

Statement of Significance – Major projects

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This document must be accompanied by the Standard Information Form 1A

Section 1: The church in its urban / rural environment.

1.1 Setting of the Church

Christleton is a village and civil parish on the outskirts of Chester in the unitary authority of Cheshire West and Chester and the ceremonial county of Cheshire, England. The 2011 Census recorded a population for the entire civil parish of 3,400. The Shropshire Union Canal (originally Chester Canal) passes through the village. There is also a large pond situated by the village widely known as "Christleton Pit" which attracts children from the village and surrounding areas due to the abundance of wildlife, swans, and ducks.

Its history can be traced with certainty to the Domesday Book, which contains an entry for Christleton, though there is evidence of earlier occupation. It is likely that a church was on the site at this time. In 1093 the patronage of the church was given to the monks of St Werburgh's Abbey, Chester. The church was rebuilt in stone around 1490, and the tower built at this time is still present. The church sustained considerable damage during the Civil War and around 1730 the nave and chancel were repaired. However, during a service in 1873 the roof of the nave partly collapsed. Plans for rebuilding the church were prepared by Butterfield, retaining the 15th-century tower, adding gargoyles to each corner and a short spire to the turret. The rebuilding took place between 1874 and 1878.

1.2 The Living Churchyard

What is the significance of the natural heritage of the site?

In the churchyard is an ashlar red sandstone sundial from the mid-late 18th century, and the headstone of William Huggins and members of his family dated 1884. Both of these are listed at Grade II. Also listed at Grade II is the lych gate which was designed by Butterfield and is built from ashlar red sandstone and timber framing with a Welsh slate roof and a red tile ridge. The churchyard contains the war graves of six soldiers of World War I, including former Wales international footballer Billy Matthews who is commemorated as 'Shoeing Smith William Mathews, Royal Field Artillery, and a soldier and a Home Guardsman of World War II.

The Church register from 1604 shows that Christleton was hit by a severe plague, and two local families were particularly badly affected, as shown below.

The list of burials include

2 May Margaret Seller 4 June Thomas Spiser
3 May Thomas Seller 5 June Janeta Spiser
21 May Elena Seller 16 June William Spiser
21 May Johnannes Seller 17 June Anne Spiser

31 May Robertus Seller 23 June Margareta Spiser

Members of the Dixon Family of Littleton are laid to rest in a large family vault in the rear churchyard adjacent to the Rector's vestry. There are separate graves for the first Thomas & his wife Anne, buried with their son James and his family. For William & Barbara Dixon, and for Dr F.M and Sir Rupert Granger & families connected by marriage to the Dixon's.

The other great benefactor of the Victorian period was Lucy Anne Ince. Her life is commemorated on a tablet in the churchyard as well as within the church. The large family vault is situated to the north the footpath from Pepper Street. It was she, together with several other families and with the active support of Canon Garnett, who influenced the decision to rebuild the present church on its original site. A decision that now seems to have been very successful, and benefits us all.

Whilst researching the graveyard for members of the community who served in WWI, we came across seven graves from 1914-18 War, and one from WWII listed as Commonwealth Graves Commission Memorials. There are also records of other men who died in WWI, and were buried or missing in the battlefields of France, Belgium and Gallipoli which are inscribed on family memorials. Full details of these can be found in the Christleton Great War Stories Book published by Christleton Local History Group, or on the Christleton village website www.christleton.org.uk

St James' Church & Churchyard stands as testament to these people, and to the thousands who have worshipped and supported the church in Christleton over the centuries.

1.3 Social History

What is the historic and present use of the church and churchyard by the congregation and wider community? How does this contribute to its significance?

Recent investigations suggest that a church existed on this site soon after the Roman occupation of Chester. The evidence for this comes from the fact that early churches of this period were built with a circular churchyard, and Christleton like several others in the Chester area followed this pattern. In these churches the oldest graves are also laid in concentric circles around the church building. This design is also found in churches in north Wales and usually associated with the fourth or fifth century. The balance of probability is that the church was in existence before the arrival of the pagan Saxons during the 7thC. The name "Christetone" in the Domesday Book of 1086 suggests the existence of a Christian settlement. The name Christleton means "the village or place of Christ", or alternatively "Cristentum" the enclosed farm of the Christians. Local names of this type are thought to date back to AD 600-750. Other sources state that the name Christleton comes from "farmstead with a cross" or the "Township of Christ."

