

Friary Church of St. Francis and St. Anthony Crawley

PROJECT TEAM

Client:
Rev. Chris Bergin
S.T.L (Parish Priest)

Architect:
Deirdre Waddington
B.Arch, RIBA

Quantity Surveyor:
Lawrence Foote and
Partners Ltd

Main Contractor
(Phase 2):
W H Catchpole
Building Contractors

Mechanical
Consultant:
Pasion Star Ltd

Lighting Consultant:
Light Perceptions

Sound Installation:
SystemDesign

Stonework:
T.E.Tilley Ltd

Cleaning/restoration
of ceiling:
The Wall Paintings
Workshop

When the Capuchin friars moved away from Crawley in 1981 they transferred the Church of St. Francis and St. Anthony, by then surrounded by buses, shopping malls and overweening office blocks, to the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. The tradition of keeping the church doors wide open has continued and people are constantly passing through them. There is no enticing coffee bar and there are no effusive “welcomers.” People simply come in numbers to attend daily mass and as individuals to offer a quiet prayer and, problematically, light candles.

The 1959 church

Once Crawley had been designated as the site for a New Town, the Friars commissioned H.S. Goodhart-Rendel to replace their modest Victorian church with one with a capacity of about 350. Goodhart-Rendel’s building is in his characteristic modern Romanesque style with a massive bell tower over the crossing (*Fig 1*). External walls are of the rather porous solid polychromatic brickwork so much admired by architectural critics and so prone both to internal condensation and to direct water penetration.



The ceiling was constructed of pre-cast concrete panels spanning between concrete purlins rendered and beautifully decorated to the designs of one of the Capuchins (*Fig 2*). The building was completed in the year of Goodhart-Rendel’s death (1959) and listed Grade II in 2008.

Alterations during the 1990s

Blackening of the interior together with a desire to bring the congregation closer to the sanctuary, prompted the parish to undertake a major reordering during the 1990s. The bell tower was taken down and the supporting masonry removed. A steel portal frame

- 1> Church of St. Francis and St. Anthony showing tower and polychrome brickwork
- 2> Goodhart-Rendel interior 1959
- 3> Day chapel added to chancel in 1995
- 4> Sanctuary before latest re-ordering showing sliding folding screen and arrangement of steps
- 5> Condition of decorations. The paint was white when applied

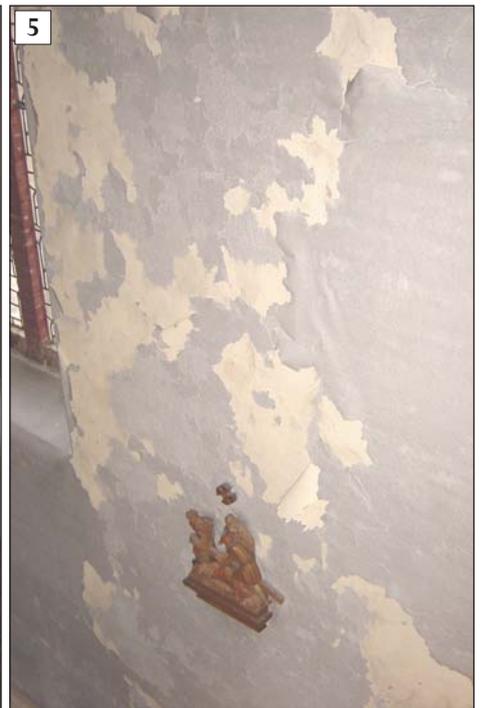


spanning the full width of the church was introduced and the tower re-built in cavity brickwork. In the process a significant part of Goodhart-Rendel's concrete ceiling was demolished. At the same time the chancel was extended and the tabernacle moved to a newly-created "day chapel" where its setting was less than noble (Fig 3). To separate the day chapel from the rest of the church, a wide concrete beam supporting a sliding folding screen was installed below the chancel arch (Fig 4).

Apart from destroying the integrity of the original design, the new arrangement proved to have some practical drawbacks. The screen was left permanently in the open position; the sanctuary was so small and its steps so complicated that a succession of celebrants fell off it and, thanks to an application of non-breathable paint, the decorations deteriorated very seriously (Fig 5). The brief for the latest scheme was to remedy defects in the fabric, improve access for the disabled and create a more practical and prayerful interior.

Remedial works

Prior to the main refurbishment, a preliminary contract was awarded to; divert rainwater away from vulnerable parts of the external walls; improve insulation and watertightness of flat roofs; and replace pointing washed out from the brickwork. The structure was given time to dry out before work started on ➤



