

St John the Evangelist Parish Church, Clevedon

Statement of Significance



St John the Evangelist, Queen's Road, Clevedon BS21 7TH
Listing status: Grade II*
Architect: William Butterfield - years of construction: 1876-78

Classification key

High – important at national to international levels

Moderate-High – important at regional or sometimes higher

Moderate – usually of local value but of regional significance for group or other value (e.g. vernacular architecture)

Low-Moderate – of local value **Low** – adds little or nothing to the value of a site or detracts from it

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

1.1 Setting of the Church

St John's is located on the edge of Victorian Mid-Clevedon. Its position is relatively low-lying, although the tower and red tile roof are prominent features amongst the otherwise limestone and slated houses of the Lower Town.



The church is surrounded by gardens, particularly to the southern side. Cremated remains are interred along the perimeter wall but there are no burials in the church grounds. The northwest portion of the church grounds have been used as allotments for many years. The church hall sits in the southwest corner.

Mid-Clevedon is predominantly Regency and Victorian houses and villas and was largely developed by the Elton family of Clevedon Court who saw the opportunity to create a seaside resort with rail links to Bristol.

The church is situated on the edge of Mid-Clevedon and was built to serve the less prosperous and (in the nineteenth century) densely populated area of South Clevedon/Lower Town (the 'old village' and Railway Triangle area). Sir Arthur Hallam Elton donated the land and paid for the church as a memorial to his late wife, Dame Rhoda Elton.

St John's is an expression of the Victorian High Church's mission to the working people. Clevedon has continued to develop to the south which is where most of the town's twentieth and twenty first century housing development has occurred and where local businesses, supermarkets and most retail premises are based.

1.2 The Living Churchyard

The church yard is actually a garden with flowers and shrubs at the edge of the church building, several benches, a large expanse of lawn and a war memorial in the form of a calvary.



The allotments in the north west corner of the site are also neatly maintained. The site has a good number of trees and is therefore a habitat for birds and other wildlife.



1.3 Social History

The Elton family of Clevedon Court were (and continue de facto to be) patrons of the church, the patronage was subsequently transferred to the Society for the Maintenance of the Faith). St John's, like All Saints, the Elton's other Clevedon parish, was built to present the High Church to the people of the town. For over a century the building has told Clevedon's story and the windows, statues and war memorials preserve their names.

The church and its hall continue to serve the local community. The church as well as being the home of a growing and confident congregation hosts concerts and civic events. Since November 2021 both Clevedon and Nailsea Choral Societies have given concerts in the church and May 2022 saw the inauguration of an annual St John's Festival (around the feast of St John at the Latin Gate - 6th May).

The church originally formed part of a group with the Vicarage and Parish School (1889, also a gift of the Elton family). St John's CEVA Primary School has now moved to a site in south Clevedon and the former school building is used as the town library. The church and the vicarage (also by Butterfield) remain cheek by jowl and all the better for that.

1.4 The church building in general

The official listing:

II 1875-6, by William Butterfield for Sir Arthur Elton. Squared and coursed local stone, with Bath stone banding and dressings; plain tile roof. Nave with aisles, transepts and south-west tower with saddleback roof; new porch and second vestry added 1883-4.*

Exterior designed in a robust Gothic Revival style typical of Butterfield, with paired lancets to aisles and otherwise an imaginative use of Middle Pointed tracery to all windows, including a rose window to the north transept, combined with a robust handling of the principal elements.

Interior: narrow aisles with arcades on square chamfered piers without capitals. Pulpit and choir fittings of oak and walnut intermixed; patterned plain and encaustic tiles, with an effective use of Devonshire and other marbles in the chancel. Lower part of walls in nave and aisles lined with red and other coloured Staffordshire tiles. Finely-carpentered roof throughout, with a brattished cornice and deep canted arch bracing to nave. Due to subsidence the stone arch dividing the interior has been replaced by a girder and iron screen by C.G. Hare, 1909. Glass by Heaton, Butler and Bayne. Lady Chapel fitted by Hare. The chancel reredos originally had marble cross surrounded by four Evangelistic emblems in mosaic on gold grounds.

