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THREE POST-WAR CHURCHES IN LEEDS

BY GEOFFREY DAVY

ST CYPRIAN AND ST JAMES, HAREHILLS

ST DAVID, WAINCLIFFE

ST PAUL, IRELAND WOOD

HISTORIC BUILDINGS REPORT

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SUMMARY

The three churches, St Cyprian and St James, St David and St Paul, designed by Geoffrey Davy and built between 1959 and 1965, are the most striking of their period in Leeds. They display an awareness of advances in liturgical thinking through the architect's membership of the New Churches Research Group, demonstrate the care that went into their design and detailing and show how the example of Le Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamp influenced the work of a provincial British practice.

Geoffrey Davy and Kitson Pyman & Partners

Geoffrey Davy (1912-1988) studied architecture at Leeds School of Architecture where he won the West Yorkshire Society of Architects Design Prize in 1933. He joined Kitson Parish Ledgard & Pyman, the successor to the noted Leeds practice of Bedford & Kitson whose suburban houses had won praise from the incisive German writer Hermann Muthesius, in 1935, having already undertaken unpaid work experience with the firm before he commenced his architectural studies in 1930. He left in August 1939 to join the army, ending the war as a Captain in the Royal Engineers. He returned to Kitsons in November 1945, was appointed an Associate in 1950 and a Partner in 1956.¹

The practice, which became known as Kitson Pyman & Partners in 1959, covered a broad range of work for private and public clients, specialising in licensed premises, offices for banks, building societies and insurance companies, individual private houses and churches. Davy's first church was St Stephen, Moor Allerton (1954),² followed by St Andrew's Methodist Church, Old Lane, Beeston (1956). These were quite simple buildings, the former a hall church of a type popular in early post-war years in a time of materials shortages, the latter a development of the same themes. One thing both churches display is Davy's interest in fine brickwork. He had spent holidays in the Netherlands and, in common with many other British architects of the late 1930s, had developed a great liking for the work of Dudok; several of his commercial buildings such as the West Riding Hosiery Ltd premises in Burley Road (1948) reveal his indebtedness. Davy, together with his senior assistant Charles Sewell, joined the New Churches Research Group founded by Rev. Peter Hammond and Robert Maguire in 1957. They developed an interest in the ideas of the Liturgical Movement, although they were concerned that the introduction of an alien liturgical tradition could result in a church being left with a liturgy that was merely fashionable once the initial enthusiasm for it had died away. At the heart of Davy's liturgical thinking was his belief that there should be nothing between the congregation and the priest. The placing of the choir between nave and sanctuary was particularly abhorrent to him. These ideas were to be developed in the series of three churches which are the subject of this report, built between 1959 and 1965, each of which have common elements yet are radically different in appearance.

St Cyprian and St James, Coldcotes Avenue, Harehills

BI No: 109630 NGR: SE3266134819

A mission church consisting of a wooden hut on brick foundations was established in 1903 in the newly built artisan suburb of Harehills. Its congregation grew following the closure of St James, Cross York Street in February 1949. The money raised from

the sale of the site of the demolished St James was used to fund a new building for St Cyprian's, when combined with £3000 raised by the congregation in a "buy a brick" scheme and £1000 from the Leeds Church Extension Society. Kitson Parish Ledgard & Pyman were appointed architects.³



Exterior from the west (© English Heritage NMR 20911 26/01/06)

Plans for the new building to seat 272 people were drawn up by May 1957. It cost £26,000 including furnishings and was consecrated on 25th April 1959. Several fittings from St James are incorporated, including the organ by Abbot & Smith around which the W end of the church is designed, the communion table, lectern and pulpit. St James was built 1794-1801 and the interior was extensively remodelled in a highly sympathetic manner in 1902 by Sydney Kitson. It is likely that the pulpit is the work of Kitson.

The church was built on a concrete raft to avoid the effects of mining subsidence. It is built of buff coloured brick (Wrays of York 2" facing) with a roof of Burlington slate and has an unusual plan with nave walls that are splayed towards the W end, a SW porch and a canted W wall that adjoins a stumpy bell tower with tall louvres on all four sides. Preliminary perspectives dated May and June 1957 show a slimmer tower with belfry openings in only the E and W walls. The nave walls rise to the E end and the W wall rises to the tower. Tall slit-like windows light the nave, while the W wall is

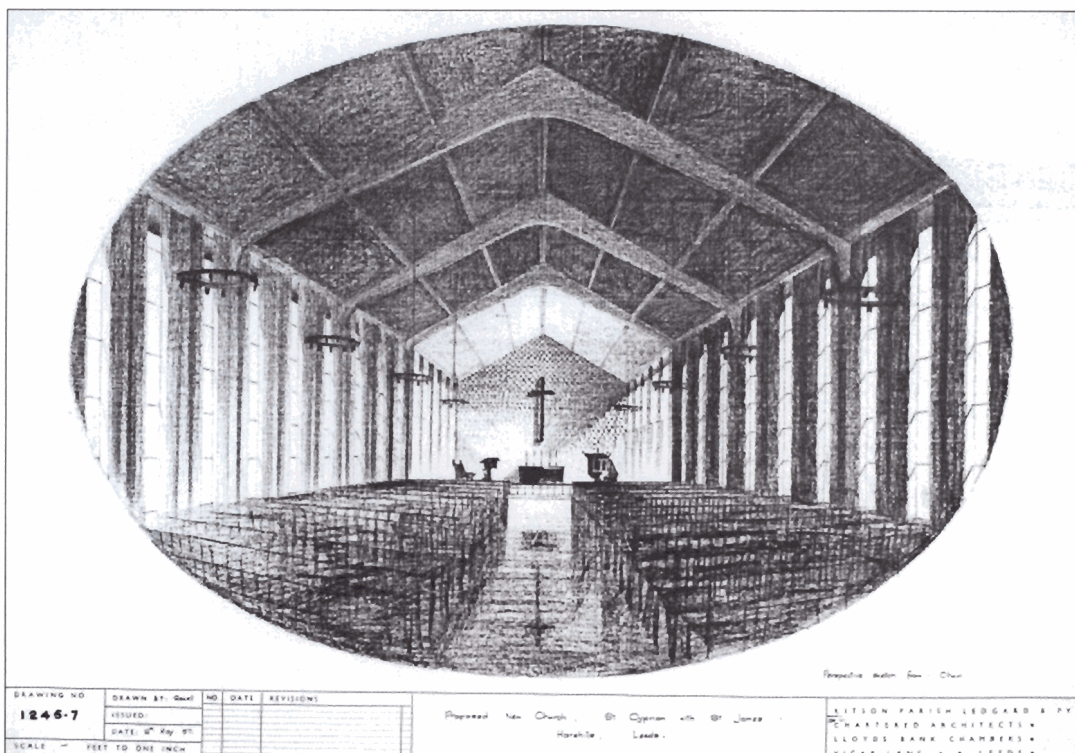
punctuated by small square openings, filled with heavy, coloured pot glass. Davy had visited Ronchamp and Corbusian influence is evident here.

The interior is dominated by the effects produced by the Belgian-made antique glass in the tall nave windows, the multi-coloured glass in the W wall and the two large coloured (predominantly blue and red in Mondrian-like patterns) windows that light the sanctuary. Initial proposals showed the roof with laminated timber beams and purlins exposed but these were covered with longitudinal deal boards, a solution followed at the other two churches. The interior is faced with the same bricks as the exterior save in the sanctuary where the side walls are stone faced and the E wall is of brick laid in saw tooth bonding so as to give a textured effect like that of a pineapple. The bricks for this wall were all laid by the foreman as he considered it was the only way in which consistency could be maintained. Doors lead off by the sanctuary on the S side to vicar's and verger's vestries and on the N to a choir vestry. A corridor runs behind the E wall of the sanctuary with male and female toilets off it and a door in the centre of the E wall of the building. The choir stalls are at the W end, following Davy's view that they should not form a barrier between priest and people. They are raised in three rows on platforms and behind them two staircases lead to a crypt room (intended as a cloakroom) below the tower. The baptistery (which has a portable font) is to the NW. Altar rails and other fittings are in a simple style designed by the architect and largely unchanged since construction. The simple fittings reflect the churchmanship which is traditional low church.

