

# ST MARY PRIMROSE HILL

Heritage Statement

DOW JONES ARCHITECTS



# 1 INTRODUCTION



The purpose of this statement is to inform the proposal to create new spaces for Mary's at St Mary the Virgin, Primrose Hill. It has been created using the four principle heritage values given in Historic England's advice note 12. It will sit alongside the architectural drawings and design and access statement.

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# 2 HISTORY AND CONTEXT

## 2.1 Location

The Parish Church of St Mary-the-Virgin, Elsworthy Road, London NW3 3DJ

## 2.2 Planning History

The church has had a range of permissions granted for work over the last forty years, which are listed below. NB Permissions for works to the trees on the site have not been listed here.

- 8702778 (1987) Application to extend the church to the west, forming a parish room and kitchenette. Riley & Glanfield Architects.
- 2005/1620/P. Application to demolish the ambulatory, and construct the St Mary's Centre to the east. MRDA Architects.
- 2007:2007/1324/P. Application for revised landscaping to the east of the church, adjacent to the St Mary's Centre. MRDA Architects.
- : 2020/0964/P, dated 25 February 2020, application to install 87 photovoltaic cells to the main roof of the nave on behalf of the parish council, refused. MRDA Architects.
- APP/X5210/W/20/3259869: Installation of 58 photovoltaic solar panels on nave roof (south elevation) and associated supporting equipment granted at appeal. MRDA Architects.

## 2.3 Listing

The church is Grade 2 listed.

The designation description is as follows:

*Grade: II*

*Listing: 1329902*

*Date first listed: 14.05.1974*

*Address: CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN, PRIMROSE HILL ROAD*

*Listing description:*

*CAMDEN*

*TQ2784SE PRIMROSE HILL ROAD 798-1/63/1336 (West side) 14/05/74 Church of St Mary the Virgin Church. 1871-2. By Michael P Manning; built by Dove Brothers. c1891-2 south aisle and chapel added. Red brick with stone dressings. Slated roofs with lugged brick eaves cornice. Early French Gothic style.*

*EXTERIOR: three-bay aisled nave with clerestory and north transept, apsidal-ended sanctuary and south-east chapel. Main entrances on north elevation; western entrance with gabled portico, eastern with gabled hoodmould, both with brick moulded arches having bas relief tympana. Slightly pointed lancet windows. Gabled transept with three arcaded windows, plate tracery rose window and three linked lancets in apex. Chancel has five plate tracery windows flanked by buttresses; west end three arcades windows, plate tracery rose window flanked by oculi.*

*INTERIOR: has wagon roof to nave and transept; chancel and south-east chapel are vaulted; aisles have flying buttresses. Columns with stiff leaf capitals. Features by local artists include stained glass by Clayton and Bell and C.E. Kempe, enamelwork by Henry Holiday, reredos and pulpit by G.F. Bodley, oak seating by Temple Moore.*

*HISTORICAL NOTE: due to the High Church practices of the first incumbent, St Mary the Virgin was not consecrated until 1885. From 1901-15 the vicar, Percy Dearmer, editor of the English Hymnal and Songs of Praise, made the church a showpiece of liturgical worship and good music. His reforms included whitewashing of the original red and black interior.*



Assessment of the war memorial for listing:

The war memorial within the grounds is not listed, and a Faculty for its removal has been granted.

Summary of Building

War memorial, 1921, with figurative sculpture.

Reasons for currently not Listing the Building

Primrose Hill War Memorial is not recommended for listing for the following principal reasons: Architectural interest \* The removal of the original 1920s cross and the addition of name panels in the 1990s has heavily altered the original design, to a point where its original interest has been compromised; \* The figurative sculpture, though attractive, is a 1988 addition, and the name panels date from the 1990s, both therefore falling under the age threshold for listing.

