

Welcome to St Nicholas Church



St Nicholas is a Grade 1 listed building of national significance, and the oldest building in the town. Christians have worshipped on this site for over 900 years, although the existing church is mostly a medieval building, with substantial fabric dating from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries.

If you look around this ancient building you'll see evidence of continual change across the centuries. From adding new windows to knocking down balconies, from building new aisles and changes to the floor, each generation has put its own stamp on the building to suit the work and worship of the church in its own day. And in 2018 we felt that it was time for us to do the same.

Why change an ancient and beautiful building?

Because the church building, whilst important, is not the church. The church is the people. The church building is simply a place set aside for the worship of God by the people of God, and where people wrestling with the meaning of life can gather to hear the good news of Jesus for themselves and grow in their faith.

So our desire for the church building was that it would better serve the aims of the church. For us, they were 5-fold. (See diagram→)

From our initial desires for change, through the long process of gathering ideas, planning, seeking the permissions and doing the work, we kept these 5 aims in our minds.

As you read this story and look around the building, we hope you agree it was worth all the work.



In 2018, after several years of informal conversations and realising we needed to do something, we began our project to revitalise the church to fit our needs.

Our aim was to revitalise and refurbish the church to equip the building for work and mission for the next 100 years, whilst enhancing its beauty, history and heritage.

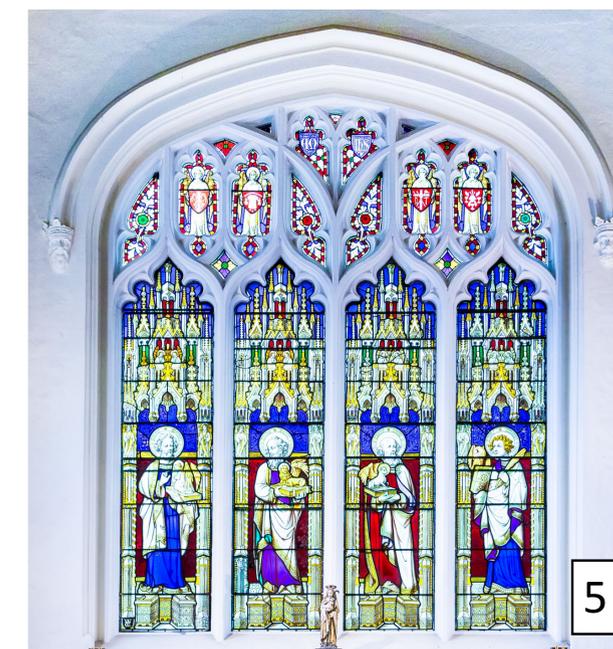
We commissioned a survey of the woodwork, and through consultations with heritage bodies and our church family, we identified elements where special care was required. This included the medieval wooden screens which would all be preserved, although some would be moved. (1)

The misericords, with their carved seats, didn't originate in this church, but they help to tell its story. These would need a new home somewhere in the building. (2)

Monuments and memorials were scattered across the building, on the walls and on the floors. Many of these, like this ornate carving from the 13th century, (3) needed extra care.

Amongst the congregation, the two most loved items were the 19th century reredos (4) and the great east window (5).

Can you find all these items?



The Way We Were...

In 2018 the church looked like this. It was much used, and much loved, but a lot of work was needed.



The church family was growing so we needed more seating space for our regular Sunday congregation.

We also wanted to have the room to welcome more people in at Christmas, Easter and for weddings and baptisms.

Our children's groups were crammed in unsuitable areas. They needed better facilities for learning about Jesus.