It is likely that this early meeting place, was in the vicinity of the Manor House Farm, or perhaps on the present church site, which sits on a broad expanse of underlying old red sandstone on the top of a ridge running from Helsby to Waverton, overlooking the Cheshire Plain, and with good views of the city of Chester and the River Dee. The fact that those farm inhabitants were sufficiently unusual to be noted as Christians, suggests the name was coined by pagan Saxons.

Christleton, Christetone, Christlington, Ham Cristleton (The main hamlet near the church), Magna Cristleton, Kirkecristleton, Kysterton and Kryrsylton are all variations of the village name. Littleton an abbreviation of Little or parva Christleton appears in the twelfth century, as does Rogh or rough Christleton now Rowton. The name Cotton Abbots comes from the Abbots of Chester who owned the land around 1096, and Cotton Edmunds comes from parva Cotton, the land which belonged to William de Cotton who lived at Cotton Hall in the fourteenth century, who had a son called Edmund, hence the name Cotton Edmunds. The five townships of Christleton, Littleton, Rowton, Cotton Abbots and Cotton Edmunds make up the Ecclesiastical Parish of Christleton.

It is almost certain that a more substantial wooden building existed by the 14thC, and the present tower is thought to be from the second church, built in the time of Rector Thomas in 1484. It is said that a woodcutter, Thomas Meyer from Bavaria was employed at this time, and his family (now the Mayer's family) have worshipped here ever since. The timber for the church building would have come from local forests, and there is evidence of timber from Christleton being sold for building purposes as late as the 18thC. There are no formal records of the building of this first stone church, but local stone from the nearby Christleton and Waverton Quarries was used. The earliest recorded clergyman was Robert, Parson of Christleton in 1215, but as the church was in the patronage of the monks of the Abbey in Chester there might have been a small meeting place rather than a formal building at this time. The Abbots Well is another link between the Village and the Abbey, because water from the well in Christleton was channelled in pipes through Boughton to the site of the Abbey. (Now Chester Cathedral)
1282.

The Burnells granted to the monks of St Werburgh "The fountain of Christleton" A cistern 20ft square was formed near the village and another within the cloisters of the Abbey.

The list of clergy is continuous from 1215 to the present day. This list of Rectors is intriguing to the modern reader as it includes titles such as Monsignor, Dom, terms used in the English church before the reformation.

Christleton village and its inhabitants suffered a great deal during the English Civil War (1642-45) when it was occupied by Officers and Men of the Parliamentary Army, led by Sir William Brereton. The church building was part of the reason for their deployment here, as the tower commanded views across vast swathes of countryside, including Chester & the River Dee. The building itself could hold hundreds of troops. This deep involvement of an attacking force meant that the building itself suffered damage, although this was comparatively light compared to the rest of the village which was largely destroyed before the main battle at Rowton Moor which took place on September 24th 1645. As the Parliamentarians remained in control of the area long after the Battle, no revenge attack occurred to cause further harm to the building. Any damage was temporarily patched up until the nave and chancel were completely rebuilt in brick in the 1730's.

This part of the church was re-built in Georgian style in 1736 by the Rev. Philip Smallridge Rector and a Chaplain to Queen Caroline, who managed to obtain money by the issue of a Parliamentary "Brief", a device used to get churches from a wider area to contribute to the building of a new church. £1, 250 was gathered for Christleton through this appeal, but £1,000 of this went in legal costs, with local people then contributing "in kind" using their own transport and labour to enable the building to be completed.

