

Heritage Statement St Mary's Church, Willesborough



April 2015

1. INTRODUCTION

Part One: Development of the Church Building and its Contents

2. 11TH – 18TH CENTURY

3. THE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY

Part Two: Significance

4. SIGNIFICANCE

5. BIOGRAPHIES OF ARCHITECTS TO THE CHURCH

6. NATIONAL HERITAGE LISTING

Part Three: Sources

7. APPENDIX BIBLIOGRAPHY & REFERENCES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Statement summarises existing historic information on St Mary's Church, Willesborough and is intended to be part of a planning application for new external doors to the tower, and for which purpose the reader's attention is drawn to section 4, item 4.19. This statement sets out the main phases of development of the building and the evolution of its interior fittings.
- 1.2 This statement gives an overview of the history of the whole Church. Some of the interior which is described in this statement is in the process of being changed as part of the re-ordering scheme currently being implemented at the time of writing.

Use of this Statement

- 1.3 The purpose of this Statement is to inform all the stakeholders of the architectural and historical significance of the physical fabric of the Church, including its past and present religious context. It should be used as a reference document to assess the heritage value of different parts of the existing building.

Preparation of this Statement

- 1.4 This Statement has been prepared by Nick Lee Evans BSc (Hons), MSc Dip Arch RIBA SCA, a Specialist Conservation Architect on the RIBA Register of Accredited Conservation Architects.
- 1.5 A bibliography and comprehensive references are provided in *Section 8*.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH BUILDING AND ITS CONTENTS: 11TH – 18TH CENTURIES

Early History

- 2.1 According to RJ Carlton, who researched the history of the Church, the earliest recorded reference to a Church in Willesborough dates from 1075, where there is a reference that Pope Clement V supplied chrism oil, used in baptism and anointing, to the Church at a cost of 7p per annum. However, it is thought that the Church may date from Saxon times when it is thought that there was an early settlement in Willesborough. RJ Carlton also cites an early will in which a Saxon, in the time of King Alfred called Æthelfurth, leaves land in the area we now call Willesborough to the Abbey of St Augustine.
- 2.2 There is, however, no record in the Domesday Book to Willesborough as a specific place or church, which is unusual if there was a Saxon church on the site.
- 2.3 R J Carton also cites in his evidence for early origins of the Church that it was on a list of churches belonging to the Abbey of St Augustine of Canterbury. This was made in the year 1200, but there was believed to be a copy of a document in existence in 1100 (see also Archaeologica Cantiana Vol 45).
- 2.4 Edward Hasted in 1798 also quotes documents which showed the Abbey of St Augustine owned the Church at Willesborough and reports in his History of Kent that the Pope Inslip in 1359:-

“And the next year the vicarage of this church was endowed by the archbishop, who decreed, that the perpetual vicar should receive for his portion, all the fruits, rents, and income to the church, by whatever means so ever arising then or in future, the tithes of sheaves or corn not growing within orchards and gardens, and of hay arising from the meadows extending themselves from Esschetesford is bregge through the northern part of this parish only excepted, which tithes should wholly belong to the religious and their monastery; that the vicar should have a house within the rectory of the church, to be built at the expense of the religious, and to be repaired from that time by the vicar, together with a garden and croft, and one rood of land for a curtilage adjoining to the rectory; the court, and the barns of the rectory adjoining and contiguous to it, being reserved for the use of the religious; and that the vicar should have two acres of arable land of the endowment to himself, of the glebe of the church, lying close to it, which, together with the above-mentioned crost and rood of land the religious should cause to be amortised to the vicarage at their own costs and expenses, or should prepare some

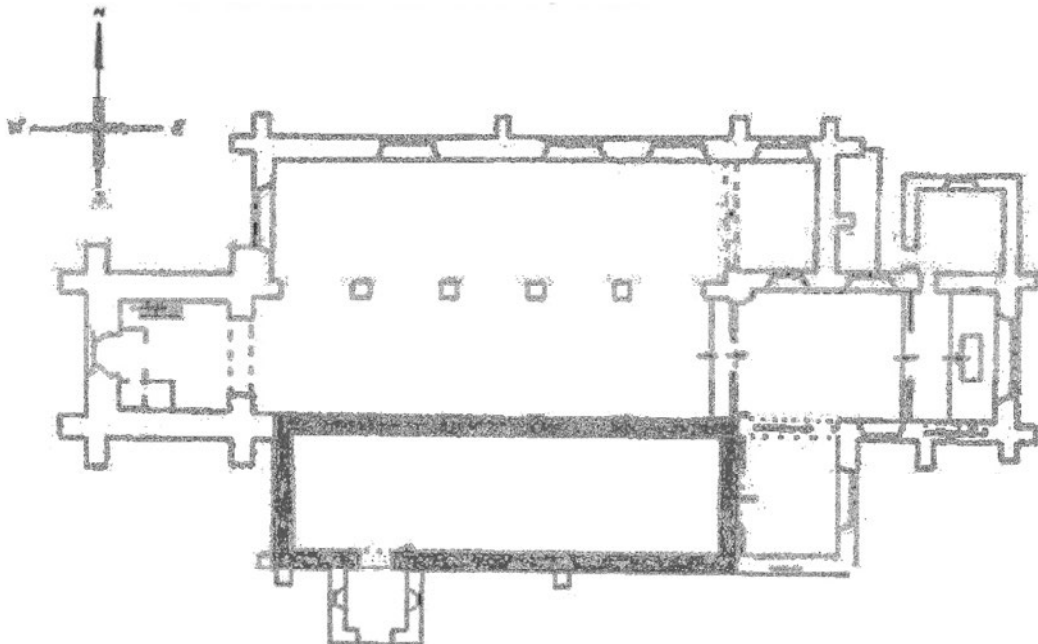
other sufficient security for it; but that the vicar should undergo the burthens of officiating in the divine services for ever in this church, either by himself or some other fit priest, and likewise of administering or finding of lights in the chancel, of bread and wine for the celebrating of masses, the reparation of books, vestments, and other ecclesiastical ornaments, and should likewise sustain the episcopal rights, the procuration likewise due to the archdeacon, and other archidiaconal rights, but that the religious should bear the rest of the burthens not expressed before, which used to be incumbent on the rectors of the church in past times.” (Edward Hasted Parishes: Willesborough' The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 7 (1798), pp. 566-576).

