

ST MARTIN OF TOURS CHURCH, EYNSFORD

Diocese of Rochester

INTRODUCTION

St Martin's Church is in the parish of Eynsford in the Darent Valley about seven miles north of Sevenoaks. The village lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the church is strategically placed at the heart of the Eynsford Conservation Area opposite the picturesque bridge and ford over the river Darent. The distinctive shingled needle spire of the church is clearly visible from the A225 approach road into the village and the lych gate marks the entrance to the churchyard.

The building itself is Grade I listed and has a relatively simple layout which comprises a late 12th century west doorway, whilst the nave, chancel, south transept, west tower and porch are mostly of the 13th century with a later 16th century north aisle. There are traces of the earlier Norman church in the chancel windows and its semicircular apse. The building is constructed in flint with stone dressings and with a clay tiled roof. The interior is relatively plain and light, with the distinctive features being the chancel apse, and the large south transept. The church is built on a sloping site, so the floor levels of the transept and chancel are both considerably higher than the nave, which itself has a sloping floor.

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Eynsford is an attractive and thriving commuter village with the ruins of a Norman castle, several local shops and a primary school but few other community facilities. The church already had a small separate meeting room with kitchen and toilet facilities but this was about 100 yards from the church building at the eastern end of the churchyard. The PCC was keen to be able to expand the role of the church within the local community as well as to improve and enhance the building and the facilities that it could offer. However, they felt that the best way to achieve this aim was to reorder the church internally.

The church is in a shared benefice with Farningham and Lullingstone which are neighbouring villages.



View of church from the bridge over the river Darent



View of church from the north showing the north aisle & boiler room before reordering



View of west door archway

THE PROJECT BRIEF

The PCC wanted to provide a meeting room, tea making area and accessible wc as well as a clergy vestry, choir vestry and improved storage to enable the church to cater for community as well as religious events. In an initial feasibility study, the north aisle and the adjoining boiler room were identified as possible areas which could be adapted for these functions. The raised chancel and south transept areas were to be kept intact.

Another key aim was to reorder the church interior by removing the pews, re-laying the floor in the nave and moving the font to provide for modern liturgy more effectively. The pews were of 19th century date and not high quality, whilst the flooring was dark coloured encaustic tiling between the raised pew platforms. The nave arcades were blocked up by modern flimsy screens. These features limited the flexibility of seating layouts, restricted accessibility and were not visually sympathetic to the interior of the church.

A new heating system, lighting and audio installation together with a drainage connection were included under the overall project brief as well as complete internal redecoration. Wheelchair access to the church through the churchyard was also needed as an alternative to the steep steps from the lych gate.

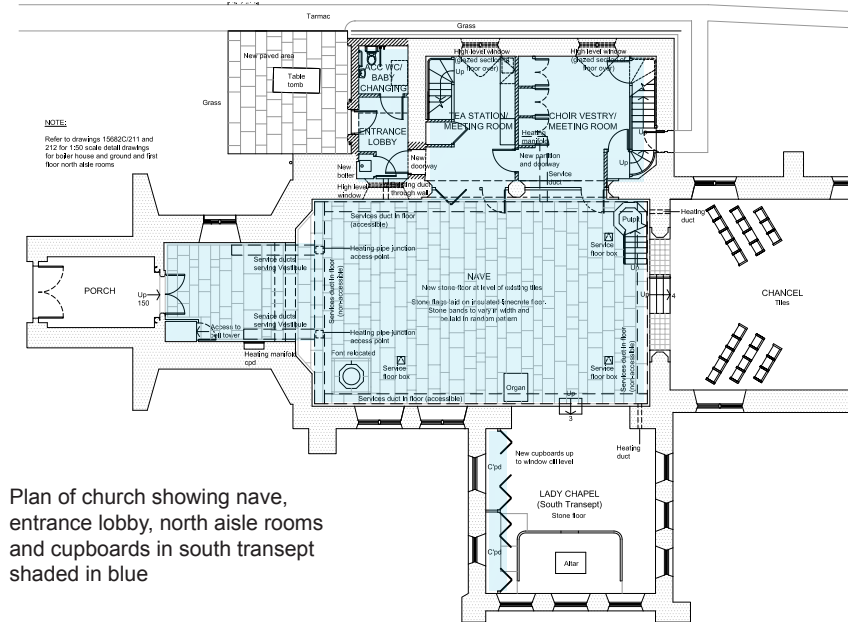
THE PROPOSALS

The existing boiler room was re-built to provide a new accessible entrance lobby and WC. The existing north nave window adjacent to the entrance lobby was adapted by raising the cill height to allow the creation of a new doorway between the lobby and the north aisle, thus providing a new access into the nave.

The north aisle itself was reconfigured to provide a tea station, choir vestry and extensive storage on the ground floor with two separate staircases from these rooms up to a new first floor level comprising a clergy vestry and a meeting room.