Research reveals that there were two important chapels to be found within St James precincts. "The Brereton and Cholmondeley Chapel", and the "Cotton or Venables

Chapel". "In 1525 Eleanor daughter of Sir William Brereton* caused two windows to be made, one with shields with her arms, and those of her husband Thomas son of Thomas Bulkeley of Ayton. The second was dedicated to Eleanor and her second husband Hugh Cholmondeley who possessed the manor of Rowton. This chapel was thought to be in ruins by 1619"

"The Cotton Chapel was to the south side of the church and had one window. In the 1737 plan it is styled the Chapel for Cotton Hall." Sir William Venables of Kinderton and second wife Katherine daughter of Robert Grosvenor of Eaton had the window adorned with two shields. The window may have been erected in celebration of Sir William being elected High Sheriff of Cheshire in 1526. The Arms of Cotton were borne by the Cottons of Cotton Hall. A Cotton Chapel was still present in the 1737 building, but there is also evidence of there being an even larger chapel belonging to the Townsend Family. Robert Townsend an Ironmonger of Chester acquired substantial property in Christleton from his Aunt Egerton. There is a record that states that in 1712 his grandson Robert Townsend later "The Recorder for Chester" was given permission to build a chapel or oratory with burying place under it in Christleton Church. It also states that two of the Townsend pews had fireplaces.

*This Sir William Brereton is not the leader of the Parliamentary soldiers mentioned earlier.

On Sunday January 1873 part of the roof of the brick building of 1736 collapsed and some of the congregation were covered with snow. Canon Garnett used the opportunity and his influence to have a substantial rebuild of the nave and chancel. He was determined to provide the best, and spent more money than the church and village could afford to ensure that the new structure would last for much longer than the previous buildings. The red sandstone blocks came from quarries in Delamere and Waverton, and were used together with a creamy white sandstone, from Stourton Hill Quarry, on Wirral. This building designed by William Butterfield and completed in 1876, was consecrated in July 1877, is described more fully in the remainder of the text, is the church we see today. It remains as the place of worship for the people of Christleton, a place where worship has been continuous for well over a thousand years.

A number of smaller changes have taken place in the succeeding years, but are mainly to do with the artefacts within the church, or stained glass windows, the moving of the font from the tower vestry, to the nave, and the removal of a memorial wrought iron rood screen to create a new lady chapel, where the choir vestry once stood. A new oak cross was placed on the Lych Gate in 2000, donated by Mrs Nancy Catherall (nee Mayers) continuing a link with the family that has probably existed since 1484. New gates were erected on the porch, the war memorial and the gate entry on Pepper Street in 2006. The church building itself was brought up to date with major work on the roof, tower and the electrics following a quinquennial review in 2000. The Millennium Window in the Lady Chapel was paid for by public subscription and commemorates a thousand years of history in the village, and the work of Churches Together in Christleton. In 2016 a new central heating boiler was installed.

1.4 The church building in general

Provide a description of the church.

The church is built in ashlar red and white sandstone with a green slate roof. Its plan consists of a nave and chancel in one range with a clerestory, north and south aisles, a south porch, side chapels to the chancel, and a west tower. The tower is in two stages with diagonal buttresses and a stair turret at the southeast angle. It has a three-light west window. The bell openings have two lights and are louvred. The parapets are embattled and have gargoyles. On top of the tower is a shingled pyramidal cap.

1.5 The church building in detail

Assess the significance of either each historical phase of the building or of each area within it. For example, north aisle, south chancel elevation, Norman tower

Church: late C15 tower, the rest 1874-77 by W. Butterfield. Ashlar red sandstone. Green slate roof. Nave and chancel in one range, north and south aisles, south porch, side chapels to chancel and a 2-stage west tower. Aisles have rectangular windows of 2 or 3 cusped lights. Similar 2-light windows in the clerestorey. Gabled porch with arched entrance on engaged columns. Tall gabled and buttressed side chapel has a 3-light window with cusped tracery. Similar tall 2-light window in the chancel and a 3-light east window. Tower has diagonal buttresses and a stair turret at the south-east angle. 3-light west window and a 2-light louvred bell opening. Gargoyle rainspouts below an embattled parapet. The shingled pyramidal cap is Butterfield's addition. Interior: decorated with red and white sandstone. 5-bay nave arcades of double chamfered arches on octagonal piers. The clerestorey windows are over the piers and all the windows have wooden lintels. A wagon roof is sprung from stone corbels. Tall narrow triple-chamfered tower arch where plaster mimics the white stone. Wrought iron chancel screen beneath a hanging wooden screen. The panels of coloured stonework continue into the chancel and have a chequerboard pattern added in the upper portion. 2 bay arcades to the side chapels with the sanctuary beyond. This has a large alabaster reredos with cusped and quatrefoil panels filled with mosaic. Above, the roof contains painted quatrefoil panels. West window of 1877 by Gibbs and much of the other glass by Kempe 1884-1904. Large painted panels of the royal arms dated 1665, by Randle Holme III (Pevsner and Hubbard). The red sandstone came from Waverton quarry and the white from Stourton Hill.