- 2.5 There is also a reference in Mr Carton's book to a publication by A L Poole "Domesday Book of Magna Carta" in which there is a citation to a letter written in 1359 by Pope Lucius III to the Abbot of St Augustine's in Canterbury recommending that the Vicar of Willesborough should retire and needs some take over the living "in that he could pursue his studies unhampered by financial difficulties."
- 2.6 The Church is thought to have remained in the possession of Augustine's Abbey until the dissolution of the monasteries (1545) (*'Houses of Benedictine monks: The cathedral priory of the Holy Trinity or Christ Church, Canterbury', A History of the County of Kent: Volume 2 (1926), pp. 113-121*).when it was settled on the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury.
- 2.7 Though there has been no written evidence for an earlier Saxon church, in a book about Kent churches by H R Pratt-Boorman and V J Torr (published in 1954) attribute the west wall of the south aisle as an example of very precious early Saxon masonry, "*over the square headed 15th century window of common type is a deep, but blocked recess, and above these are different walling can be detected, changing on each side as it enters the roof..... Most early churches had no aisles at all, and then, when they gradually began to be built (as at nearby Sevington and Hinxhill) approaching the year 1200, in many cases they where narrow and low with a lean-to roof to the nave.... This then, is not an aisle at all, but a lofty nave, of the type seen at Ditton and Bonington. The blocked recess is not technically a "double splay" but is a very early, and almost certainly pre-Conquest, and akin to the position of the Saxon window at Whitfield, high above Dover. Now, it follows that there was the west wall of the original Willesborough church, doubtless a Saxon nave and chancel only, and the little is left of this end wall, through later rebuilding*".
- 2.8 John Newman in his study of the *Buildings of England, Kent, West and Weald* reports speculated by Alex Clifton Taylor that the 16 most westerly feet of the southern south aisle wall were only 2'7" thick, which is a characteristic thickness of a Saxon wall.

However, our recent accurate digital survey of the building does not pick up marked difference in thickness along the southern wall of the south aisle. However, it does gradually thin out towards the west end.

2.9 Whilst there may be little documentary evidence, this section of walling does seem to be quite early and has a different form of construction from other parts of the Church. It may well have Saxon origins, if it is, it is certainly a rare surviving piece of fabric and of national significance.

2.10 Mr Garner, in his book on the history of the Church, has prepared a series of sketch plans of how the Church may have been through its development. He speculates that in the year in 1100, the Church was some 16 x 60' in size, occupying the greater part of the south aisle. However, there is little documentary evidence to support this.



Mr Garner's sketch of the early Church in 1100

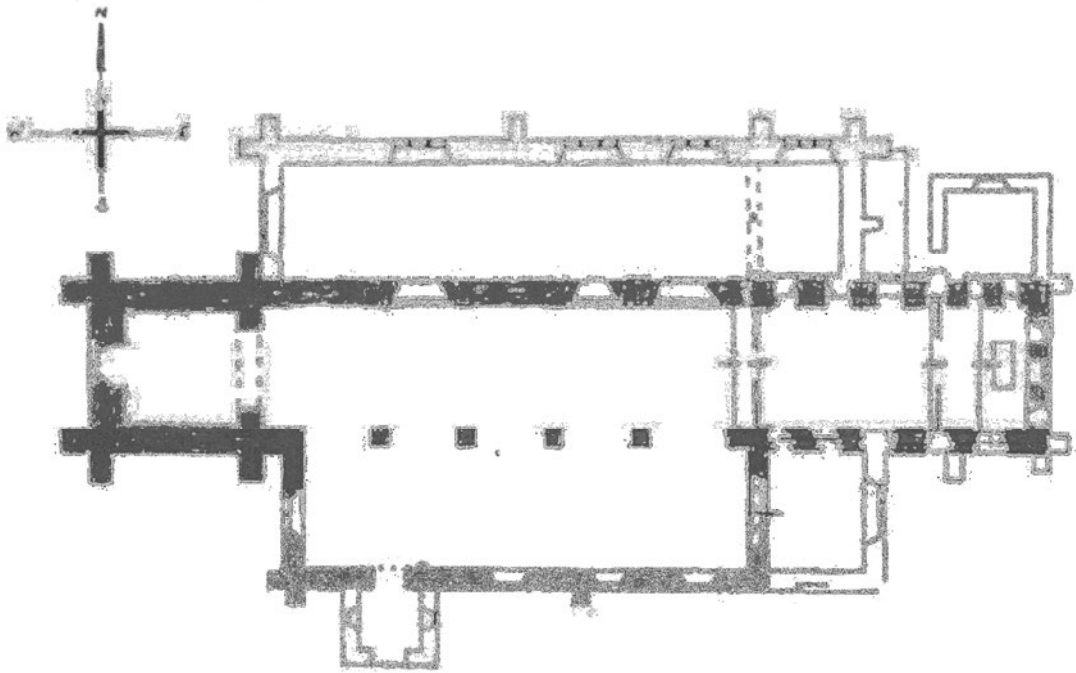
2.11 The Church was later extended on the north side and a new main access formed. The new arcade between the new nave and original Church was made of Tufa (a form of chalk easily worked but largely worked out by the later Mediaeval period (A C Taylor the Buildings of England, Kent, West and Weald). Given the shape and form of the columns in the arcade this is likely to have been in the 13th century. The columns are round near the west end and octagonal towards the eastern end near the chancel. The

column bases seem to have been extended on their base with sandstone, presumably by J L Pearson when he restored the Church. I wonder if the Church originally had a higher floor and to impose a hierarchy to the high altar, did he drop the floor?



Photograph of the 13th century tufa arcade on left and 19th century copy on right

- 2.12. The base of the tower can be similarly dated the 13th century with a fine shafted west doorway and lancet window on the southern side. Mr Garner speculates again that there may have been no chancel in the 13th century, but the current chancel dates from the 14th century. He also produced another sketch plan for the Church around of 1220.



Mr Garner's sketch of the early Church in 1100

The Chancel

- 2.13 The architecture of the chancel indicates that it is probably a 14th century structure, with its delicate early 14th century labels to the windows and fine head corbels. Mr Garner dates it to 1320. The chancel arch is also 14th century and the head corbels feature an exquisitely carved figure of the woman's head in the wimple. It is interesting to note that the chancel is slightly wider than you might expect; the southern wall is a continuation of the line of chalk pillars, but the north wall is stepped out from a line of the north wall of the nave.



Photograph of the figurine on the corbels to the chancel arch

- 2.14 Inside the chancel there is a 14th century sedila, small stone seat long way provision for the celebrant and two acolytes to sit. There is also a 14th century pescina adjacent to the seats on the eastern side and a curiously angled locked up priest's doorway on the western side.

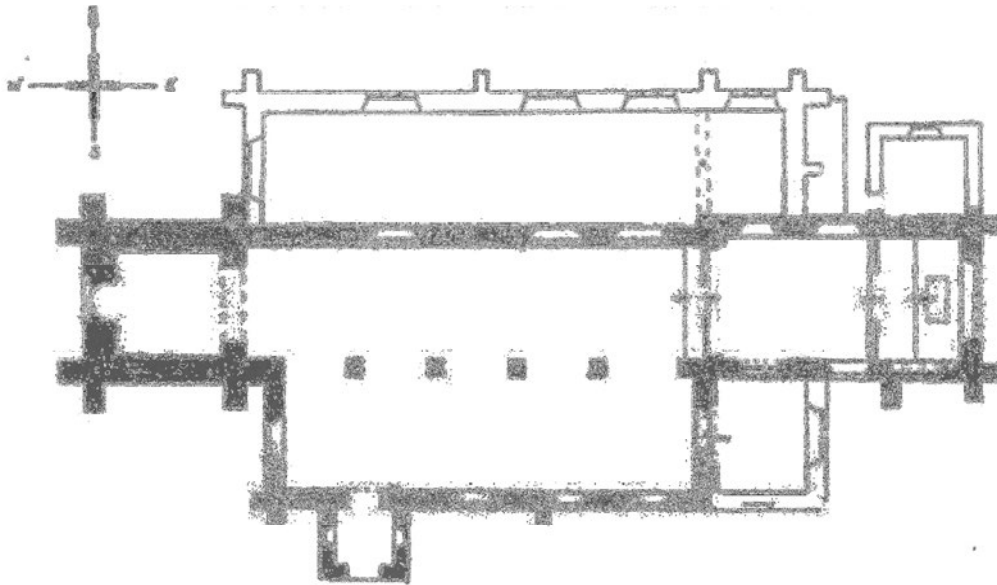


Photograph of the Sedilia and piscine.