Within the church itself, a new limecrete floor with Purbeck stone finish was laid in the nave and tower area. The aim of this change was to unify the appearance and light quality of the nave with the chancel and transept. The two arcades between the nave and north aisle were infilled with a new oak framed glazed screen to provide visual and acoustic separation. Oak cupboards were installed in the south transept and the PCC purchased new oak chairs to replace the pews.

Heating for the building is provided by a new gas fired boiler in the entrance lobby and the opportunity was taken to install underfloor heating in the nave area, supplemented by traditional style column radiators in the main worship areas of nave, chancel and transept with flat panel radiators in the north aisle rooms.



Plan of church showing nave, entrance lobby, north aisle rooms and cupboards in south transept shaded in blue



View of new entrance porch adjacent to north aisle

OBTAINING PERMISSIONS AND TIME LINE

The PCC had first approached the DAC and their architects in 2008 and an initial feasibility study was prepared together with statements of need and significance. However, it was not until the end of 2013 that Planning permission, obtaining the DAC Faculty and Building Regulations approval were finally achieved. This process involved lengthy and complex consultations with Rochester DAC, as well as Historic England and SPAB. Numerous design changes and even a second tender process were undertaken to meet the PCC's brief and available funding.

Some of the most difficult design and technical problems to overcome were the insertion of the new doorway in the north aisle to give access to the new entrance porch, the folding glazed screens in the aisle archway and also the staircases to the upper rooms, due to the limited space and headroom within the north aisle.

The unexpected discovery of a large vault below the nave floor led to some delays to the contract and this was fully recorded by the archaeologist. Similarly the change of route for the new drainage due to the excessive costs of making a road connection by the lych gate also led to construction changes, but otherwise the building process ran comparatively smoothly. Essential quinquennial roof repairs were also carried out on the nave, chancel and north aisle roofs at the same time. The duration of the contract for the whole reordering project including the repair works was from August 2014 – May 2015.

PROJECT COSTS, FUNDRAISING AND GRANT AID

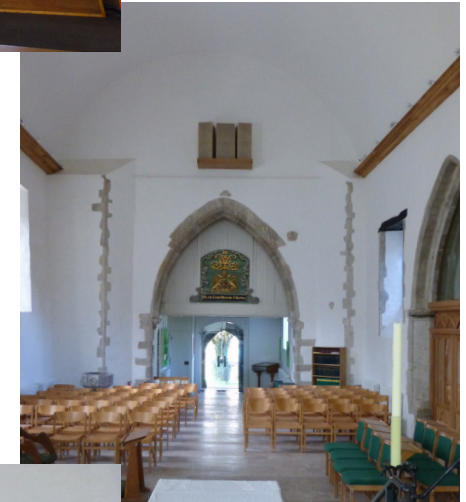
The total building contract cost of the reordering project was £497,500 and at one stage, the PCC were expecting to have to undertake it in two phases. The total project cost including professional and local authority fees amounted to £616,500. This cost excludes £24,500 for re-roofing of the Chancel which was funded entirely by the Dean & Chapter.

PROJECT TEAM & SPECIALIST SUPPLIERS

Architects:	Clague Architects
Structural Engineer:	Adrian Cox Associates
Heating Design:	John Love Associates
Lighting Design:	CES Church Lighting
Audio-visual Design:	Idium Technology
Archaeology:	Swale Archaeology
Main Contractor:	Riverside Construction Ltd
Stone Flooring:	Haysom Purbeck Stone Ltd



Above: view of church looking towards north aisle before reordering



Right: View of nave looking west towards the tower

Below: view of church looking towards north aisle and new arcade screens



PROJECT REVIEW

Has the completed scheme achieved the objectives of the brief?

Yes

Have new uses for the church been generated?

Yes, but it's still early days. We have a number of one-off events booked, such as concerts, dances and exhibitions. A chess club now uses the building every Friday night. We have also used the church building more creatively for worship, and a new services is being started on a Sunday evening soon.

Has the congregation changed/increased/decreased?

No change as yet, but we are launching new services soon and hope that this will result in growth. It's too early to tell whether the reordered building itself will result in more people joining the church.

Were there any unexpected conflicts between church and community?

The only conflict that occurred was about the removal of the pews and this was entirely expected.

Is the project sustainable in the long term?

Yes, it will not cost more to run the church than previously. Should extra cleaning etc be needed, this will be covered by letting income.

Does the PCC have any future plans?

We aim to complete the project by finishing the visual installation and buying the remaining 15 new chairs. We do not plan any further building work but we do have more ideas about how we want to utilise the spaces.

Parish website details and contact

www.efl-churches.org

Rector of Eynsford with Farningham and Lullingstone

Office: 01322 863050

Photographs and church plan courtesy of Clague Architects



View of tea station and mobile servery looking towards arcade screen



View from new doorway in entrance lobby towards arcade screen



First floor meeting room in north aisle



New oak cupboards in south transept