

St Barnabas Church

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Vicar:

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE *May 2014*

General Description

Designed by Sir Ninian Comper in partnership with William Bucknall, and built in the first decade of the twentieth century to serve the new residential neighbourhood of Manor Park, St Barnabas Church is a Grade II listed building of red brick with stone copings and window tracery. A 'hidden gem', with informal front garden leading to a triple-gabled west front, it makes an unexpected break from the surrounding rows of terraced houses. Along the north side is a striking vista of arched buttresses. The interior, bigger than one would anticipate from the outside, is a joy: late gothic-style windows and measured arches in the nave give a sense of lightness, high wide aisles offer the spaciousness of a hall-church, while a long chancel leads the eye to a fine east window that commands the architectural unity of the building. The 'Christ in glory' in the centre of this window, installed in 1954, incorporates Comper's "trademark" strawberry motif in the bottom right hand corner. Either side of the east window, two "Comper angel" candle sconces add a touch of richness.



North of the chancel, separated by an oak parclose screen (also Comper), is a Lady Chapel with a stone memorial to those from the parish who lost their lives in the 1914-18 war - a soberingly long list of names, plainly but elegantly inscribed. Originally there was no screen, but sections of the Lady Chapel wall and pillars were painted. The organ on the south side of the chancel came from St. Michael and All Angels church when a new church and community centre were built in 1989. The organ loft panelling was installed in 1951 as a memorial to parishioners who died in the 1939-45 war. Beneath the organ loft is the sacristy, and beyond, with separate door into the chancel, the choir vestry: a pleasing room with boat-shaped wooden ceiling and mullioned, diamond-paned windows.

The church was re-ordered in the 1970s, the sanctuary partitioned off by a temporary screen, and the altar brought forward to the east end of the nave. The original communion rail, choir stalls, and eagle lectern remain. At the same time a kitchen and toilets were installed in the north-west corner of the nave. The octagonal carved stone font (originally raised on two stone steps and situated where the kitchen now is) has an attractive cover of wood and wrought iron.

Unusual aumbry in the sanctuary. Door handles and locks throughout distinctively designed. Of note finally are the pulpit and bell (in a bellcote above the south aisle roof) - the former dating from the 17th century, rescued from a church at Rayleigh when undergoing modernisation; the latter, cast by Richard Bowler in 1596, salvaged in 1932 from the debris of Markshall church, Coggeshall (and cleaned and re-hung in 2011).



Current State of Repair

St. Barnabas is currently on the 'Heritage at Risk' register. To halt drastic deterioration the building urgently needs structural repair and renewal work. This is the PCC's top priority, so the long-term mission and outreach of the church is not impeded. A first phase of restoration (roof, copings, buttresses, high-level brickwork and rainwater goods at the east end) was completed in 2011, and a second phase is nearing completion at the time of writing (extensive high-level brick and stone repairs/renewal on south and west elevations, re-slating of entire south aisle roof, new fascia and guttering, new south gully). Fundraising is in progress for a third phase, to re-slate the whole of the nave and north aisle roofs, and undertake further high-level brick and stone work, together with buttress pinning and new guttering along the north elevation. This will secure the most vital areas of the building, but extensive repairs to lower-level brickwork are also urgent priorities, as well as window conservation work, repairs to external doors, and interior decoration.

Community Facility

In the 1970s, with the demographic profile of the parish changing, the church hall was sold and became a Sikh gurdwara. Since then the west end of the church has doubled as a church hall for social and community use.

The building is in use throughout the week, hosting a Pre-School group, a Textile arts project, a karate academy, Indian classical dance classes, two local bands, and one-off ecumenical and interfaith events, as well as the church's own singing group, religious services, and regular Traidcraft stall. The groups generate some income to help maintain the building as a community resource, but rents are kept low to keep activities affordable. The people attending these activities come from diverse ethnic, cultural, and faith backgrounds, and range from 0-

101 years old. Based at the church, the textiles project also delivers sessions at other venues across the Borough, and is developing a social enterprise to work with adults with learning disabilities. A community gardening project is being planned in partnership with the Trinity Centre.

The largest public space in the locality, with good acoustics and comfortably seating 300, St. Barnabas is also used for public meetings, charity fairs, and jazz concerts, as well as for weddings, funerals, commemorations and public events.

The benches in the front garden are well, if at times inappropriately, used by the general public.