- 2.15 One of the Church's most significant features is the window on the north side, just to the east of the organ room, where original 14th century glass has been re-constructed and providing new settings in 1868 by Clayton and Bell, who also designed the attractive east window detailing scenes and the Passion. The south window of the chancel also contains fragments of Mediaeval 14th century glass, but is not as significant as the northern window, which includes two whole figures of Saints standing under heavy tabernacles. The Saints are thought to be on the left St John Baptista and on the right Saint Margaret of Antioch. In the top quadrafoil window there is a further figure which is probably St Paul.



Photograph of the Mediaeval glass in the windows



Mr Garne's sketch plan of the Church around 1320

The Memorial Chapel

- 2.16 Around 1470, the south aisle was extended with a chantry chapel. Carton reports that he found a reference in the will of Richard Elys (Ellis) to his burial in the churchyard at the end of the new work on the south aisle of the Church. He speculates that this new

work must have been a chantry he paid for, which was added to the east end of the south aisle and, given the date of his will, he presumes the chantry to have been built sometime before 11.

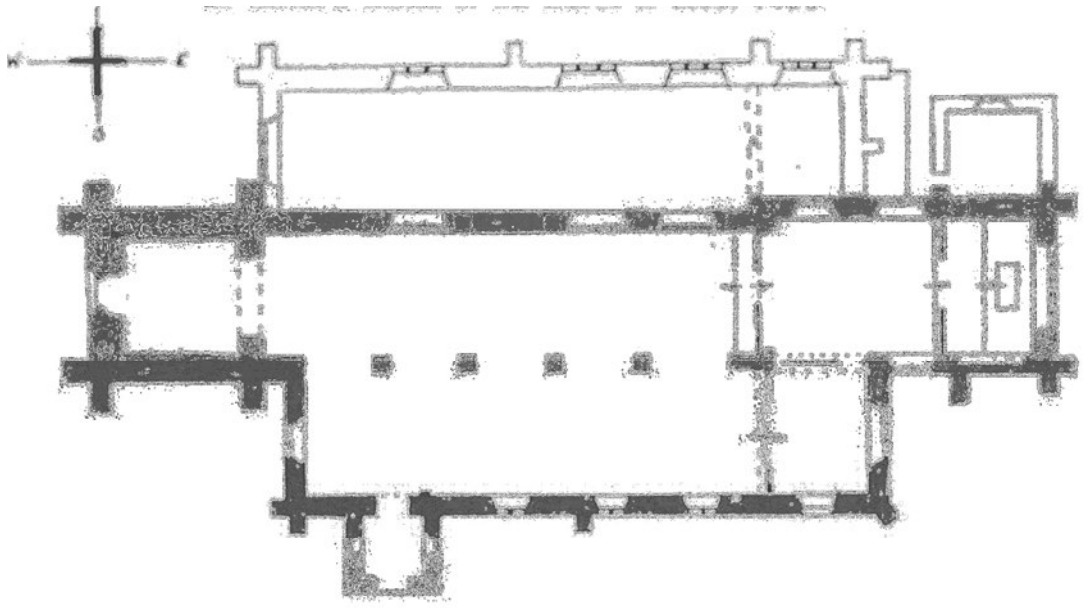
- 2.17 The glass in the top window on the east elevation over the altar, is 15th century work and is probably the original glass. The head depicted in the roundel in the base of the middle light is thought that it be that of Thomasine the wife of Thomas Ellis, the lower glass is more modern and dates from 1904 by Herbert Bryans.



Photograph of the east window in the memorial chapel

The 15th Century - The south aisle roof and windows

- 2.18 At some point in the 15th century, the roof of the south aisle must have been reconstructed using Crown post construction and the windows and doors rebuilt in the style of the period. I personally find it intriguing that the 15th century windows on the south aisle gradually increase in size and scale towards the eastern end, a feature not observed before.



Mr Garner's sketch of how the Church must have looked around 1480



Photograph of the south aisle

Clergy Vestry

2.19 The clergy vestry on the north side of the Church must have existed in the later Medieval period. It was possibly a family Chapel, as it can be clearly seen in watercolour dating from 1808, before the north aisle was built. At this time, it had a cat-slide roof of the main chapel. Indeed, if you look at the walling of this small structure the lower section below the relatively high dado rail is probably Mediaeval, though heavily restored in the Victorian period. Around the time the north aisle was added in 1858, the clergy vestry was formed by demolishing the higher walls and the cat-slide removed and a gable facing north added.

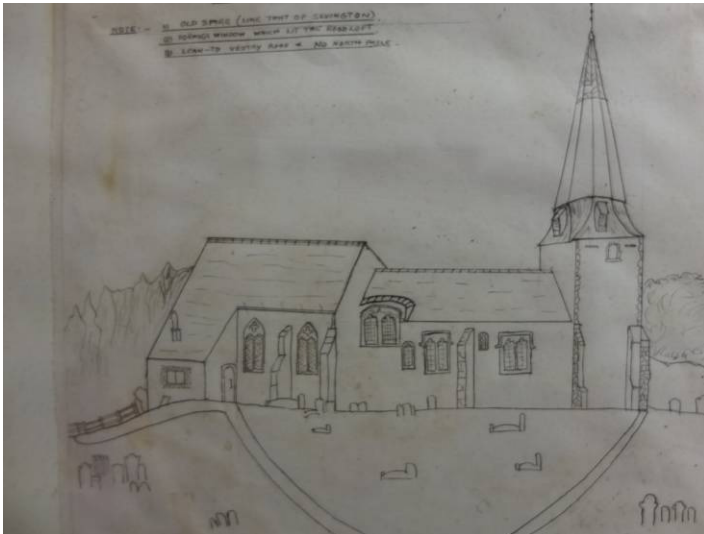


Photograph of the Clergy Vestry

2.20 It is interesting to note that the Petrie watercolour shown below also shows a small lean-to structure at the west end of the original nave and a high level window, possibly the level of the Rood screen, where the chancel and the nave meet.



Watercolour of the north side of the Church 1808 by H Petrie (Kent Archaeological Society Collection)



Pencil sketch of the Church in 1808



Sepia drawing of the Church in 1861 by William Saunders (Kent Archaeological Society Collection)

Medieval Interior Fittings

- 2.21 The interior of the current Church is largely Victorian in character and date, but there are a few surviving Mediaeval fragments within the building. The Rood screen across the chancel has the remnants of the doorway onto the Rood, which can be seen. Garner in his research uncovered a number of bequests to the Rood between 1470 and 1520. The Petrie watercolour also shows a high level window in the area of the screen on the north side, which may have lit the area above the Rood screen. Garner also refers to the will of Richard Guenuire in 1506, who left 20 shillings to make a window to the Rood loft.
- 2.22 There is still a Mediaeval stoop adjacent to the south door and let into the wall, which would have been used for crossing oneself with Holy water on entry into the Church. Further along in the Memorial Chapel, there is a surviving piscine, which would have been used by the Minister to wash the vessels used in the Eucharist. This is a further indication that prior to the Chapel being built, the earlier Church must have had its chancel in this vicinity.

