



A little Moorish

The exuberant decorative scheme has been restored by Thomas Ford & Partners at a rare surviving Teulon church, St Mary's in Ealing

By Barrie Evans. Photographs by Paul Riddle/View

As the Victorian era was beginning, the design of Anglican churches typically reflected established order and sobriety, among other supposed virtues. So it must have been a daring step for the community of St Mary's church in Ealing to take its simple 1740 Georgian brick-and-tile 'preaching box' of a church (by J Horne) and ask SS Teulon for a complete makeover; a design that, particularly inside, can be described as festive, with more emphasis on the fiesta

than the religious festival. It aroused controversy then and since. At its dedication in 1866 Archbishop Tait described the alterations as the 'conversion of a Georgian monstrosity into the semblance of a Constantinopolitan basilica'. Pevsner branded the tower 'elephantine', the interior decor 'wayward' and the roof framing 'coarse', though he liked the pulpit. Others have thought it worth a Grade II listing.

At the time of its redesign, the church

community was under pressure to do something. Ealing had been changing from a village into a town, spurred by the coming of the railway in 1838. The recently built Christ Church was drawing worshippers away from St Mary's. It was time to rebrand. Outside, Teulon changed the whole shape and colour of St Mary's, extending the naves laterally at ground-floor level, introducing buttresses (presumably functionally unnecessary) in polychromatic brickwork,



Opposite: the view from the chancel with retained pews and nave altar.

Above: uncompromising decorative scheme, including the pulpit by Teulon

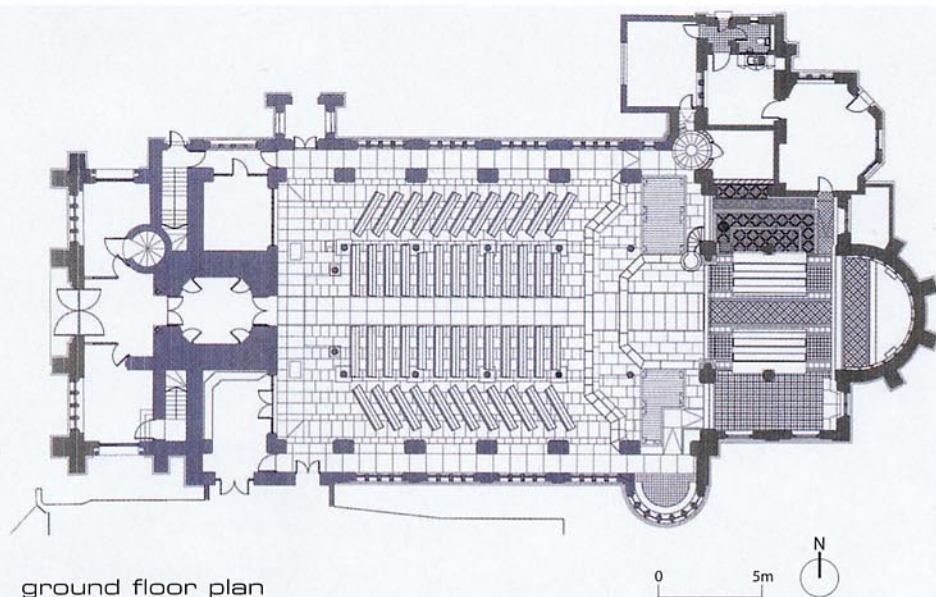
changing the stonework of openings and in some places reshaping the openings themselves, adding a large apsidal chancel to the east and a new extensive porch range to the west front, and extending the tower (the flanking stair turret was added later, in 1874). Only lack of funds prevented Teulon capping the tower with a spire.

Today the shock of the new has faded, as has the strong polychromy of the brickwork. And in a few cases horizontal black brick

bands turn out to have been painted stock bricks. This interesting, if somewhat awkward, conjunction of what was at the time old and new, was upstaged in the boldness and completeness of the transformation within. There, it is sometimes difficult to tell what belongs to what era, but Teulon can have left little more than the brick walls, and even then he headed the windows and structural openings within the body of the church with polychromatic brick arches. Rows of

new cast-iron columns separated nave from aisles, brightly painted in reds, greens and gold, supporting balconies that filled most of the aisles and the new roof structure of intersecting timber trusses. This in turn supported new, plain, blue-painted ceilings, with the addition of gold stars in the chancel. Walls were painted white with religious texts in gold lettering above the chancel and eastern aisle arches.

Various changes have been made over



ground floor plan



One of the many strong carvings throughout the church

the years, such as dark-staining the natural-finish pine of the pews and the roof structure. Most unsympathetically, during extensive refurbishment and redecoration in the mid-1950s, architect H S Goodhart-Rendel painted out Teulon's decorative scheme using blue and cream.

