St Nicholas Church, Stevenage
Assessment of Heritage Significance

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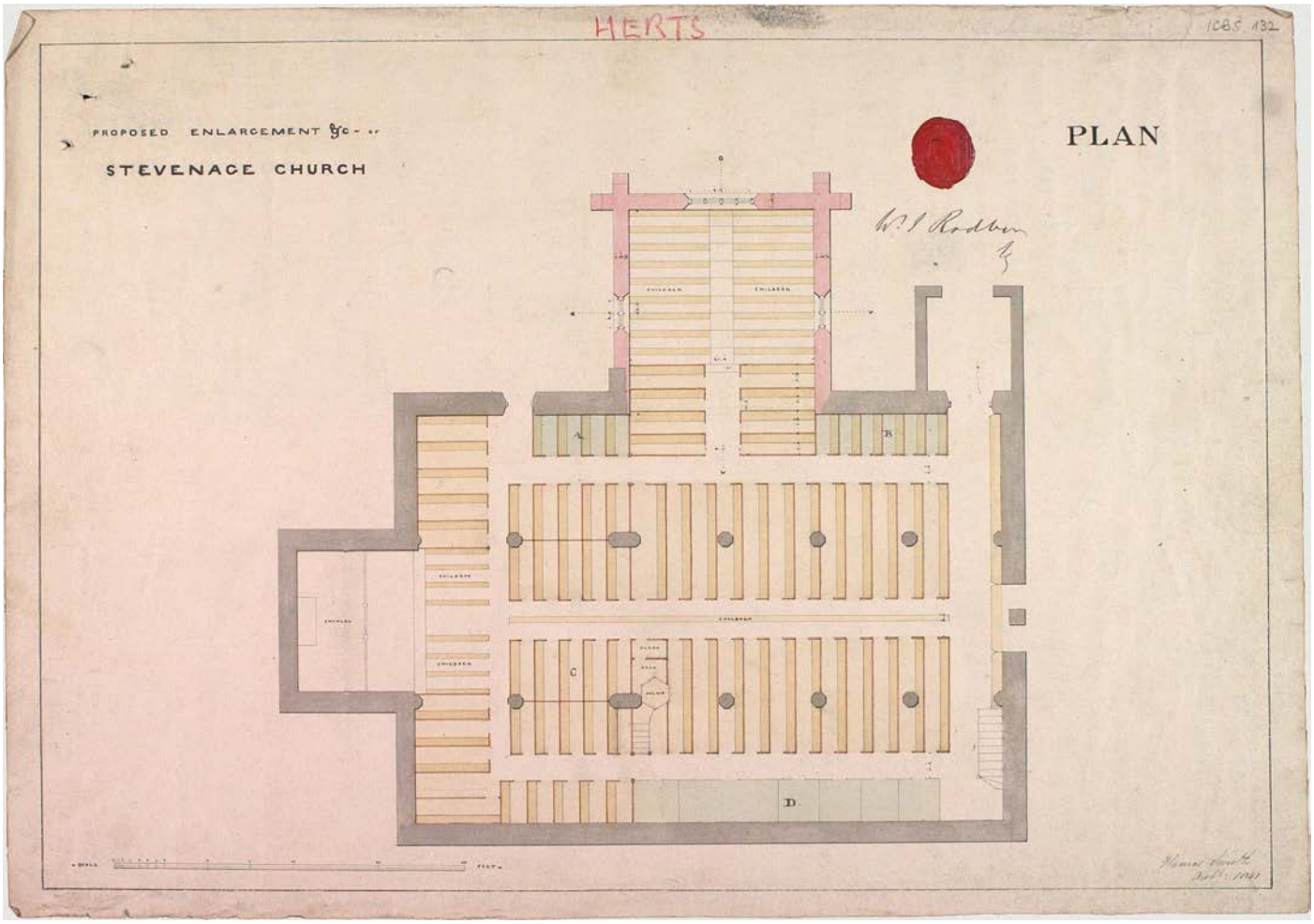
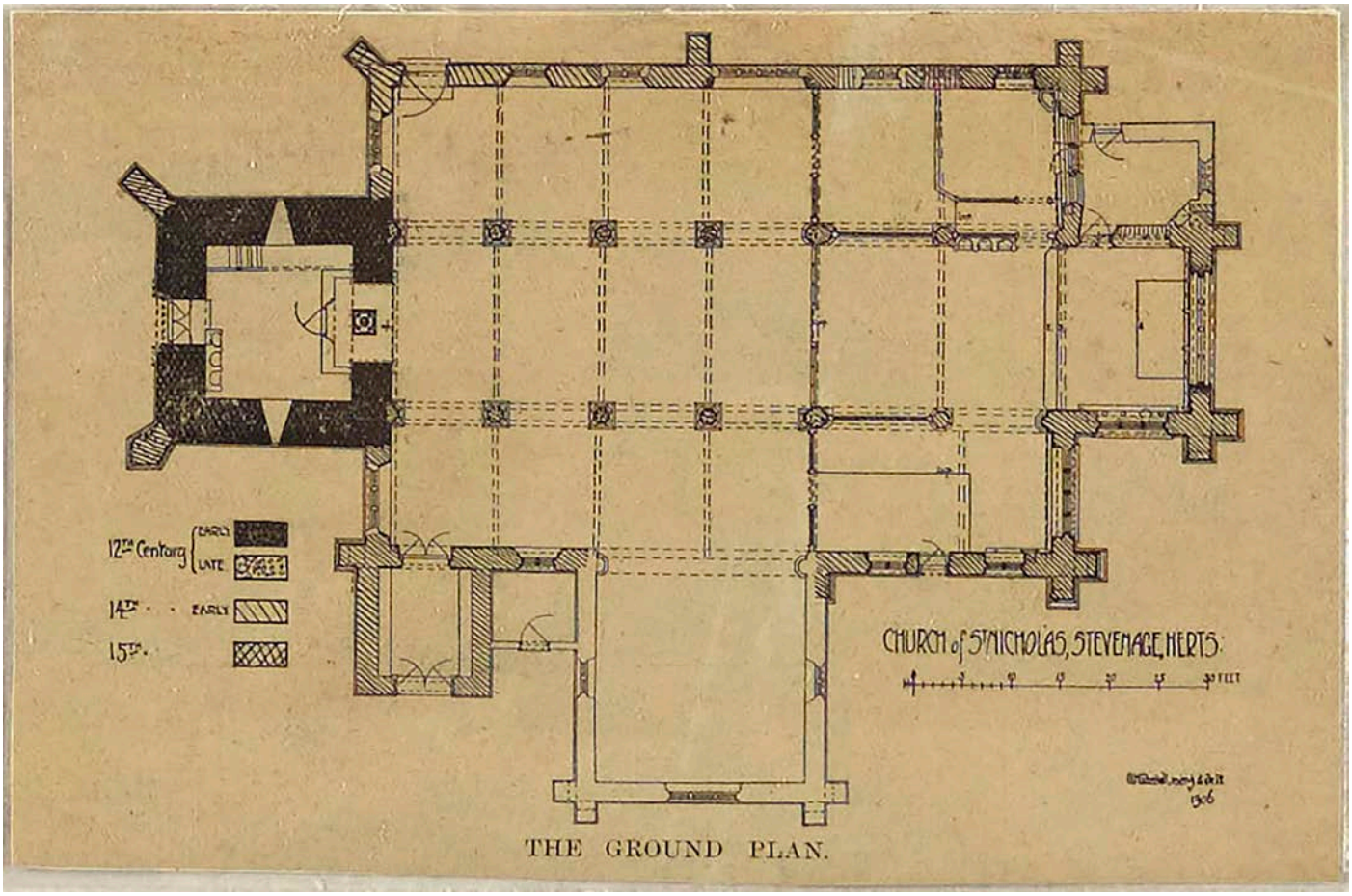


Above: Proposed plan for 1841 restoration showing the position of the medieval screens; the chancel is on the left and the new transept at the top, while the tower is not depicted. (ICBS File 2724 by kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of London)

Below: Plan of the church used in Mullard (1906) showing locations of screens and choirstalls at that time. (HALS 37417)



1 THE SITE

St Nicholas, Rectory Lane, Stevenage, Hertfordshire

1.1 LOCATION

National Grid Reference: TL 24074 26207

District:	Stevenage Borough Council
District Type:	District Authority
Parish:	Stevenage, St Nicholas
Diocese:	St Albans

The setting of St Nicholas is immediately striking for feeling so rural; it is set apart from what is now perceived as the historic core of Stevenage around the Great North Road, and is little impacted by the development of new neighbourhoods from the late 1940s onwards when Stevenage expanded to become one of the satellite, overspill towns of London. Both Tompkins (1902) and others make reference to a fire destroying the Saxon town near the church, which is not to be confused with a later fire in 1807 that affected what is today known as the Old Town. The later medieval town centred on a market established in 1281 where the roads to Hitchin and Baldock diverged.