The Tower

The tower is a saddle back construction and contains the five original bells with one addition to make a relatively light ring of six. The main entrance to the church is though the south door at the foot of the tower.

The vestries and north porch

The original vestry was augmented by a new priest's vestry and adjacent north porch, added by Butterfield in 1884.



Priest's vestry and north porch, 1884



St John's from the north

The interior



St John's as it appeared at its consecration in 1878 or shortly after

The overall scheme would have been of high importance. The removal of the original chancel arch (as a result of structural instability) and the subsequent decision of the vestry in the early 20th century to whitewash out the stencilling together significantly changed the appearance of the church. The latter error was compounded by the boarding in of the chancel and reredos behind oak panelling. The rich Victorian fulness of Butterfield's scheme was almost destroyed.



St John's in mid-twentieth century. This was still how the church appeared when the church guide was written in 1978 for the centenary.

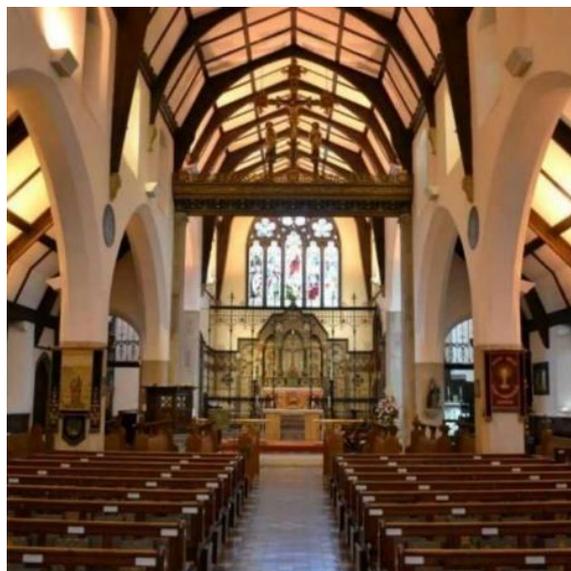


Close-up of the mid-twentieth century image showing the oak panelling masking Butterfield's colourful Victorian scheme.

It was this muted presentation of the church that Pevsner must have seen when he dismissed the church as 'Butterfield but without merit'. Most of Butterfield's design had been hidden or obliterated. It could be argued that Pevsner does not sufficiently value the work of C G Hare (pupil and partner of G F Bodley) as his rood beam, calvary and Lady Chapel altar add back some of the grandeur and colour lost from the original scheme.

By the 1990s the decoration of the east end saw the light of day once more, but Butterfield's choir stalls were disposed of and stalls from nearby Christ Church imported. The parclose screens separating the lady chapel and organ from the chancel were also removed and sold.

Furthermore, the iron screen was moved eastwards by one bay so that it was no longer aligned with the rood beam but now closed the foot of the steps to the sanctuary. The nave altar was then moved onto a raised platform at the front of the chancel. All of these changes were done without faculty and led to a Chancellor's Court of Enquiry. It is a fact that although these changes were made illegally, they do improve the use of the church for modern liturgy and the alterations were subsequently approved, albeit with sharp rebuke.



St John's in 2019

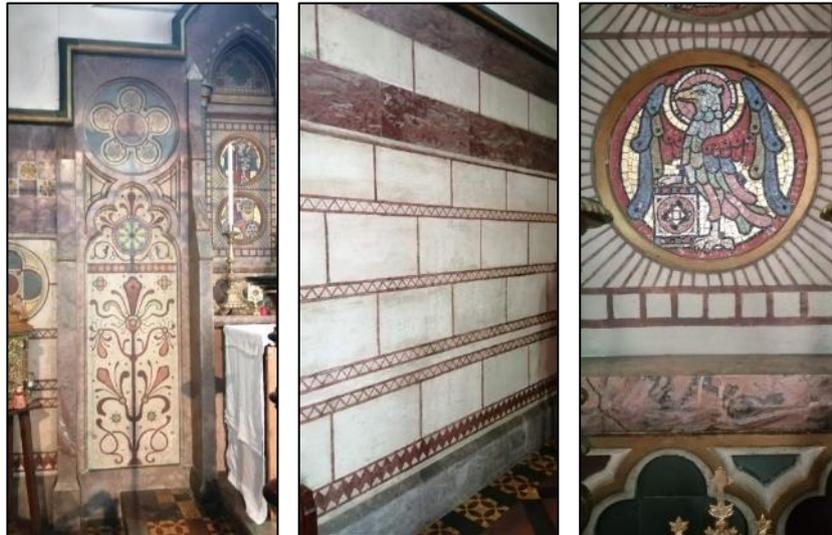
The scheme of the church remains of High-Moderate significance, and much can be done to recover the original appearance and atmosphere.

