

Church of St Lawrence, Bovingdon Heritage Statement for the church and conservation area



South elevation: viewed from the main path.



North Elevation: viewed from near the boundary wall.



North Elevation: From the NE looking over to the location for the extension

1.0 Church: Setting and Introduction

1.1 St Lawrence Bovingdon is a Grade II* listed church which was substantially rebuilt in 1844-1846. The architect was Thomas Talbot Bury of Lee & Bury. The church, churchyard and church-associated property forms a substantial part of the heart of the Bovingdon Conservation area, which has been recently extended.

1.2 The Bovingdon Conservation Area Character Statement gives context to the development of the church. It comments that the church dates from 1235 and village developed as a cluster of farmsteads. The tower was added c 1400, the base of which still survives.

‘...The Church and churchyard became a powerful focus, around which the settlement steadily developed and coalesced in the late medieval period....’¹

1.3 From the late 18th through the 19th centuries there was ‘...a major shift of focus for the village from a settlement clustered around the churchyard, to a thriving hamlet serving the local population and passing traffic on the Chipperfield Road...the emerging identity of the village provided the impetus for Bovingdon to break from Hemel Hempstead and in the C19th it became a separate parish in its own right.’²

‘...Granville Ryder, resident lord of the manor at Westbrook from 1832-1879. established the village school, built the new Parsonage house, added an extension to Bury Farm, rebuilt the Church in 1845, and allocated land for the Memorial Hall, built in 1921.’³

¹ P6 ‘Bovingdon Conservation Area: Character Appraisal & Management proposals’ Dacorum Borough Council

² P7 *ibid*

³ P11 *ibid*

- 1.4 The church stands in the middle of a large churchyard, which is the second-largest in the county. The churchyard is open and burials continue.
- 1.5 An avenue of Irish yews defines a footpath, which runs across the site from far southwest entrance onto the site up to a lych gate on the north boundary. At the same southwest corner there is a very discreet vehicular entrance leading to a gravelled car park.
- 1.5 The area around the church, accessed by narrow, rural lanes is 'unexpectedly secretive'⁴. Trees line Church Lane, Vicarage Lane and Stoney Lane; there is only a glimpse or two of the church along Church Street through gaps between the houses on Church Street until one gets to the eastern end of the churchyard.

'...Despite its impressive bulk, even the Church tends to offer only snatched views from around its perimeter.'⁵

The distinguished flint and brick boundary wall surrounding the generous churchyard, the yew- tree avenue and lych-gate consolidate and enhance its setting.⁶

2.0 Exterior

- 2.1 The church has been largely rebuilt in a mix of Decorative and Perpendicular styles. It comprises flint-faced rubble walls with the occasional inclusion of puddingstone. The quoins and window surrounds etc. are in Bath stone but there is much older clunch stonework around the west door, porch and low level on the south aisle. The tower is a 3-stage square tower with a stainless steel flat roof behind a parapet with merlons & embrasures. 4 pinnacles to each corner. There is no spire (contrary to the listing description).
- 2.2 The nave has two side aisles, both with distinctively different styles of windows. The south aisle has perpendicular-style windows: square hood-moulded, 3-light windows topped by decorative saltire tracery with trefoil cusping. The north face of the side-aisle has pointed-arched 2-light trefoil windows with a quatrefoil light & cusped lights. Both clerestoreys have plainer, square hood-moulded 2-light windows, which also match the upper windows to the tower.
- 2.3 The nave and side aisles have stainless-steel roofs.
- 2.4 The chancel is slate roofed and all windows differ in style – the largest of course is the East window with long windows under decorative-style tracery with 2 trefoil windows on either side of circular tracery containing 3 cusped trefoil windows and other lights.

⁴ P13 *ibid*

⁵ p16 *ibid*

⁶ p24 *ibid*

- 2.5 On the north side there is a lean-to vestry with an EDPM membrane on the roof. Stairs lead down in front of the vestry to the heating plant below. A tall flue rises up on the north side of the chancel. In front of the vestry is a small 20th century flint-faced WC which is showing signs of deterioration.
- 2.6 The south porch appears to have been the historic main route into the church judging by the gap in the buildings opposite; perhaps it was so up to the formation of the new path through the site. It contains some older clunch stonework and has a slate roof.
- 2.7 The south approach is a particularly bright and welcoming route into the church with a lovely openness to the churchyard beyond. This area is used for the occasional outdoor events.

3.0 Church Interior

- 3.1 In the nave, five handsome, but relatively low, bay arcades on each side support the clerestory which in turn supports the exposed boarded timber roof.
- 3.2 The entrance from the west door (and path) leads to a fully glazed screen set in a high, pointed arch to the nave. A similar pointed arch differentiates the chancel from the nave. Over both arches are painted decorative ribbons with quotations from scripture.
- 3.3 A door at the east end of the north aisle leads into the current kitchen and cleaning store. This room is in a dilapidated state and not fit for purpose. This room housed the former vestry.⁷
- 3.4 The incomplete set of pews have previously been attributed to Thomas Talbot Bury but this is not correct. Talbot Bury had an interest in pews and wrote a book 'Remains of Ecclesiastical Woodwork' in 1847, but there is no evidence, in terms of quality of design, correct use of historic precedent, materials and workmanship to suggest that he designed the Bovingdon pews. A recent report by church furniture specialist Charles Tracy, included with this application, has come to the conclusion that it is very unlikely that Talbot Bury designed them; all evidence⁸ points to mass-produced manufacture as a cost saving. His view is that they detract from the setting of the church interior⁹. Vestry records point to disputes between Talbot Bury and his partner and also