The manor of Stevenage was granted to Westminster Abbey in 1062 and remained in its ownership until the Dissolution. It would seem that whenever the fire occurred that destroyed the Saxon town, the Abbey was not anxious to rebuild it. In 1554 the manor passed to the Bishops of London, in whose ownership it remained, apart from the years of the Commonwealth, until 1868. This in part explains why the Bishop of London was invited to give a sermon on the completion of the 1841 enlargement of the church, although Revd George Blomfield was also the Bishop's brother.

1.2 STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

1.2.1 Listed Building

The church was listed Grade I in 1948. It forms a group with 'Moonhill' and 'Dominic Cottage', adjacent buildings on the south side that are both listed Grade II.

1.2.2 Conservation Area

There are five conservation areas within Stevenage. St Nicholas' Church is located in the St Nicholas/ Rectory Lane Conservation Area, which was first designated in July 1982. The boundary was amended in 1984. All the conservation areas were appraised in 2005. A St Nicholas/Rectory Lane Conservation Area Management Plan Supplementary Planning Document was adopted in July 2012.

1.2.3 Ecclesiastical exemption

The church and churchyard benefit from Ecclesiastical Exemption as set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (England) Order 2010 (SI 2010 No 1176). External development or demolition would require listed building consent. Any modifications to the fabric of the church or the churchyard must be granted a faculty from the Diocesan Chancellor. In reaching a judgement the Chancellor will take into account comments from the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC), Historic England, relevant amenity societies and the Church Buildings Council (CBC).

Above: Buckler's view dated 1831 (Church of England Record Centre)

Below left: west elevation of tower arch with re-located Nicholson doors. Below right: capital on western tower arch

Capital supporting arch over west door into the tower

Postcard pre-dating Nicholson's restoration (Church of England Record Centre)

2 UNDERSTANDING THE BUILDING

As it exists today, the church consists of an aisled nave with a chancel flanked by chapels to north and south. The chancel projects one bay further east than the chapels. At the west end stands a tower crowned by a lead spire. To the south the church has been extended with a nineteenth-century transept and in the early twentieth-century by a south aisle. The walls of the church are largely constructed of flint rubble with ashlar used for details such as window tracery, quoins, and buttresses. Brick is used for the building of the south transept (with a cement render) and as an infill material, particularly on the exterior of the north aisle. With the exception of one blocked window in the north aisle, all of the window tracery appears to be the work of nineteenth-century and later restorers and all buttresses have been substantially re-made.

Internally the nave arcade consists of four bays with shallow pointed arches standing on octagonal columns with a small clerestory of two-light openings. There is no chancel arch, the chancel and its flanking chapels being differentiated by means of wooden screens. The two-bay arcades between the chancel and the chapels are similar but not identical. At the west end of the nave a round-headed arch opens into the base of the tower.

South of the south nave aisles an in-filled arcade hides the presence of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century extensions. These are now used as a large meeting room, kitchen and WC facilities.

Internally the masonry is almost entirely painted white. Where areas have been left unpainted to reveal the extensive medieval graffiti, it is apparent that the columns of the nave are made of chalk.

2.1 MEDIEVAL CHURCH

i) Romanesque

The oldest part of the existing structure is the west tower. This would originally have been constructed without buttresses. There are two small Romanesque style windows on each of the north and south sides, though only the lower one on the north side has the appearance of retaining any original masonry. The west door has had a substantial part of its round-headed arch renewed but it retains its original twelfth century capitals. Internally the tower arch springs from simple impost blocks on the east (church) side but is decorated with a roll moulding and shafts with mask-like capitals on the west (tower) side.

ii) Gothic

The octagonal columns of the nave arcade stand on bases consisting of two simple rolls above a large square plinth, chamfered in two steps. These are widely recognised as dating from the thirteenth century.

The National Heritage List states that "Aisles widened and C12 chancel rebuilt circa 1330", although what evidence this is based upon is unclear. The south aisle wall is now entirely lost, subsumed in later alterations. Photographs pre-dating Nicholson's aisle in the Church of England Record Centre and Russell's 1906 plan show two-light windows in this aisle, though these could be Victorian. Buckler's 1831 view from the south-east seems to show that at least one of the aisle widows was a lancet which would be consistent with the nave columns. The north aisle has several Victorian two-light windows and one blocked medieval survival, probably not in its original location. If the north aisle and north east chapel are one continuous build, then the buttresses are difficult to explain. At the west end the buttress is diagonally set whilst at the east end are a pair of angle buttresses. Between the two stands a single buttress that

View across nave towards north aisle

does not seem to relate to any internal feature. The arches of the arcade are relatively shallow, moulded in three orders, the inner one with a hollow chamfered profile. The clerestory above consists of two cinquefoil-cusped lights (where they survive) within a depressed arch with a steeply raking cill. The arcade arches, capitals and the clerestory windows are part of an extensive fifteenth-century remodelling of the church (see below).

The three-bay chancel is flanked north and south by two-bay chapels. There is evidence of an early window (Romanesque or early Gothic) on the north side between the vestry door and the eastern arch into the chapel, indicating that the chancel was once aisleless, at least on the north side. There is no chancel arch or arches from the nave aisles into the chapels. The chapels open into the chancel through an arcade. On the south side the arches are slightly lower than on the north. The responds are semicircular in plan, but the intervening column is octagonal. The arches are moulded in two orders with a simply chamfered profile. The label stops are carved anachronistically in the form of heads, some with Tudor ruffs. On the north side the responds are semi-octagonal. The arches have a profile of two chamfered orders but here the chamfer terminates in a scroll-like decoration above the capital. All of this suggests that the north chapel is later than that on the south. The style of the surviving window tracery and the piscinas in both chapels would suggest that the chapels were modified and/or built around the middle of the fourteenth century.

The eastern bay of the chancel is occupied by the altar. The east window has Perpendicular style tracery. This is entirely a modern interpretation. Buckler's image of the church in 1831 shows an Italianate window in this location. It also shows that whilst the enclosing arch of the south chapel east window is in place, the tracery is lost. The 1841 restoration claims to have rediscovered the windows flanking the altar and the sedilia and piscina though to what extent we can rely upon the design is very much open to question. The window has a segmental head internally and a square head externally. If the form of this sedilia and piscina can be relied upon, then these are in an identical style to the piscinas in the flanking chapels.

Above the arcades the walls of the chancel rise to the same height as the nave. There is now no clerestory in the chancel but the outline of blocked clerestory windows can be detected in the plaster, at least in the first chancel bay.

Summary: development of the medieval church

- The Romanesque west tower dates to the early twelfth century.
- The nave columns and bases date to the thirteenth century. It is possible that at least part of the north aisle wall and the former south aisle wall are of a similar date.
- On the evidence of the surviving jamb of a blocked window the chancel must have been as long as the existing chancel by the early gothic period, and that no chapel stood on the north side at this time.
- The chapel on the south side appears to predate that on the north. The arcade on the north side does not match and must be later.
- Stylistic details such as the piscinas suggest that substantial modifications took place after the middle of the fourteenth century (see screens below).
- In the middle of the fifteenth century the church was substantially modified. This included:
  1. the introduction of a number of large Perpendicular windows at the east end of the chancel and chapels, and in the bay west of the screens in the nave aisles;
  2. the arches of the nave arcades;
  3. the clerestory, and roof (possibly also the ceiling over the chancel removed by Nicholson);
  4. the second series of screens (see below); and
  5. the font cover.

Chancel screen viewed from the west

Chancel screen viewed from the east

iii) Screens and other timber furnishings

It is important to see the screens alongside developments in the architecture of the building, not simply as objects in their own right.

There are currently six medieval timber screens in the church and part of another from the church in the Stevenage Museum. Charles Tracy in his assessment of the historic timber furnishings assigned a date for the chancel screen as c.1350-75 on stylistic evidence

> *One might have expected the mid-14th-century rood-screen to have been accompanied by lateral choir-aisle screens ensuite, although there is, of course, no evidence for any such today. It is likely that they were replaced, if they ever existed, by the identified pair of early-15th-century screens, illustrated in two drawings in the Oldfield collection at the Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Hertford, and the surviving screen on the south side still extant today. The early-15th-century ancillary screens must have been part of a radical re-ordering some fifty years later than the 14th-century rood-screen. (pp.8-9)*

Tracy appears not to have recognised that the chancel screen, the two western parclose screens and the fragment of screen in the museum all form part of one set and that the two eastern parclose screens and the screen now at the entrance to the south chapel form part of a second set of screens that are contemporary with the mid-fifteenth century modifications to the church.

