

ST MARK'S CHURCH,
VICARAGE AND HALL

*Old Marylebone Road
City of Westminster*

by

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Historical Analysis & Research Team
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1. Introduction

The Church of St Mark, Old Marylebone Road, built 1870-1 to designs by Sir Arthur Blomfield, is currently the subject of a development proposal. It has been suggested that the church, as well as its neighbouring vicarage of 1880, be demolished. The church hall at 17 Homer Row also comes into the frame. All buildings are currently unlisted. Historical information has been requested on the church and its fittings, as well as its ancillary buildings, and its place within Blomfield's oeuvre.

Although access was gained to the interior of the church, its former schools were not inspected, nor were the vicarage or church hall.

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2. *The History of the Church and Vicarage of St Mark*

The Church of St Mark was begun in 1871, to designs by Sir Arthur Blomfield (1829-99), on a site on the south-east side of the old Marylebone Road, previously occupied by terraced houses (Fig. 1). The church was consecrated on 29 June 1872 and, like many other churches in the Diocese of London, served as a 'daughter church', the parent church being St Mary's, Bryanston Square. Late in the nineteenth century, St Mark's became autonomous, with its own parish centred on the triangle formed by Seymour Place, Edgware Road and Old Marylebone Road. The parish was composed almost exclusively of tradesmen, artisans and working men, and the inmates of the nearby Church of England Servants' Home and Christian Union almshouses.¹

St Mark's was apparently built to house between five and six hundred persons,² an estimate borne out by the Ordnance Survey map of 1934-40, which has 'seats for 620' written across the outline of the building. It was an inexpensive church,³ with iron columns dividing nave from aisles, and was built in what appears to have been a rather narrow and constricted site (Figs 2 and 3). The orientation is not quite correct due to the line of the street, the chancel facing a south-easterly direction. However, for the purpose of this report, conventional liturgical directions will be used. On the left (north) of the main church, beyond the tower, were the attached schools, also referred to as the church hall. On the right (south) was the vicarage, completed in early 1880 and designed by Messrs. Spalding and Evans to 'harmonise with the church and schools to which it is attached'⁴ (Fig. 4). The presence of these attached buildings meant that the interior of the church was rather poorly lit. Originally, dormer windows were placed in the roofs of the lean-to aisles. As we will see, these were later removed.

St Mark's appears to have been popular under its first vicar, Reverend Bellewes, and is said to have provided for a parish numbering around 4,500 people.⁵ After 1893, however, when the Reverend Fuller took over as vicar of St Mark's, the church experienced a period of some disturbance and controversy. Reverend Fuller introduced a 'new ritual', involving the erection of stations of the cross, and made many changes in the church, all without faculty.⁶ He was eventually reported by the churchwardens and parishioners, many of whom had stopped attending services, and the case was heard at the Consistory Court of London in late August 1897. The changes made by Fuller included the erection of a side chapel in the north aisle of the church; the removal of two gas standards from the chancel; the covering over of the stained glass windows at the east end with thick blinds; the removal of communion rails from the chancel; and the covering over of portions of the east end wall, so as to hide the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. It was decreed by the Consistory Court that all these changes be reversed, except for that involving the side chapel, erected in 1895, which was allowed to remain.⁷ The case was reported in the *Illustrated Church News* of April 1898, and a photograph of the chancel was given (Fig. 5).

In 1903, further alterations were carried out at St Mark's Church, seemingly under the supervision of architect George Frederick Bodley (1827-1907).⁸ Far from learning from the Reverend Fuller's experiences, the new vicar did not think to seek the relevant faculties before proceeding. Most significantly, the dormer windows in both the side aisles were blocked up and plastered over, as 'it was found that their light was not required after the

¹ *Centenary* 1972, p. 2

² Faculty papers for 1897-8 (MS 18319/16)

³ Cherry and Pevsner 1991, p. 602; Clarke 1966, p. 134

⁴ *Architect* 1880, p. 133

⁵ *Times* report of 7 December 1897, included with Faculty papers for 1897-8 (MS 18319/16)

⁶ Faculty papers for 1897-8 (MS 18319/16)

⁷ Faculty for erection of side chapel granted on April 21 1898.

⁸ Faculty papers for 1903 (MS 18319/12). A letter of June 1903 refers to 'the architect Mr Bodley'.

alterations in the other windows were completed'.⁹ This work was done with the full support of Bodley, who felt that 'the dormer windows originally constructed with a view to lighten the chancel are out of keeping with the architecture of the church' and 'are no longer required for the purpose for which they were intended'.¹⁰ A Faculty of 19 December gave retrospective consent for this work, though adding that the windows should be reopened if the needs of the parishioners demanded it. The Faculty also gave permission for works including the renovation and enlargement of the organ, which was removed from its unnamed 'present position' to the west gallery, which had until then been used for seating; the installation of electricity in order to light the whole church; the reglazing of all the windows with white glass, except for the east window which 'is to be partly of stained glass and partly blocked'; the painting and enlarging of the reredos; and the cleansing, painting and decorating of nave and chancel.¹¹

The next, and essentially the last, major work to be carried out at St Mark's dates from 1913 (Faculty was issued on 8 August). The raised flooring of the chancel was extended into a part of the nave, previously occupied by choir seats. This overcame the 'exceedingly inconvenient' arrangements of the original chancel, and enabled a portion of the choir to be seated at the east end.¹² The architect responsible for this work was Harold C. King, presumably the same man as that listed at St Mark's vicarage in 1930.¹³

The schools attached to the north of the church continued in use until c.1934, when they appear to have been leased out; a film studio is listed in their place in 1935, and the word 'studio' is written across the building on the Ordnance Survey map of 1934-40.¹⁴ The church made up for this loss of space by making use of a nearby building, 17 Homer Row, as its parish hall.¹⁵

The vicarage was still occupied by the vicar of St Mark's into the 1960s, and seems to have continued in use until relatively recently. It now serves as a hostel for homeless people.

In 1972, the year in which St Mark's was celebrating its centenary, the future of the building came under discussion. There had been major changes in the structure of the parish; many of the surrounding buildings were demolished in the 1960s and replaced by large office blocks, and the population had become a shifting one, people remaining for only a short time in the area.¹⁶ The church itself was in poor repair; an outbreak of dry rot in the roof timbers had been recently discovered, and it was estimated that it would cost between £3,000 and £4,000 to rectify.¹⁷ In view of this combination of circumstances, it was proposed that church, church hall (ie original schools) and vicarage all be demolished, to be replaced with fresh parochial accommodation, as well as a number of flats and offices. Partial redevelopment was seen to be impossible, due to the position of the church.¹⁸ No objection to the demolition of the buildings was raised by the Greater London Council, who described the church as 'rather dull architecturally both internally and externally', though the Deputy Secretary of the Council for Places of Worship wrote that 'unlike a great many of Blomfield's churches, not a few of which are coming forward for redundancy at this time, this is not an overlarge building, and is of some moderate quality and individuality.'¹⁹ For reasons that are not recorded, the development proposals did not in

⁹ Ibid. Letter of 27 May 1903.

¹⁰ Ibid. Letter from vicar and churchwardens to Consistory Court of London.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Faculty papers of 1913 (MS 18319/31)

¹³ Ibid; Post Office directory, 1930

¹⁴ There is a paper in the Council for the Care of Churches file on the building, dated 16 June 1972, which states that 'the hall has been used as a film studio since 1927.' However, this is not borne out by post office directories.

