

St Mary, Ringmer
Chancel and Congregational Seating Assessment

Hugh Harrison
Jane Root

September 2020

Contents

List of Figures

Introduction	1
Summary Description	1
Historical Introduction	2
The History and Development of the Church Building	
<i>Early History</i>	3
<i>The Nineteenth Century: 1812-63</i>	4
<i>The Nineteenth Century: 1863-c1884</i>	6
<i>The Later Nineteenth Century</i>	11
<i>Early Twentieth Century</i>	12
<i>Later Twentieth Century</i>	14
Seating Assessment	19
Significance	20
Conclusion and Recommendations	22
Bibliography	22
Illustrations	

Reasonable efforts have been made by the author of this report to contact or otherwise trace the copyright owner[s] of the illustrations, text or otherwise used in this report. If you have any questions relating to the copyright please contact Jane Root, 1 Moravian Cottages, Weston Road, Bath, BA1 2XX. Reasonable reproduction charges will be paid.

List of Figures

Fig 1 *Existing Plan of Chancel* William S Newman 1967 (WSRO EP/I/98 Ringmer, St Mary, folder 2; by courtesy of the Vicar of Ringmer and with acknowledgements to the County Archivist, West Sussex Record Office)

Fig 2 *Suggested Chancel Layout* William S Newman 1968 (WSRO EP/I/98 Ringmer, St Mary, folder 2; by courtesy of the Vicar of Ringmer and with acknowledgements to the County Archivist, West Sussex Record Office)

Graphics 1-4 showing approximate extent of phases of work to choir stalls

Plates 1-25 current photographs marked up to illustrate physical analysis

Introduction

This report was researched and written by Jane Root in collaboration with Hugh Harrison. Its purpose is to provide an assessment of the choir stalls at St Mary, Ringmer within their physical and historical context to inform a proposed reordering. Extensive but not exhaustive documentary research has been undertaken, focusing on key periods of activity, but this report does not set out to provide a comprehensive history of the building. It is likely that there will always be gaps in knowledge because, as W H Legge commented in 1898, the

... history of the parish church of Ringmer is neither so full nor so continuous as to permit of a consecutive account of those mutations which have befallen it. (Legge 1898, 225)

Research for this report was not quite complete when libraries and records offices were closed at short notice in March 2020. East and West Sussex Records Offices reopened on a limited basis in August 2020 but Lambeth Palace Library remains closed until an unknown date in 2021. Copies of material at Lambeth have been ordered remotely. The Sussex Archaeological Society's Barbican Library also remains closed until further notice and library staff have no access to the building. As a result, Dr William Martin's late nineteenth century diary which records some information about the church has not been seen, although it is known to John Kay of Ringmer History Group whose help and advice in the preparation of this report is acknowledged with thanks.

The assistance of staff at East and West Sussex Records Offices and Lambeth Palace Library, of Esme Evans, Honorary Librarian to the Sussex Archaeological Society, and Dr David Parsons is also acknowledged with thanks.

Summary Description

The parish church of St Mary the Virgin, Ringmer is a Grade I Listed Building (NHLE List Entry no 1238690). It is the only Grade I building in the Ringmer Conservation Area designated in 1976 (Lewes and Eastbourne Councils Conservation Area Appraisal). The NHLE entry describes:

Chancel with north and south chapels, nave with aisles, south porch and west tower. Chancel, nave (except the westernmost bay) and porch C15.

North and south chapels early C16. The westernmost bay of the nave and the tower were rebuilt in 1884 at the expense of William Langham Christie of Glyndebourne to replace the medieval tower which was burned down in the C15, Architect Ewan Christian. The gallery and organ were given by John Christie of Glyndebourne in 1922. (NHLE List Entry no 1238690)

According to Antram and Pevsner,

... a restoration was undertaken by a local builder, *Joseph Miller*, in 1844, followed by another in 1872. (Antram and Pevsner 2013, 590)

No source is given for this information and the date for the first restoration is probably a mistake since documented repairs were undertaken by Joseph Miller in 1864 (*The Builder* Vol XXII, 673). Evidence discussed in this report confirms that further work was undertaken in 1872.

The NADFAS Record of Church Furnishings completed in 2013 is kept at the church with additional folders of dated photographs.

Historical Introduction

Ringmer was historically part of the Deanery of South Malling, an ecclesiastical peculiar which remained under the direct jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury until the abolition of peculiars in the mid nineteenth century (Dunkin 1875, 9; LPL catalogue). The College of South Malling was an ancient foundation re-founded by Archbishop Theobald in 1150 (VCH II, 117-8). The Dean of the College was also the Rural Dean of South Malling and the dean and canons were responsible for the appointment of vicars to serve the parishes in the deanery, including Ringmer (VCH II, 118). Following the suppression of the College in 1547 the prebend or rectory of Ringmer passed briefly into lay ownership before reverting to the Crown (Dunkin 1875, 72-3). During this period it was leased to the Gage family but in 1588 the fee farm of the rectory was granted to Richard Branthwaite, Roger Bromley and their heirs in perpetuity subject to an annual rent payment of £24 (LPL Arches F4 ff158-161; Dunkin 1875, 72-3).

The rectory continued in lay ownership and in 1767 the lay rector or impropiator of Ringmer was Richard Harcourt (Kay 2000, 173). In October 1812 R B Harcourt offered 'Broil Place Farm' and the great tithes of the parish

of Ringmer to be let by tender for nine years from Michaelmas 1813 (*Sussex Weekly Advertiser* 12 October 1812 p1 col 2). The impropiator in 1836 was reportedly ‘Count D’Harcourt’ and in 1875 the lay rector of Ringmer was

... a Mr. Andrew Duncan, of London, but by what right he possesses [it], whether by purchase or otherwise, we have not been able to ascertain. (Dunkin 1875, 73)

The ownership of the rectory is significant in terms of this report because the lay rectors not only collected a substantial income from the great tithes of the parish but were also responsible for the maintenance of the chancel of the parish church. Evidence discussed in this report confirms that the Duncan family took practical responsibility for the maintenance of the chancel during their ownership. Research has failed to establish whether they or their predecessors contributed to or were in any way responsible for the installation of the present chancel furniture.

The History and Development of the Church Building

Early History

Primary sources for the early history of the building have not been consulted for this report. In 1898 W H Legge described substantial physical evidence for the Norman foundation of the church, including fragments of masonry built in to other structures around the village, but he found no documentary records earlier than the thirteenth century (Legge 1898, 225-6). Legge suggests that the north chancel aisle was probably the chantry chapel founded in 1275 by the vicar of Ringmer and served by a chaplain appointed by the Dean of South Malling (Legge 1898, 227). He describes monuments to two members of the Springett family of Broyle Place in the south chapel, including Sir William Springett – a ‘fanatical soldier of the Parliament in the civil wars’ – who died at the siege of Arundel (Legge 1898, 230-1). Legge suggests that

... it is only too probable that Ringmer parish church was despoiled of much that can never be replaced, as regards art and handicraft, by Sir William’s mistaken zeal...

and quotes evidence provided by Springett’s widow for his destructive activities in ‘steeple-houses’ (Legge 1898, 231-2).

Copies of eighteenth and early nineteenth century visitation records made under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury have been supplied by Lambeth Palace Library (LPL MS 1115/37, MS 1134A/6, ff.128-31, VH 55/1, pp.459-66, VH 55/2b, ff.108-10). These do not provide any information about the church seating. Collections of eighteenth and early nineteenth century images in Sussex Archaeological Society Library and elsewhere have been investigated but do not show the interior of the building (SAS; SRS picture database; information from John Kay). In 1791, the church interior was described as being

... in neat repair, having two small side aisles, each separated by four pointed arches upon octagonal pillars. The chancel is also commodious and full of inscriptions, and on each side is a chapel, with monuments, &c. That on the south side is the largest, and displays numerous mural monuments and inscriptions, for the family of Springett, &c. (typescript extract 'An Account of Ringmer in Sussex from the "Topographer" for the year 1791 Vol IV' in SAS Library Ringmer file Accn 30223)

The Nineteenth Century: 1812-63

In 1835 T W Horsfield described Ringmer parish church as 'truly Sussex – rude, irregular, and ancient' and noted that the 'interior corresponds with its outward appearance' (Horsfield 1835 i, 350).