1.6 Contents of the Church

Provide a description of its contents and their significance. It is reasonable to group these if there is a contemporary scheme which is significant as such, for example one could say a complete scheme of 18th-century furnishings, of high significance.

The interior is decorated with red and white sandstone with a chequerboard pattern added in the upper portion. There is no chancel arch, but between the nave and the chancel is a tympanum marking the division. In the chancel is a large alabaster reredos having panels filled with mosaic. The chancel is floored

with Minton tiles. The west window dated 1877 is by Gibbs and much of the other stained glass is by the firm of Kempe, and is dated between 1884 and 1904. In the north aisle is a window dating from about 1986 by Cliff Boddy, and there is a window celebrating the 2000 millennium in the south transept by Bill Davies. A large painted panel of the royal arms dated 1665 is by Randle Holme III. The font is made from Sicilian marble on a Derbyshire limestone base. The churchwardens' benches have canopies. The altar table is Jacobean. Also in the church is a carving of a pelican feeding her young with her own blood, and an old village constable's staff. The two-manual organ was built by George Holdich, and rebuilt around 1990 by Rushworth and Dreaper. There is a ring of eight bells cast in 1928 by John Taylor and Company.

1.7 Significance for mission

What are the strengths of the building as it is for worship and mission? What potential for adapted and new uses does the church and its setting already have with little or no change?

The main strength of the building for worship and mission is arguably its beauty which glories God. The layout, architectural features, e.g. font, nave, chancel through to Sanctuary, and stained glass windows provide potential points of encounter between persons and the divine. The building promotes the sense that one is standing on holy ground.

This strength lends itself to the church being a viable "visitor attraction", and one could see ways in which this could be exploited for missional purposes. By way of example, the Rector has developed, though not published, a church tour app which could be further developed to facilitate encounter.

The integration of audio-visual (AV) facilities have afforded some flexibility of worship pattern and provision and, e.g., learning opportunities. However, we have found the inflexibility of, primarily, the nave space on account of the fixed pews a limiting factor in said regard, and a barrier to other expressions of mission, as detailed elsewhere.

Section 2 : The significance of the area affected by the proposal.

2.1 Identify the parts of the church and/or churchyard which will be directly or indirectly affected by your proposal.

The architect details of the proposal are given in separate supporting documentation.

The extension, housing a kitchen, toilets, and storage is proposed for the NW corner of the church. The extension impacts the NW wall of the church, and extends a short distance into the churchyard.

The Lady Chapel would be impacted through its enclosure as a designated meeting space.

The pews, throughout the nave, would be impacted through the provision of more flexible seating, albeit in keeping we desire with the building's beauty.

The current children's corner and library would be reimagined to account for the final server area. The impact on the library is potentially the greatest, though this is very seldom used.

2.2 Set out the significance of these particular parts.

For the extension. The church wall dates from c. 1876.

The graves, in one of the oldest sections of the churchyard, which would be effected are as detailed in supporting documentation – graves.pdf

The Lady Chapel enclosure is a glass glazing. It is not anticipated this will materially effect the structure of the chapel. Furthermore, account will be taken to minimise the the impact of reflections and acoustics as a result of enclosing the chapel.

The pews, as far as we understand, are not listed as of especial interest to the building, aside possibly the Churchwarden pews at the West end of the church (possibly dating from the 1880s). They are not discussed in the local history booklet of the church. See supporting documentation – pews for further details.

The children's corner and library are effectively of no significance.

