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**The importance of the medieval Church in the 21st century:
St Michael and All Angels Church, Highworth, Swindon.**

Thomas John Dobson

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment
of a B.A. (Hons.) in History
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
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Abstract

This dissertation will be studying the importance of the medieval Church in the 21st century. It will be focusing on one specific church - St Michael and All Angels in Highworth, Swindon – and whether or not this church retains its importance in the town today. Originally looking at the history of the church and its relevance today, this dissertation will finish by studying the impact a modern society with far more open and accepting views has had on the Church and its historical and biblical laws. Finally, this work will use the assessment and ideas reached through the study of St Michael's and use these to generalise to the Church of England, thus providing a more overall view of the subject.

It is often the case that the Church or specific churches are only studied through one aspect of what they are. By choosing to focus on either the architecture, or the religion, or the societal impacts of a church, the authors of these works are able to go into a great deal more detail and analysis. By doing this, however, they ignore many of the ideas which have gone into the creation of these buildings. Churches are architectural and historical buildings, they are places of worship and sites of religion, and have/did have a great impact on society. As a result of this, it is ignorant to study only one of these areas when trying to assess the importance of the church today. Therefore, this work will be studying all three of these areas using architectural evidence, images, textual resources and modern scholarship to reach an informed conclusion.

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Image taken by Steve Silk.

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Introduction

Vitruvius wrote that ‘all buildings have two components: the building itself and an idea its architect tried to express’.¹ This is true for many buildings, perhaps none more so than for churches. Biblically, the first church was established by St. Peter, who was referred to as the rock upon which Jesus built his church.² Throughout the Bible there are several references made to churches and crucially each of these descriptions refers to a person or group of people, not a physical building.³ Whilst it is unclear where this practice began, it clearly began with Christian worship being held in large buildings and then,⁴ as the importance of Christianity grew, purpose-built churches were created, using the Judaic temple as a model.⁵ Throughout time, these buildings have become larger and more elaborate, mirroring the importance placed on Christianity by society.

Given the importance of Christianity, it is unsurprising that there is a great deal of scholarship dedicated to this topic. Where nearly all these works fall short, however, is in their failure to recognise churches as the embodiment of many different ideas, each of which is essential. Whilst many works attempt to provide a holistic depiction, they eventually focus on a singular element – either their physical, theological, or social roles and features. One work even states that they will be trying to provide a holistic coverage of churches whilst only focusing on one of these elements, in their case, studying churches theologically.⁶ This dissertation therefore aims to recognise the many essential elements of a church, and the impossibility of studying a

¹ D. R. McNamara, *How to read Churches: A crash course in ecclesiastical architecture* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc, 2016), p. 01.

² The King James Bible, Matthew, 16:18.

³ The King James Bible, Romans, 12:1.

The King James Bible, Ephesians 2:20.

The King James Bible, 1 Peter 2:5.

The King James Bible, Revelations 21:22.

⁴ McNamara, *How to read Churches* (2016), p. 26.

⁵ The King James Bible, 1 Kings 5:13-18.

McNamara, *How to read Churches* (2016), p. 14.

⁶ D. Anderson, *History and Imagery in British Churches* (London: John Murray Publishers Ltd., 1971), p. 01.

church without doing so. By doing this, it is intended that there will be a fully-rounded discussion and debate focusing on the importance of the Church in English history, focusing on its importance today. To do so for the entirety of the country, which has a lengthy and varied history, is impossible to achieve, so this work will focus primarily on the parish church of St Michael and All Angels, Highworth.⁷

Dedicated to St Michael like many other hilltop churches,⁸ it is difficult to know how old the current manifestation of St Michael's is,⁹ but it is commonly dated as a 13th century church built on a much older site.¹⁰ Due to this, it has seen a plethora of changes as a physical building and as the manifestation of a religion. A church has been recorded as existing atop Highworth hill for the past one thousand years, first recorded in the Domesday Book.¹¹ Seeing growth and expansion during the medieval period,¹² St Michael's has since withstood some of the greatest challenges seen in English History, as well as surviving arguably the greatest threat to the Church in England – the protestant reformation.¹³ It is now under great pressure to remain as relevant in the secularising 21st century, and is planning to undergo a great deal of changes, starting in May 2018.¹⁴ The planned work has been laid out in a 'reordering document',¹⁵ and has created conversation around the importance of the church, which has inspired this dissertation.

