

St Mary's Church

Location: Barnes, London, UK

Client: St Mary's Parochial Church Council

Dates of Involvement: 1978 - 1984

Awards:

- RIBA Commendation
- King of Prussia Gold Medal Special Commendation
- Civic Trust Award
- First International Interior Design Award

“What is said and done there can be shared by everyone: 300 people can see without interruption and hear without amplification. And on occasions when the worshippers are fewer they can fill smaller spaces comfortably. Ted Cullinan and his colleagues have contrived a building that is both practical and numinous.” John Whale, Member of St Mary's Barnes Congregation



In 1978 a fire virtually destroyed St Mary's Church in Barnes. We created a design that reaffirmed the architectural and historical significance of the mediaeval original, but also provided **a place of worship for today, and for the future.**

Our design released the mediaeval church from the over-bearing Victorian nave and its chancel was restored as a Lady Chapel. This means people can enter the Church by its original door and pass through the familiar into the new.

A great coloured timber roof grows out of the mediaeval to provide the new, yet intimate, Church. 500 people are now able to gather around the altar on three sides, lit from the lantern above.

This award-winning design was developed through consultation with eleven official bodies and numerous, heated public meetings.

We did not allow the quality of the architecture to suffer during these discussions; rather they allowed us to improve it, to create a Church that has not only proved to be a practical place of worship, but also a joy to be in.

Much cherished, it is frequently used as a concert venue due to its remarkable acoustic properties.

Context

Adaptation and alteration is nothing new to St Mary's: the oldest parts date back to the 12th century, with new aisles added in 1786 and restoration in 1852 and 1905.

During the early evening of 8 June 1978, the whole church was gutted by fire. In the aftermath the parishioners decided to rebuild.

Over a four year period of detailed regular deliberation on every aspect of the design from foundations to font, a brief and counterpart design for a new church were evolved that would, in preference to a pastiche reinstatement of its predecessor, retain the historic core of the old while adding to it anew.

As a tangible link with the history of the church, key elements of the surviving fabric were meticulously restored and whole-heartedly incorporated into the composition. At the specific request of the congregation the 19th century east window was saved and re-positioned above the new altar.

From all the ridge trusses the red-clay tiled roofs fold down to the eaves to form a continuous canopy over old and new work.



At the east end of the old church, the north flank wall of the chancel is now rebuilt as an external wall and at the west end, the north side of the tower is now similarly revealed, so once again the mediaeval church can be perceived as a whole.

Creativity

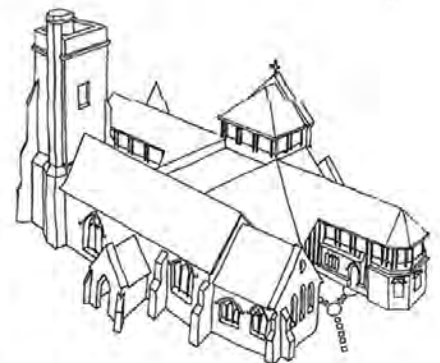
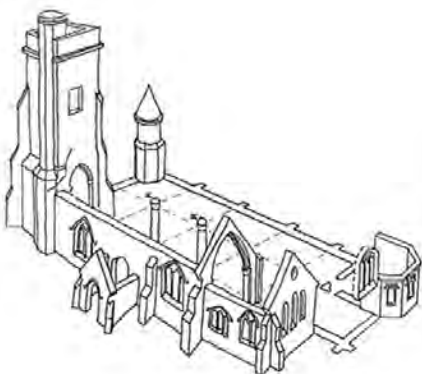
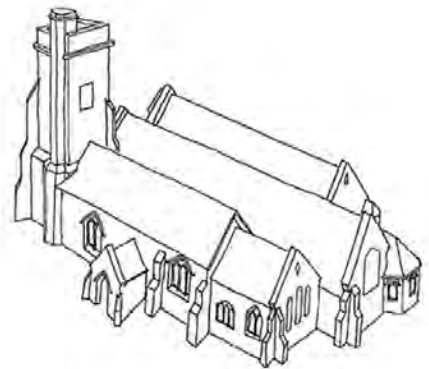
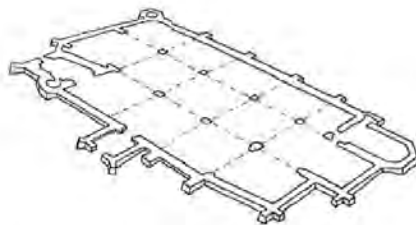
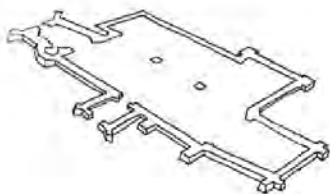
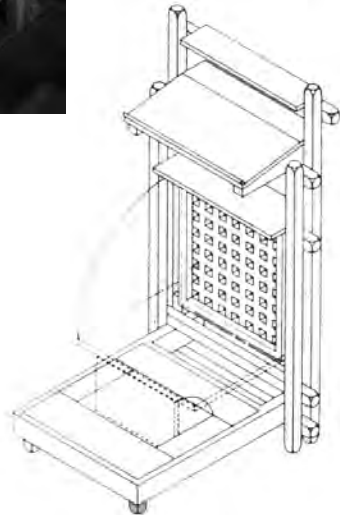
At St Mary's we transferred the emphasis from a formal, rather severe formation of congregation and clergy into an arrangement with a central though not dominating focus.

The roof, sweeping down like a warm and friendly canopy over the entire structure, is a reference point for all other elements that, together, give a feeling of being part of one continuous design process.

The stick-like structure of the canopy is reflected in the use of wood throughout the interior – from altar rail and lecterns to seating and free-standing furniture.

Beech screens, fronting the seating areas, have a dual role as flip-up benches for extra capacity. Wooden columns dissect the screens combining the beech of the furniture with metal candleholders, reflecting the material and design influence of the canopy.

In 1985, St Mary's Barnes was the first winner of the International Interior Design Award.



Above: St Mary's through the ages