¹⁵ The first mention of a 'St Mark's Parish Hall' at 17 Homer Row comes in the post office directory for 1935.

¹⁶ *Centenary* 1972, p. 3

¹⁷ CCC File

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

the end go ahead, though they were clearly still under discussion in 1979. In that year, a second report on the church was produced by the Council for Places of Worship, stating that because of the poor structural condition of the building, the Council 'would not feel justified in opposing the proposed redundancy or eventual demolition of the church.' However, it was again reiterated that St Mark's was not 'entirely lacking in quality. The exterior has some impact on its surroundings and the interior shows Blomfield's pragmatic approach to designing a cheap church which is practical and simple but not without character.'²⁰

Repairs (damp proofing and roof repairs) were eventually carried out in 1988-9, and there were further repairs in 1996.²¹ Around the same time (ie the mid-1990s) the interior of the church was reworked; the majority of the fittings were removed, and carpet was laid down throughout (Fig. 6). St Mark's continues to be used for worship every Sunday, but is hired out for various purposes during the rest of the week. The original schools are now occupied by a publishing company, and a small space under the tower serves as the church office.

3. *The Church Described*

St Mark's is a brick church, in the Gothic Revival style (Fig. 7). Only its west end is visible from any of the surrounding streets. On the left (north) of the main façade rises a corner tower, of five unequal stages. At the lower level is the doorway to the original hall (ie schools), similar in design to the doorway of the church itself. The fourth stage, which is recessed, bears roundels for clock faces in each wall, though the clocks have long been lost. Above is a band of blind arcading and a tall belfry, with narrow paired lancet openings, topped by a pyramidal roof characteristic of Blomfield.

The main section of the west front is dominated by a prominent gable. This contains a brick relieving arch pierced by two two-light windows with quatrefoils above, and a circular light containing three trefoils in smaller circles. At each side are buttresses terminating in octagonal pinnacles, which have mostly been removed. A lean-to roof at the lower level covers a narthex, entered via a gabled doorway. In the tympanum, there is a carved figure of St Mark.

The interior of the church is plain, but characterful. It consists of a clerestoried nave with lean-to side aisles and has a shallow chancel flanked by chapels. Above the narthex is a gallery, which now contains the organ but was originally intended for seating (Fig. 8). It is accessible only at first floor level from the tower. The nave arcades are carried on cast iron columns, now painted black (Fig. 9). The clerestory above has arched openings over each bay, each containing four lancets (two tall, two short) (see Fig. 8). The wall above the sharply pointed chancel arch is pierced by three arches, the central one holding a wooden cross (Fig. 10). The nave roof is made up of tie-beams and king-posts, strengthened by arch braces at each bay (see Fig. 8).

As has been shown, the north chancel chapel was erected c.1895. It is unlit by windows, and has a door in its north wall, which leads to the former schools. The chapel is divided from the chancel by a triplet of arches, as is the south chapel (Figs 11 and 12). Above these arches rises, on the north, two windows. Above the south chapel is a chamber, reached via a staircase. A photograph published in the *Illustrated Church News* in 1898 proves that this upper chamber originally housed the organ (see Fig. 5). The chancel is roofed with a panelled timber vault.

There are rooms beyond the south aisle and south chancel chapel, but it is not known what

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Faculty papers for 1988-9 (MS 29441/392)

purpose they serve.

4. *Church Furnishings and Fittings*

A very thorough account of the furnishings and fittings of St Mark's was given in the 1979 report prepared by the Council for Places of Worship.²² However, the majority of items mentioned – pews, choirstalls, pulpit, tapestries, etc (Figs 13 and 14) – appear to have been removed from the church. It is not known whether or not they have been placed in store. Descriptions will only be provided of furnishings and fittings which were readily displayed in the church when it was visited on 1st August 2001.

The windows of St Mark's are all of plain glass, presumably that inserted in 1903, excepting the three lights of the chancel window (Fig. 15). The uppermost parts of these contain representations of the Virgin and Child, flanked by St Mark and St Francis, and appear to have been produced by Morris & Co.²³ The lower parts of the chancel window, which were blocked under the Faculty of 1903, now contain stained glass, with figures of Joan of Arc, St George and St Maurice. These lower windows were conceived as a war memorial in memory of 'the men of this church and parish who gave their lives in the great war 1914-1918' and seem to date from c.1920. The three east end lights, as shown in a photograph of 1898, originally bore glass decorated with geometrical patterns (see Fig. 5).

On the west gallery stands the organ, which is described in the Council for Places of Worship report as a 'two-manual instrument by Whiteley of Chester' (see Fig. 8). Its openwork case is termed 'vaguely Italianate' in character. This is not the original organ, which was by Bishop and Starr (see Fig. 5).²⁴

The north chancel chapel, erected c.1895, retains its metalwork screens (see Fig. 11). These are ascribed to c.1910 in the Council for Places of Worship report, but may be original.

Other fittings to survive include the reredos, an altar table, some memorial tablets (three of brass in the chancel, and three of wood in the north chancel chapel), some candlesticks, a couple of modern lecterns, and a grand piano, presumably that mentioned in 1979 as being by Hagspiel of Dresden.²⁵ The reredos, shown at the high altar in a photograph of 1944 (see Fig. 13) but now in the south chancel chapel, is brightly painted, and has five panels with scenes from the life of Christ (Fig. 16). Its decorative scheme does not correspond with that of a reredos described in the Faculty of 1903, though it could have been repainted. The altar table does correspond with the original, as shown in a sketch of August 1897, although only the base survives.²⁶ The base is Gothic in style, and has a central panel carved with a pelican feeding her young (Fig. 17).

5. *The Vicarage Described*

The vicarage, built immediately to the south of St Mark's church, is a tall narrow building of three main storeys plus basement and attic (Fig. 18). A datestone over the entrance gives the year 1879, and the word 'Salve' (welcome). As has been mentioned, the building was completed early on in 1880 to designs by Messrs. Spalding & Evans, and was intended to harmonise with the church and schools (see Fig. 4). It is of red brick, with Bath stone dressings and, as built, had a roof covered with brown Broseley tiles. There is a small

²² CCC File

²³ *Ibid*

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ Faculty papers for 1897-8 (MS 18319/16)

garden at its main (west) front.

The entrance is reached via a gabled porch lit by a small window, and is placed on the right of the façade (Fig. 19). To the left, at ground floor level, is a large, stone-faced canted bay window, and another rises above, supported by brackets. Each has four main lights divided into two, the lights of the upper window having arched heads. There is a similarly designed single window, flush with the wall, above the porch. In addition, there is a two light window at second floor level and a hipped dormer window rising in the roof.

The Architect described the vicarage in 1880 as containing ‘dining and drawing rooms, and an additional sitting-room (to be used for parish purposes), study, six bedrooms, bath-room, &c., and on the basement the kitchen and usual domestic offices.’²⁷

6. *The Church Hall*

The building used as St Mark’s church hall from the mid-1930s appears to date from the turn of the twentieth century (Fig. 20). On the second edition Ordnance Survey map of 1894-6, its site is shown as being occupied by a terrace of buildings (Fig. 21). By 1916, when the third edition map was published, the hall has appeared (Fig. 22). Its original use is not known – the building is not listed in post office directories until 1935, when it appears as ‘St Mark’s parish hall’.