⁷ For more general information on this church see <http://www.stmichaelshighworth.co.uk/welcome.htm>.

⁸ Anderson, *History and Imagery in British Churches* (1971), p. 11.

⁹ R. K. Morris, 'Mouldings and the Analysis of Medieval Style', *Medieval Architecture and Its Intellectual Context*, ed. P. Crossley and E. Fernie (London: Hambledon Press, 1990), pp. 240-257, p. 243.

¹⁰ B. Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels Church, Highworth* (Highworth: Highworth Historical Society, 2010), p. 09.

¹¹ Anon., *The Domesday Book: England's Heritage, Then and Now*, ed. T. Hinde (Surrey: Coombe Books, 1996), p. 293.

Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels Church* (2010), p. 15.

¹² Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels Church* (2010), p. 27.

¹³ D. L. Edwards, *Christian England: Revised Edition* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1989), part 2, p. 24-5.

¹⁴ G. Sowden, *Highworth Link April 2018*, ed. S. Gardiner (Highworth: Highworth Link, 2018), p. 08. Available on: [http://www.highworthlink.co.uk/1%20LINK%20APRIL%202018%20\(No%20trims\).pdf](http://www.highworthlink.co.uk/1%20LINK%20APRIL%202018%20(No%20trims).pdf).

¹⁵ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

Chapter 1: Religion and its Architecture

With St Michael's having been in near constant use for the past seven hundred years, it is clear that the church has always held an important role within the community, both as a religious building, and as a societal one. Much of its religious importance is reflected in its architecture and decoration, such as its shape and its stained glass. Despite this, the politics and views of the townspeople have had a great impact on the church, and how much this importance is evident fluctuates as a result of this. This chapter will therefore focus on the impact that the religious aspects and the architectural features of the church, as well as the changes made to it, and how these changes have impacted upon the importance of the church in Highworth.

One factor that had possibly the greatest impact on St Michael's and its importance in Highworth was the reduction in attendance following the commonwealth, and the rise of non-conformism both in the town and nationally.¹⁶ Today, Highworth has four churches, each with fairly large congregations.¹⁷ The development of two other churches – the United Reformed Church in the 18th century and the Methodist Church in the 19th century - led to a rapid decrease both in the attendance at St Michael's and probably in the donations it was receiving.¹⁸ This meant that, whilst the Church as an institution and the house of Christianity was still greatly important in Highworth, the importance of St Michael's was reduced, as was its grandeur. Neither of these two 'new' churches were housed in a traditional church building,¹⁹ with the United Reformed originally running out of one of their member's houses.²⁰ This further indicates that the importance of the church building was decreasing, as it was no

¹⁶ Anon., 'Old Photographs', *A History of Highworth, Part Two* (Highworth: Highworth Historical Society, 1986), pp. 280-318, p. 296.

¹⁷ Highworth Link, Normal Service Times, Available at: <http://www.highworthlink.co.uk/services.html> Accessed on [04/04/2018].

¹⁸ Anon., 'Old Photographs' (1986), p. 296.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ R. A. Beck, *Highworth United Reformed Church: A short History, 4th Edition updated to 2005AD* (Highworth: Highworth United Reformed Church, 2005), p. 07.

longer important for it to have many examples of religious symbolism, a number of which had been outlawed under the Reformation and the following commonwealth.²¹

Sanctuary: The Church outside of the law?

The concept of sanctuary is one such idea which had been intrinsically linked with the religious symbolism of a church but was slowly banned following the Reformation,²² clearly showing the transferral of power from the Church to the state.²³ Throughout history, there have been clear ideas of safety provided by religious buildings, which have then been adopted by Christianity.²⁴ As with much of Christian ideology, the idea of ‘sanctuary’ evolved throughout the medieval period, slowly growing in importance. It began to apply to more and more of the church building, having started as only existing when an individual was touching the altar or was stood on the altar steps.²⁵ This is because they were stood where the church was consecrated, where the eucharist is blessed, and next to the symbolic reminder of Jesus’ sacrifice for all humanity.²⁶ The idea of sanctuary remained such an important one that over time the area in which sanctuary was valid spread to include all of the church or monastery and sometimes the church grounds too.²⁷ The importance of sanctuary is recorded in many sources that were familiar to a medieval audience, such as Gregory Nazianzus’ ‘Oration 18’,²⁸

²¹ Edwards, *Christian England* (1989), p. 289-290.

