

**St MARY'S CHURCH
Swainswick
Somerset**

Heritage Statement

Prepared on behalf of

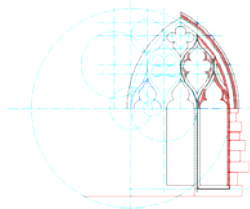
**The Parochial Church Council of St Mary The Virgin, Swainswick
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By

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August 2018



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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This document presents an assessment of the architectural and historical significance of the layout and fabric of St Mary's Church at Upper Swainswick near Bath. It has been commissioned by the Parochial Church Council to inform and support their faculty application for a re-ordering. It has been prepared by Michael Heaton MCifA IHBC - an archaeologist and architectural historian – in accordance with the published guidance of *The Church of England*¹ and *Historic England*². It is based on proportionate background research into the history of the building from primary³ and secondary sources, followed by visual inspection on the 27th June 2018.
- 1.2 Descriptive terminology follows the Ecclesiological Society⁴ and NADFAS⁵; research and survey has been undertaken in accordance with the author's published methods⁶; assessment of significance follows the guidances of *The Church of England*, *Historic England*⁷, Semple Kerr⁸ and ICOMOS⁹ and is predicated on the acknowledgement that a 'heritage asset' such as an historic building has archaeological, historical, aesthetic and societal qualities¹⁰. Assessing the relative values of those qualities is essentially a subjective exercise dependent on factors such as completeness, scarcity, established historical themes and use. Those values are complementary, but they can also be mutually exclusive¹¹: older does not necessarily mean more significant. Significance is taken to mean '*importance*' and the '*ability to convey meaning*' and is assessed with reference to the ecclesiological and architectural history of this area of the southwest and expressed here using a hierarchical terminology based on that established by Kerr¹², viz: *Exceptional, Considerable, Modest, Neutral, Negative*. The three higher levels of that hierarchy correspond broadly to the designation grades applied to 'Listed Buildings', viz: Grade 1 (Exceptional), Grade 2* (Considerable) and Grade 2 (Moderate).
- 1.3 St Mary's Church is a Grade 2* Listed Building¹³. It is an active place of Christian worship and, as such, is exempt from secular Listed Building controls by virtue of the *Ecclesiastical Exemption Order 2010*, which requires the approval of the Diocesan

¹ Church Buildings Council, n.d., 'Statements of Significance and Statements of Need,' **Guidance Note**. (Church of England):

² English Heritage, 2001, 2006; CifA, 2008; ALGAO, 1997

³ Parish Records held at Somerset Records Office; published descriptions held at SRO and Bath Records Office .

⁴ Cooper and Brown (Eds), 2011.

⁵ NADFAS, 2001

⁶ Heaton, 2009; 2014; 2018

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Kerr, J.S., 1996

⁹ ICOMOS, 2011

¹⁰ The terms used for these categories vary between *Historic England* publications.

¹¹ this is the criteria used by *Historic England* for designating 'Listed Buildings' and 'Scheduled Monuments', and it is robust and defensible. Cf. Suddard and Hargreaves, 1996, p43.

¹² Kerr, *op cit*

¹³ Statutory Description presented as Appendix 1

Advisory Committee for all works that would otherwise require Listed Building Consent.

2 The Site

- 2.1 The site is defined and illustrated more fully in the Faculty submission to which this report is appended. St Mary's Church is situated in the village of Upper Swainswick, on the east side of the Lambrook valley approximately 1 mile north of the urban edge of Bath at Larkhall. It is a dramatic landscape dominated by the steep-sided Lambrook valley and the limestone plateaux above it, populated by farmsteads and the village of Upper Swainswick. The church is situated at the centre of the village and stands within a churchyard overlooked by houses.
- 2.1.2 It is a small multi-phase building comprising Nave, Chancel, Tower, North Aisle and South Porch. It is distinguished from most other churches in the area by its archaeological complexity, its Saddleback roof, the survival of Romanesque decoration around its entrance door and throughout the Nave, its piers Tower base and by the use of ogee arches over its external South Porch door and an adjacent window in the south wall of the Nave that are exceptional in a medieval English church. The movable internal fabric comprises *inter alia* five blocks of seats of varying forms (Figure 2, Nos 1-5), together with an electric organ, the Font, a variety of chairs, mural monuments and hatchments, an *ad hoc* Vestry and a recently installed kitchen.
- 2.1.3 The proposals would affect the seating, the Pulpit steps and Font base, part of the floor, the internal Porch door and the Vestry.