1.5 The church building in detail

The Chancel and sanctuary



Butterfield's 1876-78 scheme is best understood at the east end of the church, where it has survived almost intact. The reredos is constructed of Devonshire marble with mosaic inserts and surrounded by richly painted panels. The lower walls of the chancel retain their original paint scheme with blockwork suggested in a deep red-brown (bull's blood) on a ground of cream. The upper walls have now been overpainted in white but were originally richly stencilled.



Details from the sanctuary – the mosaic roundels were a gift from William Butterfield.

The 1911 copper altar frontal was made by the renowned Arts and Crafts firm Barkentin and Krall of Regent Street, London. Although it is not part of Butterfield's original scheme it sits very harmoniously within the composition. The frontal is of itself of high-moderate significance.



The large candlesticks in front of the High Altar are Elton Ware and one of many gifts to the church by the Elton family.

The sanctuary also contains a quatrefoil of Christ at Emmaus.

Overall the sanctuary is a vivid expression of Butterfield's work and is of high-moderate value. The colours are now muted by dirt and dust and are in need of expert conservation.



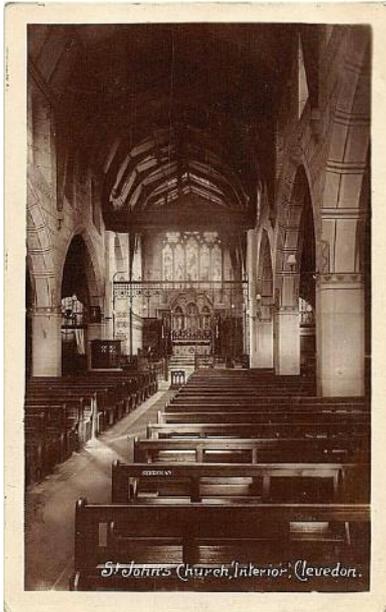


St. John's Church, Interior, Clevedon.

Interior of Sanctuary c 1910. Iron screen now in place but stencilled decoration evident throughout.

The screen

The screen was added in 1909. The original chancel arch had become unstable and was removed (the cross that surmounted it is now fixed to the external east wall). A new rood beam with figures and iron screen was commissioned from C G Hare, a pupil and later partner of G F Bodley. The screen originally stood directly beneath the rood group but was moved in the 1990s (without faculty) to its present position at the front to the High Altar steps. The screen is finely wrought and enhances the Arts and Crafts character of the church. It is of moderate value.



The screen when installed



The screen in its current position

The Lady Chapel

The Lady Chapel was fitted by C G Hare, possibly at the same time that the rood group and screen were introduced. The reredos contains an image of Our Lady in the manner of Raphael. The painting had belonged to a previous incumbent at St John's.

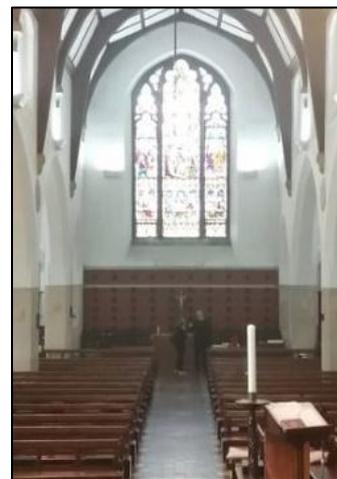


The scheme is of low-moderate value.