History

The aftermath of the World Wars saw the biggest single wave of public commemoration ever with tens of thousands of memorials erected across the country. This was the result of both the huge impact on communities of the loss of three quarters of a million British lives, and also the official policy of not repatriating the dead. Therefore, the memorials provided the main focus of the grief felt at this great loss. One such memorial was raised at St Mary the Virgin Church in Primrose Hill on 13 November 1921. The memorial was originally topped by a wooden cross, however at some point in the 1970s or 1980s it fell and hit a pedestrian and so it was removed as a safety risk. It was replaced with the current Madonna and Child sculpture, by Phillip Turner, in 1988; this was gifted by one Agnes Mantle. New name panels were added in the 1990s. In 1999 the memorial was refurbished with the aid of a £250 grant from the War Memorials Trust and it was re-dedicated on 7 May 2000. It is currently (2017) scheduled for demolition.

Details

Recessed shrine-type memorial, made of sandstone, and formed of two recessed panel on top of a plinth, topped by a (heavily eroded) sculpture of a Mother and Child, presumably representing Madonna and the Infant Christ. The front faces of the upper section of recessed shrine bear the (heavily eroded) inscription: 1914 / THEIR NAME LIV- / ETH [?] / 1918. The left panel bears the names of the Fallen with the inscriptions: 1914 - 1918 WAR and the 1939 - 1945 WAR. The right panel bears more names of the Fallen for the First World War and also names under the inscription: THE FALKLANDS WAR - 1982.

2.4 Conservation Area

The church sits in the London Borough of Camden Elsworthy Road Conservation Area. The conservation area is predominately residential and contains large detached and semi-detached villas from the 19th century and early 20th century. They are in a variety of styles and materials, which are often grouped within the sub-areas of the conservation area. Adjacent to the church the dwellings are predominately large villas built of stock brick, with neo-Georgian detailing. On Elsworthy Road, a number of dwellings have mock-Tudor half timbered details. Outside the Conservation Area, but immediately opposite the church across King Henry's Road, are a series of modernist low-rise streets that form part of the Chalcots Estate. These are flat roofed dwellings built of painted brick and with black timber cladding.

The Conservation Area appraisal notes that the views of the Church of St Mary the Virgin to the west and north-west along King Henry's Road (1) and Primrose Hill Road (2) respectively, and the view looking west along Elsworthy Road (3) as being of significance. It also notes that the view out of the Conservation Area towards the summit of Primrose Hill from the end of Elsworthy Terrace as being significant, though the church does not feature in this view.

The views on Elsworthy Road are characterised by houses with front gardens lining a residential road. The south side of King Henry's Road is similar, with the Chalcots Estate located opposite the church on the north side of the road. The view towards Primrose Hill is characterised more by the avenue of trees to either side. This makes a very green view with buildings along the road and to an extent, the church, obscured by mature trees.

2.5 Archaeological Potential

There is limited archeological potential on the site. The site has not been used for burials and the area was pasture land until it was developed in the 19th century. The proposal does not extend significantly beyond the footprint of the existing church or the existing St Mary's Centre, which disturbed the ground across the proposed site.