3 Historical development

- 3.1 The structural development of the church building is summarised by the Statutory Description, which is appended to this report and not repeated here, other than in summary. It is of 12th century origin, extended and altered in the 14th and 15th centuries and 'restored' in the mid-late 19th century; and is the burial place of John Wood, father, son and daughter - the architects of Georgian Bath – and of Thomas Prynne, father of the Puritan polemicist William Prynne (1600-1669). Comparison of the existing layout with that recorded by the tithes survey of 1839, and photographs of 1855, 1935 and 1938¹⁴ reveal that the Chancel was extended by c. two metres between 1855 and 1883 and the extension was then rebuilt c. 1935-8. The regularity of the wall fabric and its similarity to later work of c. 1921 suggests the Chancel was entirely rebuilt at that time, but in all other respects the 'statutory' description is accepted.
- 3.2 Other than that photograph, mid 19th century watercolours of the exterior¹⁵, two early 20th century photographs of the interior and a very comprehensive NADFAS inventory of 1987, the primary sources identified are wholly textual, primarily Churchwardens accounts and anecdotal descriptions published in topographies¹⁶, detailed analysis of which is beyond the scope of this study. High quality fabric records *per se* survive from 1921 and demonstrate that the interior furnishings and, to an extent, the layout are largely of early 20th century date.
- 3.3 The parish commissioned W.D. Caroe in c. 1921 to re-design the layout of the interior, new seating for the Memorial Chapel (east end of the North Aisle) and the

¹⁴ SRO: D/P/swk/23/3; Bath in Time Nos. 23328 and 23332, Geo. L. Dafnis Colln.

¹⁵ SRO: A/DAS/1/388/1

¹⁶ cf. Tunstall, 1847; Jour Brit Arch Assoc. 1857; Peach, 1980; Wickham, 1965

Choir (then housed at the base of the Tower), and general improvement of the structural fabric. Caroe's proposals were presented on four drawings that survive at the Somerset Records Office, one of which is reproduced here on Figure 1. The plan shows the extent and nature of seating that time (in outline) and his proposals (coloured), which included rebuilding of the east wall of the Chancel and its window. The extant seating comprised a block of benches in the centre of the church (1), two blocks of benches against the south wall of the Nave (2 and 3) and a narrow block of benches along the north wall of the North Aisle of different dimensions and configuration to the present box pews (4). Caroe's plan also shows an extra pier at the northeast corner of the Tower and, apparently, squints through the east wall of the Nave at its northeast corner; together with screens across the west end of the North Aisle, the east end of the Nave and the east side of the Tower that are no longer present. Caroe proposed the positioning of the organ in the south side of the Tower, two blocks of Choir stalls at the southeast and northeast corners of the Tower, two opposed blocks of benches and bench fronts and a commemorative mural panel in the Memorial Chapel and two small blocks of seats at the west end of the Chancel, the designs of which were illustrated on another of his drawings.

- 3.4 Correspondence contained in the Faculty file and a measured survey of 1972 (Figure 1) suggests all the work specified by Caroe was undertaken over a period of c. 17 years; together with extensive re-plastering, re-laying of floor slabs in the Chancel, Vestry and Memorial Chapel, including the Forde ledger; and the removal of a 'platform' and underlying debris from the west end of the North Aisle. The correspondence relating to the latter indicates that the debris included human remains, which suggests it had been generated by earlier floor works or interments.
- 3.5 Faculties were granted in 1936 for the removal from the church of an oak 'Prayer desk', stained softwood Frontal Case and Bench Front, and candlesticks from the Pulpit, together with re-location within the church of a 'Choir kneeling desk and seat' and the installation of a safe in the Vestry. Other, substantial changes not recorded by Faculties, were also carried out between 1935 and 1938. Photographs from the George L Davis Collection (Figure 3) record the appearance of the east end of the Nave and the Chancel in c.1935 and 1938: The most striking change was the east end and window of Chancel, which were clearly completely rebuilt to Caroe's 1921 design between 1935 and 1938; but there was also a masonry screen (circled on Figure 3) projecting from the south abutment of the Chancel arch, of complementary design to the Pulpit and the east window of the Chancel; doors on the bench ends of the larger southern block (3) of benches (thus making them pews) and the complete enclosure of the pulpit by those pews. By 1938 the east end of the Chancel has been rebuilt; Caroe's benches installed in the west end (Choir ?) of the Chancel; the main southern block of benches (3) shortened and their doors removed.
- 3.6 Repairs and refurbishments continued throughout the ensuing decades, including the complete rebuilding of the Bell Frame in 1964-70. By 1972, the interior was quite full. The floor plan created then (Figure 1) reveals additional seating to the present in the western half of the Chancel, at the east side of the Tower and in the Memorial Chapel, as well as a long block of pews along the north wall of the North Aisle that differed in dimensions to the present box pews (4). Reduction of seating capacity appears to have commenced shortly afterwards: a note on the 1972 plan, dated 1975, states " *Organ, organ seat and two adjacent pews now re-arranged*". This appears to be referring to the 'Choir' facilities installed to Caroe's design during 1921-9. In 2000, a Faculty was granted for re-location of "*..three smaller pews from the 'Side Chapel' to the Vestry*" and the "*..re-alignment of the remaining two pews to form a worship and meeting area*"; and most recently, consent was granted for installation of the kitchen in 2008.