The old fashioned interior does not seem surprising given the long incumbency of the Revd John Constable, who was Vicar of Ringmer for more than 50 years from 1812-63 (Legge 1898, 236). However, Constable rebuilt the parsonage house with the help of a substantial mortgage from Queen Anne's Bounty in 1849 and it is evident that he was also responsible for some significant alterations to the church (WSRO EPII/41/106; ESRO PAR 461/4/2/1; WSRO EP/V/16A). Limited research in a transcript of Constable's diary, which he kept only intermittently with a long gap from 1835-51, has not identified any references to work in the church building (ESRO PAR 461/7/2/1). Other sources provide more information and according to W H Legge, Constable replaced the existing east window in 1842:

The chancel is separated from this chapel [N] by two pointed arches over polygonal columns. It is lighted by a window in the Perpendicular style, which was inserted by the Rev. John Constable in 1842. It is a bad copy

of the east window of the chantry, and replaces two narrow lancet windows which formerly occupied the east wall. In the wide wall-space between these lancets there was a buttress outside. Possibly the corresponding inside space may have been occupied by a painting or carved work. In after times a tablet of the Commandments was affixed here ... [and when] ... the present window was inserted, in 1842, this tablet was cut in two, and the halves placed on each side of the window. They were finally removed in the alterations of 1872. At present the lower half of this window is blocked up by an erection of upholstery. (Legge 1898, 229)

The surviving churchwardens' accounts for the period 1848-72 record limited routine maintenance and repairs but provide little evidence for any exceptional expenditure (ESRO PAR 461/9/1/1). In March 1849 a substantial payment of £85.4.7 was made to Mr Davey 'on Acct of Bill' and at the same time an allowance of 5s was made for 'Old Church Door' hinting at the nature of the work in hand (ESRO PAR 461/9/1/1). It seems likely that this included the restoration of the porch again described by W H Legge in disparaging terms in 1898:

The south entrance to the church is through a wooden Gothic porch. The main portion of this is of considerable antiquity. The front was restored about fifty years ago. Until recently this porch was one of the most picturesque features of the church; but the hand of the Philistine has been upon it, and stripped off its ancient mantle of ivy. (Legge 1898, 235)

A stove was installed in 1851 at a cost of £18.9.6 largely defrayed by public subscription (ESRO PAR 461/9/1/1). In 1853 two small parcels of land were added to the churchyard (WSRO EPII/26/4).

The congregational seating does not seem to have been altered during Constable's incumbency. A later description refers to 'high-backed oak pews' and a 'panelled oak pulpit and reading desk' which survived until the early 1870s (Legge 1898, 234). The description suggests a possible refurnishing in the seventeenth century. However, the former west gallery was reportedly erected in 1754 by Henry Snooke of Delves House, and this may have involved a wider refitting of the church interior (John Kay: Ringmer Church file quoting Legge 1900, 1-14). A newspaper account of a dispute over the occupation of one of the pews which took place during a service in 1846 provides some

further information about the congregational seating at that date. This describes the occupants of the pew facing each other and a pew door fastened with a 'button' (*Sussex Advertiser* 18 August 1846, p2 cols 6-7). No descriptions of the chancel furnishings at this period have been seen. The antiquary Sir Stephen Glynne visited the church in or before 1840 but made no reference to the church furnishings in his notes (information from Dr David Parsons). Lambeth Palace Library holds a series of church survey reports undertaken for the Cambridge Camden Society in the early 1840s. A copy of the Ringmer report supplied by the Library shows that J M Neale visited on behalf of the Society on 10 August 1841 (LPL MS 1987 ff 69-72v). The long and detailed CCS recording form specifically invites comment on the nave and chancel seating and other joinery but frustratingly Neale did not complete any of these sections. It might be assumed that he saw nothing he considered worthy of note, or he may have been short of time. However, the elements listed on the form include 'Poppy heads', inevitably begging questions about why he did not record the early carved elements of the present stalls.

There seems to have been no practical reason to alter the congregational seating in the middle years of the nineteenth century since there was no shortage of seats in the church and the majority of them were free. The population of Ringmer rose from 897 in 1801 to 1271 in 1821 but then remained almost static until 1851 when it was 1374 (VCH II, 227). The 1851 religious census return was completed by the curate, the Revd Edward Symons, on 31 March (National Archives HO 129/84). This states that the church then provided 400 free sittings and 150 'Other Sittings'. Estimated attendances at services on the previous day were 320 in the morning, including 70 Sunday Scholars, 370 in the afternoon, again including 70 Sunday Scholars, and four in the evening. According to Symons, attendances over the previous month averaged 370 in the morning and 410 in the afternoon. In 1789 H T Shadwell had been granted a faculty to build and appropriate a pew and it is clear from the 1846 dispute that at least some of the 'other sittings' were still attached to property in the village and were maintained and occupied by the property owners (WSRO EP/V/18/8; *Sussex Advertiser* 18 August 1846, p2 cols 6-7).

The Nineteenth Century: 1863-c1884

Constable's curate Edward Symons succeeded him as vicar and was instituted on 16 May 1863 (WSRO EP/V/16A). After 'many, many years [as] the hard working curate' the appointment seems to have been a popular one (*Hampshire*

Advertiser 11 April 1863 p2 col 3). On 25 September 1862 a 6d rate was allowed towards the costs of the new burial ground and another for the repair and other necessary expenses of the church, each producing £19.1.4 (ESRO PAR461/9/1/1). However, in 1863 the bills were paid by voluntary contributions from most of the ratepayers ‘J Rickman defaulter having quashed this Rate’ (ESRO PAR461/9/1/1). Members of the Rickman family also defaulted in 1865 but cleaning and unspecified repairs costing £67 were agreed in 1864 (ESRO PAR461/9/1/1).

On 10 September 1864 *The Builder* reported that the

... parish church, having been for a long time in a very dilapidated condition, has been repaired and renovated, under Mr. Joseph Miller, the contractor. The interior walls are now stuccoed, and the woodwork stained, thus bringing to light many features of its old architecture, which have hitherto been buried in whitewash. (*The Builder* Vol XXII, 673)

Local opposition to church rates may have been fomented by dissent in the parish. There was an independent chapel by 1855 but in 1875 Symons reported that it was ‘very indifferently’ attended and entirely by the poorer classes (Kelly’s *Directory*; WSRO EP/V/16A). A Sunday School ‘taught by a bigotted Dissenter’ was poorly attended and a daily school conducted by the Quakers and attended principally by the very young was ‘manifestly falling off’ (WSRO EP/V/16A). Following the abolition of compulsory church rates in 1868, voluntary subscriptions totalling £25.15.3 were collected in 1869 and further voluntary contributions in 1870 (ESRO PAR461/9/1/1). In 1875 Symons reported that the church was funded by voluntary rates (WSRO EP/V/16A).

Despite submitting the lowest tender, Miller was not successful when further work was commissioned in 1872. On 26 July 1872 one of the regular reports on tenders in *The Building News* included the prices given

For reseating and repairing the parish church, Ringmer, Sussex:-

Davey.....	£320	0	0
Thorp	299	0	0
Berry (accepted).....	291	16	0
Miller.....	278	0	0

(*The Building News* Vol 23, p74)

The highest tenderer, Davey, was presumably the same, or related to, the individual who remodelled the church porch in 1849 (ESRO PAR 461/9/1/1). In 1898 W H Legge described the work undertaken in 1872:

At the west end of the church there was formerly a gallery of oak, erected by ... Henry Snooke [the younger, son and namesake of the vicar instituted in 1690]. From this point of vantage the village orchestra was wont to render the church music of those days on a variety of instruments; one of which, an oboe, is still extant, religiously preserved as a relic of times and customs forever passed away. This orchestra was not superseded until 1856; the gallery surviving until the alterations of 1872, when together with the high-backed oak pews, it was removed and taken possession of by the builder in part payment of his account. At this time, too, the same fate befel [sic] the old panelled oak pulpit and reading desk; while some carved work (to what part of the church pertaining I have been unable to discover) was actually consigned to the flames! (Legge 1898, 234)

Some correspondence in the archive of Lord Monk Bretton of Conyboro confirms that the choir stalls formed part of the 1872 reseating scheme (ESRO/MOB/1/2/3/688: I am indebted to John Kay for this reference). A note forwarded by Edward Symons to 'Mr Dodson' in 1878 records:

Ringmer Church Restoration 1873

To Contract for new seating & paving nave, aisles, Chancel & North Chantry, new Screen & floor forming vestry in South Chantry & new Pulpit	291.16.0
Additional Cost of Pulpit executed in stone instead of wood	15.0.0
Oak Altar Rail & Standards	8.0.0
Restoring Font	6.0.0
Repairs to Roof Timbers, new boarding, staining & varnishing Chancel Ceiling & sundry repairs to nave, Chancel &c internally	<u>65. 4.0</u>
	£386.0.0

(ESRO/MOB/1/2/3/688)

An article in the Ringmer History Newsletter notes that a heating system was installed when the nave and chancel floors were relaid in 1872 (RHN 90 Dec 1992, p4). This information was taken from a notebook describing church alterations kept by Maud Kibbler (†1939) now in the possession of John Kay. He suggests that her information for this period before her personal knowledge is based on hearsay but may well be accurate.