Chancel screen

The upper part of the chancel screen is known to have been retrieved from the parish's tithe barn by the Rector, G.B. Blomfield, prior to the sale and demolition of the barn in 1840. It was then installed as a reredos in the chancel as part of the 1841 restoration. It can be seen in this location in a number of late nineteenth-century photographs. The Victoria County History (1912) records that the lower part of the chancel screen stands at the entrance to the chancel. Indeed a screen in this location seems to be shown in plans of the church dated 1841 and 1906. Cussans 1870-71 says "The lower part only of the chancel screen remains." In 1910 the RCHM(E) for Hertfordshire says that, "Against the east wall behind the altar upper part of a traceried wood screen now painted: fifteenth century; the lower part is the entrance to the chancel." In 1900 the well established firm of Ketts in Cambridge presented an estimate for the cost of restoring the screen which it appears was not taken up. Nicholson says in 1913, "There are also six fine turn-up stalls and portions of the carved desk fronts are worked up into the present chancel screen."

The screen as we see it today is as it was reconstructed by Nicholson with a modern dado. Nicholson incorporated medieval tracery heads into a pair of desk fronts now in the chancel (see below). If these are the remains of what earlier writers had interpreted as the lower part of the screen, then it is difficult given their dimensions and style, to see how they would be compatible with the surviving upper part of the screen. If the base of the screen did indeed survive then why would Nicholson not have incorporated it into his reconstruction of the chancel screen?

The screen is divided into four lights either side of a central doorway. The design is more elaborate but clearly of the same type as the two adjacent parclose screens. Each light has an ogee arch which is trefoil cusped and sub-cusped. Along the upper edge of these arches run crockets with a finial at the apex. Flanking the finial are two traceried two-light window designs. The tracery is in the form of a perpendicular reticulation, the 'windows' being set within a rectangular frame. Between the heads of each light a pinnacle is suspended. All of these are modern, so this aspect of the design cannot be relied upon.

The doorway is in the form of a depressed four-centred arch with an ogee label. Above the arch the

Fragment of medieval screen held in Stevenage Museum

Above: Watercolour in Oldfield Collection depicting so-called south screen (HALS DE/Of/6)

Below: chancel and western parclose screens from the east

Detail of tracery on western parclose screen on south side of chancel

spandrels are filled with more window designs with perpendicular reticulated tracery but on a slightly larger scale and with more elaborate cusping.

A moulded cornice runs across the top of the entire screen, decorated on the nave side with foliate bosses and on the chancel side with lead stars. The cornice is intact and this would seem to indicate that the chancel screen fits snugly into its current location and is thus original to the church. It is likely that the screen originally supported a rood loft though no obvious access to this has survived.

Museum fragment

A fragment of screen from the church is preserved in Stevenage Museum. This is clearly the head of an entrance arch through a screen. The design is identical to one of the screens illustrated by Oldfield c1800 and labelled as the screen across the entrance to the south chapel. It is not clear whether Oldfield has simply become confused about his north and south, or if the screens for the north and south chapels were swapped some time in the nineteenth century. Certainly this screen is at the entrance to the north chapel in late nineteenth century photographs.

The design of this arch, with the perpendicular reticulated tracery is almost identical to the head of the doorway on the chancel screen. The Oldfield watercolour shows that this screen is a simplified version of the chancel screen, there are four lights on either side

of the doorway, each with a cusped arch and reticulated tracery designs in the spandrels.

West chancel parclose screens

The chancel is divided from its flanking chapels by two arches north and south. The screens filling these arches are of two different designs. The design used for the parclose screens in the two western arches is essentially the same as the chancel screen and the museum screen. The screens are divided into five bays. As usual there is openwork tracery in the upper part. The dado section is relatively plain. The arches and tracery are very similar to those used for the entrance arches in the chancel and museum screens, with the addition of cinquefoil cusping. Cusping would have been omitted from the entrance arches as they would have created a risk of head injury from the lowered head height and the sharp points.

The dado of these flanking screens has been raised and a raked ledge for books attached on the chapel sides. These alterations probably date from the eighteenth century when the screens appear to have been used to form private 'box' pews. These screens, unlike the chancel and museum screen, are stained with a dark brown paint which serves to disguise any anomalous repairs. The screens do not appear to fit snugly into their current location with the gap between the ends of the screen and the column and respond of the arch being crudely filled with timber. This infilling does not indicate that the screens were not designed for their current location. Nicholas Cholwell's Memorandum Book records that in 1841 "The old screens were also lowered two feet to the present, and apparently original position." Nicholson subsequently lowered the floor again in his restoration in 1913. If one imagines the screens nearly three feet higher then the cornice would encounter the curve of the arch and indeed one can see that the screens were first adjusted to accommodate the arch and then patched when subsequently lowered.

Summary: chancel and related screens

The upper parts of the chancel screen, the fragment of the museum screen and the two western parclose screens all form part of the same suite of screens. The perpendicular tracery means that the middle of the fourteenth century is the earliest possible date. However this tracery form can be found in architecture over a long period of time. The foliage forms are consistent with a date in the second half of the fourteenth century. The tower stairs have been dated on the evidence of dendrochronology to between 1360 and 1382. This coincides neatly with Tracy's dating of the chancel screen to c1350-75 on stylistic grounds. It is tempting to assign a similar date to this first set of screens as part of an extensive redevelopment of the church.

South chapel screen

South chapel screen

The screen that stands across the west end of the south chapel has a central doorway with tracery in the head and is flanked on either side with parclose screening which is simply boarded in the dado section and has four lights above. There are a number of peculiarities about this screen. It is illustrated in 1800 by Oldfield and labelled as the north chapel screen. Second, it is back to front. Standing in the south aisle looking into the chapel we are looking at the back of the screen. The front of the screen is a little more elaborate with buttresses marking the doorway and each end of the screen. The more elaborate face, as with the chancel screen, should face out. The screen on either side of the opening is rebated to receive a dado height door, now lost. Finally, the beam forming the cornice is not original and has been cut immediately above the opening.

The openwork tracery forming the head of the opening appears not to be an original part of this screen. The tracery over the doorway consists of a pointed arch, cinquefoil cusped and trefoil sub-cusped. The spandrels over the arch are filled with quatrefoil cusped circles. All of these features are entirely absent from the screens on either side. A close examination of the springing of this arch shows that small sections of wood have been inserted, forming the transition from the vertical door jamb to the curve of the arch. Furthermore, the points of the cusps have been removed, presumably because they would have represented a head hazard to anyone passing through the doorway. Nevertheless, the manner in which the cusps are carved is very close to the cusping on the eastern parclose screens. It may be that although this arch is not in its original location, it did originally form some part of the furnishings created at this date (see below).

The upper parts of the screens on either side of the doorway are each divided into four cinquefoil cusped ogee lights. The spandrels, between the extrados of the arch and the square enclosing frame, are filled

East face of south chapel screen, displaying buttresses that would normally face the body of the church

Detail of tracery on south chapel screen

St Mary's Church, Ewelme, Oxfordshire: tracery on parclose screen

with perpendicular panel tracery. Tracy has convincingly compared this tracery to the south elevation of the upper storey of the watching chamber at St Albans Cathedral. In an article in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* he dates the majority of the watching chamber to 1370 and the south face to 1420 following a fire. He thus dates this screen to 1420 also. However, whilst his dating of the majority of the watching chamber to 1370 is made by comparing its style to firmly dated monuments, his dating of the south face is general and impressionistic. He says,

> *The style of the bressumer carving on the south side is later than that on the north. It is of inferior quality and,* ***unequivocally, of an early fifteenth-century date****. The St Alban martyrdom scene on the south side is a close copy of the one on the north side, betraying a variation only in competence.*
>
> *The addition of a new loft, complete with floor and bressumer below, on the south side* ***in about 1420*** *was a radical renovation.* ***[Emphasis added]*** *(Tracy 1992, p.108.)*

A comparison between the parclose screens at Stevenage and the screens at St Mary, Ewelme in Oxfordshire is very persuasive. The arch-form and tracery is almost an exact match. Ewelme can be dated with a fair degree of precision to between 1437 and 1450. A similar date for the Stevenage screens would therefore seem appropriate.

East chancel parclose screens

The eastern pair of parclose screens form a set with the screen at the entrance to the south chancel chapel. The tracery is essentially the same, though there are four tracery lights instead of six, and as the openings are wider the design is somewhat stretched or extended. The dado is treated in exactly the same way with vertical boarding. Each of these parclose screens has a doorway with a depressed four-centred arch with carved foliage in the spandrels. (A very similar door in stone can be seen at Ewelme leading from the chancel to the vestry.) In this arrangement the doorways would have opened from the chancel directly into the side of the chapel altars. This seems a little indecorous. The IHBC plan drawn up for the 1841 restoration (see p.4) seems to show the screens

Detail of desk frontal

Tracery on Lady Chapel chair above, with Green Man misericord below

the other way around, with the doors at the west end of the bay.

Desk frontals

When Nicholson restored the chancel he incorporated six tracery heads into desk frontals for the six choir stalls. This tracery consists of a four-centred arch, trefoil cusped and sub-cusped. The spandrels between the arch and the frame are filled with stylised foliage. This foliage is an exact match for the foliage in the spandrels over the doors in the eastern parclose screens and the cusped arches are very close to the arch now at the west entrance to the south chapel.

