



Solihull Parish: St Alphege Parish Church

A Grade I Listed Mediaeval Church.

Statement of Significance

August 2021 (Ian Simpson), additions and revisions September 2024 (Solihull PCC)





1. Listing and Statutory Information

NHL Entry Number: 1076693, designated 5th December 1949, Grade I.

Listing Text: Available at <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1076693>

Reasons For Designation (© Crown Copyright Text): The Church of St Alphege, a parish church with phases of development throughout the medieval period and later, is listed at Grade I for the following principal reasons:

- * Architectural interest: the church has architecture surviving from multiple periods, reflecting changing practices in English architecture over many centuries;
- * Historic interest: the church retains a high proportion of significant medieval fabric, with its various phases and alterations reflecting the long history of Solihull;
- * Fittings: St Alphege contains a very good set of historic fittings which also represent many different periods and are of consistently high quality;
- * Group value: for its contribution to the townscape of Solihull, and relationship with other listed buildings.

Address: The Square, Solihull, West Midlands B91 3RQ

Conservation Area Status: Situated within the Solihull Conservation Area.

Local Authority: Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

Heritage At Risk Status: Not considered at risk, not on the Heritage At Risk Register.

2. Summary of overall significance

Archaeological Significance: **High**

Previous excavations have yielded some interesting finds including well-preserved mediaeval burials. The development of the building can be traced through several phases from the 13th Century onwards.

Architectural Significance: **Of Very High Significance Nationally**

Grade I Listed, therefore considered to be within the top 2.5% of all Listed Buildings nationally.

Artistic Significance: **High**

A range of stained-glass windows and monuments spanning a number of periods. These are generally of a very high quality; several of the windows are by noted artists / studios.

Historical Significance: **High**

Particularly interesting for its connections to the de Odingsells, Lords of the Manor of Solihull - a family which came to England with the Norman Conquest - and to the Holbech family. The Chantry Chapel with its crypt below give insight into the life and practice of the mediaeval church.

Spiritual Significance: **High**

A place of worship has existed on this site for 800 years. Strong sense of sacred place.



3. The Development of the Building within its environment

2020 was the year in which the people of Solihull celebrated 800 years of continuous Christian worship and witness in the town. It is believed that the town's name derives from the site on which St. Alphege Church stands: the red marl soil became very muddy in wet weather leading to it being referred to as the "soily hill".

Whilst it was in 1220 that the lord of the manor Hugh de Odingsells (c.1175 – c.1239) founded the current church, there is evidence of a smaller and simpler 12th Century church on the site; indeed, traces of its fabric survive within the current structure. Whether or not this earlier church had been abandoned prior to 1220 is unknown.

The de Odingsells family continued to enlarge and improve the church over the next two centuries. William de Odingsells, the third member of the family to hold the manor of Solihull, set the process in motion rebuilding the chancel and adding the Chapel of St. Alphege. The 14th Century saw the transepts and north porch added, although it would be 1535 before the north aisle would be complete in its current form.

The top section of the tower was completed in 1470 and a 59m spire added thereafter; this is not, however, the spire we see today. The original tower collapsed in 1757 and was replaced by the current spire, which at 57.34m is slightly shorter but still a very significant local landmark which commands the view as on the approach from the north-west via Solihull High Street towards The Square.

The construction of the church in sandstone must have been an expensive and logistically challenging operation. The local Mercian mudstone lacks the structural strength required of a building material and so the sandstone was brought in from Coventry and later from Shropshire / Staffordshire; the Triassic mudstone bed upon which the church sits was found to be moving under the weight of the church until remedial action was taken in 1940. Almost all other local buildings until the mid-18th Century were built of timber from the nearby Arden Forest.

Solihull, at the intersection of two ancient routes, was established as a burgh in the Middle Ages. Under burgage, strips of land either side of the wide main street (now High Street) were rented out to free tenants by the lord of the manor in return for cash rent.

The concentration of Listed buildings around The Square and the south-eastern end of the High Street, many dating from the 16th Century but almost all at least refaced in brick and stone if not substantially rebuilt during the 18th Century, tells the story of how a fairly small, but undoubtedly prosperous market village developed around the church in the late mediaeval period and grew into a town from the 1750s onward. Many more such buildings further out from the church were lost in the Mell Square development of the 1960s, increasing the significance of those which survive.

Solihull Parish is, according to the Church Urban Fund, one of the most affluent in the country. Solihull today is a town of around 123,000 souls; the Metropolitan Borough of the same name – which includes Birmingham Airport and the National Exhibition Centre – has a population of almost 215,000.

The ancient Parish Church of St. Alphege, surrounded by its churchyard in which many generations of Silhillians have been laid to rest, remains to this day at the very heart of the town. It is a hugely important landmark, an historical treasure trove and a place hallowed by the prayers of Solihull's people over the course of eight centuries.



4. Significance and development of the interior

Taken as a whole, the interior of St Alphege Church is of huge significance. It is a positive treasure trove of building fabric and artwork from every century from the 13th onwards. It tells the story not only of its own development as a church but of the town it serves and its notable people. Clearly in such an important interior only interventions of the highest quality should be considered and even then only when they offer benefits which greatly outweigh any harm to the significance.

Of particular interest are the two chapels, one above the other, to the north-east corner of the chancel. The lower one, known today as St. Francis Chapel, is reached by six steps. It contains a rare fireplace, evidence of it having been priest's quarters in the Middle Ages. It was built in the late 13th Century and is also notable for its ancient strap-hinged oak entrance door. The ceiling has two bays of quadripartite rib vaulting and there are four windows depicting saints, including St. Alphege.

The upper chapel is the Chapel of St. Alphege, reached by eleven steps. This would have been a chantry chapel in mediaeval times. Six red roses survive of a decoration scheme from that era; the remains of a piscina remind us that Mass would have been celebrated regularly in here. There are some good stained glass windows in this chapel including the 1908 east window by Bertram Lamplugh (see below SA.I) and a west window (SA.w.I) incorporating fragments of much earlier windows.

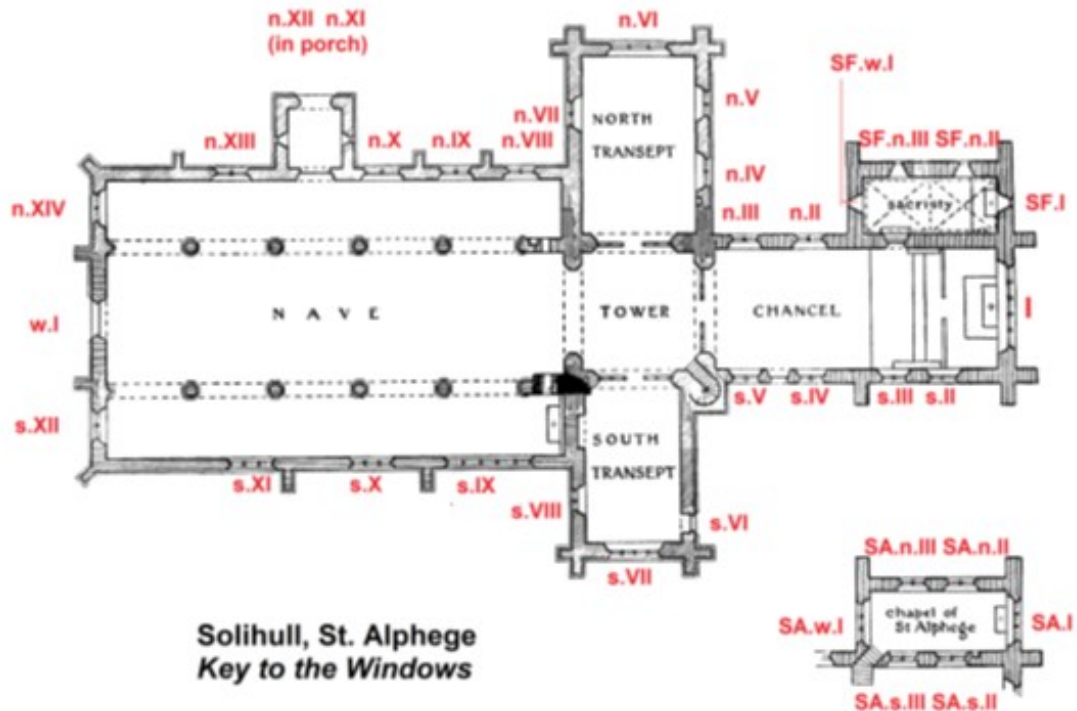
In the nave may be seen evidence of several stages of the church's development, giving it a high archaeological significance overall. The oldest part of the fabric is incorporated within the short wall to the east of the south arcade: there is a blocked window of the late 12th Century here. Above the western arch of the tower crossing may be seen the steeply pitched line of the former roof which abuts the tower much lower than the current roof. There is also a blocked window which in ancient times was external.

