St Silas, Kentish Town) is a distinctive feature of the interior and includes plaques or wall-mounted light shades depicting angels, those over the Lady Chapel entrance inscribed with the letter 'M'. Some of the smaller fittings were gifts from parishioners from holiday visits to Tyrol and Oberammergau, for example the crucifix now above the font by Anton Lang and small figures on the Lady Chapel window ledge. This way of furnishing and ornamenting a church was typical of affluent Anglo-Catholic congregations in the inter-war period.

The church including hall and clergy accommodation were listed grade II in 2013, when major changes were proposed (and have since been carried out).

*Fig. 6 The West Gallery of St Francis, Bournemouth with its almost Art Deco shouldered openings; note also the original 'Atlas White' cement walls. (Photo: Alwyn Ladell)*



### *St Mary the Virgin, Kenton Road, Kenton, Harrow*

This is probably Gibbons' best-known church, one of his most ingeniously planned, and has the finest fittings of any of his churches. Originally to be dedicated to St Leonard, this was changed as the new church received funds from demolition of St Mary the Virgin, Charing Cross Road, another church with a strong Anglo-Catholic tradition. The first incumbent, Father Johnson, was a powerful personality and had substantial private means to embellish the church.

St Mary's stands well back from the road linked by a cloister to a clergy house and ancillary rooms at right angles (completed in 1959), thereby creating a garden in front with a Calvary in memory of Johnson's mother (Fig.7). Gibbons used fine quality buff brick with stone facings rather than London stocks and a free Gothic Revival style rather than his usual Romanesque. The tower is a prominent local landmark. The church was consecrated in 1936.

*Fig. 7: St Mary's, Kenton, with the church to the left and clergy house to the right. (Photo: Steve Cadman)*







Fig. 8: The chancel of St Mary's, Kenton, with the Blessed Sacrament Chapel beyond. (Photo: Des Hill)

Of Gibbons' churches, it is probably the one most strongly influenced by Temple Moore (as exemplified by St Wilfrid's, Harrogate) in its spatial subtlety. This can be seen in its broad double north aisle and the way in which a cross-axis is achieved without transepts; it also has his characteristic shouldered arches. A rood beam dominates the interior. We also find one of his raised rear chapels (the Blessed Sacrament Chapel) behind the high altar, on a level with the West Gallery, with a vestry underneath.

What is also remarkable about St Mary's is the completeness of its mostly contemporary fittings for ritualistic worship (justifying its grade II★ listing). Here Gibbons' main collaborator was Herbert Palliser, Professor of Sculpture at the Royal Academy, who carved the font, Stations of the Cross (in Minchinhampton stone) and statue of the standing Virgin and Child above the West entrance door. A finely-crafted wooden pulpit has textile fringing in a Baroque manner on the canopy and on the pulpit steps a carved figure (possibly also by Palliser) of St Anselm, much associated with Harrow, holding a model of the church.

The altar is surrounded by a baldacchino or ciborium, the most elaborate of the three in Gibbons' churches (Fig.8). It has cusped and filigree decoration and is adorned with gilded and coloured saints. The handsome marble font has a hanging cover, complemented by a small medieval angel, from St Giles, Cripplegate, set in the wall nearby. The font is set against the stairs to the West Gallery, making for a dramatic setting for baptism.

Much of the stained glass is by James Powell of the Whitefriars firm (based not far away in Wealdstone from 1923) and consists mostly of post-war memorials. A window by John Hall & Sons (1937) in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel depicts Father Johnson's mother in medieval dress worshipping in the green fields of Kenton, St Mary's Church – in a rather more elaborate version of the actual building – rising behind (Fig.9). There is also medieval glass from All Saints, York, and icons, one presented by Queen Mary.

The church underwent a high-quality restoration in 2012 to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of its consecration. There are pressures for change, however: the linked hall is now rented out to a nursery meaning that social functions take place at the back of the church. Some pews have been taken out and



*Fig. 9: Memorial window at St Mary's, Kenton, showing Mary Johnson, the mother of the first incumbent. (Photo: Robert Drake)*





*Fig. 10: Exterior of the Church of the Transfiguration, Kempston; note the quality of the brickwork and the oddity of Gothic tracery in a round-arched window. (Photo: Des Hill)*

a glass screen is proposed in this area. Grade II★ listed inter-war churches are very rare and it is to be hoped that careful consideration will be given before any further changes are made.

### *Church of the Transfiguration, Bedford Road, Kempston*

The church was largely paid for by a legacy from Anne Charles-Williamson and construction began in 1938. (A corner stone bears the inscription ‘For God’s Glory 31.7.1938’.) There was a race against time to consecrate the church once the Second World War had started, and the building was completed with some difficulty in the summer of 1940. Built of brown brick with ashlar dressings and hipped clay tile roofs (Fig.10), the Transfiguration has many typical Gibbons features and is perhaps closest in style to St Barnabas, Northolt completed in 1954 which has a similar sideways-on bellcote.



*Fig. 11: South porch and bellcote of the Church of the Transfiguration, Kempston. (Photo: Robert Drake)*





Fig. 12: Interior of the Church of the Transfiguration, Kempston, looking east. (Photo: Robert Drake)

Inside it is spacious with a nave, north and south aisles (the former wider than the latter) and south porch with a projecting gable and bellcote (Fig.11). How it looked originally with the north aisle regimental chapel is shown in the Incorporated Church Building Society's publication *Fifty Modern Churches* (1947).<sup>4</sup> Inside, the white-walled interior, like most of Gibbons' churches, is spatially inventive with a raised east end chapel behind the altar, with sacristy beneath, which effectively brings the altar forward and ensures good sight lines to it. The nave and chancel have a striking acid yellow, trussed barrel vault, with a rood above the high altar. (Fig.12) A plain, dark wood pulpit originally filled the space between south aisle arcade pillars almost halfway down – such pulpits are vulnerable to removal or adaptation as sound booths as current worship styles demand more informal preaching and recorded musical accompaniment. Here at least the pulpit has been retained but

it is now in the north aisle. This wider north aisle was designed as a chapel for the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment (expressed on the exterior by the unusual quarter circle exterior chapel for flag laying) and distinctive long benches against the wall, going ‘through’ the arches. The church has relatively few fittings: the font is from St John’s, Kempston, a nineteenth-century church demolished in 1966 (thus ensuring survival of the Transfiguration); and an abstract, finely-coloured east window by Alfred R. Fisher of Powells of 1972.

Of all Gibbons’ churches, it is perhaps the one where his mastery of form is most easily appreciated because of its simplicity both outside and in. It was listed grade II in 1984, a rare accolade for a building less than half a century old, making it an early listing of an inter-war church.<sup>5</sup>

### *Church of St Peter and St Paul, Bromley*

Bromley in south-east London (historically in the county of Kent) suffered enormous losses to its churches in the Second

*Fig. 13 The north side of Bromley Parish Church including the north transept entrance (see also cover image).*

*(Photo: Des Hill)*







Fig. 14: The children's chapel, Bromley Parish Church. Painted decoration by Alison Hodson, 2007. (Photo: Des Hill)



*Fig. 15 The Lady Chapel, Bromley Parish Church. (Photo: Des Hill)*





*Fig. 16: The nave of Bromley Parish Church, looking west. (Photo: Des Hill)*

World War. One of these casualties was the parish church of St Peter and St Paul which in 1941 was destroyed apart from the tower. Gibbons was invited to rebuild the church after a visit by the PCC to St Mary's, Kenton. His design for the striking north transept entrance was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1945 and widely reproduced in the architectural press (Fig.13).<sup>6</sup> The foundation stone was laid by Princess Elizabeth in 1949. The architecture takes its cue from the fifteenth-century tower, in terms of scale, materials and style (Gothic) and the flints of the old church were re-used, with new Kentish Ragstone dressings. Gibbons added a small children's chapel (Fig.14) to the tower which is linked across the ambulatory to the long nave which was finished in 1952 with a temporary east wall. The east end of church was completed in 1957 with short transepts and a chancel, sanctuary and Lady Chapel. (Fig.15). A fine sculpture of Christ the King by James Wedgwood was erected over the north transept entrance (see cover image).<sup>7</sup>

Gibbons employed Margaret Edith Aldrich Rope to provide many of the windows as well as her pupil, Clare Dawson, Edward Woore; Carl Edwards added a window in memory of Hazel Kissick, a schoolgirl who died trying to save the church during the raid in 1941. The font incorporates the basin of the medieval font which survived the bombing and a characteristic Gibbons gilded font cover.

There are typical Gibbons motifs such as shouldered openings creating an expansive space with wide aisles (Fig.16) (especially on the north side) suitable for a large town church which held civic services. Harold Macmillan's pew as local MP is at the front with carving of the symbol of the House of Commons and across the aisle is the Mayor's pew, also with symbolic carving. Gibbons also designed the pulpit and choir woodwork (made by John Thompson of Kilburn, North Yorks with his characteristic mouse symbol). The ceiled nave roof is painted blue and side aisles are outlined in a pinky-orange.