Ecumenical and Multifaith

St Barnabas is part of 'Churches Together in Manor Park', has active contact with the local Evangelical Christian network 'Transform Newham', and hosts occasional gatherings of a local Tamil Christian fellowship. It is valued by people of different faiths as a witness for Christianity in a multifaith setting. Community textile open days, and an evening of Sufi music and poetry held at St. Barnabas, organised with Anjuman mosque, have helped enhance intercultural and faith relations. Our building is an important sign of the presence and engagement of the national church in the area: as the parish church, used by people of all backgrounds, it provides a place of "common property" amid a diversity of faith communities (including Christian groups of diverse persuasions). The somewhat bare interior creates 'spiritual' space that does not impose a strongly acculturated Christianity. As far as possible we share in networks such as the Newham Association of Faiths, the Faithful Friends project, and Bridge Builders in Unity, as well as interfaith events at the Trinity Centre.

Arts and Music

St Barnabas was for many years the base for an art club, and was a Newham Festival of the Arts venue. Current use of the premises by music and dance groups continues this tradition. The Bharatanatyam dance group teaches to a nationally significant standard. The Textiles Project exhibits both locally and in Central London. Exhibitions of art work have demonstrated that the under-used east end of the church could make a successful exhibition, recital, and meeting space. Currently it is used as a work space for the Textiles Project, and occasional film and drama events.

Ecology

Most front gardens and many back gardens in the area have been paved, reducing the amount of green space, and making the church site all the more valuable as a wildlife habitat. Residents and passers-by (the church is on a bus route) appreciate the garden as a "little oasis". The church is surrounded to the north, east, and south by a narrow curtilage of land: there is a small Sunday School garden, and the plan is to develop a general community gardening and outdoor play area. The front garden has an area set aside for interment of Ashes, with a simple oak beam for memorial plaques. Pink hawthorn, holly, cherry, crabapple, acacia, and holm oak make a change from the pollarded limes and planes in the streets round about. Garden plants have been donated, and volunteers do their best against vandalism, litter, and foxes. And currently, builder's equipment, scaffolding, and debris!

Built Environment

St Barnabas is a fine example of an unfashionable yet important style of architecture. Neighbouring neo-gothic churches have been either demolished or substantially altered, and some characterful secular buildings (e.g. pubs) of the same era have also disappeared. Visitors and school groups comment how “old” the building is, sensing history and tradition. It is both a sign of continuity and a reminder of diversity and craftsmanship in streets that show a mix of neglect, utilitarian modernisation, and ready-made additions. The interior, much more impressive than the unostentatious facade suggests, has aesthetic appeal across cultural and faith boundaries, and is an excellent contemporary community space.

Commitment to the Future

So far around half a million pounds has been spent on the urgently needed ‘re-fit’ of the entire church. This testifies to the commitment of the parish, the Diocese of Chelmsford, English Heritage, and other funders. A Heritage Lottery Fund application is currently being prepared for Phase 3. It is clear to all that if these repairs are left any longer, the cost in the end will be exponentially greater. More importantly, there is commitment to securing and increasing the community benefit. Internal adaptations are needed to maximise the potential for community use, and to increase income for the continuing maintenance of the building.

We recognise the challenges. But with a spirit of Gospel realism (Luke 14.28ff) we rejoice in the path of faithful discipleship to which we are called - as stewards of a useful and uplifting building open to all in the name of the Saviour whom we proclaim in worship, word, and deed.



Christian Aid drumming event at St. Barnabas

STATEMENT OF NEEDS

Demographic

Located in one of the most deprived Boroughs in the country, St. Barnabas Manor Park is among the 10% most deprived parishes in the Church of England. Of the 2011 census population of 12,083 (a 23% increase from the previous census), 95% are from ethnic minorities. It is densely populated, with some houses owner-occupied and well cared for, but others subdivided to accommodate up to as many as 20 people. 30% of households in the parish are deemed “overcrowded”. Nearly 40% of the population are under 25. Poverty, poor housing, low skills, transience of population and unemployment create great social needs. Many in employment have poor pay and no security. Low income is a problem - unemployed, students,

and low paid workers total over 65% of the working-age population. The religious profile of the parish is nearly 50% Muslim, 19% Hindu, 17% Christian, 5% Sikh. Only 8% declared no faith. Most of the Christian minority come originally from Africa, the Indian sub-continent, and former Soviet countries, and belong to denominations other than Anglican (e.g. Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Orthodox, Mar Thoma). Nevertheless St. Barnabas has a broad-based, committed congregation, most of whom live in or near the parish. Sunday worship attracts an average congregation of 40+, with a vigorous Sunday School, and there is demand for pastoral offices and pastoral assistance, as well as space for community activities as mentioned above. Because of the exceptional diversity of the parish and its range of social needs and intercultural opportunities, St. Barnabas has significant educational and training potential for the wider Church.