Contrasting the north aisle of the 14th Century with the south aisle of the 16th Century shows several differences in design between the two centuries, not least in the windows. The large square-headed window in the south aisle, for instance, is typical of the 16th Century.

The Chancel is largely of the 13th Century (complete with a piscina) although with evidence of development and renewal over the years. The east window by William Wales (see below) was added in 1845-7 whilst the roof dates from as recently as 1933 having been reconstructed following an outbreak of death watch beetle. The communion rails are late 17th Century and are of eight bays, carved with foliage.

The hexagonal pulpit is of Jacobean date, probably about 1610 according to Matthew H. Bloxam's *Antiquities of Warwickshire* p.16. It is a work of quality being finely carved and featuring what looks like a rather fierce sea monster or dragon-like creature.

5. Windows: Overall Significance High



Taken as a whole body of work, the collection of stained-glass windows in St Alphege Church is a very impressive and highly significant collection of work. None of the individual windows is without significance and even the plain glazing contains historic glass which needs to be treated with respect.

Some of the highlights amongst the windows are as follows:

I – the East Window, of five lights, by William Wales (1845-57)

Inscription: THIS WINDOW THE WORK OF WILLIAM WALES OF NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE WAS GIVEN TO THE CHURCH OF SOLIHULL PARTLY BY THE BEQUEST OF THOMAS CHATTOCK ESQ & BY THE RECTOR IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1845 || AND WAS COMPLETED IN THE YEAR 1857 IN MEMORY OF JANE THE WIDOW OF THE SAID THOMAS CHATTOCK BY THEIR SURVIVING CHILDREN.

A work of high significance for its quality, the importance of the artist and the change in blue glass production technique between 1845 and 1857.

SA.I – The East Window of St Alphege Chapel, of three lights, by Bertram Lamplugh, 1908

St. Edith of Wilton / St. Mary The Blessed Virgin / St. Elizabeth of Hungary.

A work of high significance. In memory of Edith Harvey Brooks (wife of the Rector).

n.IX – window of two lights circa 1920

Unsigned but a work of some quality, depicting two Christian soldiers (a crown revealing the one on the right to be a king).

In memory of 2nd Lt. Horace Jackson, Machine Gun Corps, killed in action in France on March 21st, 1918, aged 20.

Of local historical significance (war memorial).



n.X – window of two lights, 1937

Depicting St. Alban and St. Martin. Unsigned.

Inscribed “In memory of John Shilvock Wright, 2nd Lieutenant 29th Siege Battery R.G.A. born 7th February 1898. Killed in action near Courtrai on 7th November 1919 and who now lies buried in the military cemetery at Vichte, this window is given by his brother William Edward Wright in the year 1937”.

The window bears the insignia of the Royal Artillery and the mottoes “UBIQUE” (everywhere) and “QUO FAS ET GLORIA DUCUNT” (wherever fate and glory lead).

Of local historical significance (war memorial).

n.XIII – window of two lights, by Claude Price, 1977

Depicting a single scene – the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

This is by Claude Price (1905-1993) of the Birmingham School of Art and a work of singular beauty. Inscribed “To the Glory of GOD and in memory of Charles Andrew Remery 1897-1964.”

n.XIV – window of two lights by the studio of Charles Eamer Kempe, probably 1880

Depicting St. Cecilia and St. George. It is clearly the “twin” of s.XII.

Inscription obscured. The window has a few cracks, but this is a quality piece of art.

w.I – a massive window of five lights by Charles Eamer Kempe, 1879

A Jesse window which traces the lineage of Christ through the Old Testament. The tree of Jesse was a very popular device in the mediaeval period and some very fine examples survive in the Midlands, for instance at Saint Lawrence in Ludlow and at Saint Mary the virgin in Shrewsbury.

This window differs slightly from the mediaeval treatments of the subject in that Jesse is shown seated rather than in the traditional recumbent position. Also slightly unusual is that as well as featuring Jesse, the bottom row of figures depicts the prophets Jeremiah, Isaiah, Zechariah and Moses - shown carrying the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments.

This window is significant for its beauty and the treatment of the subject, as well as for being the work of an acknowledged master of the art of stained glass.

s.XII - a window of two lights by the studio of Charles Eamer Kempe, 1880

Depicting St Etheldreda and Saint Augustine Cantuar (the first Archbishop of Canterbury).

The dedication reads “in the reverence of God and in affectionate memory of Henry Arthur Lee, Mary Susan Lee and Edith Constance Lee; Charles Evans, rector of this parish, and Susanna Sarah his wife have dedicated this window AD 1880”.

This is a high quality and significant work as would be expected from the studio of one of the masters of late Victorian stained glass.



6. Monuments: Overall Significance High

St. Alphege Church has many monuments which at some point require cataloguing. All are high in historical significance locally and many have considerable artistic significance.

In **St. Katherine's Chapel** is a monument to the Holbech (or Holbeche) family who moved to Warwickshire from Lincolnshire in the late Middle Ages. It tells, in Latin but with later additions in English, the history of the family in some detail. Among the illustrious individuals listed:

- in the 14th Century Lawrence Holbeche wrote the first lexicon of the Hebrew language in English;
- David Holbeche persuaded Henry IV to offer clemency to Owain Glyndŵr in the early 15th Century;
- Thomas Holbeche distinguished himself at the Siege of Boulogne in 1544 under Henry VIII.

The association between the Holbeche family and the church spanned 13 generations. For its historical detail alone this is a highly significant monument. It is also a very fine example of the monumental stonemason's craft of that era and so is of high artistic significance.

The **South Aisle** has a total of 29 monuments and memorials. A good example is that to the magistrate William Hawes (d. 1611). This is a beautiful and well-preserved monument in paint on wood telling the story, in both Latin and English, of an upright man who was obviously much missed by those he left behind. Again this is significant for its historical and artistic value.

Two earlier monuments in the South Aisle are of the 16th Century. These stone slabs, one at each end of the aisle upright against the wall, were rediscovered in the 1879 restoration having lain for many decades under seating. They commemorate Thomas Greswolde (d. 1577) and his three wives (east end) and Richard Greswolde (d. 1537) and his wife Alice (west end). These are highly significant artefacts despite their condition, the inscriptions being highly worn and only partly legible.

At the Nave side of the **Tower Crossing** are four funerary hatchments of members of the Greswolde family. These are of historical and artistic interest and tell something of the story of that family through the visual language of heraldry.



7. Seating: Overall Significance Low, (dedications: Medium)

The congregational seating consists of four blocks of wooden pews sited atop wooden pew platforms in a manner typical of the late Victorian era. The pews themselves have little of interest to commend them in terms of their design. One school of thought says that they show how the building has been used liturgically since the 1880s, but another would argue that they have *dictated* how the building has been used in the same period given their mass and inflexibility, and that they have obliterated whatever was there before them.

There are, however, points of significance within the seating. The frontal on the south side bears the inscription "Mayoral pew presented by Solihull School on the occasion of the incorporation of the Borough of Solihull, 24th May 1954". Behind this is the Mayoral Pew with the arms of Solihull from 1560 and from 1954. This shows the central significance of the church in the civic life of the town.

At the opposite end of the church the two rearmost pew-ends bear inscriptions to the memory of two long-serving Churchwardens. That to the north side recalls Robert Bragg (1929-53) and that to the south P.W. Harrison (1942-62). The fifth pew on the south-central block bears the inscription "W.W. 1747", relating to either William Weston, Churchwarden in 1748, or more likely William Wedge, Churchwarden 1757-8. It is important that those who have given selflessly of themselves over many years to serve the church are remembered; this in turn invests these inscriptions with a moderate significance.