This is Gibbons' first major post-war work, which was carried out over a long rebuilding period, from 1949 to 1957. It shows his skill as a church architect marrying gothic motifs with modern materials, fine stained glass and architect-



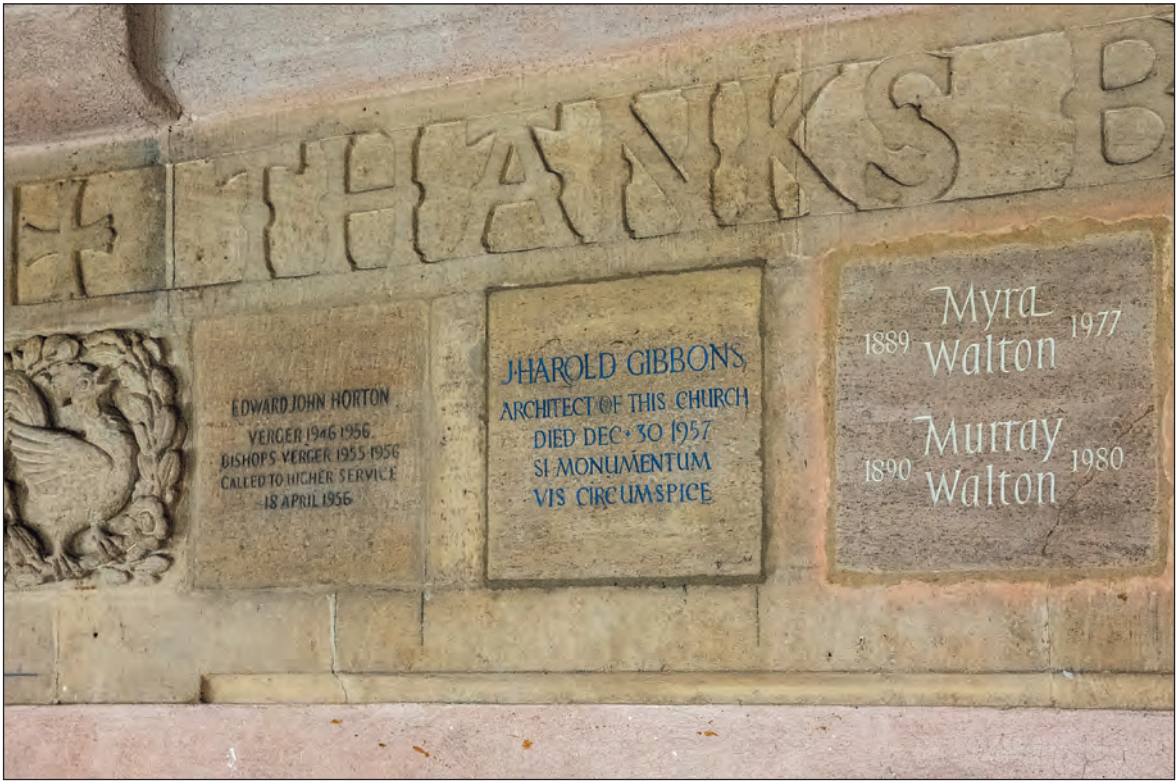


Fig. 17 Memorial plaque to Gibbons in the ambulatory at Bromley Parish Church. (Photo: Des Hill)

designed fittings. A stone plaque in the ambulatory commemorating Gibbons' death at the end of 1957 appropriately demonstrates his close association with the church he designed and where his ashes are buried (Fig. 17).

#### Notes

- 1 Quoted in *St Augustine of Canterbury, Highgate: An Illustrated Architectural History* Paul Bell 2012.
- 2 *Architect's Journal* no. 1701, 24 August 1927, pp. 251–252.
- 3 'The New Gothic' in *Brick Builder* October 1927, pp. 8–9.
- 4 *Fifty Modern Churches* Incorporated Church Building Society 1947, pp. 120–122.
- 5 *An Architectural Pilgrim's Progress in Bedfordshire*. Notes of a C20 Society event led by Charles O'Brien and Robert Drake, 13 September 2014.
- 6 *The Architect and Building News* 6 July 1945, p. 5.
- 7 *Bromley Parish Church: A History and Guide* Helen Gribble 2007 (Parish and L&T Press).

## VIEWPOINT: St Mary-at-Hill, a restoration unfinished

Gavin Stamp

For anyone who saw the church before the fire of 10 May 1988, the interior of St Mary-at-Hill near Billingsgate in the City of London was a great wonder and a delight. It was the only City church that retained, unaltered, its box pews and its other elaborate furnishings were glorious (fig. 1). John Betjeman perhaps best conveyed its character: 'This, is the least spoiled and the most gorgeous interior in the City, all the more exciting for being hidden away among cobbled alleys, paved passages, brick walls, overhung by plane trees, and a smell of fish,' he wrote in 1967, before going on to praise the

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massive and splendid woodwork with which the church abounds. The west end, with its glass and wood screen, gallery and magnificent organ case, the high pews with their many delicate sword-rests, the altar-piece, altar table, turned Communion rails, the sounding board and pulpit below, approached by a long wooden staircase with carved balusters, are all seen in a mysterious light filtering through pretty early Victorian windows... The atmosphere of merchant grandeur, pew-openers and the time of Dickens is unforgettable.<sup>1</sup>

*Fig. 1: The glorious interior of St Mary-at-Hill in 1985 – three years before the fire. (Photo: Gavin Stamp)*



Ian Nairn, with his nose for the unusual and the authentic, agreed: ‘A Wren church as it should be, not genteel with light woodwork and scoutmaster-saints. The architecture is nothing, here, even though it is one of Wren’s most interesting plans, given a foppish restoration in 1847; the fittings are everything.’<sup>2</sup> A decade earlier, Elizabeth and Wayland Young – the future saviours of Hawksmoor’s churches and St Pancras Station – had a similar response to the unexpected richness of the interior of St Mary-at-Hill, which was as much Early Victorian as of the time of Christopher Wren:

You come out of Billingsgate fish market into a landscape of dark, rich oak, where the work of those to whom the style was living and of those to whom it was dead blend in a paradoxical display of Restoration furniture at its very best.<sup>3</sup>

This woodwork had long been admired; back in 1896 in his own study of London churches, George Birch had noted that ‘The chief glories of this church are its wonderfully beautiful fittings.’<sup>4</sup> Sadly, although this modest building still stands today, its wonderful interior has gone – although, as most of the furnishings and woodwork survives in store, it still could and should be recreated.

The complicated, confusing history of St Mary-at-Hill is given in the thorough and detailed monograph by the late Paul Jeffery published by the Ecclesiological Society in 1996. To summarise, the medieval church badly damaged in the Great Fire was rebuilt in 1670–74 under Wren’s general direction to serve both its old parish and that of St Andrew Hubbard. The new building, very possibly designed by Robert Hooke, which incorporated the north and south walls from the old church with the old windows, was given a Greek cross plan, with transepts. The ceilings were coved while a shallow dome supporting a large lantern was raised over the central bay. Nikolaus Pevsner wrote that, ‘The plan is one of the most interesting among remaining Wren churches. It is derived from the Byzantine quincunx plan, i.e., it possesses a square domed centre resting on four free-standing columns.’<sup>5</sup> This was a plan which also reflected that of the previous medieval church. Although the ceilings, dome and roof were later replaced, the plan remained unchanged and the unusual capitals to the four free-standing columns date from Wren’s time. They have been variously described; Jeffery noted that they are

a Composite capital employing elements from the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian orders, and are described in Sebastian Serlio’s *The Five Books of Architecture*, Book IV. Wren’s library contained a copy of Serlio and it may be presumed that this or another copy would have been available also to Hooke.<sup>6</sup>



The east window behind the reredos was bricked up in 1767 and twenty years later George Gwilt, surveyor to the parish, replaced the patched up medieval tower with a new, rather dull construction of brick. But the most significant change came with the appointment as surveyor in 1826 of James Savage, best known as the architect of that pioneering Gothic Revival church, St Luke's, Chelsea. Because of its decayed condition, Savage recommended the complete rebuilding of the roof. Internally, barrel vaults were now placed over the arms of the cross plan and in the centre a much higher coffered dome was erected over pendentives, with a (smaller) lantern in the centre. These new plaster ceilings, vaults and the dome were handsomely detailed and decorated in a delicate Neo-Classical style. At the same time the surviving medieval windows in the north and south walls were replaced by new centrally positioned round-arched openings, allowing pilaster responds to be placed against the walls to complete an architecturally coherent interior. All this work, including new cushions and other furnishings, was completed in 1827.

*Fig. 2. The interior of the church in 1876, looking west towards the organ. (Photo: Gavin Stamp)*







*Fig. 3. The interior of the church on 12 May 1988, two days after the fire that destroyed most of the roof: the pulpit and reredos had been damaged but had not been burned.*

*(Photo: Gavin Stamp)*

Further repairs and significant work to the interior were carried out under Savage's direction after a fire caused some damage in 1848. Alterations were then made to the pews, pulpit, reredos and other woodwork, with the addition of much new carving all done in a convincing seventeenth-century style by the distinguished wood carver William Gibbs Rogers (c.1792–1875). So convincing, indeed, that several experts have apparently found it difficult to distinguish Rogers' work from that of the time of Wren, although, as Elizabeth and Wayland Young pointed out, 'the pulpit, reading desk and rector's pew are all dated 1849, and the lion and unicorn have 'V.R.' on their breasts. Regular, slow, solid, dark, circumstantial, these pieces, and particularly the stairs to the pulpit and reading desk, give a new meaning to the words 'Victorian pastiche'. Pevsner wrote that Rogers' 'work can hardly be distinguished from that of Wren's craftsmen, a feat which few would expect from an Early Victorian craftsman' while Betjeman thought the woodwork 'so good that it is hard to make out which is 17th-century and which Gibbs Rogers.'