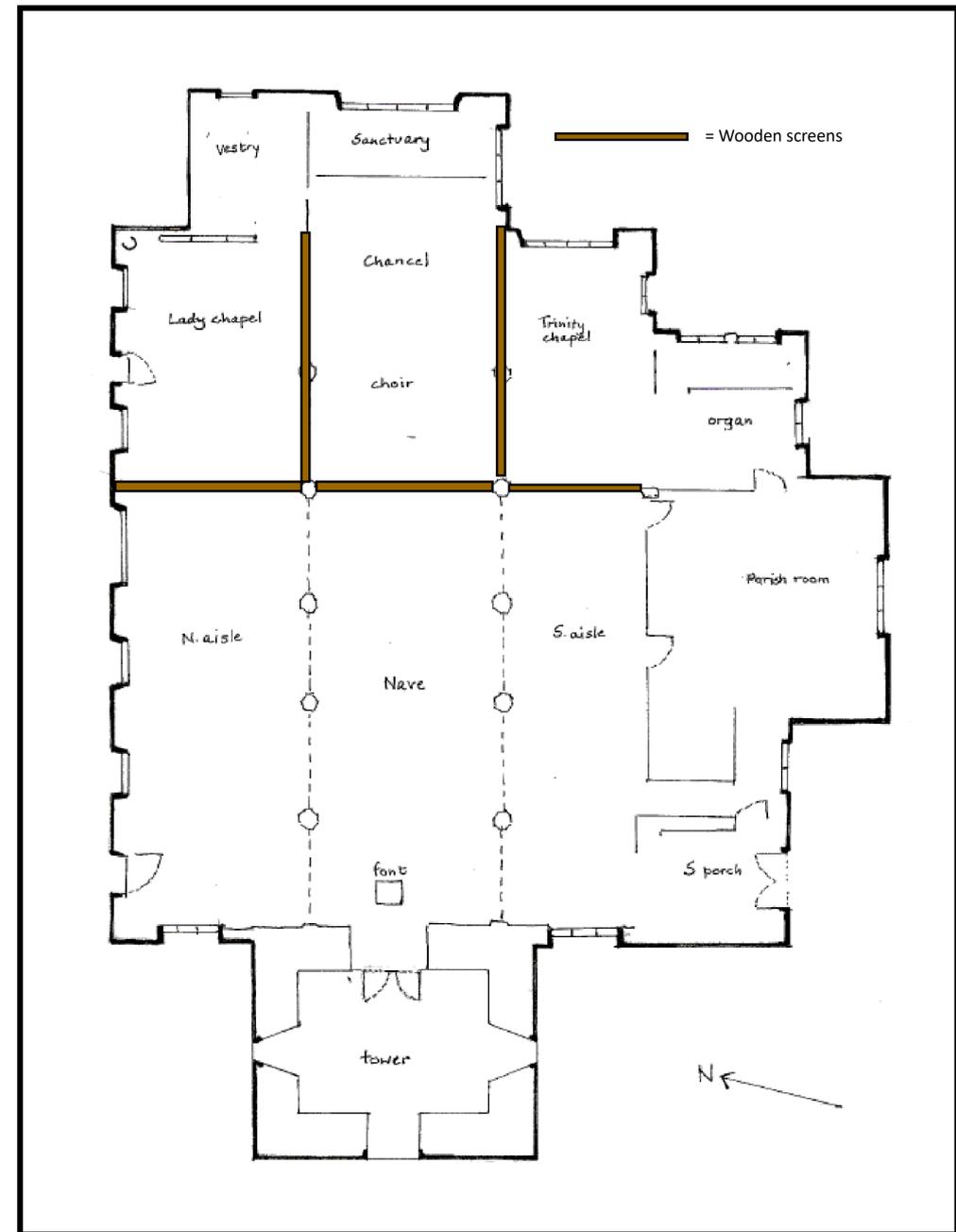
We also needed a creche for our little ones.



Music is important to us, and our music group was growing and needed space to continue to expand.

Can you see where the wooden screen have moved to?

And what has happened to the arches?



The floor was breaking up and becoming unsafe. Take a look at the picture opposite and you'll see the problem. No wonder we needed a new one!

The lighting was also poor and made the church look dull and dreary, not bright and inviting.

A new floor and better lighting would make also the church safer.



Above all, we wanted the church to look its best so it reflected the glory of God.



We wanted the flexibility to use the building to host more community events such as concerts, school events, children's holiday clubs and festivals, so the whole community could come into the church and enjoy this beautiful building.

Much of our space wasn't flexible.
We wanted to change that.

The pews may now be in a slightly different position, but the carved mice are still there!

Can you find them all?



How we got from there to here...

Once we had worked out what we needed, we then had to think through the best way to achieve those goals, and think through what we were prepared to change and what we wanted to keep.

So we had a congregational survey and asked what people liked best about the building and what they wanted to see improved.



Our project manager, **Anthony Taylor**, helped us appoint our architect, **Mark Eddison**, from  **MEB Design Ltd** Chartered Architects. Mark took our comments away and over the next few months drew up some initial plans.

We consulted with  **Historic England** the **Church Buildings Council** and the Diocesan Advisory Committee of the Diocese of St Albans, and after some negotiations, we were encouraged to proceed.