*For further detailed assessment of the significance of the nave pews, please read Appendix B: SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT OF PEWS AND OTHER FURNITURE
by Rachel Sycamore November 23rd 2023*

*For detailed assessment of the Jacobean pulpit, the Rector's stall, St Katherine Chapel pews, St Katherine's Chapel Altar, Servers' Stalls, Choirstalls and the Bookstall, please read Appendix B: SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT OF PULPIT, STALLS AND OTHER FURNITURE
by Rachel Sycamore August 29 2024*

8. The significance of the areas affected by the proposal

I. Items to be removed

- a. North entrance glazed doors to be replaced with modern glazed door
 - i. **Low** Poorly fitting 1970s utilitarian glazed doors with wooden frame
- b. Nave pews and pew islands
 - i. **Low** Most pews of low significance. See detailed report in Appendix B.
 - ii. **Medium** Those pews with inscriptions and the Mayoral pew
- c. Pulpit arched base and steps
 - i. **Low** Pulpit steps See detailed report in Appendix B.
 - ii. **Medium** Pulpit arched base. See detailed report in Appendix B.
- d. Nave perimeter heating pipes
 - i. **Low** Large diameter black cast iron heating pipes at floor level
- e. Wardens' stalls
 - i. **Medium** Mixed classical-Gothic with slim columns by Laurence King, 1963. In similar colour to previous tower altar and communion rails, since disposed of. Over large and out of keeping, drawing the eye away from the more important features of the medieval church. Crest obscures the bottom of the west end Kempe Jesse tree window.
- f. St Katherine's Chapel pews and altar
 - i. **Low** Mid-20th Century. See detailed report in Appendix B.
- g. Bookstall, to be replaced with new fittings against the west wall
 - i. **Low** Mid-20th Century. See detailed report in Appendix B.
- h. Rector's stall
 - i. **Medium** Mid-20th Century commissioned to commemorate a former Rector of the parish. See detailed report in Appendix B.
- i. Eagle lectern steps
 - i. **Low** 1970s utilitarian, carpeted. Picture by Rector's stall in Appendix B.
- j. Loose hassocks
 - i. **Low** Little used, plain mid-20th Century worn box hassocks with no embroidery or dedication
- k. Wooden funerary candles (6)
 - i. **Low** Six wooden "off-the-shelf" mid-20th Century funerary candles

II. Items to be relocated

- a. Jacobean pulpit to be moved to the south-east corner of the choir stalls
 - i. **High** See detailed report in Appendix B.
- b. Eagle lectern to be moved to the north side of the High Altar Sanctuary
 - i. **Medium** 1884, in memory of Dr. Thomas Lowe
- c. Servers' Stalls to be returned to the west end of the choir stalls
 - i. **Medium** Victorian pews and shaped seats. See Appendix B.
- d. Roll of Rectors, to be hung in St Katherine's Chapel
 - i. **Low** Painted in red on rear panels of Wardens' stalls, 1963
- e. Illegible Greswolde grave marker slabs to be set into nave floor paving
 - i. **High** See Section 6 above.
- f. Three external gravestones/monuments to be set within new external paving
 - i. **Medium** Early 20th Century gravestones / monuments
- g. Mayoral pew ends and churchwarden pew dedication plaques to be retained in perimeter seating
 - i. **Medium** Those pews with inscriptions and the Mayoral pew

III. Items to be adapted:

- a. North and west wooden entrance doors to be fixed open
 - i. **High** West door: oak, 1535
 - ii. **Medium** North door: probably Victorian
- b. North entrance outer gates to be rehung and fixed open
 - i. **Medium** Pair of iron gates “The gift of Mrs. Elizabeth Fisher, Widow, 1746”
- c. Children’s Corner loose furniture to be relocated to the north-west corner and re-stained to match new fittings
 - i. **Low** 21st Century basic benches
- d. Choir stalls at west end to remove 1975 additions to accommodate Servers’ Stalls
 - i. **Low** Modern, plain panelled additions from 1975. See detailed report in Appendix B.
- e. South choir stalls at east end to be shortened to accommodate relocated pulpit
 - i. **Medium** 1847, reworked, Victorian gothic-revival style choir stalls. See detailed report in Appendix B.
- f. St Katherine’s Chapel floor to be lowered and levelled with ramp access from tower area
 - i. **Medium** Chapel substantially refurbished in 1944. Origins date back to about 1350.
- g. Screen to St Katherine’s Chapel to be lowered
 - i. **Low** Screen is from the mid-20th Century, originally positioned in the west arch under the tower, moved in 1960s to the east arch under the tower, and in 1975 adapted to fit as a screen to the north transept
- h. New external western entrance (narthex) to be created adjacent to west end wall
 - i. **High** With origins from 1535, the west wall and windows of the church were rebuilt in 1879. There are arrow cuts in the stonework beside the west door, made by archers who practised their skill on the village green after they had been to Mass. In the design of the new narthex the west wall and arrow cuts will be untouched and remain visible.
 - ii. **Medium** The buttresses to the west wall were added by Leslie Temple Moore in 1951

APPENDIX A: Photographs



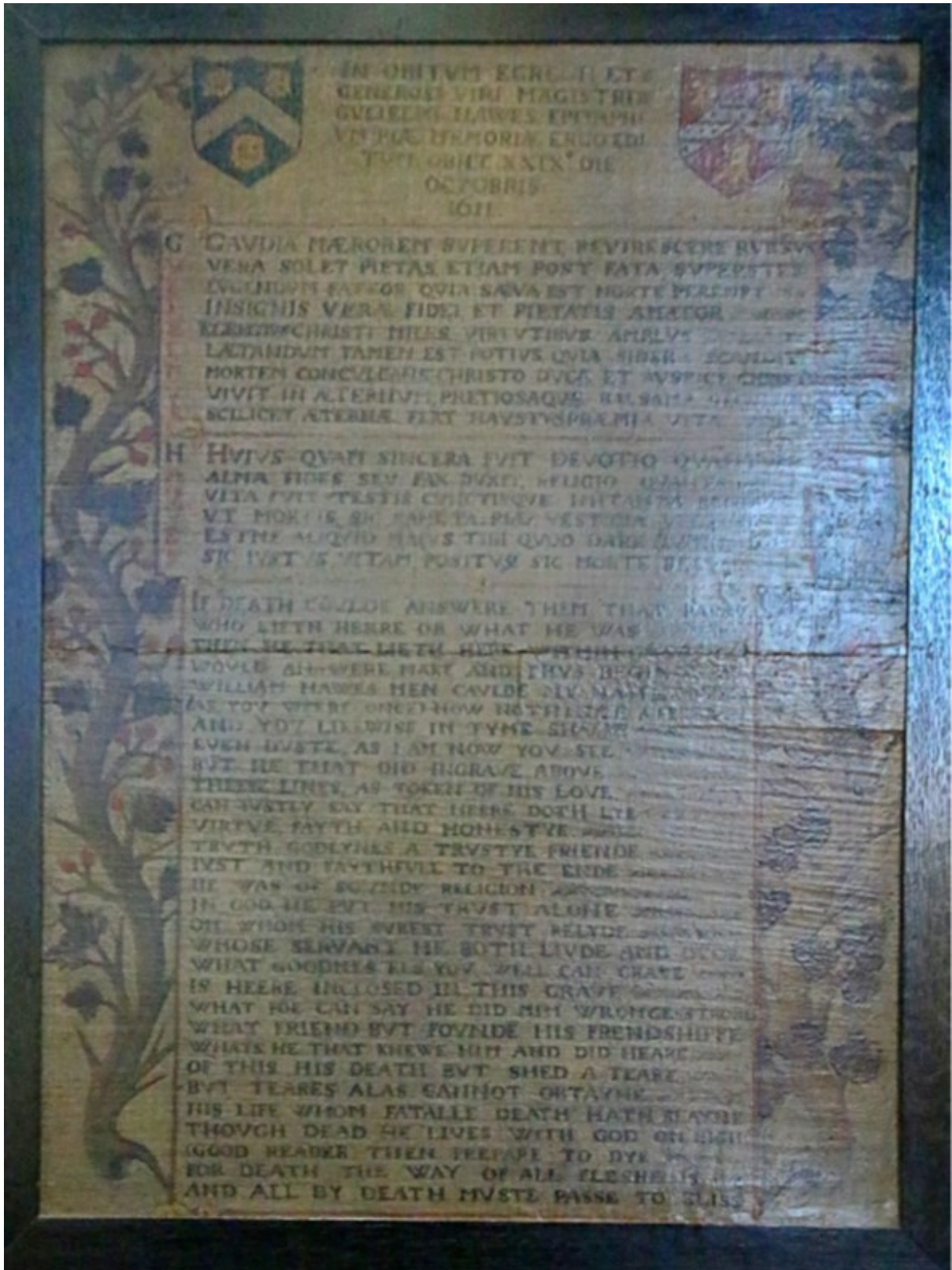
(Above) The Holbech (Holbeche) Family Monument in St. Catherine's Chapel.

(Below) Details from the Jesse Tree Window by C.E. Kempe.





The Presentation of Christ In The Temple (window n.XIII) by Claude Price (1905-93).



Monument to William Hawes, Magistrate (d. 1611)



The two south blocks of pews, showing the Borough Frontal and Mayoral Pew.

Below: Detail of Borough Frontal.





West end showing Charles Eamer Kempe Jesse Tree window (1879), Candelabrum (1706), Font (14th Century) and Wardens' Stalls (1963)



Exterior view of the church, showing the spire, north elevation and transept and war memorial.