Rogers' conspicuous talent was much admired in his day. He had made a particular study of the carvings of Grinling Gibbons and the seventeenth-century woodwork in City churches, and, in

addition to new carving in several London churches, he had worked at Carlton House, the Brighton Pavilion and the House of Lords. The commission to embellish St Mary-at-Hill came from the Rector, the Irish composer, archaeologist and theologian the Revd J. C. Crosthwaite, who accepted the living in 1844. In consequence, as Francis Bumpus noted, the church ‘was entirely refitted with such an extent of wood-carving as had not been executed before in the City for many years.’<sup>7</sup> This included the splendid organ case, made in an appropriate style by Rogers, for a fine new instrument by William Hill (fig. 2).

Few changes were made to St Mary-at-Hill after 1849 and the church escaped serious damage during the Second World War. In 1967 Seely and Paget carried out repairs and removed some of the Victorian glass. But disaster came during the night of 10 May 1988 when a fire started by a workman’s blowlamp destroyed most of Savage’s roof structure. The central dome collapsed and falling timbers smashed some of the pews (fig. 3). Further damage to both the structure and the woodwork was caused by water from the firemen’s hoses. The ‘least spoiled and the most gorgeous interior in the City’ was left a sodden wreck, open to the sky (figs. 4–6).

Despite rumours that the church would be made redundant (the notorious Templeman Report, advocating closure of two-thirds of the City churches, was published soon after the fire), it was decided to restore the building. The surviving woodwork and other fittings were put into storage and a new roof placed over the church. The repair and reconstruction was carried out by the Conservation Practice (project architect John Barnes) and Savage’s internal fibrous plaster vaults and cupola were carefully reproduced. The church was reopened for worship in December 1991 – but, apart from wainscot around the perimeter walls, its interior was then largely empty. A second phase of restoration work, involving the repair and reinstatement of the pews, reredos, pulpit, organ, wrought-iron sword rests, etc., was then promised. This was not covered by the insurance money which largely paid for the first phase, and so funds were to be sought by the Friends of City Churches and from the National Heritage Memorial Fund. But although, as Simon Bradley wrote about the woodwork in St Mary-at-Hill in the revised ‘Pevsner’ for the City of London in 1997, ‘Its full restoration is an urgent priority’<sup>8</sup>, and despite the immense wealth of the City of London, all that has happened over the last two decades is that the 1848 organ has been restored, and reinstated above the west gallery in 2002.

Today, almost thirty years after the fire, the interior of St Mary-at-Hill is more like a public hall than a place of worship; its architectural glory has gone. A curtain hangs where the reredos





*Fig. 4. Looking north-west on 12 May 1988: the roof and James Savage's plaster vaults have gone, but the organ and many of the box pews had survived. (Photo: Gavin Stamp)*



*Fig. 5. The roofless north transept on 12 May 1988, with the splendid sword-rests rising above the surviving pews. (Photo: Gavin Stamp)*





*Fig. 6. Looking east across some of the surviving box pews towards the damaged but intact reredos on 12 May 1988. (Photo: Gavin Stamp)*



*Fig. 7. The east end of St Mary-at-Hill on 12 May 1988: many but by no means all of the box pews had been smashed by falling timbers from the burning roof. (Photo: Gavin Stamp)*

once stood as this, along with the rest of the ‘wonderfully beautiful fittings’, remains in store, at the parish’s expense, with Hugh Harrison Conservation, the independent timber contractor, in Devon. The parish appears to have no enthusiasm for completing the restoration of the interior; it offers instead a ‘versatile space... suitable for conferences, opera and theatrical rehearsals and productions,’ etc. But these are activities that surely could equally well take place in one of the several nearby City churches that have long lost their original furniture (I think of St Nicholas Cole Abbey, and even St Mary-le-Bow). Furthermore, notices in the

church and a ‘history leaflet’ quote Betjeman’s description, while being a little economical with the truth: they state that the box pews and ‘the Victorian reredos were severely damaged by... fire in 1988’ which was not quite the case, while the adjective ‘Victorian’ might be interpreted as pejorative, implying that the reredos was therefore discordant and unimportant when it was in fact a magnificent composition, partly original and partly by Rogers in the manner of Wren.

Proof, if proof were needed, that most of the woodwork in St Mary-at-Hill survived the fire, if damaged by water, and was capable of restoration and reinstatement is provided by the contemporary photographs reproduced here. On 12 May 1988, two days after the fire, in the course of my brief, inglorious career as Architecture Correspondent of the *Independent*, I was able to get inside the ruined building and take photographs. These confirm that although some of the pews were smashed to pieces, many survived intact (see figs 4–6). They also show that the reredos was largely undamaged (fig. 7) and that Rogers’ splendid pulpit could equally well be restored (according to one estimate, 80 per cent of the original timber fittings survive in store). Four days later, the newspaper published my article on the church and the fire, which I described as ‘a heartbreaking tragedy, as terrible in its way as the destruction of the transept of York Minster by fire... For those too young to have seen the effect of incendiary bombs, the pathetic ruination of this interior is an awful reminder of what the Blitz must have been like.’<sup>9</sup> I quoted what the then Rector, the Venerable Archdeacon Dr B. A. C. Kirk-Duncan, announced to me – on Ascension Day – ‘It will rise again!’, but without all the glorious woodwork and other fittings put back in place, St Mary-at-Hill cannot be said to have fully risen again. It still could.

#### Notes

- 1 John Betjeman, *The City of London Churches*, Pitkin Pictorials Ltd, 1967, p.26
- 2 Ian Nairn, *Nairn’s London*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1966, p.34
- 3 Elizabeth and Wayland Young, *Old London Churches*, Faber & Faber, London, 1956, p.109
- 4 George H. Birch, *London Churches of the XVIIth & XVIIIth Centuries*, Batsford, London, 1896, p.42
- 5 Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London I: The Cities of London and Westminster*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1957, p.152
- 6 Paul Jeffery, *The Parish Church of St Mary-at-Hill in the City of London*, The Ecclesiological Society, London, 1996, p.17
- 7 Francis Bumpus, *London Churches Ancient & Modern*, vol.1, T. Werner Laurie, London, n.d. [c.1907], p.362
- 8 Simon Bradley & Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London I: The City of London*, Penguin Books, London, 1997, p.246
- 9 ‘Wren’s image of “merchant grandeur” to rise again’, *The Independent*, Monday 16 May 1988, p.3



## Review Essay

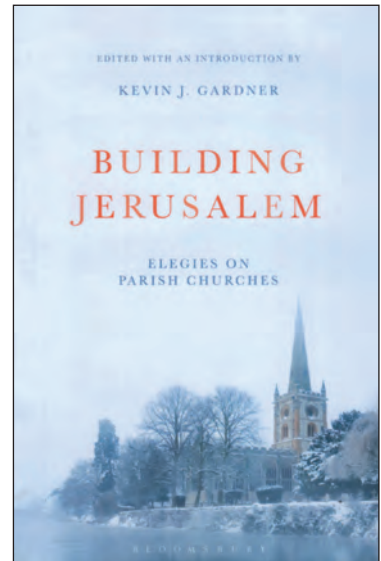
by Graham Parry

Kevin J. Gardner (ed.), *Building Jerusalem: Elegies on Parish Churches*. Bloomsbury, 2016, 191 pp., £16.99 hdbk, ISBN 978 147292 435 3

How fares the Church of England in our time? This collection of poems brings together the reflections and judgements of more than sixty poets on their visits to churches up and down the country. What is surprising is that from the diversity of voices emerges a remarkable consensus of themes and opinions. The experience of church visiting has many strands, which are intertwined in different ways for every visitor, yet there is a broad similarity of response to time spent in these buildings, whether they are known or unfamiliar, ruined or still active. The overwhelming response is regret for something lost. But uncertainty about how to engage with the expectations that a church proposes is a common theme, and the commonest theme of all is the certainty of death for all visitors, with no more hope of resurrection or life everlasting. So many memorials crowd the walls, so many dead lie in every churchyard that a church speaks more convincingly of mortality than of any other theme.

The editor, Kevin Gardner, who has written much on Betjeman, reflects in his introduction on the sadness and the awareness of loss that colour most modern poems about the Church. The prevalence of these tones explains his choice of the term 'elegies' in his sub-title. He invokes Simon Jenkins' view that what has been lost is that fusion of faith and community and identity 'that has brought the English people together in village and town through a thousand years of history.' The collective memory that was centred in the Church is faltering or has failed, and nothing has taken its place. Poets lamenting the loss of faith are in some way reminding us of that collective memory enshrined in Anglicanism, yet there is almost inevitably a forlorn note in the verse.

The majority of churches that inspire poems are rural, part of a village that is in turn part of a landscape. The combination naturally promotes reflections on England, with its depth of history, and the place of the church both in that history and in our own time. There is often appreciation of the ways in which the trees and flowers and grass of the countryside have adapted themselves so congenially to the churches that rise up every few miles across the land. It is noticeable how frequently rivers or streams are associated with these churches, or the open sea, suggesting perhaps the never-failing vitality of natural forces that



contrast with or compensate for the exhaustion of the spiritual energies that once filled the temples. 'What energies / Persist are harnessed to the stream / ... hurtling without plan or aim' (Anthony Thwaite). Weather is always important in these church-visiting poems; more often than not it is raining.