We took the new set of plans to the Church Family and set up a committee to consider some of the details.

Once the design and plans had been finalised by architects Mark Eddison and **Natasa Morrou** at MEB Design, and with the help of engineers Michal Stachurski and **Alex Lindley** at Rolton Group and **Karen Nolloth** at Cornerstone Consulting Engineers, we applied for a faculty to do the work. This was granted in February 2019.

We went out to tender and appointed  **Borras** as the main contractor and **Andy Morton** as our Quantity Surveyor.

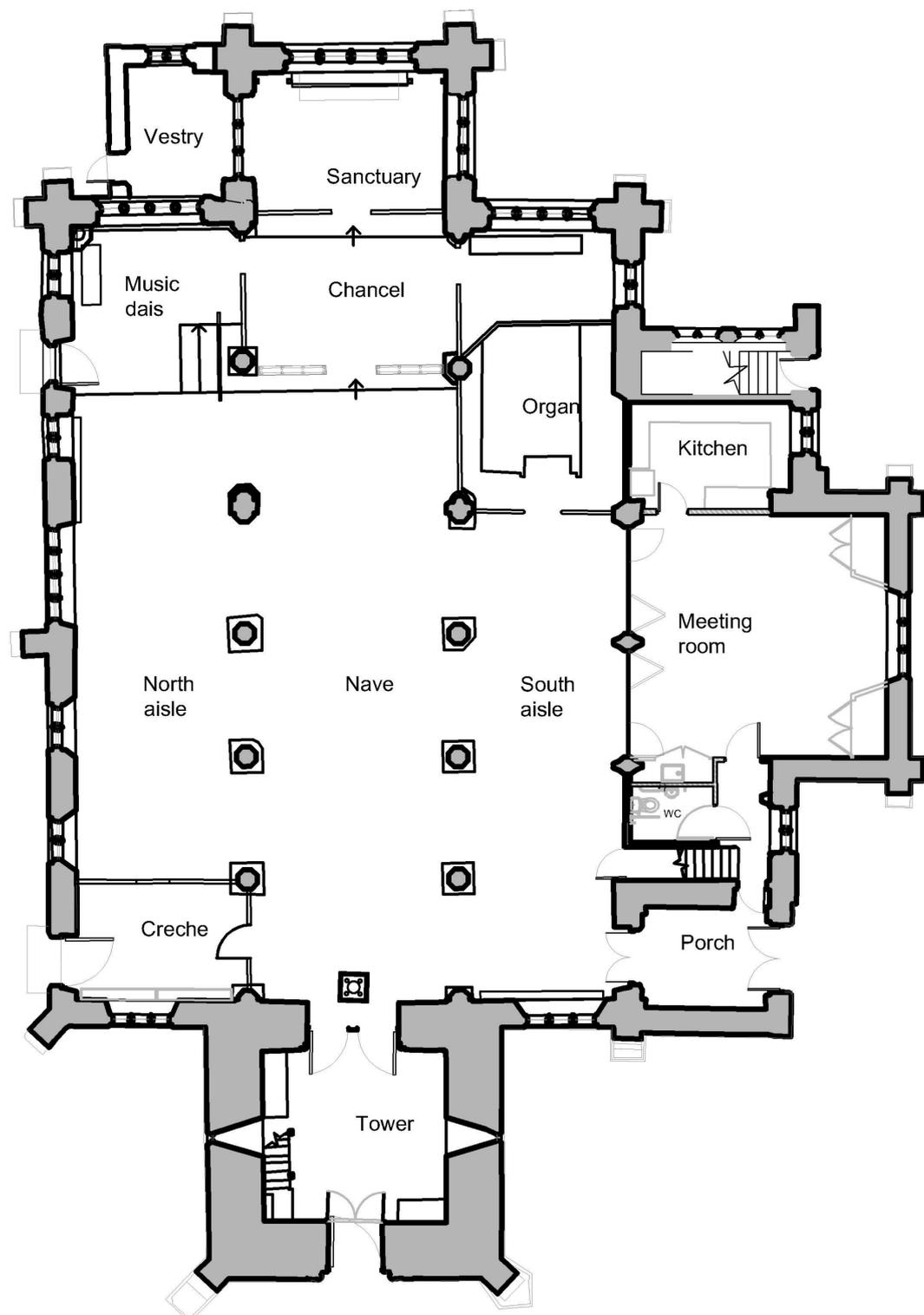
Before the work began, we undertook an historical survey (**Artemis Heritage**), and an archaeological survey (**KDK Archaeology**), to record what the church was like before. We then arranged to meet at the Leys School during the work.