There are two short letters with the note summarising the cost of the 1873 works, both dated 15 January 1878 (ESRO MOB/1/2/3/688). A letter from George Bushby in Lewes to an unidentified correspondent, probably Edward Symons, states:

The cost of restoring Ringmer Church was Four hundred pounds. We had no architect. Charles Berry did the work; who is lately dead. (ESRO MOB/1/2/3/688)

It seems that Edward Symons immediately forwarded Bushby's letter with the note on costs to Mr Dodson, identified by John Kay in his Ringmer Church file as John George Dodson (later Lord Monk Bretton), commenting that he had obtained the contract for

... the re-pewing of Ringmer Church not the restoration and I have now the pleasure to forward it to you – Mr Berry was his own Architect and I believe the execution of the work gave entire satisfaction to the Committee. (ESRO MOB/1/2/3/688)

John Kay notes that this

... Charles Berry was Charles James BERRY (1823-1877), second child and eldest son of James BERRY junior, who ran a building firm in Malling Street that in 1861 employed 24 men and 1 boy. In various entries in the British Newspaper Archive he is described as an architect as well as a builder. (John Kay: Ringmer Church file)

On 15 October 1875 Mr Symons completed his written responses to the Bishop's Articles of Visitation and Enquiry (WSRO EP/V/16A). In reply to questions about the provision of seating and alterations and expenditure in the parish in the last three years, Symons confirmed that the church had been 'repewed' with open sittings funded by voluntary contributions and would accommodate about 350 people. His answers imply that all the sittings were free. It is evident that the significant reduction in the provision of

congregational seating was not a problem, since Symons reported that the population of the parish in 1871 was 1500, and the maximum attendance at any one service was around 250. Unsurprisingly, he did not think that any additional church accommodation was required. When asked ‘under what authority’ such alterations had been made he admitted to a ‘misapprehension as to the necessary authority for so doing’, confirming that no faculty had been obtained (WSRO EP/V/16A).

It is not clear when or how the new choir stalls were first used and a surpliced choir of 12 men and six boys was described as ‘lately organised by T. Horsey, Esq., of the Elms’ in the spring of 1877 (*Sussex Advertiser* 14 March 1877 p3 col 2). On 31 March 1877 the *Sussex Advertiser* reported that

Great interest is now being taken in the choral portion of the Divine Service of this church, and the choir, under the teaching of Mr Paddock, of Lewes, promises to become most efficient (p3 col 3).

The choir was still active five years later when the *West Sussex Journal* reported that the

...porch of the church is evidently ancient, but all the old pews inside have been taken away, and my guide informed me that the villagers have been favoured with a set of ‘new commandments’. On looking over them I could detect no material difference between them and the ‘old commandments’ to which we were all so well accustomed. On Sundays there is a choir in the church of twelve men and six boys, which must represent no small proportion of the male population of Ringmer. (*West Sussex Journal* 23 May 1882 p3 col 6)

Evidence discussed in this report shows that the 1872 reseating and associated works were the last significant intervention to follow the essentially pragmatic approach to the care and maintenance of the church building prevalent during the incumbency of John Constable (1812-63). As Constable’s longstanding curate – and not himself a wealthy man - it is probably not surprising that Symons adopted a similar approach to the work undertaken in 1864 and 1872, calling on the services of the same local contractors (*Hampshire Advertiser* 11 April 1863 p2 col 3; ESRO PAR 461/9/1/1; *The Builder* Vol XXII, 673; *The Building News* Vol 23, p74). However, by 1872 this approach was distinctly old fashioned and stands in marked contrast to later interventions which were

largely funded by wealthy individuals and designed by nationally recognised architects.

The Later Nineteenth Century

On 16 May 1884 a faculty was granted to the Vicar and Churchwardens of Ringmer and William Langham Christie MP of Glyndebourne for the erection of ‘a handsome West Tower in Flint and Sandstone’ (WSRO EP/II/26/10, 419-20). Christie was named on the faculty because the tower would be built ‘at his sole cost’ and the scheme was designed by Ewan Christian, architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who had worked for Christie at Glyndebourne (Oxford DNB; Charles 1896, 71; NHLE List Entry no 1353005). The work involved taking down part of the west wall of the church and re-erecting the fifteenth-century west window in the west wall of the new tower. The clock and bell in the existing timber turret were reused, and a carved timber screen erected between the tower and the nave in a new tower arch (WSRO EP/II/26/10, 420). The construction of the tower would allow for the creation of about 30 additional sittings, but the area it enclosed included about 23 graves. Plans with the faculty papers at WSRO do not show the east end of the building (WSRO EP/II/27/555).

On 28 April 1887 the Bishop of Chichester consecrated an extension to the churchyard, acquired under a deed of Sir Charles William Blunt Bt dated 7 December 1886 (WSRO EP/II/26/10, 490). By 1891 the parish was embroiled in a ritualist controversy involving the curate, the Revd C D P Davies (*Sussex Agricultural Express* 4 August 1891 p4 cols 2-3; LPL Benson 100 ff1-44). John Kay notes that Mr Symons suffered a period of senility in later life, and it seems likely that this contributed to difficulties in the parish (John Kay: personal information). Following Symons’ death in 1891 the Revd F B Gribbell was instituted vicar on 27 November (John Kay: personal information; *Sussex Agricultural Express* 1 December 1891 p4 col 3). A newspaper account of the institution notes that at least two of the congregation had heard Symons preach his first sermon and could ‘contrast the church of their boyhood and its box pews with the restored edifice [and] its comfortable equipments’ (*Sussex Agricultural Express* 1 December 1891 p4 col 3).

An 1899 handwritten journal kept by Dr William Martin and now deposited in the Sussex Archaeological Society Library reportedly records some information

about the parish church in the late nineteenth century but has not been seen as the library remains closed until further notice (John Kay: personal information).

Early Twentieth Century

Evidence discussed in this report suggests that the late nineteenth century ritualist controversy at Ringmer arose out of a conjunction of local and national circumstances (cf <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/church-furnishing-in-19th-century-england/>). The shift in churchmanship which ritualism implies is paralleled in a series of interventions in the physical development of the church building, and following on from W L Christie's gift of the new tower in 1884 multiple faculties were granted for work to enrich the church interior in the early part of the twentieth century.

Constable's 1842 east window was replaced by the present five-light window designed by Arthur Blomfield, second son, pupil and partner of Sir Arthur Blomfield c1901 (ESRO PAR461/4/5/2, 3; Sussex Parish Churches Architects & Artists). Elevations and plans of the east end of the building as existing and proposed have not been seen (ESRO PAR461/4/5/2, 3). On 5 March 1902 a faculty was granted for a new east window to replace the existing window 'with one of fitting Design approved by us the new window being filled in with plain glass' (WSRO EP/II/26/11, 327-8; EP/II/27/556). According to Maud Kibbler's notebook the stained glass was added in 1903 and is by Powell & Co (John Kay: Ringmer Church file). The stone mullions in the windows of the north chapel were reportedly restored by the lay rector, Mrs Andrew Duncan, in the same year (John Kay: Ringmer Church file [Maud Kibbler's notebook]). According to Maud Kibbler the stone mullions of the north aisle windows were restored at the expense of W L Christie in 1908, and C G Treherne of Merton House paid for porch roof repairs and a new figure of the Virgin Mary in 1908-9 (John Kay: Ringmer Church file). More porch repairs were undertaken in 1912-13 (John Kay: Ringmer Church file).

Selective research has been undertaken into a long list of later faculties relating to the embellishment of the church interior. Faculties concerning burials and memorials have largely been omitted. Much of the new decorative work was designed by the Anglo-Catholic church architect and stained glass designer F C Eden (1864-1944; Oxford DNB; Sussex Parish Churches Architects & Artists). On 5 July 1909 a faculty was granted for new panelling and paving designed by Eden for the north chancel aisle - or Lady Chapel - at the expense of Mrs

Aubrey Hillman of Lewes (WSRO EP/II/26/12, 46-8; ESRO PAR461/4/4/3). In 1917 faculty permission was granted for a stained glass window in the Lady Chapel in memory of the Revd F B Gribbell, vicar for 23 years, again designed by F C Eden (WSRO EP/II/26/12, 488-9; ESRO PAR461/4/4/4).