Once inside, the problem for many of the poets is how to respond. Most sense that 'There is something / that is not ourselves. / Something to grasp / if we could name it' (Jeremy Hooker) but it eludes us. All the poets feel the gravitational pull of a church, but most cannot entirely explain it. Charles Causley finds himself 'Drawn by I know not what, to sound / A fabled shore, unlost, unfound'. Larkin reflects that 'the place was not worth stopping for. / Yet stop I did: in fact I often do, / And always end much at a loss like this, / Wondering what to look for . . .' U.A. Fanthorpe contrasts the banalities written in the visitors' book – that 'land of the perpetually-flowering cliché' – with the experience that defies description, for 'what they found, / Whatever it was, it wasn't what / They say.' We lack the language to articulate our relationship with a church, just as that relationship itself has diminished over time. In the Saxon church at Greensted, she reflects on the decline from the miraculous to the ordinary: 'Processing pilgrims, / The marvels that drew them – / Headless king, holy wolf – / Have all fined down to / Postcards, a guidebook, / Mattins on Sunday'. Frustrated by a worn-out gravestone, Sean Street pleads 'Show me some sign. What point / is a grave without a message?' George Barker, also seeking a sign, gets a blank refusal: 'To this the unspoken No / of the dead god responds', and the poet leaves Thurgarton church convinced 'that we die in the clay we / dread, desired, and deserved, / awaiting no Judgement Day.' Peter Scupham leaves his church with the 'Stone gone dim, / God down to his last hymn'. Even the minister in Geoffrey Grigson's 'West Window' is unsure of his role: '*And now - / What now, whispers to himself upon / His knees the priest, now time hurts me, / Home walks away, and deserts me*'.

Few among this throng of poets remember that a church is a place for worship, and only John Betjeman is able to communicate the intensity of worship and the joy of thanksgiving. The prayer at the end of 'St Saviour's, Highbury' and the meditation on the sacrament in 'A Lincolnshire Church' remind one that instinctive, unselfconscious worship can still be the natural response to a church, for a few – for very few. John Heath-Stubbs' long poem on St Mary Magdalene, Old Milton, modulates into a sustained prayer of intercession, lifted by a meditation on the saint, 'Prime witness of the only Resurrection'. Hope and belief are still alive in him, but Heath-Stubbs was writing shortly after the war, and belongs, like Betjeman, to an older generation that was raised in

traditional ways of piety. For most younger poets, a church is a place for reflection, for thinking about oneself in the presence of death. There is virtually no mention of the theology of the Church in these poems. Sin, redemption, atonement, resurrection have little relevance any more. There is no desire, or will, to engage with the articles of belief. John Greening in his 'Nocturne' wonders if the next generation of children will even understand the significance of a cross.

What is striking in this collection is a pervasive sense that the real Church of England was the medieval Church with its monasteries and parish churches and isolated chapels holding the whole country together. The full panoply of religion was then in place, and what came after the Reformation was a diminished inheritance, in spiritual life, architecture and community. Many poets linger in monastic remains, knowing that Gothic is the natural framework of faith (though the gravity of Norman also satisfies), and feeling the residual power of these sacred sites that still arouse reverence and awe. At Fountains Abbey Clive Wilmer phrases his response to the eloquent ruins in words to which many can assent. The monks, he writes, 'from the stone of their landscaped minds',

fashioned

A form for those meanings, a form  
That arched over meaningful air.  
According to their time they shaped it  
With massive grace.  
And in the face of evil, weathers and decay  
Its essence constant in the shifting of ages.

Ruins and abandoned churches attract many poets, who find traces there of a faith that once infused a whole way of living, now lost. The post-Reformation Church of England does not seem to satisfy the imagination in the way that the Old Church did. Protestantism has brought division, as Anthony Thwaite's poem 'Reformation' reports. Fragments of the broken medieval church lie half-concealed across the landscape, 'High hedges stand above spoiled finials',

And Sunday mornings see small meeting houses,  
Reformed parishes and tabernacles,  
Bethesdas and the whole wide countryside,  
All split seven ways in sect and congregation,  
Assembling to praise God from whom all blessings  
Flow through his derelict priories, abbeys, cells  
The afternoon sun will show, faint shadows among fields.



The elemental fire of faith still smoulders in those Catholic remains; what has come after lacks the ancient strength.

The strength of reformed religion lay in the Word, in the haunting beauty of the translated Bible, in the authority of the Book of Common Prayer. Yet the modern Church of England has despiritualised itself by rejecting the Authorized Version, its greatest asset, replacing it by what Kevin Crossley-Holland calls a 'babyfood bible' in which 'Divine authority, / our fathers' cadences, / and their fathers' fathers,' has been 'shuffled off'. What is heard now is 'committee-speak! / The work of the worthy / with flat feet, / fearful of fire and unknowing.' At service-time he bows his head not in reverence but in despair, 'While the Word / was betrayed by the word.'

Surely Little Gidding will revive the dedicated Anglican? This is the place that has been made twice holy, by Nicholas Ferrar's devotions and by Eliot's incomparable lines. Here above all is 'where prayer has been valid', here the goal of modern pilgrimage for those who seek the dove descending or who merely wish to inform curiosity. Two poets make the journey: Neil Powell, who brings 'In one hand Eliot, in the other Pevsner', and John Greening, whose thoughts turn at the end to another book. Powell goes through the rituals of a visit, has the experience without understanding the meaning, and finds Pevsner's words prevail over Eliot's: 'Little Gidding is a confusing church.' Greening finds the place deserted and goes home, his thoughts full of worries about the thefts and vandalism that happen in empty churches. He goes home to wrap up a Christmas present – 'that book by Richard Dawkins'. Enough said. The vulgar and the intellectual enemies of the Church are in the ascendant.

Greening set out 'wondering about Huntingdonshire churches: who uses them now? / Are we even closer to the fulfilling of Larkin's prophecy?' Larkin's 'Church Going' of 1954 is the commanding poem of this volume, made perhaps more impressive as one recognises how many church poems pay tacit homage to its themes. It is a poem that no one who writes about our churches can ignore. Its success is the product of several factors, including its length, which gives space for thoughtfulness and its clarity, which makes it eminently accessible. The narrative unfolds easily and leads the reader into a serious, unexpected survey of possible futures. The phrasing is irresistible, catching what so often eludes expression in its delicate net of words:

A serious house on serious earth it is,  
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,  
Are recognised, and robed as destinies.

Above all, it raises and confronts the large issues of the Church in our time. What purpose does it serve in a secularised society? What needs in human nature does it now satisfy? Why are we drawn to these uncomfortable places? If one can foresee the death of faith, what then? Today we are sixty years further down the line of time. The editor of this collection reminds us that weekly attendance in the Church of England amounts to less than 2 per cent of the population, and remarks that ‘no one could deny that the Church of England is moribund and that its power over ordinary lives is insignificant.’

For one of our leading poets, the show is already over. Ted Hughes briefly mythologises the history of Christianity in the North in ‘Heptonstall Old Church’. The great bird of faith landed here. ‘Its song put a light in the valleys.’ ‘Its song brought a crystal from space / And set it in men’s heads. / Then the bird died.’

The crystal in men’s heads  
Blackened and fell to pieces.

The valleys went out.

This is not the first time the death of the Church has been announced. Kevin Gardner appropriately chooses a stanza from Matthew Arnold’s ‘Grande Chartreuse’ as an epigram for his volume, for it was Arnold who most emotively explored a world in which faith had died. In ‘Dover Beach’, probably written in the early 1850s, he heard the ‘melancholy, long, withdrawing roar’ as the Sea of Faith retreated, leaving the world ‘a darkling plain’, vast and drear. The Grande Chartreuse stanzas were composed about the same period; in them Arnold questions himself about why he has been attracted to ‘this living tomb’ of the monastery? ‘Your faith is now / But a dead time’s exploded dream’. Like Larkin a hundred years later, Arnold imagines a time when men will look uncomprehendingly on the ruins of this church, as Christianity follows earlier beliefs into oblivion. In fact, we know that there was a vast resurgence of Christianity in the second half of the nineteenth century, with more churches built than at any time since the Middle Ages. Now that the sea of faith has drained to a new low, can it possibly make yet another comeback? Christianity has shown its resilience over and over again throughout history, but at this time its future – and especially the future of the Church of England as an official religion of the state – looks dark indeed.

I should add a note about the title, *Building Jerusalem*, which seems to me to be a misnomer. Kevin Gardner uses it to evoke the Blake/Parry anthem which ‘occupies an unlikely position in English music in its broad and vital appeal to a people to whom

notions of both empire and established Church are essentially dead or meaningless'. Poets who engage in the recovery of Anglican memory, he claims, are in effect 'building Jerusalem in England', with a hope that 'the present world of chaos and fragmentation might be transmuted into identity, order and meaning'. Yet the cumulative experience of reading the poems in this volume is quite the opposite of this hope: a sense of sadness, forlornness and despondency predominates. 'The Destruction of the Temple' might be a more appropriate title.