4 Description

4.1 The generalities of the layout, structure and decorative fabric are as described by the List description (Appendix 1) and are not repeated here. The following presents only descriptions not available in Appendix 1.

4.2 *Seating.*

4.2.1 (1). Fixed benches with open outer ends but medial partition spanning between the arcade piers, fixed to integral softwood flooring and incorporating book rests on backs and on single free-standing bench front. Near vertical backs, except rearmost bench, which is vertical. Stained and varnished softwood: backs of 170mm wide T&G that extend to floor, seat of solid board, bench ends composite with incised mono-foil decoration. Easternmost bench front rebuilt.

4.2.2 (2) As (1) but with open backs below the seats and darker staining.

4.2.3 (3) Fixed benches with open ends retaining the bead and rebates for doors and 90mm deep hinges, set into integral parquet dais. Stained and varnished softwood. Vertical backs of 260mm wide T&G that extend to the floor, solid seat and panelled ends decorated only by chamfer on the stiles and rails. Rearmost has higher back with scalloped ends. Tenons of missing bench front survive in the dais.

4.2.4 (4) Box pews facing south on stone floor slabs. Lightly stained softwood. Vertical backs and partitions/ends of 270mm wide T&G that extend to floor, solid seats and panelled ends/partitions with chamfered stiles and rails. Doors hung on 55mm deep 'Baldwin Patent' hinges and fitted with brass thumb latches.

4.2.5 (5) Caroe bench. A single decorated bench and detached matching bench front situated at the east end of the North Aisle within the former Memorial Chapel. As designed by W.D.Caroe: Solid ends and seats supporting panelled backs and fronts decorated with guilloche and military motifs and fleur-de-lys finials, in oak. (It is understood that the other Caroe bench is in storage).

4.3 *The floor*

4.3.1 The floor is of mixed flagstones, ledgers and paving bricks, roughly even but with slightly raised floor levels in the Chancel and the east end of the North Aisle. The paving materials vary considerably in materials, dimensions and wear; and incorporate linear features suggestive of extensive replacements and/or the edges of blocks of fixed seating.

4.3.2 The floor structure has been augmented by a temporary timber extension of the Chancel floor at its western edge in front of the central block (1) of pews.

4.4 *The pulpit*

4.4.1 Elegant structure of fine-grained limestone and (?Purbeck) marble shafts on a raised plinth, executed in a mid-late 19th century version of 'Middle Pointed' or Decorated style as popularised by G.G.Scott and the Camden Society. The 1855 and 1935 photographs suggest it was paired with the Chancel window, which suggests it was installed between 1855 and 1883 when the Chancel was extended. It is lined-out internally with T&G panelling that formerly incorporated a seat, and accessed up two slightly worn stone steps.

4.5 *The inner Porch door*

- 4.5.1 Heavy duty round-headed door covered in red baize cloth, superficially of quasi-panelled construction but carpentry not visible for inspection. Hung on butt hinges fixed to a timber lining and fitted with a heavy-duty brass rim lock. The pintles and the mural bolt recess of an earlier door survive within the internal reveals.

4.6 *Vestry*

- 4.6.1 Lightweight carcass of machine-sawn softwood assembled with flat wire brads, situated in the southwest corner of the nave. It is fixed to the benches in front of it by screws but appears to have been scribed onto the masonry of the tower pier and Nave south wall, and stands on a raised timber dais slightly higher than the bench dais it adjoins.