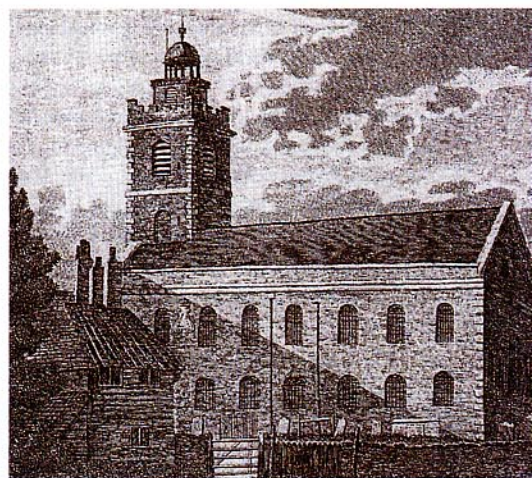
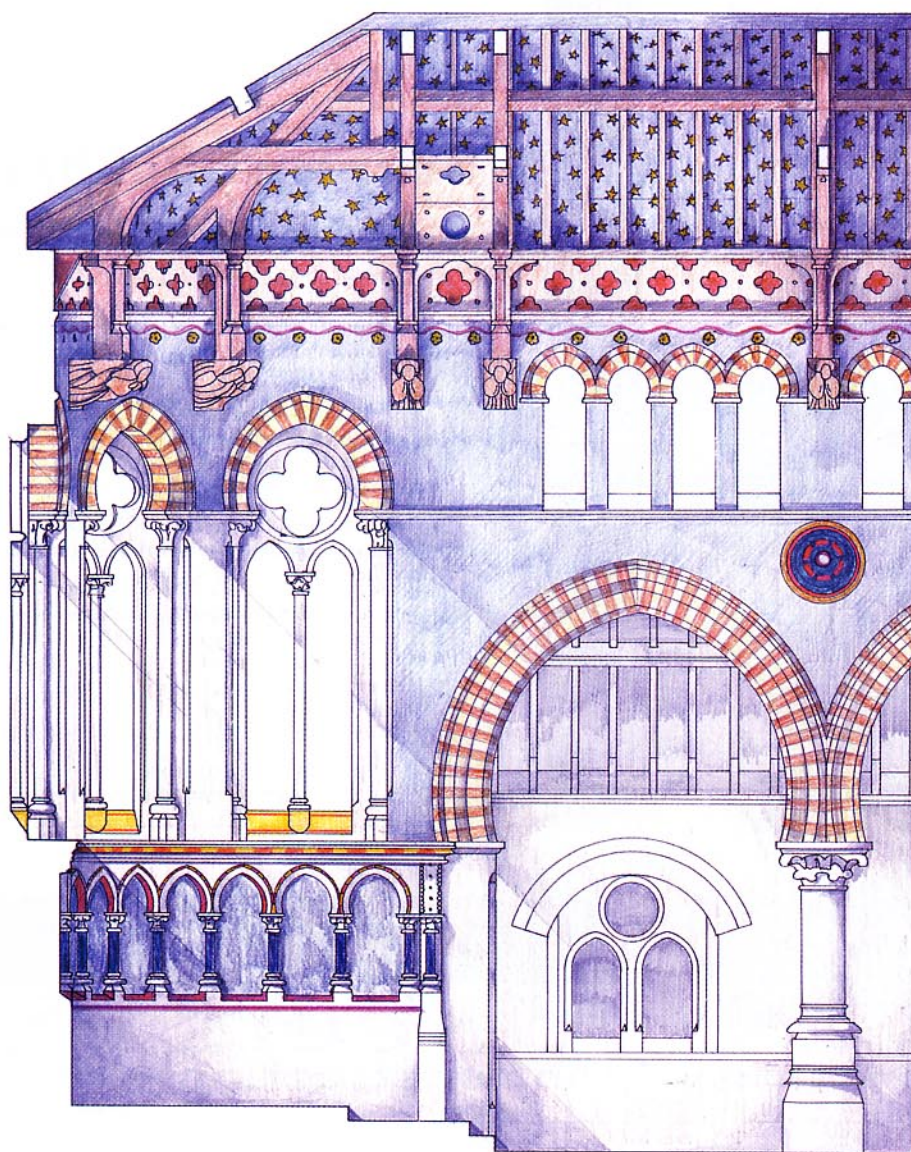
It was in 1984, when another round of building work became needed, that the church community focused on repair and restoration. First came urgent external repair, completed in 1988. For a decade, design development, fund-raising and discussions with various statutory and advisory bodies such as English Heritage, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the Ancient Monuments Society, the Victorian Society, the church and local authority continued. Architect Ron Sims moved on and in 1988 Thomas Ford & Partners was appointed. The works – which have cost about £1.3 million – got the go-ahead in 1999.