²² The United States Department of Justice, Church Sanctuary for Illegal Aliens, Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/file/23546/download> Accessed on [04/04/2018].

²³ S. McSheffrey, ‘Sanctuary and the Legal Topography of Pre-Reformation London’. *American Society for Legal History*, Volume 27: (2009), pp. 483-514, p. 484.

²⁴ D. J. Bederman, *International Law in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 249. McSheffrey, ‘Sanctuary’. *American Society for Legal History* (2009), p. 483.

²⁵ Anderson, *History and Imagery in British Churches* (1971), p. 75.

²⁶ R. Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 81.

²⁷ Anderson, *History and Imagery in British Churches* (1971), p. 75.

²⁸ G. Nazianzus, *Oration 18: On the Death of his Father*, Available at: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/gregnaz-fathr.asp> Accessed on [05/04/2018].

Giovanni's '*Decameron*',²⁹ and the Book of Exodus.³⁰ As with many ideas, the importance of sanctuary is shown more in the negative than in the positive. When Edward IV broke sanctuary, for example, it is recorded as being outrageous,³¹ and was even used to suggest that he could not be the rightful king, as a king was God's representative, who would not violate the sanctity of His holy space.³² In addition to this, the fact that Henry VIII and successive monarchs had to specifically ban sanctuary – it was ultimately banned under James I in 1623 – clearly shows its importance,³³ grouping it with other important religious ideas, such as monasteries and chantries.



Figure 1: West Door Cannon Ball Hole

There are no historical examples of sanctuary being claimed in Highworth prior to the reformation, but there is a very detailed example of something akin to sanctuary being claimed during the Civil War.³⁴ According to town legend, the parliamentary army marched through Highworth on 26th June 1649 and

besieged the staunch royalists who were firmly ensconced inside the church.³⁵ This skirmish reportedly lasted until the parliamentarians fired upon the church, leaving behind a cannonball hole next to the west door, which can be seen to this day.³⁶ Following this, the church was taken, the royalists captured, and the church ransacked.³⁷ Whilst this demonstrates that the

²⁹ B. Giovanni, *The Decameron*, Available at: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/decameron.txt> Accessed on [05/04/2018].

³⁰ A. M. Rodriguez, 'Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus'. *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Volume 24: (1986), pp. 127-145, p. 127.
The King James Bible, Exodus 25:8.

³¹ P. Gregory, D. Baldwin and M. Jones, *The women of the Cousins' War: The Duchess, The Queen, and the King's Mother* (London: Simon and Schuster UK Ltd., 2011), p. 175.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ The United States Department of Justice, Church Sanctuary for Illegal Aliens, Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/file/23546/download> Accessed on [04/04/2018].

³⁴ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels Church* (2010), p. 62.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels Church* (2010), p. 62-4.

³⁷ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels Church* (2010), p. 06.

sanctity of churches had decreased, as the sacking of ecclesiastical buildings was no longer viewed quite so negatively, the fact is that a church was viewed as the central, secure building of a town, especially in Highworth, as well as being a safe haven unlikely to be attacked. This shows that, in spite of the Reformation removing the official right to sanctuary, churches stayed at the centre of town life, and therefore remained as an important building to the town. Furthermore, the fact that the blasting of the west door has entered town legend and become a focal point for town identity also shows how important St Michael's is to Highworth, even in this increasingly secular age.

A secondary example of the religious symbology that can be found in medieval churches can be seen in the floor shape of a church. Whilst many 19th century churches were built with a focal point and seating radiating outwards from this to mirror the temple found in Jerusalem,³⁸ medieval churches were often built with a crucifix floorplan, as a constant reminder of Jesus' sacrifice.³⁹ By creating this floorplan out of stone, it was designed to be an everlasting example to the parishioners of His sacrifice, as both are permanent.⁴⁰ This floorplan also aimed to ensure that



Figure 2: Floorplan of the modern church

the building was instantly recognisable as a church, providing a further link between all churches, besides their shared theological identity. Further to this, the use of the crucifix as an integral part of the building provides the space with further sanctity, creating a link between

³⁸ McNamara, *How to read Churches* (2016), p. 89.