4.7 *Setting*

- 4.7.1 The church stands in the northwest corner of one of two rectangular graveyards overlooked by the substantial farm house of Manor Farm and, to the south and east, the mainly vernacular dwellings of the village. The principal churchyard contains small but mature trees and is surrounded by a rubble wall that is entered through a wrought iron gate in its south side, which leads to a cobble-paved path that curves gently towards the south porch. The ground rises to the north from the south wall of the church, so that the headstones, monuments and vegetation ascend like the seating of an amphitheatre alongside and behind the church when viewed from the south.
- 4.7.2 The natural relief and tight-grained layout of the village restrict medium-distance views of the church building, so that it is appreciated as an architectural and historical entity only at close quarter or from several miles away to the west on the other side of the valley. From both those viewpoints, the adjacent buildings and the partially wooded slopes of the valley side behind them form an essential visual frame to the church when viewed from the west, northwest and southwest. From these perspectives, St Mary's is the epitome of a rural English church.

5 **Analysis**

- 5.1 In common with most rural churches, the structure and decorative ensemble of the building is the result of centuries of extension and alteration, the most recent having taken place in the last quarter of the 19th century but itself rebuilt c. 1935-8.
- 5.2 That complex structural history is reflected in the surviving fixtures and fittings, particularly the seating. Of the five blocks of seats, two (4 and 5) post-date Caroe's re-ordering design of 1921 and appear to have been installed, or at least substantially altered, after 1972. The Baldwin hinges incorporated in the box pews (4) were patented in 1949¹⁷ and, as there is no evidence for earlier hinges, we must conclude that these were installed here after 1949; whilst the historical sources suggest they were at least re-configured after 1972, if not installed wholly anew. Caroe's benches, together with their commemorative mural panel, were designed in 1921 for the east end of the North Aisle (Memorial Chapel) but at least one had been moved to the west of the Chancel by 1938. It appears both were together again in the Memorial Chapel by 1972, but they were again separated in c. 2000 when one set was placed in storage outside the church and the other turned through 90° to face the North Aisle.

¹⁷ UK Patent Ref: 635,886. No. 22741/48

Of the other three, the southern block (3) formerly had doors in both ends and so was designed for a different position, possibly a different church, and is substantially incomplete in lacking their doors and at least one entire row. Only (1) and (2) are plausibly *in situ* and probably designed, or at least first purchased, for this church. Both are factory-made benches of generic late 19th century design: as the church is understood to have been 'restored' in the "late 19th century" by C.E.Davis, it is likely that these benches were installed at that time and that they formerly extended across most of the nave and north aisle in three discontinuous blocks.

- 5.3 In tandem with that cyclic re-seating, archive sources reveal that during the last 100 years most of the movable furnishings have been removed from or relocated within the church; parts of the floors re-laid; structural and decorative masonry removed; most of the walls re-rendered; and temporary fittings such as the chancel floor extension and the Vestry installed.
- 5.4 The external porch door, alone, appears to have survived past re-orderings. It is understood to have been installed in the inner door opening in c. 1634 and moved to its present position at an unknown date before c. 1856 when it was recoded in situ by Revd Francis Lockett's photograph. It is understood to have been replaced by the present inner porch door, which is superficially of 18th or early 19th century date in being of quasi-panelled construction and hung on butt hinges. Its close fit suggests it was made for this opening, but the purpose of the baize covering is not understood.

6 Assessment

6.1 Significance

- 6.1.1 This is a church building of considerable significance. That significance derives from the archaeological complexity of its structural fabric; the quality and variety of its architectural detailing; its association with Wood family and William Prynne; its community value as a well-used place of worship and civic facility; and, to a lesser extent, its valley-side setting. The ogee window and porch door openings, in particular, are exceptional; whilst the saddle-back tower roof is a rare survival of an archaic roof form.
- 6.1.2 It's internal furnishings, however, contribute little to that significance, and its seating especially so. The benches and pews are of varied form and design, all are substantially incomplete and none relate to the structural or decorative history of the building. Two blocks (4 and 5) were installed or substantially altered after 1972; one block (3) is not original to this church and lacks its doors and one complete row; leaving only two sets of benches (1 and 2) likely to have installed in the late 19th century and surviving in a relatively complete state. Only one set (5) were definitely designed for this church, by W.D.Caroe in 1921 and, though dispersed, it is understood these survive wholly intact. Caroe was a major figure of the Arts and Crafts Movement and remains one of Britain's most significant historical architects, whose practice still exists and specialises in the conservation and liturgical reform of churches. These benches, alone, are of aesthetic and historical significance. The others, though probably original to this church, both are factory-made and of generic late 19th century 'catalogue' design. If the terminology of Kerr *et al* was to be employed, the seating is of Neutral significance in that all but the Caroe benches neither contribute to nor detract from the building's aesthetic and historical character. The Vestry, though also a utilitarian fitting of later 20th century construction, obstructs views of the interior's most striking feature - the tower base: it is an intrusive feature that detracts from the aesthetic and ecclesiological significance of the church.
- 6.1.3 The floor makes a modest contribution to the building's significance, but that is purely aesthetic: the positions of the individual flag stones and even some of the ledger stones have been adjusted cyclically and it is likely that continuous adjustment and