Lady Chapel chair with tracery

As Charles Tracy describes,

> *The church possesses another tracery-head, incorporated into a handsome 19th-century arm chair. It is more stylised than those on the choir-stall desk-fronts and is possibly early 16th century. (Tracy 2013, p.17)*

This tracery is clearly an attempt by a later woodworker to match the style of the six existing tracery heads now incorporated into Nicholson's desk fronts. The reason why this was necessary is unclear. As with the desk fronts the design consists of a four-centred arch, trefoil cusped and sub-cusped, though here the arch has straight sides. Again, as with the desk fronts the spandrels are filled with stylised foliage, but here carved in a very different and distinctive manner. The foliage appears to be intended to represent a vine with a bunch of grapes and stylised leaves. The vine has been pruned so that at each point where the branch forks one of the two stems has been cut. The significance of this will become apparent below.

Choir stalls

On the east side of the chancel screen stand six stalls with misericord seats, in two sets of three. The standards (the vertical divisions) are finely if not elaborately carved. Below the level of the seats are semi-octagonal columns. The elbow rests are usually in the form of simplified foliage(?) whilst one has crocodile-like jaws. In comparison the capping rail seems very crude, and may be a later addition.

Of the misericords one is uncarved, four are contemporary with the stalls and one, carved with an image of a Green Man, is described by Tracy as "…an interloper of the end of the fifteenth century,…". Of the four contemporaneous misericords, one is carved with an angel with raised hands and two depict oak trees and one a vine. There is little unanimity as to the date of these stalls. Tracy and Druce (1938) assign them to the early fourteenth century, Pevsner says fifteenth-century.

There is some debate as to whether these are original to the church. There would normally be no need for choir stalls in a parochial setting. Where they do exist, they are usually associated with a collegiate foundation or aspirations to collegiate status. Could

Above: i) three choirstalls, ii) spandrel on desk frontal compared with iii) spandrel on parclose screen

Below: fragments of medieval stained glass

they be associated with the Confraternity of the Holy Trinity mentioned in a will of 1446? There is ample evidence that stalls were sometimes acquired for parish churches from dissolved monasteries. George C Druce has suggested that these may have originated at Wymondley Priory, a house of Augustinian Canons dissolved in 1537. Tracy regards this as "… a somewhat flattering provenance for this furniture…".

What we can say with certainty is that they were in the church in 1804 when they are recorded by Oldfield. This excludes the possibility that they were introduced by a nineteenth-century antiquarian or collector. But we can go further than that. What nobody seems to have noticed is that the tracery panel incorporated in the priest's chair and the "interloper" misericord carved with the image of the Green Man, are carved by the same sculptor. Both use the pruned vine stem convention, where at each bifurcation one of the two stems is pruned. This demonstrates that they were both carved for St Nicholas (as the seat back is a copy of the desk frontals). There are thus two possibilities depending on the date of the carving. Either these two carvings were executed after the stalls were brought into the church at the dissolution of the monasteries, or they were in the church from the fourteenth century and repaired and added to in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries. This means they have been in the church since at least the middle of the sixteenth century.

Font cover

The font cover as restored by Nicholson incorporates six crocketed arrises of a spire-like structure. These undoubtedly originally formed the top of a late medieval towering font cover. A comparison with Ewelme is again instructive. John Goodall, writing of the Ewelme font cover says,

> *The crocketing of the original radiating boards on the upper stage of the font follows a very unusual pattern which suggests an East Anglian provenance for the work. In this stage the crockets are conventionally cut as curling leaves with the exception of the uppermost - which is pressed flat against the finial…. (Goodall, 2001, p.69.)*

This is exactly what we have at Stevenage.

iv) Other fixtures and fittings

Font

The thirteenth-century font stands in the westernmost bay of the nave before the tower arch. It consists of a

columnar stem with four attached shafts supporting a large square 'bowl'.

Stained glass

What medieval stained glass survives is now in the south window of the Trinity Chapel. This consists of some fragments of foliage and a fifteenth-century monk in a blue habit praying before an open book with the edges of the pages picked out in silver stain. In 1804 Oldfield recorded two shields bearing pre-1340 royal arms. These appear to have been lost.

Tower stairs

In the tower a stair with solid oak treads on sloping bearers has recently been tree-ring dated to between 1360 and 1382.

Monuments

In the Lady Chapel lies the damaged effigy of a noble woman dating to c1300 (above). This high quality piece of sculpture is deeply undercut and the figures beside her head depict a monk and the other a secular figure supporting her elbows, perhaps family members(?). In the chancel, north of the altar is preserved the brass of Stephen Hellard, rector 1472–1506 wearing a cope, his hands clasped in prayer (right). At the entrance to the Lady Chapel is preserved a matrix that once held the brass of a couple with their children as weepers and four heraldic shields (mid C15) and at the entrance to the chancel a black marble slab with inscribed cross (C13?).

Summary: later screens and other medieval furnishings

A second set of wooden furnishings consists of: the west screen into the south chapel; the two eastern parclose screens, the tracery on the desk frontal and the remains of the medieval font cover. These can be dated to c1440 by very close comparison to similar furnishings at Ewelme in Oxfordshire which can be dated with precision by documentary evidence. This suggests that the church underwent another extensive refurbishment in the middle of the fifteenth century that included not only this woodwork but the nave arcade, a number of large traceried windows, the clerestory windows and roof.

There is no evidence to prove that the stalls were, or were not, created for the church. We can say that they were there from the mid-sixteenth century at the latest.

Undated sketch of church before 1841 restoration (HALS DE/X837/1/58)

v) Conclusions

- The Romanesque tower is the earliest fabric evident in the building.
- In the thirteenth century the church consisted of an aisled nave and a chancel that must have been as long as the present chancel (or very nearly so). There may have been a chapel on the south side of the chancel, but not on the north (see evidence of window on north side).
- In the third quarter of the fourteenth century the church underwent a substantial rebuilding program. This included the tower stairs, the substantial remodelling or building of the chapels flanking the chancel (see window tracery, piscinas and image niche) and the sanctuary (see double piscina and sedilia). This work probably included the first set of screens (Chancel screen, western parclose screens and the screen now in the Stevenage Museum)
- The choir stalls probably date to the fourteenth century, though it is not certain whether they were created for the church or imported at the Dissolution of the Monasteries.
- In the middle of the fifteenth century the church underwent a scheme of very extensive modifications. This included: the arches of the nave arcade, the clerestory, the insertion of large windows (e.g. those immediately west of the screens), the roof, font cover, and the second set of screens (the present south chapel screen and two eastern parclose screens) and the tracery preserved in the desk frontals.
- In the sixteenth century the choir stalls were modified (Green Man misericord, and top rail added) and the tracery now forming part of the priest's chair was carved. This may have been carried out following the acquisition of the stalls in an imperfect state following the Dissolution.

2.2 Nineteenth century restorations

i) 1841 restoration

Impressions of the pre-1840 church can be gained from sketches and watercolours in the Hertfordshire County Record Office (HALS): an early 19th-century sketch by a member of the Bourne family (see above), an 1804 watercolour in the Oldfield Collection and two 1831 watercolours by Buckler. These show a building consisting of nave, north and south aisle, chancel and chancel chapels, with western tower and south porch. The entire building is battlemented in the Bourne sketch (artistic licence or a pointer to work on the exterior funded by Captain Jellicoe Turner in 1836?), but in the 1804 and 1831 watercolours the eastern bay of the nave and the chancel are not battlemented. The chancel is lit by one large round-arched window at the east end, with mullions and transom. The east end of the south aisle appears to have a similar window with mullions and transom beneath a Perpendicular label, and the south aisle windows are also round arched beneath labels. The windows appear to be plain-glazed. The appearance of the exterior suggests that the interior was furnished according to 18th-century tastes, with wainscoting on the walls (White and Thorne 1934) and high boxed pews. A shallow west end gallery existed and offered free seating; it is not clear whether this is the same or separate from a gallery installed in 1792 to accommodate 'fiddlers and flautists'. Was the first organ, a barrel and finger type of 1836, located in the gallery too? Sources mention it being in the north aisle; the 1841 floor plan shows no marked space for the organ, although it might have been located in the aisle behind a nave column immediately opposite the transept.

In 1840 Revd Blomfield applied to the Incorporated Church Building Society (ICBS File 2724) for a grant to enlarge the church to gain additional free seating. This was to be achieved by breaking through the south wall to add a 'transept', in which the seating all

The piscinas and sedilia uncovered in the 1841 restoration

faced north towards the pulpit. There are two plans in Lambeth Palace Library: a pen and ink drawing by the churchwardens shows the disposition of the proposed seating which was considered inadequate by ICBS because the society was concerned that the foundations for the transept were not substantial enough. An architect drew up the second plan to address the criticism, thereby giving greater clarity to the structure of the entire building. Both plans show all seats (apart from the choir) focused on the pulpit, reading desk and clerk's desk adjacent to the north pier of the 'chancel arch'. The architect's plan shows the presence of screens separating the nave and aisles from the chancel and its chapels and also in the west bays of the chancel.

