

The History of Holy Trinity Sunningdale

Holy Trinity Church is a Grade 2 listed building in the conservation area of the old village of Sunningdale.

1839 to 1860

In 1839, the population of Sunningdale had reached almost 600, and the people of Sunningdale decided it was time to have a church of their own. Until Holy Trinity Parish Church in Sunningdale was built, the nearest church had been in Sunninghill, or Old Windsor.

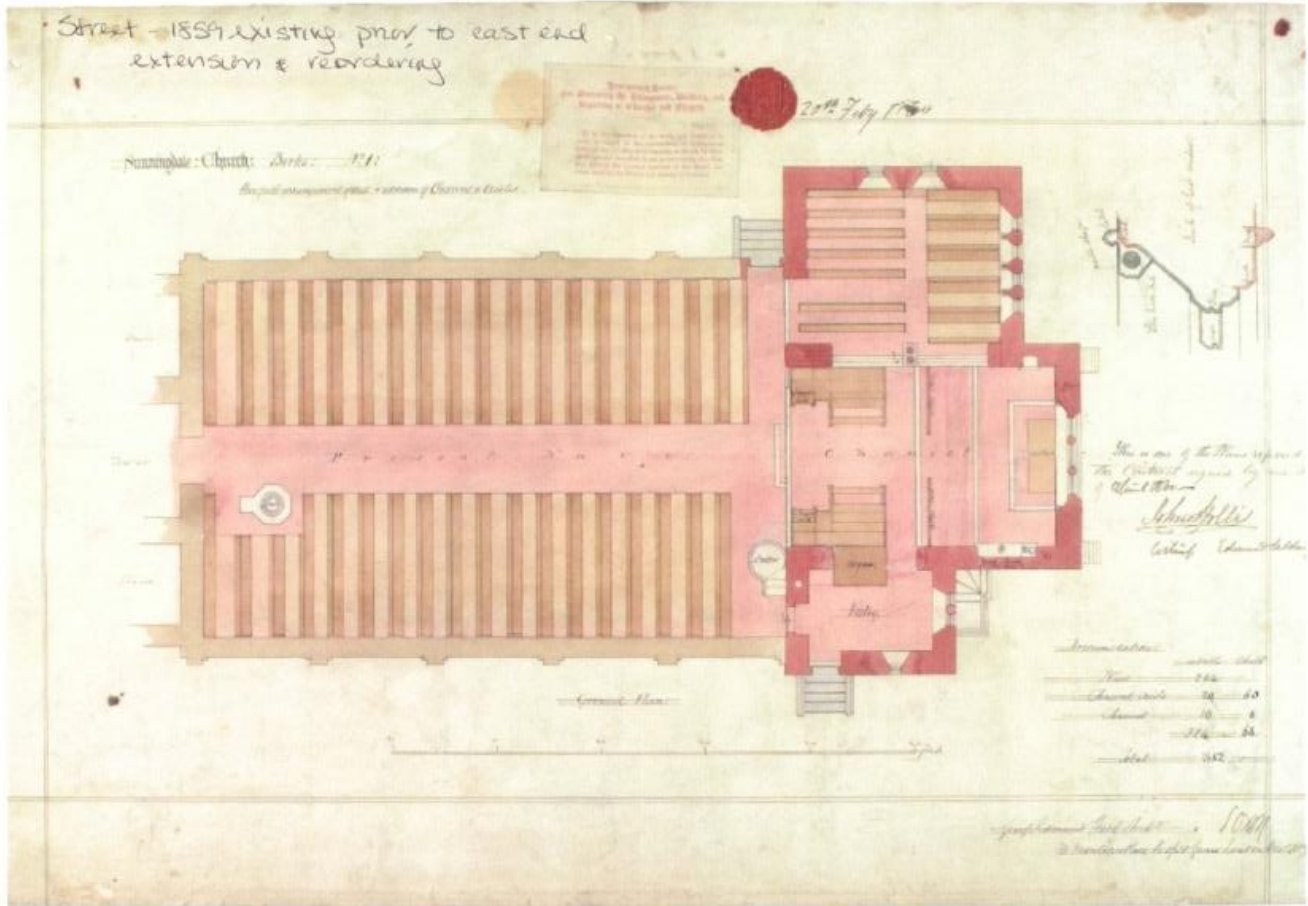
The church stands on the site of an old gravel pit which existed on Sunningdale Common. One acre of this land was acquired by Mr. John Platt, and donated to the parish as a site for the church.