The hall is a wide-fronted building, with three storeys divided by string courses. At ground floor level, there are three irregularly spaced doorways with windows above, and two large nine-light windows at the centre of the façade, presumably lighting the main space. The building is of yellow coloured brick, with window and door surrounds set off in red brick, and horizontal bands of red brick at ground and first floor level. There are two windows at second floor level, the height required being provided by a raised section of parapet and a small, single gable.

Adjoining the hall on the west is a terrace of 1960s houses, and on the east is a large block of flats, dated 1915.

7. *The Architect: Sir Arthur Blomfield*

Sir Arthur Blomfield (1829-99) is best remembered as a church architect of the Gothic Revival school. He was born at Fulham Palace, the son of C. J. Blomfield, Bishop of London, and received his professional training as a pupil of P. C. Hardwick. In 1856, Blomfield opened his first office in Adelphi Terrace, and began working immediately in the Gothic Revival style. His family connections with the clergy assured his involvement in church works, one of the earliest of which was Christ Church, Hornsey (1861-2, enlarged 1867). Blomfield was to enjoy a long and successful career, with several prestigious awards being conferred upon him, culminating in a knighthood in 1889. He died suddenly in 1899, though his work was continued by his two sons, Charles J. Blomfield and Arthur C. Blomfield, who he had taken into partnership in 1890.

Over his career, Blomfield designed and added to an impressive number of churches. Some of the most admired are Holy Trinity, Privett, Hampshire (1876-78; listed grade II*; described by Pevsner as ‘exceptionally good’ and in 1999 as ‘perhaps his finest building’);²⁸ St Andrew’s, Bethune Road, Hackney (1883-4; listed grade II*); St Mary’s,

²⁷ *Architect* 1880, p. 133

²⁸ Pevsner and Lloyd 1985, p. 471; *Ecclesiology Today* 1999, p. 10

Portsea, Portsmouth (1887-89; listed grade II*; described by Pevsner as 'architecturally splendid');²⁹ and the nave, south porch and south transept of Southwark Cathedral, added 1890-7. Blomfield had four cathedrals under his care at different times – Salisbury, Canterbury, Lincoln, and Chichester. He was also the diocesan architect to Winchester, and built the cathedral library at Hereford.

Nonetheless, Blomfield's architectural output was not solely ecclesiastical, and was not restricted to the Gothic Revival style. In 1883, he was appointed architect to the Bank of England, a post formerly held by his old master, Hardwick. The Bank's Law Courts branch, a building in the classical style, was constructed in 1886-8 to Blomfield's designs. Other important buildings were Denton Manor, Lincolnshire (1883; demolished); the Royal College of Music, London (1894); and, especially significant, the Church House in Dean's Yard, Westminster (from 1896). Blomfield was also responsible for designing a great many colleges and schools, including Sion College Library on the Thames Embankment (1886) and Queen's School and Lower Chapel for Eton College (1889-91).

8. *St Mark's in Context*

Blomfield excelled in the art of keeping down costs when designing a church, and was frequently inventive in this area. One of the best examples of this is his St Barnabas, Oxford (1869 onwards), which has rubble walls rendered with cement, ornamented by simple brick bands and features.

St Mark's fits naturally into this category of work. Blomfield seems to have chosen cast iron as the material for the columns of the nave arcade principally to reduce cost, though it may also have been to reduce bulk. He had a very flexible attitude to materials, sometimes using concrete, and was particularly approving of cast iron, which had been of key interest to his father, C. J. Blomfield. His choice of the material at St Mark's fits into a wider trend of the time; J. P. St Aubyn, for example, had used cast iron for the columns of his St Clement's, Notting Hill (1867-9), as had George and Henry Godwin at St Jude's, Kensington (1867-70).

Thus, St Mark's is a competent early work, which demonstrates some of Blomfield's architectural sensibilities. It would not be correct to compare it with works such as Holy Trinity, Privett, where lack of money was no object, the patron being George Nicholson, a wealthy ginmaker and MP.³⁰ Although St Mark's is plain and unornamented, this is not out of keeping with other of Blomfield's buildings. *The Builder*, in its 1899 obituary to the architect, mentioned the 'quiet and unobtrusive character' of many of his works.³¹

9. *Conclusion*

In conclusion, then, it can be said that St Mark's, Old Marylebone Road – despite being overlooked by most of the major church studies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – is a building of much interest. It was designed by Blomfield, an architect who – though dismissed in early editions of the *Buildings of England* as 'dull' – was a competent, well-respected and well connected figure of the middle rank. It is a characteristic example of his work – especially representative of his talents in cost cutting – and is mentioned by name in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and *Ecclesiology Today* as being an instance of his pragmatic approach to materials.³² The church is also representative of a wider trend

²⁹ Pevsner and Lloyd 1985, p. 441

³⁰ *Ecclesiology Today* 1999, p. 10

³¹ *Builder* 1899, p. 407

³² *DNB; Ecclesiology Today* 1999, p. 9

in architecture, in that it forms a group with a vicarage and national schools.

Externally, the church – together with its vicarage and schools – is very little altered (compare Figs. 4, 7, and 23). It has lost its clock faces, and the pinnacles which flanked its west gable, but otherwise is almost exactly as depicted in 1880 in *The Architect*. Internally, although the fittings have generally been removed, it is also considerably intact, apart from a few minor changes and alterations. St Mark's, together with its vicarage and schools, make a significant contribution to the streetscape, especially when viewed from along Transept Street. The historic character of the buildings is emphasised by the close proximity of modern office blocks. The present church hall at 17 Homer Row, however, is less interesting, in that it did not form part of the original church group.

In 1994, Andrew Saint wrote a report on St John the Baptist, Eltham, rebuilt in 1873-5 by Blomfield. In it, he considered Blomfield's wider contribution, and stated that of his London churches one was listed grade II* (St Andrew's, Hackney), five at grade II (Christ Church, Hornsey; Christ Church, East Sheen; St Mark's, Hackney; St Andrew's, Kingston-upon-Thames; and St John the Baptist, Eltham), and at least seven were unlisted (St Mark, Marylebone; St James, Camden; Christ Church, Richmond; St Nicholas (formerly St Thomas), Hammersmith; St Simon, Hammersmith; St Matthew, Sinclair Road, Hammersmith; and St Matthew, Wandsworth Bridge Road, Hammersmith). He then remarked that 'in any revision of the lists, more of the unlisted churches, perhaps all of them, would be listed'.³³ It is certainly true to say that Blomfield's churches are more valued now than they were around twenty-five years ago, when the historic and architectural value of St Mark's was last assessed.

³³ Internal report: copy in HA&RT Biography File

Sources and References

1. Published Material

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- Builder* 1899 Obituary to Sir Arthur Blomfield, *The Builder*, (November 4 1899), p.407
- Centenary* 1972 *St Mark's, Old Marylebone Road, London NW1: Centenary 1872-1972* (copy in file on St Mark's at Council for the Care of Churches)
- Cherry and Pevsner 1991 Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 3: North West*, (1991)
- Clarke 1966 B. F. L. Clarke, *Parish Churches of London*, (1966)
- Ecclesiology Today* 1999 'Profiles: Arthur William Blomfield', *Ecclesiology Today*, no. 18, (January, 1999), pp. 9-11
- Pevsner and Lloyd 1985 Nikolaus Pevsner and David Lloyd, *The Buildings of England: Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, (1967, 1985 ed.)