The Duncan family were still taking practical responsibility for the chancel in 1914, when Mrs Duncan commissioned E H Fuller, Architect and Surveyor of Lewes, to undertake repairs to the roof and windows, to repair or replace the vestry door and clean down the cement rendered internal walls which had been dirtied by the 'smoke of lamps' and other causes (ESRO FAA/ACC5611/3/530). Mrs Duncan's responsibility extended to the north and south chapels, the latter then used as a vestry and organ chamber. Fuller is not included in the extensive database of architects and artists on the Sussex Parish Churches website, suggesting that his church practice was small.

In 1921 a faculty was granted for the restoration of the south chapel at the expense of the Springett family to the designs of F C Eden (WSRO EP/II/27/1985; ESRO PAR461/4/4/7, 8; John Kay: Ringmer Church file). Correspondence suggests that the original intention was to repair and replace the existing organ at the east end of the building, but on 8 August 1922 faculty permission was granted for the removal of the old organ, relocation of the font and the construction of new choir and clergy vestries (WSRO EP/II/27/1985, 3381; ESRO PAR461/4/4/9). The new organ at the west end of the church with two vestries under the gallery was given by John Christie (John Kay: Ringmer Church file [Maud Kibbler's notebook]; NHLE List Entry no 1238690). The scheme was designed by the church architect E L Warre who also worked for John Christie at Glyndebourne, where he helped him to remodel the house and design the first opera house (Sussex Parish Churches Architects & Artists; NHLE List Entry no 1353005). A small undated guide to the church – with the date 1962 added - states that much of the oak panelling of the screen is of genuine antiquity and was brought from Glyndebourne (SAS Library file: Ringmer Accn 30223). The source of this information and any relationship between this work and the tower screen installed in 1884 are not known (WSRO EP/II/26/10, 420). It seems possible that material removed from the south chancel chapel was reused at the west end of the church but no evidence for this has been seen.

The lay rector's responsibility for chancel repairs was extinguished in the mid-1920s (ESRO PAR461/16/3/1). In 1926 Mrs Duncan entered into negotiations

with the incumbent Mr Leefe to compound her liability by the payment of a lump sum. At the same time, she was engaged in negotiations over the redemption of the great tithes, which she also owned and which in 1928 produced an income of more than £500 *pa*. Mrs Duncan's solicitors suggested that

... it would be as well both for themselves as for the Parish if they could get rid of this liability of repair as the position if a large amount of tithes were redeemed would not be a satisfactory one. (ESRO PAR461/16/3/1)

During protracted negotiations both Leefe and Mrs Duncan died but the matter seems to have been concluded by the payment of a lump sum in the spring of 1929 (ESRO PAR461/16/3/1).

On 27 February 1930 a faculty was granted for alterations and improvements in the chancel including adjusting the level of the floor and panelling on the east chancel wall and the provision of a new altar table (WSRO EP/II/27/1699; ESRO PAR461/4/4/14). The work was again specified by F C Eden. The altar, reredos and candlesticks were the gift of Maud Kibbler in memory of her sisters (John Kay: Ringmer Church file [Maud Kibbler's notebook]). In the same year an oak font cover was given in memory of Miss Sally Martin (John Kay: Ringmer Church file [Ringmer Church Log Book]). In 1933 Eden designed the present oak pulpit, the gift of John Byron as a memorial to his wife (WSRO EP/II/27/1337; ESRO PAR461/4/4/15; John Kay: Ringmer Church file). Eden oversaw the installation of an electric organ blower and electric lighting in the same year (WSRO EP/II/27/1342; ESRO PAR461/4/4/16).

Later Twentieth Century

The parish material deposited at East Sussex Record Office includes 40 faculties with outside dates 1940-2009 (ESRO PAR461/4/4/17-56). These have not been fully investigated. They include:

- Repairs – unspecified - 1953 (ESRO PAR461/4/4/21)
- Fixing an oak door in the organ screen at the entrance to the vestry 1962 (ESRO PAR461/4/4/22)
- New oil-fired boiler, four new radiators and additional heating coils 1964 (ESRO PAR461/4/4/23, 24)

- Archdeacon's certificate for repairs and redecoration 1965 (ESRO PAR461/4/4/27)
- Redecoration of the nave and side aisles 1966 (ESRO PAR461/4/4/29)
- Rewiring, new lighting and repairs 1967 (ESRO PAR461/4/4/30)
- Alterations and repairs to the choir stalls and priest's desk 1969 (ESRO PAR461/4/4/31)
- Reordering of the altar and sanctuary (ESRO PAR461/4/4/40)
- Removal of a pew at the western end of the nave and adjacent to the font to provide wheelchair access 2005 (ESRO PAR461/4/4/54).

Quinquennial inspection reports provide some useful information about the chancel furniture and help to explain the alterations subsequently made. Following his inspection in 1961 the church architect John Denman reported that

The choir and clergy stalls, pulpit and lectern are in oak. There is some evidence of beetle infestation in the platform curbs of the choir stalls which appears to be active in places.

... The nave pews are in pine in which there has been slight beetle attack in places. (ESRO PAR461/16/10/1)

In 1966 John Denman's successor as church architect, William Newman, reported that the

Pews were found to be generally sound but the pew fronts in the Chancel are insecure and should be attended to.

The small prayer desks which have been provided at the East end of these stalls, to give extra accommodation, are of course, quite out of keeping and could well be improved upon.

The priest's desks are small and rather meagre in every way and perhaps therefore a general improvement scheme for all these stalls and pew fronts might be considered. (ESRO PAR461/16/10/1)

The inadequate accommodation in the stalls and difficulty experienced by the choir when they attempted to 'process in and out in a dignified manner' prompted the parish to embark on a 'long period of experiment and investigation' (WSRO EP/I/98 Ringmer, St Mary, folder 2). On 8 December 1968 they applied for a faculty for 'Repairs and extensions to the Choir Stalls

and Priest's desk' specified by W S Newman (WSRO EP/I/98 Ringmer, St Mary, folder 2).

Copies of Newman's report and other papers are with the diocesan material at WSRO:

Architect's Report on proposed alterations to choir stalls

Not many years ago two rows of choir stalls at either side of the Chancel were adequate to seat the members of the choir. Gradually the numbers in the choir have increased and in order to accommodate them extra seating has had to be provided.

In the first instance this was done by placing chairs at the ends of the stalls but this was soon found to be insufficient and spare pews, which were in the South Chapel, were added at the back of the original choir stalls. Temporary staging had to be constructed to take these additional stalls and backrests had to be added to the stalls in front of them. This additional seating was carried out in a temporary manner and was found to be satisfactory in that the full choir could be accommodated and a good acoustical result achieved.

One of the main objections, however, was that the additional choir stall on the North side of the Chancel seriously encroached into the Lady Chapel and no matter how it had been treated it would have marred the appearance.

On the opposite side, due to the extra width of the main pier, the additional choir stall does not seriously project into the Chapel.

The enclosed drawing No. 891/2 shows a plan of these pews as they now exist.

After considerable thought and discussion it has been finally agreed to alter, adapt and extend the existing pews as shown on the enclosed drawing No. 891/6. As will be seen this allows two longer pews on the North side, and three on the South side together with the Priest's Desk and Chair.

The present stalls are of no great age and are not, by any means, of meritorious design. The design of the panelled pew fronts is not exactly

regular and one side does not match the other. Some of the pew ends have carved finials and some seat widths are different to others.

A copy of the schedule of works describing our proposals for adapting and extending the pews is enclosed. It will be seen from this that the variations mentioned have been taken into account in our proposals.

So far as estimating is concerned, it was thought that there would be so much difference in contractor's estimates for carrying out this work that it would be best to obtain quotations for doing the work on a cost plus basis. (WSRO EP/I/98 Ringmer, St Mary, folder 2)

Newman's report continues with a schedule of the work required to extend the choir stalls. This refers to the lettering scheme used to identify the stalls and fronts on his drawings (Figs 1, 2):

Remove the rearmost choir stall, on the North side, together with the built up staging and steps.

Remove the priest's chair and desk on the North side.

Remove the rearmost choir stall on the South side complete with staging and steps. Also remove the priest's chair and desk from this side.

Remove the East end panel from stall (A) and extend the stall by approximately 3'6" using oak stained to match existing and increase the depth of the present seat panel by 2" by grooving in a strip of oak and giving additional support by means of battens screwed to underside of seat. Replace the end panel.

Extend stall (B) by approximately 4'0" in the same manner and similarly increase the depth of the seat panel by 2".