Mock-Tudor timber on Elsworthy road



Elsworthy Terrace



Elliot Square on King Henry's Road, part of the Chalcot Estate

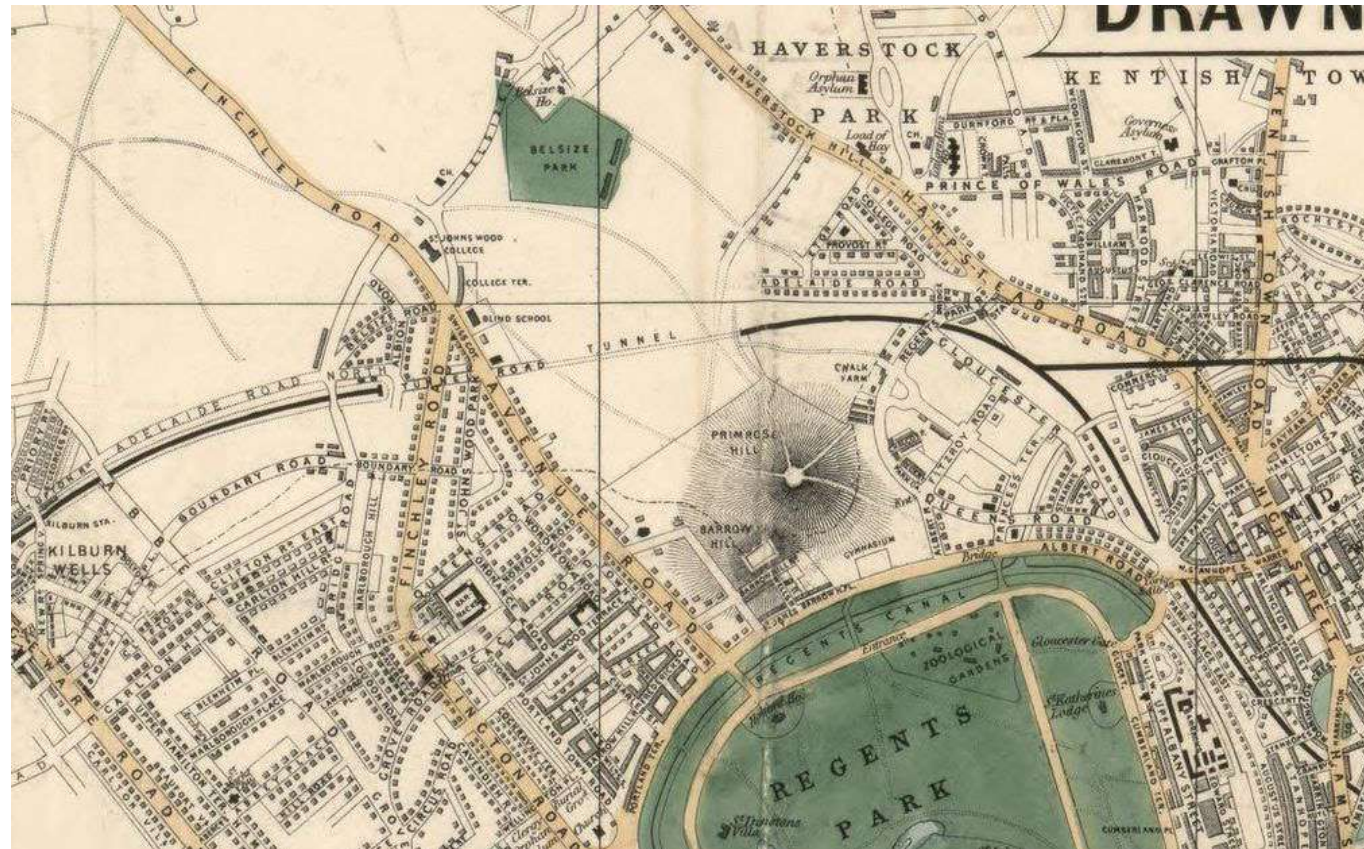


Villa on Elsworthy Toad, built 1890





# 3. HISTORY OF ST MARY'S



1865 Whitbread's Map of London. Whilst the design is similar and King Henry's Road and Harley Road remain, other parts were not realised. Road names such as Provost Lane, Kings College Road and Eton Road are references to the long-term Etonian ownership

## 3.1 Primrose Hill

During the 15th century, Henry VI gave eight acres of land including Primrose Hill to the provost and fellows of the newly founded Eton College.

Unlike Kentish Town (which was a village development), the area around Primrose Hill remained open until the mid 19th Century when extensive development was carried out.

