

St Wilfrid's Church, Church Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex

Statement of Need

St Wilfrid's Church was built in 1865 under the professional services of architect George Bodley with Charles Eamer Kempe responsible for the stained-glass windows and the painted vault ceiling. The warden's vestry, choir vestry and toilet area were added later in 1881. The flat roof over this area has been leaking water for some time and this ingress has caused major damp problems to all three rooms, an issue raised on the quinquennial in 2022 as requiring urgent attention. Water damage has not only damaged, beyond repair, many items but the wooden cladding in the warden's vestry has succumbed to wet and dry rot (which has now been removed under an emergency faculty)

The one toilet is totally inadequate with no separate area for hand washing. We have no disabled toilet and no area for baby changing facilities. We can no longer use any of these rooms due to the damp, mould and general condition of them. The wall mounted safe in the warden's vestry is very damp causing damage to the contents. Downpipes from the tower have blocked and caused further damp and water ingress into the church on the north aisle with the vast majority of the tiles being cracked. The tiles on this side of the roof also require replacement.

Since the closure of the Clair Hall venue in 2020 the church building is now the largest space for concerts and events in Haywards Heath, with the two manual Ticknell pipe organ (installed in 1998) being much desired by local music groups and choirs who wish to use the church as a venue, but find the lack of facilities as a drawback. New toilets within a refurbished, dry, space would enable us to reach out and work alongside the wider community by hosting and holding concerts and events. This will build upon our existing music ministry and will help to encourage new moments of encounter between the Church community and the wider town.

We considered the possibility of extending the vestry to create a new small meeting room within the space, however it was decided that the cost of such an expansion was prohibitive for the space that would be created. Based on this we decided to work within the existing footprint of the vestry to provide the best facilities possible, is to retain a vestry while also providing for three toilets (including disabled and children changing facilities, and also a kitchenette area).

The new toilets and the small purpose kitchenette area would allow us to invite groups to use our church for community fellowship. As part of our church mission we welcome local schools for RE visits, and also host carol concerts and services with over 400 people in attendance, but the lack of suitable toilets make these difficult to manage. We are fortunate to see a growth of young families to the church in recent years, facilities for baby changing and handwashing will encourage them to remain part of the church community. We wish to

welcome all ages to our church, whether attending on a regular basis or for Baptisms, Weddings or Funerals.

We have refreshments frequently after our services to encourage fellowship, but a lack of suitable washing facilities is a hindrance to his ministry and also to the wider mission of the Parish. The refurbishment is an essential aspect to our future growth in attendance and outreach, and is one of the main objectives in our current five year Mission Action Plan adopted in 2025.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St. Wilfrid's Church in Haywards Heath was built between 1863 and 1865 to serve the growing town, replacing a former school that served as a temporary chapel. Designed by G.F. Bodley, the church is a notable example of Decorated Gothic architecture and consecrated on June 5, 1865. Upon consecration, it became the parish church and the first Vicar, Revd R.E. Wyatt, was appointed.

It was opened in 1865 and an inscription beneath the present gallery inside that implies the nave clerestory was erected in 1890 refers only to the glazing, which was replaced again in 1962.

The church is constructed from local stone from Birch Green and features a distinctive low, spired, tiled tower. The church stands on the highest point in Haywards Heath, approximately 300 feet above sea level.



Photograph of the north side of the church in 1866

The church is listed as a Grade II* historic building for its architectural and historical importance. It is a prominent example of a late 19th-century Arts and Crafts church, with some stained glass windows from the William Morris workshop.

Official Listing

Location

Statutory Address: Church of St Wilfrid, Church Road

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: West Sussex

District: Mid Sussex (District Authority)

Parish: Haywards Heath

National Grid Reference: TQ 33098 23915

Details

This list entry was subject to a Minor Amendment on 23 March 2021 to correct name and reformat the text to current standards TQ 32 SW 4/111

HAYWARDS HEATH CHURCH ROAD Church of St Wilfrid

10.9.51 II Church. 1863-65 by G F Bodley in Decorated style. Built of Sussex and Ardingly sandstones with tiled roof having decorative ridge tiles. Central tower, five bay nave with clerestory and lean to aisles with buttresses. South chapel in transept and short chancel of one bay. Tower of three stages with south east turret with stepped buttresses and octagonal turret above. Hipped tiled roof with iron finial. Bell-stage has double pointed window. Nave has quatrefoil and cinquefoil openings to clerestory. Deep plinth to aisles whose windows have double original openings and trefoiled heads. South west gabled porch with cross-shaped saddlestone and arched doorcase with hood moulding and panelled door.*