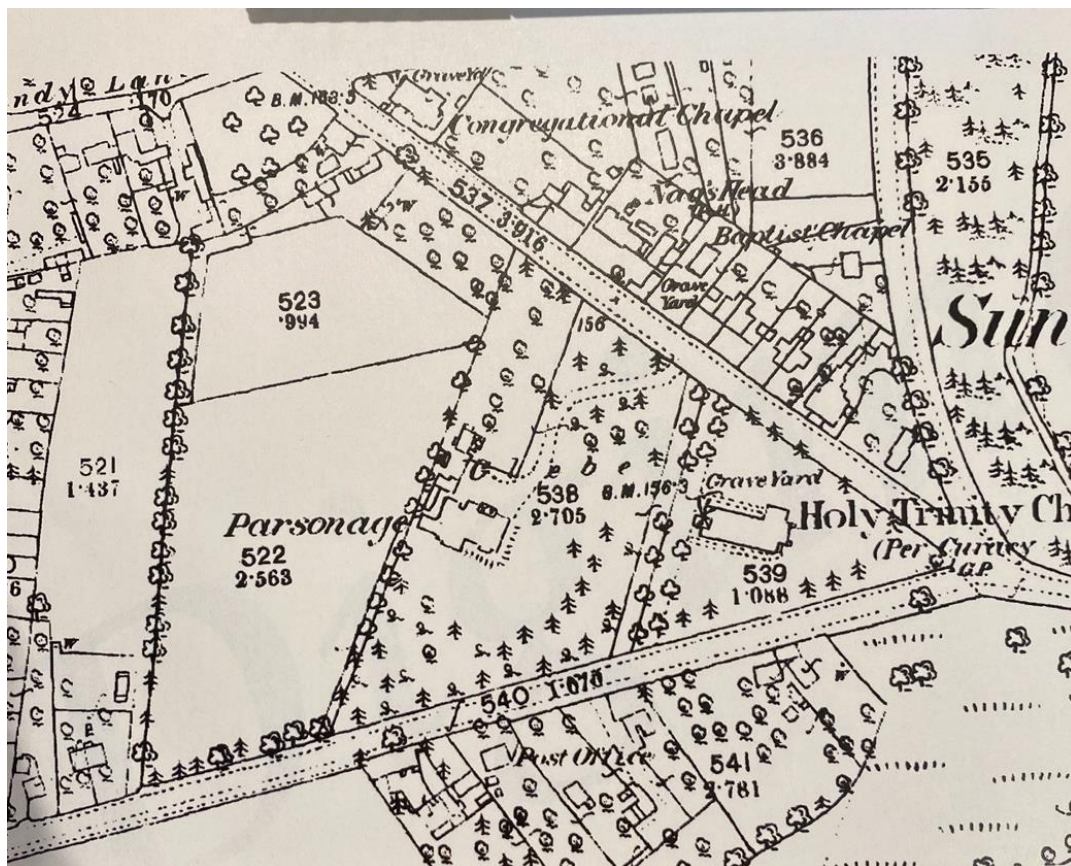
Our triangle of land bounded by Church Rd, High Street and Trinity Crescent.

Building work began very quickly, even before the conveyancing had been completed. The church was completed on the 22nd October 1840. The church was originally a very small plain building designed by architect Robert Ebbles. The cost of the construction work came to £1600 at the time. The only remaining part of the original church is the foundation stone which was laid by H.R.H. Princess Augusta on the 27th September 1840. *(This is placed under the new foundation stone of the current building and can be seen from the pathway past the west end of the building.)*

We have no pictures of the original church but the following architect's drawing shows the outline and plan of the church. Notice that the main entrance was in the middle of the west wall and was through the square church tower.



