

ST GREGORY AND ST MARTIN'S CHURCH, WYE

Diocese of Canterbury

INTRODUCTION

The church of St Gregory and St Martin stands in the parish of Wye which lies on the edge of the north downs about 5 miles north east of Ashford and 12 miles south west of Canterbury. It is at the centre of the Wye Conservation Area and the village is set within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The church itself is Grade I listed and it sits well back from the roadside within an extensive churchyard and is adjacent to the historic Wye College which dates back to the mid 15th century. There are approximately one hundred listed properties within the village which is an indication of its high historical and architectural significance.

Most of the original cruciform shaped church dated from the late 13th century, and its layout comprised an aisled nave, transepts, tower crossing and chancel. After the collapse of the tower in the late 17th century, much of the church was re-built by 1706 with the massive three stage tower replacing the former south transept. The chancel is a distinctive feature of the rebuilt church with semicircular apse and painted panelling with choir stalls in 18th century style which contrast with the medieval interior of the rest of the church.

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Wye is a thriving large village which has a primary school, a number of local shops, public houses and a railway station. The church attracts a total congregation of about 130 people to the normal two or three Sunday services and it is open daily. Many visitors also come to the church, including those walking along the North Downs Way. The PCC was keen to be able to cater for a wider variety of church services and community events.

The church is in the parish of Wye with Hinxhill, the latter now being a chapel of ease to Wye church. It is part of the West Bridge Deanery and one of a total of eight rural churches within the Wye Benefice which also include Boughton Aluph, Brook, Elmstead, Hastingleigh, Hinxhill, Petham and Waltham.

The PCC at Wye have undertaken a continued programme of interventions to improve facilities in the church in order to widen the use of the building by responding to new patterns of worship as well as a variety of community needs, including improved accessibility.



View of church from Church Street



View of church interior showing chancel



View of chancel & tower from north east

THE PROJECT BRIEF

The PCC had already carried out a number of reordering projects starting with the provision of new toilets located in a new extension designed by Le Fevre Wood & Royle in the 1990s. This extension was discretely located between the tower and the south porch, and hidden behind a flint wall with crenellated parapet to match the existing aisles.

Between 2006 and 2014 further projects were carried out, including the introduction of the new glazed entrance doors in the south porch, the installation of a tea station at the west end of the north aisle and improved access from the south door via a new ramp and steps, all of which were designed by the same architects. An oak audio visual control desk at the west end of the nave was designed by Clague architects in conjunction with Barn Audio installations.

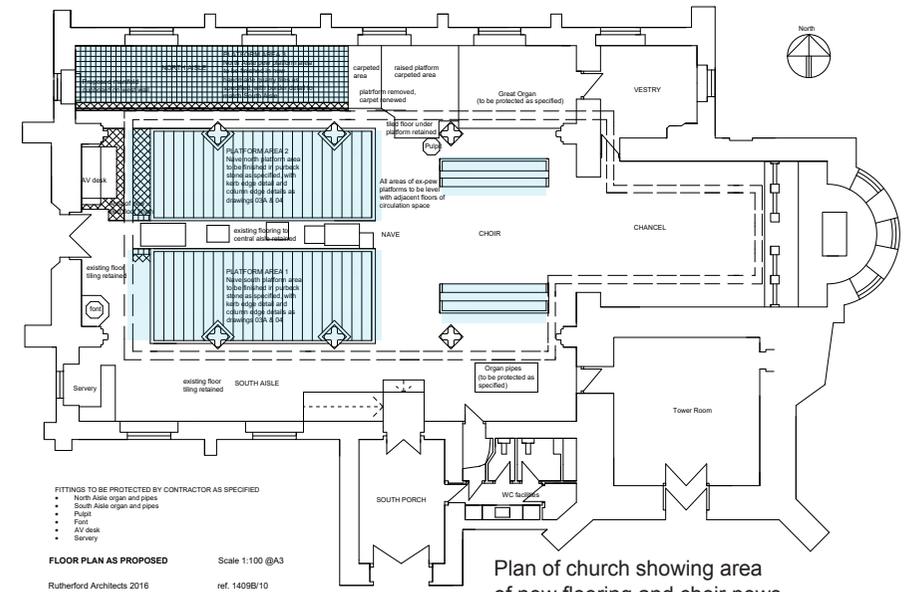
The PCC's next plan was to increase the flexibility of the nave seating by the replacement of the pews with moveable seating and this was designed and supervised on site by Rutherford Architects. This work formed Phase 1 of the interior reordering of the nave. Phase 2 includes the replacement of the existing choir stalls with matching moveable pews.