Graham Parry, University of York



## Book reviews

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James Bettley and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England, Suffolk East*. Yale University Press, 2015, 677 pp., 118 col. pls, £35.00 hdbk, ISBN 978 0 300 19654 2

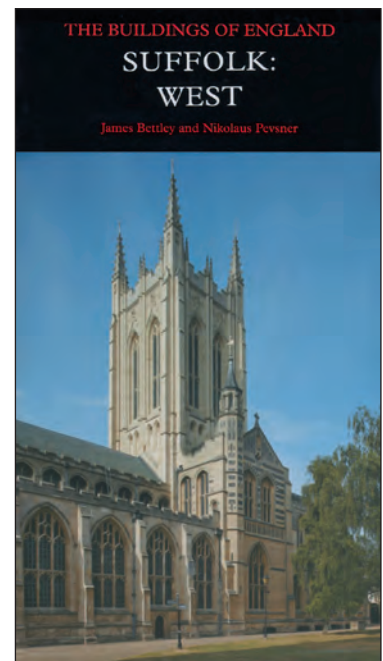
James Bettley and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England, Suffolk West*. Yale University Press, 2015, 635 pp., 117 col. pls, £35.00 hdbk, ISBN 978 0 300 19655 9

James Bettley's revision of Suffolk completes the revision of the Buildings of England (BoE) volumes for East Anglia – unless you include Hertfordshire, on which Bettley is now working. I hope it does not take the six years Suffolk took. The Norfolk volumes by Bill Wilson were the first (1997 and 1999) and they are beginning to show their age, lacking some details (for instance, of church restorations and furnishings) seen in the more recent volumes.

There are now two volumes for East and West Suffolk, not corresponding to the 1888–1974 counties but to a division based on the main A roads. Although recognised as 'potentially controversial', this is probably the most sensible break for the traveller, but it has resulted in the Introduction being revised to only include places in the east or west. Personally, I would prefer one county-wide introduction (perhaps with (E) and (W) after the place name) rather than making the Introduction fit the specific volume, but this is now Yale's policy. The place names are still very small on the map and unfortunately the break across the county is hard to determine as it runs along the spine.

The wording of both the Introduction and Gazetteer entries remain essentially Pevsner's and Bettley has successfully integrated wholly new entries (such as St Edmundsbury Cathedral). With so much extra material available, every entry appears to have been expanded – though each volume is still by modern BoE standards quite manageable. Looking at the summary of the county's mediaeval stained glass, Pevsner's original four lines only naming Long Melford church and Hengrave Hall, has become five lines with three churches in Suffolk (E) and nine lines with seven churches in Suffolk (W). But Hengrave Hall's glass is no longer 'possibly by Galyon Hone, c.1525', but is 'made in France, shipped to England 1527 and installed by Robert Wright of Bury St Edmunds in 1540', a typical example of the advance in knowledge since 1961.

The greater number of attributions of monuments of the post-mediaeval period leads to a much longer section in the



Introduction too. Perhaps the greatest improvement is in the description and classification of timber roofs – though curiously, angels are only mentioned in the Gazetteer entries. Sadly for an East Anglian, Bettley apparently dislikes flint ‘which aesthetically leaves much to be desired’ and ‘no material makes uglier ruins’, but the entries give full descriptions of its decorative use.

That advance in scholarship can also be seen in the new sections of the Introduction for the years after 1840, originally summarised by Pevsner as ‘The Victorian Age’ and ‘Twentieth Century’. Bettley’s two essays on ‘Architecture 1840–1914’ and ‘Architecture since 1914’ give full overviews of local architects as well as the national figures and also explain much more about sculpture and church fittings including glass, though the lack of good twentieth-century churches and furnishings is noted. The 1961 account of the new work at St Edmundsbury Cathedral appears to be written by ‘Mr Dykes Bower’ (as acknowledged in a footnote). I suspect that Pevsner could not approve of what was being done but Bettley is full of praise for its completion, ‘the greatest architectural achievement’ of the twentieth century. I cannot see that the central tower (‘an impressive last (or late?) roar of the Gothic Revival’) is ‘largely but not entirely Suffolk in inspiration’. I am reminded first of Yorkshire (Hedon) and then Somerset (Wells, St Cuthbert), but the building certainly has ‘a truly cathedral-like appearance and character’ which I suggest Pevsner might well have conceded.

This revision includes all we have come to expect, with many more attributions in the church entries for fittings and furnishings as well as the names of restoration architects and details of contemporary changes. There is much more on Nonconformist and Roman Catholic buildings, mention of good vicarages and lych gates, many text illustrations and brilliant colour photography (mainly by Paul Highnam). Buildings and settlements are put into context and a brief development history rounds out the entries for towns. The peculiar is not ignored though and I particularly enjoyed the continued inclusion of *Curiosum*, such as at Somersham (W), ‘A First World War bomb’.

These revised volumes go beyond Pevsner’s original intention of swiftly creating an informed architectural and artistic account and I like to think that he would have approved the greater detail that his revisers have included – without losing sight of the need to be succinct. The longer entries reflect our greater knowledge but also perhaps the wider audience that turns to their Pevsner, whether they are architectural historians or simply culture vultures. Long may revisions continue to James Bettley’s exemplary standard!

Richard Halsey, Cambridge Historic Churches Trust

Clare Hartwell, Nikolaus Pevsner, and Elizabeth Williamson, *The Buildings of England: Derbyshire*. Yale University Press, 2016, 733 pp., 121 col. pls, £35.00 hdbk, ISBN 978 0 300 21559 5

No jaunt in England is complete without a Pevsner tucked into one's raincoat pocket. For over sixty years *The Buildings of England* have been an indispensable guide and companion for the academic, the local historian, and the curious traveller alike. The enduring value of the series owes much to Nikolaus Pevsner's pithy descriptions, *bons mots*, and aesthetic judgements, but it is the periodic updating of the volumes by subsequent editors that ensures their continuing usefulness as practical guides. This is the third edition of Derbyshire and it represents a major revision of the work.

Since Elizabeth Williamson's careful correction of the first edition in 1977, much has changed in the county. Significant buildings have come and some have gone, but, more importantly, new research that has changed our understanding of many of the structures discussed in the gazetteer. Clare Hartwell and her collaborators have done a magnificent job in summarizing the present state of knowledge. The volume begins with a new introduction. There is now an account of the geology of the county, written by Ian Thomas, and Paul Everson has contributed an overview of its archaeology up to the Norman Conquest. Both provide essential context for Hartwell's discussion of the architecture of Derbyshire. There is still much here on churches and large houses – we would not want to be without them – but there is more on transport and industry, suburban growth, and building since 1945. The introduction provides the local architectural history that Pevsner envisaged at the same time as addressing the broader issues of modern scholarship.

As enlightening as this is, however, most readers will home in on the entries in the gazetteer. Here too there have been substantial improvements. As before, the settlement is the basic unit of the text, but now in many cases it is prefaced by a general account of its development. Street plans, sparse in the earlier editions, are more widely provided and topographical analysis is essayed for the first time in some of the more complex settlements. An infilled marketplace in Melbourne, for example, is identified in a discussion of the relationship between the church and a castle that is no longer extant. Hartwell retains much of Pevsner's descriptions of the major buildings, but re-arranges and corrects them where appropriate in the light of the most recent research, sometimes rejecting his judgements, but more often qualifying them with a 'probably' or a 'maybe'. Early engravings,

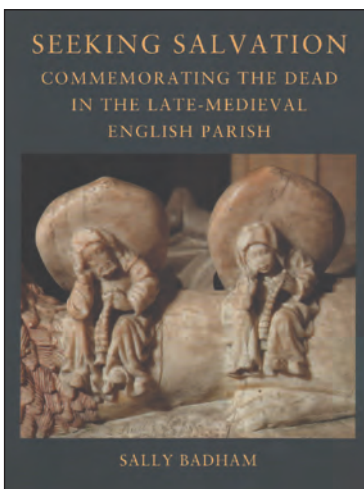




reproduced in the body of the text, are used judiciously to add to the arguments. Hartwell also provides an account of many structures that passed Pevsner by or failed to engage his interest. The whole is illustrated with a series of 121 colour plates bound into the centre of the volume.

Hartwell is unafraid of expressing emotions and impressions and writes with an engaging style that complements Pevsner's often telegraphic utterances. She is to be congratulated in bringing a classic into the twenty-first century and making it relevant to the modern age. The new edition of *Derbyshire* is indispensable for anyone interested in the county, even though its abundant scholarship no longer fits into that raincoat pocket.

David Roffe, University of Oxford



Sally Badham, *Seeking Salvation commemorating the dead in the late-medieval English parish*. Shaun Tyas, 2015, 396 pp., 118 col. pls, £39.95, hdbk, ISBN 978 1 907730 47 4

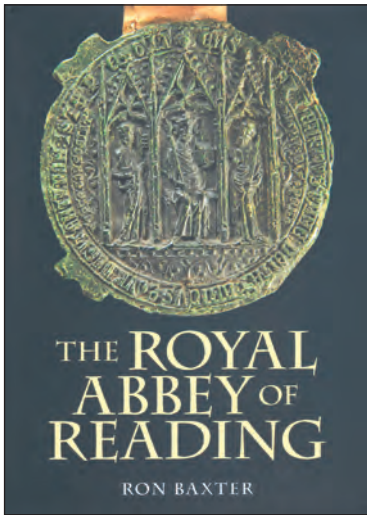
Late medieval religious culture was dominated by concern for the fate of the soul after death, especially after the official promulgation of the Doctrine of Purgatory in 1274. That concern increased as mortality rose during the climatic downturn of the early fourteenth century and even more particularly following the terrible effects of the Black Death and the subsequent frequent visitations of plague. Living and dead parishioners were forged into an intimate relationship in which the dead sought not only remembrance but also prayer to shorten their time in Purgatory, and the living sought to reduce their own pains, when their time came, by performing good works, amongst which were commemoration of, and prayer for, the dead. All levels of society shared the same concerns and could co-operate to mutual benefit, the wealthy deceased providing various kinds of memorial to prompt the living, both rich and poor, to pray for them, thereby helping people of all conditions in their quest for their own salvation. As personal wealth became more broadly distributed through the later middle ages, so people from a greater range of social backgrounds could afford some kind of commemoration, spreading the co-operative web of benefits even more widely through the worshipping community.