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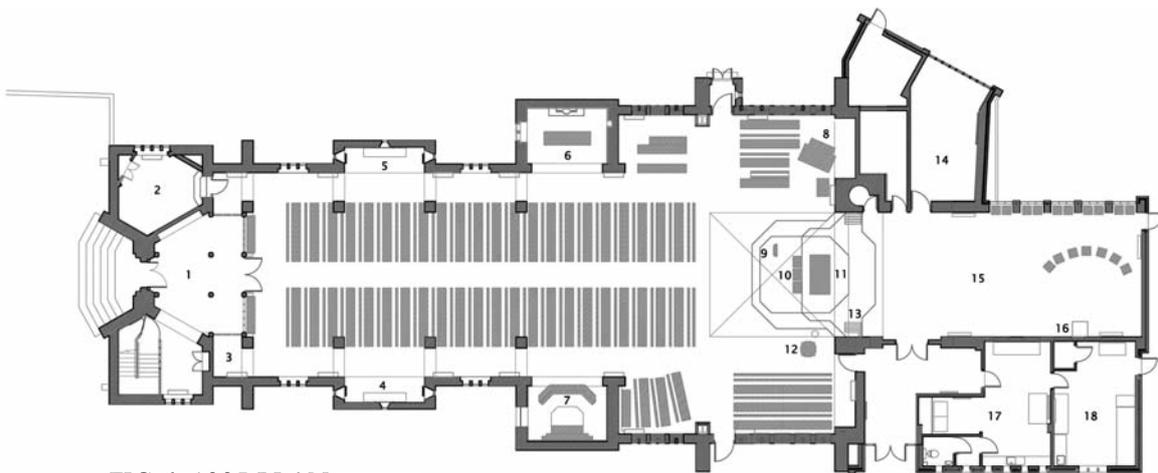


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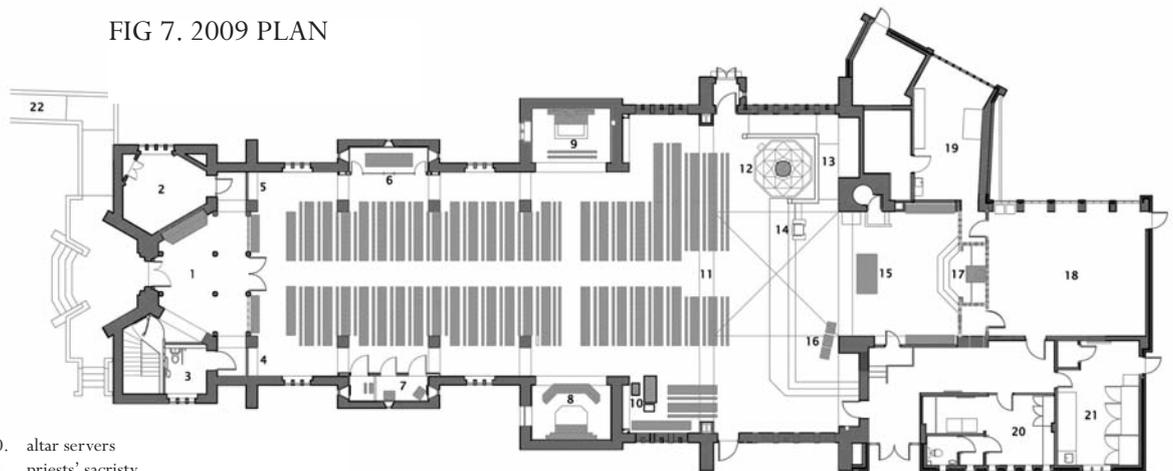


- KEY
1. narthex
 2. repository
 3. shrine
 4. shrine
 5. shrine
 6. Blunt memorial
 7. St. Anthony chapel
 8. organ
 9. ambo
 10. celebrant's chair
 11. altar
 12. font
 13. sliding folding screen
 14. reconciliation
 15. day chapel
 16. tabernacle
 17. working sacristy
 18. priests' sacristy

FIG 6. 1995 PLAN

- KEY
1. narthex
 2. repository
 3. accessible wc
 4. shrine
 5. shrine
 6. Blunt memorial
 7. confessional
 8. St. Anthony chapel
 9. Lady chapel
 10. organ
 11. new false arch
 12. font
 13. ramp
 14. ambo
 15. altar
 16. celebrant's chair
 17. tabernacle
 18. childrens' liturgy
 19. working sacristy

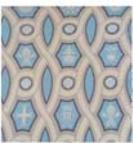
FIG 7. 2009 PLAN



20. altar servers
21. priests' sacristy
22. entrance ramp

making good the interior. Efforts to reduce the longstanding problem of sooty deposits associated with candles burning in a space with cold damp walls centred on improving the insulation and installing a new heating system. Insulated drylinings were applied to those external walls where the architecture permitted and also to the 1995 ceiling. Insulation of roof spaces was improved with care taken to remedy cold bridging via steel and concrete beams. However, approval from conservation bodies for application of breathable siloxane-based water repellent to

those porous external walls which could not be lined was not forthcoming. Primitive noisy convector heaters installed in the 1980s were replaced by underfloor heating in the new sanctuary. Elsewhere efficient Jaga low water content radiator-convectors fitted with virtually silent fan boosters were installed. These maintain a steady background temperature coupled with fast heating prior to church services. Slotted plywood casings allow heat rising from flow and return pipes to warm the surface of external walls.



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- 6> Floor plan prior to latest re-ordering
- 7> New floor plan
- 8> The new sanctuary
- 9> New recessed tabernacle
- 10> New setting for font



"The atmosphere of the church should be such as to hush the thoughtless voice"
(Sir Ninian Comper).