The following OS map is pre 1880 and shows the outline of the church which reflects the design above. The map shows the area before any building work on Trinity Crescent and that the Vicar then lived in a substantial parsonage in three acres of land!





I was sent this photograph by Mr. John Edge who tells me it is the original Vicarage (Parsonage).

When this was demolished a new Vicarage (no.2) was built on the corner of Church Road and Sidbury Close and is now "Old Church House". Some church members remember visiting the Vicar there and the garden parties!

The current Vicarage (no.3) was built in the garden of Old Church House. It is not quite the same grand style as Vicarages 1 and 2!!

1860 to 1887

In 1860 the then Incumbent, the Reverend W C Raffles Flint, added the Chancel and a small Chapel to the original church. The architect was GE Street. The Chapel was later to become the Vestry, and is now the Lady Chapel. These were built to commemorate the Reverend's uncle, Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of Singapore and The London Zoo.

The following photograph shows the church after Revd. Raffles additions. This gives a very clear view of the original church and square tower.



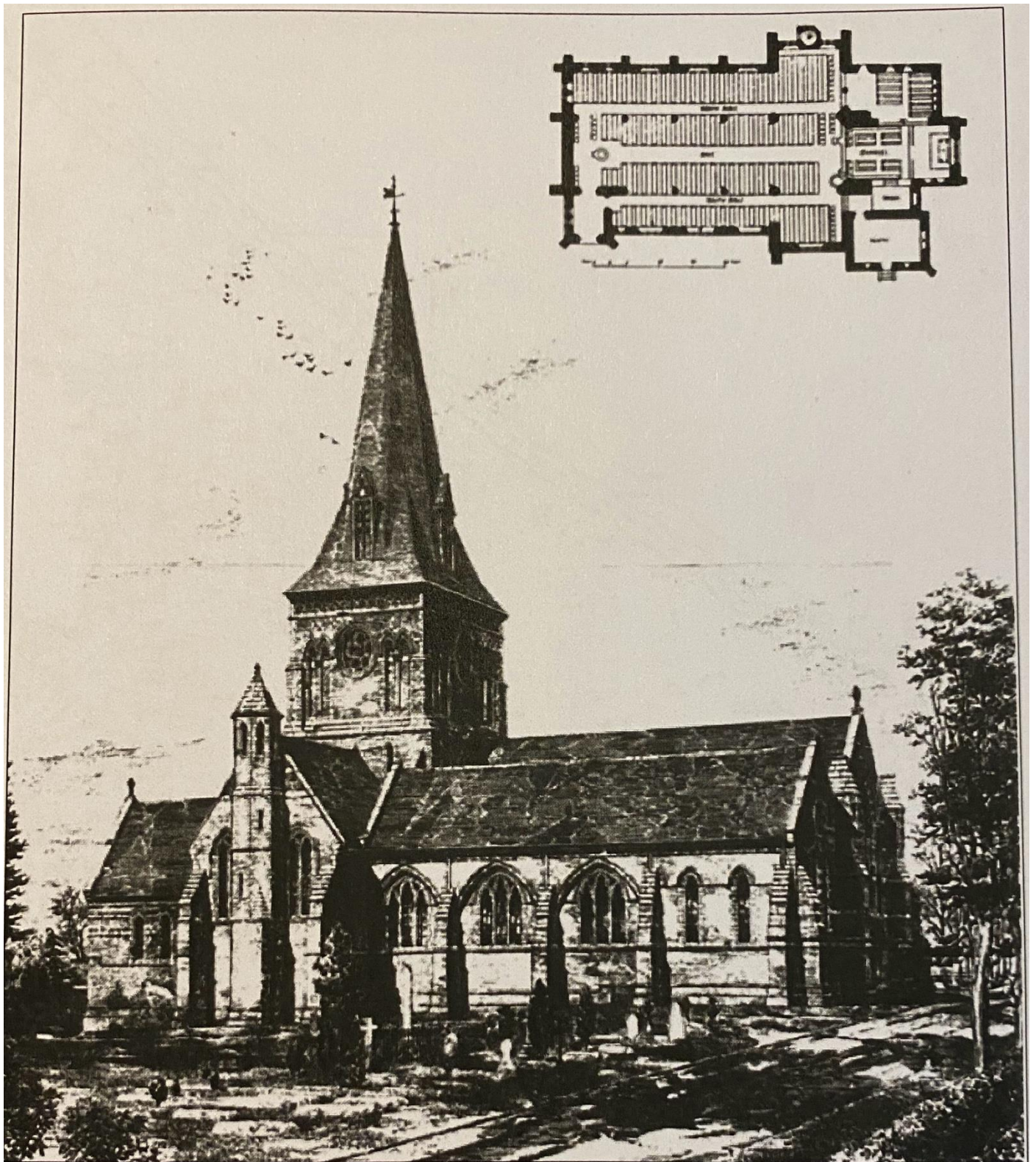
Unfortunately there is a tree obscuring the view of the original vestry which was later extended to house the new organ. A similar view to the one above was the inspiration for a painting used to illustrate F.C. Hodders book "A Short History of Sunningdale"