stabilisation will be necessary in the future; whilst the timber dais extending the Chancel floor is probably hiding worn steps or the remains of a removed bench. It is the overall character of the floor that is important, not the position or exact level of individual components of it. Retention of the Forde and Wood ledgers is desirable, but their individual positions are not important. The pulpit steps are also of only modest significance. They are not an integral architectural part of the pulpit, to all intents and purposes they are hardly visible and would, in the normal turn of events, be replaced cyclically as they wore-down.

- 6.1.4 The inner porch door is wholly atypical for a church, the baize cloth being a domestic material. It is not the original door, the pintles for which remain unused behind it, and the butt hinges suggest a later 18th century date, but without forensic dismantling the date at which it was installed can only be guessed at. It was undoubtedly made for this opening, but it neither contributes to nor detracts from the church's aesthetic or historical interest, so might reasonably be ascribed neutral significance.

6.2 Affect of the proposals

- 6.2.1 The proposals, in general, would not affect the structural or decorative fabric of the church building, nor its setting, but would improve its utility as a place of worship and civic facility. There would be changes to the seating, but its essential significance would remain unaffected, possibly enhanced.
- 6.2.2 Localised adjustment of the floor slabs, floor levels, chancel floor extension dais and the pulpit steps would be consistent with normal patterns of maintenance and demonstrable historical use and would affect only the recent appearance of the floors. This would not affect the significance of the building deleteriously.
- 6.2.3 Removal of the benches would alter the internal layout and appearance of the church, but not affect its essential archaeological, aesthetic, historical or communal significance deleteriously. The benches are a mixed assemblage of largely incomplete joinery of varying age and design of little aesthetic charm and no archaeological or historical significance. Their replacement with movable seats would facilitate the optimum viable religious and secular use of the building, and thereby enhance the significance of the church. The Caroe bench(es), alone, are of aesthetic and historical significance and, though now dispersed and re-oriented, they survive as an architectural assemblage and part of the memorial to the parish's WW1 dead. Dismantling of the one retained bench and bench front and its reconfiguration in a new Vestry screen would be equivalent to the commemorative and polemical use of *spolia* in Classical and Renaissance architecture, for which there are a few British examples¹⁸, but it is doubtful if the curatorial authorities or Regimental associations would perceive it as such. Dismantling of the Caroe bench(es) would diminish the aesthetic, historical and communal significance of the church.
- 6.2.4 Replacement of the internal porch door with a glazed alternative, and removal of the *ad hoc* Vestry, would remove the church's most incongruous and relatively recent accretions and facilitate a better visual appreciation of its interior space and architectural form. This would enhance the significance of the building. As the porch door was probably made for this building, storage and re-use would be preferable to disposal.
- 6.2.5 In summary, it would be reasonable to conclude that all but one of the proposals would enhance the communal significance of St Mary's Church without affect its archaeological, aesthetic or historical significance deleteriously. Dismantling and