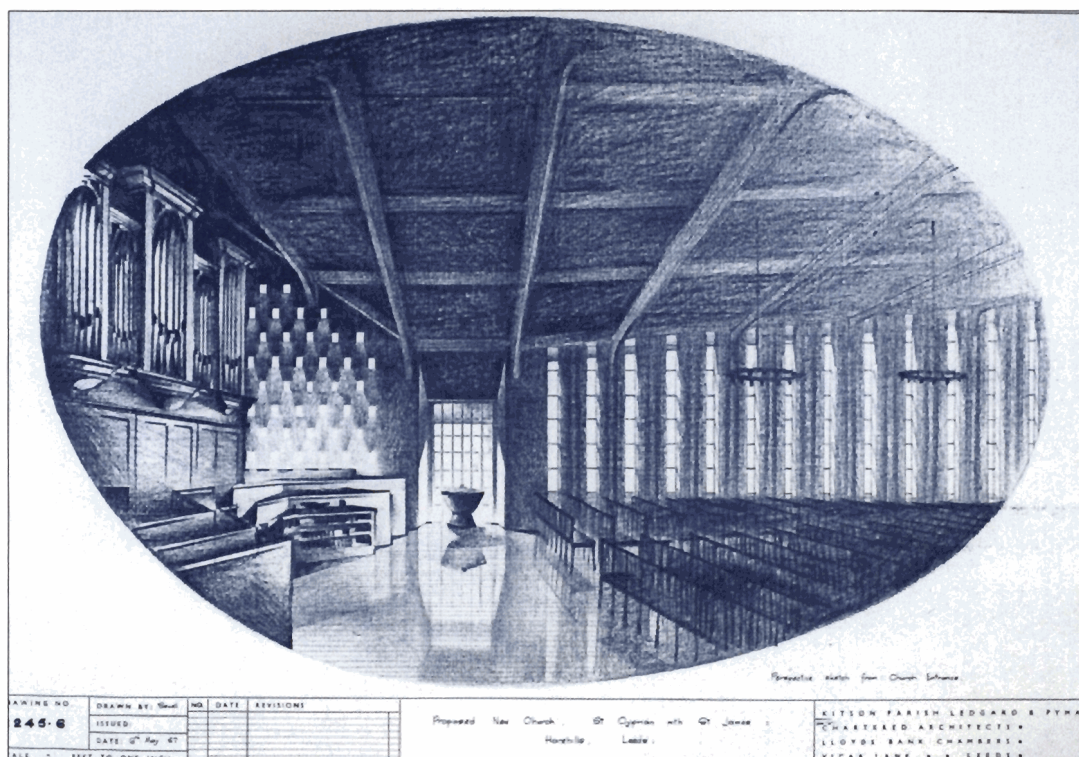
The building marks the emergence of a personal style for Geoffrey Davy, which was to be further developed in St David, Waincliffe (1961) and St Paul, Ireland Wood (1965).

Work is soon to commence on a new church hall designed by Carey Jones Architects which will be accessed from the church through the existing baptistery and will result in the baptistery window being replaced by a doorway. The hall will abut on the church at this point and at the e end vestries, leaving a courtyard between the new building and the church. It should therefore not impact unduly on the fabric of the existing building.

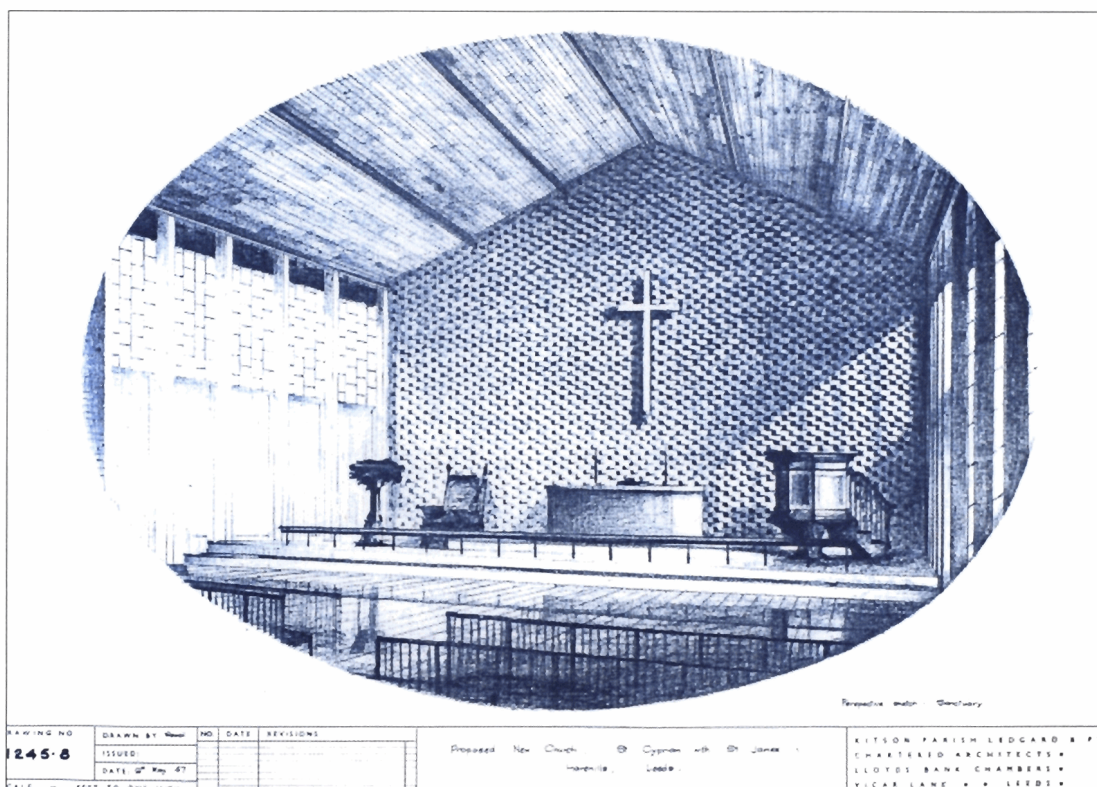
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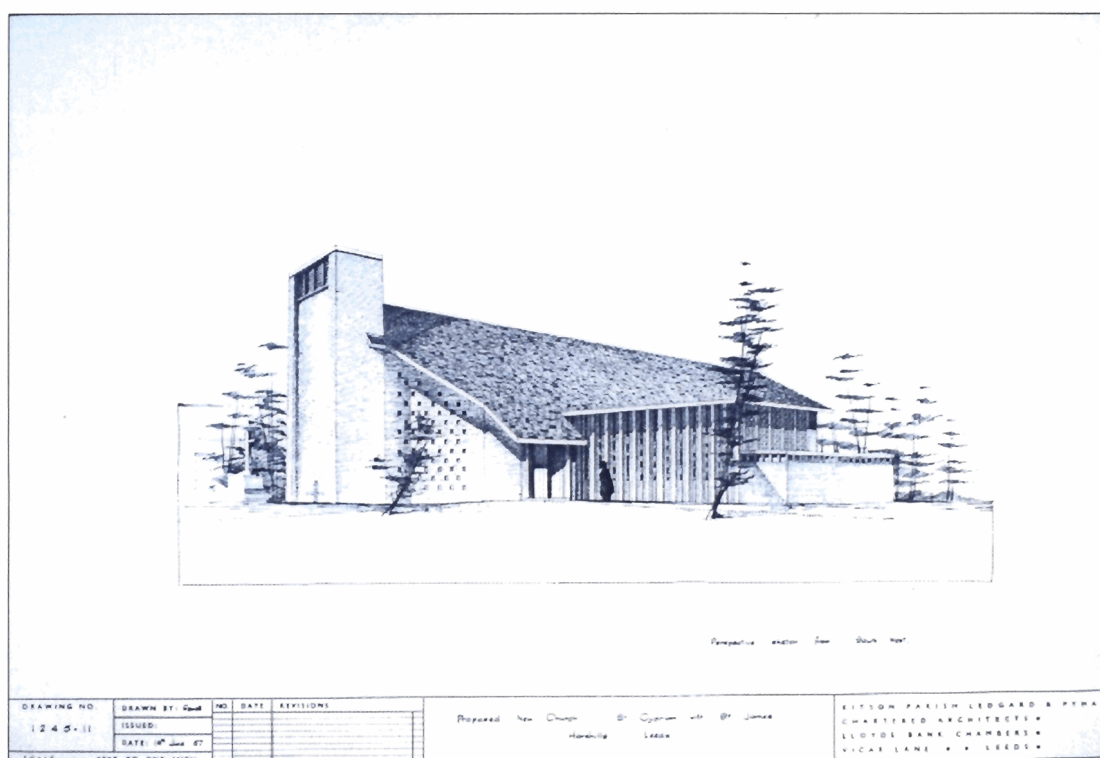
Preliminary sketch of nave, 6 May 1957 (Kitson Archive)