1887 - 1890

By 1880 the population of Sunningdale had almost outgrown the church, so in 1887 it was decided to rebuild the Nave, to provide extra capacity and also commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. This time the architect was Mr. J. Oldrid Scott. The work was completed largely through the generous assistance of Sir William Farmer of Coworth Park. The foundation stone was laid at the West end of the church, immediately above the original stone, on the 13th June 1887, by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, later to become King Edward the VII. The Spire was not completed until 1890. *(NB. We recently received a gift of the Spirit Level used by HRH the Prince of Wales when laying the foundation stone. A year earlier the same level had been used by HRH the Duke of Cambridge to lay the foundation stone of St. Michael's Church in Portsmouth.)*

The church is of cruciform plan built of red brick with blue headers, limestone dressings and some flint flush work. The timber framed coped-gabled roofs are high pitched covered with red clay tiles with the exception of the barrel roof to the chancel. The spire is clad with wood shingles. The interior is red brick banded with black brick, stone dressings. Specifically there is a 4-bay arcade to the north aisle with compound piers of 4 shafts supporting pointed arches, all of limestone. There is a 4-bay arcade of similar design to the south aisle.



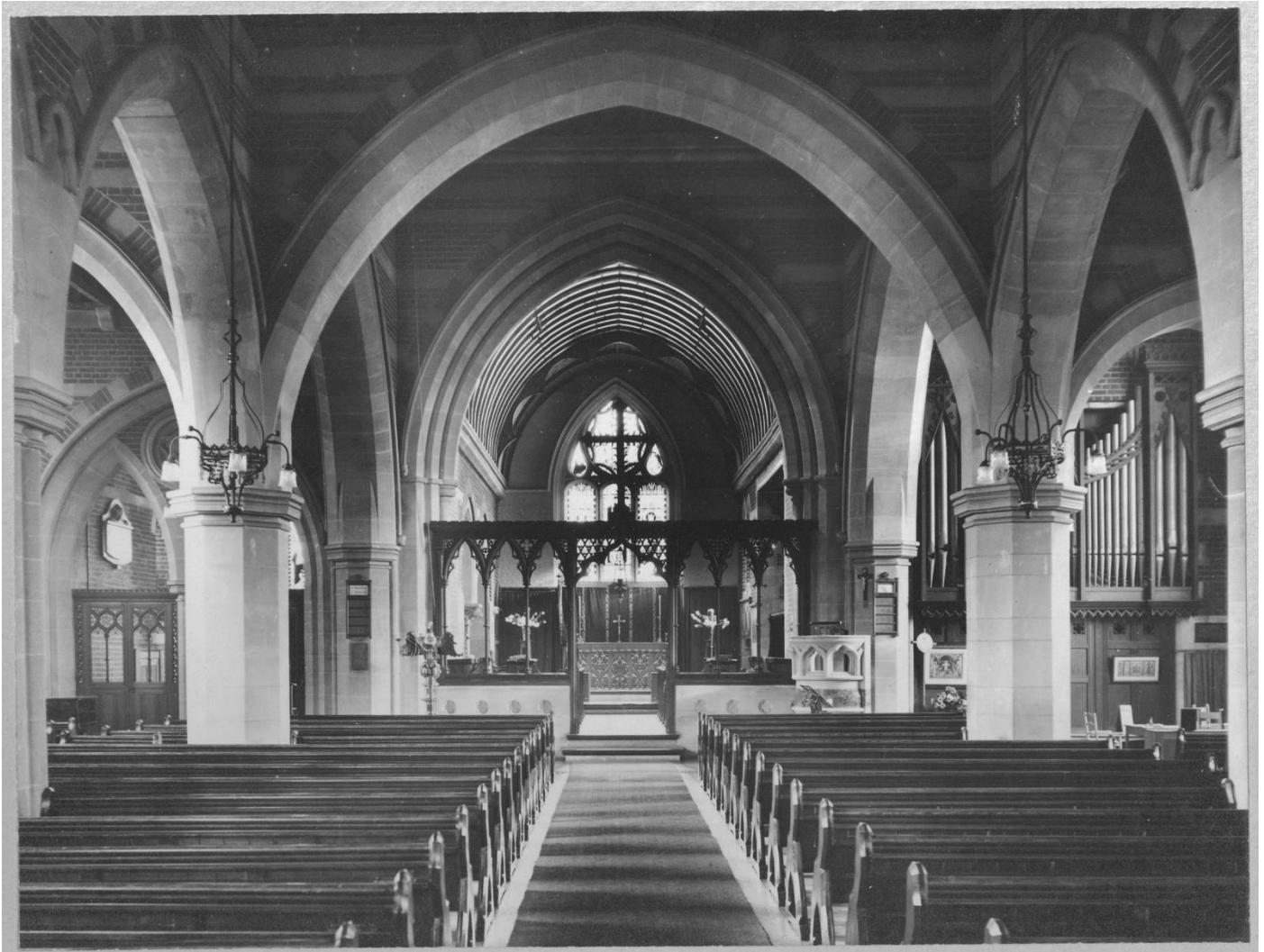
1887 (J. Oldrid Scott). Published in *The Architect*, May 28th 1887. From archiseek.com.