We left the church in June 2019.

We wouldn't be back for over a year!

This is the plan of the church as it is now.



MEB Design Ltd
Chartered Architects



London Office 30 St John's Lane, London, EC1M 4NB

T: 0207 490 5266
london@mbedesign.co.uk www.mbedesign.co.uk
Also at Kent and Oxford

PROJECT TITLE
Church of St. Nicholas, Stevenage

DRAWING TITLE
Ground floor plan

SCALE
NTS

DATE

DRAWN/CHKD

DRAWING No.
1656
Rev.

There have been a lot of changes.

How many can you find?



What did it all cost?

And how did we pay for it?

The final cost of the project, including VAT, fees for architects, engineers, quantity surveyors, archaeologists and other specialists, is estimated to be a staggering **£1,050,000**.

For a relatively small church, this was a huge sum to raise.

Fortunately, back in 2008, the church received a huge bequest from a local man called **Bob Hawkes**. His legacy was restricted to the maintenance and repair of the building, but since around 80% of the work was classed as repair, the church was able to apply to the trustees of the Hawkes Bequest who generously agreed to fund much of this project.

The **Friends of St Nicholas Church** organised various events and were able to donate a grand total of **£17,400** towards the project.



BEDS & HERTS
Historic Churches Trust



THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
DIOCESE OF
ST ALBANS

Both gave us generous
donations of **£5,000**.

The **Beatrice Laing Trust**, one of the



gave us a generous
grant of **£8000**.

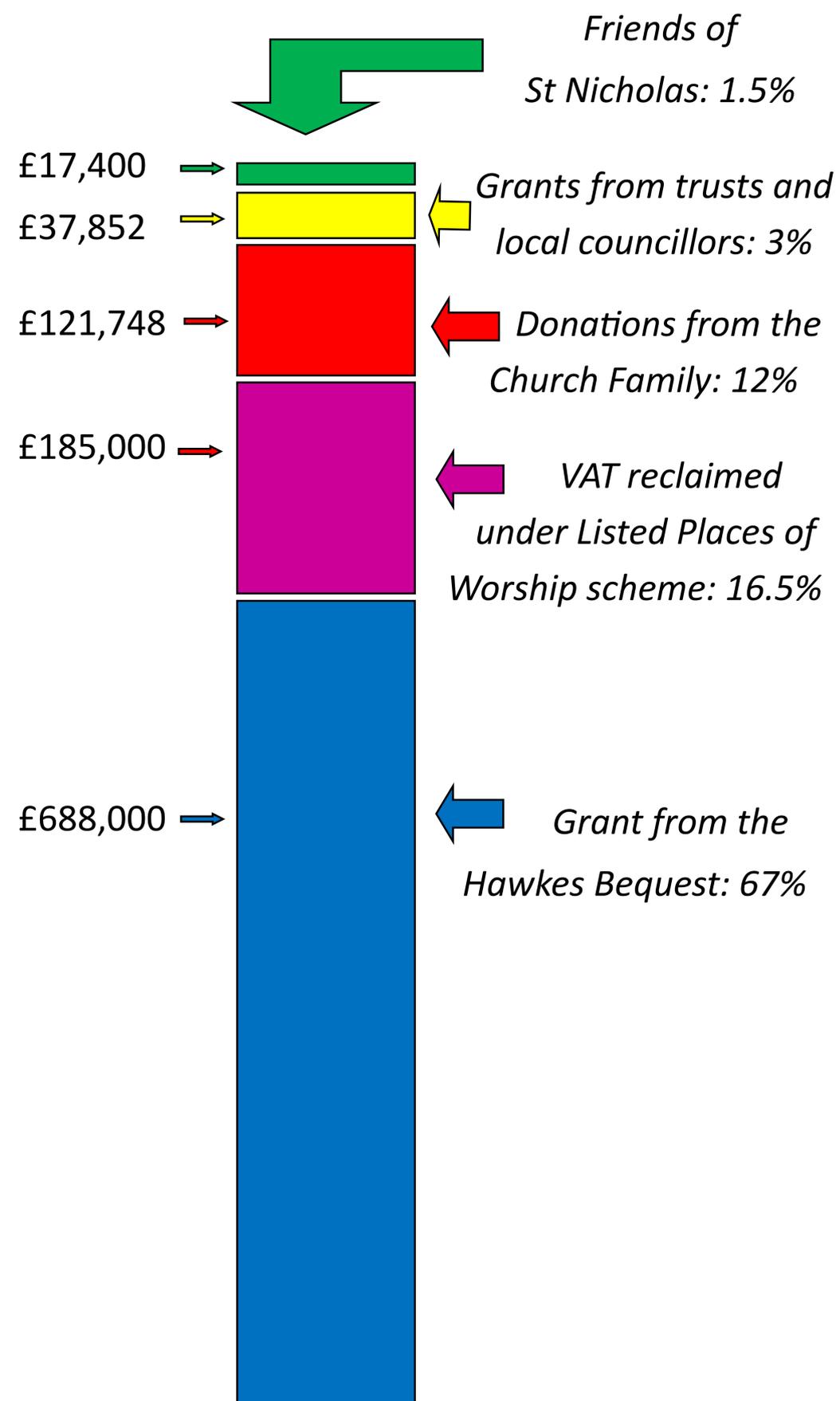
Our largest single donation came from
who wonderfully donated **£15,300**.