Preliminary sketch of west end 6 May 1957 (Kitson Archive)



Preliminary sketch of sanctuary 6 May 1957 (Kitson Archive)



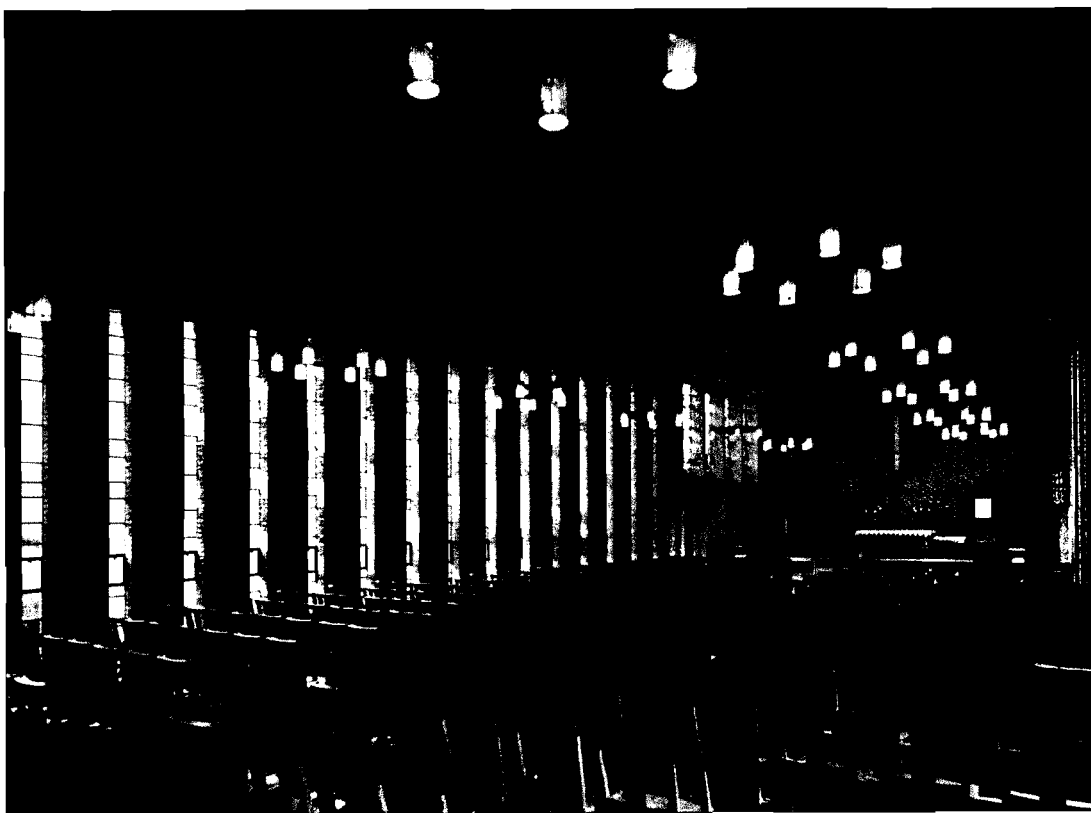
Perspective 14 June 1957 (Kitson Archive)



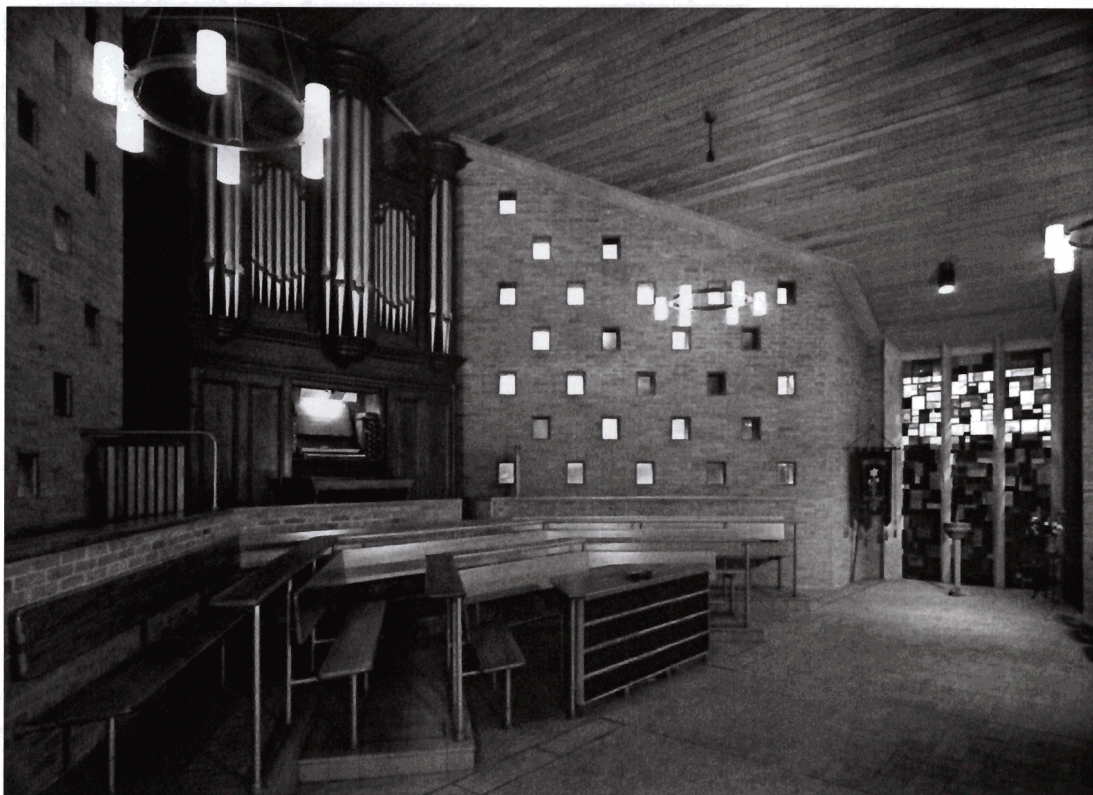
*Exterior from the west
c. 1959 (Kitson Archive)*



*Interior of south west porch
c. 1959 (Kitson Archive)*



Interior from south west c. 1959 (Kitson Archive)



West end and choir c. 1959 (Kitson Archive)