This is the church we have now. Note though that on this sketch the North Door is missing and the current vestry has not been built.

The insert shows us what mattered most – as many pews as possible!

Soon after the Chancel was built, a small organ was given by Mr. Arbuthnot of Coworth Park. This was replaced in 1890 by a much bigger organ, built by the Thomas Harrison firm of organ builders. It was originally built in 1865 for the new church of St. Martin-on-the-Hill, Scarborough.*

The opening recital of the Sunningdale organ was given by Sir George Elvey in November 1890. The organ was refurbished with a new tracker action and some tonal modifications by John Bowen of Northampton in 1970 and was cleaned and overhauled in 1984.



The above photograph shows the church as Scott planned it but has already been slightly adapted. Over to the right some pews have been removed to create a children's corner. Curtains have been hung covering over the tile work behind the altar.

The candelabra that now hang in the aisles used to hang over the nave and this photograph was taken long before the north transept was enclosed to create the room we use as a creche and for meetings and long before the South Transept was enclosed with sliding doors.

The Harrison organ can be seen to the right and extending and using the vestry for this instrument meant that the chapel was used as a vestry.

1890 - 1907

The acquisition of the larger organ meant the loss of the vestry, and so the Lady Chapel remained the Vestry until the present Vestry was built in 1905. To accommodate this new build two windows in the Lady Chapel were partly bricked up.