¹⁸ Heaton, 2016

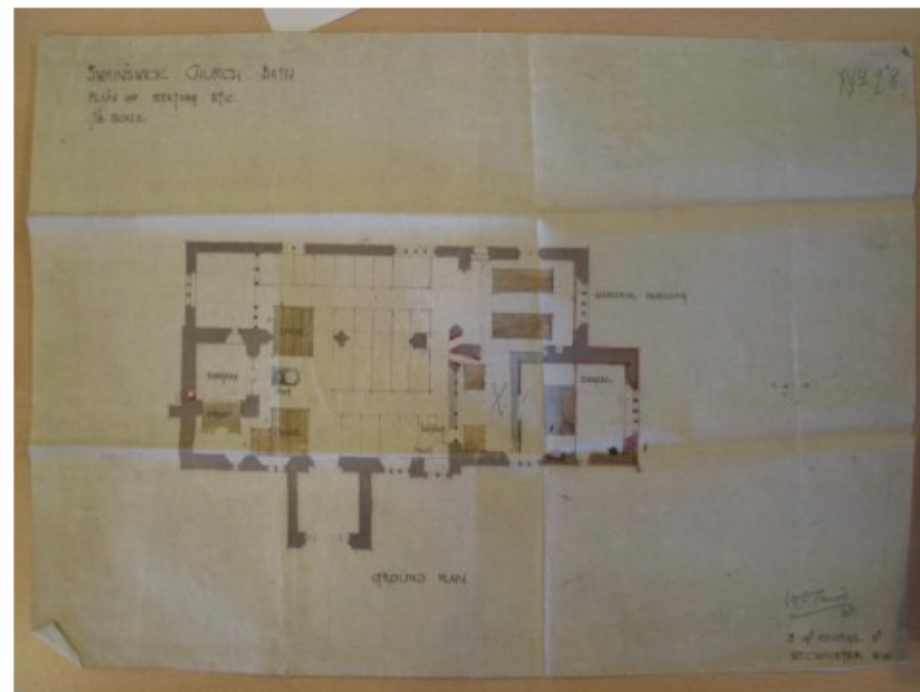
reconfiguration of the Caroe bench(es) alone, would diminish the church's aesthetic, historical and communal significance.

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