



St Peter's is a Grade II* listed church in Notting Hill Gate, west London. The only classical 19th century church in the district, and reputed to be the last Classical Revival church built in London in the 19th century, St Peter's was built to designs by Thomas Allom.

Its west tower and large-scale portico being particularly notable features. Building began in 1855 and the church was consecrated in 1857.

The chancel was added in 1879 and during the 1880s a number of church features and furnishings were enhanced along with the addition of the Baptistry to the south-west corner.

Introduction

St Peter's is an active and lively church, however before the project began it was suffering from its success. In a normal week over 1000 people were coming through the doors of St Peter's. At a typical Sunday service congregation numbers were over 170, with 90 children attending the Sunday School classes.

The rest of the week was equally busy with an Under-3's drop-in group attracting up to 200 children, parents and carers four mornings a week. Daily prayer, study groups and coffee mornings were running along with weddings, baptisms, confirmations and funerals, on top of which the church's splendid acoustics attracted choir and orchestra performances as well as use by local schools for events and plays.

However St Peter's was not suitably equipped for such numbers. The church had only two WCs both of which were in very poor condition and one was in a tricky location, no disabled facilities and only makeshift baby-changing areas. Minimal kitchen facilities, inadequate fire exits and no defined meeting spaces or rooms meant that it was almost impossible to have more than one or at most two activities going on simultaneously.

Vision

The vision for St Peter's was therefore to retain the beauty of the church and highlight its primary role as a place of worship and house of prayer, while transforming its ability to serve the congregation and



the community; bringing into use the space not otherwise used, enhancing its facilities and improving access.



Refurbished foyer area with glazing and crèche visible to the right

What has been done?

To achieve the aim of modernising and improving the church's facilities, a large-scale re-ordering of the interior has been carried out which involved various works:

- The Narthex has been refurbished into a suitable foyer area for a variety of uses. A fully equipped kitchen and servery, several WCs (including a disabled toilet and baby changing facilities) and a disabled platform lift have been constructed along the north wall of the foyer, and a crèche room along the south. This has a large window through to the church along with speakers which enable parents to see and hear the service whilst looking after children.
- The striking Baptistry in the south-west corner had previously been used as a dumping ground, yet has now been restored and glazed to stress its historic and sacred nature, while keeping it visible. The smaller entrance vestibules have also been renovated and toilet facilities constructed in previously unusable space. The foyer area as a whole has seen the most dramatic change and now provides the church with the key facilities it was so desperately lacking.
- Glass screens and doors have now been installed between the main foyer and the church itself where a solid wall stood previously, which has significantly brightened and opened up the area, and increased visibility through to the church itself.
- Despite there being substantial space along the north, south, and west galleries of the church, these spacious areas were out of bounds for safety reasons, and ended up being used for miscellaneous storage. Therefore the rear pews were removed from the gallery and the space was leveled to provide



usable activity spaces, while the front rows of pews were retained and reconditioned. Glass screens have also been installed around the edge of the gallery level in order for the balustrade to comply with current Building Regulations, whilst retaining visibility into the church.

- A small kitchenette was installed in the west gallery to enhance the now-usable space. New meeting rooms just off the gallery also help to make it a fully-functional area.
- Less major work has included the refurbishment of the vestry/annex, now complete with an office, meeting room and refurbished WCs. Two entirely new staircases have been constructed in the north aisle, one providing access to a fire escape door, the other to the crypt and its storage.
- The gallery-level stained glass windows were also restored, many of which were removed for the necessary work, and the 1905 JW Walker organ which is of exceptional quality, was also fully restored as part of the project.



Restored and glazed Baptistery



Kitchen and servery

How did you start?

Firstly the congregation was asked what improvements they would like to see. Questionnaires helped them to voice their opinions on the project, and interviews were carried out with the major church users.

This was very useful and vitally important to keep the church users involved with the project.