By far the majority of *memoria* – objects or activities designed to promote commemoration – have long since fallen victim to the ravages of time, and especially to the deliberate destruction brought about as a result of the changes in belief initiated during the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. Sally Badham's book reminds us, however, of the huge quantity of

commemorative objects and furnishings once possessed by parishes even of quite modest means, and of the vast amount of commemorative activity held within parochial places of worship. It draws on such physical evidence as still exists (illustrated by 118 colour plates, mostly by C. B. Newman, reproduced at good sizes and at a very high quality in a separate section of the book), and, more particularly, on a wealth of documentary evidence, much of it testamentary.

Two opening chapters provide introductions to the purposes of *memoria* and (perhaps a little too briefly) to the theology and religious culture of which they formed a part. The body of the book then follows with eight chapters detailing different kinds of commemorative object and activity: philanthropic works such as alms-giving and bridge-building; donations to churches for building, fixtures, fittings, furnishings and altar ornaments; the establishment of chantries, colleges, gilds, and the funding of prayers and other services either in perpetuity or for a fixed term; the funding of lights; the conducting of funerals; finally, the different kinds of monument erected after death, and their location within churches. The summary list may seem bald, but the important thing to grasp is that it was all-encompassing: every element of a parochial church or chapel and its furnishing, every object within it, could be made into a vehicle for commemoration, for the beseeching of prayer both during the routine liturgical round and through specifically commemorative services. Even in the poorest of communities it would have been impossible to be unaware of some *memoria*, of some appeal from the dead to the living for mutually advantageous prayer. That is not to suggest that everywhere was possessed of the culture to the same degree: there are hints of regional variations, notably an absence of gilds and some other forms of commemoration in the wealthy Cotswolds where they might be expected to have flourished. Neither, as a short final chapter discusses, did everyone participate in the culture to the same extent, particularly in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries as ideas of Reform began to percolate through society. But the central message of the book – that the culture of commemoration was a defining and integral part of late medieval religion for the vast majority of people – is amply demonstrated. None of that means that the book is ‘definitive’: as the author notes several times, there is much work to be done, particularly on teasing out chronological, regional and social differences in practice, but it provides a solid introduction and a foundation on which more detailed studies of particular issues can be built.

P. S. Barnwell, Kellogg College, Oxford



Ron Baxter, *The Royal Abbey of Reading*. Boydell Press, 2016, 354 pp., 143 b&w pls, £50.00 hdbk, ISBN 978 1 78327 084 2

a church whose east end arrangement and elevation were unknown, and whose length was a matter of speculation ....

This was the sorry state of Reading Abbey by the eighteenth century as described in Ron Baxter's introduction to *The Royal Abbey of Reading*. The painstaking work since of a handful of scholars in archives and the more recent discoveries made by archaeologists and art historians have changed the picture, but Reading Abbey has had to wait until 2016 for a substantial monograph bringing together all the material related to this major monastic site. Baxter expertly navigates the reader through a wide range of visual and documentary primary source material, threading in the work of other scholars from Henry Englefield in the late eighteenth century to his own recent significant contribution with Stuart Harrison to the rediscovery of the cloisters, to create a comprehensive and thoroughly readable account of the state of knowledge of this elusive medieval complex. No doubt its appearance now will help promote Reading council's own ambitious plans to develop a new cultural area in the city based on the site and called the Abbey Quarter.

The book falls into two roughly equal sections, the first of which deals with the history of the monastery in terms of its use. In these chapters we are invited to consider its importance as an English Cluniac foundation, as a royal mausoleum built for Henry I, as a place of pilgrimage and as a favoured residence for medieval monarchs. In the second we turn to the appearance of the twelfth-century buildings and the Lady Chapel added to the east end in the fourteenth. Between the two sections a darker chapter surveying the fortunes of the abbey from the Reformation through the depredations of the Civil War to the large scale neglect of the site subsequently as the masonry was recycled and the site redeveloped for other purposes is entitled 'Dissolution and Dilapidation'.

The tantalising presence of a major abbey of which so little remains has tempted some writers to treat the site and especially the church itself as a lost prototype for a number of innovations which survive in a more mature form elsewhere, or as filling in an awkward gap in tracing the development of a stylistic feature. In this regard Baxter looks at the argument that Reading played a significant role in the history of the giant order in twelfth-century English church architecture, ultimately and perhaps inevitably concluding that evidence is insufficient to provide a definitive



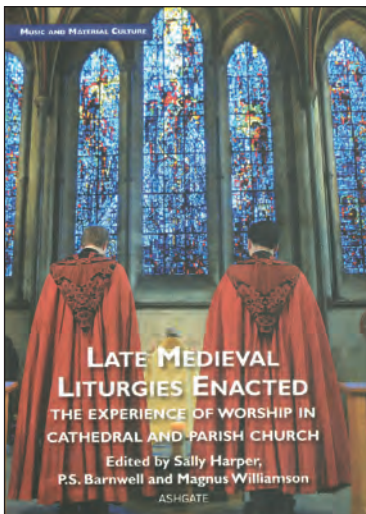
answer. Far from adopting this approach himself, Baxter's way, especially in the first part of the book, is to repopulate and recreate the building drawing on resources of all kinds to create a strong impression of a living community on a functioning site. Here we have analyses of the number of times various royals through the centuries stayed at the abbey and what they did there, who was buried in the church and why, what relics were acquired and where many of them came from. Along the way some fascinating information comes to light including an account of a tournament enacted as part of the festivities of a wedding which had taken place at Reading in which Edward III and his knights dressed up as the Lord Mayor and aldermen of the City of London, the revelation that the only manuscript of the famous medieval carol 'Sumer is icumen in' was written at the abbey, and that the only Englishman to claim the title of Holy Roman Emperor was buried there. If some of the anecdotes seem superfluous to Reading's history – the reader is often left to make the connexions herself – nevertheless this material really animates the subject and stimulates the historical imagination. In terms of royal visits to the abbey it would have been helpful to relate the information to the same kind of data available for other monastic institutions at the time to form a picture of exactly how far Reading was a particularly favoured destination. One body of evidence which is used throughout the book is the thoroughly romantic imaginings of the abbey's history through a series of paintings commissioned by the remarkable early historian of the abbey, Jamieson Boyd Hurry, pathologist and woad expert. The choice of subjects of the paintings and mode of representation give a fascinating additional insight into the Victorian view of the medieval period in the age of Tennyson.

Church furnishings are always the most elusive objects in an investigation of English medieval church history. In the chapter dealing with the abbey's collection of relics, a particularly vulnerable subset of this category, Baxter usefully gives the reader an idea of the rich and varied reliquaries described in the documents, by referring to comparative objects, inevitably not English ones, which have survived from elsewhere. A fascinating section on Reading's most important relic, the hand of St James, suggests the St Panteleon arm reliquary now in Baltimore, as a likely form for its precious container. A passage he cites from the Reading Abbey cartulary on the same page even suggests that the Reading reliquary was used as an arm extension to bless the pious with, though Baxter, perhaps wisely, does not push his speculation that far. Elsewhere the same method is used for a discussion of a relic of Mary Magdalen given to the abbey in the late fourteenth

century though here the primary documentary evidence gives an impression of an image of the saint containing her relics rather than an image, examples of which Baxter cites for comparative purposes, where the figure of the saint itself holds a model reliquary with the relics within.

The first section of the book effectively makes the reader hungry for the discussion of the material appearance of the building which is the subject of the last three chapters. Here Baxter's own pioneering research takes its proper place and one is left feeling that literally no stone has been left unturned in this thoroughgoing and exhaustive analysis of the available evidence. For experts this is the heart of the book, but for general readers the great achievement of this monograph is that the lively and informative first section so effectively prepares them for the heady challenges of the second.

Catherine Oakes, Kellogg College, University of Oxford



Sally Harper, P. S. Barnwell and Magnus Williamson (eds), *Late Medieval Liturgy Enacted*. Ashgate, 2016, 349 pp., 54 col. pls, 35 b&w pls, £95.00, hdbk, ISBN 978 1 4724 4137 9

The publication of this lavishly illustrated collection of essays, which range across such varied disciplines as theology, liturgiology, musicology, anthropology and psychology as well as archaeology and history, marks the completion of the project on the *Experience of Worship in Late Medieval Cathedral and Parish Church* directed by Professor John Harper at Bangor University between 2009 and 2013, part of a wider research programme investigating *Religion and Society* jointly funded by the Arts and Humanities and the Economic and Social Research Councils.

Some of the contributions provide factual accounts of the challenges faced by members of the project who in 2011 staged enactments of the late medieval Mass and some other offices in two contrasting locations, Salisbury Cathedral and the redundant parish church of St Teilo, Llandeilo Tal-y-bont, now reassembled in St Fagans, the National Museum of Wales. These not only included the formidable task of establishing the liturgical text and the musical accompaniments but also the manufacture of replica ecclesiastical artefacts and vestments, and the building of an organ. The enactments themselves were recorded and can be viewed on the project web site, [www.experienceofworship.org.uk](http://www.experienceofworship.org.uk).