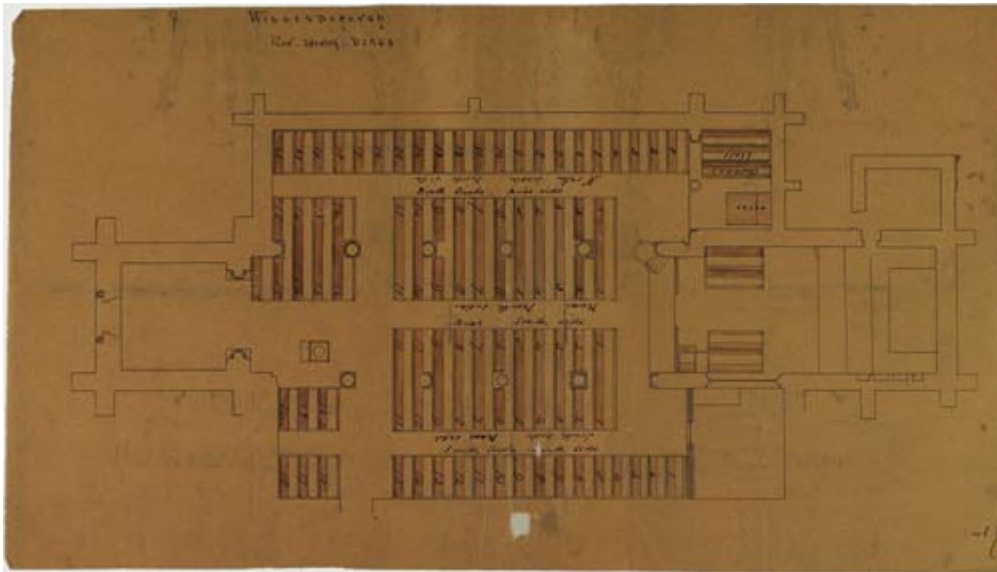


Photograph of Mediaeval piscina and rood screen doorway at the east end of the south aisle

- 2.23 Another historically significant and interesting feature of the church, are the Mediaeval scratched sundials, which curiously sit on the inside of the south door to the porch. The sundials would have been used by the clergy to determine the time for matins. Because they are on the inside of the building they must have been moved here to protect them possibly from the outside face of the same doorway. If so, it would indicate that the porch is a later addition.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH BUILDING AND ITS CONTENTS SINCE THE 19TH CENTURY

- 3.1 There is evidence the Church had box pews through the 18th-century. Garner quotes the words of the late Richard Cook from this period he described the church's *"it was a poor place, all high pews with the pulpit standing down in the Church with sounding board. Nothing but brick and tombstones, the Belfry was shut off, - a sort of tool house"*.
- 3.2 The 19th century, brought many changes to the Church building and in 1817 seven gallery walls were erected at the west end of the nave "for the encouragement of better singing". (*Carlton p28*).
- 3.3 The Gallery did not last long, and in 1838 when Mr Gould arrived as vicar, he took out both the gallery and the high pews in the chancel. In about 1842, the area south of the font at the west end of the south aisle was cleared of pews for Willesborough's first girls' school, and the base of the tower was also cleared to create a boys' school room. The children were taught in these spaces until a new National school was build in Church Road in 1848.
- 3.4 In 1857, Mr Russell was appointed as vicar and set about a campaign to restore and extend the building. His first campaign was to restore the steeple which he found to be in very bad condition and replace it with a new one. This was designed by Joseph Clarke in 1865. The new steeple must have followed a similar form to the Mediaeval steeple, since the Petrie drawing of 1808 shows a not dissimilar shaped structure probably also covered in shingle. Garner speculates there has probably been a steeple since the 14th century on this Church.
- 3.5 The well known late Victorian architect John Loughborough Pearson was appointed to design a new north aisle, which he did by demolishing the north wall and then replicating in sandstone the arcade on the southern side. The works in 1867-8 were in part funded by the Incorporated Society for Buildings and Churches to enlarge the Church by 250 persons. The windows on the new north aisle are somewhat squat, and their decorated tracery described as "harsh" by John Newman. Willesborough unfortunately is clearly not one of Pearson's finest works. Around this time, the ceilings were removed and the new north aisle was created with a King post roof with exposed rafters, to a pattern which echoed the design of the earlier south aisle roof. The chancel roof was also replaced and the window in the south wall was given by Mr Russell.
- 3.6 Pearson also removed all the original pews and replaced them with simple pine benches, as can be seen in his petition drawing below:-



3.7 I assume that during the Pearson's campaign the original ledger stones from the nave and south aisle were moved into the chancel and new decorative and encaustic tiles were installed. The passageways are now largely covered by black and red quarry tiles, and the new pews were fitted on timber pew platforms. I also suspect the floor levels were altered in the Church to make the nave taller, as the basis of the columns seem to have been extended often in sandstone rather than the original tufa. This is particularly noticeable around the junction between the south aisle and the tower.



Red and black quarry tile passageways

Pearson also probably replaced the pulpit with a marble pulpit accessed from a new step into the chancel.



Photograph of pulpit

- 3.8 Around the time of the Pearson campaign, the chantry was restored by Lucy Wharton in 1868 and a new high Victorian style memorial in marble to Charles Wharton (who died in 1863) and his wife Lucy, who died in 1896. The reredos, like the memorial, features the bearded and moustached face of Charles Wharton.



The Charles Wharton Memorial

- 3.9 In 1884, the original barrel organ was replaced with the present tracker action organ, built by Fincham of East Road London, which was situated at the end of the new north aisle. One of the Mediaeval windows on the north aisle was removed to form a new larger opening for the organ console. The organ was enlarged by the original builder in 1919 after the Great War and part converted to pneumatic action. It was completely

refurbished in 1984 and the old actions replaced by an electric action. As can be seen by the date plaque on the present choir stalls they were also installed, presumably to match the new arrangement.



Photograph of the Victorian north aisle with organ chamber at the east end

- 3.10 In 1886, the original peal of bells was enlarged to six bells and in 1887, in celebration of the Queen Victoria's Jubilee, the subscription was raised to install a clock in the tower.
- 3.11 Mr Gardner reports of the earliest heating system - the Church walls have a hypocaust system with a burner found on the metal covers in the floor of the tower, which fed hot air into the floor ducts through gratings just inside the south door.