A printed summary of accounts for the restoration for the years 1841, 1842, 1843 and 1844, totalling £1,079.4s.6d, reveals that the most expensive items were the work of the carpenters presumably for the pews, flooring and roofs (£300+); the bricklayers and masons for the transept and work connected with unblocking the north and south chancel windows (£200+); the plasterers' for external and internal rendering (£160+); and the glaziers, including William Wailes for the east window in particular (£150+). The initial programme of works in 1841 included building the south transept, replacing the pews and creating a new, screened minister's vestry in the north-east corner of the church as well as some restoration and the lowering of the chancel floor. The summary goes on to show various tweaks to the newly installed items being made in subsequent years, generally, it would seem, to improve comfort.

ii) Later developments

George Blomfield was vicar of Stevenage for 40 years, retiring in 1874. Towards the end of his long tenure, in 1871, it is recorded that the music gallery was taken down and Gothic tracery was installed in some windows. It was under Blomfield's successor, William Jowitt, who served for 38 years and died in 1912, that some significant modifications to the

Postcard dated 1912 just before Nicholson's restoration

church began to happen. A primary driver for change was the replacement in 1884 of the old organ, located by then in the north chancel chapel, with a new instrument placed in the south chancel chapel, and it is the effect of this change which most surviving 19th-century photographs document.

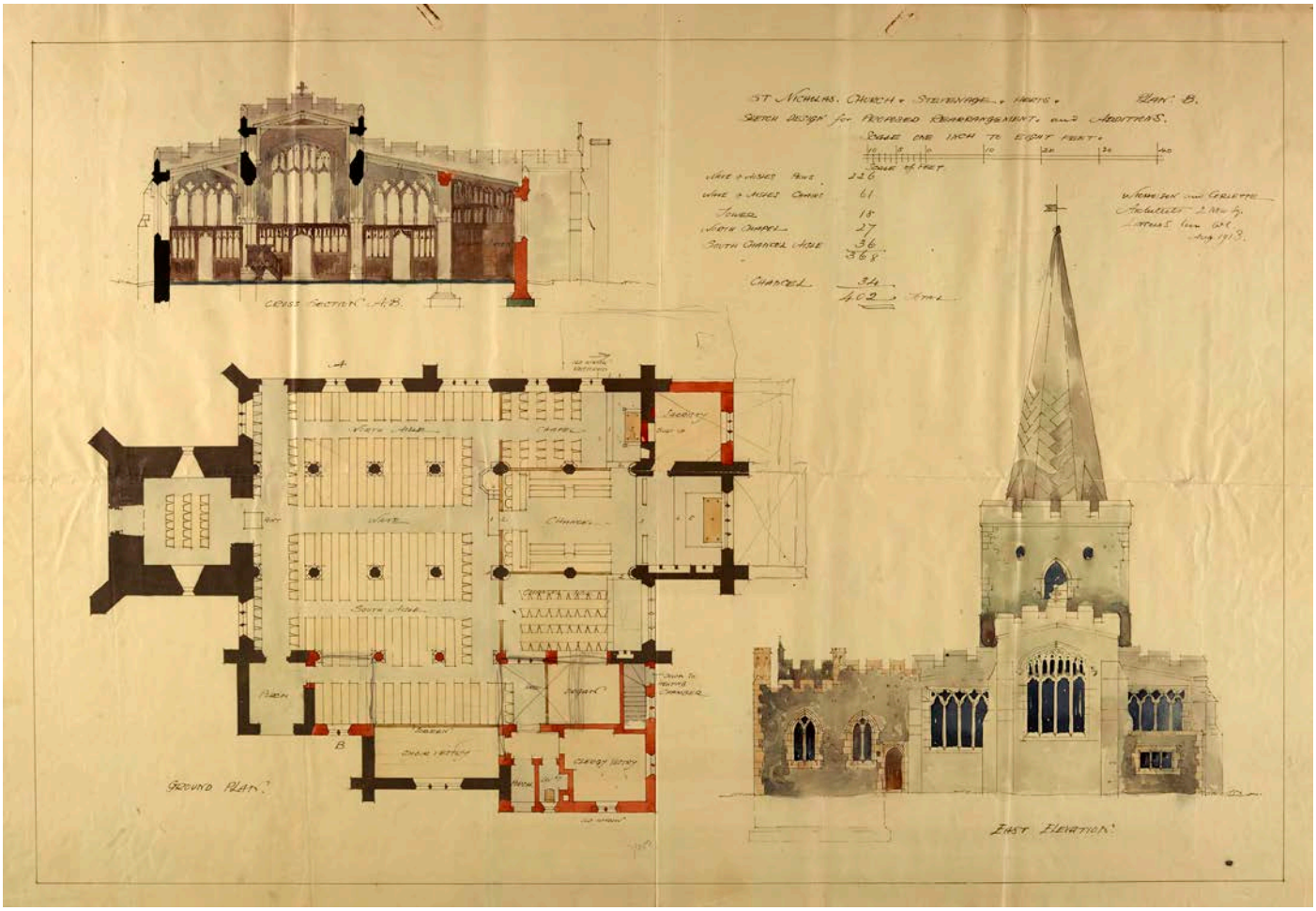
In May 1884 the Stevenage Local Magazine records:

> *The newness of life and feeling which must ever be the special message of Easter was this year most fitly symbolised in our Parish Church by the new organ, the new window, and new arrangement of the choir and chancel.*

The article continues:

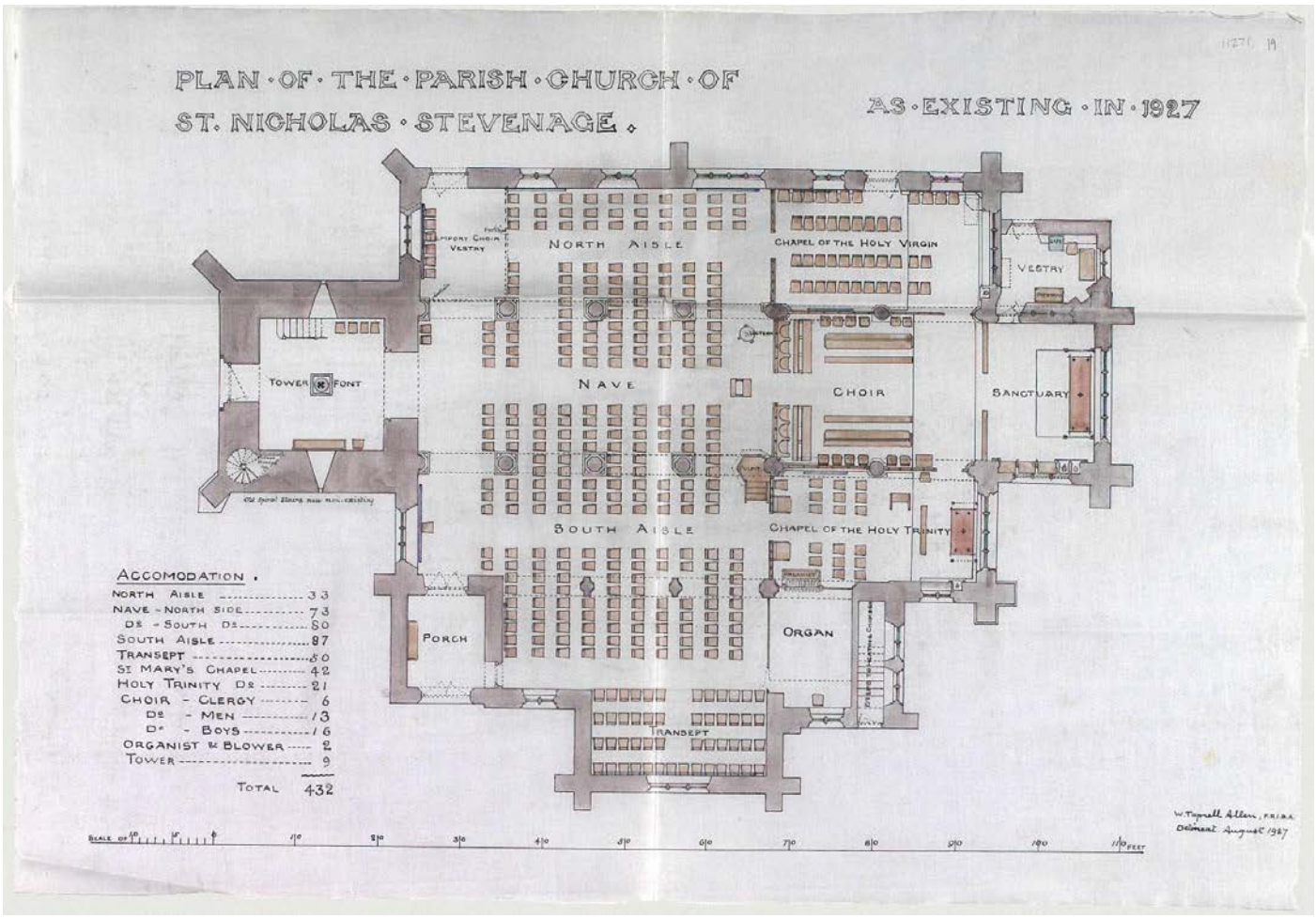
> *The new tiles in the sacrarium and in the chancel give a look of brightness which, to say the least, was not given by the matting and carpets which they replace. The arrangements of the chancel seats and of the choir stalls is a great improvement on the former over-crowded position of the pews, and we shall not be surprised if the parishioners animated by the example of the Patron and Rector in their care for the chancel, should decide to re-seat the whole of the nave. Certainly nothing can well be more uncomfortable than many of the pews now are, whether for sitting or kneeling.*

The new window was in the south wall of the transept, with glass designed by Hardman, depicting *Noli me tangere* and commemorating Lieutenant Edward Wilkinson. Pevsner (1977) dismisses the window, describing the colours as gaudy, 'still the painterly



Above: Nicholson's proposed Plan B with the Faculty papers for his restoration; the sketch shows proposed position of the screens.