The west end

The font originally stood in a central position at the west end of the church. At some point it was relocated to the corner of the north aisle. It has now been hemmed in by tables and furniture used to create a servery for morning coffee etc. A modern western altar now occupies the position directly beneath the window. These items are of low architectural significance.

Churchwardens' pews (which do not belong to the church and whose provenance is unknown) have also been placed against the west wall. They are of low interest.



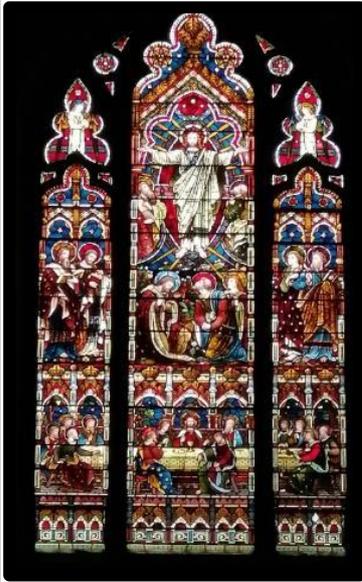
Butterfield's scheme of red wall tiles remains in place and is of low-moderate significance.

These features are of moderate value and it would be desirable to remove the cluttered additional furniture and restore the font to its central position.

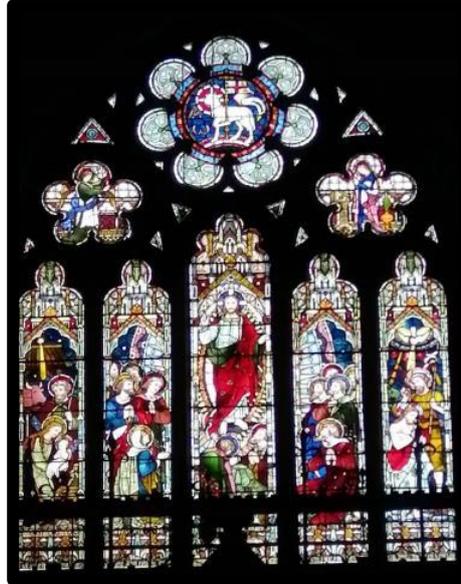
The glass

The majority of the glass is by Heaton, Butler and Bayne. The East and West windows and the windows to the aisles were part of the original scheme. They are colourful and striking. The clerestory windows were added in or around 1909 and are by Lavers, Barraud and Westlake. The church guide of 1978 also ascribes some to Kempe-Tower. The principal window in the Lady Chapel is quite different in character from the other windows in the church and is in the style of Comper. It may even be by Comper but is not signed with the strawberry motif used in virtually all his later work.

The overall effect of the windows is to render the church interior somewhat gloomy. This is a factor in the aspiration to improve the lighting scheme in due course.



West window – the Transfiguration



East Window – Ascension (central panel)



Example of window from the south aisle



Clerestory window



Lady chapel

As part of Butterfield's overall scheme, the windows are of moderate importance.

1.6 Other contents of the Church

The organ

The organ

The organ is a two manual instrument by 'Father' Willis. In his guide to St John's Butterfield described it as having 'remarkable sweetness of tone.'



The pulpit

The pulpit is the original from 1876/8 and is constructed of oak and walnut on a stone base. The missing choir stalls were constructed of the same materials and are likely to have had similar styles.



Pews

Most of the pews remain in the church or church hall although they have often been redistributed from their original locations. They do not seem to have been fixed and for this reason have had a rather fluid journey around the church to suit the needs of the congregation over time.

The original layout must have been highly congested. Both the south aisle and north aisle were filled with forward facing half pews leaving only the narrowest of processional corridors. The pews along the nave have central 'dickie seats' that can be folded out to create even more seating. The half-pews in the aisles have now been turned side on to flank the walls and others have been moved to create seating in the Lady Chapel and for servers in the chancel.