³⁹ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 21, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

⁴⁰ McNamara, *How to read Churches* (2016), p. 60.

the crucifix Jesus died upon and the church itself. This clearly demonstrates the importance of religious symbolism to medieval Christians, particularly with the high level of illiteracy in society.⁴¹ By using a symbol that has many different meanings, it could be interpreted in a different way by each person who saw it, imparting a different message to each parishioner. The importance of this symbol cannot be under-stressed as it shows the importance of Jesus' sacrifice to everyone, regardless of their socio-economic standing, or level of literacy. Despite its importance to all medieval parishioners, this importance has not lasted, partially due to the overall decline of symbolism in society as the overall literacy rate has risen exponentially.⁴² Due to this, the crucifix floorplan has seen a reduction in importance as visitors to churches nowadays do not expect to find vital symbolism in the shape of the church.

In Highworth, the importance of the crucifix floorplan was weakened by the installation of the Victorian pews and the organ, which obscured this shaping.⁴³ This implies that the permanence of the seating was more important to the Victorian custodians of St Michael's than the symbolism contained within the crucifix floorplan. This floorplan, however, was of great consideration during the recent consultation over the Reordering. It was mentioned many times in the Chancellor's report of 2016 and was actually the deciding factor in whether to allow many of the changes proposed.⁴⁴ Because of this, it is possible that, along with many of the medieval ideas found in parish churches, the importance of crucifix layouts is once more on the rise in popularity and importance.

⁴¹ Kieckhefer, *Theology of Stone* (2005), p. 137.

J. Bennett, *The Measure of Literacy in Late Medieval England: The Case of St Albans, 1237-1399*, Available at: <https://kb.osu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/1811/45120/1/TheMeasureofLiteracyinLaterMedievalEngland.pdf> Accessed on [05/04/2018].

⁴² National Literacy Trust, Adult Literacy, Available on: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/parents-and-families/adult-literacy/> Accessed on [05/04/2018].

⁴³ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 18, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

The Apple: Not just a 21st century technology revolution

Another example of how important the permanence of symbolism was to the builders of medieval churches can be found in the extensive links to Adam, Eve, and the Garden of Eden throughout the buildings.⁴⁵ As they are responsible for the Original Sin of humankind,⁴⁶ which ultimately led to the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus,⁴⁷ it is understandable that, to a medieval audience, Adam and Eve held an increased level of importance above many other biblical figures. This can be seen through the importance placed on the need to atone for sins, almost as a way of apologising for this sin, rather than thanking Jesus for his sacrifice, as is the modern practice. This heightened relationship between the first two humans and the medieval parishioners can clearly be seen throughout many churches' architecture, with vines and floral



Figure 3: Font topped with Easter floral decoration

elements playing a large role in the permanent decoration of a church,⁴⁸ in features such as capitals of columns, in woodwork, and in the floor tiles.

In St Michael's there are very few of these elements which date to the medieval period, although it is possible that they were removed during the 16th century reformation.⁴⁹ Despite this, floral imagery is still abundant throughout the church, with vines featuring heavily in the floor tiles in the Chancel, the windowsill under the east window, the woodwork of

the pulpit, and even in the millennium window. In addition to this, the three misericord pews are heavily decorated in floral imagery, with roses and climbing plants surrounding the main

⁴⁵ McNamara, *How to read Churches* (2016), p. 37.

⁴⁶ The King James Bible, Genesis, 3:6-24.

⁴⁷ The King James Bible, Luke, 24.

⁴⁸ McNamara, *How to read Churches* (2016), p. 37.

⁴⁹ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 34.

under-seat images.⁵⁰ Because of this abundance of floral and vegetative imagery found in the modern decorations of St Michael's, it is likely that the pre-reformation decoration also heavily featured flora and fauna. With the current parishioners continuing to decorate the church with flowers for celebratory events, such as weddings and festivals, particularly prevalent at harvest, Christmas, and Easter, spending more than £600 on flowers annually,⁵¹ it is clear that the relationship between churches and natural decoration is still strong today, particularly in a rural town which is surrounded by farmland, such as Highworth. The fact that the church remains at the centre of each of these events, even hosting the town's flower shows and Christmas tree festivals,⁵² demonstrates the continued importance of St Michael's to Highworth, and the key role that flora plays in this.