Thoughts were taken on board and feedback was given throughout the process, with the giving of presentations, and a model being made of the church to demonstrate on a small scale what the project was hoping to achieve.

Who were your main partners in developing and implementing this project?

The architect Charles Sheppard whose guidance was extremely helpful, and the congregation.

What was the total cost of the project?

Approximately £1.4 million.

How did you raise the funds?

Fundraising for the project was very successful; about £1.3 million was raised locally. A small amount of money was received through grants, and numerous donations were given from the congregation.

How long did it take from start to finish – from initial proposal to the building being completed and opened?

The process began in December 2004 and the work was finished and the building opened in March 2010, so over 5 years.



Newly cleared and levelled galleries, with glass safety screens

What lessons were learnt? What would you have done differently?



Principally the same approach would have been taken, however throughout the process a number of lessons have certainly been learnt and from these a few points of experience and advice have become clear:

- Select the architect very carefully and ensure that they have the requisite experience, as this is invaluable. As at St Peter's, the architect can be a very knowledgeable source.
- Consult the users of the church and give them involvement in the project, this is vitally important. Questionnaires etc give visitors and the congregation a chance to voice their views on what they, the users, believe would benefit the church most.
- At St Peter's the project committee consulted the consultative bodies early on, as soon as there were comprehensible plans for the project – this was very helpful. It is recommended to do this so that they can have their say at an early stage.
- Minutes and note-taking are invaluable – every meeting was minuted over the 5 years of the scheme, and proved to be extremely useful for referring to past discussions and decisions.
- After consultation, it is good to formulate a few key principles for what you are trying to achieve, for example at St Peter's these were; providing updated facilities; increasing visibility; and improving accessibility.
- St Peter's also worked hard on producing a good Statement of Needs. Although it is a requirement, it is worthwhile spending a good deal of time on this document as if it is written in sufficient detail the statement can serve as a blueprint for the project and be referred back to when necessary. It is important that the project does not deviate too much from the statement- from why it is being done.
- The more thoughtful and careful the planning and preparation for the project, the easier the execution. The level of thought and attention to detail that went into the project was definitely worthwhile. A good committee is also very valuable, particularly with regard to having the continuity of those responsible for the project, while so many different consultants and experts are coming and going.
- Two very important points; those serving on the committee must be prepared to devote a great deal of time to the project, and the committee must have the confidence of the PCC on whose behalf it is acting. It must have the authority and be willing to take decisions.
- Prayer also played a significant role, both on the part of the committee and the congregation, in seeking God's guidance regarding both the project and how best to adapt the building, as well as in relation to the financial side.

Successes:

Making improvements to the church without losing the essence of the building.





Has there been an increase in numbers entering the church?

Yes, and a wider variety of people too.

To what degree has this project contributed to the sustainability of the building itself?

The potential increase in income from a variety of things (including the creation of usable spaces and redevelopment of the gallery space for other uses) will hopefully assist in sustaining the building itself.

Has there been an increase in income?

Probably, however it is fairly early days!

What management structures are in place for the running of the building? (who takes bookings, organises events etc)

The parish office – under guidance of the church committee.

Sustainability of the Project: how are you looking to sustain what you have achieved in the long term?

The hope is for the building to be self-financing and as a result, the project sustainable.



The brighter, glazed Narthex and entrance porches, with facilities to the left and right and refurbished gallery above



Any future plans for the building?

The church has lots of potential, and there are a number of hopes for the future:

- St Peter's wish to let out the new meeting rooms. They have also been holding artists' exhibitions in the newly-created gallery space and it is hoped that this will continue.
- Several orchestras are also interested in playing at the church. There have been lunchtime concerts every Monday since the work was done, and it is hoped that there will be much more music, particularly given the refurbished high-quality organ.
- There are also ideas developing with regard to use of the new church facilities for weddings and receptions; the gallery space could accommodate receptions of 200-300 people.

If you wish to contact the church or want to find out more visit their website at:

www.nottinghillchurch.org.uk