Following the construction of the Regent's Canal, in 1820, and the building of the London and Birmingham Railway opened in the 1830s, residential development around Primrose Hill began in 1840. The new development was varied, and included large villas being built for wealthy residents, terraced houses

rented out floor by floor or sometimes room by room by multiple families, small terraces of railway worker cottages, and smaller gardens and mews which housed artisan workshops, livery stables and manufacture (notably piano manufacture).

The last major development was Primrose Hill Studios in 1877 which continued Primrose Hill's association with the arts. Since its beginnings, Primrose Hill has, and still has, a mix of tenures and commercial activity.

Primrose Hill itself became a public park in 1842 after an Act of Parliament effected an exchange between The Crown and Eton College.



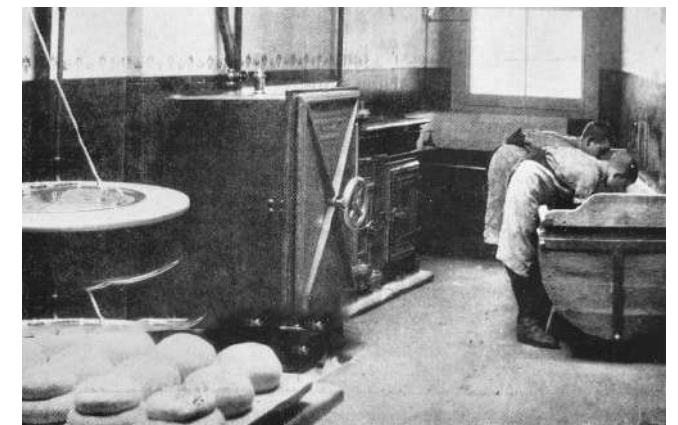
Map of The Boys Home, 1896

## 3.2 The Boys' Home

The parish of St Mary's has a long history of social action, with its roots in the worshipping community at the 'Home for the Maintenance by their Own Labour of Destitute Boys Not Convicted of Crime'. The Home was founded by George William Bell in 1858, and moved in 1865 to Regent's Park Road, at the junction with King Henry's Road.

The aim of the school was to save children from destitution. Boys were fed, clothed and taught practical skills and trades which including- shoe making, baking, tailoring, carpentry etc. The funds generated from the sale of these items contributed to the running of the school.

There was originally no chapel on the site, and the chaplain led prayers in the schoolroom. Local people were invited into the school to generate philanthropic interest.



Top: the bakery where boys learned to bake  
bottom: gymnastics lessons  
left: photo of children and staff

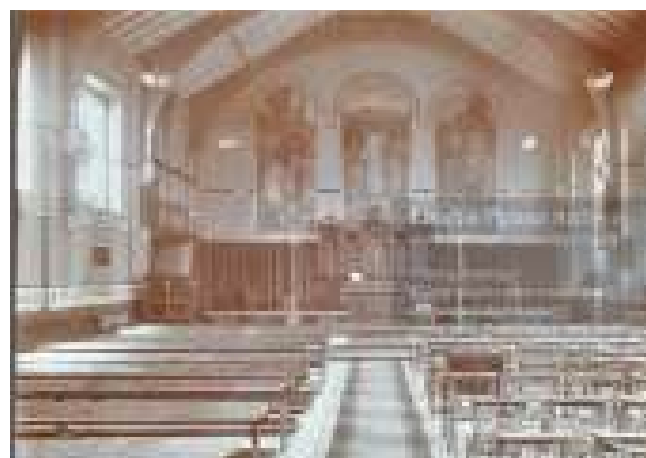




The temporary tin church on Ainger Road in 1867



Boys' Home Chapel, 1872



Boys' Home Industrial School, Regent's Park Road: interior of the chapel, 1872

### 3.3 The Tin Church

As the congregation expanded, Bell campaigned for the establishment of a separate church. A temporary iron church was built, somewhere between Erskine and Ainger Roads, and opened in April 1867. The building was built from much of Bell's own money, and seated for 400 adults and 50 children.