Below: Plan of church in 1927 (ICBS File 11271, courtesy of Lambeth Palace Library)



View of the church from the south-east showing the east end of Nicholson's additional aisle

approach of the C18 and by no means yet medievalizing'.

In the years following Jowitt's investiture in 1874, the medieval screens and stalls were moved around a few times. Cussans (1870-81) records that the stalls were located either side of the chancel but the desks had gone. The stalls were still in situ in 1883 (anonymous cutting in the Gerish Collection). In 1906 however, when Mullard's report was published, the choirstalls have been separated with three placed in the tower and only three retained in the chancel. Mullard also points to the relocation of the south east parclose screen to mask the choir vestry in the north chapel. The RCHME in 1910 records the same disposition of the choir stalls.

2.3 TWENTIETH-CENTURY RESTORATIONS

i) Nicholson's restoration

The church today owes much to Nicholson's attempts to meet the need of the growing town and to rationalise the building's plan for the new vicar, Henry Molony, invested in 1912, who died in 1918. In his 10-page report dated 1913, Nicholson described the recent changes as being of no interest "artistic or otherwise". He details significant restoration issues as well as thoughts on making the building more dignified. If at the time he envisaged three phases of work to suit the parish's budget - 1) nave and chancel, 2) tower, 3) clergy vestry - the outbreak of the First World War undoubtedly forced this approach. For this reason, for instance, the replacement of the 1841 pews with chairs was only ever seen as temporary. In 1927 Nicholson drew up plans and designs for installing oak pews in the nave, but his ideas were not taken forward due to the more pressing needs of dealing with the tower and the south roofs. His vision for a building enhanced with oak pews was only fulfilled with the installation of 'Mouseman' pews in 1964.

In Nicholson's view, "the whole building underwent a drastic 'restoration' some 70 years ago when most of the window traceries were renewed, the East Window was inserted and South Transept was added". He goes on "moreover the whole of the ancient screens remain, though in a somewhat mutilated state and, in two cases, removed from their proper places. There are also six fine turn up stalls and portions of the carved desk fronts are worked up into the present chancel screen."

> *How far one is justified in attempting to restore the exterior walls to their ancient condition is a matter on which two opinions are ~~necessary~~ possible, but there can be no doubt of the desirability of restoring the ancient furniture to its proper use and fortunately this would be by no means a difficult or costly task.*

Making the building watertight was his first priority, however, dealing with the roofs and heating. Due to severe water ingress problems, the old pew platforms would be removed and the floor relaid. Once the fabric was sound, the internal arrangement could be considered: "A sound scheme for this should be laid down and executed as opportunity arises, thus the details of the reflooring and the heating apparatus would be governed by this scheme even if the whole could not be done at once." He goes on:

> *We should take into account the convenience of the clergy and of the congregation during both services and sermons, the solution of the organ problem, provision for small weekday congregations, and many other matters of the same kind, always keeping in view the obligation of preserving and as far as possible restoring the ancient features of the building with which we are entrusted.*

Because of the unsatisfactory north-facing seating arrangements in the transept, his first thought was to place the choir vestry in the transept and to put the organ there too. His preference would have been to place the organ at the west end for better acoustical results, but he recognised that the costs of creating a loft and installing the organ within it was an expensive solution:

> *These old churches were never intended to hold organs of any size and if an organ is a necessity nowadays the fact must be faced that a compromise of some kind will be necessary. But it is quite evident that no plan can be worse than that of planting down an obstruction of the bulk of an ordinary modern organ upon the floor of a church, especially in a case where the utmost seating capacity is required.*

View of the chancel

View of the Holy Trinity Chapel before the recent re-location of the organ (from Tracy 2013)

Removing the organ from its position in the south chapel would help to make the chancel and its aisles "spacious and airy". "It is hardly necessary to say that the screens and stalls should be replaced in their old position and it may be estimated that this work with a few necessary repairs could be done for £200 or £300." He puts forward the idea that their restoration might be linked to a memorial.

> *In speaking of the restoring of the screens it must be understood that no attempt would be made to renew the defaced ornaments, the necessary parts would of course have to be supplied as regards the structural portions but it is not justifiable to restore the ancient work so as to give the appearance of new.*

The south chancel aisle could be used for small weekday congregations, and the old chancel altar placed within it. A larger new altar might be installed in the chancel, but at this stage he did not envisage a reredos: "if a reredos was ever introduced it should be kept low and of the simplest possible outline." The present reredos, carved to Nicholson's design by Guglielmo Tosi of Brompton, London, was installed in 1916; Tosi worked with Nicholson on various projects, most notably the rood figures above the strainer arches in Wells Cathedral. The finely carved reredos at Stevenage depicts the Crucifixion flanked by the Nativity and the parable of the Good Shepherd.

In dealing with the heating , Nicholson proposed that a heating chamber might be conveniently placed beneath a new vestry, which features in the angle between the chancel and the transept in his two plans of 1913 (Plan A and Plan B). "Should further enlargement be necessary it could be economically arranged by building an additional South Aisle on the site of the present transept, reusing the old windows in the new wall." The old clergy vestry could be refurbished as a sacristy. In a supplementary note dated 25 August, Nicholson demonstrates the distinctions between his two plans, and warms to his idea of building a new aisle to address seating needs and to offer better sight-lines for the congregation.

The 1927 plan hanging in the church and attached to ICBS File 11271 for this restoration shows that a compromise was adopted; indeed it is possible to see the architect working towards this solution in some of the pencil modifications sketched on Plan B. If the church had been enlarged according to Plan A, the organ would have been at the west end and the awkwardness of the transept might have been made to look yet more unsatisfactory. Plan B proposed an infill in the same angle that would have been in line with the east wall of the chancel aisle and was square to accommodate the organ as well as the clergy vestry and facilities. In both plans the transept was split in two east-west, with the south half converted for use as a choir vestry and the north half filled with east-facing pews. The north half resembles a miniature aisle, particularly in Plan B where it is separated from the medieval south aisle with an arcade. In the compromise solution, the end of the aisle is stepped back from the east end of the medieval aisle and the organ is brought forward in Nicholson's new aisle to be adjacent with the existing south chapel screen.

iii) Later developments

Due to the outbreak of war, Nicholson's restoration was in effect realised over a long period extending into the interwar years. From the 1930s Albert Richardson undertook some minor improvements within the church including the elegant rail in front of the chancel altar (1938) and the installation of a new pulpit in 1949 (removed in 1994). The north chapel reverted to use as a Lady Chapel for private prayer in 1960; the faculty papers indicate that this included the installation of pews to replace chairs, altar rails, altar, cross, candlesticks and the sculpture of Mary with Jesus based on a much larger sculpture on South Uist. The modern screen was introduced in 1961, at which point it is presumed the old screen was taken apart and the surviving fragment was sent to Stev-

The west wall of the nave

enage Museum. The re-seating of the church with Mouseman pews occurred in 1964.

From 1927 until 1948, the choir vestry was located in the north-west corner of the church. As the Revd John King wrote in the faculty papers :

> *Here is the history. In 1926 the Choir Vestry was in the modern South Transept. In 1927 it was moved into the N.W. Corner of the church, because a grande dame in the next parish who worshipped here complained it masked a brass tablet setting out the virtues of her son in whose memory the South window (a shocker) was given. Now she has died, and what is left of the family has no connection with the parish. My Churchwarden, therefore has proposed that the vestry reverts to its old position.*

The conversion of the transept/Nicholson aisle into a parish room occurred in 1977; a formal Consistory Court hearing in the Church resolved the reordering in the parish's favour – objections related to the sale of some land in the Old Town and the feeling among the objectors that the Old Town was a better location for such a facility. Such was the limited recognition of Nicholson's significance as a church architect in 1977, however, the installation of the room had a major impact on how he had envisaged the spaces within the building. It could be argued that the recent relocation of the organ back into the south chancel chapel has completed the degradation of Nicholson's desire to lighten the church and enable views of the chancel altar.