Glad to have the Chapel back, a new altar, rails and paving were installed in 1907, the gift of William Trotter. Using the Chapel for something else and claiming it back seems to be a recurring theme in church life. When space is required – use the Chapel!

1907 - 2004

There were no further major adaptations to the church until 1974 when the north transept was enclosed to create the 'Church Room' as space used for meetings and a creche room on Sundays. Throughout the church's history many other gifts and additions have been made including the stained glass windows, rood screen, pulpit and lectern.

2004 to present day

As the church moved into the new millennium, increasing congregation numbers and a need to modernize certain areas created the need for a special project to better equip the church. Within this project entitled "Embracing the Future" were many items including the refurbishment of the Coronation Memorial Institute building (used to house the church office and Rendezvous Café), resourcing a youth worker, extending the Vicarage and re-ordering the Church building.

All the work to re-order the church building fell within the existing structure and many were improvements to work which had been done in the past. These works included: creating an improved WC with separate sink and disabled access, a refurbishment of the Vestry including a refitted kitchen, reopening access from the Vestry to the Chapel, improvement to the screening and soundproofing between the Chapel and the Chancel, restoration and conservation of the beautifully decorated ceiling in the Chancel, screening to the South Transept and a new removable stage/raised dais area to the nave and commissioning of two new stained glass windows for the Chancel representing a new heaven and a new earth from Revelations 21.

Transforming Trinity.

The loss of the CMI building over the road severely impacted the life and activity of the church. The rooms and spaces there allowed the church family to flourish although the church building remained unused for large periods of time each week.

Seeking to address twin needs; to create the facilities the church requires and tackle some long term church issues, The Heritage Project was created which sadly did not follow through. An extension was given planning permission but remained un-funded. These matters rested during a vacancy, however the desire remains for the church to be much more accommodating to the activities that would allow it to flourish. Transforming Trinity is seeking to address these issues.

Additional Notes:

The furniture, including the bench pews, communion rails, marble font and pulpit appear to date from the various works undertaken in the late 1800s.

A large marble monumental slab is in the southwest end of the nave, with relief figures in dress uniform, inscribed to Admiral Prince Victor of Hohenlohe GCB d.1891. He was a German Prince and half-nephew of Queen Victoria who ran away from school in his native land and was sponsored to enter the Royal Navy by Queen Victoria. On his retirement from the Navy he became a sculptor working under the name Count Gleichen with a studio in St James' Palace. His daughter Lady Feodora Gleichen studied at his studios and sculpted the monument to her father. A memorial to Prince Victor's wife, Laura is situated above the font.

One bell presumably installed when the spire was constructed, remains on the timber beams in the spire.

The church is surrounded by a churchyard, which is now closed. The gates and railings to the south entrance of the churchyard date from 1839 and are also listed Grade II. A war memorial is on the Eastern corner of the churchyard at the junction of Church Road and the High Street.

**An email received in February 2021 from Dr.Graham Cory shed some light on the acquisition of the organ. He explained that it was insufficiently powerful for St.Martin's-on-the-Hill. He also shared that on its original installation at St.Martin's it was played by Revd John Bacchus Dyke, sometime precentor of Durham. He happened to be a close friend of Thomas Harrison but he is also the composer of various hymn tunes still played as accompaniment to our worship. MELITA (Eternal Father strong to save) - DOMINUS REGOT ME (The King of Love my Shepherd is) and NICEA (Holy, Holy Holy) are just three of the 300+ hymn tunes he composed.*

For those of us entitled to snoop about the building where worshippers rarely access, it's clear to see the organ had to be adapted to fit the space it now occupies. Some of the carved faces are now neatly surrounded by the wooden structure supporting the pipes. The most recent works on the organ to repair and restore some rather heavy handed intervention some time ago has shown that the organ is certainly powerful enough for the space we have at Holy Trinity and that the organ remains the best of instruments to accompany a large congregation singing the well-loved hymns and carols.