The Building: Structural Needs

Our 2013 quinquennial inspection specified the need to continue urgently with the present phased programme of ‘rescue’ for the entire building. The first phase was successfully completed in 2011, but in the interim the condition of the rest of the structure had visibly deteriorated. The rate of deterioration can only increase as damage in one place leads to knock-

on damage all around. The roof tiles and remaining gully are almost at the end of their life, and need completely replacing, along with the fascia and guttering along the north aisle. If not addressed as an immediate priority these problems will start to make the building unviable. For many years the church’s priority was active ministry in the local community, with building needs addressed as required for everyday running purposes. Now it is vital to ensure the building’s long-term soundness in order to sustain the church’s ministry and mission. Phase 1 (high-level repairs at the east end, rainwater goods and drains) was made possible by generous grants from English



Heritage, London Over the Border, Friends of Essex Churches, and National Churches Trust, as well as by the parish’s own fundraising events. For Phase 2 (high-level repairs at the west end and along the south elevation, with re-roofing of S. aisle, new guttering and gulleys, and roof alarm) we had a second English Heritage grant and a second grant from London Over the Border. Generous support from church members old and new was also hugely appreciated. In this second phase it has finally been possible to renew the broken cross on the central west gable. A third Phase (c.£300,000) is now needed for the remaining roof (re-slating over nave and north aisle) and extensive further brick and stonework and pinning of buttresses.

Meanwhile much work will still remain to be done on brickwork at lower levels and to doors and windows. A specialist window survey is also required, and clearly a substantial amount of work will be called for there. Internally, the stone flags at the east end are badly deteriorated, the electrics need renewing, the toilets need upgrading, with disabled provision, and the kitchen needs modernising to improve hygiene as well as convenience. Further internal needs: improve the main entrance, create a side entrance to increase weekday flexibility of building use, make good fallen plaster, damage from leaking rainwater, mend broken pews, etc., and redecorate. The parquet floor at the west end of the nave requires protection and care due to heavy community use.

Community Needs

Although the building is used seven days a week, it is ill-adapted for multiple use, and the potential of the space is not being realised. A number of local groups have asked to use the premises, and we are fundraising for urgently needed work (disabled and child toilets, improved midweek access, outdoor play and social area) that will optimise use of the building while retaining its distinctive qualities and appeal. As well as the significant community benefit this will bring, it will also generate income to enable the church to become more self-sustaining.

Accessibility

The whole of the church except the sanctuary is at ground level, so access is easy for all (disabled access would be built into any plans for the sanctuary). Disabled toilet facilities are needed, and drawings have been made and costed. The main entrance is accessible but not inviting - manageable for those with wheelchairs or walking frames, but lacking light, and with an awkward arrangement of doors. Plans have also been drawn and costed to reclaim the neglected north side and east end garden area, which could be an attractive and valuable asset.

Regeneration

The parish is situated at the opposite end of the Borough from the 'Newham arc of opportunity' (Stratford and Canning Town), and did not noticeably benefit from the Olympics. Indeed it is claimed by many that the area is "going down", with ever more petty crime, litter in the streets, and shops such as the Co-Op disappearing in favour of pound stores, pawn shops, gambling and payday loan premises, and fast food outlets. Public spending cuts have left local community facilities closed or run-down and services reduced and uncertain. More people call at the church for food, and support of foodbanks is an essential service. (Local gurdwaras do a superb job offering free cooked food to all callers - a traditional aspect of Sikh observance - and without these many more people would go hungry.)

Environment

Rubble, thorns, Japanese knotweed and ivy need eradicating on the north side of the church and the area at the east end, and the ground appropriately planted and paved. Proposals already costed will tie in with a new community gardening project being developed in partnership with the Trinity Centre. The front garden needs improvement (bent railings, ancient noticeboard, disused parking space, and main path to the church). Litter bins of an appropriate design are needed beside the benches. A cleaner/caretaker is needed as building use increases.

Needs of the Church Community

The core identity of the building as a place of Christian worship and witness needs to be affirmed in a way that is visible, intrinsic to the overall character of the premises, and genuinely welcoming. Replacement of the broken cross on the W. front, visible to all from the High Street, will be a significant marker of the restoration not only of the building but also of the self-confidence of the church community. Internal re-ordering will need further imaginative and sensitive thinking to secure the sense of 'sanctuary' where the altar is sited while integrating sacred and profane in a way that communicates Gospel values and makes a

beautiful building available for multiple community use. Of great importance once the major structural needs are no longer pressing concerns, is the sanctuary at the east end where the high altar would originally have been. This space needs to be imaginatively and sensitively re-envisioned in a way that respects the overall architectural design of the building - conceived with the high altar as its central focus - while honouring the different liturgical concepts and community needs of the present. Clearly the work required is beyond the means of the local congregation alone to pay for. Ongoing and regular one-off local fundraising events bring a generous response, but those living on low incomes are still badly affected by recession and job insecurity. We depend on the concern and support of the wider Church and community. All who have a care for the church will need to be committed in prayer and active engagement, that our efforts may "bear fruit richly" to the glory of God.



Details from the East window