2. Unpublished Material

- Faculties Faculty papers referred to are held in the Guildhall Manuscripts Library, London
- CCC File File on St Mark's Church, Old Marylebone Road, held by Council for the Care of Churches, Church House, London
- HA&RT Biography File HA&RT biography file on Sir Arthur Blomfield

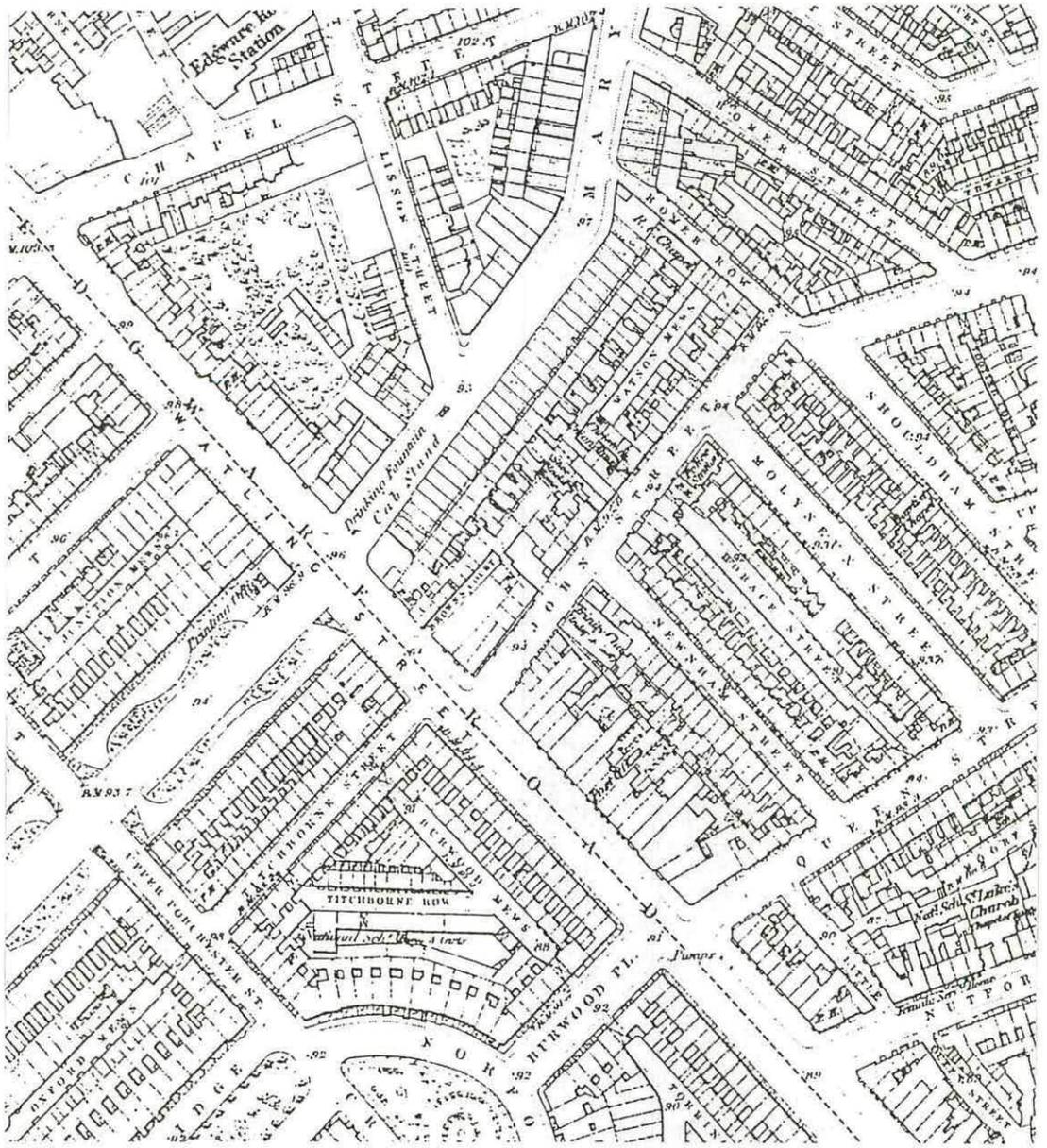


Figure 1; Detail of the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1872. The site of St Mark's was then occupied by terraced houses

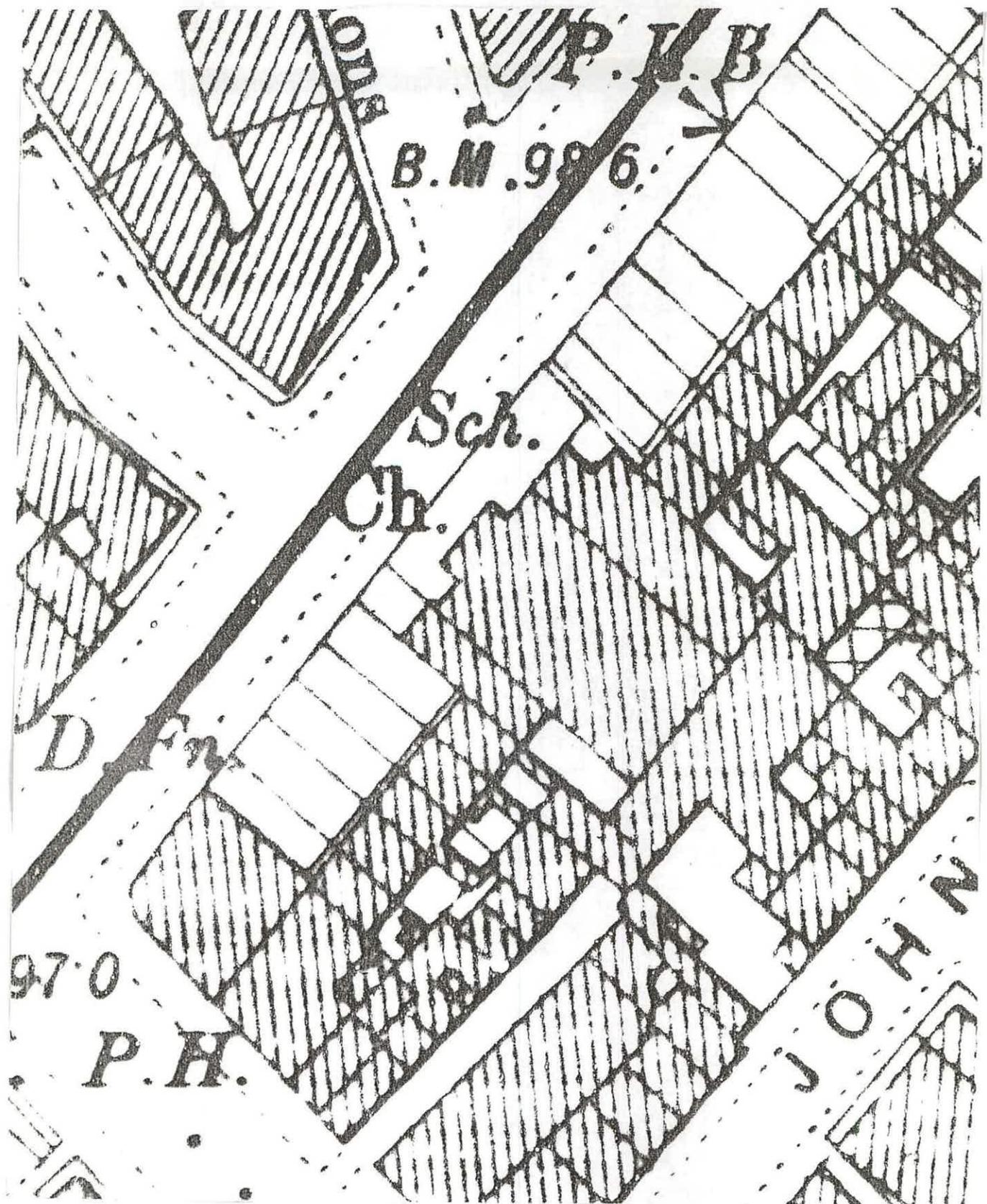


Figure 2; Detail of second edition Ordnance Survey map of 1894-6, showing St Mark's Church, School and Vicarage