Stained Glass: More than a pretty window

Stained glass windows are a further example of the use of church architecture as a permanent form of worship both in the medieval church and today. As glass, let alone stained glass, was an expensive commodity to any medieval church,⁵³ due to it being a manufactured material, it was an expensive addition to a church, signifying the wealth of an area.⁵⁴ This therefore can be seen as a demonstration of the wealth of St Michael's, which currently contains six

⁵⁰ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 40-1.

⁵¹ St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, The Parochial Church Council of St Michael and All Angels, Highworth with Sevenhampton and Inglesham Financial Statements for 31 December 2016, p. 22, Available at: <http://www.stmichaelshighworth.co.uk/churchinformation.htm> Accessed on [05/04/2018].

⁵² Swindon Advertiser, XMAS COUNTDOWN: Where to find Carol and Christmas church services, Available at: http://www.swindonadvertiser.co.uk/news/10110106.XMAS_COUNTDOWN_Where_to_find_Carol_and_Christmas_church_services/ Accessed on [05/04/2018].

⁵³ J. Stock, Stained Glass: Value Added, Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/property/4812654/Value-added-stained-glass.html> Accessed on [05/04/2018].

⁵⁴ Highworth Historical Society, About Highworth, Available on: <http://www.highworthhistoricalsociety.co.uk/highworth-archives.html?showall=&start=1> Accessed on [05/04/2018].



Figure 4: The Chancel Window

stained-glass windows,⁵⁵ each in a significant place within the church: by the hatch to the Bell Tower, in the Chancel, and then shining coloured light onto the font, and the pulpit. If these windows are in the same locations as the medieval windows, this clearly shows that to a medieval mind the change in colours that this glass created amplified the sun's light, shining it down upon the religiously significant areas of the church.⁵⁶ This was viewed as a physical representation of God's presence, His light providing sanctity to the church,⁵⁷

and shining on his parishioners, something which can also be seen in many depictions of God or the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸ With none of the original stained glass surviving, it is difficult to interpret the extent to which the current stained glass matches and would be seen to fulfil a similar role. In spite of this, the fact that the current stained-glass windows are still in the same significant spaces implies that they are similar to those installed by the medieval townsfolk of Highworth, and as such, have a similar meaning. Whilst this does not directly demonstrate the importance or lack of importance of a medieval building in the 21st century, it does show that many of the things that were important to a medieval parishioner are still important today. In addition to this, the fact that the current stained-glass windows



Figure 5: The Millennium Window

⁵⁵ Duncan and Mandy, Stained Glass windows at The Church of St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Wiltshire, Available at: http://www.oodwooc.co.uk/ph_highworth_sg6.htm Accessed on [05/04/2018].

⁵⁶ Suger in Kieckhefer, *Theology of Stone* (2005), p. 108.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

The King James Bible, John, 8:12.

⁵⁸ Roderic Bowen Library and Archive (RBLA), Missale Sarisburiens in Anglia Anno MDXI, PHI01221.

have all been funded and chosen by families in Highworth suggests that the church is still an important part of the town, and that its decoration was of great import to them. The two best examples of this are the removal of the chancel window with the other important artefacts of St Michael's during the Blitz,⁵⁹ and the installation of a modern designed stained-glass window as part of Highworth's celebrations at the start of the new millennium.⁶⁰

In addition to stained glass, candles continue to serve as a physical embodiment of God's light, playing a key role in illuminating the church before the invention of gas lights,⁶¹ and, then and now, in a symbolic nature during festivals such as Advent and Christmas.⁶² This use of candles to ensure that the church was always full of light once again demonstrates the importance of the symbolism attached to light within a church. This has developed throughout history but is still in practice today. In St Michael's today, there is a larger grouping of lights at the end of the aisle, and the lights in the chancel, nave and choir are turned on daily to light the church whether there are services or not, just to welcome visitors. Despite the installation of modern, electric lighting throughout the church,⁶³ candles still play a significant role in the church, with a candle being lit for each Sunday in Advent, gradually increasing in size as the birthday of Jesus approaches. The largest candle of them all is lit during the Midnight Mass service on Christmas Eve. Situated in the centre of the church where all can see, it symbolises the return of God's light into the world: the birth of Jesus and the start of his journey to free mankind from the Original Sin.⁶⁴ Because of this, it is clear that light, whether from the sun or candles, remains at the heart of worship, and has done for the past 1000 years. The Carols by Candlelight service annually fills the church – more so than the other Christmas or Advent services – so

⁵⁹ Anon, The East Window sign, as can be seen at Duncan and Mandy, East (Altar) Window, Available at: http://www.oodwooc.co.uk/ph_highworth_sg4.htm#TOP Accessed on [05/04/2018].