The central sections of the book contain some valuable scholarly studies of a mainly musicological nature. In one Roger Bowers demonstrates how in the century before the Reformation the demand for ever more elaborate polyphony transformed Salisbury Cathedral choir into a body of professional singers, in a

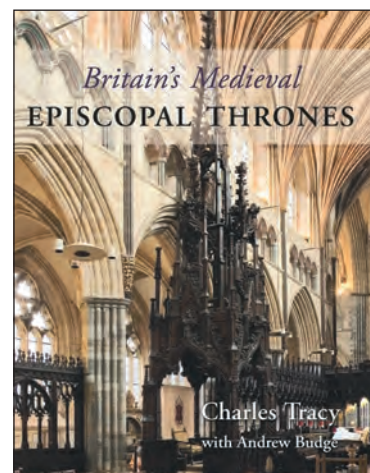
second Magnus Williamson proves beyond doubt that in the same period a large number of parish churches were installing organs and supporting choirs capable of singing polyphony, while in a third Jane Flynn describes the education and training necessary to produce such music. Two papers then focus on the English laity in the late middle ages, with Judith Aveling examining the development of the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus, which may indicate a growth in literacy at least in the upper ranks of society, and P. S. Barnwell through a close reading of vernacular devotional works elucidating the different ways lay people could have shared in medieval worship.

Considerable space is devoted to an analysis of the enactments and to the reflections of individual participants. Nils Holger Petersen in particular asks ‘whether we can really claim to get any other information from experimental liturgical enactment than about how we – the moderns carrying out the enactment – *experience what we believe to be close to what was done in the Middle Ages*’ (pp. 273–4). The possibility or impossibility of gaining access to the beliefs and feelings of people in the remote past underlies the whole *Experience of Worship* project, and though he adopts a rather more confident stance than Petersen, in his final assessment John Harper, echoing the words of Donald Rumsfeld, concludes that in the medieval period ‘the known unknowns and the unknown unknowns dominate any consideration of the laity at the Mass’ (p. 287).

Claire Cross, University of York

Charles Tracey and Andrew Budge, *Britain's Medieval Episcopal Thrones*. Oxbow Books, 2015, 192 pp., many col. Pls, £50.00 hdbk, ISBN 978 1 78297 782 7

This defining book on the surviving medieval episcopal thrones in England and Wales leaves little, if any, ground uncovered in terms of bringing together and updating the available scholarship on the subject. Six thrones are examined in detail – four in wood (Exeter, Hereford, St Davids and Lincoln) and two in stone (Wells and Durham), introduced with a chapter giving an account of the significance and visual evolution of this furnishing as a symbol of the power and authority of the Western Church. Charles Tracey is the main author and his colleague Andrew Budge is responsible for the chapter on the stone thrones, though Budge's presence is evident throughout and a number of the photo credits are his. These scholars are masterly in pulling together the work of fellow conservationists, art historians and archaeologists past and present whose contributions are not only assimilated into the main text but also arrayed in a range of visually and intellectually stimulating





formats – photographs, drawings, plans, fascinating footnotes, and a treasure trove of appendices dealing with the polychromy of the Exeter *sedes*, the carriage of its timber, relevant extracts, helpfully annotated, from Exeter cathedral's fabric rolls, and a detailed analysis of the construction of the Exeter and St David's thrones.

The six thrones considered all date from the fourteenth century, by which time their location would have been associated with the choir stalls, usually to the south-east, and no longer centrally placed in the apse behind the altar where the earliest episcopal thrones were situated. This move, Tracey notes, enhances the practical function of the throne over the ceremonial and symbolic. Three of the wooden thrones, all architectonic in design, and clearly destined for a fixed location often as part of a set of contemporary choir furnishings are dealt with together in a lengthy second chapter. In the same way the two stone thrones are the subject of chapter four. Between them a much shorter chapter is dedicated to a more anomalous case which is the less monumental and moveable wooden bishop's chair now in the chapter house at Lincoln. This is supplemented by a section on chairs of a similar generic type, documented but no longer existing, at Canterbury, Wells and Llandaff. The chapters read as if they have been conceived discretely and there is little cross-referencing between them. In the Lincoln chapter the lion motif on the chair is discussed in the light of the symbolic link between such furnishings, the throne of Solomon and the throne of Christ himself, through the typological connection between Solomon's ivory throne flanked by lions and the throne upon which Christ sits which was represented by the Virgin Mary. Tracey supports this reading with reference to thirteenth-century *Bible Moralisée* exegeses of this kind, and he might also have pointed to the contemporary explicit reference to this typology on the thirteenth-century facade of Strasbourg Cathedral. Lions however are a common device both for representing power in itself and also the power to crush formidable enemies. These readings are also given due consideration as well as a more local link between lions and the heraldry of the bishop under whose aegis the throne was possibly made.

Terminology (*sedes*, *thronos*, *cathedra*) is not closely defined, perhaps because terms were interchangeable at the time, though it was interesting to learn that *cathedra* was not a word used for this purpose before the thirteenth century. Some readers may have liked to hear more about how far the thrones were actively employed in liturgies, but such avenues of enquiry may be reasonably considered as potentially overloading a book which is already exemplary in its comprehensive research and detailed analysis and one which, through the delightful variety of its

delivery, maintains nevertheless a lightness of touch which makes it a joy to read and return to.

Catherine Oakes, Kellogg College, Oxford

Michael Hodges, *Parish Churches of Greater London: a guide*. Heritage of London Trust, 2016, 446 pp., many col. pls, £25.00 pbk, ISBN 978 0 946694 08 2

This fascinating and comprehensive guide covers 420 Anglican and Catholic churches found across the 31 Greater London boroughs. It excludes the City of London, as it was felt that this group of churches have been more than adequately covered elsewhere. The latest Pevsner set for London – all five volumes of it – includes 1,200 Anglican and Catholic parish churches and author Michael Hodges chose 420 for this book.

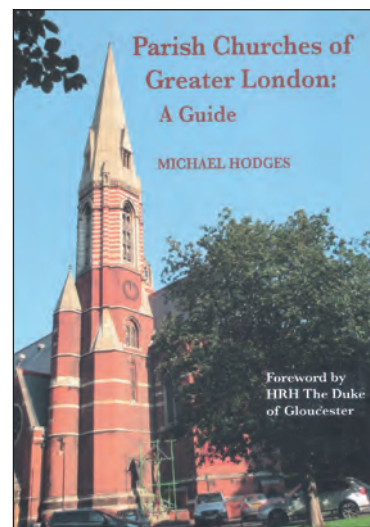
He is clear about appreciating his choices will differ from those of many others and makes no secret of the fact that he leans towards the Anglo-Catholic end of the belief spectrum, deploring the ripping out of pews and their replacement ‘by “comfy” chairs usually in hideous primary colours’. But as far as I can tell, his leanings have not influenced his choices, so we can make up our own minds when we push open the door to find a re-ordered interior on whether the church has been sensitively adapted to meet the needs of the twenty-first century or a wonderful aesthetic interior has been ruined.

Visiting and photographing each church as well as providing a succinct summary of its key features was obviously a huge task, but it is one the author says he found fascinating. This probably kept him going.

Organised borough by borough, Hodges helpfully introduces each borough to provide a degree of context. Usefully he also includes a survey of the chosen churches by period as well as short biographies of individual architects and their churches for those who have a particular area of interest.

It is clearly only possible to include a limited amount of information for each church plus on average three or four photos. It is probably best, therefore, to see the entries as tantalising tasters to remind you of a building you had forgotten about and want to see again or bringing to your attention one that you had not ever heard about. Hopefully, it will inspire those uninitiated into the delights of church crawling to start visiting churches in their area and perhaps further afield.

This is a wonderful book to have close to hand when relaxing or to keep in the back of the car so that you can pop into a church when you are in a new area of the Capital for work or pleasure. That said, most people travel around London on public transport



and it is quite a hefty tome to carry in your bag. In these days of smart phones and tablets, it is an ideal candidate to be digitised – with the addition of grid references and postcodes so people can easily see when there is a rather special church building close by.

Becky Payne, Historic Religious Buildings Alliance



Kate Tiller, *Parsonages*. Shire Publications, 2016, 88 pp., many col. pls, £8.99 pbk, ISBN 978 1 78442 137 3

It is a pleasure to recommend this concise, clear and accurate history of Anglican parsonages in England, and a book which, furthermore, welcomes the reader to its title page with a vivid reproduction of Martin Charles' fabulous photograph of Louth vicarage. Designed in 1832 by C.J. Carter, and with the great spire of the parish church looming above it as if the former had bizarrely landed at a strange angle upon the roof of the little parsonage itself, there are few other houses which so well sum up the rare and often unsung delights of that decade.

As you would expect from a slim volume in the Shire series, *Parsonages* is written by an expert in local and regional history archives, and in this case Kate Tiller is Reader Emerita at Kellogg College in Oxford. I notice from her own website bibliography that although she is described as an historian of the long eighteenth century, it seems to be local history itself, rather than in any particular period of it, on which she has mostly published. The first sections of this book cover the early parish and its parsonage mostly from the point of view of land ownership, which indeed is the subject that accounts for almost everything that has ever happened in English history. She also passes the inevitable test of explaining clearly and without being patronising the difference between a rector and a vicar, a test which I feel all of us ought to undertake in print at some point.