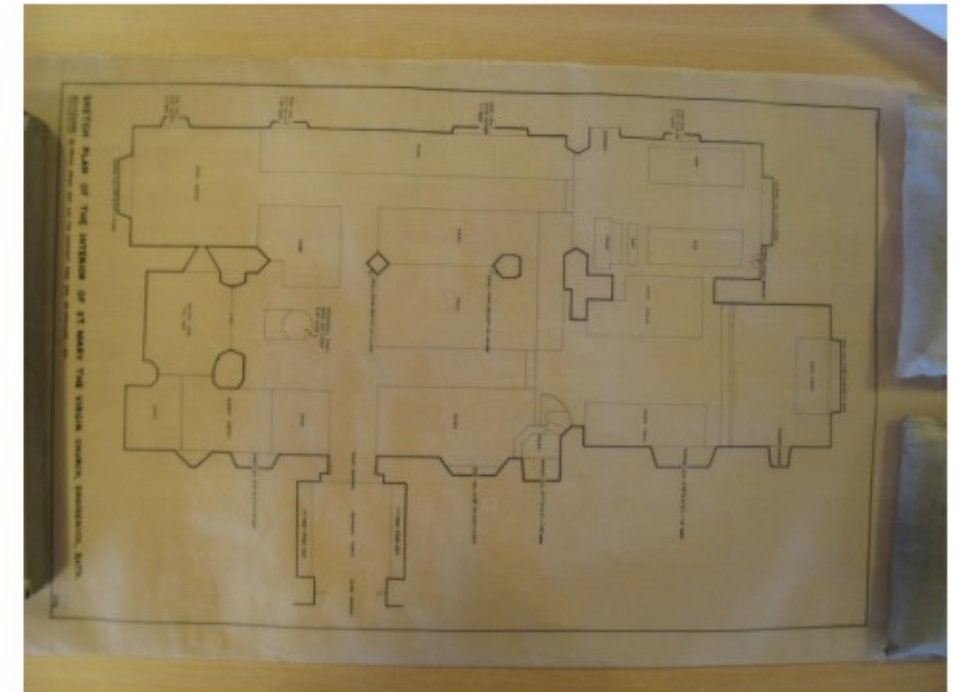
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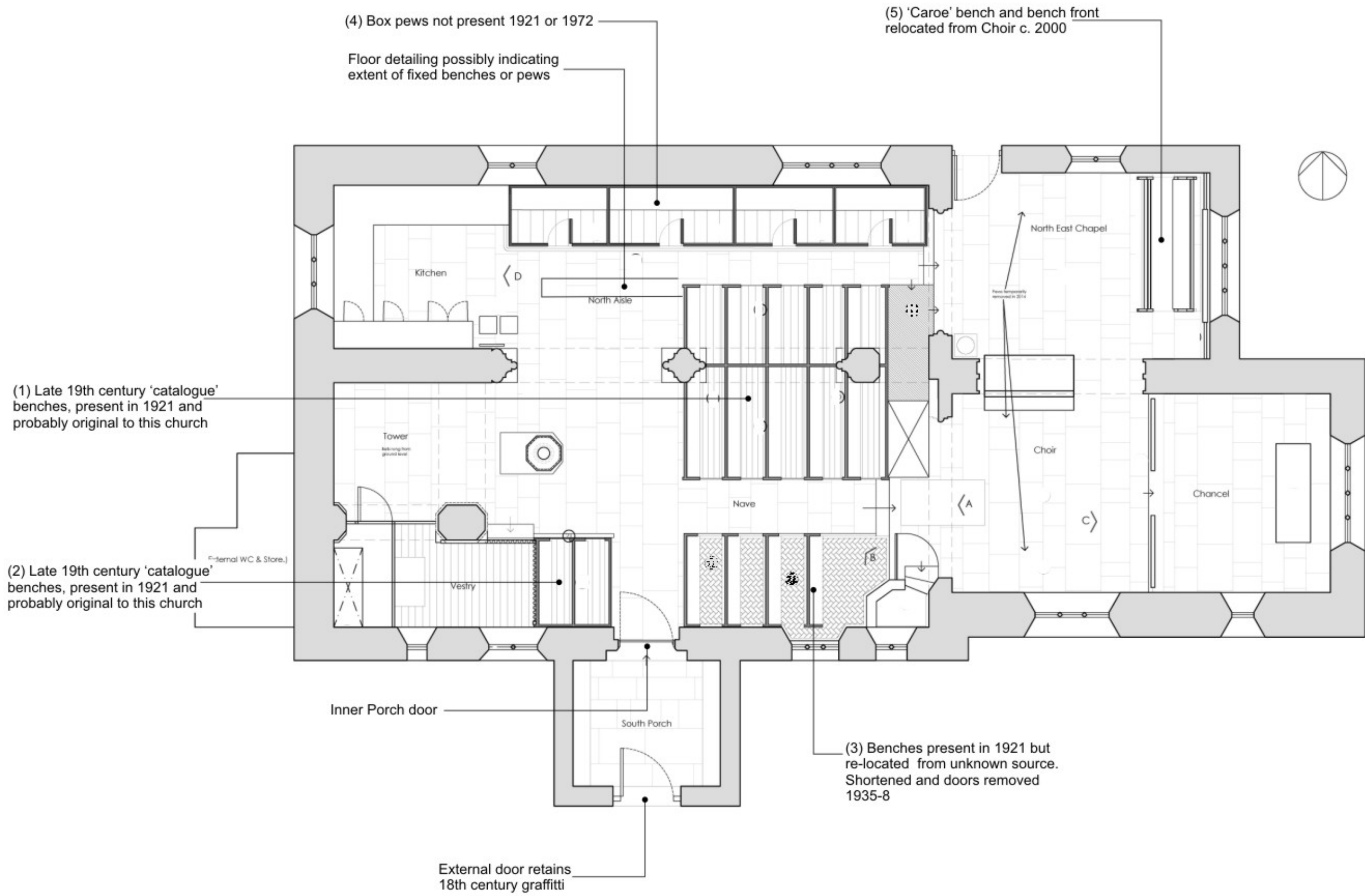
The church in 1855. Note the shorter Chancel and the round-headed form of its east window