Section 3: Assessment of the impact of the proposals

3.1 Describe and assess the impact of your proposal on these parts, and on the whole.

The extension extends on a N-S line from the NW corner of the church into the churchyard. It primarily impacts the church wall, and a number of graves. The age of the graves suggest they may be reasonably resited or laid flat (depending on local custom). It is proposed where possible to lay them flat and incorporate them into the design of the extension as detailed in the supporting documentation. The access into the extension will match the colouring of the surrounding area, in an effort to minimise its impact. The associated impact on the children's corner and library are of no comparative significance. The children's corner can be reimagined or resited to the enclosed Lady Chapel (LOW impact), and the library could be resited or closed. The library is very seldom used (HIGH IMPACT). The extension has a minor impact on the whole of the church building, but is assessed as having MODERATE impact.

The use of clear enclosure for the Lady chapel should minimise its impact, and ensure views of, e.g., the SE window are retained from the chancel. The impact is judged LOW.

The removal of the majority of the pews is significant, and judged as having HIGH impact. The case for removal of the pews is detailed in supporting documentation – pews.pdf. It is assessed that sensitive replacement seating, in keeping with the building, allow the building to adopt a traditional resting state and minimise the impact of this part of the proposal on the character of the whole building.

3.2 Explain how you intend, where possible, to mitigate the impact of the proposed works on the significance of the parts affected and the whole.

To minimise the impact on the graves. We intend, where possible, to incorporate them into the design of the extension as detailed in the architect supporting documentation.

The material chosen for the Lady Chapel enclosure will maintain sight-lines in the church, mitigate against unhelpful reflections and noise.

As detailed in the supporting documentation, the colour and style of the flexible seating has been chosen by the community to maintain the sacred quality of the building. See supporting documentation chairs.pdf

Sources consulted

Cummings, D. (2000), Christleton 2000 Years of History, Christleton Local History Group (and references therein).

Statement of Needs – Major projects

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Statement of Need – Major projects

1. General Information

This should provide an overview of the parish and the current use of the building.

The parish of Christleton in the Chester Deanery consists of St James Church, and serves the communities of Christleton, Littleton, Rowton, Cotton Abbots, and Cotton Edmunds. The electoral roll (2021) stood at 172 members, while the parish population is c. 3400. The communities of the parish are rural, though they rest about 3 miles SE of Chester city. The parish includes a high school, primary school, two care homes, a Save the Family facility, two community public houses, a Methodist church, and a number of other small businesses. The current use of the building centres around worship on Sunday mornings, Wednesday mornings, and for praying the Daily Office on weekdays. In the year prior to the pandemic we have begun to host our local primary school for special services. We have also used the building for a number of learning events. The small church car park is currently used by the community.

2. What do you need?

Briefly explain your needs (not your proposals). Append any brief for your architect.

We need toilets since there are none in the church. The nearest one is across the road in the parish hall, to which we may, in future, lose access. For our older community especially, the lack of a toilet in the church is a barrier to attendance. Also, to encourage young families we need baby change facilities.

We need a kitchen to facilitate hospitality for groups between 6 to 150.

We need flexible space to provide space for a variety of activities for groups between 6-150, see supporting documentation – future uses of St James.pdf.

3. The Proposals

Set out what you are proposing to do in order to meet the needs set out in section 2.

To create space for toilets we are proposing an extension, dimensions as detailed in the architect brief, to the NW of the church.

To create a kitchen space for hospitality we are proposing an extension to the NW of the church.

To create flexible space for a variety of activities, among them a community cafe, we are proposing to remove the nave pews and replace them with appropriate moveable seating. This seating may be stored in the extension when not in use.

4. Why do you need it and why do you need it now?

The development of the church estate of which the building is the key part, has largely been prompted by assessments of the health of our church community. A sustained decline in church attendance over many years, lack of engagement with ~ 80% of the demographic of the communities of the parish, and < 10 % weekly usage of the church suggests the viability of the church community is in question in the near future, unless the church estate is orientated to participate more fully in the five marks of mission; and most obviously through marks 1 to 4. It is believed to do nothing in response, seeking to grow a healthy church, is not an option.