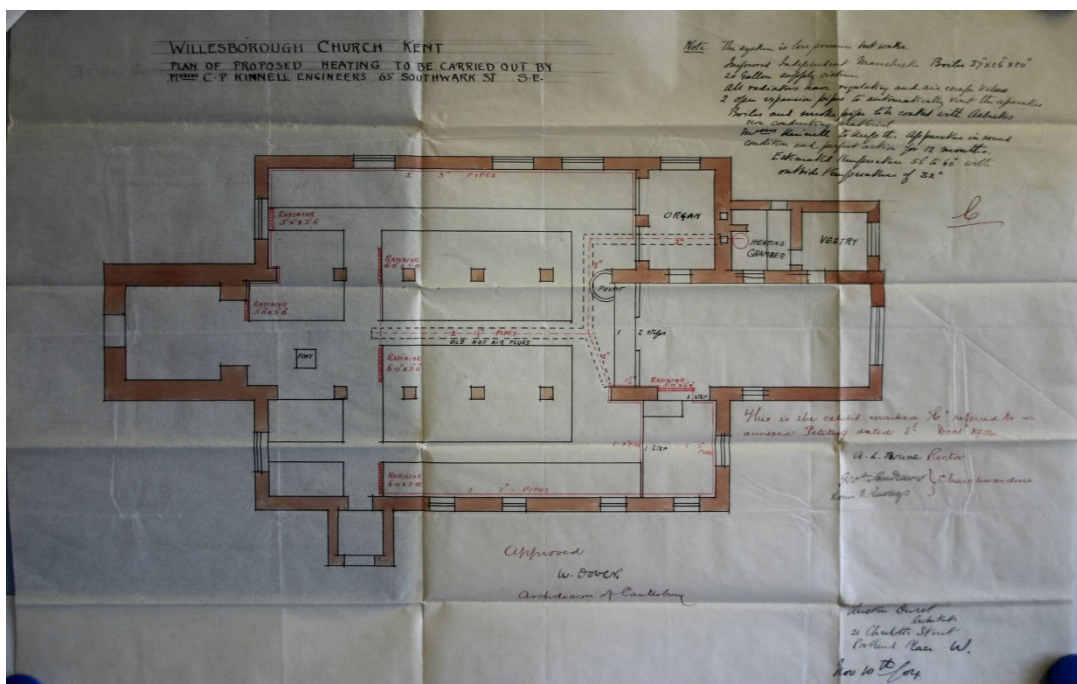


Photograph of the early radiators dating from the 1905 heating system

The present hot water system and radiators was installed in 1905, with a solid fuel boiler house at the east end of north aisle and distinctive radiators at the west end of the Church. An early hand drawn post card from the early Twentieth Century, shows the boiler house with a lean-to roof. At that time the roof to the boiler house is lower and the boiler house is sunk into the ground. There is an integrated flue into the east wall of the north aisle, so I presume it was built around the same time as the north aisle. Certainly, it was there by the time the organ was installed in 1884, after which time it would have been very difficult to build in.

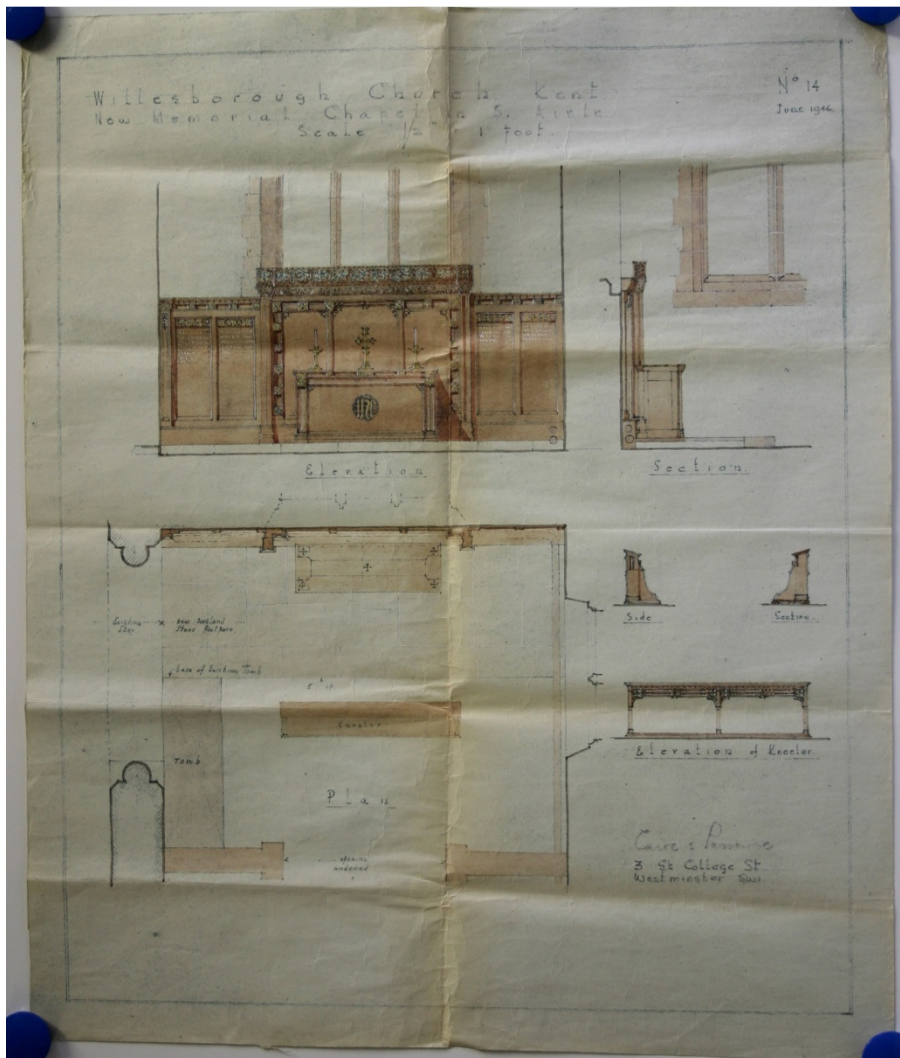


Above Early postcard of St Mary's Church, Willesborough seen from the north side showing a larger roof over the boiler house as it was when there was a coke boiler. Below is the 1905 Faculty plan for the heating system in showing the boiler room.