APPENDIX B:

SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT OF PEWS AND OTHER FURNITURE

by Rachel Sycamore November 23rd 2023

Detailed assessment of the nave pews, surplus communion rails (the subject of a faculty application which was granted to allow disposal), 17th Century gate (in storage) and a small carved piece (in storage).

SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT OF PULPIT, STALLS AND OTHER FURNITURE

by Rachel Sycamore August 29 2024

Detailed assessment of the Jacobean pulpit, the Rector's stall, St Katherine Chapel pews, St Katherine's Chapel Altar, Servers' Stalls, Choirstalls and Bookstall.



SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT
OF PEWS AND OTHER
FURNITURE AT ST. ALPHEGE
CHURCH, CHURCH HILL ROAD,
SOLIHULL, B91 3RQ.



NOVEMBER 23, 2023
RACHEL SYCAMORE, B. A. (HONS), MRES
Furniture Consultant to the Hereford Diocese

Assessment of Pews and other furniture at St. Alphege Church, Solihull. Rachel Sycamore B. A. Hons, MRes

I have been asked by Solihull PCC to provide a significance assessment for the pews in St. Alphege Church and other furniture currently in store, including a carved gate and altar rails. For identification purposes, the positions of the pews are illustrated on a sketch plan of the church (Figure 1.a). The intention is to remove all of the pews from the nave. The PCC plan for the church to undergo extensive renovations, to include under-floor heating in the nave, improved lighting and the installation of a servery area in the rear south-west corner of the nave. The aim is to create a more open and flexible space in the nave for community events. They also wish to permanently open up the West door as the main entrance with the addition of a glazed porch, in the hope that the church becomes more accessible and welcoming to visitors approaching the church from the town. I visited the church on 17th October 2023.

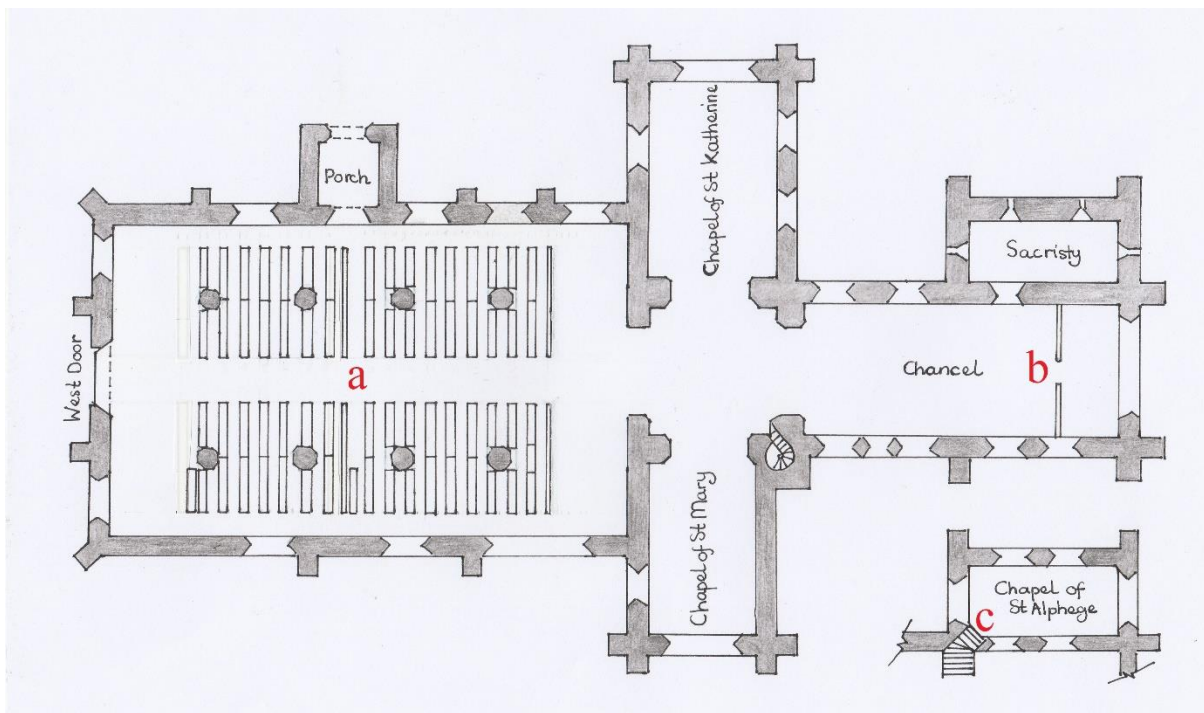


Figure 1. Sketch plan view of St. Alphege, Solihull, showing approximate position of pews (a), communion rail (b) and former position of gate (c). Not to scale (Sycamore, 2023, based on a plan created by The Birmingham Archaeological Society¹).

The Pews in the Nave

Position

From the front of the nave there are sixteen rows of pews divided by a central aisle running from the altar to the West door (Figure 1). A further aisle running from the north door to the south wall divides the pews into nine rows plus a frontal, and seven rows plus a frontal (Figures 1-6).

¹ Pemberton, 1905, p. 54

Construction and condition

The pews vary in length between 203 cm and 300 cm, being approximately 45 cm deep and 88.5 cm high. Most pews are fixed in rows to raised platforms made of pine boards (renewed in 2001)², though two are free-standing (Figure 1); one of which has been joined to the rearmost pew to create a folding table store (Figure 10). There is also a single free-standing pew in the transept crossing which measures 126 cm long, 46 cm deep and 94 cm high (Figure 20). The pews are constructed from both quarter-sawn (distinctive figure pattern) and straight-sawn oak of plain boards. The bench-ends comprise two panels set within a frame, secured with timber pegs; the panels vary between raised fielded panels and plain recessed panels (Figures 7 & 8). The bench-ends adjacent to the central aisle have brass brackets and steel fluted drip-trays for umbrellas (Figure 7), whereas those adjacent to the north and south aisles have cast iron brackets and rectangular drip-trays for umbrellas (Figure 8). The backs of the pews comprise a moulded top rail upon two rows of plain, loose panels set within frames, though some panels are raised and fielded (Figures 9 & 10). Some of the panels have been cut down and re-arranged to fit a particular width, demonstrating re-use (Figure 13). The bench-seats are also made from oak boards (Figure 7). On the rear of each pew there is a bookrest in addition to a book-holder, both made of oak, though the holder is made from lighter, newer oak and therefore added more recently (Figure 11). Each frontal is made up of two rows of raised fielded panels set within frames, with heavy applied mouldings; those at the top are in landscape, those at the bottom are in portrait (Figures 2-6). In the south side of the nave, the second pew from the front measures 151 cm long and has been embellished with carved ceremonial crests, displaying coats of arms and the date '1954' (Figures 3 & 12). The frontal before it is inscribed 'Mayoral pew presented by Solihull School on the occasion of the incorporation of the Borough of Solihull, 24th May 1954'. Carved on the panels of two bench-ends in the south side of the nave are the inscriptions of former churchwardens, 'W. W. 1747' and 'Robert Bragg Church Warden 1929-1953' (Figure 14a & b). A further panel in the north side of the nave is dedicated to another former churchwarden 'P. W. Harrison 1942-62' (Figure 14c)

The bench-ends are slightly darker in colour than the pews themselves, which points to them being older since oak darkens with age. On closer inspection, it can be seen that the bench-ends have been made wider with the addition of oak strips either side and the dowels have been stained to match in with the surrounding timber (Figures 7 & 8). The seats have been given additional support brackets underneath, which conceal the panelled inner side of the bench-ends (Figure 15). This all points to the current pews being remodelled to incorporate sections of earlier pews.

Generally, the pews are all in good condition, though some of them have had holes cut out for the provision of gas central heating pipes. Some of the panels in the bench-ends display the scars of former plaques. There are no apparent signs of woodworm.

² Solihull Parish News, February 2001, p.11



Figure 2. Pews as seen from the front of the nave.



Figure 3. Pews in the south aisle from the front of the nave.



Figure 4. Pews in the north aisle from the front of the nave.



Figure 5 Pews viewed from the front of the north aisle.



Figure 6. Pews viewed from the front of the south aisle.



Figure 7. Bench-ends on the north side of the central aisle showing stained dowels.



Figure 8. Bench-ends facing into the south aisle.



Figure 9. Pews in north aisle viewed from the rear of the nave.



Figure 10. Pews in south aisle viewed from the rear of the nave.



Figure 11. Book rest and book holder on rear of pew.



Figure 12. Commemorative carved crests on Mayoral pew in south side of the nave.



Figure 13. Rear of pews row showing re-working of older panelling to fit.



Figure 14 a, b, c. Bench-ends with inscriptions dedicated to former churchwardens.



Figure 15. Additional support bracket beneath seat concealing panelled bench-end.