3 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Historic England suggests that significance may be understood in terms of the following values:

- Evidential value (evidence of past human activity)
- Historical value (the association of the place with past people or events)
- Aesthetic value (sensory appreciation that may be designed or fortuitous)
- Communal value (meaning of a place for people who relate to it, this may well extend beyond the current users/owners)

In assessing significance it is useful to have a clear scale of heritage values. However, in most hierarchies of significance international and national significance are rated more highly than local significance. This is particularly unfortunate when assessing "communal value" which is, of its nature, particularly significant to local people.

High	Exceptional - particularly important at national or international levels
Moderate-High	Special - important at regional or national levels
Moderate	Some - usually of local value but of regional significance for group or other value
Low-Moderate	Local - of local value
Low	Little or Negative value - which adds little or nothing or actually detracts from the value of a site or area, for example a concrete boiler house

The church is Grade I listed by Historic England and therefore, taken as a whole, of **High Significance**. That is not to say that all elements of the fabric and its contents contribute equally to that significance.

3.1 Medieval fabric and monuments

The surviving medieval fabric has **high significance**. It has aesthetic qualities, both designed and accidental, and the fabric records the development and changing use of the church as a place of worship over 900 years. There are a number of medieval monuments, the damaged sculpted effigy of a noble woman and the brass of Stephen Hellard are the best preserved and of the **highest significance**. None of the medieval monuments are likely to be in their original locations as we know that the floor has been

re-laid and most of the floor slabs align with the, now removed, nineteenth-century pew platforms.

Medieval screens

The medieval screens are the most significant elements of the church furnishings. These are of **high significance**. It is evident that they have all been moved and modified to varying extents. The chancel screen is both the most elaborate and heavily restored of the surviving screens. The upper traceried section survives in good condition, though with extensive restorations carried out in deal in the nineteenth century. The lower dado section is entirely twentieth-century (see below for significance of Nicholson's interventions). The screen is thus of **high significance** as a surviving example of a chancel screen, it is particularly notable for not having been painted dark brown, and thus preserves some of its colour and the lead stars on the east face. Some of its significance derives from its present location. It is clear that it was designed to stand in this approximate location, though it was at one stage removed from the church, subsequently deployed as a reredos and only returned to it original location at the entrance to the chancel as part of the early twentieth-century work on the church. The significance of the screen cannot be judged entirely as an independent object. It forms part of a suite of screens (one modern) that reflects medieval liturgical arrangements.

The two western parclose screens, which are of a similar design to the chancel screen, are also of **high significance**. They seem to have stood in this location from the middle ages, though they have been raised and lowered at various times in their history.

The screen at the entrance to the Trinity Chapel may once have been located at the entrance to the Lady Chapel. It seems to have been substantially modified. The door is missing, it is mounted back to front, the cornice is not original and we suspect that the arch over the doorway is not in its original location. Never-the-less this screen has **high significance**. Its design is related to the two eastern parclose screens, the southern one of which was used for a period of almost 30 years to screen a choir vestry in the Lady Chapel. These too are of **high significance**.

Choir stalls

The choir stalls date from the fourteenth century, and were modified in the sixteenth century. We cannot say with certainty that they were created for the church. We can say that they have been in the church since at least the sixteenth century. They are of **high significance** not only as objects of intrinsic historical and aesthetic interest but also for what they can tell us about the way in which liturgical furnishings have been modified and adapted to suit changing liturgical practice.

Carved angel misericord

Desk frontals and font cover

The desk frontals are in large part the creation of Nicholson. Never-the-less they incorporate tracery heads that must once have formed part of the liturgical furnishings associated with the mid-fifteenth century modifications to the church. Thus their significance is higher than it might be if we were to assess them as free-standing objects. Their **moderate-high significance** derives in large part from the links that can be made to the architecture of the building and other contemporary fittings within it. The same can be said of the fragments of the medieval font cover that have been incorporated by Nicholson into a twentieth-century font lid. These cusped arris mouldings can be linked stylistically to the mid-fifteenth-century building programme and screens.

Victorian priest's chair incorporating tracery head

This chair, which might otherwise be easily overlooked, incorporated a tracery head that has been carved (probably in the sixteenth century) in imitation of the tracery in the above mentioned desk frontals. Its **moderate-high significance** lies not only in its intrinsic value as a piece of historic carving, but more importantly as evidence that links the choir stalls with the church in at least as far back as the sixteenth century.

3.2 NINETEENTH CENTURY FABRIC AND FITTINGS

Clearly the medieval church underwent a significant transformation in the 18th-century and in the years up to the 1841 restoration. On the exterior this is discernible in the battlements of 1836, which were restored by Nicholson, and on the interior this is evident in the westernmost bays of the nave where the loss of medieval label over the arcade indicate the modifications required to install a west gallery. These

Monument to Captain Jellicoe Turner, benefactor to the church in the 1830s

Nicholson's fine reredos carved by Guglielmo Tosi

have **moderate significance** as a reminder of the development of the building.

The 1840s restoration is evidenced by the transept, the reopened north and south windows, the retrieval of the former chancel screen to form a reredos and the new east window tracery and glass by Wailes, depicting the Evangelists. These elements have **moderate-high significance**.

Most of the late 19th-century interventions undertaken in the chancel, when the organ was installed in 1884 were all swept away by Nicholson's and later restorations. Various window traceries were replaced or renewed to bring the church back to the Gothic style, and these have **moderate significance**.

The church is not richly endowed with ledger stones and memorial tablets. The ledgers that survive generally pre-date the 18th-century church and the most important sequence is to be found in the north aisle. The tablets include two painted benefactor boards above the tower arch; a tablet to Charles Gibbon (d.1771) in the north chapel that has lost its slate backing, swagged heraldic arms and urn; and an elegant neoclassical memorial to Captain Jellicoe Turner the early 19th-century benefactor of the church and its music. These all have **moderate significance**.

3.3 Twentieth-century fabric and fittings

The exterior of the church as we see it today is largely as Sir Charles Nicholson restored it. Here it is possible to see clearly his attempts to rationalise the plan, to conserve the fabric and to provide the number of seats that the parish required as well as accommodate the facilities that had become the *sine qua non* of a Gothic Revival church: vestries, organ and heating chamber. This aspect of his contribution has **moderate-high significance**.

Nicholson's vision for the interior has however been altered incrementally throughout the century. In some respects the realisation of his plan was hampered by the onset and length of the First World War and the modest financial resources of the parish. His restoration was a long-drawn out process, coming to an end in c. 1930. What he saw in this building is captured in this comment in the *Stevenage Church Magazine* of October 1914, probably written by Revd Molony:

> *I was struck, a week or two ago, by the remark of a lady, who went into the church after the tower arch had been opened up, and when all the seating and the organ had been removed, and the building stood disclosed in bare emptiness, so that you could see its proportions and symmetry. She had worshipped in the Church all her life, and yet she said, "I had no idea it was so fine". If in its present wrecked condition it is already showing its possibilities, I am sure that in its completed state it will prove a revelation to all.*

Nicholson found five medieval screens in place and proposed that the element of the chancel screen previously behind the altar should be brought forward to its original position on a new base and that the parclose screen in the north chapel should be replaced on the south side of the chancel where it had been before the installation of the 1884 organ. Nicholson put great emphasis on screens being open so that choir and clergy could be seen and heard throughout the church. He took great care in thinking through the location of the organ, and because of financial constraints developed the idea of an additional south aisle with the organ at the east end, using the element of the old transept projecting beyond his new south wall as the choir vestry and placing seating in the remainder of the new aisle that would have offered some views into the south chapel and chancel. If all of these ideas were intact, and particularly if the parish had been able to pursue Nicholson's designs for pews in 1927, then it would be fair to ascribe **moderate-high significance** to his interventions. The reredos has **moderate-high significance** as a fine example of Nicholson's skills as a designer of church

South aisle showing how the parish room has closed off Nicholson's additional aisle and the organ has obscured the chapel

