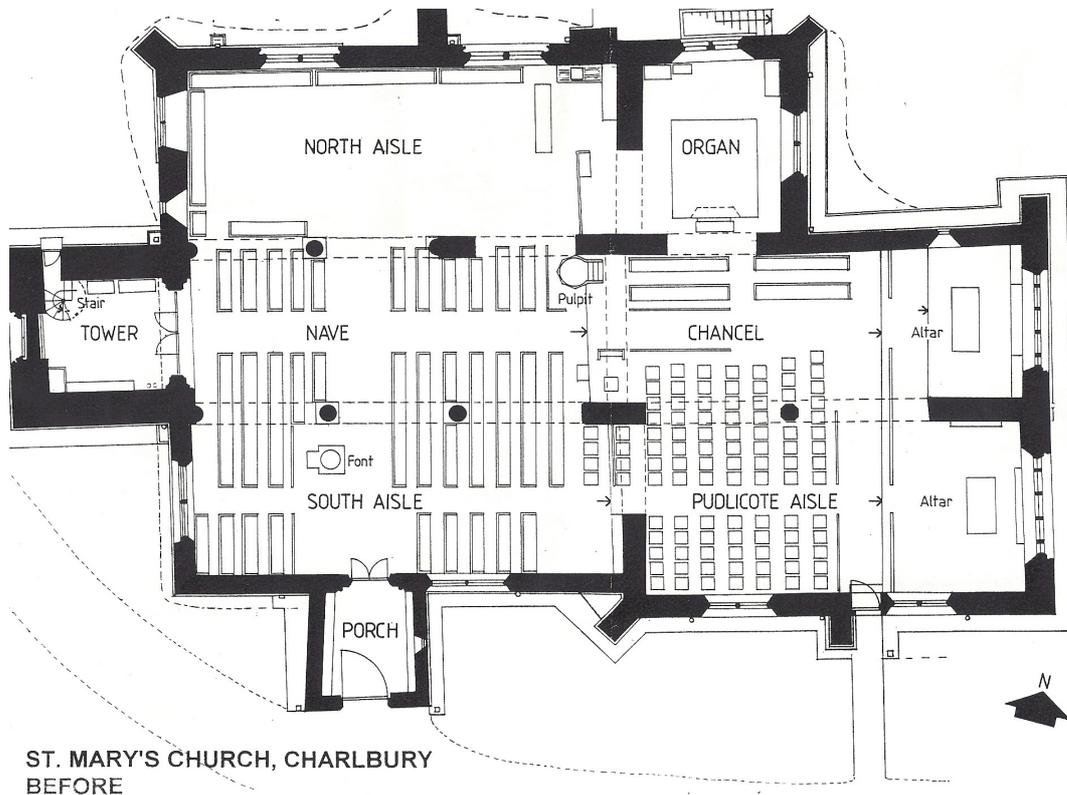


Why are we the “wrong” way round

Lots of visitors are surprised (and many delighted) with the re-arrangement of St Mary's church, but want to know what led to this layout. For them and for anyone else who wonders, here is the story.

The quinquennial inspections of 1985 and 1990 told a disastrous story. There was dry rot, wet rot, death watch beetle, you name it we had it. And we had just finished a series of repairs to stop the roof leaking, install a new organ and rehang the bells. It was a big problem.

At the time the layout of the church was as you see in diagram 1.