Figure 16. Four sections of Victorian communion rail.



Figure 17. Gate and detail of hinge.



Figure 18. Detail of brass hinge on communion rail.

Communion Rails

Currently in storage are four carved oak communion rails (Figure 16). These are typical of the Victorian style and of low significance.

Gate

Also in storage is a single, dark, oak gate with an asymmetrical curved top rail, the top of which is embellished with a carved rosette (Figure 17). There are two panels, the top panel being carved and pierced acanthus leaves with mitred mouldings, the other panel being plain with mitred mouldings. There are two brass hinges, but also evidence of previous hinges having been filled in with new timber just above these (Figure 17). The carved panel and the brass hinges match the communion rail in the chancel (Figures 1.b & 18), and on closer inspection it was found that the gate previously hung at the top of the steps into the Chapel of St. Alphege, but was likely removed when a metal handrail was fitted up the steps (Figure 1.c). The brass hinges are more recent replacements for the original hinges.

Small Carved Piece

Also in storage is a small section of carving made from oak (Figure 19). The style of carving suggests it possibly dates from the 15th century and may be a section of a larger pierced screen, though it did not appear to fit into any of the screens located within the church.



Figure 19. Small carved piece.



Figure 20. Bench made from cut-down panels and bench-ends.



Figure 21. Nave at St. Mary's Church, Cerne Abbas, Dorset.

Historical Evidence

Pews

The church of St. Alphege originated in the 12th century, with additions made from the late 13th to the 16th century, and alterations in the 18th through to the 20th century.³ Historic England lists the pews in the nave as “dating from 1879 with a Mayor’s Pew of 1954”.⁴

Rev. Robert Pemberton writes that the church was ‘re-seated with old-fashioned stiff pews in 1679, but these, after being rearranged in 1835, were replaced by the present seats in the general restoration of 1879’.⁵ The inscriptions are also mentioned; according to Pemberton ‘W.W. 1747’ relates to either William Weston, Churchwarden in 1748, or more likely William Wedge, Churchwarden 1757-8.⁶ Pemberton adds in a footnote that ‘In 1754 there seems to have been a general redistribution of seats, and several purchases of “pews in Church at £1 a pew”’.⁷

This footnote explains the use of raised fielded panels in some of the present pews, as these are typical of the 18th century style.⁸ Therefore, evidence points to the present pews being formed in the late 19th century reusing panels from 18th century pews.

Gate

Historic England list that “The communion rail of 1679 has twisted balusters, carved foliage and pierced square panels.”⁹

Salzman, together with Foster, Pevsner and Wedgwood, dates the communion rail in the chancel to c. 1680; the latter writes that the balusters, pierced acanthus foliage and pierced panels are typical of late 17th century work.¹⁰

The gate that formerly marked the entrance to the sacristy was made at the same time by the same craftsman.

Significance

Pews

Panelled pews are the most common Victorian design for church seating,¹¹ though it is likely that the present pews have been constructed to incorporate earlier 18th century pews, repurposed into panelled backs and bench-ends. They are in good condition, though most of them are of low significance. Those pews with inscriptions, and the Mayoral pew are unique to the church and therefore of medium significance.

Gate

The late Jacobean gate is of high significance, being part of a quality set commissioned for the chancel in the late 17th century.

³ Historic England, 2017, List entry number 1076693

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Pemberton, 1905, p. 92

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. pp. 92-93

⁸ Chinnery, 1979

⁹ Historic England, 2017, List entry number 1076693

¹⁰ Salzman, 1947, pp. 214-229; Foster, Pevsner and Wedgwood, 2022, p. 756

¹¹ Cooper and Brown, 2011

Communion Rails

The four sections of Victorian communion rail currently in storage are of low significance.

Small Carved Piece

This carving is of medium significance unless the remainder of it can be located, in which case it would be of greater significance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Pews

At present, the quantity of fixed pews in the nave allows little flexibility or experimentation with the overall space, which is considerable. One could argue that the church is currently 'over-pewed' for most present-day services. Removing the pews from the nave would firstly allow under-floor heating to be installed. Secondly, it would allow more versatile use of the space and greater movement around the nave, and provide better visibility to the structure of the nave, including the pillars. One option would be to reduce the length of some of the pews to become free-standing, like the pew in the transept crossing, although even at 126 cm long this pew is still heavy and difficult for two people to lift (see Figure 20). However, this option would not provide the flexible space required for modern day use. Given that St. Alphege is the town's third largest public venue, it is hoped that the refurbishments will attract greater use by the wider community. It is therefore intended to replace the fixed pews with stackable chairs which can be placed in numerous configurations and easily moved by one person. A similar scheme has been undertaken successfully at St. Mary's Church in Cerne Abbas, Dorset, providing a light and airy flexible space in the nave (Figure 21). Consideration needs to be given to how and where chairs would be stacked when they are not being used.

Another option is to remove some of the pews and retain the remainder, creating an open, flexible space behind rows of fixed pews.

The mayoral pew with carved crests, and those pews with inscriptions are unique to St. Alphege and its history, so I recommend these be retained. They could be placed around the perimeter of the nave, or their timber be re-purposed into cupboards for the new servery area in the south-west corner of the nave.

If sold at auction, the pews might fetch between £50 and £100, but would have to be cut down to fit a domestic setting. Another option would be to follow the example of the 'Take a Pew' scheme in the Diocese of Herefordshire, in partnership with the Local Authority and *EnvioAbility*, a non-profit organisation.¹² Members of the congregation and local community were given the opportunity to purchase a pew at a reasonable price, which was then cut down to their specific requirements for use in their own home.¹³ A similar scheme would ensure the pews remained in the local area and appreciated by those for whom the church holds meaning, whilst creating opportunities for people with disabilities or difficulties in employment.

Gate

I recommend a new position is found for the gate in the church. Perhaps it could be mounted on the wall of the chancel near the matching communion rail.

¹² Cooper and Brown, 2011, pp. 412-413

¹³ Ibid.

Communion Rail

The carved communion rail in four sections which is currently in storage is excess to the church's needs, but might be required by another church.

Small Carved Piece

I recommend this little carved section be labelled and put on display, or retained somewhere safe, whilst further research is carried out into its origin and date.

Further Reading

Cooper and Brown, 2011

Cox, 1916

Photographs

All photographs were taken by the author, Rachel Sycamore.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Andy Halstead for explaining the intentions of the Solihull PCC.

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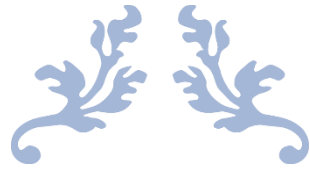
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SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT OF
PULPIT, STALLS AND OTHER
FURNITURE AT ST. ALPHEGE
CHURCH, CHURCH HILL ROAD,
SOLIHULL, B91 3RQ.



AUGUST 29, 2024

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Assessment of Pulpit, Stalls and other furniture at St. Alphege Church, Solihull. Rachel Sycamore B. A. Hons, MRes

I have been asked by Solihull PCC to provide a significance assessment for the pulpit, choir stalls and other furniture in St. Alphege Church. For identification purposes, the approximate locations of the items are marked on a sketch plan of the church in red (Figure 1). The PCC are planning for the church to undergo extensive renovations, to include relocating the panelled section of the pulpit into the chancel and re-configuring the Chapel of St. Katherine in the north transept; removing the pews and altar table to enable the floor to be levelled with a gently-sloped entrance, and new storage cupboards to be fitted. They also wish to relocate the servers' stalls from the opening of St. Katherine's Chapel back to their original position in the chancel, alongside the choir stalls. In addition, the PCC wish to dispose of a bookstall and rector's stall from the nave.

I visited the church on 2nd August 2024.