Marks 1 and 2 – To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom and teach, baptise, and nurture new believers.

Societal changes have provided an impetus for more inclusive, participatory, and whole body expressions of proclamation and teaching, which run alongside more traditional expressions. The creation of flexible space in the main body of the church facilitates these expressions, as detailed in supporting documentation – future uses of St James.pdf. We are conscious that the north and south aisles of the church are inaccessible to wheelchairs.

Mark 3 and 4 – To respond to human need through loving service: To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation.

St James is the largest public space in the village and should be a focal point for the community. The creation of a small cafe space at the rear of the church will provide a hub for people to meet in a safe space and thereby combat social issues of loneliness and isolation. In the years since we started on this project, a local business has now opened a coffee shop which demonstrated we had correctly identified the need. The ‘flavour’, e.g., dementia, cafe church, etc, of any cafe expressions we run will complement the newly opened local cafe. At the same time, the proposals permit other activities such as homework clubs, engaging with the divine through the arts and new media, and providing access to social services through having dedicated private spaces. In these ways, we develop our participation in the divine life expressed through said marks.

In summary, currently we are restricted in being more creative with our church space, due to a lack of flexibility and inadequate facilities. To offer versatile space, would allow us to offer a different look and feel for the various types of services we would like to provide throughout the year. It would also allow the use of the church for a broader array of events, activities and performances, as detailed in our supporting documentation.

Further to the issue of why now? Having not engaged with children and young people for many years, we are started to see small numbers engage with the community. Their inclusion and nurture currently appears to be partly inhibited by not being able to offer fresh expressions of community life and worship. The church has a pressing need to develop the building to help it participate in God’s mission which will in turn generate income which will further bless the communities it serves. Finally, e.g., the proposed development of the law college and a retirement complex in the parish will bring a number of new houses to the area which will create demand for new services like those we seek to offer.

5. What is the evidence for the need?

The discernment of the PCC and a number of, mostly, members of the community have led to the generation of the proposal to date. There is majority support for the proposals. Six one hour community consultations have been held thus far to share details of the proposals and seek feedback, see supporting documentation – community consultations. We hosted 42 people across all six consultation events, and there was a clear consensus of support for them from attendees. A small number of people do not like the idea of removing the pews. The DAC have also undertaken a visit to the church to discuss this proposal, and have given encouraging feedback.

It was also made clear to us that flexible seating would have made a positive impact during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Christleton Community Plan (2012) notes inadequate provision of some services and facilities, including recreational activities for all ages, and a need to encourage a greater level of social responsibility. The proposed development is aligned with directions noted in this Plan. Complementary evidence for the need may be, e.g., discerned from church growth reports which identify, e.g., engagement with young people, space for creating relationships, nurturing disciples, and providing hospitality as important dimensions for developing a healthy church community which in turn maximises its service impact.

6. How is the proposal contributing to the need for environmental sustainability?

Are we being radical enough? Should, e.g., the proposal include solar panels on the roof? We assess there would be widespread opposition to this suggestion.

The development of a healthy church community which demands a fit for purpose building is likely to have an impact on our environmental sustainability, albeit indirectly. The facilities will serve as vehicles for fair trade products and be better positioned to advocate for environmental action and change through the relationships it will foster, create, and sustain.

7. What other options to meet the need were considered, taking point 6 and the impact identified in the Statement of Significance into account?

We considered the development within the confines of the existing building, but ruled this out because of the negative impact it would have on our space for worship.

The feasibility study was commissioned in Jan 2019, and arrived c. Jun 2020. From then until now we have iterated over a number of designs: We started seeking to keep pews/benches in the church but eventually ruled this out because it significantly limited future uses of the church – it is felt we have now arrived at the right balance between respecting the architecture of the building and creating a flexible space which can be used. We also started with an extension wrapped around the NW corner and attaching to the Bell Tower. We moved away from this, post the DAC visit and its feedback, on account of mitigating against Heritage (not touching the Bell tower – the oldest part of the church) and philosophical concerns about maintaining a ‘cleaner’ cruciform shape for the church.