The priest in charge of the iron church was the Reverend Charles Fuller, chaplain of the Boys' Home. When, however, he introduced Tractarian elements to his services, Bell found this offensive; he eventually withdrew the boys from the church. The Boys' Home later had their own chapel built in around 1872.



Red ring indicates area where the tin church was built in relation to St Mary's

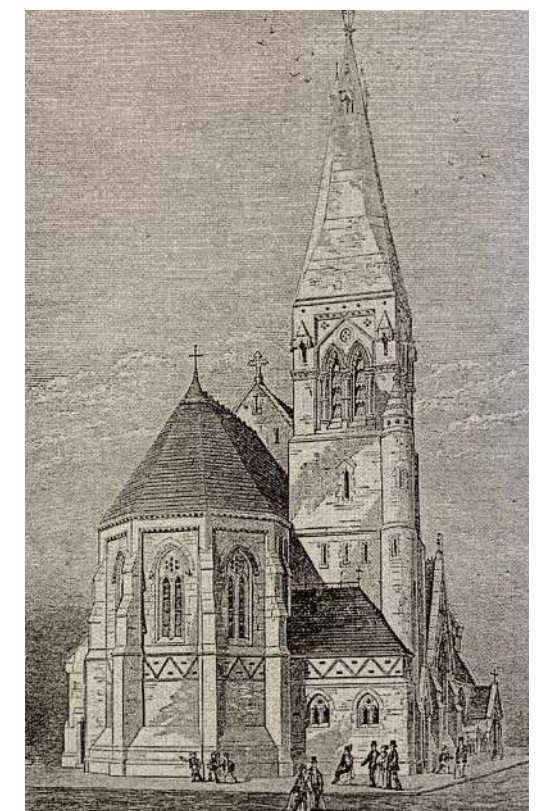


St Mary's, 1904

### 3.4 St Mary's

In 1870, Eton College donated a site for a permanent new church, St Mary's, and a local member of the congregation, M.P. Manning, was asked to design it. Construction began later that year in December 1870, and was completed in 1872. The congregation were not able to raise all the money required for Manning's scheme, so a scaled-down version was built, without the spire, narthex and west end. The south aisle, chapel, sacristy and ambulatory were added later in the 1890s.

M.P. Manning was an architect and surveyor mainly working for the United Reform Church. There is relatively little information available about his work. St Mary's was built fairly early on in his career with only one recorded building built before, the church of St Olave's on the Isle of Man in 1862.



The original design for St Mary's



3.5 Percy Dearmer at St Mary's

The Church of St Mary's came into prominence in the early 20th Century due to the changes introduced by its third vicar, Percy Dearmer. Dearmer was the vicar between 1901 and 1915 and was a lifelong socialist, advocating for public ministry of women and social justice.

Dearmer is well known for his publication of the influential work, *The Parson's Handbook*. The intention of the book was to establish Anglo-Catholic liturgical practices in the native English tradition (as opposed to Italianate ones). It was to help “remedying the lamentable confusion, lawlessness, and vulgarity which are conspicuous in the Church at this time” and was focused mainly on the art and beauty in worship. He implemented many of these English reforms whilst at St Mary's, such as whitewashing the polychromatic brick of the chancel in 1906 and the rest of the church in 1914, and introducing the singing of plainsong and hanging pictures and curtains.

In 1906, Dearmer collaborated with Ralph Vaughan Williams on *The English Hymnal*. He later worked with Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw to produce *Songs of Praise* in 1926, and *The Oxford Book of Carols* in 1928. *The English Hymnal* was described as the best collection of English hymns when it was published. It offered an alternative to *Hymns Ancient and Modern* and gained national popularity. The book reflected the hymns sung by Dearmer's congregation at St Mary.

Both books are pivotal in the Church of England and have been credited with reintroducing traditional and medieval English music. They are notable for the first appearances of well-known hymns such as ‘Morning has broken’, ‘I'n the bleak mid-winter’ and ‘He who would valiant be’.