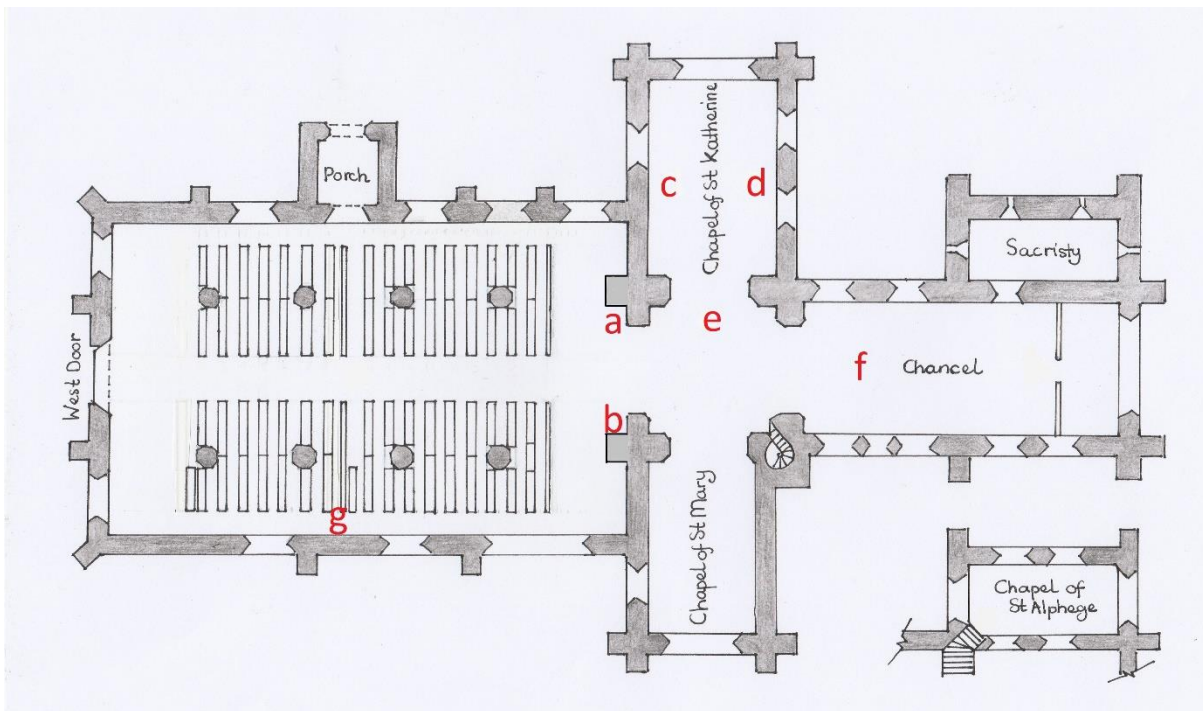


Figure 1. Sketch plan view of St. Alphege, Solihull, showing approximate location of Pulpit (a), Rector's Stall (b), St. Katherine's Chapel Pews (c), Altar Table (d), Servers' Stalls (e), Choir Stalls (f) and Bookstall (g).

Not to scale (Sycamore, 2024, based on a plan created by The Birmingham Archaeological Society¹).

The Pulpit

The pulpit currently stands at the eastern end of the nave, near the entrance to the north transept, or Chapel of St. Katherine (Figure 1.a). It measures 192 cm tall in total and is shaped as a hexagon with one side being the opening to the reading platform (Figure 2). It is made up from three sections: the main

¹ Pemberton, 1905, p. 54

section measures 120 cm tall and consists of five dark oak, hand-carved panels, typical of the Jacobean style with carved dragons and lion's heads, applied lozenge-decoration and Romanesque-style blind arches (Figure 3). The panels are generally in good condition, though there is a small area of erosion due to historic woodworm, and several applied pieces of frieze are missing (Figure 4). The rear of the panels displays hand-chamfered panels fitted into frames, which have twin-pinned tenon joints (Figure 5). The moulded pediment atop the carved panels, bible-rest and inner shelving are of lighter, machined timber (Figure 5).

The base, measuring approximately 72 cm tall, is made from lighter, machined oak, with Romanesque-style arched openings, machine-fluted pillars, heavy machined mouldings and plinth (Figure 6). Five light oak steps lead up to the reading platform, through an ornately-carved gate; this is also made of oak of a similar coloured oak to the base and top pediment (Figures 2 & 7). Though the front of the gate appears to be hand-carved with a gold painted cross, the timber on the reverse side of the gate displays the regular striations of a machine band-saw (Figures 7 & 8).

The PCC wish to dismantle the pulpit and remove the base and steps; they wish to retain and relocate the panelled section (along with top moulding and bible-rest) and carved gate to the eastern end of the south side of the chancel.²



Figure 2. Pulpit showing three sections, steps and gate.

² Please see 'Pulpit Adaptations' by Burrell Foley Fischer Architects and Urban Designers 2024



Figure 3. Carved panels making up the main section of the pulpit.



Figure 4. Detail of pulpit panel showing missing applied frieze pieces and woodworm damage.



Figure 5. Interior of pulpit showing rear of panels, added top moulding, shelves and bible-rest.



Figure 6. Base and plinth of pulpit showing machine-moulded pillars and arches.

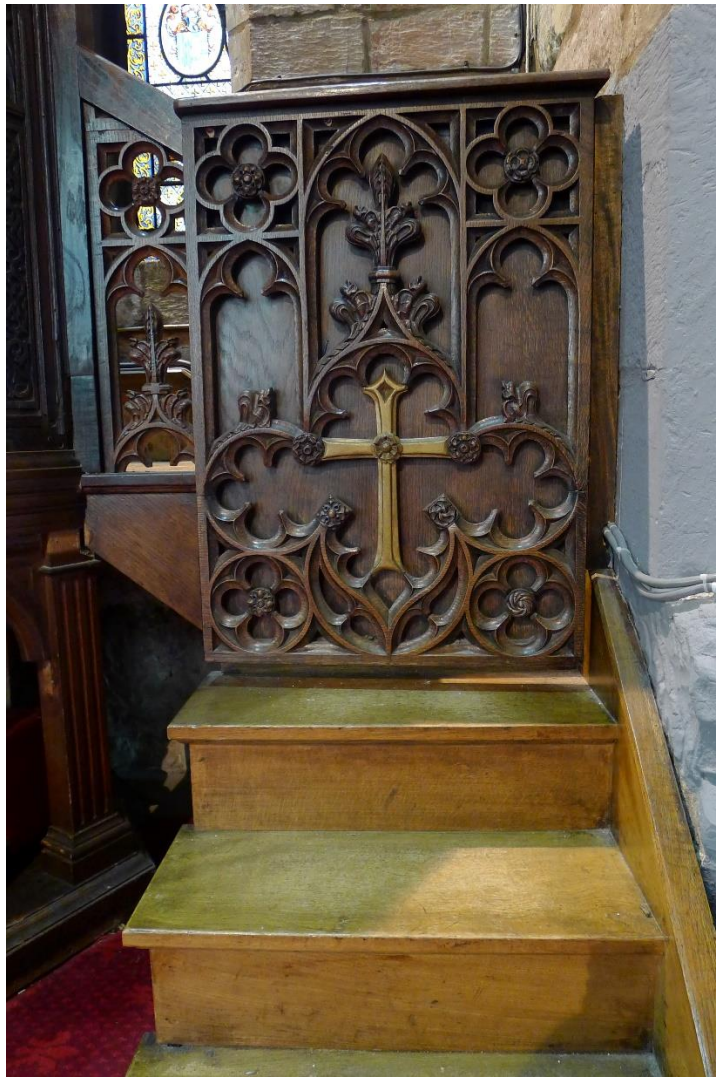


Figure 7. Carved ornate gate and steps up to pulpit.



Figure 8. Rear of ornate gate showing perpendicular striations of machine bandsaw.

Rector's Stall

The rector's stall is currently positioned at the east end of the nave, near the entrance to the south transept, or former Chapel of St Mary (Figure 1.b). It measures 101.5 cm wide, 130 cm deep and 110 cm high maximum and is made from both straight-sawn and quarter-sawn oak (being the more decorative and better quality). The seat is 47 cm deep, having a deeply moulded and shaped back-rest, supported by carved pillars. Both the seat and book-rest are attached to a carpeted oak plinth (Figure 9). The book rest is 32.5 cm deep and consists of internal shelves behind three carved panels, with blind tracery in the gothic revival style (Figure 10).

In the centre of the seat-back is a carved crest of a deer's head and antlers with a ribbon bearing the motto 'Je suis prêt', meaning 'I am prepared, willing, ready'. Below this is the inscription 'A. Edward Fraser, Rector 1935-53' (Figure 11).

The PCC wish to dispose of the rector's stall as it is surplus to requirements.



Figure 9. Rector's stall showing seat and book-rest attached to carpeted plinth.



Figure 10. Rear of book rest showing three carved panels with gothic-style tracery.



Figure 11. Rear of seat showing carved back-rest, carved crest and inscription.

St. Katherine's Chapel Pews

The pews in St. Katherine's Chapel (Figure 1.c) consist of a long pew fixed to the west wall, plus two long pews and two sections of book-rests made from oak, both quarter-sawn and straight-sawn (Figure 12). The backs of the benches comprise a vertical row of plain boards set between the seat and top-rail so they sit flush (Figure 13). The bench-ends are shaped and machine-moulded. The book-rests also have shaped, machine-moulded ends and present a row of plain framed panels with mitred stiles (uprights) to the front (Figure 14). Both the pews and book-rests are fixed to a timber boarded floor.