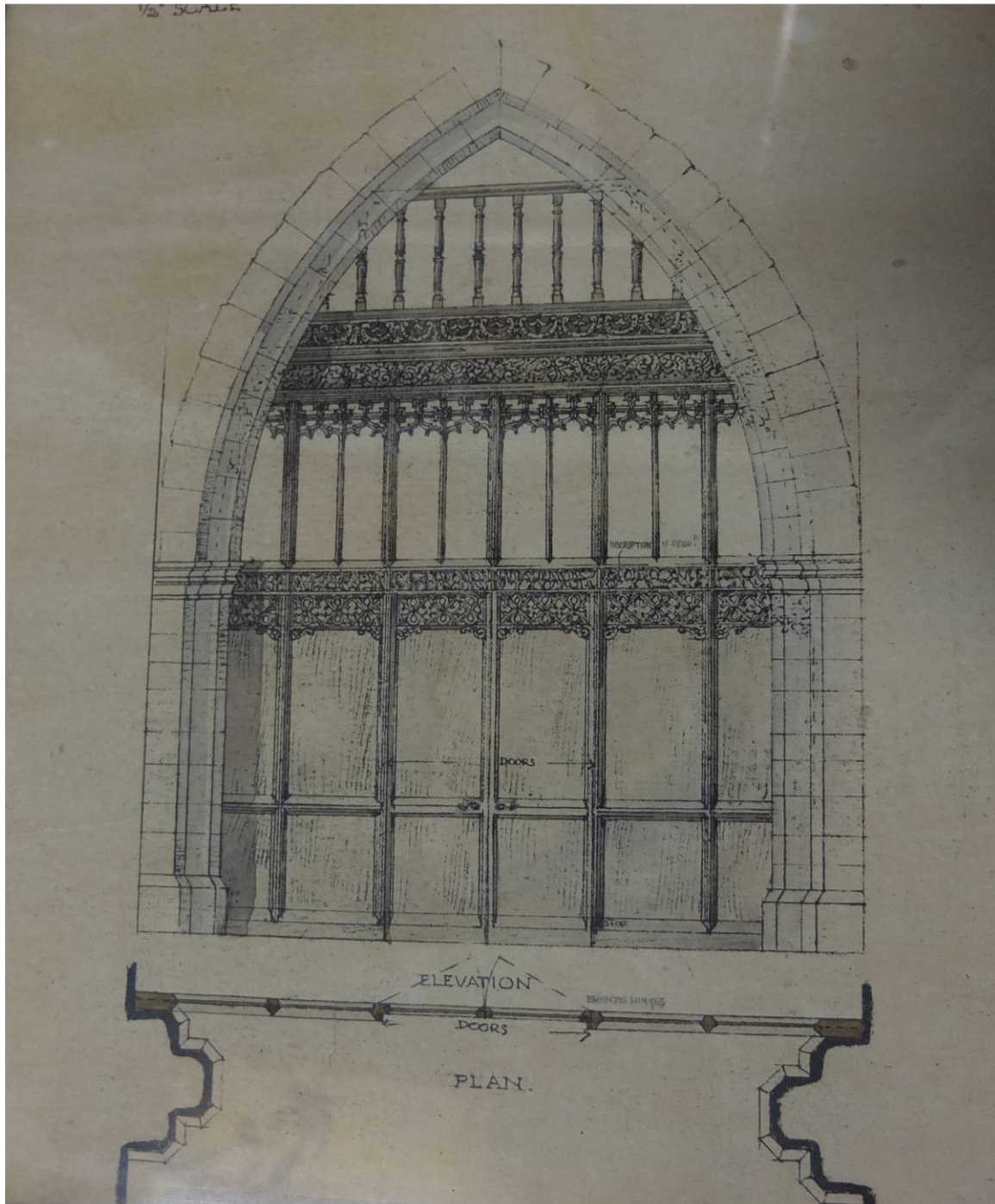
The Twentieth Century

- 3.12 As mentioned above the heating system we see today was put into the church in 1905 and it is interesting to note that the drawings held in the Faculty records indicate that there was a larger boiler house where we propose to re-build one at this time and no low walls separating the choir from the nave below the chancel arch at this time. Photographs from the turn of the century also show that there was only a small timber rail at this time where we now see walls.
- 3.13 In 1920, the first electric lighting was introduced into the Church replacing the original oil lanterns.
- 3.14 In 1902, the Ellis Chapel became the property of the Church and was used as a choir vestry up until 1946, when a Faculty was given to convert the Chapel into a memorial chapel to those who died in the 1939 to 1945 war. The wall and metal screen to the south aisle was widened and opened up. Carøe and Partners designed a new reredos, altar and pew which you can still see today



Carøe and Partners Faculty plan for the war memorial chapel

- 3.14 Until 1929, the ground floor of the tower was used as a ringing chamber. After the re-commissioning of the bells in 1930, a first floor was added to the tower and a new screen in the tower arch was added by the well-known early 20th Century Ecclesiastical Architect - Carøe.
- 3.15 In 1983, the toilet was installed and water was brought into the building. The toilet is still at the base of the tower.



Carøe's drawing of the screen in the tower arch

4. SIGNIFICANCE

Levels of Significance

4.1 The assessment of the significance of the building is far from an exact science and all it can be based upon is the specialist knowledge of the building type and the comparison with similar buildings elsewhere. A different group of stakeholders may view the building as having distinct and special meaning to them.

4.2 By convention, significance is graded on a relative scale, which is based on trying to categorise the building and the elements within the building in their levels of importance.
It is the custom to provide an overall assessment of the significance of the building as a whole, in the following categories ranked from the lowest to highest:

1 Local

2 Regional

3 National

4 International

4.3 The analysis can be further refined by considering the value of each constituent part of the building and how it contributes to the character of the whole, using the following categories:

1 Exceptional

An element of outstanding interest.

2 Considerable

An element of special interest which makes an important contribution to the importance of the building.

3 Some

An element of lesser interest or one which is partly altered or adapted.

4 Little

An element which contributes minimally to the overall significance of the building.

5 Negative or Intrusive

An element which detracts from the value and the interest of the building and directly threatens it.

Statutory Designations

4.4 St Mary's Church is a Grade II Listed Building and this indicates that the entire building and its internal fittings are judged to be of interest and significance.

Historic Significance

- 4.5 As the Parish Church of Willesborough, the history of the Church is intrinsically tied to the development of the local community, giving it exceptional local and considerable regional significance. The foundation of the Church possibly pre-dates Norman times and, if it is Saxon in origin, would make the site and the remaining pre-conquest walls of *National and International significance*, since so few walls remain from this period.
- 4.6 Through the early Mediaeval period, the Church prospered and became the resting place for the nobility and gentry of the area including the Ellis family. Later it became the resting place of the Wharton family. The Church, however, only served a small rural community eclipsed by the nearby market town of Ashford and, through the post reformation period, the documentary evidence acquired by Mr Garner and Carton, shows that the Church was somewhat neglected and often only served by absentee clerics.
- 4.7 In the 19th Century the area prospered as Ashford became a regional railway hub and the manufacturing of trains and carriages was developed in a new industrial area with railway works between Willesborough and Ashford. The growth in local work opportunities led to increased urbanisation of the area to the north of Willesborough. As the population increased, there became a need to expand the Parish Church. The Church's current Victorian interior is largely derived from the expansion and restoration of the Church in the middle of the 19th century, which was facilitated by the growth in the local population.
- 4.8 The founding of an early school inside the Church, gave St Mary's added local status for a brief period 1838 to 1842; after which time, the school moved into a Church-owned building keeping its close links with Parish Church.

Architectural Significance

- 4.9 The architecture of the Church is clearly significant, telling the complex story of the Church's evolution and its responses in built form to the changing liturgies through the centuries. The Church we see today is largely the product of Revd Russell's vision. This, in turn, was based on the Oxford Movement's vision of restoring the Church to something akin to the Mediaeval Church, adapted for the prevailing liturgy. Revd Russell employed John Loughborough Pearson, who was strongly associated with this Movement, as was Clarke before him. The Church certainly has some regional architectural significance, as examples of these well known Victorian architects' work, albeit not particularly noteworthy.

South Aisle

- 4.10 If the west end of the south wall is Saxon, this would be a rare surviving early masonry structure and of exceptional national, if not international, significance.
- 4.11 It is clear from documentary sources that there has been a church on the site since Mediaeval times (at least 1200). The south aisle is clearly the oldest surviving part of the Church making this early mediaeval structure of significance. The further we go back into the mediaeval period the less there is surviving mediaeval fabric and these need to be respected. However, only the walls survive from the 13th Century - the floors, roof, windows and door openings all date from later centuries. Therefore, we can only see fragments of the early Church and this lessens the relative importance in a region where there are a number of early Mediaeval and Saxon churches which survive in a more intact form.