⁶⁰ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels*, (2010), p. 122.

⁶¹ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels*, (2010), p. 93.

⁶² J.A.R Pimlot, *The Englishman's Christmas: A Social History* (Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1978), p. 11.

⁶³ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels*, (2010), p. 118.

⁶⁴ The King James Bible, Genesis, 3:6-24.

they are obviously associated with Christmas worship by many of the townsfolk, and, by extension, they help to ensure that the church remains at the heart of the town.

Does a new carpet really change a room?

One architectural element of the current church that will change completely during the Reordering and must therefore be considered as less important than the other architectural elements of St Michael's, is the current floor covering. As part of the reordering of the church the Parochial Church Council (PCC) plans to install underfloor heating, and then level the floor to make the church more accessible.⁶⁵ As a result of this, the variety in floor coverings will be covered and become unknown to future generations, much as it is not known what the pews stand on. This demonstrates once more that there is a current disregard for the floor or its layout within the church, something which has changed greatly since the medieval period when floor tiles were used as an artistic canvas or were often grave markers. This disguising of the medieval floor coverings may be one reason behind the lack of attention given to the current flooring – it is of a 19th century or later creation, and therefore lacks many of the interesting features that were common on the medieval floor tiles.

St Bernard describes Cluniac churches as bearing the images of saints, and being decorated in extravagant colours,⁶⁶ something it can be assumed was copied in the larger parish churches of Europe. Given that this decoration is a development from the Anglo-Saxon floor tiles found in local churches, such as St James' Church at Avebury,⁶⁷ it is possible that, in addition to grave markers, St Michael's had some form of decorative floor covering, although it is unclear whether they were clay floor tiles with dyed patterns similar to other local churches, or more

⁶⁵ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 01, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

⁶⁶ St Bernard, Apologia, Available at: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/bernard1.asp> Accessed on [06/04/2018].

⁶⁷ M. Shepherdson, *Welcome to St James' Church Avebury* (Avebury: Avebury Parish Council, 2017), p. 02.

decorative tiles befitting its status as a large parish church.⁶⁸ What is clear, however, is that the Victorian floor coverings which are visible in the bare areas of the church, such as the chancel, are likely to be a modern recreation of what they believed covered the floor of the church in the medieval period, befitting the Victorian obsession with medievalism.⁶⁹ The fact that the original floor covering is not visible today, and where the Victorian interpretation can be found, is dark and uninteresting, partially demonstrates why there is little interest in the town with the floor coverings of the church, unlike where there is an abundance of medieval floor decorations, such as at Westminster Abbey or St John the Baptist church at Inglesham, a tiny hamlet just outside Highworth.⁷⁰ The lack of interest in the floor – whether the floor coverings or the changes being made to it by the Reordering – clearly illustrates the reduced interest in the church within the town, and, because of this, shows the reduced relationship between the town and St Michaels, and thus the overall importance of the church.

Thank God for colour! Medieval wall art

There are many examples of the Victorian love of medievalism in St Michael's, the most obvious of which are the repainting of the recesses in the nave, and also of a banner behind the high altar in the chancel.⁷¹ Despite these being Victorian additions, they have become some of the church's most recognisable features and provide



Figure 6: Ampney St Mary Wall Paintings

⁶⁸ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 11, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

⁶⁹ H. Roberts, 'Victorian Medievalism: Revival or Masquerade?'. *Browning Institute Studies*, Volume 8: (1980), pp. 11-44, p. 11.

⁷⁰ Westminster Abbey, Famous People, Available at: <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/famous-people> Accessed on [06/04/2018].

The Churches Conservation Trust, *church of St John the Baptist: Inglesham, Wiltshire* (London: The Churches Conservation Trust, 2016).