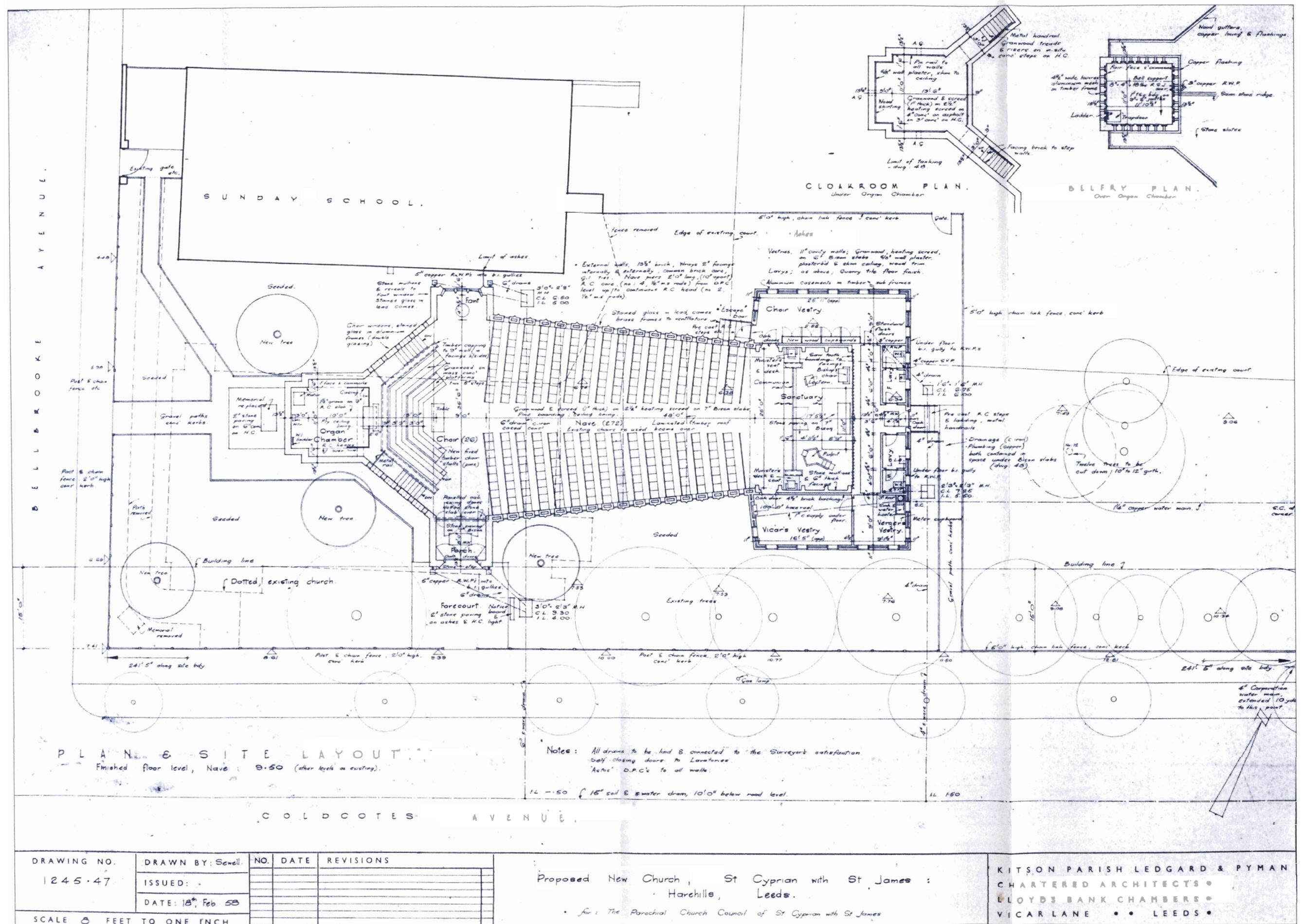
West end and choir (© English Heritage NMR 20917 26/01/06)



Sanctuary (© English Heritage NMR 20910 26/01/06)



Interior from south west (© English Heritage NMR 20913 26/01/06)

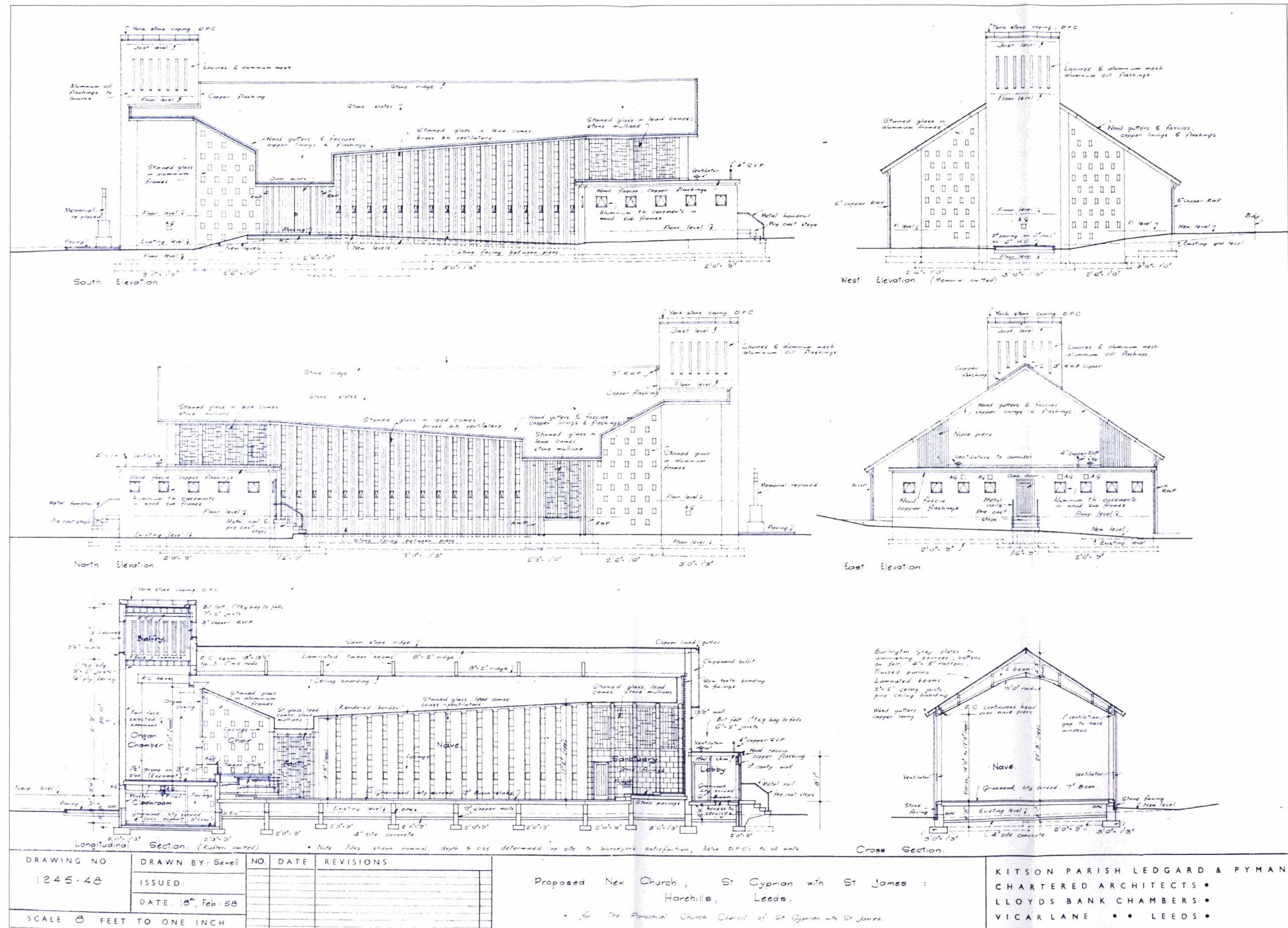


Plan as built (Kitson Archive)