Note:  
For a more detailed history of the church, please refer to ‘*St Mary the Virgin Primrose Hill: A Church and its People 1872-2022*’ by Christopher Kitching, Matador, 2022.



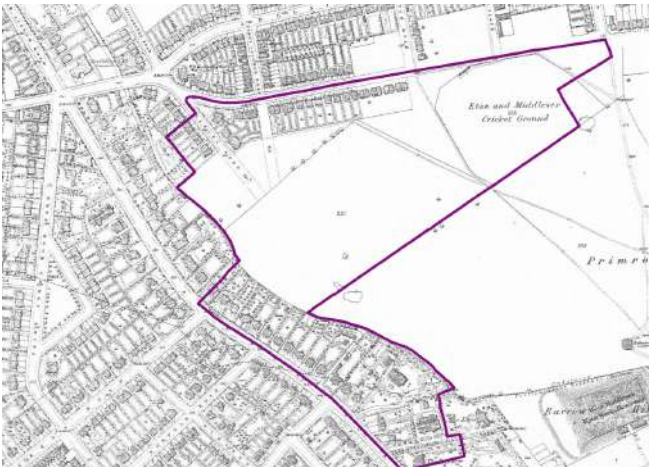
Percy Dearmer, vicar of St Mary's in 1901



Percy Dearmer with the choir, 1910



3.6 Comparative Maps



1871 the site of the church forms part of the Eton & Middlesex Cricket Ground



1894: St Mary's and nearby terraced houses built on the cricket ground



1914: larger houses developed on the land, forming extension of Elsworthy and Harley roads and the creation of Wadham Gardens



1935



3.7 Development of the Building

The original church building consisted of the nave and a north aisle.

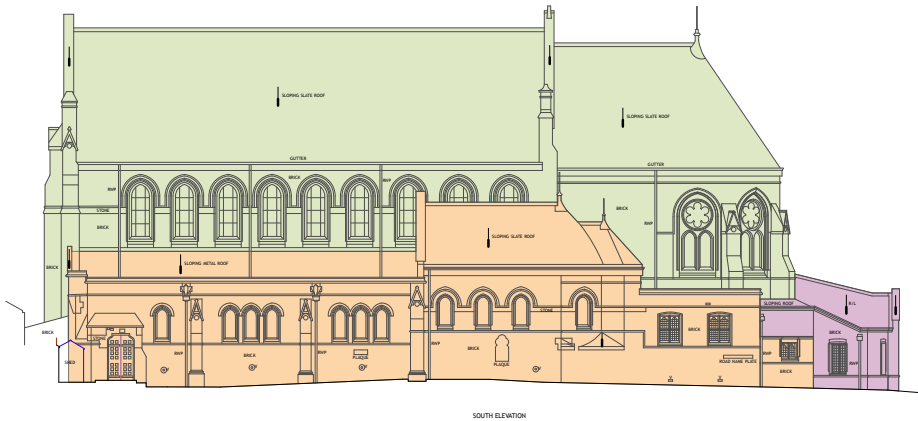
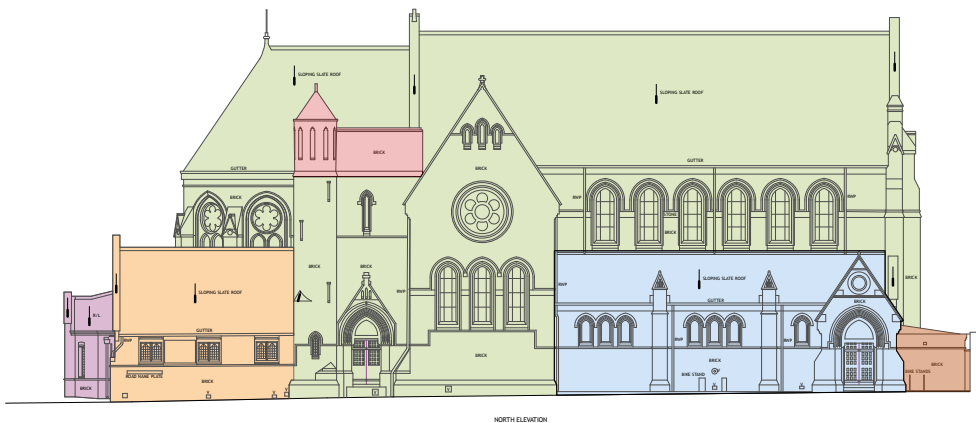
Following subsidence of the ground beneath the church, most likely due to the clay ground conditions and the construction of a railway tunnel adjacent to the building in the 1870's, the north aisle was demolished and reconstructed to a different design. Dove Brothers of Islington carried out this building work.

