

ST MARY'S CHURCH, GOUDHURST

Diocese of Canterbury

INTRODUCTION

St Mary's Church tower overlooks from its prominent hilltop position the village and parish of Goudhurst in the Weald of Kent about seven miles south-east of Tunbridge Wells. The church is Grade I listed and stands within the Goudhurst Conservation Area adjacent to the Star and Eagle Inn.

The building has a relatively traditional layout comprising a nave, chancel, wide north and south aisles and a west tower. There are two chapels at the east end adjacent to the chancel and a small vestry at the west end next to the tower. The main body of the church dates from the 13th to the 15th century but the tower dates from the mid 17th century and has a mixture of Gothic and classical features. The church was restored in the late 19th century by Slater and Carpenter, who also added the vestry. There are significant monuments within the church. The building is constructed in Wealden sandstone and with clay tiled roofs to the nave and south aisle, and lead roofs with battlements to the north aisle.

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Goudhurst is a picturesque thriving hilltop village with extensive views over the surrounding Wealden countryside. There are several local shops, a village hall and a primary school as well as two local public houses but few other community facilities.

The church itself had no separate meeting rooms, refreshment or toilet facilities and so the Star and Eagle pub adjacent to the church had to be used for these purposes. The PCC was keen to be able to expand the role and outreach of the church within the local community, particularly in encouraging young people to participate. They also wanted to improve and enhance the church building but the challenge was how to accommodate these alterations within such an important historic place without causing a detrimental impact.

Goudhurst shares its benefice with Christ Church Kilndown which is about three miles away to the south west.



View of church from the east showing the south aisle & chancel



View of west tower approached from the village



View of new glazed entrance doors in the tower

THE PROJECT BRIEF

The PCC wanted to improve access to the church from the High Street through the main west door entrance in the tower and thence into the nave. They also wished to provide new facilities to enable the building to be used for community based functions such as concerts, visiting choirs, drama productions and art exhibitions. In an initial feasibility study, areas which could be adapted for these purposes were identified, including the tower and adjacent vestry and the western end of the two aisles.

Another key aim was to reorder the church interior by providing an independent space within the church for the children's activities to be held at the same time as the main services and which could also function as a quiet meeting place. A kitchen and toilet facilities, as well as more storage space were also important features for both church related and community functions.

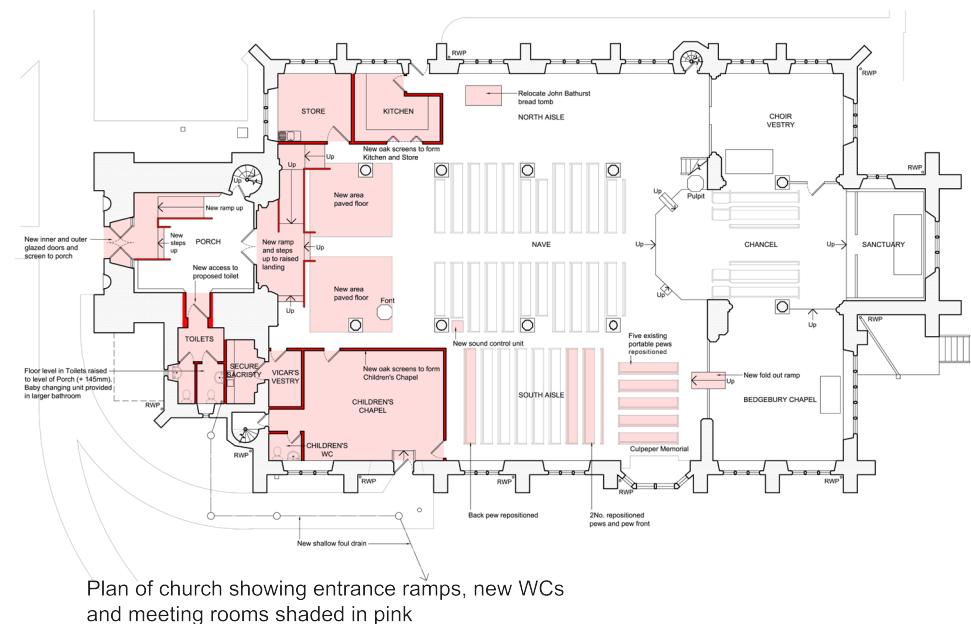
THE PROPOSALS

Improved visibility from the churchyard gate of the main entrance and interior was achieved by the installation of new glazed doors in the tower, allowing the existing solid wood doors to be retained and held back at times when the church is open.

New steps and ramps within the tower and west end of the nave have resolved issues of level changes at the main entrance and into the nave. These are flanked by simple black ironwork balustrades with brass handrails. Pews and pew platforms have been removed at the west end of the nave to create a more open meeting area for refreshments after services and other events. This area has a new terracotta tiled floor to complement the existing 19th century tiling.

A new doorway was formed within the thick tower wall to provide access to two WCs which replaced part of the vestry. The vestry itself was remodelled to incorporate part of the south aisle. Within the west end of the nave, two 'pods' were created to provide a children's room, with its own toilet, in the south aisle and a kitchen together with a store and flower room in the north aisle. These spaces were constructed with carefully designed partially glazed oak screens including ceilings to make them completely soundproof.