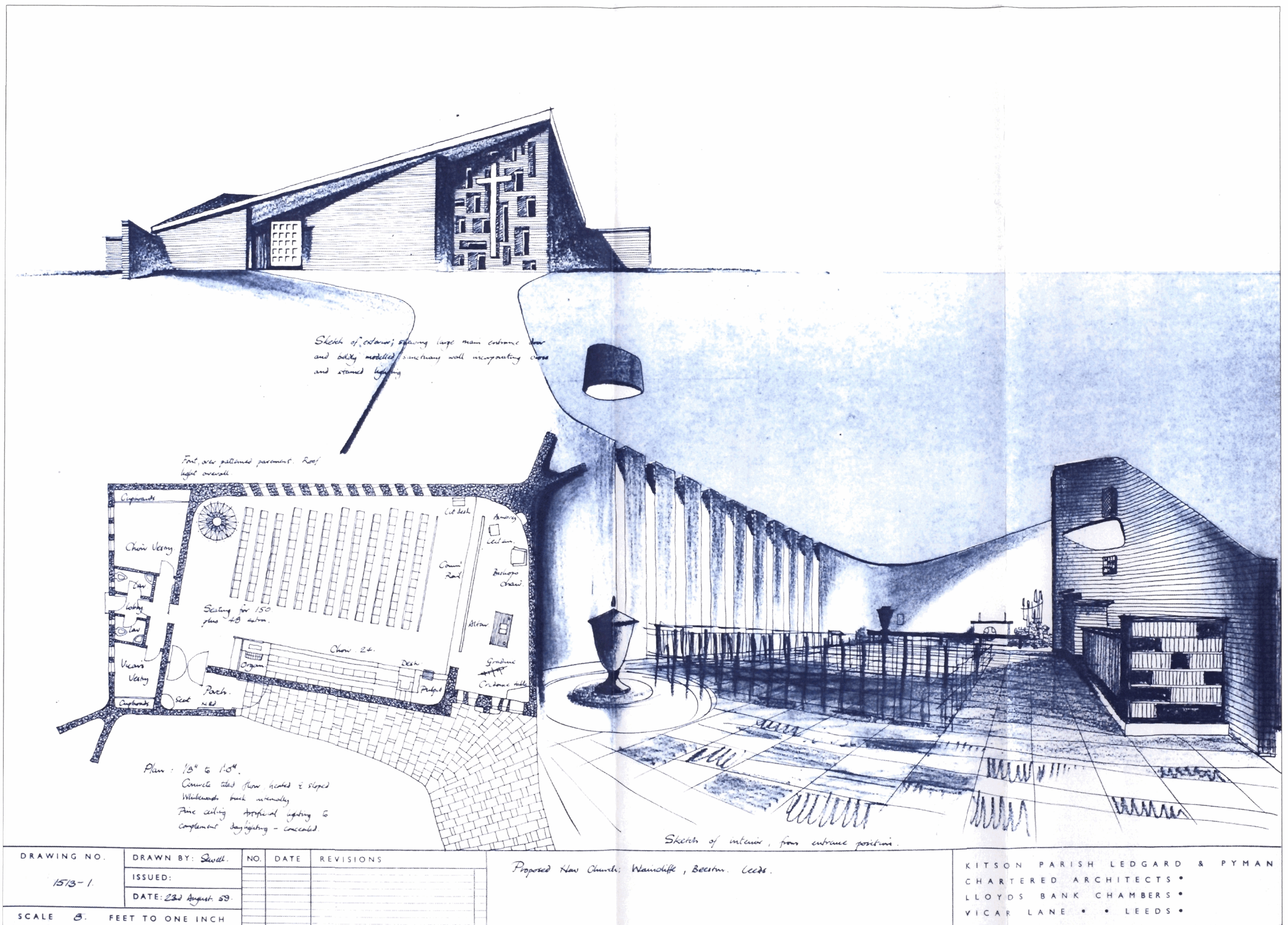
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Elevations as built (Kitson Archive)



Preliminary sketch and plan 23 August 1959 (Kitson Archive)

St David, Dewsbury Road, Waincliffe

BI No: 109631

NGR: SE2877729758

St David replaced a temporary wooden church put up when the area was developed during the 1930s with private semi-detached houses. It was then on the extreme SW edge of Leeds. Building work commenced on 5 December 1960 and the church was completed on 24 November 1961. It cost £20,800, less furnishings and about £24,000 in all.



Exterior from south east (© English Heritage NMR 27029 24/05/06)

The Parochial Church Council's requirements were that the church should have chairs rather than pews and that there should be some powerful external feature – a giant cross which might be made of glazed bricks to give it impact.⁴ The vicar, Rev. Thomas, had seen St Cyprian and St James, Harehills, and was so impressed that he commissioned the Kitson firm. His enthusiasm was not initially shared by the PCC who said that they wanted a traditional type of church. It took much persuasion from the vicar and a series of illustrated talks by the architect to the lay members of the PCC to get the design through for in Davy's words "there is little doubt that the scheme would have shocked and upset the majority of the older established members of the congregation had not the logic of planning for the liturgy been carefully explained stage by stage before the final design was presented".

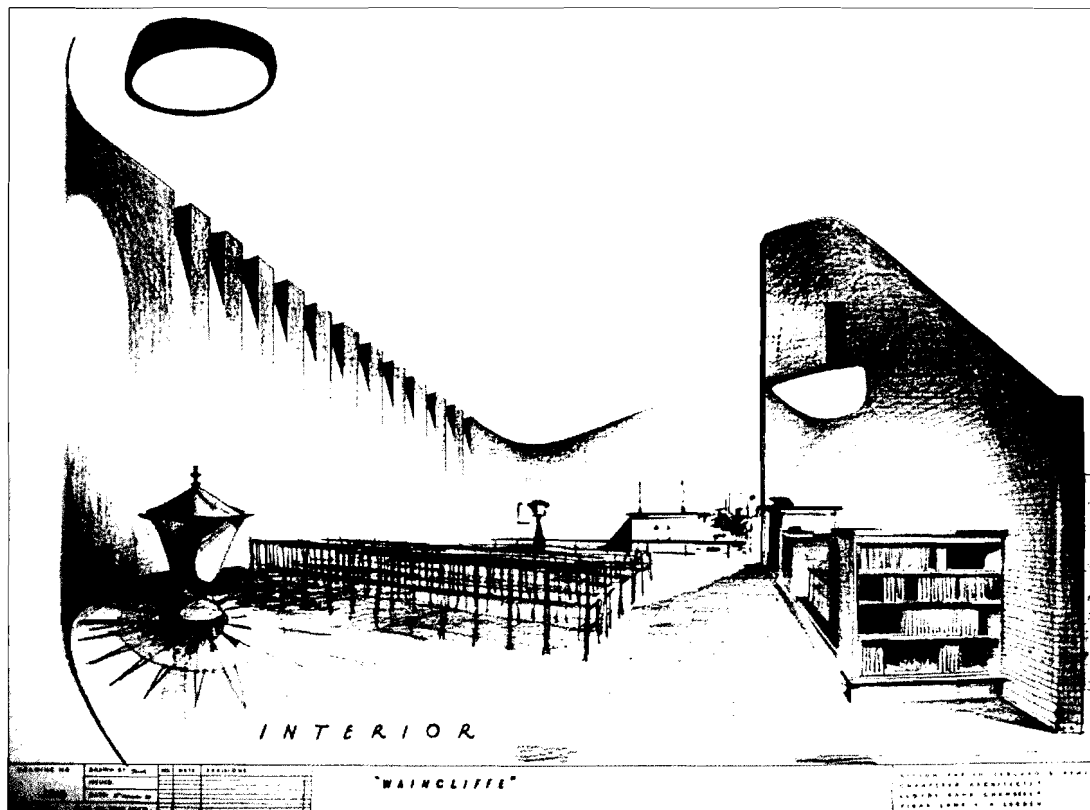
The result was striking - a hyperbolic paraboloid roof, a 25ft high reconstituted stone

cross and an abstract stained glass window extending the height of the building fulfilled the PCC's requirement for external impact. Initial design drafts dated 23 August 1959 had shown a giant cross of the type envisaged by the PCC but set within an abstract composition of openings punctured in the wall, again redolent of Corbusier at Ronchamp with perhaps a nod to the contemporary work of George Pace. Davy stated that his aim in designing the building was that it "should be liturgically functional, that it should achieve spaciousness within a small compass and that it should have an air of unity and simplicity in keeping with its unpretentious character".⁵ He wanted to create an "atmosphere" that avoided any traditional idea of religious gloom and expressed his intention in a presentation to the PCC, "This is a small church- it will never be asked to provide for great display, for civic processional or for impressive ceremonial. Let it be quiet, humble, friendly – prepared to receive anyone in whatever frame of mind for peaceful meditation. Let it express a unity - the altar simple and approachable, not remote and awe-inspiring..." He felt within the church "there should be a sense of progression – from darkness to light, from lowness to height, from Crib to Cross". Concentration on the three primary functions: Baptism, The Word and the Eucharist led to the elimination of a lectern; a pulpit with a reading desk below would suffice. The inspiration for the church seems, like St Cyprian & St James to derive much from Ronchamp but also perhaps something from Basil Spence's small churches which had received much coverage in the architectural press – most notably St Catherine's, Richmond, Sheffield.