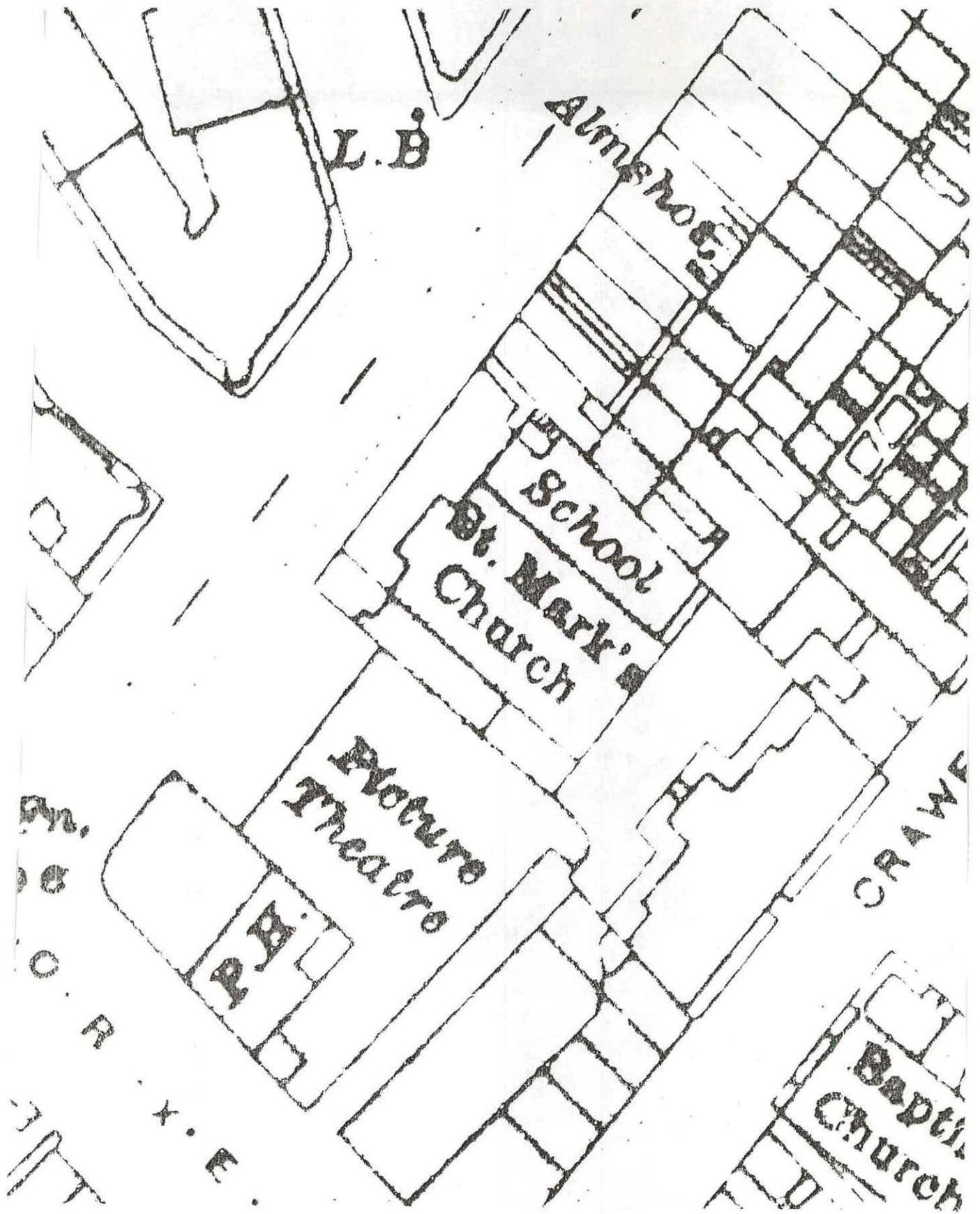


Figure 3; Detail of third edition Ordnance Survey map of 1916, showing St Mark's Church, School and Vicarage



Figure 4; View of St Mark's Church and Vicarage, published in *The Architect* on February 21 1880



Figure 5; Photograph of chancel of St Mark's, published in the *Illustrated Church News* on April 1 1898. The original organ can be seen above the south chancel chapel on the right of the picture

