

PROJECT

ALL SAINTS' WEST HAM



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As with many churches, All Saints’ suffered from the appearance of being closed for much of the day to the casual passer-by. People sometimes asked if the building was redundant, and whether it could be for sale. Contrary to this appearance, the parish had a lively worship and pastoral life which continues today.

For many years the parish planned to remove a modest nineteenth-century lean-to vestry and replace it with a new facility offering up-to-date amenities and rooms that for use by the wider community. Construction started in 2001, and piled footings were in place >



# ALL SAINTS' WEST HAM – THE AVENONS BUILDING

The architecture of All Saints’ – within its context of an ancient graveyard surrounded by mature trees – evokes the more picturesque parts of Essex to be found deeper within the Chelmsford Diocese than West Ham’s London E15 postcode. Today, the site sits just east of the halfway-point along the ribbon development between Stratford and West Ham stations; but in pre-industrial times, it formed

the focal point of West Ham village – sitting on slightly raised ground overlooking the open marshes where the Lee valley joined the Thames.

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PROJECT

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before work had to stop, and the funds were diverted to a major roof repair project following the discovery of serious defects.

It took the most part of a decade to recover from this setback. The development site left to languish behind hoardings became overgrown – hosting a metal container accommodating temporary lavatories. The site also severed the long porch from the host building, and blocked a pedestrian route around the churchyard.

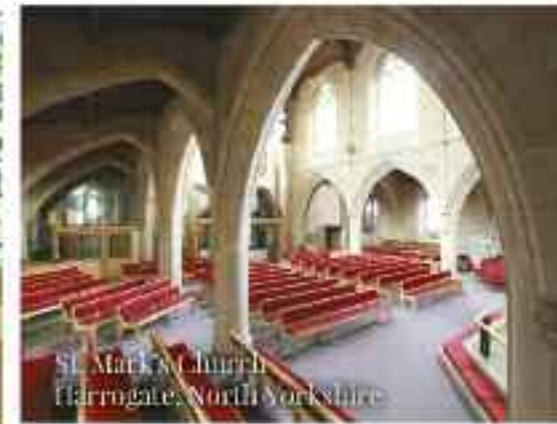
The original development proposals comprised a two-storey annex building, and considerable building work within the nave and aisles: providing additional accommodation on two floors throughout. This would answer a considerable need for ancillary spaces to house administration functions, a kitchen, better facilities for wider community use, and storage – relieving the very fine interior of the church from clutter.

The parish approached HMDW Architects to re-think the proposals and develop a more affordable version – encroaching less within the worship space. The annex building therefore formed the bulk of the revised scheme: providing new WC amenities, step-free access, meeting rooms, a choir vestry, and an office which overlooks and controls entry into the building.

This arrangement is key – enabling the church to open more frequently, and receive casual visitors – whilst also allowing for the annexe to operate independently of the church. Inside the church, discrete single-storey timber-panelled enclosures house a large kitchen and store room at the west end of the nave. The design allows for future expansion upwards to form a gallery or first floor, linked through to the lift in the annexe. The sound system was also renewed and equipped with a hearing loop. >



Holy Trinity Church, Cuckfield, West Sussex



St. Mark's Church, Harrogate, North Yorkshire



St. Mary's Church, Kirtlington, Oxfordshire



Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Stanborough Park



St. James Church, Itidley, Northampton

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## PROJECT

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Careful positioning of rooflights in the annexe ensures that ample daylight continues to pass through several high-level windows into the south aisle. At certain times of the year, sunlight also passes through these windows deep into the worship space.

Whilst the scheme sought to address the unfinished original project, it also improved general accessibility and re-united historic features that had been lost. Stone window dressings from Stratford Langthorne Abbey (to which the church building used to belong) survived the dissolution of the monasteries – spending many years built into the wall of a pub. During the last decade, they could be found stored on a trolley in the church. The new work saw them built permanently into the church wall, where they now grace the interior of the new choir vestry.

The entrance vestibule of the new annexe re-connects the long porch with the south aisle. This creates a much shorter step-free route from the surrounding streets into the building, following adjustment of the long porch floor to eliminate a step, and reinstatement of the paths around this part of the churchyard. Minor adjustments were also made at the east end of the church to provide step-free access to the historic side chapels and choir.

The annexe itself is a simple box shape – detached from the south aisle by vertical windows. Inside, the exposed brick of the former exterior wall was retained to help preserve a sense of the history, and ‘archaeological’ layers.

Externally, the use of the stock brick, arched-headed windows, parapet string course, and stone copings evoke the host building – here part of south façade reconstructed in the eighteenth century.

The design intention was to be contemporary and complementary. The brick and copings used stockpiles that were found to be in good condition despite having lain under covers on the site since 2002. The renovation of the long porch included the glazing-in of the sides to increase security whilst adding resistance to weathering of the interior finishes.

The name for the building is taken from the Avenons Charity – whose roots hail back to Nicholas Avenon in the sixteenth century

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– when the churchwardens and vicars of All Saints’ were responsible for receiving bequests and making donations to people within the parish. The building continues this tradition by increasing opportunities for the parish to serve the local community. With the site having stood derelict for many years, the presence of the new building – and the activities taking place within – brings something of a new focal point to the long-forgotten centre of the original West Ham village. ■

**PROJECT TEAM:**

Architect: HMDW Architects Ltd  
 Contractor: Bakers of Danbury Ltd  
 QS: EBBS Burman Ltd  
 Mechanical Installations: Jones Heating (Redbridge) Ltd  
 Electrical Installation: Dennis Johns Electrical Ltd

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