And we were also supported by a number of **local and County Councillors**
who together gave **£4552** from their locality budgets.

The astonishing sum of just under **£122,000** was donated by members of
the **congregation of St Nicholas Church** in lump sums or regular pledges.

And HM Government contributed **£185,000** in grants under the Listed
Places of Worship Scheme to cover the VAT.



We are incredibly grateful for all those who have supported this project financially, however large or small their donation, and thankful to God for softening their hearts to give.

The story of the work...

We moved out of the church and into the Leys School and settled in to a new way of meeting together.



But our mission to spread the good news of Jesus didn't stop just because we were out of our building...

Around the St Nicholas estate we...

Delivered 1000's of invitations, washed cars, got involved with **LOVE STEVENAGE** and moved our monthly *Snack and Chat* lunches to the St Nicholas Tavern.

6 Ways of Finding Out More

CHAT: If you'd like someone to come and talk to you about the Christian faith either in your home or over a coffee or a beer, then do get in touch. Our contact details are below.

READ: If you'd like to read an account of the life of Jesus from the Bible, or read about what it means to be a Christian or why the Bible can be trusted, do get in touch. We'd be delighted to give you a free book to read. And if you'd like to discuss it once you finished, we would be very happy to come and meet with you.

DISCOVER: If you'd like to join a small group of people to discuss the claims of Jesus, do get in touch. We regularly run courses for groups of people to check out the claims of Jesus. There are no prayers or singing, and of course, there's no charge. You can sit back and listen or ask lots of questions.

INVESTIGATE: If you'd like to read more about us as a church, or listen to some of the sermons before coming along, then do take a look at our website, (there are plenty of articles to read) or see our facebook page.

VISIT: If you'd like to come along on a Sunday morning, then please do. There's no need to book, and children are very welcome.

PRAYER: And if there's an issue that you'd like us to pray about, either with you or at our regular prayer meetings, then do let us know. We believe that we have a God who hears and answers prayers in line with his good purposes. So we would be delighted to pray for you.

CONTACT DETAILS
 Email: rector@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk
 Telephone: 01438 213587
 Website: www.saintnicholaschurch.org.uk

A Message from St Nicholas Church Stevenage
Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ!

As you might have seen in the local press or on social media, St Nicholas Church is currently closed for a major, once in a century, renovation. This includes laying a new stone floor with underfloor heating, upgrading the lighting and sound systems, tweaking the layout of the main worship space to make it more flexible, and creating more space for our Sunday children's groups and mid week activities and other groups who use the church.

While the work is going on, the church will be meeting each **Sunday at 10:45am** at the Leys School on Ripon Road. We'd love you to come along + join us.

If you've never been to church, or haven't been for a while, walking in the doors of a church can be pretty nerve wracking. So this leaflet will tell you a little bit about us as a church and what you'd find on a Sunday morning. It also explains a little about the Christian faith and gives you six ways to find out more.

We believe that we have good news of great joy to share, and we hope that you'll want to come along and hear for yourself.
 May God bless you and your family.
 Grace and peace.
Deve Brown
 Rector, St Nicholas Church Stevenage.