THE PROPOSALS

The fixed pews and raised timber pew platforms in the nave were removed and replaced with a level stone floor and moveable pew benches. Choir stalls at the east end of the nave were also replaced with more flexible seating. These stalls were to be re-configured to form screens around the additional loose chairs stored at the west end of the North Aisle. The aisle floor was finished in handmade quarry tiles to match the existing in the South Aisle and the raised platform at the east end was removed and carpeted for use as a children's activity area.

The proposals included the installation of underfloor heating below the new flooring, using the proprietary Jupiter dry system to minimise archaeological disturbance, and connected up to the existing finned tubular heating within the floor ducts. This additional heating helped to improve the comfort levels within the main body of the church.

Existing ledger stones within the tiled central aisle of the nave floor were carefully integrated into the new stone flooring.



Plan of church showing area of new flooring and choir pews shaded in blue



View of nave with pews looking west before reordering

OBTAINING PERMISSIONS AND TIME LINE

The PCC first began discussing the project to replace the nave pews and choir stalls with moveable pews at the end of 2014. A detailed statement of significance and statement of need together with outline design proposals were prepared by the PCC and the architect for submission to the DAC in October 2015.

The consultation process with the DAC and other advisory bodies continued until the granting of the Faculty at the end of September 2016. During this period an archaeological evaluation was carried out, the detailed drawings and specification prepared and the tenders received. The contract works commenced as soon as the faculty was granted and the church was closed during the works with services held at the local school to assist with a very tight programme on site. Both the stone flooring and the clay tiles had long delivery periods but the project was completed in mid December 2016 in time for the Christmas services. The new moveable pews for the choir area were installed in August 2017, thus completing the second phase of the project.

PROJECT COSTS, FUNDRAISING AND GRANT AID

The total project cost for Phase 1 including professional fees, was £200,876 excluding VAT of £21,000 which was recovered subsequently. The anticipated cost for Phase 2 was about £36,500 including VAT which will not be recoverable.

In order to raise funds for the project, the PCC used existing funds for fabric work from a charity associated with the church, applied for grants, held fundraising events, asked for donations towards individual bench seats, approached local organisations for donations and sold the old pews.

PROJECT TEAM & SPECIALIST SUPPLIERS

Architects: Rutherford Architects
Heating Engineer & Design: Pasion Star with Jupiter Heating
Archaeology: Canterbury Archaeological Trust
Main Contractor: B W May & Son Ltd
Oak pews & furniture: Luke Hughes

Glazed Doors, Extension for WCs, Ramp & Tea Station:
Architect: Le Fevre Wood & Royle (now Clague)
Doors Supplier: Stewart Fraser Ltd

Oak Audio Desk:
Architect: Clague
Audio specialist: Old Barn Studios



View of nave looking west after reordering



Detail of flooring at base of column

PROJECT REVIEW

Has the completed scheme achieved the objectives of the brief?

Yes, definitely. The increased flexibility provided by the new moveable bench seating is much appreciated for the regular family service, celebration services, youth services and informal worship gatherings. Wheelchair users can now be accommodated within the nave seating instead of being sidelined in the north aisle. The congregation can also now face the font when baptisms take place and the choir area is now more easily used for staging school shows, music events and public meetings.

Have new uses for the church been generated?

It is early days, but we have held a barn dance, and used the church for coffee mornings in the past but now so much more easily and comfortably, and in terms of fund-raising, much more successfully, although how much of that is directly the result of the reordering is impossible to say.

Has the congregation changed/increased/decreased?

We have not yet fully started to use the church for a big range of additional activities so it is too early to say.

Were there any unexpected conflicts between church and community? No

Is the project sustainable in the long term? Yes

Does the PCC have any future plans?

Not at this stage.

Best Piece of Advice?

Don't start building work in September as so much has to be finalised in the last few weeks and August is not a good time as everyone – church and builders etc - is away. Having said that, we couldn't begin until all the summer weddings were over, and we were anxious to complete in time for Christmas, which we just managed to do with about a week to spare. Furthermore, had we not done so, with other events committed to take place in the church in the New Year, it would have meant delaying the project for another 12 months.

Parish website details and contact

www.wyebenefice.org.uk

Parish office: 01233 813 793

Photographs on page 2 and church plan courtesy of Rutherord Architects

Photographs on pages 1, 3 & 4 courtesy of Elaine Wren



View of glazed porch doors with extension for WCs on the right



View of audio cabinet



View of tea station and bookshelves