Exterior from north east (© English Heritage NMR 27021 24/05/06)

The S and E walls meet dramatically at the highest point of the church and this is marked by the tall window that illuminates the sanctuary. Other than this, the S wall is only punctuated by six small square openings lighting the nave. This S wall is canted in from the E end so as to create the entrance to the church. The N wall has twelve tall slit-like windows of the type found in Davy's other churches. The NE corner of the building is curved with a gentle radius. All the walls are of brick. The roof was originally to have been of stressed skin construction but this was abandoned on grounds of cost and replaced by one of joist and board construction. The structurally redundant buttresses on the SW and NE corners were retained because it was felt they had "value in bringing the silhouette into repose".



Preliminary sketch of interior 5 December 1959 (Kitson Archive)

In plan, the building is, in effect, a rectangle with the liturgical S side partly cut away but this cut away reflects the entirely different axis which the interior of the building follows. This tension between interior and exterior, marked by the use of heavily rounded corners to the worship area rather than acute angles, makes what is essentially a small and simple building one that is spatially complex. It reflects Davy's growing fascination with plan and processional entrance to a church. He described it as "a free form, moulded to give a sense of progression from low entrance to high

sanctuary, punctuated by emphasis at the font, the pulpit and the altar, and, with the vestries, regulated within a containing and unifying rectangle”.



Interior from south west
(© English Heritage NMR 27016 24/05/06)

Internally, the walls are built with reject facing bricks and are painted white. The intention was to achieve simple rugged textures, something also sought in the accompanying use of reject brick paving, whose imperfections of surface, colour and shape would create texture. Again, Davy is seeking rough, almost crude surfaces, very much following Le Corbusier at the Maison Jaoul. The two dominant elements are the

great sweep of the tilted hyperbolic-paraboloid roof which is clad in deal boarding and the curve of the wall which meets it, echoed in the sharper radius of the projecting wall behind the pulpit. This projects sufficiently to obscure the view of the great coloured glass SE window so that light pours across the sanctuary from an invisible source – a highly effective arrangement.

The roof shape was not chosen for structural reasons but to give emphasis to the liturgical focal points of font, pulpit and altar with the least height over the entrance, rising over the font and sweeping up to the pulpit and higher still over the altar and “sweeping out to the sky above the cross in the South window”. The N windows have Davy’s favoured antique glazing with some coloured panes and contain fluorescent tubes



Interior from south east
(© English Heritage NMR 27015 24/05/06)

recessed in the left hand reveals to give the effect of natural daylight. There are vicar’s and choir vestries and toilets at the W end of the building.

The furnishings, all designed by Davy are of equally simple design and are constructed of square section wrought iron, painted black and natural wood. They include, altar rails, the Bishop's Chair, altar, lectern, credence table and choir stalls which are on a raised platform running along the S wall of the church – an unusual location and contrasting with those at the other two churches, which are at the back. The location was chosen so that the choir felt they were part of the main body of worshippers and not trespassers between them and the altar. The only enrichments are a small plaque of St David adjacent to the pulpit and a corbel from St David's cathedral, Wales in an angle of the sanctuary walls. The pulpit is brick built. As at the later St Paul, the baptistery is top-lit with a small circular light cut into the roof above a font of green reinforced glass-fibre. The simple cylindrical tapered font (which has somewhat unkindly been compared to a dustbin) has been resprayed by a local car body workshop.

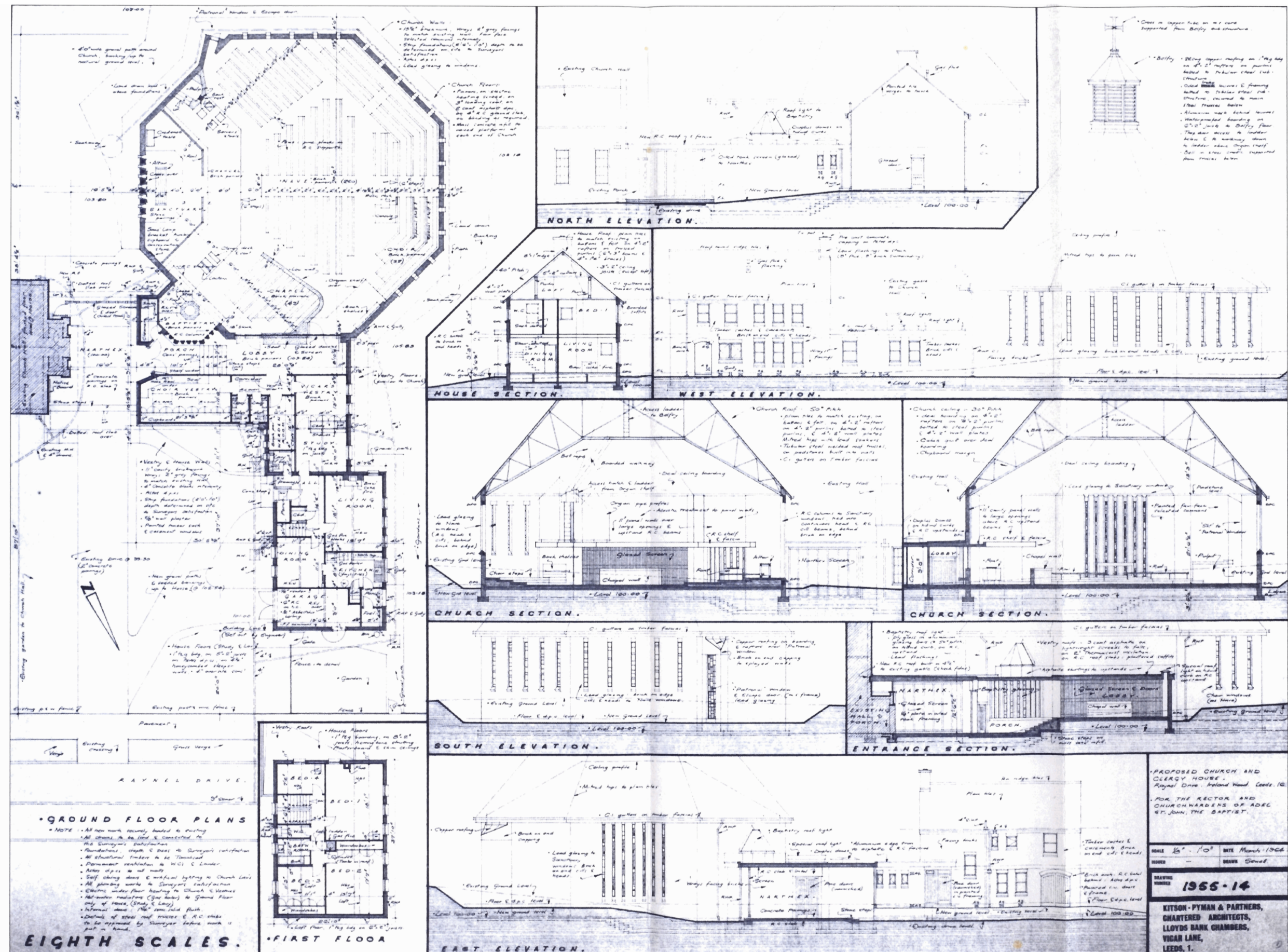
The church won the Hoffman Wood Gold Medal (the leading award for architecture in Leeds at the time) in 1961 and this is displayed in a glass case at the rear of the nave, together with photographs of Davy receiving the award. The altar rails have been moved back slightly, a wooden cross added to the E wall, the roof has been repaired and the heating system replaced but otherwise the interior is virtually unchanged since construction and well represents the liturgical thinking of the early 1960s. It continues to have a congregation of about 20-25 and is Broad Church in outlook. Visited 16 August 2005