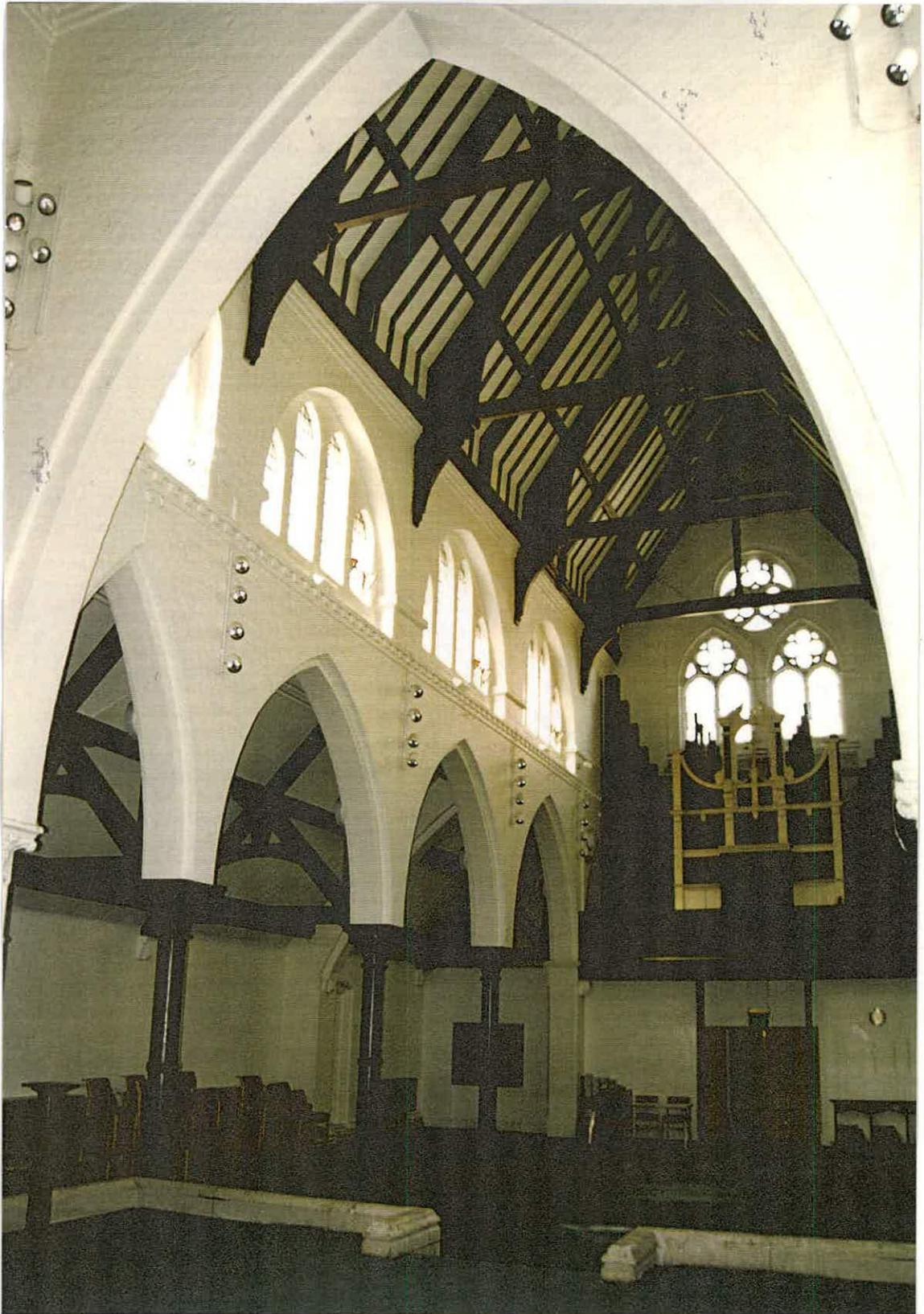


Figure 6; The interior of St Mark's Church as it appears today

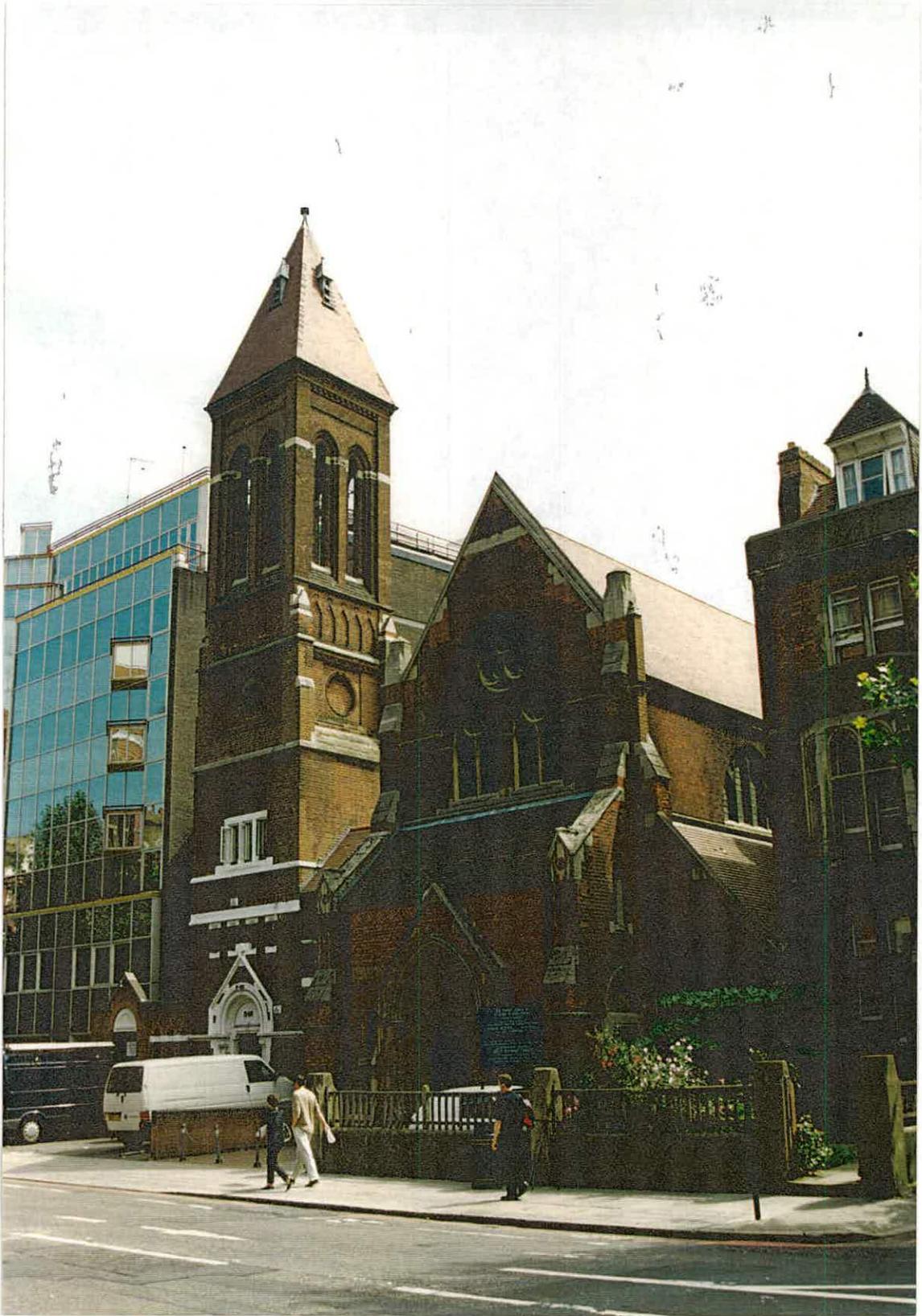


Figure 7; Recent photograph showing the exterior (west front) of St Mark's Church



Figure 8; Interior of St Mark's, looking towards the organ at the west end of the church



Figure 9; Detail showing cast iron columns of nave arcade, now painted black



Figure 10; Interior of St Mark's, looking towards the chancel and east end of the church