Also extend the bookrest with carved brackets all to match existing.

Similarly extend the length of choir stalls (C) by approximately 3'3" together with bookrest and carved brackets and (D) by approximately 4'0" and in addition construct a bookrest approximately 9'0" long with carved brackets all as those existing, to serve the rearmost pew on this side.

The carved front panel on the North side (E) is to be removed and extended by approximately 2'6", i.e. by removing one of the return panels and adding two fluted bottom panels and posts with the upper panels also extended, all to match existing. Replace the return panel and repair any loose panels and generally make good to any damaged parts of the existing work.

Similarly remove the front panel from the South side (F) and extend by approximately 3'9", i.e. by two lower carved panels and four top panels, repositioning the return end at the end of the new work. All carving and moulding is to match the existing work in material, shape and colour. Make good any damaged portions of the work.

The podium on which the choir stalls are mounted is to be altered to suit the new arrangement. This involves extending both North and South side podiums by approximately 2'0".

With the podium extended to the required size the stalls can be re-located. The North side pew front (E) is now to be positioned on the South and the South side pew on the North side.

A new priest's chair and desk is to be constructed in oak to stand on the South side. The desk to have a carved and fretted front panel to echo the design of the pew front carved panels. (WSRO EP/I/98 Ringmer, St Mary, folder 2)

On 3 February 1969 a faculty was granted for

The carrying out of alterations and repairs to the Choir Stalls and Priest's Desk in Ringmer Parish Church, in accordance with the report, plans and specification prepared by Mr. W. S. Newman, F.R.I.B.A., of 139, High Street, Lewes, filed with the said Petition. (ESRO PAR461/4/4/31)

Faculty papers show the proposed contractors were Press & Banks Ltd of Framfield and the estimated cost of the work was £800. It was undertaken piecemeal to avoid disrupting services and the certificate of completion is dated 5 October 1969 (WSRO EP/I/98 Ringmer, St Mary, folder 2).

Seating Assessment

The woodwork of the choir stalls has been assessed by eye and the dates of the individual timbers from the physical evidence for reuse (Pls 17-20). Early material is described as ‘ancient’ in this text - and the captions to the accompanying illustrations - to distinguish it from material contemporary with the construction of the choir stalls in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Graphics 1-3).

The lengths of the surviving ‘ancient’ components are:

- Front stall south side: top rail 2490mm/98”, seat rail 2390mm/94”, seat boards 1930mm/76” and 990mm/39”
- Front to south stalls: 2720mm/107”
- Front to north stalls: 2895mm/114” (*cf* Graphics 1-3).

The similar lengths of the ancient pieces suggest that they may originally have been part of the same construction, and the evidence of reuse is shown by splits and old nail holes (Pls 17-20). However, the carved panels in the two fronts are of different widths, confirming that the fronts did not originate as a matching pair (Graphics 1, 2). The pattern of the carving, known as nulling, is characteristic of the early seventeenth century (Figs 5, 14, 15, 17). It can be found as panels in a frieze (for example in the solar at Stokesay Castle (NHLE List Entry no 1269939)) but is generally used as a continuous frieze, as it is found in the Ringmer tower screen. However, evidence discussed in this report suggests that the carved work in the tower screen was probably brought from Glyndebourne *c*1922 (ESRO PAR461/4/4/9; John Kay: Ringmer Church file [Maud Kibbler’s notebook]; SAS Library file: Ringmer Accn 30223). In contrast, the carved work in the stall fronts is probably indigenous to the building and was retained when other carved work was destroyed during the 1872 reordering (Legge 1898, 234). There is evidence to suggest that the church was refurnished in the seventeenth century following despoliation in the Civil War and the ‘high-backed oak pews’ described by W H Legge in 1898 would be characteristic of this date (Legge 1898, 231-2, 234).

It is difficult to distinguish the ancient work from more recent work to the stalls as all of the older work has been refinished, including all components of the framing and the ogee spandrel panels. This implies that the woodwork was dismantled and every piece separately refinished before it was put back

together. The ogee arch panels may have been cut from solid square panels in 1872. The poppy heads are late fifteenth-century in appearance but have been refitted on 'new' ends probably made up from ancient material (Graphic 3; Pls 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13). The ends of the back stalls are similarly made up from planks of unequal width (Pl 6). The 1969 work can be identified and is shown in a different colour on Graphics 1-4.

Newman's schedule of work shows that the 1872 choir stalls were extended and put onto extended platforms with a new clergy desk and stall on the south side c1969 (WSRO EP/I/98 Ringmer, St Mary, folder 2; ESRO PAR461/4/4/31). The decision to remove the surviving box pews in the nave yet make the new choir stalls from fragments of Jacobean timber is interesting. Only very few Jacobean timbers were reused although complete sections of panelling were used for the fronts. The date of the timber used for the stall ends is unknown: it could be Jacobean or older, or the ends could have been made from timber reused in 1872. They show no evidence of previous use as stall or pew ends. The reused Jacobean material is oak, and fittingly the stalls were completed in the same material reflecting the importance of the chancel in contrast to the cheaper pine used in the nave.

The congregational seating was designed and made by the local contractor Charles Berry c1872-3. The benches are made in pine and are typical in design and arrangement and comparable with hundreds of other re-pewing schemes of this period. The layout is quite standard with seating filling the church to provide the maximum amount of accommodation for the congregation. The design is unexceptional with comfortable width seat boards and sloping seat backs. There are no draught boards so those with long legs can stretch them out under the seat in front. The most notable element of the design is the deliberate similarity of the pew fronts to the choir stall fronts which creates a pleasing link between the two sets of seating. It will be seen that the front pew on the north side of the nave has been removed since Newman drew up his plan for his proposed work on the choir stalls in 1969 (Figs 1, 2).

Significance

The Chancel Stalls

The architectural, artistic and historic interest of the chancel furnishings at St Mary, Ringmer can usefully be described within the framework set out in

Historic England's *Conservation Principles* (2008). The heritage values of these stalls in their physical and historical context in the church building can be summarised in terms of their:

- Evidential value *derived from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity*

The stalls provide unique physical evidence for the development of the church interior, including the detailing of the joinery and reuse of materials in three major phases of work. Their design and construction provides evidence for changing attitudes to the fabric of the church building and changing patterns of worship in Anglican churches in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

- Historical value *derived from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present, tends to be illustrative or associative*

The stalls are a physical expression of the development of the choral tradition in English parish churches in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The extension of the stalls reflects the attraction of choral singing in a developing suburban society. They represent an evolving but still familiar form of worship and continuity in the pattern of parish life over 150 years.

- Aesthetic value *derived from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place*

The selection and reuse of materials shows an appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of the earlier work and subtly reinforces the hierarchy of chancel furniture and congregational seating. The chancel stalls represent a considered intervention in a highly significant part of the church c1872, reconsidered in a very different physical context at the east end of the building in 1969.

- Communal value *derived from the meaning of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory*

The parish church is a highly significant focal point for the local community and the evolving tradition of church music has played an important and continuing role in the cultural life of Ringmer.

The Congregational Seating

The congregational seating is unexceptional and its significance is low.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary:

- The heritage value of the chancel assemblage as a whole is relatively low *within the context of this Grade I listed building*. The quality of the joinery and carving is not exceptional in the national context. The design of the stalls has evolved since their inception in 1872 and further considered change is acceptable in principle.
- The value of the ‘ancient’ woodwork is relatively high.

The parish and their architect propose to retain the two stall fronts and the front stall on the south side. It is important to retain the poppy heads and probable ancient material in the renewed stall ends on the north and south sides, but it would in principle be acceptable to shorten the stalls so long as the ends are retained.