Caroe's proposal of 1921. Correspondence indicates the proposals were realised over a period of c. 17 years.

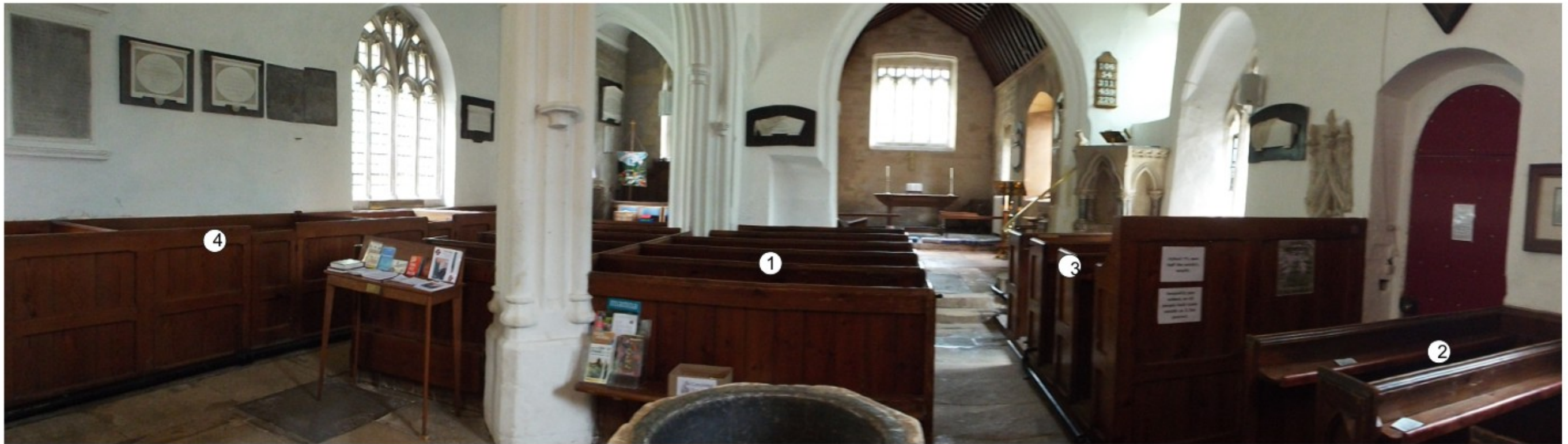


Layout of the interior in 1972.



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Figure 2



General view of the interior from the west end



Exterior porch door



Pulpit and steps



Benches (3) showing empty hinge rebates



Benches (3) showing relic door parting bead



Box pews (4). Their layout does not match that of the 1972 survey

ST 76 NE SWAINSWICK UPPER SWAINSWICK

5/239 CHURCH OF ST MARY

1.2.56 II*

G.V.

Anglican Parish Church. C12, altered C14 and C15; restored mid - late C19 by C.E. Davis of Bath. West tower, nave, north aisle, south porch, chancel and north chancel chapel. Ashlar and coursed rubble; stone slate roof with coped raised verges. The west tower is probably C14 and it is built into the west end of the nave: 3 stages with plain ashlar parapet and quoins; saddleback roof; single square light on second stage and 2-light cusped window to bell chamber; buttress with off-sets at west corner. Nave: to the left of the porch is 2-light window with cusped ogee-headed tracery, under a square hood mould, single narrow light at left; to the right of the porch is a fine 3-light window with an ogee head, moulded mullions and surrounds and reticulated tracery in the upper part, ogee hoodmould and finial; at the far right is a 2-light casement window with segmental heads and ovolo moulded surrounds. Gabled and projecting south porch; plank studded door in fine moulded and ogee headed doorway. Chancel is mostly C19: 2 windows on south side, one plain with 3-lights and one single cusped light; 4-light Perpendicular style but C19 east window. North chantry chapel has a 4-light late Perpendicular style east window with cusped heads and under a square dripmould; similar 2-light window on north side and doorway with a chamfered and 4-centre headed surround (leaf carving in the spandrels). North aisle: remains of stoup close to chantry door; large 4-light Perpendicular style window at left, with 4-centred head; 2-light window to west with a small square light at the right; 3-light west window in ovolo moulded and round-headed surrounds. South door is mid - late C12: single columns with scalloped capitals; arch with 2 bands of zig-zag; hoodmould with a band of dogtooth moulding and carved head stops. Interior. Three of the supporting piers of the tower are visible: octagonal with stops on the south piers; double chamfered arches to east and south with continuous hoodmoulds and string course; coarsely cut head stops and figure of a demi-angel on south-east pier. 2 bay north arcade with piers of alternating hollow mouldings and engaged shafts; 4-centred arches but round-headed and chamfered, narrow arch to east. Ogee moulded chancel arch; arch from aisle to north chantry chapel has engaged columns with foliate and crocketed capitals; arch from chancel to north chapel has a Perpendicular style panelled soffit and sides. Stoup to east of south door has an elaborate canopy with an ogee head and crocketed pinnacles; plain 4-centre headed recess with carved spandrels and thin columns surrounds piscina in north chapel. Pulpit: late C19 in an Early English style. Font, possibly early C13; recut: ashlar; octagonal bowl on a cylindrical stem and with a moulded base. Monuments. Tower: Mary Morgan 1794, by William Reeves of Bath in marble and with a draped urn. Nave: Royal Arms of Charles I, 1647. Chancel: Catherine Winsloe, by T. King of Bath in marble with an oval medallion bearing a draped urn which stands on a plinth decorated with heraldry; brass to Edmund Forde, 1439. North aisle: John and William Turner, 1678 and Anne Danvers, 1682, inscribed tablets. (N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England : North Somerset and Bristol*, 1958).

Listing NGR: ST7565268417

Pevsner, N, *The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol*, (1958)



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