

A LITTLE HISTORY OF SOUTHCHURCH

By Mike Penry

Episode 31: THE 2006 IMPROVEMENTS

In 2006 Holy Trinity received a much-needed makeover. It came about because builders were very keen to put housing on the unused playing field to the South of the graveyard, but the church held a covenant on the use of the land. Finally, it was agreed the church would lift the covenant, for a substantial monetary consideration. One of our then Churchwardens describes paying into the bank a cheque for over a million pounds! In time-honoured fashion the money didn't all come to our church – it was split one-third for Holy Trinity and two-thirds to the diocese – and we made good use of our one-third, making some significant improvements to the church.

Reproduced below is a description, written at the time, of the main elements of the work undertaken.

Redecoration and new carpeting

Comper churches - so beloved of Sir John Betjeman - use colour to focus attention on the most important parts of the church, in particular the altar. We intend to do the same in our own Comper church at Holy Trinity by repainting the New Church ceilings in such a way that the sanctuary is the most lavishly decorated part of the church and the eye drawn to the altar:

- the nave ceiling will be painted burgundy red, with gold highlights (which will be more dramatic as you approach the chancel);
- the chancel ceiling will be painted a rich blue (to match the blue in the angels' wings in the East Window), with gold and white stars providing a heavenly canopy for the altar.

The walls will be repainted in white, and the main carpet replaced with a carpet of a richer shade of red to complement the nave ceiling. The sanctuary carpets will also be replaced, using a design similar to that of the current carpets. We believe that the overall effect will be both striking and faithful to Comper's wish that his churches should "move to worship, bring a man to his knees, and refresh his soul in a weary land".

Re-ordering the west end of the church

As the Rector explained, we want to provide a more welcoming environment for worshippers and visitors and to give ourselves much greater flexibility in our use of the church. The main aim is to create an open space at the west end of both the New and Old churches. The oak pillars and font will remain, but most other existing furniture (and clutter!) will disappear. In particular, around a dozen pews will be removed (although they will not disappear completely as, wherever possible, we will re-use them in the new furniture).

A new reception area will be created just inside the south door (reflecting the likelihood that the south door will remain the main entrance to the church, despite the intention in 1906 to create a new entrance on the Boulevard). The reception area will include a reception desk, new shelving for storage of hymn books and service books, and a purpose designed unit for display of church magazines and leaflets. The furniture will all be finished in oak.

A small kitchen facility will be created in the northwest corner of the church. This too will for the most part be finished in oak, subject to the need to cater for spillages etc. We will continue to use the Parish House for major bunfights, but the new church facility will make us much better equipped to provide refreshments in the church.

All joinery and redecoration work will be carried out by Bakers of Danbury Ltd. That is probably the best guarantee I can give as to quality, attention to detail and a sympathetic understanding of churches.

Improvements for the disabled

We will be making better provision for the disabled by halving two pews in the New Church and one pew in the Old Church to provide proper seating areas for the wheelchair disabled. We will also be removing the step from the south porch into the church.

New lighting and sound amplification systems

As the Rector has said, both our lighting and sound amplification systems are in urgent need of modernisation. The essential first step is the rewiring of the church, a very substantial task which will be carried out for us by G.P. Mason & Sons.

The new lighting system, which has been designed by the specialist firm Ecclesiastical Lighting, will create a much more atmospheric place in which to worship and enjoy the church to its full potential. We will be using low voltage lighting fittings, which will give us a flexible lighting system controlled via a preset dimming control system. The overall level of lighting will be significantly improved, and we will be able to highlight the church's main architectural features (including the repainted ceilings).

The new sound system has been designed by the local firm Soundtrack Ltd (which has recently renovated the sound system at St Mary's Prittlewell). All existing speakers - the organ speakers apart - will be replaced.

Project implementation

It has been clear for a long time that this work needs to be taken forward as a single large project, to reduce costs, make proper provision for health and safety and ensure that the work is carried out in a logical order. The work will necessitate full scaffolding of the church, which will need to be treated as a building site - with no unauthorised access - while the improvements are being made.

Timescale

We would very much like the work to be carried out in early 2006, so that the church is suitably resplendent for the centenary of the New Church, which we will begin to celebrate in May 2006. It is not certain at the moment that this will happen, as we first need to receive the approval of the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) and, following that, obtain a faculty (that is, a formal permission from the Diocese to carry out the work). All being well - and we have had detailed discussions with the DAC as our plans have developed - we will have DAC approval by mid-November, at which point the formal notices relating to our petition for a faculty will appear on church noticeboards. This should in turn enable us to have a faculty by Christmas. If all goes well, it is likely that the last services before the work begins and the church is temporarily closed will be on New Year's Day 2006.

Come back in a couple of weeks' time for the final episode of our Little History of Southchurch: "SOUTHCHURCH IN THE 20TH CENTURY".

- A summary of 20th Century developments in Southchurch.
 - Trams arrive.
 - Southchurch is split into multiple parishes.
- Peggy Mount and Frankie Howerd entertain troops in the church.

See all Episodes of 'A Little History of Southchurch' [here](#)