The proposed removal of the front benches on each side of the nave would seem acceptable. It is important that the pew fronts are retained as is intended.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

East Sussex Records Office at The Keep (ESRO): parish records, Monk Bretton of Conyboro archive, local studies material

Lambeth Palace Library (LPL): visitation records, CCS surveys

Sussex Archaeological Society Library (SAS Library): local studies library

West Sussex Records Office (WSRO): diocesan records

Personal information and transcripts of research material from John Kay and Dr David Parsons

Secondary Sources

Andrew Townsend Architects and Jane Root with Hugh Harrison 2015
Victorian Anglican Church Seating unpublished report to English Heritage 6356
(NHPP 4D1.403)

Antram, Nicholas and Pevsner, Nikolaus 2013 *The Buildings of England
Sussex: East with Brighton and Hove* Yale University Press

The Builder Volume for 1864 XXII London

The Building News and Engineering Journal Volume the Twenty-Third July-
December 1872 London

Charles, Elizabeth Rundle 1896 *Ewan Christian, Architect* Cambridge
University Press

Cooper, Trevor and Brown, Sarah 2011 *Pews, Benches & Chairs: Church
seating in English parish churches from the fourteenth century to the present*
The Ecclesiological Society, London

Dunkin, E H W 1875 'Contributions towards the Ecclesiastical History of the
Deanery of South Malling in the County of Sussex' in *SAC XXVI*, George P
Bacon, Lewes

Historic England [English Heritage] 2008 *Conservation Principles: Policies
and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment*
English Heritage

Horsfield, T W 1835 *The History, Antiquities, and Topography of the County of
Sussex* Volume One, Sussex Press, Lewes, Nichols and Son, London
republished Kohler and Coombes, Dorking 1974

Kay, John E 2000 'The Broyle Enclosure, 1767-71' in *Sussex Archaeological
Collections* 138 (2000)

Legge, W Heneage 1898 'The Church of Ringmer, Sussex' in *The Reliquary
and Illustrated Archaeologist* new series Vol IV October 1898 [ESRO PAR
461/7/4/1]

Legge, W Heneage 1900 'Delves House, Ringmer, with some Account of
Gilbert White and his Relatives there Residing' in *The Reliquary and Illustrated
Archaeologist* new series Vol VI

NADFAS 2013 *St. Mary the Virgin, Ringmer, East Sussex* typescript record of church furnishings

Ringmer History Newsletters 1981- Ringmer History Study Group

VCH II 1907 *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: Sussex* Volume Two, ed William Page, pub Archibald Constable & Co Ltd, London

Online Resources (accessed February-May 2020)

The British Newspaper Archive:

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search>

Historic England Archive photograph collection 'England's Places':

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/archive-collections/englands-places/>

Internet Archive digital library: <https://archive.org/index.php>

Lewes and Eastbourne Councils, Ringmer Conservation Area Appraisal:

https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/_resources/assets/inline/full/0/258999.pdf

National Archives downloads: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

The National Heritage List for England (NHLE):

<http://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list>

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: <https://www.oxforddnb.com/>

Ringmer History Study Group: <http://www.ringmer.info/ringmer-history-study-group.html>

Sussex Parish Churches website: <https://sussexparishchurches.org/>

Sussex Record Society (SRS) Bibliography Index:

<https://www.sussexrecordsociety.org/dbs/biblio/places/R/Ringmer>

Sussex Record Society (SRS) Picture database:

<https://www.sussexrecordsociety.org/dbs/jf/places/Ringmer/>

Victoria and Albert Museum (VAM) online resources:

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/church-furnishing-in-19th-century-england/>

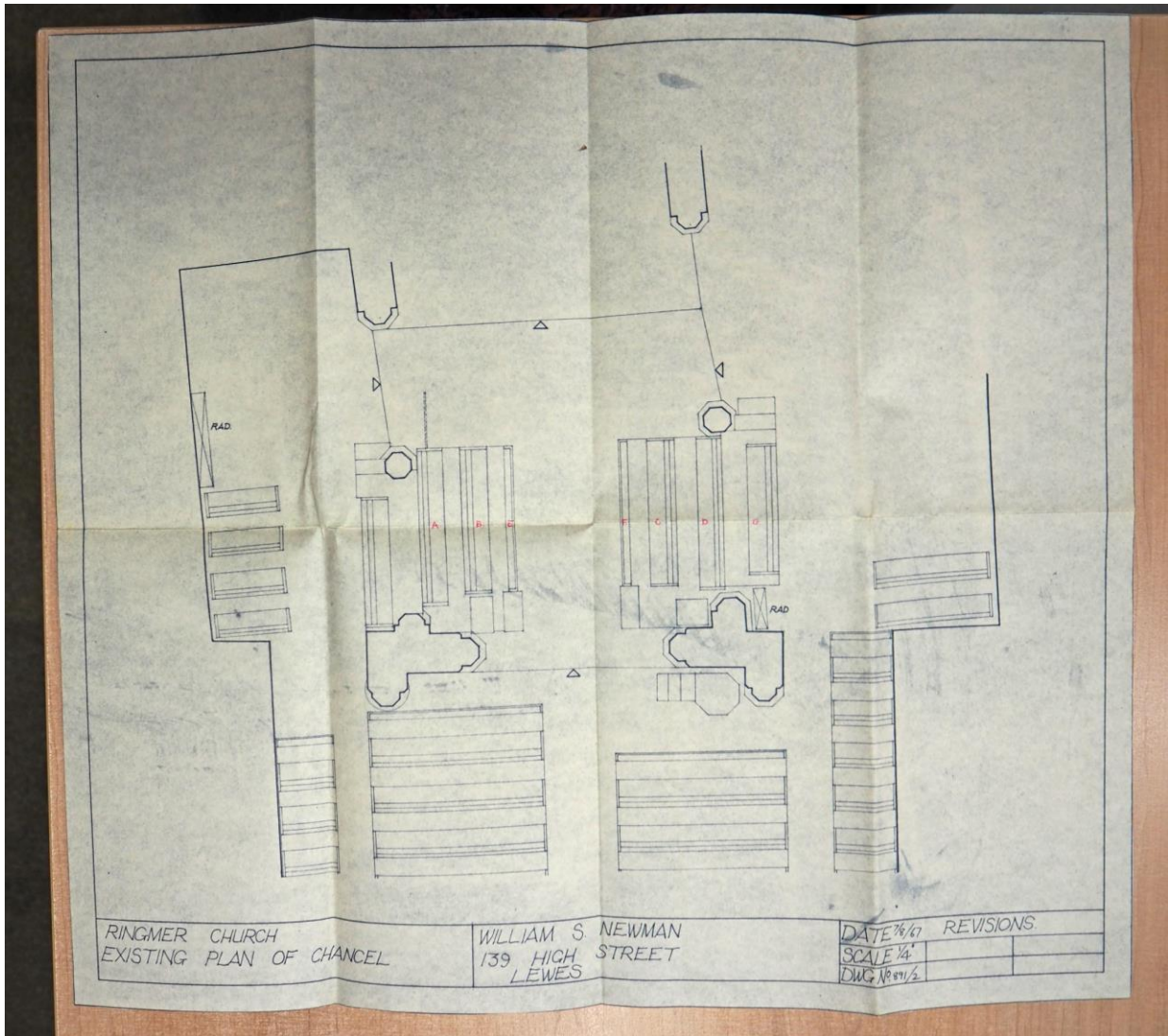


Fig 1 Existing Plan of Chancel William S Newman 1967 (WSRO EP/1/98 Ringmer, St Mary, folder 2; by courtesy of the Vicar of Ringmer and with acknowledgements to the County Archivist, West Sussex Record Office)