Font c. 1961 (Kitson Archive)



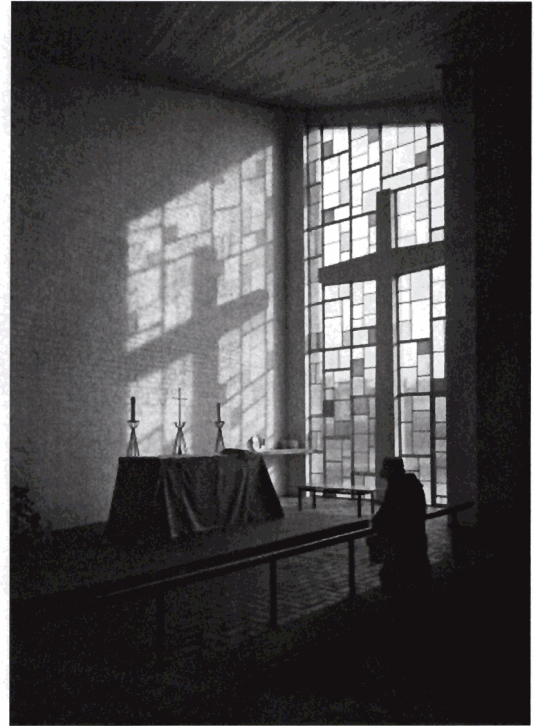
Interior from south west c. 1961 (Kitson Archive)



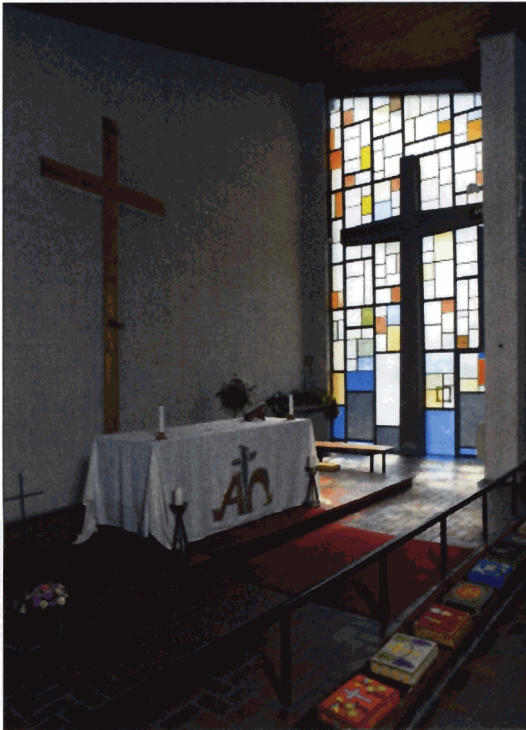
Plan and elevations March 1964 (Kitson Archive)



**Exterior from south east
c. 1961 (Kitson Archive)**



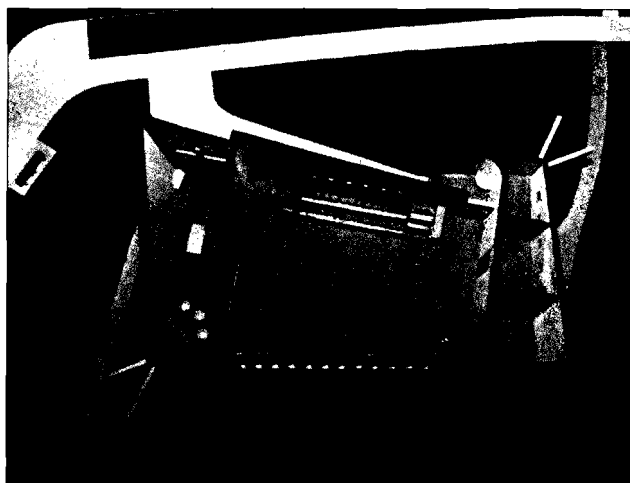
**Sanctuary
c. 1961 (Kitson Archive)**



**Sanctuary
(© English Heritage NMR 27025 24/05/06)**



**East window
(© English Heritage NMR 27018 24/05/06)**



Model from above (Kitson Archive)



Model from south east (Kitson Archive)



Model from south west (Kitson Archive)

St Paul, Raynel Drive, Ireland Wood

BI No: 109632 NGR: SE2605339382

St Paul is the last of the three churches. Built in 1965 to serve a parish that up until then had been catered for by services held in a hall church of 1951, also designed by Kitson Parish, Legard & Pyman, Noel Pyman being the architect responsible, it is located in an area of early post-war council housing – an area that the vicar states is relatively stable with few of the signs of community breakdown experienced on some of the other Leeds estates. Congregations average 70-80 and the approach is Broad Church.



Exterior from the west (© English Heritage NMR 27061 23/05/06)

The Kitson firm (by now Kitson Pyman & Partners) was again commissioned to build the new church.⁸ Davy drew up a Questionnaire covering over a hundred items prior to the completion of the design brief. Two fundamental factors were a tight budget and the parish's requirement for a complex, to include a vicarage and linked vestries and ancillary rooms, rather than an individual building. The worship space was the principal element and would absorb as much of the budget as possible so as to ensure it had sufficient "presence".

The shape the worship space should take was then determined. Davy was suspicious of the increasingly fashionable centrally planned church. Charles Sewell wrote:

We were both very aware that the most effective shape would be a drum surmounted by either a dome or a cone: we were, equally, aware that a circular plan does nothing to aid liturgy (however much it has great symbolic attributes). There is, in a circle, an intensity of interest in the centre, to the virtual exclusion of all else. Centrally planned spaces have been tried for church buildings, many times and all seem to be inappropriate for the placing of the essential element – the Altar/Table: set in the ‘obvious location – the centre – and liturgy is compromised; set at the perimeter and the result is ‘unease’, and indecision.



*Exterior from north east with the 1951 church to the left and the vicarage to the right
(© English Heritage NMR 27048 23/05/06)*

A decision was taken to employ an octagon which retained some of the strength of a circle but enabled some of the interest to leak away towards the periphery, making the placing of the Altar/Table easier. The design was worked up using simple card models which revealed the problems posed by the foreshortening effects of pitched roofs on an octagonal plan. The roof height was considerably increased and the belfry that crowned the roof made much larger in size as a consequence.

In the liturgical planning of the church, Davy was influenced by the views that had been recently set out by the Very Rev. Seiriol Evans, Dean of Gloucester, who urged caution in the application of the principles of the Liturgical Movement to Anglican

ritual. Evans wished to promote the growth of an indigenous approach to liturgy, which would be appropriate to English worship rather than adopt too readily an alien liturgical tradition. Davy also considered the dispute between Bishops Laud and Williams with Laud locating the Altar/Table within the chancel, towards the W end to facilitate participation, emphasising the Altar aspect while Williams emphasised the Table aspect by locating it at the E end of the nave. Davy wondered whether the planning might be arranged so as to permit more than one preference, depending on how the debate resolved itself in the long term.