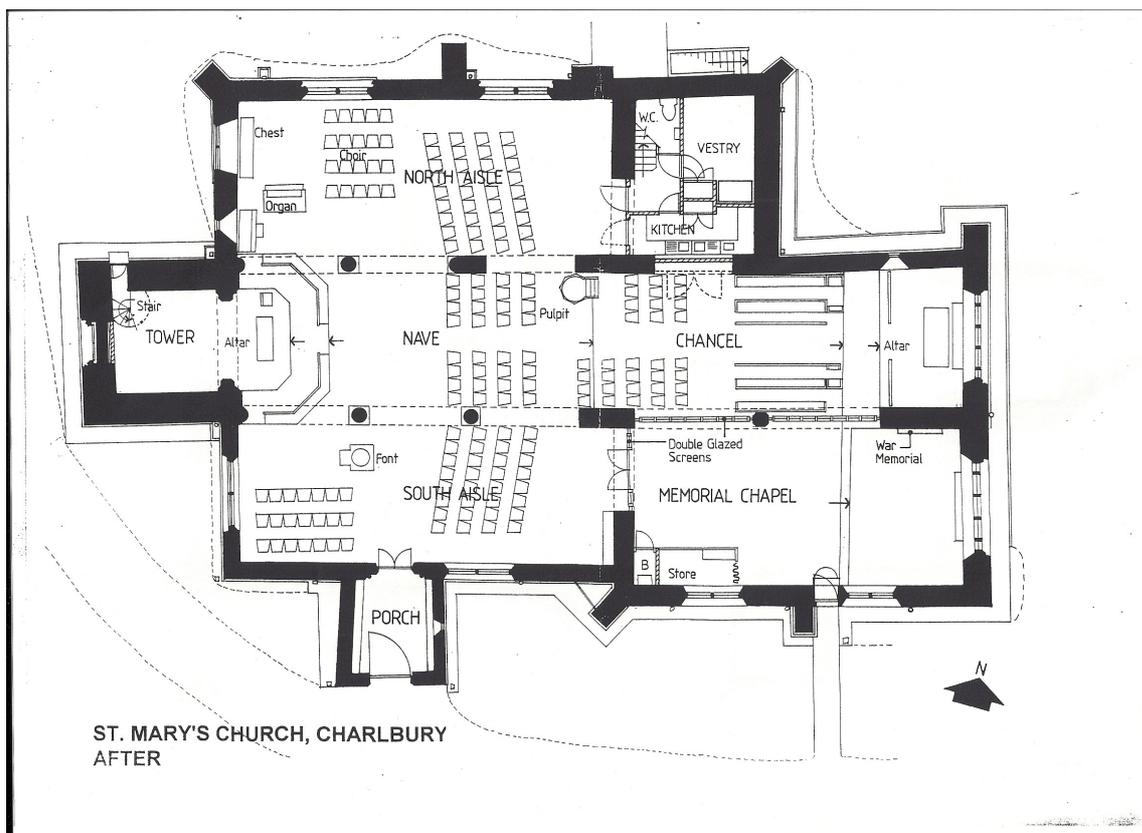


The church faced the conventional way, which presented several problems. Only those in the central nave could see anything of what was going on; the north and south aisles were cut off. To mitigate these effects we had taken to having the larger family services in the Pudlicote aisle, and although this could accommodate more than the nave, the north, south and now the central aisles were still out of the picture. The north aisle became the home of the Sunday School, but being separated from the main church by only a flimsy

net curtain, the inevitable noise disturbed the overflow congregation in the central and south aisles, who were having enough trouble following the service as it was. The pews themselves presented an unbroken vista of a toffee brown sea covering the floor. They had been installed by a curate in the mid 19th century and were made of pine.

The wooden floor was one of the major problems as it was rotten and becoming unsafe. This it transpired was because bearers supporting it were found to be laid directly on the bare earth. The pews had to come out so we could replace the floor, and the obvious question to ask ourselves was – could we, should we, put them back, and in what configuration to best fit the needs of a growing church.

The PCC and architect looked at many options and visited other churches within a radius of 60 miles for inspiration. We tried plans with the altar at the chancel steps, along the north wall, and many other combinations. We finally arrived at scheme "K" which in essence is the one you see today. This is outlined in diagram 2.



The theory behind this scheme – which has indeed proved correct – is that the greatest number of people can see, and feel part of, the service. The Chancel and east altar are retained for smaller, more

intimate services and the Pudlicote aisle has been glassed in (soundproofed) and the name changed to Memorial chapel (because the war memorial is there) to provide somewhere for the Sunday club to meet.

The floor was replaced by a Cotswold stone floor and, after much discussion, the pews were replaced by upholstered chairs, similar to those we were using in the Pudlicote aisle before the changes.

The alterations took place between 1992 and 1995. For the duration of about 6 months we had to hold our services in the hall of the old primary school. All in all we raised around £340,000 for the re-ordering, all but a small amount of which came from local donations, bequests and intensive fund-raising efforts. It was a small miracle how this amount was raised in such a short time.

Once finished, we were amazed and gratified by the open, lighter and overall inclusive feel imparted to the church. In some way it looked both newer, but also more ancient, in that you could now see the base of the pillars against a stone floor. The Sunday club space worked brilliantly with the children able to re-join their parents for communion.

We continue to develop the church . Additions to the scheme since its completion in 1996 have included the installation of a re-glazed west window, dedicated to Martin Chadwick, a previous and much loved vicar under whose careful guidance the re-ordering was completed. Other improvements have been the provision of glass doors to improve the feeling of welcome, the removal of the choir stalls to increase capacity in the chancel and open up the east altar. a new organ, and many more

As the church and congregation continue to develop no doubt further facilities will be added, like those already done to improve the sound system and provide audio visual capability. We are already running out of space for the young people to meet and this is on the agenda for the future.

Our aim in all this is to provide a space in which we can further the work of the church in spreading the good news about Jesus Christ and helping people of all ages to engage more effectively in the worship of God. It is a "living building" that, after more than 900 years, continues to offer this town and community a holy space where we can encounter God's presence and peace.

We hope you like the results.