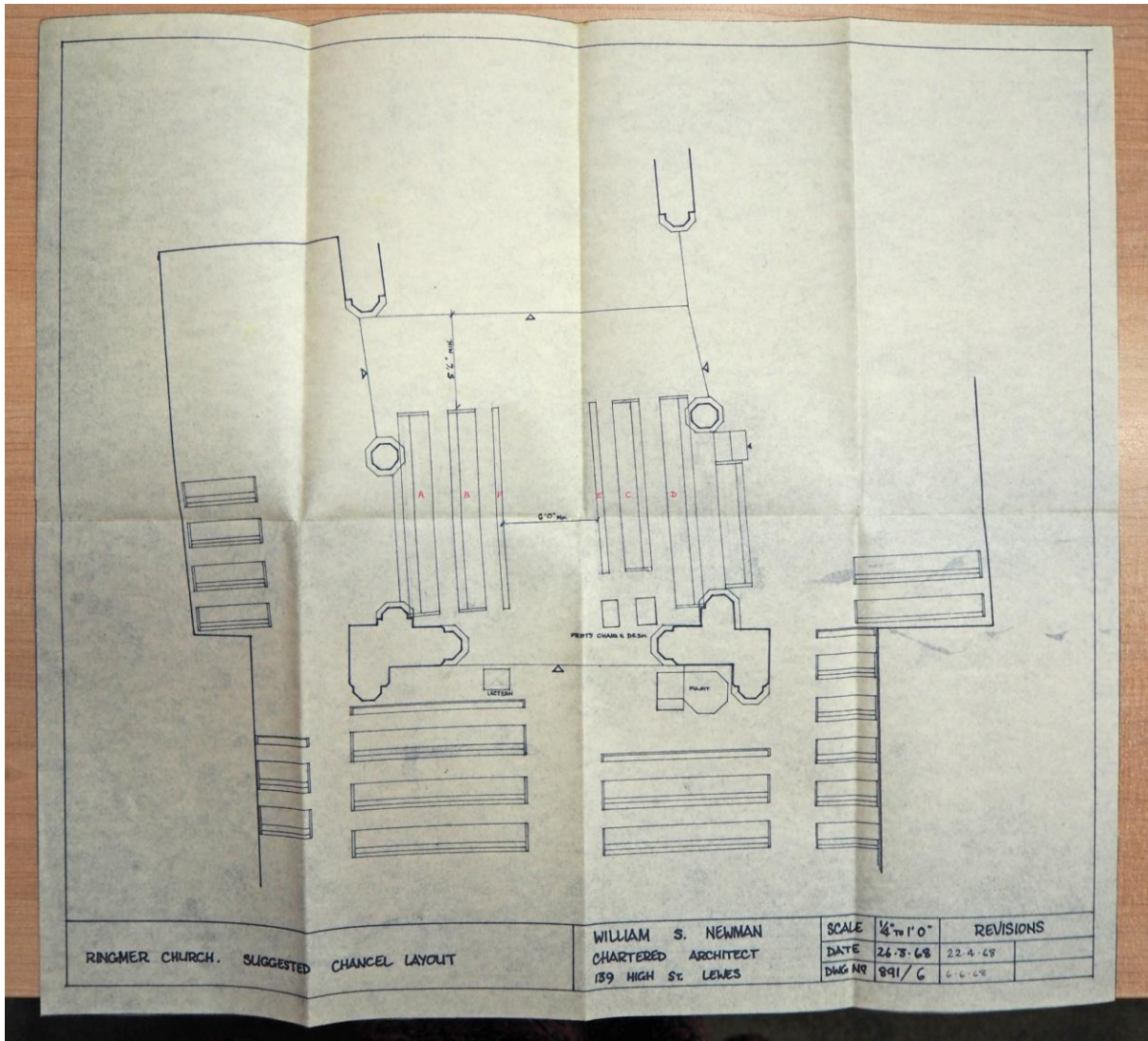
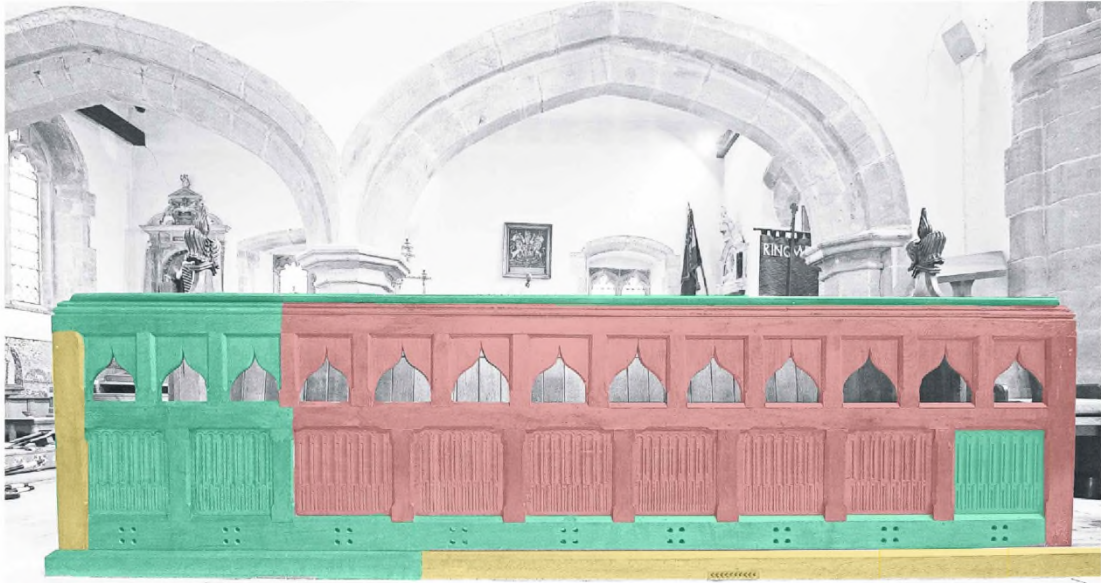


Fig 2 *Suggested Chancel Layout* William S Newman 1968 (WSRO EP/1/98 Ringmer, St Mary, folder 2; by courtesy of the Vicar of Ringmer and with acknowledgements to the County Archivist, West Sussex Record Office)



- 17th, century
- 1872
- 1969

Graphic showing approximate extent of the various periods of work. The front ends could be new wood in 1872 or reused 17th c. The west nulled panel looks to be 1969, but could be 1872.

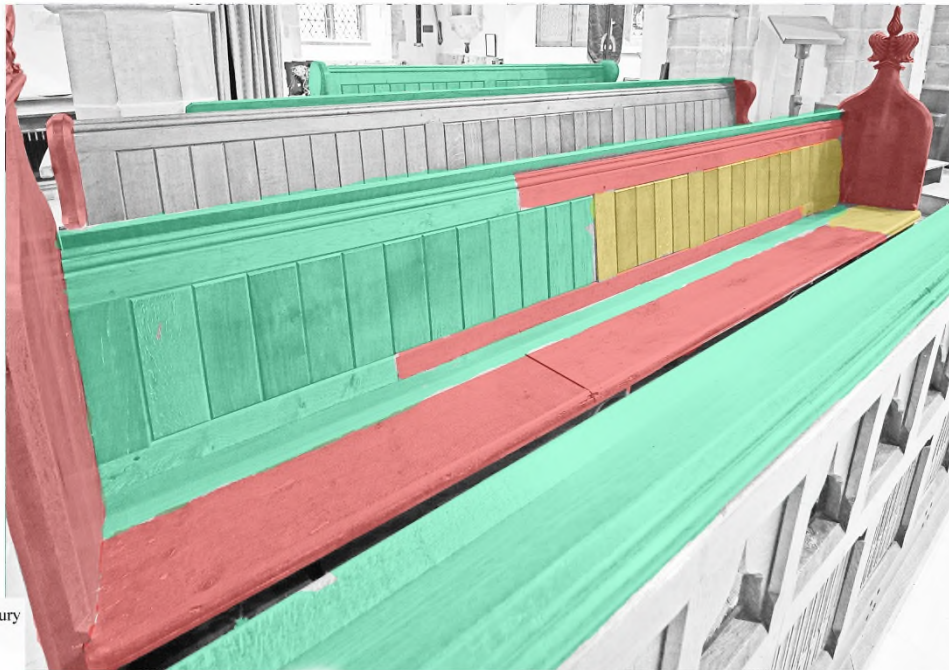
GRAPHIC 1



- 17th, century
- 1872
- 1969

Front to north choir stalls, approximate extent of various periods of work.

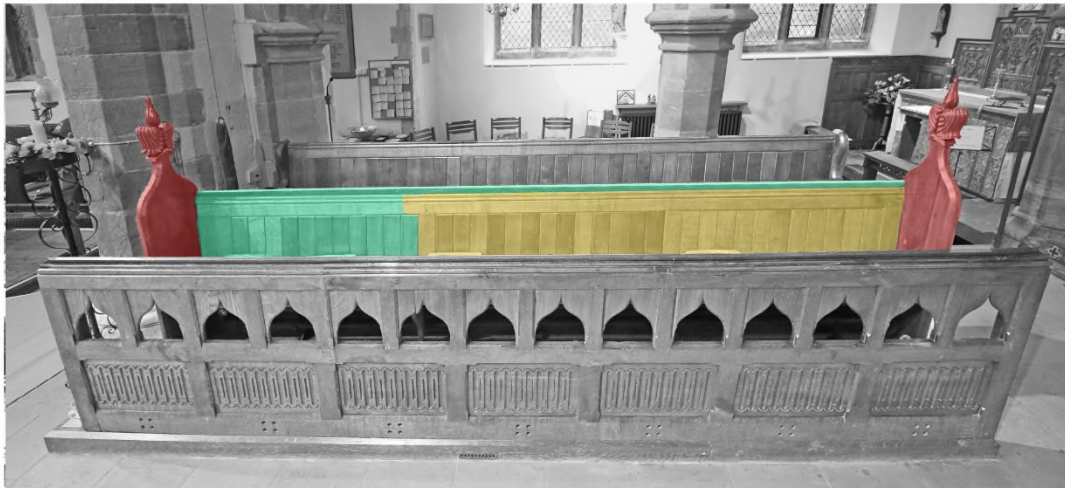
GRAPHIC 2



- 17th, century
- 1872
- 1969

Graphic showing pieces of 17th c woodwork reused in the south front stall (coloured red). The green shows the extension to the front stall in 1969 and the new book boards as specified by William Newman. There is no evidence of the 1969 extension to the second stall but the rear stall was added in 1969 as shown.