It was with this in mind that Davy positioned the Altar/Table, the seating and the low wall demarcating the chapel. From this followed the planning of the entry route, again something Davy felt a critical part of how the building is perceived. He felt that the entrance into the worship space should be low-key and a form of preparation, a 'breathing space' after leaving the outside world. The entry corridor had two sets of doors leading into the church and some restricted views into the space. The font was designed to be clearly visible from the entry route to mark the idea of Baptism as entry to the church.

In the light of the care taken in establishing the liturgical framework for the church, it is interesting to note that in the current vicar's view, the church works particularly well liturgically and it also, by virtue of its design, brings members of the congregation closer together. He feels that if buildings can influence behaviour, this one does.

The church is constructed of two inch grey facing bricks manufactured by Wrays of York. A steeply pitched tiled roof rises to an octagonal louvred timber belfry. This roof is supported on a light steel truss, concealed internally by deal boarding as also used at St Cyprian & St James and St David. Davy employs his favoured slit-like windows filled with antique Belgian glass on five of the elevations. A protuberance for a stained glass Patronal window to light the pulpit that also includes a fire exit and the half-octagonal baptistery are the only deviations from octagonal form. The hall church was retained as the church hall and Davy created a glazed narthex to link it to the present church which is also linked to the vicarage on the N side by a vestry. The narthex door leads to some steps and then a lobby with two sets of glazed doors to the church on the S side and to the vestry on the N. The baptistery cuts into this corridor and borrows light from it. Once the worship space is entered, its scale immediately becomes apparent. Unlike the other two churches, the seating is fixed with long pews on concrete bases (inspired by a church in Sweden that Davy had visited), the seating being positioned so that they relate to the angled platform that comprises the sanctuary, ensuring that all members of the congregation have a good view.

Other aspects of Davy's distinctive architectural language are found here: the raised canted choir stalls at the back of the church, as used at St Cyprian & St James, the plain brick interior, painted white, the top-lit baptistery as at St David, the brick floors in the sanctuary and baptistery, the brick-built pulpit, the sparse modernity of the altar rails and other fittings and the brightly coloured abstract glass. The baptistery to the left of the sanctuary has a deliberately plain (so as not to detract from the Altar/Table) octagonal stone font which can be clearly seen from the whole of the church. To the right of the choir stalls, the organ is supported on a raised shelf.



Light fitting
(© English Heritage NMR 27051 23/05/06)

The seven-light E window has a tubular steel cross hung in front of it (which the architects felt strongly should be 'barbaric' in appearance). It is flanked by large complementary tubular light fittings whose design is based on a 'thicket' which is a mixture of cross and octagon. These too, were intended to be 'harsh and uncompromising'. A model for the light fittings was constructed and, powered by an old low voltage transformer, hung in the architects' offices for some weeks to see whether it would work. The combination of these fittings, the cross and the E window is highly effective.

The flat-roofed vicar's and choir vestries and toilets form a covered link to the vicarage which is in a simple pitched roof style. The complex occupies a very large well-landscaped corner site.

There have been minimal changes since the church was built. Two were non-controversial; the replacement of the heating system and the installation of a stair-lift. A proposal in the 1980s to demolish a curved brick wall enclosing an area of seating intended as a chapel was abandoned after considerable opposition.⁷ The wall has been retained but all but one row of the pews have been taken out in this area which has had a small altar installed for use as a weekday chapel.

Visited 18 August 2005



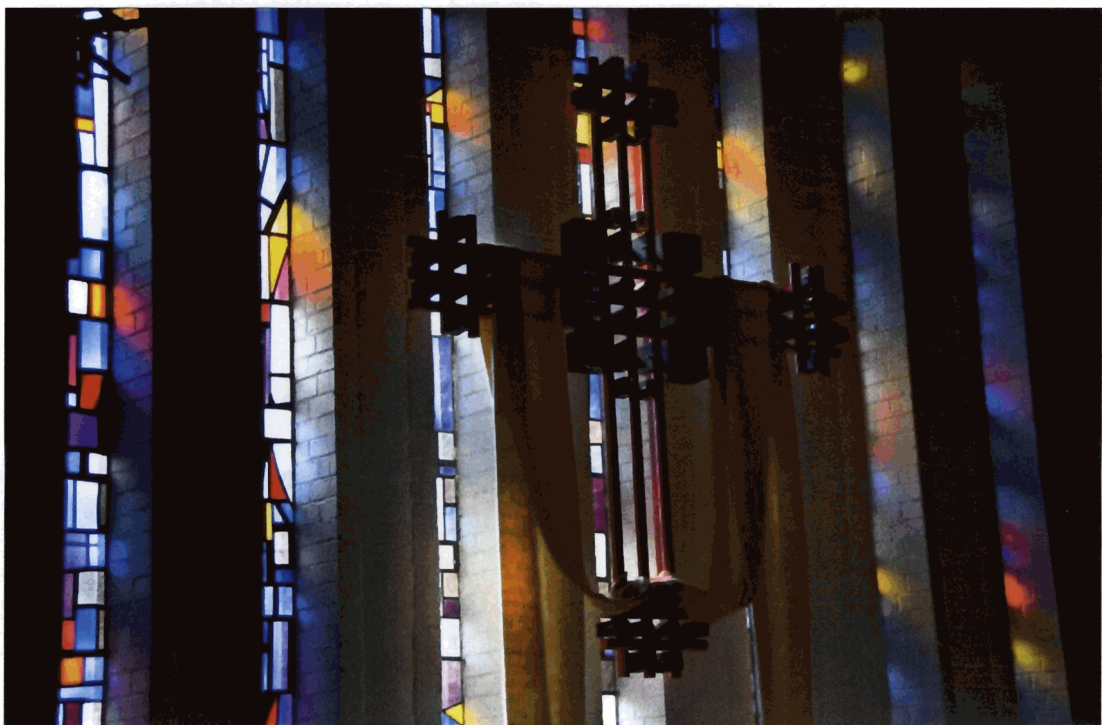
*Interior from the entrance, weekday chapel in the foreground
(© English Heritage NMR 27057 23/05/06)*



Baptistery (© English Heritage NMR 27059 23/05/06)



Interior from south west (© English Heritage NMR 27055 23/05/06)



East window and cross (© English Heritage NMR 27050 23/05/06)

CONCLUSION

The three churches show well the impact of advances in liturgical thinking and the tremendous influence of Le Corbusier's Ronchamp on a British provincial practice. While it may be argued that there is little in them that is totally original, the care that went into their design and the craftsmanship in their detailing is exceptional. All three of them are little altered and they are particularly good examples of an era when advanced liturgical thought and continental design influences converged.

NOTES

1. Information from Roger Shaw from Kitson practice records.
2. St Stephen was included in Incorporated Church Building Society, *Sixty Post-war Churches* (1956) p.85.
3. *St Cyprian & St James, Notes for Centenary Celebration* (2003).
4. Julie Clarkson, *St David's Church, Waincliffe* (1999) p. 20.
5. This and the other quotations in the account of St David's are taken from 'St David, Beeston, Leeds', prepared by Geoffrey Davy for the *West Yorkshire Society of Architects Journal*, 1962, pp. 11-21.
6. The account of the design history of St Paul is based on a letter from Charles Sewell to A. F. Willshaw, dated September 2003, on designs and studies in the Kitson archive and information from Charles Sewell.
7. Information from Rev.Christopher Cornwall, Vicar of St. Paul's.

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"St David, Beeston, Leeds", West Yorkshire Society of Architects Journal, 1962, pp. 11-21.

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Drawings and design sketches by Kitson, Pyman & Partners for St Cyprian & St James, St David and St Paul held by Charles Sewell.

Charles Sewell, Letter to A. F. Willshaw, setting out the design history of St Paul's, September 2003

Interviews with Roger Shaw, the last partner in the Kitson firm, and Charles Sewell, former Senior Assistant Architect, 18 October and 15 November 2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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