⁷ . It is in very poor condition, there is substantial evidence of rot and the floor over the heating chamber below is currently under investigation as it is feared that the brick vault below is losing structural integrity All as identified in the 2018 quinquennial report

⁸ Including inappropriate Baroque features, cut-down lengths to fit the columns rather than custom-made to fit; interchangeable and detachable poppy heads- which Dr Tracy identifies as being carved with machine tools "quite without education or inspiration." p5. 'St Lawrence, Bovingdon Hertfordshire. The Nave pews. A significance assessment' Charles Tracy B.A. Ph.D. FSA

⁹ '...The overall appearance is unnerving and quite unsuited to the architecture. It is inconceivable that the arrangement emanated from Talbot Bury's practice.' p4 *ibid*

great concerns raised by the church about cost over-runs at the end of the build.

- 3.5 A 14C chest tomb facing the chancel arch has an effigy of an unknown knight. We are advised that this used to be sited in the west end and was relocated in recent memory. There is a pre-rebuild engraving which shows it previously under one of the arcade arches
- 3.6 The centre window in the north aisle is in memory of Thomas Talbot Bury.
- 3.7 At the west end of the north aisle there is a new vestry area behind a timber screen.
- 3.8 At the west end of the south aisle is an open children's area. The organ has been re-sited into the east end of the south aisle and the pews have been rearranged to allow some space for a variety of instruments.
- 3.9 Leading off from the north aisle is a dilapidated kitchen set in the former vestry, which is in a poor state.

4.0 The significance of the church and its setting in the conservation area.

- 4.1 The church is Grade 2* listed and is a nationally designated heritage asset as being of 'more than special interest'. It is a scholarly reconstruction by Talbot Bury, replacing a significant amount of the original fabric. Most of the original fabric can be seen in the tower and there are remnants of the original lower parts of the walls still in evidence: there is some archaeological significance with the retention of some of the historic fabric.
- 4.2 Overall the exterior has high significance due firstly to the historic remnants of the tower, which might be more 'original' than first assumed, but also to the general integrity of the design of the 19th century 'restoration'. What is of interest is the careful differentiation between the windows on the south side to those on the north.
- 4.3 The setting of the heritage asset is at present eroded by the alterations around the former vestry, including the large stainless steel flue and the WC extension. The EDPM roofing to the vestry also detracts from the general setting of the heritage asset and the roofing to the side aisles and nave is 20th century stainless steel. See photo on page 2 above. It is the least satisfactory corner of the building.
- 4.4 There are other heritage assets that are also relevant to this church's significance. These include two cultural heritage assets.

- 4.5 One of these cultural heritage assets is the function of the church as a place of worship and gathering. The cultural heritage asset of worship at this site is nearly eight centuries old and is therefore of high significance.
- 4.6 The other *cultural* heritage asset, is the focus of the village around the church, and this has been eroded over the last two centuries as the conservation area character appraisal, discussed in Section 1 above makes clear.
- 4.7 The churchyard still forms a significant part of the conservation area even as expanded.
- 4.8 The bulk of the area around the church is 'unexpectedly secretive'¹⁰. Even within the churchyard, the Irish yew trees set up lines of travel through the churchyard which channels the users through the site.
- 4.9 It would be interesting to know how long it takes newcomers into the village firstly to discover, then to actually be tempted to visit the church despite the best efforts of the church to add interest into the churchyard with new paths and sculptures. There is a barrier of rather unappealing sections of the High Street between the church and most of the housing in Bovingdon.

5.0 THE PROPOSALS GENERALLY

- 5.1 It is not possible to accommodate all the needs of the church in the current building. See drawing 1248 DOS 001.
- The church is full on certain occasions, including services held for the local school, and further enclosure within the existing envelope is not feasible. It would also destroy the enjoyment of the space.
- 5.2 This is further discussed in detail in the Statement of Need and Table of Activities tabled by the parish.
- 5.3 Other locations around the churchyard were also considered – including siting the facility in the church's car park. Refer to drawing 1248 DOS 002.
- 5.4 A remote location away from the church is very difficult to manage on Sunday with movements around Sunday school and also to accommodate other events that the church holds, including concerts. Refer again to the Statement of Need.
- 5.5 Many early extension schemes were considered, representative of these include:

¹⁰ P13 *ibid*

- A north aisle extension: eliminated as we felt that it impacted unduly on the existing north elevation and Talbot Bury's light-filled interior.
- Various single storey extensions from the vestry including an angled version felt by the DAC to be unsympathetic to the axes of the church.
- A number of two-storey options behind the Chancel but by the time stairs and a platform lift were added, the rooms were unworkable.

5.6 All the solutions also had to minimise the effect of the scheme on existing graves. All solutions have attempted to work around ones known to be an issue. In pre-application discussions we were advised that this is not a planning issue but any solution that required mass reburials (such as to the west of the tower) would make the project completely unsustainable financially, quite apart to the upset caused.

6.0 THE DESIGN AND IMPACT OF THE DESIGN ON THE HERITAGE ASSETS

6.1 Refer to Sections 6.00 & 9.00 of the Design & Access Statement

Francesca Weal RIBA SCA
WEAL-Architects
www.weal-architects.co.uk

Aug 21