- 4.12 The sundials inside the south door are of some considerable national significance as few of these remain. They clearly have been moved inside to protect them, which suggests the south door has been re-built, possibly by Pearson or Clarke.
- 4.13 The early mediaeval stoop by the south door tends to confirm the door to the Church has not moved and is of historic and architectural significance. The piscine at the other end of the south aisle is also early Mediaeval and of considerable significance, as it may mark where the early altar was located.
- 4.14 The south aisle was renovated and modernised in the 15th Century, when the memorial chapel was added and new windows and crown post roof constructed. The two light square headed windows interestingly gradually increase in scale as you approach the east end, which is a subtle and I suspect is a very unusual architectural feature of some national significance.
- 4.15 Most English Mediaeval glass was destroyed in the Reformation and, therefore, the 15th Century glass in the attractive tracery of the east window in the south aisle, is clearly of considerable national interest.
- 4.16 The current memorial chapel is largely the product of mid-Twentieth Century intervention to make a wall memorial. The reredos, altar and timber dais all date from this intervention which has some community significance and, whilst the workmanship and materials are good, it is only of little significance.
- 4.17 The walls dividing the chancel from the south aisle and the accompanying ironwork is rather clumsy, but probably the work of Clarke or Pearson and of modest interest, but it is not a particularly attractive piece of work.
- 4.18 The ornate high Victorian memorial to Charles Wharton is memorable with the likeness of Charles with his mutton-chop moustache, and reredos styling is of some significance and interest. The other memorials to the families that used to own the chapel are of local community significance being the many owners of the largest house in the Parish at Boys Hall and they of some architectural interest as well. The wall dividing the chapel from the south aisle was altered by Carøe in 1946 reducing its significance and the proposal is currently to move it back against the side chapel walls, with the metal work above would have some impact but is reversible.

The Tower

- 4.19 The tower has been heavily restored but its base is relatively early and it has national and regional significance as an early example of this form of tower. The fine west doorway and lancet window above enhance the structure's architectural appeal. The doors themselves have fine ornate Victorian hinges and probably date from the time of Clarke's restoration of the building in the mid-Nineteenth Century (TBC)
- 4.20 The shingle steeple is said to have been there from the late mediaeval period and rebuilt by Clarke. Its higher octagonal form is similar to spires found further west on Romney Marsh, such as at Brooklands and into Sussex such as at Cuckfield and, relatively unusually, the further east you go in Kent. This steeple form certainly helps make the Church architecturally distinctive and gives it some regional architectural significance.
- 4.21 The interior of the tower is largely the product of Twentieth Century interventions which makes it of less significance than much of the building. The first floor ringing chamber and its perilously steep stair were only put into place in 1929. However, the ornately carved screen in the tower arch was designed by a well respected early Twentieth Century architect, W D Carøe, and is of some significance. It is interesting to note that Carøe also provided a screen and entrance at St Mary the Virgin in the next Parish north at almost the same time.

- 4.22 The floor of the tower is largely hidden by carpet, but there is said to still be an early cast iron coke hypocaust boiler beneath the floor which may have moderate significance.

The Nave and Aisles

- 4.23 The nave is the second oldest part of the Church and its age confirms some significance. However, its character has largely been formed by Pearson's restoration of the roof and removal of the ceiling, the relatively modest stone Victorian pulpit, simple undistinguished pine benches and relatively common red and black quarry tiled floor. It is really a Victorian interior, and a rather dull one at that, not helped by the deep plan form of the Church which tends to make it rather gloomy.
- 4.24 The simple southern arcade with its chalk tuffa 13th Century chalk columns is of considerable regional significance, since this is a local stone which was mostly used in the early mediaeval period before the quarries of the hard chalk were mined out. It would have been a cheaper stone than expensive imports such as Caen stone brought in from France and used on grander buildings as the Cathedral or St Augustine's Abbey. Its soft texture makes it easily damaged and, therefore, it is surprising to see it in such good condition. The interest in this arcade is further increased by the change from round to more complicated octagonal columns as you go nearer the east end; a feature I have recently seen at similar aged church at Cuckfield. The north arcade is a Victorian copy of the south arcade but in sand stone and some how it does not seem as elegant and of far less significance.
- 4.25 The floor to the passageways in the nave and aisles is a simple pattern of black and red tiles presumably dating from the re-ordering of the church by Pearson and therefore they have some significance but they are not an unusual part of a Victorian flooring scheme. Beneath the pew platforms there are simple softwood pew platforms of little significance which sits on sleeper walls built off a solid concrete slab.
- 4.26 The loss of pews and changes in the flooring would have some impact on the interior's historic significance, however the late Victorian character of the interior of the nave and aisles is not architectural interesting; the furniture and flooring are basic, machine made and not unusual, and therefore of only modest significance. Aesthetically it could be argued that the design is relatively dull and dominated by the heavy squat architecture of the northern arcade. The changes would we believe improve the character of the interior and the impact of the loss of Victorian relatively attractive black and red passage tile mitigated by their use in the areas used as a chapels and dais.
- 4.27 The insertion of a new glass door in a timber frame to the inner door into the south porch will also be reversible and it is not proposed to remove the historic door into the church. The frame and glass doors to the opening will have impact on the view of the arch from inside the porch but the insertion will be reversible. Therefore we feel the impact of this change is minor.

The Chancel

- 4.28 The chancel probably dates from the 14th Century and is of considerable interest and significance. It was heavily restored by Clarke or Pearson but they took care to preserve its early 14th Century glass in the north window, which is a rare survival. The complete figures of 3 saints have been set in Victorian glass and they are one of the treasures of the Church. I wonder if they have been carefully placed in one of the most sheltered windows of the Church to ensure their preservation, on the direction of Pearson. They are of exceptional national significance because they show complete figures. The new boiler house will reduce the light to these windows slightly but the low flat roof immediately outside the window on the north side will still allow light to get to them. Being on the Northern side of the church and shielded on east and west sides by buildings the window does not get any direct beams of sunshine through it now and

this will not change because of our proposals. Therefore the impact on this piece of significant fabric will be minimal.

- 4.29 The floor of the chancel is also interesting with fine encaustic tiles in the passageways between the choir stalls which lead to stone steps. The floor of the sanctuary features decorated mid-Nineteenth Century encaustic tiles with Biblical text set into them. They may be Minton and Company or one of the other mid nineteenth century tile manufactures who produced them (*Church Tiles of the Nineteenth Century- Kenneth Beulah & Hans van Lemmen- Shire Books 1987*). This, I believe, is also an unusual feature which adds interest to the space and confers some national significance. No changes are proposed to the Sanctuary.
- 4.30 Beneath the choir stalls are a series of ledger stones, which I suspect were re-laid there during the Victorian re-ordering of the Church. It's hard to make out their ages, but many are Mediaeval and of some significance. Wherever we have lifted the floorboards beneath the pew platforms in the naves and aisles we can see a concrete slab laid across the ground and sleeper walls rising from this new slab to support the floors.
- 4.31 Beneath the chancel arch are low stone walls separating the choir from the nave. As mentioned above that these walls are early twentieth century in origin but no record of a specific Faculty for them. The church proposes to remove them and the leader's chairs to open up a larger dais. Since the low walls are relatively modern and not part of Pearson's re-ordering this change has only a modest impact on the significance of the building.



