

The high altar and its reredos



The high altar is made of oak and lives in the sanctuary. It is a raised table used for the celebration of the Eucharist/Holy Communion. It is sometimes called the 'Lord's Table' or the 'Communion Table' because it represents the table where Jesus shared the last supper with his disciples.

The high altar has not been used for parish communion since 1964. Instead, a portable altar, normally kept in the south aisle, is carried to the front of the chancel. This means the priest faces the congregation instead of having his back to it up in the sanctuary.

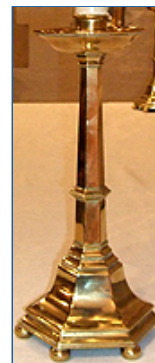
The altar cross and two candlesticks are kept on the high altar. The altar cross is inscribed "*Sacred to the memory of Henry Bendy 1936*" and the altar candlesticks are inscribed "*Sacred to the memory of Howard Fletcher 1939*".



The cross



An altar frontal



Candlestick

Altar linen

The altar is covered with several different special cloths, collectively called altar linens. They are so called because Jesus' graveclothes were made out of linen. They cover the altar during services and celebrations, and also when the altar is not being used.

Altar frontals

The frontals are the same size as the front of the altar, made of tapestry, silk or damask, and are richly decorated. There are different colours according to the time in the liturgical season.



The reredos

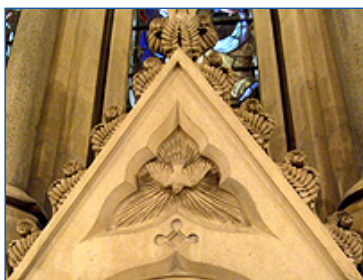
Behind the high altar is a beautifully carved stone ornamental screen called a reredos.

The word reredos comes from an Anglo-Norman 14th century term *areredos*, from *arere* behind and *dos* back, from the Latin *dorsum*. It is also known as an 'altar-piece'. A reredos can be simple or elaborate.



In St James's Church the reredos has several religious symbols. The central panel has a cross in marble. When St James's was first built, it is unlikely that there was a cross on the high altar. In those days this marble cross would have been seen as unacceptable in a 'Protestant' church. A cross in marble on the wall, though, may have been thought better. If the altar cross is removed from the high altar, as it is in Lent, the reredos cross provides a very obvious focus for the church, drawing one's eyes towards it. Above the cross there is an apex stone showing a dove carving, representing the Holy Spirit and peace, with and fern leaf decorations. The inset panels of the reredos have decorative tile patterns, shown below.

The cross is flanked by carvings of bread and wheat, and wine and grapes. The altar is the focus of the celebration of the eucharist or holy communion, when bread and wine are taken and shared. The depiction not just of the final products of bread and wine, but also of the ingredients wheat and grapes further remind us at the Harvest Festival that at the eucharist we use the fruits of the harvest in the Church's principal act of worship.



The dove on the reredos



Angels on the reredos



The bread and wine on the reredos