The emphasis then moves on to the social and the architectural. There is relatively little on the processes within the parishes during the Reformation or the Interregnum, although a little more on pastoral life during the latter, with George Herbert (of Bemerton, near Salisbury) and then Ralph Josselin (of Earls Colne, Essex) brought in evidence, followed by detailed accounts of clergy life following the Restoration. Tiller's 'golden age', as she calls it, followed by a question mark, is the Georgian era, not usually referred to as such by readers of *Ecclesiology Today*, and this part is full of those earthy, curious and furniture or garden-based anecdotes which enthusiasts of that period seem to like so much. There is a useful narrative describing the spate of legislation in the early nineteenth century that came to define the Victorian parish; not much – but just enough – on the houses of the clergy that



followed; and something of a postscript on what happened since to large parsonage houses, and what the new parsonage looks like today, including the one seen in the television comedy *Rev*.

It is a neat job. It is excellently illustrated, with good colour photographs of houses that have been well selected to make a point, and no fewer than three images of the heavily restored but originally mediaeval parsonage at Muchelney, one of the most beautiful houses in England. A suitable stocking filler for your niece or nephew.

Timothy Brittain-Catlin, University of Kent

Simon Bradley, *Churches: an Architectural Guide*. Yale University Press, 2016, 192 pp., 130 col. pls, £12.95, hdbk, ISBN 978 0 300 21554 0

With this volume Yale launches a new series, *Pevsner Introductions*, that aim to serve as gently rising pathways into the often intimidating purlieus of *The Buildings of England*. The publisher evidently feels that there is a fairly numerous body of people who feel the attraction of architecture yet lack the understanding of style, structure and historical development. It is true that more people are visiting churches these days, and more churches are open, perhaps as a result of the success of Simon Jenkins' *England's Thousand Best Churches* and other recent books that offer instruction in church exploration. Pevsner's county guides have always been subsidised, first by Penguin and now by Yale, and this new series is an attempt to enlarge their sales and readership.

Simon Bradley is one of the editors of the Pevsner Architectural Guides and has co-authored five of the county volumes, so he is a veteran ecclesiologist with long experience of utilising the vocabulary of architectural description. Pevsner himself, formed by his early training in Germany as a historian of English architecture, usually wrote brief, austere and precise notes on the churches he recorded, deploying a specialised vocabulary that a dedicated reader understands or soon learns to understand. His staccato descriptions are part of the pleasure of reading Pevsner. To the habitual user of *The Buildings of England* they are immediately evocative and informative, but to a newcomer they can be off-putting. The challenge facing Bradley is to soften the approach, to allow the apprentice church-visitor to familiarise him- or her-self with the language of architecture by means of exemplary application and with photographic help. So, the glossary of a Pevsner volume is now skilfully employed here in a succession of friendly demonstration exercises so that the reader can understand the construction of an Anglo-Saxon tower or the character of a Perpendicular chantry chapel. Detailed descriptions



and photographic depictions go hand in hand. They are accompanied by a commentary on the characteristics of the different phases of church building, on the reasons for changing disposition of parts, and on the effects of different fashions of worship on the appearance of a church. The writing is energetic and assured, but even so, there are times when Bradley unpacks the glossary of architecture too prodigally and the flourishing of technical terms becomes oppressive. I do not need to hear about brattishings and supertransoms, billet mouldings or mouchettes, queen-struts or tiercerons on my early exploratory visits to a church. There are moments of glossarial virtuosity in the book that are probably more satisfying to the author than to the reader.

What does deserve applause is the choice of photographs to complement the text. So many of the churches chosen for illustration are unfamiliar, yet they have the power to surprise and entice. As Bradley remarks, there are some 16,000 parish churches in England, so there is plenty of scope for the discovery of neglected gems. The very sight of some of the churches shown here – ones with remarkable exteriors, or with rich or pleasingly simple interiors or with furnishings that excite the imagination – is enough to cause one to get out the gazetteer and plot a journey.

This is a compendious work, well planned by an exceptionally knowledgeable author. A companion volume to *Churches* has also been published, with an equally stark title: *Houses*, by Charles O'Brien, who is another editor of the Pevsner Architectural Guides. The format of these books is the same as that of the Yale city guides, distinguished by bold cover designs that will make this new series stand out on your shelves. This is an enterprising venture by Yale that has got off to a good start. We wish it well.

Graham Parry, University of York



Robert Gage (ed.), *All Manner of Workmanship*. The Society of Faith in association with Spire Books, 2015, 128 pp., 43 col pls, £34.95, hdbk, ISBN 978 1 904965 50 3

The works of Faith Craft are not widely known outside the circles of twentieth century enthusiasts, though church crawlers may unwittingly come across examples in unexpected places. Springing from the Society of Faith, Faith Craft produced furnishings and liturgical items for churches committed to what Michael Yelton describes in this book as ‘Anglo-Catholic churches in the moderate and English tradition’ from 1916 to 1969. Particular characteristics of the Faith Craft style are the low relief carvings found in Stations of the Cross and reredos panels in a muted pallet; unmistakably mid-twentieth century in style; all of them are executed to high standards of workmanship. Never

strictly speaking restricted to being a company with employees, the best known designer associated with it was Laurence King; although Martin Travers seems never to have received a Faith Craft commission *per se*, several of those who did were trained by him and his influence can be seen in many of the photographs in this book.

*All Manner of Workmanship* results from four papers given at a symposium held in 2013. As such, it is not a comprehensive of history of Faith Craft but it nevertheless provides a sufficient cross-section of its work for it to stand as a valuable contribution to our understanding of a liturgically-focused, decorative genre which has not been addressed elsewhere. There are some gaps and, for example, there is no specific discussion of church plate or vestments, which were also areas for which Faith Craft was well known. The contributors' love of their subject matter makes for an enjoyable and informative read.

Elain Harwood provides a context for what follows with an overview of church building from 1915 to 1965. If this is not your period, you will find it an informative introduction to the rapid evolution of style of architects from those still working in Gothic to the manifestly modern. Harwood does not directly address the contribution of Faith Craft but the way in which church architects in this period responded (or not) to the challenge of creating a recognisably modern style while reflecting traditional understandings of what 'church' should look like were the same as those faced by the craftsmen of Faith Craft and provided the backgrounds which they sought to support and those others against which they reacted.

Personally, I would suggest reading Michael Yelton's chapter 3 before James Bettley's chapter 2. Yelton provides a broad assessment of Faith Craft as a company, the development of its character and the patrons who commissioned works from them and also introduces us to its principal designers. In turn, this then gives a better background to understand the two case studies of Laurence King (Bettley's essay on the most prominent of the Faith Craft designers) and Father Stephen Keeble's on his own church of St George's, Headstone. St George's hosted the symposium and has itself become a repository of Faith Craft works – both its own and others brought there from other churches. The combination of looking at the work of one designer across many churches and several designers at one church is very effective.

The usual vote of thanks must go to Spire Books for publishing an intelligent and rewarding book which might not otherwise have seen the light of day.

Mark Kirby, London DAC





## *The Ecclesiological Society*

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The Ecclesiological Society is for all those who love churches, and are interested in their fabric, furnishings and use. The Society was founded in 1879, as a successor to the Cambridge Camden Society of 1839. It has a lively programme, including various lectures, an annual conference, and visits to churches at a range of locations in the UK. Members receive the Society's periodical, *Ecclesiology Today*, twice a year.

Membership is open to all. For further details, see the Society's website at [www.ecclsoc.org](http://www.ecclsoc.org), or write to the Hon. Membership Secretary at the address given overleaf.

### **Contributions to *Ecclesiology Today***

The Editor is always pleased to receive articles for consideration for publication in *Ecclesiology Today*, or suggestions for proposed contributions, whether fully worked out or at an early stage in development. The Society wishes to encourage less-experienced authors, and the Editor is happy to provide informal support and guidance to those in this position.

In furtherance of the Society's aims, articles should promote 'the study of the arts, architecture and liturgy of the Christian Church'. They may be historical in nature, or reflect contemporary matters. They need not be restricted in time, place or denomination, and although in practice a significant number deal with Church of England churches, in recent years a wider range of material has been covered, a trend which it is wished to encourage. Articles dealing with individual buildings are welcome, although the Editor will expect the discussion to highlight matters of wider significance. The Society's interests cover a very wide field, and it is therefore important that articles should be written in a way which can be understood by anyone with a general interest in churches.

Most articles are objective and factual, but there is the opportunity for well-argued personal views on matters of general interest to be put forward in the occasional 'Viewpoint' series.

Prospective authors are invited to communicate with the Editor at the earliest possible stage. There is no formal process of refereeing, but articles will usually be sent to one or more readers for an independent opinion before acceptance for publication, and eventual publication may be dependent upon the author making such modifications as the Editor, in consultation with the readers, may recommend.

Proposed contributions should preferably be submitted by email. They should be prepared in accordance with the style guide, available on the Society's website or by application to the Editor. Authors are reminded that they are responsible for any fees and permissions required for the reproduction of illustrations.

Books for review should be sent to the Reviews Editor. Material for *Church Crawler* should be sent to the News Editor.

# *The Ecclesiological Society*

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Published by  
THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
ISSN: 1460-4213