The font was kept in its existing location, but lowered to eliminate the step. In addition, some of the pews from the nave were relocated at the east end of the south aisle. New chairs were purchased by the PCC for use at the west end of the nave and in the north aisle.



View of tower showing new entrance doors, steps and ramp

OBTAINING PERMISSIONS AND TIME LINE

The PCC had first approached the DAC and their architects (then Le Fevre Wood & Royle) in 2005 to develop a brief for their project which was called 'Building for the Future'. A statement of need evolved from this stage which was developed in a second main phase of consultation in 2007 undertaken to meet the PCC's brief and available funding. By 2010, Planning approval, the DAC Faculty and Building Regulations approval were finally obtained. This involved lengthy and complex consultations with Canterbury DAC, as well as Historic England and SPAB.

Work on site commenced early in 2011 and was completed in approximately nine months. The project comprised several separate contracts including improvements to the access from the High Street, the new glazed doors in the tower, new drainage connection, relocation of some of the monuments, the supply of new joinery items and the general building contract works.

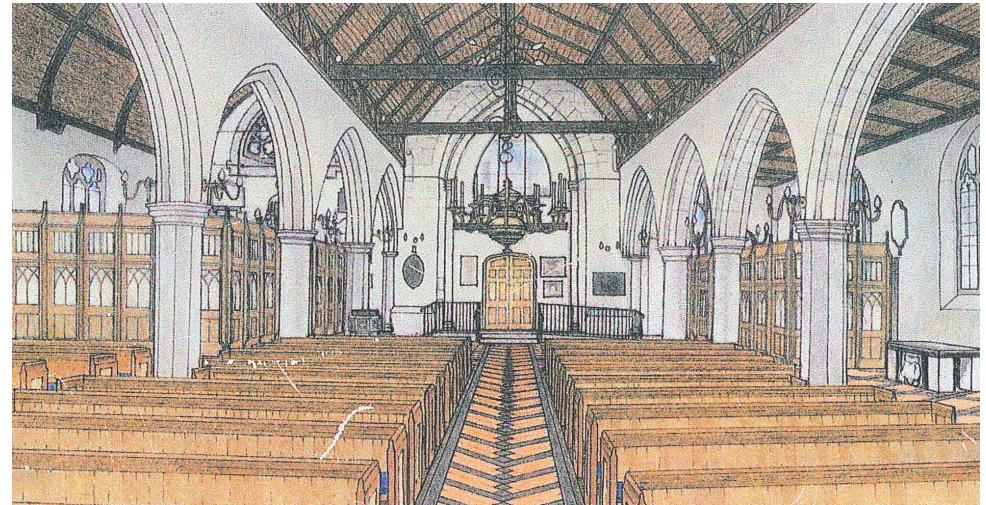
A ground radar survey carried out before the works started showed that there would be tombs under the floor at the west end of the nave, but the removal of the pew platform revealed a large brick vault with a high crown, only just allowing sufficient depth for the new flooring.

PROJECT COSTS, FUNDRAISING AND GRANT AID

The building contract cost of the reordering project was £162,800 and the project cost for all the reordering works including professional and local authority fees amounted to approximately £350,000. Funding for the project was entirely raised by parishioners by simple requests and events. Efforts to secure grants from charities was almost entirely unsuccessful as the parish was deemed to be relatively affluent.

PROJECT TEAM & SPECIALIST SUPPLIERS

Architects:	Le Fevre Wood & Royle and Clague Architects
Archaeology:	Guy Beresford and Subscan Ltd
Main contractor:	Hurstway Construction Ltd
Joinery:	Cheeseman Joinery Ltd (Durtnell)
Glazed doors:	Stewart Fraser
Engraved glass:	Mrs Freddie Quartley
Balustrade ironwork:	Ironworks UK Ltd
Memorials relocation:	Messrs Burslem



Sketch view of proposed 'pods' prepared by Le Fevre Wood & Royle



View of nave looking west towards the tower with new 'pods' in south & north aisles

PROJECT REVIEW

Has the completed scheme achieved the objectives of the brief?

Yes, on the whole very well. The 'Children's Chapel' was conceived as, amongst other functions, the place where children's church-going would be accommodated

Have new uses for the church been generated?

Yes: cafe toddlers, committee and other meetings, funeral wakes, lent lunches.

Has the congregation changed/increased/decreased?

The fact that the congregation was so committed to this project was a sign of their commitment to the growth of the church and this has been achieved with the increase in the size of the congregation.

The huge increase in the numbers of children and young people attending worship (approx 70) and the need for different spaces for the various groups to attend the Sunday club now show the Children's Chapel to be totally inadequate except as a toddler/creche venue.

Were there any unexpected conflicts between church and community?

We had several questionnaires and published the results analysed statistically including a mock-up demonstration and models and even chairs were chosen by vote. As a result there was virtually no serious dissent to a potentially contentious project.

Is the project sustainable in the long term?

Yes, it uses little in the way of additional resources and generates a modest income, usually for charitable purposes.

Does the PCC have any future plans?

Not currently on the building side of things although we are looking to add another screen and improve the AV system.

Best Piece of Advice

Be absolutely open about all the plans, listen to all objections carefully and give time to answer them. Consult widely.

Parish website details and contact

www.gkchurch.org.uk
Office: 01580 211739

Church plan and photographs courtesy of Clague Architects



View of children's room



Detail of joinery and etched inscription



Detail of new doorway in tower to WCs