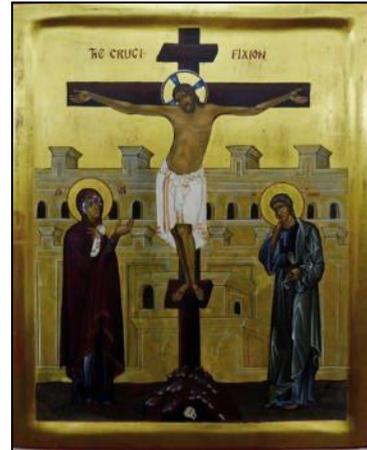
The pews themselves are pitch pine and of robust and simple design: Butterfield described them as 'low and open'. They are of moderate significance.



Pews, showing 'dickie seats'

Icons

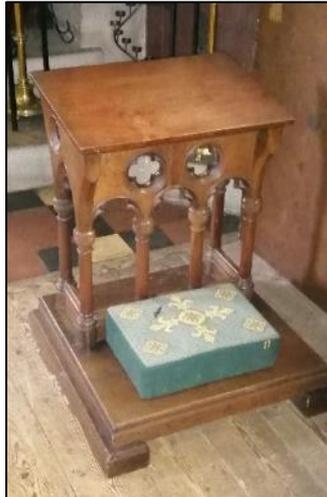
The distinguished icon writer, Aidan Hart, created a set of icons for St John's c. 2000. There are 12 icons in total. They are located in the south and north aisles.



They are considered to be amongst Hart's very best work and are of moderate significance.

Miscellaneous furniture

There are a number of additional items of church furniture. These include a prie-dieu that is positioned in front of the nave step in early photographs. There are also two Glastonbury chairs and a throne of seventeenth century appearance. The prie-dieu appears to be of Butterfield's design and is therefore of moderate significance as part of the overall scheme.



Textiles

There are five processional banners displayed in the nave of the church. They are characteristic of the High Church context of this church and are of moderate importance within the scheme.



Statues

There are a number of statues of saints in the church. The principal statue of Our Lady is carved from wood and painted, as is the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham. The others are of plaster. None are of particular aesthetic significance but all have importance in the spiritual life of the church.



1.7 Significance for mission

The church is home to a confident and growing congregation. There are typically 50-70 attending for the main service on Sundays with more than 100 at major festivals. Daily celebration of the mass attracts a smaller congregation but the Friday mass (BCP) has a regular attendance of about 15-20 people. Coffee and cake is served at the back of the church after the Friday and Sunday masses.

The church is also a regular concert venue in the town and the sanctuary can be cleared of furniture to provide a performance space. It can also accommodate a concert staging for a large choir.



The space at the back of church has also been utilised for children's craft activities and to provide a pop-up café for parents.

To support the full use of the church building by the congregation, for mission and to serve the community we will need to:

1. install lavatories (including disabled facilities)
2. and develop the back of the church for social activities and include a servery.



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 north porch.

2.2 Set out the significance of these particular parts.

As noted in section 1.4 above, the North Porch is part of an extension to the original church. It is at the back of church and has very few people passing, which is part of the concerns that we have for misuse and unsafe behaviours in this vicinity. The significance of the north porch is inherently low.

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 proposal is to place a simple pair of iron gates, painted black opening inwards towards the church. The visual impact of this will be minimal. The gates could be easily removed in the future and the intervention reversed if that was felt desirable.

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.

If these are positioned behind the stone corbels and wooden braces, then their visual impact will be minimal. Illustrations and photographs are available in the separate specification documents (please note that the illustration of the gates provided shows decorative detail that we feel should be omitted in favour of a simple plain design).

The gates will be unlocked at any time when the inner door is unlocked, thereby ensuring the effectiveness of the fire exit. The padlock combination will be available through signage by the fire exit sign.

Sources consulted

Elton, M. (1979). *The Church of St John the Evangelist Clevedon*. Clevedon Printing Company

Howell, P and Saint, A (Eds). (2017). *Butterfield Revisited*. The Victorian Society.

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

Brooks, C. (1999). *The Gothic Revival*. Phaidon.