Interior has roof of crown-post type: Tall west window with intersecting tracery. North walls rest on alternate octagonal and circular piers. Central tower rests on boldly pointed transverse arches. East window contains expressionist glass by A Archer 1962-63. Low stone screen, with alternate rose and fleur-de-lys motifs, separates nave from choir under tower. South aisle contains some William Morris stained glass of Saints c1870. South chapel has unusual stained glass depicting soldiers at the front and being hospitalized during the First World War. Wooden lectern on stone base.

Graded II for rarity of Bodley Churches.*

G F Bodley was chosen as Architect probably after his restoration of the original parish church at Cuckfield. The church demonstrates the rapid development of Bodley's style at this time from that of a radical who favoured foreign, particularly French, examples of the gothic (exemplified by his St Michael, Brighton) towards greater restraint with a preference for the later English gothic (of which Danehill, East Sussex is a good though much later example). This is exemplified at Haywards Heath by his change of the top of the tower from his original proposal for a saddleback to the parapet and tiled pyramid characteristic of many mediaeval churches in Sussex.

The plan is built round an axial tower, a feature more common in France. The chancel is short by comparison with the five-bay nave, as the space under the tower is incorporated in it. The detail is late C13 and early C14 English, including traceried east and west windows, set high. The alternating round and octagonal piers of the arcades are a feature that attracted Bodley at the time. Most unusual are the tower arches, which curve gracefully inwards from low springings.

The interior walls are today whitened, but were originally bare brick. The church in late Victorian times was not as austere as today and perhaps the greatest loss is C E Kempe's painted panelled chancel ceiling of 1864, though it has been doubted whether this ever progressed beyond the ceiling of the tower. As a former pupil of Bodley and a local resident, Kempe was no doubt well placed to obtain the commission.

The choir vestries were built on the north side of the church in 1880. A wooden partition wall was erected internally and one section has been used as the Wardens vestry housing the safes and some vestments. The other section has wooden cupboards and a hanging space for the choir robes. The final section of the build houses the one small toilet and a flower arrangement cupboard. The wardens vestry was clad in wood panelling, which has been removed under an Interim Faculty due to the discovery of dry rot.

A new lychgate was built in 1908 by L W Ridge. A replacement cross being fitted by Stephen Spooner in 2025 to replace the rotten cross at the apex of the west gable.

In 1999 C Mercer re-ordered the church, with a new west organ gallery, chairs instead of pews and a new floor was laid. Some original Victorian floor and wall tiles were restored and the new organ was built by Kenneth Tickell. In the reordering of the church the sanctuary and the chancel area was opened up to provide a flexible space for worship and other events.

Fittings

Font: Small and octagonal, c1920.

Glass:

1. (Chancel, first south window) Burlison and Grylls, designed by H P B Downing, 1921.
2. (Chancel, over original position of organ) Burlison and Grylls, c1892.
3. Glass by Morris and Co included an east window of 1867 of the Crucifixion, with figures in plain quarries. This faded and has been replaced, leaving the following:
 - i. (Chancel south window) Three saints, designed by Sir E Burne-Jones, Morris and F M Brown.
 - ii. (Baptistery) Badly faded, by Morris and F Madox Brown, 1867.
 - iii. (South aisle windows) Eight single figures in plain quarries. Three pairs, all faded, are part of the original work by Morris and Burne-Jones and dated 1870.
4. Glass in the south aisle to an unspecified physician by 'Scott and Garner' is stated to have been installed in 1878.

5. The west window of 1882 is said to have the same origin and the authors and the authors of at least the glass in the tracery have been more fully identified as T Garner (Bodley's partner) and G G Scott junior.
6. (East window) Resurrection by Wainwright and Waring, designed by A Acket, 1962
7. (Tower and north aisle, fourth window) Burlison and Grylls, 1891-93
8. (North aisle and West windows) said to have been restored by Cox and Barnard.

Pews:

The pews are late Victorian (1890) and are now placed in the north and south aisles. Removal of 12 pews would enable the church to be flexible, providing space to facilitate small group fellowship and enhance the activity space for the young and their families coming to the church. The rest of the Victorian pews in the church will be retained.





Dated 08-05-2026