Figure 11; Interior of St Mark's, showing north chancel chapel

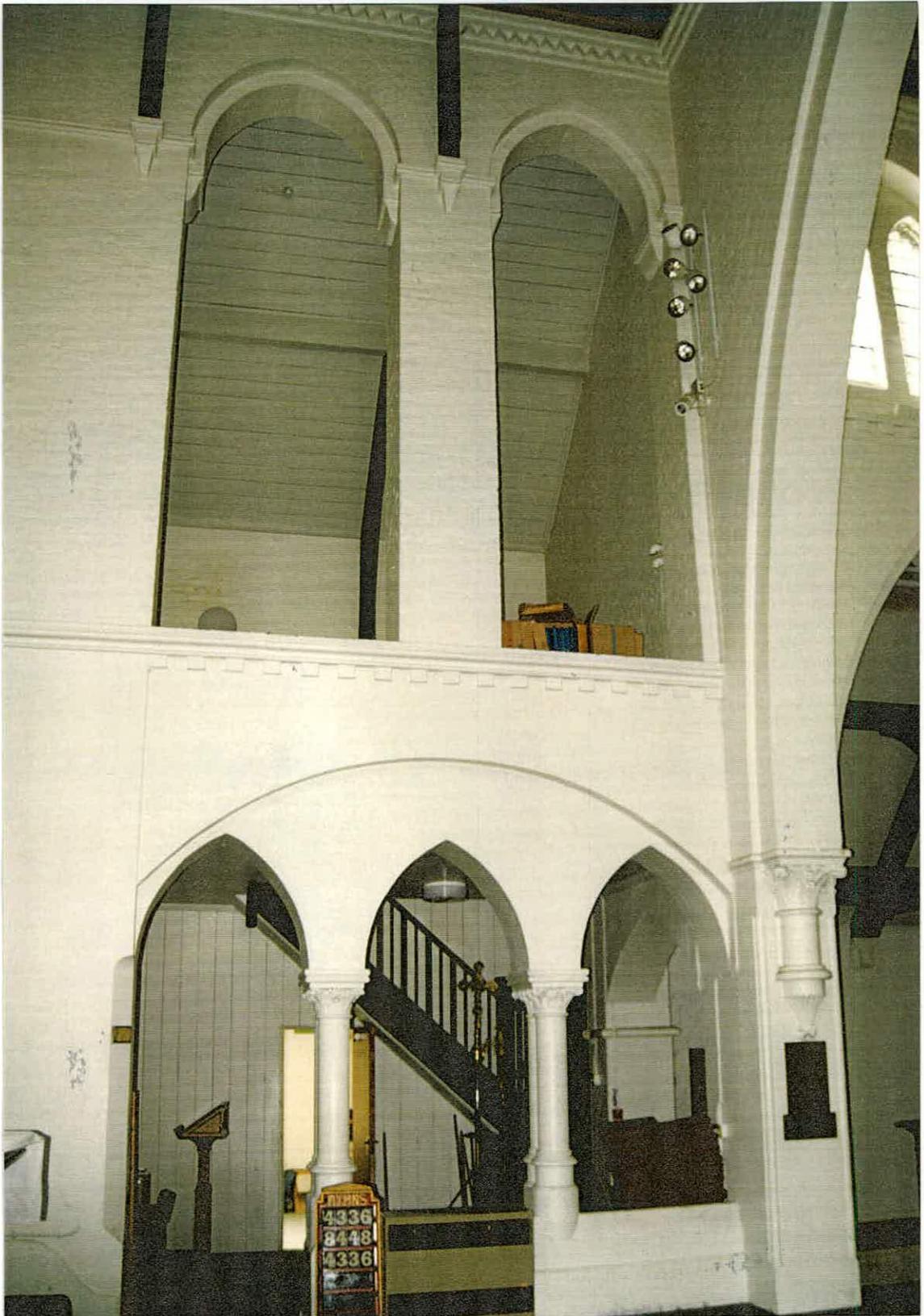


Figure 12; Interior of St Mark's, showing south chancel chapel and chamber above



Figure 13; Interior of St Mark's, as it appeared in 1944



Figure 14; Interior of St Mark's, as it appeared in 1944

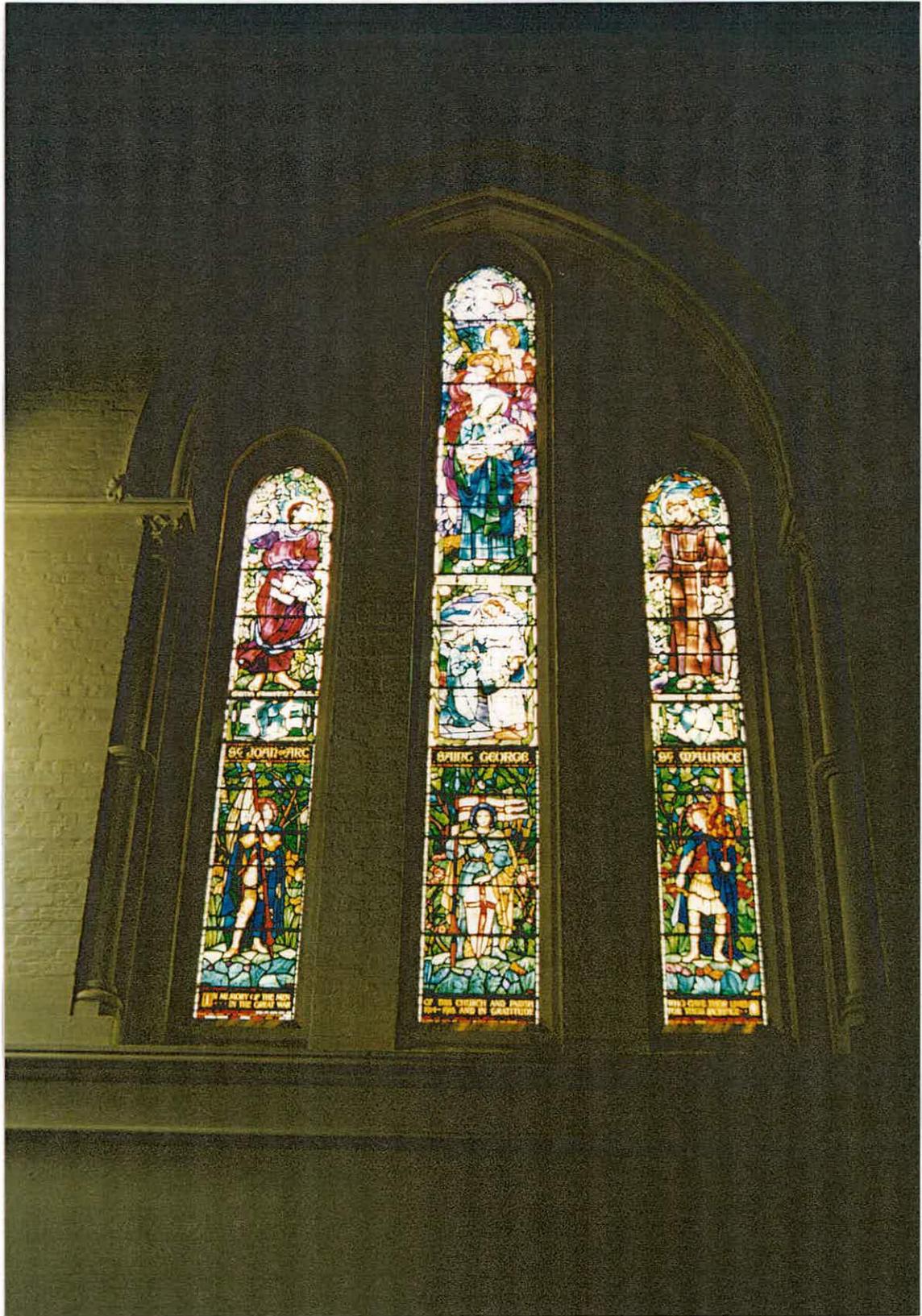


Figure 15; Detail showing stained glass of chancel windows



Figure 16; Detail of reredos, now in south chancel chapel



Figure 17; Detail of altar table which stands in the chancel



Figure 18; View of vicarage, as it appears today