The left free-standing pew measures 280 cm long, 92 cm high and 67 cm deep maximum. The right free-standing pew measures 183 cm long, 92 cm high and 56 cm deep. The left book-rest measures 204 cm long, 89 cm high and 24 cm deep; the right book-rest is 182.5 cm long, 89 cm high and 24 cm deep.

The PCC wish to remove the chapel pews and their book-rests to make way for a row of fitted storage cupboards and so that they can level the floor.³



Figure 12. Chapel pews and book-rests in St. Katherine's Chapel.

³ Please see 'North Transept Adaptations' by Burrell Foley Fischer Architects and Urban Designers 2024



Figure 13. Chapel pews showing curved ends.



Figure 14. Chapel pews from the front showing mitred panels.

St. Katherine's Chapel Altar Table

The altar table in St. Katherine's Chapel (Figure 1.d) measures 213 cm long, 90 cm high and 66 cm deep and is well constructed from oak (both quarter-sawn and plain-sawn). The table comprises seven plain panels, set within mitre-moulded frames, with a thick, flush-framed panel for the top (Figure 15). The table is attached to a reredos behind, with a carved frieze (Figure 15). There does not appear to be an opening section in the table for the purpose of storage. The colour of the oak and design is similar to that of the pews and book-rests in the chapel, so likely made around the same time (Figure 16).

The PCC wish to remove the altar table, leaving the reredos in place.⁴



Figure 15. Altar table in St. Katherine's Chapel.

⁴ Please see 'North Transept Adaptations' by Burrell Foley Fischer Architects and Urban Designers 2024



Figure 16. Front of altar table in St. Katherine's Chapel.

Servers' Stalls

The servers' stalls (Figure 1.e) were originally return stalls for the choir stalls in the chancel, but were relocated, along with the rood screen to the opening of the north transept, or St. Katherine's Chapel around 1975.⁵ A diagram from the 1969 Guide Book of St. Alphege shows the original positions of the servers' stalls as return stalls to the choir stalls in the chancel (Figure 17).⁶

The servers' stalls consist of two upright pews with ornate finials and two double seats with shaped backrests (Figure 18). A panel has been added either side of the upright pews where they meet the stone pillars (Figure 18). The upright pews measure 168 cm long, 110 cm high (plus finial) and 50 cm deep; the shaped seats measure 150 cm long and 42 cm deep (Figures 19 & 20). Each bench is made from oak, both quarter-sawn and straight-sawn, with the quarter-sawn being the most decorative and expensive timber. The mouldings and carved finials are uniform and without chisel marks, indicating they are machine-cut, and therefore constructed post-Industrial Revolution.

The PCC wish to return the servers' stalls to their original location in the chancel, as return stalls against the west wall of the chancel.⁷

⁵ Foster, Pevsner and Wedgwood, 2022, p. 755; email from Andy Halstead, 19th August 2024

⁶ St. Alphege PCC, 1969, pp. 14-15

⁷ Please see 'Choir Stall Adaptations' by Burrell Foley Fischer Architects and Urban Designers 2024

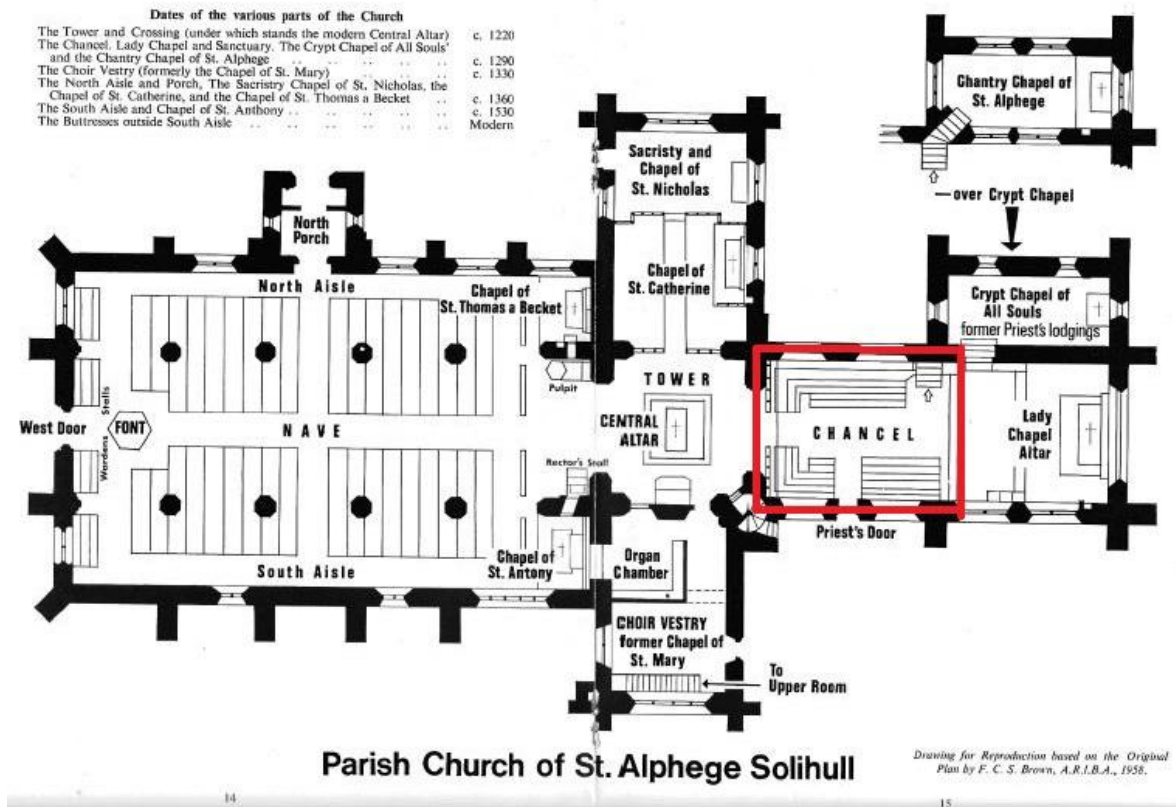


Figure 17. Diagram layout of St. Alphege in 1958, showing original positions of servers' stalls in chancel in red (St. Alphege PCC, 1969, pp. 14-15)



Figure 18. Servers' stalls flanking the opening to St. Katherine's Chapel in the north transept.



Figure 19. Left side of the servers' stalls.



Figure 20. Right side of the servers' stalls showing ornate finial and shaped back-rests.

Choir Stalls

The choir stalls stand as two rows of pews and book-rests/frontispieces flanking either side of the chancel (Figures 1.f & 21). They consist of two styles: those in a dark oak, gothic-revival style and those of a plainer design in lighter oak (Figures 22 & 23). The pews in the gothic-revival style have front panels decorated with blind tracery and bench ends with tall finials, which match those of the servers' stalls flanking the opening to St. Katherine's Chapel. Some of the back panels in the gothic-style pews display the decorative figure of quarter-sawn oak (Figure 23). Steel hymn-book rests have been added to most of the timber book-rests.

The lighter-oak extensions at the west end of the chancel were added in 1975.⁸ The extensions on the northern side of the chancel measure 84.5 cm and 232 cm; those on the southern side of the chancel measure 82.5 cm and 232 cm. Fitted to one of these panels in the south side of the chancel, there is a brass inscription plate which reads 'IN LOVING MEMORY OF BILL WRIGHT, 1900-1975, GREAT BENEFACTOR AND FRIEND OF THIS PARISH' (Figure 26).

The PCC wish to remove these later, plain oak panelled pews and their book-rests/frontispieces so that the original servers' stalls of the same design as the gothic-revival pews can be returned to the chancel as return stalls (see Figure 17).⁹



Figure 21. Choir stalls flanking the chancel.

⁸ Foster, Pevsner and Wedgwood, 2022, p. 755; email from Andy Halstead, 19th August 2024

⁹ Please see 'Choir Stall Adaptations' by Burrell Foley Fischer Architects and Urban Designers 2024



Figure 22. Choir stalls in north side of chancel, showing plain book-rest/frontispiece to be removed.



Figure 23. Choir stalls in north side of chancel.



Figure 24. Choir stalls in south side of chancel.



Figure 25. Choir stalls in south side of chancel.



Figure 26. Inscription plate attached to the modern panelling of choir stalls.

Bookstall

Against the south wall of the nave (Figure 1.g) stands a substantial oak bookstall, measuring 373 cm long, 197 cm tall and 44 cm deep (Figure 27). It comprises three double storage cupboards and two single storage cupboards supported on legs, beneath seven open sections for the display of cards or books (Figure 27). The cupboard doors comprise three beaded boards set within a frame, with decorative hinges and escutcheons. The shelves in the upper display section are of solid oak, with adjustable positions, providing flexible display of books or cards. In the centre section is a timber and metal crucifix. The bookstall has a heavy, carved pediment which conceals a lighting strip (Figures 28 & 29).