Meanwhile, back in church,



the church was cleared, the screens were moved



and a digger was brought in to dig up the floor!



And the work was only just beginning!

Take a look at the pictures below!



What's going on in these pictures? Can you put them in order?



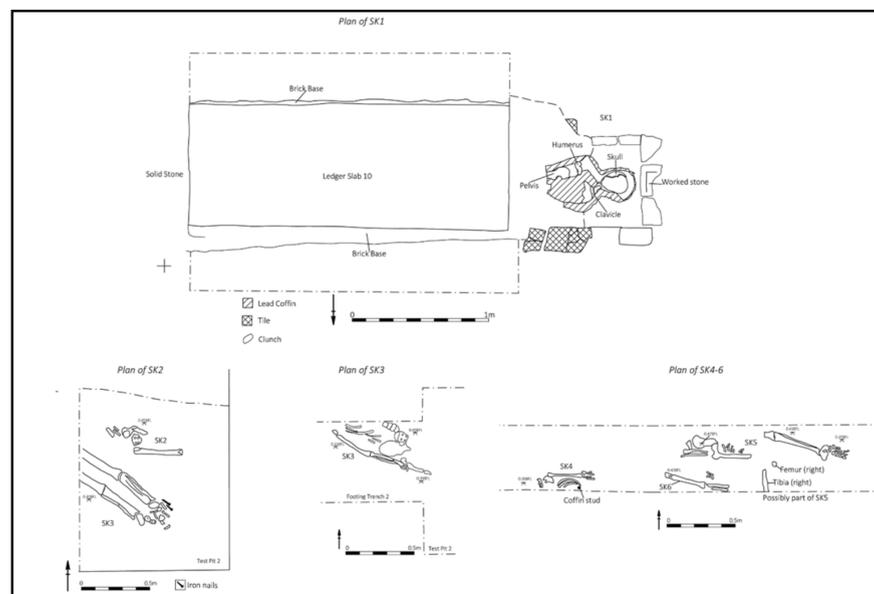
Look on the last panel for the answers!

Archaeological Discoveries

St Nicholas is the oldest building in Stevenage, so it's not surprising that as the building work progressed, lots of interesting discoveries were made. Those included 4 crypts, the burial place of (perhaps) the Church's first minister, and hundreds of bones.



The top photograph shows the crypt near the font. If the nearby ledger slab and the vault are associated, the remains within the vault are of George and Alice Crouch, Benjamin and Mary Kingman and the Kingman children. **The middle photograph** shows 2 crypts near the organ. Whether it was associated with Anne Whittington whose ledger slab lay to the west of the vault or Anne Wilson whose slab is located to the east is not certain. Whereas Ann Wilson's slab declares that there is a burial vault beneath, this may still be the case if the slab has not been relocated in previous works. **The bottom photograph** shows part of a line of burial chambers visible under the beneath ledger slabs in the north aisle. These were accessed via a brick staircase (see insert), and it would be highly unlikely that they did not contain the remains of the Whittingtons, and Georgiana Turner respectively.



The diagram and picture above show the anthropomorphic (body shaped) coffin that was discovered beneath the ledger stone in the centre of the church. Dated on stylistic grounds to the c.1290-1320, this type of coffin was popular from the 9th century as it allowed the deceased a direct line of sight of the risen Christ on Judgement Day and appears to have continued in use throughout the medieval period. The remains were of an older male, quite possibly Gerald de Standon who died in 1314, or his predecessor, Henry Borham whose place Gerald took in 1276.

Archaeological Mysteries...



Remains of several bodies were discovered buried just in front of the reredos, at the far east end of the church. Amongst the remains was this skull with evidence of several holes having been made in the skull. It is unclear whether these injuries are the result of several events of interpersonal violence, or evidence of trepanation, a surgical procedure in which a hole is drilled, cut or scraped into the skull exposing dura mater, a tough layer of connective tissue that directly overlies the brain. This dangerous procedure was sometimes used to relieve pressure on the brain caused by an injury or medical problem, but it carries a high risk of infection, direct injury to the brain and bleeding into the brain tissue.

What do you think happened?

Along with these remains was the left leg of an older child, and slightly to the south was a north-south aligned burial of an older male. The alignment of these remains is unusual. Burial within the chancel was generally reserved for the priest or high status members of the community. So these may be the remains of Rectors Stephen Hellard and Robert Chester, who are commemorated on the ledger slabs found within the chancel commemorate.