GRAPHIC 3



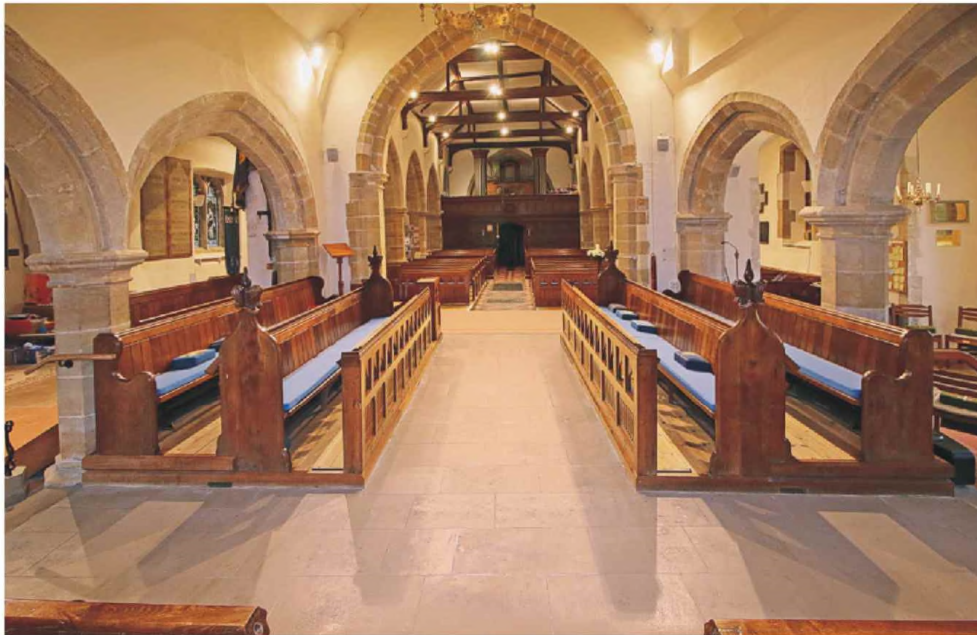
- 17th, century
- 1872
- 1969

Graphic showing the 1969 extension to the front stall, north side. The ends shown as 17th c. reused, but only assessed visually. The rear stall shows no evidence of being extended in 1969.

GRAPHIC 4



1. Choir stalls seen from the west, note the later looking clergy desk and stall

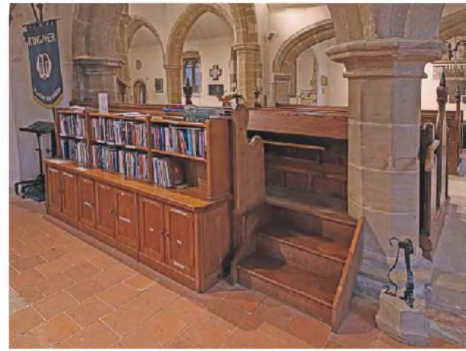


2. The choir stalls seen from the east. Note the added stall on the south side.

SOUTH STALLS



4. Oblique view of south stalls



3. Added back stall to south stalls



5. Front to south stalls. Most of this front is ancient except the left hand two panels, arrows show joints in rails.



6. East end to south stalls; note end made from 3 planks of unequal width.



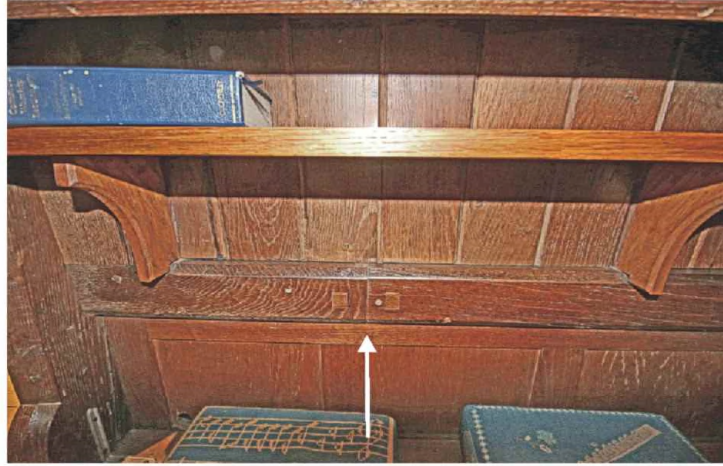
7. Front stall end also made from 3 planks

Note
All planks used to make these ends look to be reused. Note worm tunnels revealed by refinishing the timber.



8. View of inside face of the end in Plate 7. Note timber inserts covering hand rail bolt nuts each side of joint between planks

SOUTH STALLS



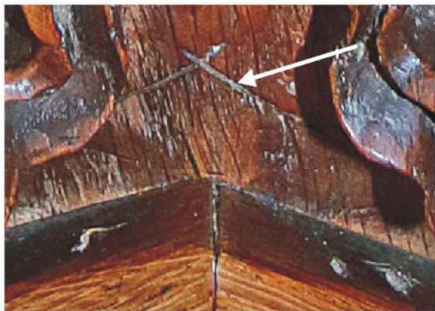
9. View of joint in the mid rail of the front stall, note the use of a hand rail bolt to secure the ends of the rail together.



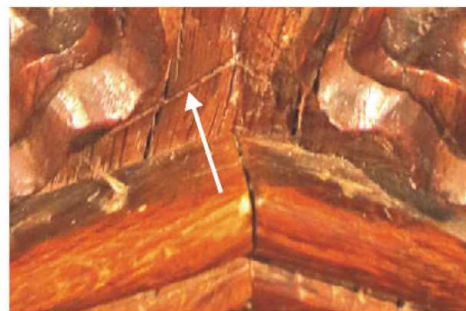
10. East face of poppy head east end of stall



11. West face of poppy head as shown in Plate 10.



12. Scribe marks showing steeper angle of base mould at original junction of carving and stall end.



13. Scribe marks showing steeper angle of base mould at original junction of carving and stall end.



NORTH STALLS

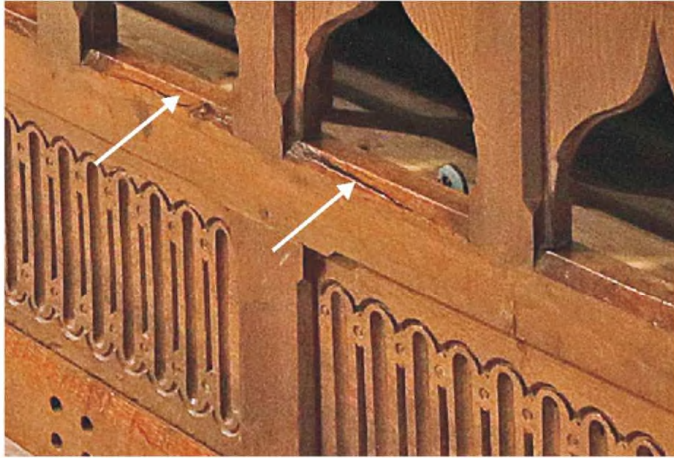
14. Oblique view



15. Front to north stalls. Most of this front is ancient except the left hand two panels, arrows show joints in rails.



16. View of back stall from the north



17. Evidence of ancient timber where it has split

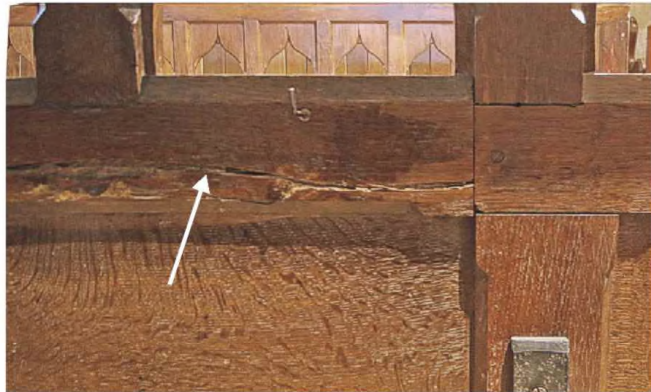
NORTH STALLS



18. Old nail holes with rust stains



19. Old nail or dowel hole



20. Long split in timber



21. View of the church looking east. The same design pews fill the nave and both aisles.



22. Typical pews as seen in the nave



23. Pew front, nave



24. Pews in north aisle



25. Back view of nave pews