The PCC intend to build a new bookstall at the west end of the nave in keeping with the other new internal fittings and so no longer require this bookstall; therefore, they would like to offer it to another church or sell it.



Figure 27. Front of bookstall lit up.



Figure 28. Bookstall from left end.



Figure 29. Bookstall from right end.

Historical Evidence

The Church

St. Alphege originated in the 12th century, with additions made from the late 13th to the 16th century, and alterations in the 18th through to the 20th century.¹⁰ According to Rev. Robert Pemberton there was ‘a general restoration of 1879’ at St. Alphege.¹¹

Pulpit

Historic England list the pulpit as ‘early C17 with blank arches’.¹² Pevsner refers to ‘PULPIT. Jacobean, with the familiar blank arches’.¹³ Pemberton writes that the pulpit ‘...is probably about 1610; and is panelled and elaborately carved. It formerly had a "tester-head" or canopy, which is believed to be still in existence in private hands. It originally stood near the first pillar of the Nave, on the south side.’¹⁴ The Church Guide Book of 1969 states that ‘The pulpit is Jacobean, 1610 AD. It originally stood against the first pillar of the nave but was moved to the south west pier arch of the tower and then to the north west pier arch in 1963. Its canopy or sounding board is now its base!’¹⁵

The pulpit is of classic Jacobean style; the deep colouration of aged oak, the patina and wear point to its being genuinely of the period. Originally, when it was made in the early 17th century, the pulpit would likely have had an ornate, carved canopy in the same style as the panels, but this is no longer present. The arched base that the panels are currently mounted on is machine-moulded, and was therefore constructed post-Industrial Revolution. Given that the base, the top moulding, bible-rest and gate are of similar colouration and timber, and display evidence of machine manufacturing, they were likely constructed after the mid-19th century, possibly during the ‘general restoration of 1879’.¹⁶ It is believed that the carved gate was constructed and donated by a parishioner between 1960-80.¹⁷ The steps are of lighter oak still, suggesting they are a later addition, perhaps when the pulpit was moved in 1963.¹⁸

Rector’s Stall

There is no reference to the rector’s stall by English Heritage or Pevsner, but the inscription points to its being commissioned by the family of the former Rector A. Edward Fraser, perhaps following his death, for his service to St. Alphege between 1935 and 1953. This would date the construction of the rector’s stall around the mid-20th century.

St. Katherine’s Chapel Pews

The pews in St. Katherine’s Chapel and their book-rests are of the same construction and pale colour of oak as the [Altar Table](#), so were likely made at the same time. Pevsner’s guide lists the altar in the north transept as ‘by Temple Moore, 1944, with painted panels’.¹⁹ Pevsner is referring to Leslie Temple Moore, who also added the south aisle buttresses and half-arches to the church in 1947-48.²⁰

¹⁰ Historic England, 2017, List entry number 1076693

¹¹ Pemberton, 1905, p. 59

¹² Historic England, 2017, List entry number 1076693

¹³ Foster, Pevsner and Wedgwood, 2022, p.756

¹⁴ Pemberton, 1905, p. 97

¹⁵ St. Alphege PCC, 1969, p. 17

¹⁶ Pemberton, 1905

¹⁷ Personal email from Andy Halstead, 28th August, 2024

¹⁸ St. Alphege PCC, 1969, p. 17

¹⁹ Foster, Pevsner and Wedgwood, 2022, p. 756

²⁰ Ibid. p. 755

Servers' Stalls

The servers' stalls are the same design and patina as the darker pews in the chancel. Pevsner's guide lists the 'Chancel STALLS and PANELLING of 1847, reworked', which is in accordance with their late Victorian design.²¹ According to the Church Guide Book of 1969, the servers' stalls were formerly return stalls to the west end of the choir stalls.²² In 1975 they, and the rood screen formerly across the chancel opening, were moved to the opening of the north transept (St. Katherine's Chapel).²³

Choir Stalls

The choir stalls in the chancel are referred to by Pevsner as 'Chancel STALLS and PANELLING OF 1847, reworked'.²⁴ The majority of the stalls are typical of the gothic-revival style favoured during the Victorian Period.²⁵ In 1975, when the servers' stalls and rood screen were moved, the choir stalls were extended using a more modern design of panelling.²⁶ It is these later additions which the PCC wish to remove.

Bookstall

The design of the bookstall, the fittings used and the pale colour of the oak timber, point to its being made in the last 50 years. Churchwarden's accounts may show an entry for the commissioning of the bookstall.

Significance

Pulpit

The Jacobean section is highly significant and should remain in St. Alphege as part of its heritage. The arched base and ornate carved gate are of medium significance. The steps up to the pulpit are of low significance.

Rector's Stall

The seat and bench are of medium significance, being specially commissioned to commemorate a former Rector of the parish, and being uniquely associated with the church.

St. Katherine's Chapel Pews and Altar Table

Even though these were commissioned by the son-in-law of the renowned architect, Temple Moore, in the mid-20th century, they are plain and undecorated, so are therefore of low significance.

Servers' Stalls

The Victorian pews and shaped seats are of medium significance.

Choir Stalls

The Victorian gothic-revival style choir stalls are of medium significance, whereas the more modern, plain panelled additions are of low significance.

Bookstall

The bookstall is of low significance.

²¹ Foster, Pevsner and Wedgwood, 2022, p. 756

²² St. Alphege PCC, 1969, pp. 14-15

²³ Foster, Pevsner and Wedgwood, 2022, p. 755; email from Andy Halstead, 19th August 2024

²⁴ Foster, Pevsner and Wedgwood, 2022, p. 756

²⁵ Cooper and Brown, 2011

²⁶ Foster, Pevsner and Wedgwood, 2022, p. 755; email from Andy Halstead, 19th August 2024

Conclusion and Recommendations

Pulpit

The Solihull PCC wish to dismantle the pulpit and re-erect the Jacobean section and gate at the east end of the south choir stalls. This will involve building a new, lower plinth and gate post at the altar-end of the southern choir stalls. Perhaps the arched plinth and timber from the steps could be re-used in the construction of the serving area at the rear of the nave, or incorporated into other timber structures in the church during the renovations.

Rector's Stall

The PCC wish to dispose of the rector's stall to another church, but being uniquely associated with St. Alphege it will hold little meaning to another parish. Perhaps it could be donated to the family of Edward Fraser. Another suggestion is that the seat and bench be separated from the plinth and re-positioned in the church separately, as they would take up less space. Perhaps the shaped seat with the inscription could be added to the shaped seats being re-positioned in the chancel.

St. Katherine's Chapel Pews and Altar Table

The PCC wish to remove these to be re-located in another church, which might be the best option, as they are surplus to requirements. Alternatively, the timber might be re-used to construct the serving area at the rear of the nave, particularly the panels of the book-rests and altar table. Care needs to be taken when detaching the altar table from the reredos so as not to damage either. Consideration will need to be given to the timber exposed on the reredos once the altar table is removed, as it will expose an area of timber with a different colour and finish. I recommend this be carried out by an experienced furniture maker/restorer.

Servers' Stalls

The PCC wish to return the servers' stalls to their original location at the west end of the chancel. The extension panels at each end of the pews will need to be removed and a decorative panel attached to the rear of the seats, more in keeping with the gothic style. It might be possible to reuse the parts of the pews in the south side of the chancel when they are shortened to accommodate the pulpit.

Choir Stalls

The PCC wish to remove the modern sections of pews and panelling that were added in 1975 to the west end of the choir stalls (seen as five modern panels either side). They wish to retain the darker, Victorian pews and their book-rests/frontispieces and re-install the matching servers' stalls back into the west-end of the chancel.²⁷ New ornate panels will be added to the exposed rear of the seats. As above, my recommendation is to re-use existing and surplus timber where possible.

Sections of the southern choir stalls nearest to the altar will need to be removed to accommodate the re-formed pulpit. The decorative, Victorian bench-ends with finials should be retained and re-fitted once the pews are shortened. The inscription plaque currently fitted to a modern panel should be retained and fitted to a remaining chancel frontispiece as part of the heritage of St. Alphege Church.

Bookstall

The PCC wish to re-locate the bookstall to another church; given its high-quality construction and useful purpose, it should be a desirable piece for another parish church to acquire.

²⁷ Please see 'Choir Stall Adaptations' by Burrell Foley Fischer Architects and Urban Designers 2024

Further Reading

Cooper and Brown, 2011

Cox, 1916

Photographs

All photographs were taken by the author, Rachel Sycamore.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Andy Halstead for explaining the intentions of the Solihull PCC.

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