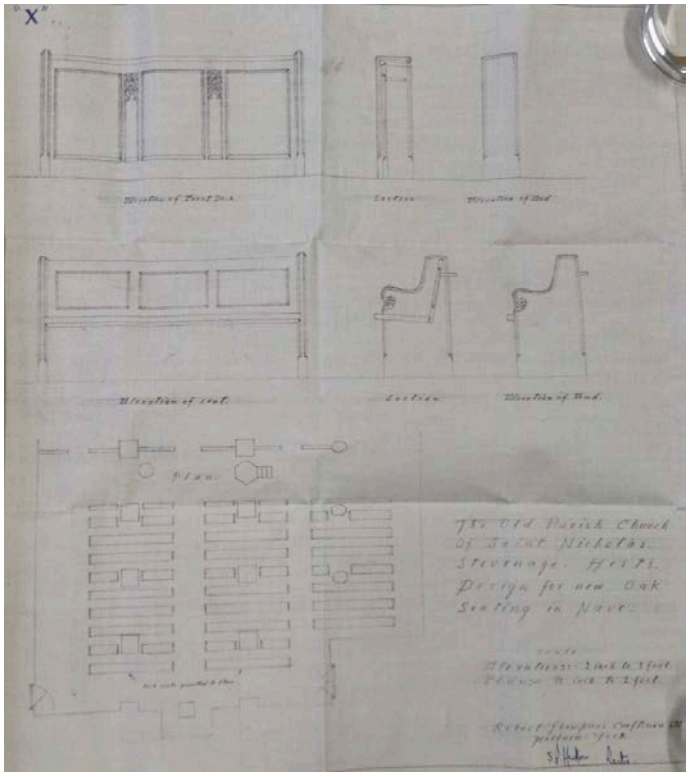
furnishings and Tosi's skills as a carver of intricate detail. However even its setting could be argued to have been compromised in 1994 by bringing the table forward, turning the curtained side-wings through 90 degrees to lie flat against the chancel wall and removing the riddel posts, reported to have come from Chester Cathedral where Revd Blomfield was a Canon.

The installation of high quality pews by Robert 'Mouseman' Thompson in 1964 would have enhanced Nicholson's restoration and therefore its significance. However, where the re-creation of the Lady Chapel in 1960 was a minor modification impacting on Nicholson's scheme, the development of the parish room and facilities in 1977 was the first significant change. Its practicality for changing parish needs cannot be denied even if the heavy-handed style of the 1970s has dated quickly. The removal of the masonry infill separating the room from the body of the building would enhance Nicholson's arcade.

The functionality of the organ was reduced when the parish room was created, as the sound would have been one-directional. The return of the organ to the north chapel in 2017, albeit in the west bay rather than the east bay, has closed off this space, blocking views of F C Eden's *Te Deum* window, installed as part of the initial restoration in 1913-15 (Eden was a good friend go Nicholson's). The significance of Nicholson's interior has therefore been compromised and today it would seem reasonable to assign **moderate significance** to what is left of his scheme.

The fine communion rail by Albert Richardson has **moderate significance**.

The creation of the parish room led to the removal of 'Mouseman' pews in Nicholson's new aisle, so the **high significance** of Thompson's scheme has also been degraded.



Robert 'Mouseman' Thompson's designs for the benches installed in 1964 (HALS DSAR/1/245/5)

North aisle floor with 'Mouseman' benches on wood-block flooring installed by Nicholson either side of re-laid ledger stones and slabs.

3.4 Summary of Significance

The church of St Nicholas is a Grade 1 listed building. Taken as a whole this is recognition that the church is of **national significance**.

The medieval building

The church is substantially a medieval building, with substantial fabric dating from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. All of this is of **high significance**.

The screens

The surviving medieval screens at the entrance to the chancel, the Trinity chapel and parclose screens between the chancel and the two flanking chapels are important survivals and thus of **high significance**. There is ample evidence, both documentary and physical, that they have all been moved at different periods and to varying degrees. This is part of their history and does not diminish their significance.

Other furniture and fittings

The church possesses a number of significant medieval furniture and fittings, sometimes incorporated into later features. All of these are of either **high** or **moderate-high significance** (see main text for detail). The choir stalls can be associated with the church at least as far back as the sixteenth century. Nicholson's desks incorporate material that is contemporary with some of the parclose screens, and a Victorian chair incorporates late medieval carving that can be linked to one of the misericords.

Monuments

The church has a modest collection of monuments of varying significance. Few if any seem to be in their original location.

Nineteenth-century restorations

Although there were substantial interventions in the fabric of the building in the nineteenth century, little, of any heritage significance survives, beyond some stained glass windows and the stump of the south transept.

Nicholson's restoration

Nicholson's early twentieth-century restoration of the church had a major impact on the spaces within the building. Anson (1960) describes him as "… the really representative Anglican architect of the present century. He designed furnishings that were both traditional and refined." "A typical Charles Nicholson interior reflects the spirit of the Caroline Divines. Both Archbishop Laud and Bishop Andrews would feel quite at home in them." At Stevenage he created a new south aisle, incorporating the Victorian transept and replacing the south aisle wall with a new arcade. He restored the chancel screen and returned it to its original location. However, budgetary constraints and the outbreak of war meant that his scheme was not fully implemented. Subsequent incremental changes have diminished the significance of Nicholson's legacy: the filling in of his arcade; removal of much of his chancel furniture; and the re-location of the organ. On balance his contribution here is of **moderate significance**.

APPENDIX: SIR CHARLES NICHOLSON 1867-1949

Sir Charles Nicholson was one of an important group of 20th-century architects and designers who, as Anglo-Catholics, believed in Eucharistic worship and a commitment to the rubric of the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. Nicholson, Sir Ninian Comper, Martin Travers, F C Eden and the younger Stephen Dykes-Bower were highly influential in the development of church buildings in the early 20th century and particularly in the interwar years, during recession and depression. A number of Anglo-Catholic societies were established in the last decade of the 19th century into the early 20th century including, amongst others, the Alcuin Club, the Warham Guild, and the Society of the Faith, which became Faith Craft. These societies promulgated ideas on liturgy, ritual, church furnishings and vestments. Until recently, the contribution of their architects and designers was seen by some architectural historians, including Pevsner, as the dying embers of the great Gothic Revival of the mid 19th century rather than being evaluated on its own merits. Major studies have begun to appear, which serve to redress the balance, including Edward Bundock's 2012 examination of Nicholson's work, although more could perhaps be done to evaluate the architect's significance.

In 1960 Peter Anson, in *Fashions in church furnishings 1840-1940*, recognised Nicholson's contribution:

> *[Nicholson] became the really representative Anglican architect of the first three decades of the present century. He designed furnishings that were both traditional and refined. The faint period flavour about them was inoffensive, and the use of colour was in keeping with contemporary 'good taste'. A church designed and furnished by Sir Charles always provided the right background for the services of the "Book of Common Prayer", carried out with loyal but rich Catholic ceremonial. None of his churches show a papalist influence, as do those transformed by Martin Travers. A typical Charles Nicholson interior reflects the spirit of the Caroline Divines. Both Archbishop Laud and Bishop Andrewes would feel quite at home in them.*

Nicholson trained in the office of John Dando Sedding, architect of Holy Trinity Sloane Street, London. On Sedding's death in 1893, Nicholson continued the practice with Henry Wilson, another of Sedding's pupils. He then worked briefly with John Micklethwaite, founder of the Alcuin Club. In 1895 he set up his own practice going into partnership with Hubert Corlette; it is during this partnership that Stevenage was restored. Bundock analyses Nicholson's work by category although there may be unresolved ambiguities: for instance should Stevenage be classed as restoration or enlargement? Furnishing of churches accounts for more than 50% of Nicholson's entire output between 1893 and 1949, and 33% of his output between 1893 and 1919. His work on enlargements and restorations is quite small in comparison: 15% and 17% respectively. His work on new churches was more slender still.

At various stages during his long career, Nicholson elaborated his views, occasionally rather verbosely, on the design and arrangement of churches and their furnishings. An early work was an edited collaboration with Charles Spooner in 1911, *Recent English ecclesiastical architecture*, followed by a pamphlet of advice for the ICBS in 1920 on *The planning and arrangement of a church and its furniture*. In Ernest Short's 1947 edited volume on *Post-war church building*, Nicholson contributed three chapters as well as some pen and ink drawings, but aged 80 the gist of his argument is remarkably consistent with his views aged 44, and the volume feels old-fashioned.

For Nicholson the focus should be the altar or table, which should be raised above the nave, but not too much. The table should not be overwhelmed by the reredos. While he advocated a screen, he felt it should be open to enable unimpeded sight-lines. He encouraged placing the organ at the west end of the church and apparently deplored using a chapel or former chapel to house it. He was no stranger to controversy, however, and his restorations were deemed too far-reaching in Norwich Cathedral and at St Botolph's Church, Boston in Lincolnshire, resulting in a rift with the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). Re-ordering affecting his own work in two churches was resolved in Consistory Courts in the 1980s: the 1931 Italian Romanesque church of St Margaret, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, and his 1901 restoration of St John the Baptist, Wonersh, Surrey.

Looking at Nicholson's 1913 report for St Nicholas, he is revealed to be a conscientious architect, taking a respectful approach to what he finds in the building. Given the condition of the fabric, restoration making use of the best surviving features of the building appears to have been his primary objective at St Nicholas in Stevenage. It is to be regretted that world events and parish finances precluded completion of his vision for this church and, therefore, a rich example of an early 20th-century church restoration.

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