Unless a "sacred space" is suitable for both public and private worship it can hardly achieve a sacred atmosphere. Since Vatican II there has been so much emphasis on designing for the "fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations" advocated by *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, that there has been a tendency to overlook the importance of simultaneously creating an atmosphere which is both focused and tranquil. Great churches are invariably the kind of places into which Luke's publican might slip, and unobtrusively ask for God's mercy, whereas layouts which concentrate exclusively on "gathering round" tend, not

only to be distracting, but also to make the individual wishing to pray quietly feel conspicuous; even out of place. Thus, when re-ordering the Friary Church, the aim was to create an atmosphere into which the individual could be absorbed and where the focus evoked the transcendent.

The 2009 re-ordering

Figures 6 and 7 show how the floor plan was amended. The structure within the chancel arch was demolished and the door to the right of the arch moved to achieve a sanctuary spacious enough to allow dignified movement between altar, ambo and celebrant's chair (*Fig 8*). The existing altar and ambo were enhanced with additional stonework and the floor was finished with 9mm wood block panels to Goodhart-Rendel's design. ➤





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- 11> False arch masking line of steel portal frame
- 12> Lady altar recovered from St. Dunstan's, Woking
- 13> View of nave showing re-instated ceiling
- 14> Bespoke light fitting

The liturgical east end was re-instated on the line of the 1959 foundation and the former day chapel converted to a room for children's liturgy. Depth was added to the new partition so that the tabernacle could be recessed (Fig 9). The font was repositioned in a dedicated space surrounded by a dwarf wall which conceals ramped access to the sanctuary (Fig 10).

The false semi-circular arch introduced beneath the 1995 portal frame conceals intrusive steel bracing and aims to unify the transition between nave and crossing.

The hollow within provides a convenient route for the plethora of lighting and sound cables which need to cross the nave, whilst the back of the arch conveniently accommodates the many spot lights directed towards the sanctuary (Fig 11). Pews have been re-arranged so that all face the liturgical east with a walkway linking the two side chapels. Goodhart-Rendel incorporated a 19th century shrine dedicated to St. Anthony in one of these chapels. The opportunity was taken to provide a new home in its counterpart for a similarly proportioned lady altar recovered from a church in Woking which was about to be demolished (Fig 12). The confessional has been restored to its original more accessible location and the historic effigy of the founder of the monastery moved to the corresponding alcove on the opposite side of the nave.



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Lighting and decoration

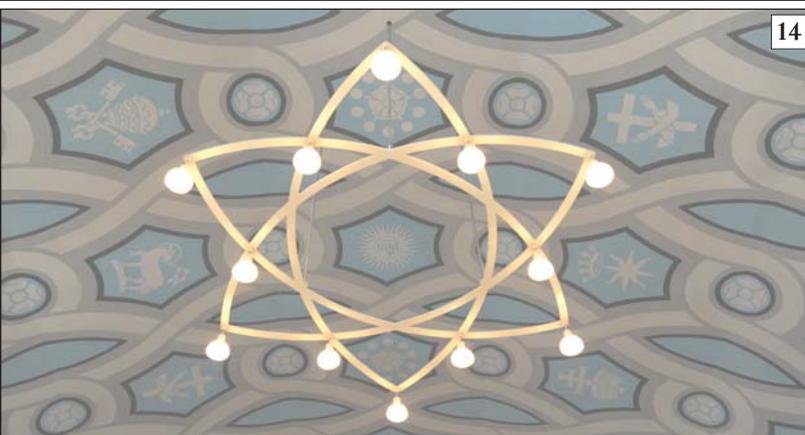
The 1959 decorated ceiling has been painstakingly cleaned to reveal a fresh blue, grey and white colour scheme. After applying textured paint to the surface of the new drylined portion of the ceiling, our specialist conservator re-created the original design,



This scheme was
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taking the opportunity to mark the date by incorporating the coats of arms of Pope Benedict and the current Bishop of Arundel and Brighton Kieran Conry (Fig 13). Old photographs were used to reproduce Goodhart-Rendel's trademark light fittings (Fig 14). These were fitted with dimmable halogen lamps in purpose-made glass shades, selected in preference to metal halide because they do not require hefty control gear. Our lighting consultant specified dimmable low voltage tracks in most other locations. Each lamp was carefully focussed to avoid unwanted shadows and give appropriate emphasis to individual features. Alternative pre-set "scenes" can be simply selected from a control panel in the sanctuary.

Access for the disabled

The new entrance ramp is well used by visitors with pushchairs and mobility scooters. A new accessible toilet has been discretely located within the narthex and the confessional has been provided with a wide door suitable for wheelchair users.

Conclusion

Parish priest Fr. Chris Bergin took a close interest in every stage of the work. He was unfailingly supportive and clear about what he wanted of the scheme. Thanks to him and to main contractors W.H.Catchpole, who were co-operative throughout and achieved the challenging goal of handing over the church in time for the 2009 Easter ceremonies, the project ran harmoniously. Parishioners are appreciative of the transformation of their church and are lighting candles with renewed enthusiasm. ■



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