Photograph of the church looking to the Chancel from early 20th century showing it as it was after the Pearson re-ordering. Note that there are no low chancel walls below the arch at this time but there was a low open screen.

- 4.32 The introduction of the new screen for the hall, kitchen, store room and cupboards in north aisle will impact the character of the nave but all insertions are reversible and

removable and not lead to the destruction of historic fabric. The most significant feature in this area is the 1930's Carøe screen to the tower will still remain but it will be visible undisturbed from the new meeting room.

The Clergy Vestry

- 4.33 The clergy vestry is entered through a small early mediaeval door, suggesting that this has been a vestry for some time. The interior of the room is relatively undistinguished and dates from the Victorian re-construction of the space, but there are some interesting built-in cupboards and a Victorian back door of minor significance.

Furniture

- 4.34 The pulpit is made of limestone to a simple design and is shown on the Pearson plan so we presume that it was placed there during his campaign of renovations and re-ordering. It is to be kept in its current place.



- 4.35 The stone font is also Victorian of a similar age, and is located where it was originally positioned by Pearson, close to the tower arch. It is proposed to keep it but move it to the sacred east end of the building where it would be given prominence and balance the pulpit, each side of the chancel arch.

- 4.36 The pew benches in the nave are simple in design and date from the Pearson Campaign in 1868. They are made of stained pine with machine cut timbers and are likely to have been made by one of the large manufacturers of pews in the 19th century such as Jones & Willis. They are not especially good and similar to many used in many churches and chapels of the period, and therefore not particularly significant.



- 4.37 The Choir stalls are more significant, made of oak with some hand carving of scrolls in the pew ends. They are very upright and crammed in and the front stall would have been designed for child choristers as the book rest from the rear stall digs into the neck of adults using. There are plaques on the stalls dating them to Easter 1884 and therefore they must be part of the Pearson re-ordering campaign. It is proposed to modify the stalls by adding a piece to the seat and padded back so they are more useable for the adult choir. This would only have a modest impact on the significance of the fabric.



- 4.38 There are two leaders' chairs close to the chancel arch which differ in style slightly from the rest of the choir stalls and may be of a latter date. There is a leaders chair shown on the south side of the church only in the Pearson scheme and one may pre-date the other. The chairs are heavy and built onto a small platform. They could be made more mobile by removing the platform and made more mobile so they can be placed elsewhere in the church if they are not removed completely.

COMMUNITY SIGNIFICANCE

- 4.39 The Church has been the historic centre of religious life in Willesborough for most of a millennium for a rural farming community. In the early 19th Century the establishment of the School in the Church also brought culture and learning to the Parish. Under the patronage of the local aristocracy, memorial chapels were built and the Church flourished and grew in size during the early Mediaeval period.
- 4.40 From the 19th Century onwards, the Church has responded to the changing character of the Parish from rural to urban. Enlarged in the 19th Century to accommodate a growing population who came to the busy market town, railway hub and manufacturing centre.
- 4.41 Locally the Church, with its distinctive spire, together with the great barn, public house opposite and farmhouse form a small cluster of Listed buildings marking the old centre of the village. These buildings mark a small cluster of buildings of historic and architectural interest in a rather undistinguished 19th and 20th Century urban expansion.
- 4.42 It continues to act as a focal point for religious worship, and as a local landmark in an area swamped by new development which has continued from the late nineteenth century up to now. The building size and location offers great scope for further

community work with local groups serving to promote community engagement, in an area still experiencing rapid change.

4.43 The church sits in a Conservation Area.

5.0 **National Heritage Listing Description**

Description: Church of St Mary, Willesborough

Grade: II

Date Listed: 24 September 1951

English Heritage Building ID: 180021

OS Grid Reference: TR0292641530

OS Grid Co-ordinates: 602926, 141530

Latitude/Longitude: 51.1371, 0.8993

Location: Sevington Lane, Kingsnorth, Kent TN24 0JG

Locality: [Ashford](#)

Local Authority: Ashford Borough Council

County: [Kent](#)

Country: [England](#)

Postcode: TN24 0JG

5344 SEVINGTON ROAD
(South West Side)
Willesborough
CHURCH OF ST MARY
TR 04 SW 3/133 24.9.51.

B GV

C14 to C15. Restored 1865-1867 and North Aisle added. Built of stone rubble with buttresses. Tiled roof. North and South chapels. West tower surmounted by octagonal spire.

St Mary's Church. Court Lodge and barns form a group.

Listing NGR: TR0296741487

6. **BIBLIOGRAPHIES OF THE ARCHITECTS WHO ARE KNOWN TO HAVE WORKED ON THE CHURCH**

J Clarke

- 6.1 Joseph Clarke (1819-88) earliest buildings are mostly in the Oxford area and he continued to work there. In his earlier career he designed many schools and later he became a specialist and prolific church architect.
- 6.2 He became the architect to the Diocese of Rochester and Canterbury as well as Hertfordshire, but his churches are to be found all over the south-east. He was also Honorary Secretary and Examining Architect to the ICBS. Whilst being commercially successful and having influence and standing in the middle of the 19th Century, he is generally seen as producing rather dull architecture.

Lit: BAL Biog file; Obit: The Builder 54 p197

W D Carøe

- 6.3 William Douglas Carøe (1857-1938) was the son of the Danish Consul in Liverpool and an English wife. After studying mathematics at Cambridge, he became a pupil of J L Pearson and while in his office worked on Truro Cathedral and Westminster Hall.
- 6.4 Later he joined Ewan Christian to become his managing assistant before setting up his own practice in 1885, where for a time he was in partnership with J H Christian. His practice was successful and before the First World War he developed a large practice.
- 6.5 Carøe was a member of the Art Workers Guild and Honorary Consulting Architect to the ICBS. He also succeeded E Christian as architect to the Ecclesiastical Commission in 1895. As well as church work, he restored seven bishops' palaces and wrote several books. He became one of the best known ecclesiastical architects, known for his perpendicular Gothic revival architecture, though he used the baroque or Queen Anne styles as well on secular buildings. He was a skilled restorer of historic buildings preferring to retain the historic patina of historic fabric than was fashionable at the time.

Lit: J M Freeman: W D Carøe RSTO FSA, his Architectural Achievements, Manchester, 1990

J L Pearson

- 6.6 John Loughborough Pearson (1817-97) was the son of a painter in Durham. He became a pupil of I Bonomi, the County Surveyor in Durham, before moving to London where he worked in the offices of the well-known architect Anthony Salvin, who had worked on Durham Cathedral, and P C Hardwick, finally going into independent practice in 1843.
- 6.7 He was one of the most successful Gothic revival architects of the age specialising in designing and restoring churches, becoming one of the most successful ecclesiastical architects of his age with his own interpretation of C13 and C14 Gothic styles.
- 6.8 Much of his early work is in the North of England and was often influenced by French examples, and was known for his well proportioned and elegant architecture with few equals. He has long been recognised as one of the foremost Victorian architects.

Lit: A Quiney: John Loughborough Pearson, 1979