During this hiatus the need to reorder the church to suit both traditional and modern forms of worship and mission had reduced mainly to a focus on flexibility of seating. (Additional rooms already existed in the Polygon, an extension completed in 1978.) Some repair was needed, better accessibility, and a new office and crèche beneath the gallery either side of the tower entrance (within the existing volume). But the main focus of the works has been the restoration of Teulon's decorative scheme.

No records of the scheme have been found at Teulon's office. The only, imperfect, documentary evidence is a later watercolour of the interior. But as partner-in-charge Clive England says, it is the evidence of the building that is most informative and reliable. Accordingly, paint analysis has been used to establish the colours, while slight underlying paint ridges on the columns and the original pricking out of the plaster for the religious texts has made replication possible.

Most of the reproduction has copied the original. However, Teulon had been faithful to tradition in making his scheme lighter in the chancel than the nave – mainly through column and ceiling colouring. This hierarchy is not now required; indeed St Mary's has used an altar in front of the nave arch for some years (rather than the altar at the east end of the chancel).

For seating flexibility, the nave pews and pew platforms have been removed, leaving little of the original floor. This, too, has been removed and the nave and aisles re-floored in concrete, with underfloor heating, topped with stone slabs. Elegant loose benches by Luke Hughes replace pews. Choir stalls in the chancel have been retained, something the Victorian Society was particularly keen on. Two tiers of stone replacing a timber platform provide a set-



Left: apse with decorative scheme. Above: the most-credible image of the pre-Teulon church

CREDITS

START ON SITE

June 2002

REDEDICATION DATE

June 2003

CLIENT

The Parochial Church Council, St Mary's Church

ARCHITECT

Thomas Ford & Partners: Clive England, Philip Morphy

QUANTITY SURVEYOR, PLANNING SUPERVISOR

Cook & Butler Partnership

MECHANICAL ENGINEER

Martin Thomas Associates

LIGHTING CONSULTANT

Light Perceptions

ACOUSTIC CONSULTANT

Nick Whitaker Electroacoustics

SOUND INSTALLER

Audioplan

MAIN CONTRACTOR

Killby and Gayford

SUBCONTRACTORS AND SUPPLIERS

Electrical Wildbloods; mechanical Austin Heating; specialist decorators Garbot; monumental repairs Hirst Conservation; joinery Miller Shopfitting; stone flooring and repairs Del Stone; stained glass repairs Chapel Studios

ting for the nave altar and, on occasion, for musicians. The pipe organ has been replaced with a compact electronic one, clearing one of the chancel aisles.

Dark balcony-front pine has been stripped and sealed, but there were not enough funds to strip the balcony pews, nor the roof structure, which has been overpainted in a pine-like tone and weight of colour.

The brickwork has been cleaned and the walls repainted white, and this combines with the soft-blue ceilings, the lightened pine and stone floor, the gold lettering and stars to give a striking luminosity to the interior. Teulon had somewhat undermined this by largely retaining the size of the glazed areas (while increasing their apparent presence with the prominent brick window surrounds) and the muting effect of stained glass (mostly designed by Thomas Boddington). Today, artificial lighting comes to the rescue. As England notes, manufacturers have been more suc-

cessful at miniaturising sound systems than they have light fittings. But the lighting system is a very important complement to the restoration, at once providing adequate illumination for reading and emphasising the architecture. In the nave a sound and lighting control desk is currently programmed with four adjustable lighting scenes for different building uses.

England was impressed by contractor Killby and Gayford's interest in the job at interview, and its continued commitment shows in the execution.

Overall this is a successful restoration project. You do wonder, though, what makeover Teulon would have created if he had been doing the job today. You suspect that today's architect would have been more constrained, resulting in a more conventional building. It is ironic that the weight of heritage conservatism has led to the rebirth of a more fun building than we would be likely to build now. Risk is OK as long as it's dead.

Cost summary

Procurement was a single-stage competitive tender by invitation, using IFC 1998, fixed price. Areas: basement 48m², ground floor 684m², church balcony 216m² (gross floor area 948m²)

	Cost per m ² (£)	Percentage of total
Substructure	45,271	3.66
Superstructure	282,100	22.78
Internal finishes (inc £55,000 for repair of monuments and stained glass)	225,594	18.22
Fittings	51,563	4.16
Services	318,652	25.73
External works	48,817	3.94
Preliminaries	207,655	16.77
Contingencies and daywork provision	58,737	4.74
TOTAL	1,238,389	100

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