Another group of disarticulated remains was exposed to the east of the row of ledger slabs in the north aisle, including the upper and lower jaws of an individual with perfectly aligned teeth but with one missing molar.

These may have belonged to Sarah Bowcock (d1660), who is buried nearby. Because of dietary changes and the increasing use of forks in the post-medieval period, the size and shape of the jaw changed, becoming smaller and less pronounced. However, as the remains found here had medieval traits and Sarah Bowcock died in 1660, it could be that this is actually an earlier burial.



Far less ancient, but just as intriguing, are these two pennies.

Can you see how old they are?

To see where they were discovered, look at the picture below.



How do you think they got there?



The full archaeological report is available to read on our website. Take a look. It's fascinating!

The Finishing Touches.

Once the church had had a new lick of paint, it was time for the audio visual to be fitted. ESS reinstated our existing mixing desk and speakers, added some new kit to make it all work and installed and put up the new video screens.



The sliding doors to the Parish Room were installed in mid August, allowing us to re-start our Sunday children's groups.



Notice boards, signs and monuments were put back up, some areas of woodwork were repainted, and finally, after over a year in storage, the pews were returned to the church, given a good clean, and put in place.



Answers to the Timeline Puzzle

Picture D: Excavation. July, 2019. The work on the centre aisle is done here. See the gaps where the wooden screens used to be and the protective covers over some of the memorial stones.

Picture A: Demolition. August, 2019. Amongst other things, the kitchen wall had to come down to make way for supporting beams for the upper room.

Picture H: Visiting. September, 2019.. With the first stage of the demolition and excavation complete, we had a chance to visit the church, see the uncovered tombs and get a sense of the new space that we would soon be able to enjoy.

Picture B: Rebuilding. October 2019. The first stage of rebuilding was the construction of underfloor ducts to take the main heating pipes and AV cables. This is all now hidden, but if you look closely at the floor you will see the inspection covers.

Picture F: Insulation. November, 2019. Before the underfloor heating was laid, the floor was insulated to ensure that all the heat went up and into the church. The insulation blocks were the size of BBQ briquettes and very light.

Picture G: Scree. December, 2019. Once the pipes were all down and tested to make sure there were no leaks, a layer of scree was laid down on top to seal in the pipes and to make a flat surface for the new stone floor to be laid.

Picture C: Floor and ceiling. December, 2019. Whilst the scree was setting, work continued in the parish room. Here the floor to the upper room is being finished.

Picture E: Stone Laying. February, 2020. Almost the last stage in the construction part of the project, the new stone floor was laid. The stone was cut from a quarry in Dorset and laid, like a jigsaw with no picture, on a bed of sand and cement to keep it in place.



How did
you do?

The Final Verdict...

After years in the planning and over a year of work, the project is now complete, and St Nicholas Church has had its once-in-a-century make-over.

Our first service back in church took place on Sunday 5th July, but the Church was officially re-opened on 12th September, 2020, by Rt Revd. Dr Michael Beasley, Bishop of Hertford.

We are absolutely delighted with the results, and we are looking forward to many years of praising and serving God and gathering together in our new surroundings.



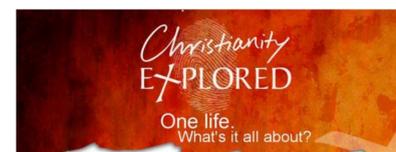
What do you think?

There are few things still left to be done. For example, inside this wooden case is a 13th century effigy of a woman and child. That's going to have a new plinth on which to sit.



We'll also be buying new chairs to replace the old and rather uncomfortable wooden ones we have at present. And then there's the task of proclaiming the good news of Jesus to the parish and town, so that the church is filled with people.

If you've never investigated the **claims of Jesus**, who He is, why He came, and what it all means for you, we'd love to help you do that. There are plenty of **free books and tracts** to take away and read, and we regularly run **short courses** to think through the Christian faith with others. And of course, you'll receive a **warm welcome every Sunday**. Why not chat with one of the stewards and ask for more details?



Final thanks...

This project could not have been completed without...

Our creative architect and his team

Our fabulous contractors

Our generous givers— individuals and charitable bodies

Our tireless project manager—Anthony Taylor

And the grace, mercy and generous provision of Almighty God, for whose greater glory this project was undertaken.

Soli Deo Gloria: September 2020.