The south aisle, sacristy, ambulatory and church hall were added in 1890-92. These were built to a slightly amended scheme, owing to the fact that Elsworthy Road had been widened since the opening of the church, reducing the space for a south aisle to be built.

The tower was not completed as originally designed, stopping short of its full height. It is likely that the top of the current tower was rebuilt in the 20th century, probably following war damage.

More recently, a parish room, kitchen and toilets were added in 1987, a plain single-storey building abutting the west of the church.

In 2006, the majority of the church's ambulatory was demolished in order to construct the St Mary's Centre, designed by MRDA. This consists of a small kitchen, disabled toilet and consultation room at the east end of the church. The remainder of the ambulatory was adapted, with a new roof behind a new parapet.





# 5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HERITAGE ASSET

The following designations will be used to denote the heritage significance of the building:

Exceptional - important at national to international levels  
Considerable - important at regional level or sometimes higher  
Some - usually of local value only but possibly of regional significance for group or other value  
Little - of limited heritage or other value  
Neutral - features which neither enhance nor detract from the value of the site  
Negative/intrusive - features which detract from the value of the site.

## 5.1 Archeological interest

As a church built in the 19th century on formerly undeveloped pastureland, there is little archeological potential on the site. There is no history of burials at the site.

There is no archeological significance.

## 5.2 Historical interest

The church has some historical value as one of the many churches that were built during London's 19th-century urban expansion. The establishment of the worshipping community in 1856, and the progression from the tin church to St Mary's Church describes the development and affirmation of the community.

The church has some particular interest as the site where Percy Dearmer implemented his thoughts on liturgy and compiled *The English Hymnal*. While the whitewashing of the church's interior disguised the original polychromatic architecture, it is an integral part of its historic interest.

The national impact of Dearmer's work gives the church some historic significance.

## 5.3 Architectural and artistic interest

The church has some architectural interest as an example of a 19th-century gothic church, exemplified by its status as a grade 2 listed building. It is well designed in terms of its layout and detailing, and is constructed of high-quality materials. The construction of internal elements such as the stained glass windows, rood cross and reredos are also of a high standard, and by noted craftsmen. However, amongst the 343,000 other grade 2 listed buildings, St Mary's is not distinctive.

M.P. Manning, not a distinguished architect, was selected as a member of the congregation. His original design was not realised in full. The building has been heavily adapted. The modern additions to the east and west end detract slightly from the overall architectural quality of the church.

Overall the church is of some architectural and artistic significance

## 5.4 Communal interest

The church has a value as the centre of Anglican worship within the parish.

The church is also used for a broad range of secular uses including choir practice, community sports activities, public lectures, brewing, community meetings and by community support groups. This raises its significance for the local community as a place where people from different backgrounds, ages and means can meet. The church is also notable as the home of Mary's, which credits its success in part to its location in this church building. This work in the community further increases its communal value.

The building provides considerable communal value.

## 5.5 Interest of setting

The setting around the church has changed considerably since the church was built, with the construction of flats to the north, east and south of the church.

Overall the setting of the church is of little significance.