Figure 19; View from south showing vicarage and church



Figure 20; Recent photograph showing the present church hall at 17 Homer Row

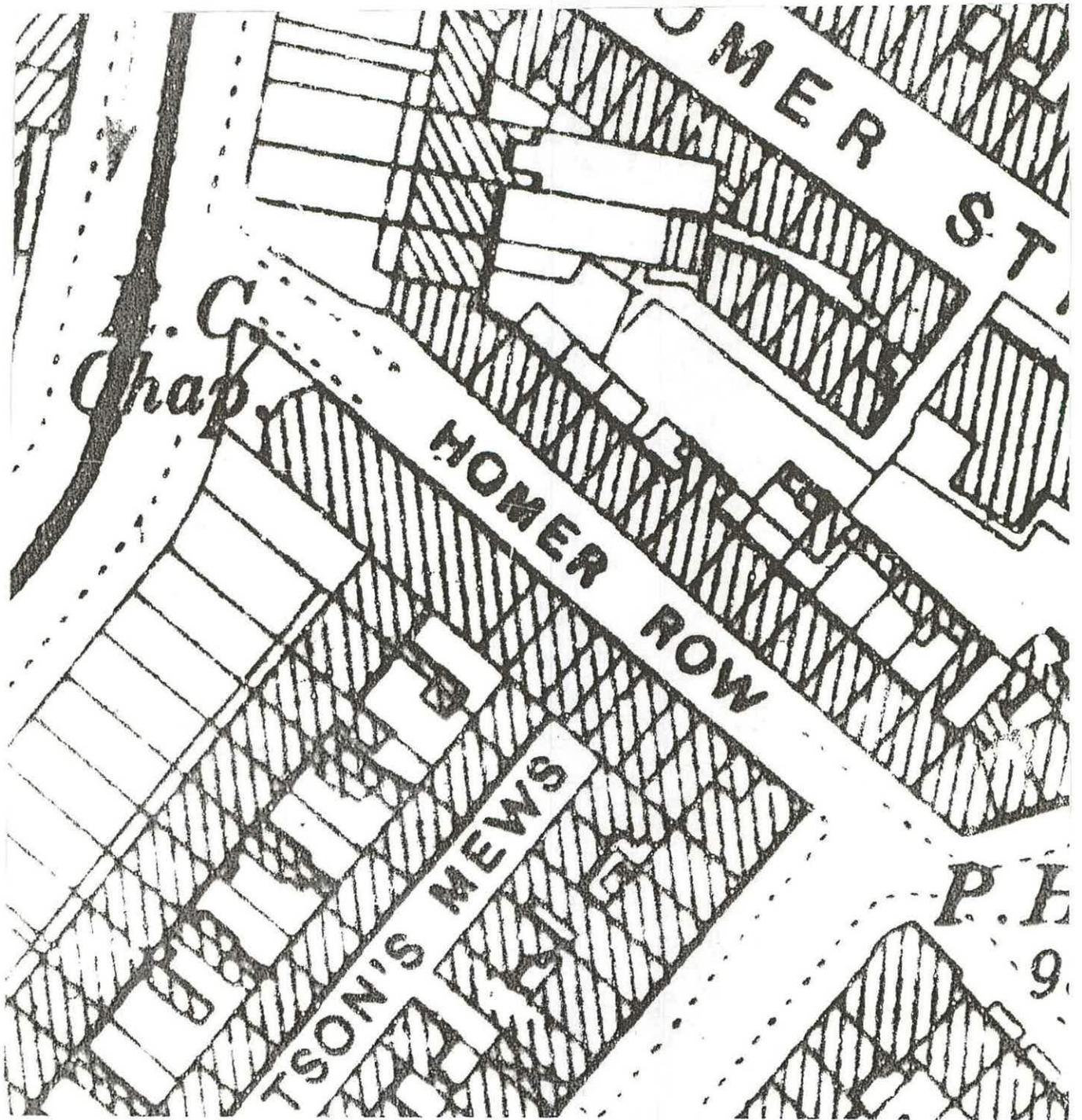


Figure 21; Detail of second edition Ordnance Survey map of 1894-6. The site of the church hall is shown as being occupied by a terrace of houses

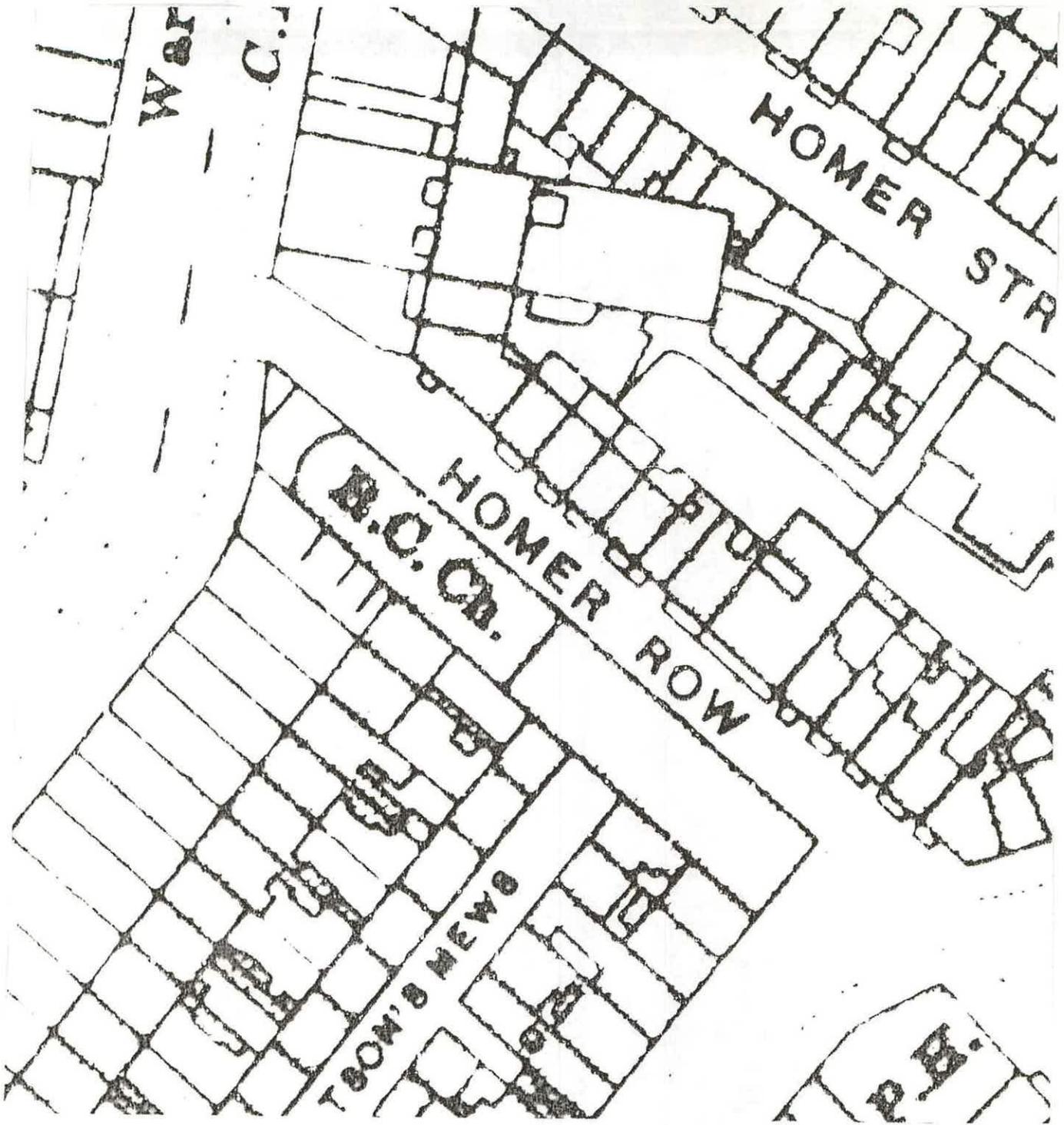


Figure 22; Detail of third edition Ordnance Survey map of 1916, showing church hall at 17 Homer Row



Figure 23; Photograph taken in August 1961 showing St Mark's Church prior to the erection of office blocks to the north