⁷¹ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels*, (2010), p. 93.

some much-needed colour, similar to what covered the church walls during the medieval period. Using x-ray technology, it has been revealed that there were definitely wall paintings in the medieval St Michael's,⁷² similar to those still visible in Inglesham,⁷³ and another nearby church at Ampney St Mary.⁷⁴

There has been extensive historical debate in the town over the identity of one identifiable figure in the church. Determined to be a saint of local importance accompanied by their symbols, it was originally assumed that this figure was St Dunstan, patron saint of blacksmiths and metal workers,⁷⁵ and whose symbol is metal-tongs. This identification makes sense - the saint was understandably popular in Highworth due to the extreme value placed on metal workers in the town, who were responsible for shoeing the plough-, cart- and carriage horses which frequented Highworth.

However, the saint has since been identified as St Eloi,⁷⁶ who is another patron saint of metal workers, as well as the patron saint of horses and those who work with them. This would mean he was identified with in a similar way to St Dunstan and what were originally believed to be the metal working tongs have since been discovered to be a horse's leg – one of the symbols of St Eloi.⁷⁷ Despite this historical debate in the town, and the legend which is believed to surround the saint depicted,⁷⁸ this figure is only identifiable under x-ray analysis. There is no sign of it visible in the current church, and there is no information on the medieval wall paintings in St Michael's itself.⁷⁹ This suggests that, despite the importance of the historical wall paintings which turned the church into a bible for the illiterate during the medieval

⁷² Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels*, (2010), p. 27.

⁷³ Churches Conservation Trust, *St John the Baptist* (2016).

⁷⁴ Ampney Town Council, Our Churches, Available at: http://www.ampney.info/vicar/Our_Churches.html Accessed on [06/04/2018].

⁷⁵ D. Attwater and C. R. John, *Dictionary of Saints*, 3rd Edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 109.

⁷⁶ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels*, (2010), p. 27.

⁷⁷ Attwater, *Dictionary of Saints*, p. 114.

⁷⁸ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels*, (2010), p. 29.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

period,⁸⁰ it is the modern wall paintings with which Highworthians now identify. However, their acceptance of the wall paintings as part of the medieval history of St Michael's suggests that it is the perceived history of these wall paintings, rather than their actual history, which is important. This also clearly shows that there is still a relationship between the townspeople of Highworth and both the medieval and modern aspects of the church, illustrating the importance to the church as a site of town pride and emotional feeling.



Figure 7: The 'modern' wall art - The Ten Commandments



Chapter 2: The church in society

There are many things that can be learned from studying large parish churches like St Michael's, such as the changes to the area's social structure. In this chapter, the effects a medieval church has on the society of a town will be reviewed. In Highworth, the importance behind the permanence of this can be seen in the fixed pews which fill much of the nave, as well as in the structured seating arrangements. As these obscure the cruciform floorplan it is evident that the physical embodiment of the societal structure was more important than religious ideology. The permanent seating firmly establishes the use of the church as a building solely as a site of worship,⁸¹ rather than as a building with multiple uses. As this has biblical precedence,⁸² the removal of this aspect of the church weakens its importance in the town, and, by extension, the importance of the Church overall.

Historically, the hierarchy in churches partially followed the hierarchy of society, with the wealthier or noble parishioners sitting closer to the front of the nave. As such, they are seated closer to God and the religious centre of the church, with only clergy sitting in front of them,⁸³ sometimes even in the chancel. This can still be seen with the clergy today, although it occurs more due to an ingrained sense of this ecclesiastical structure, rather than because it is enforced. There is also a practical aspect to this as it provides the clergy with easy access to the altar and the Bible. This means that there is less of a reduction in the rigidity of the seating arrangements than may first appear, demonstrating that whilst flexibility has been introduced to the societal structure within the church seating, there is still an accepted structure in the church. This indicates that the church still holds an important role within Highworth as an indicator of the

⁸¹ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 03, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

⁸² The King James Bible, Matthew, 21:12.

⁸³ Diocese of London, How to replace and reorder church seating, Available at: <https://www.london.anglican.org/kb/replace-reorder-church-seating/> Accessed on [10/04/2018].

historical societal structure still in force in the town. Because of this, the removal of the pews to return the church to a multifunctional space, as in other local churches,⁸⁴ could have a long-lasting impact on St Michael's. However, it has been one of the most controversial proposals of the Reordering, which further shows the perceived importance of the seating structure, and the pews, to the town.



Figure 8: One of the few surviving 'free' pews

Set societal seating also served as an indicator of wealth in the church –the seats closer to the clergy and the front of the church cost more than those towards the rear of the building. Those at the very back of the church are 'free' pews, showing that money held a great deal of power in the church.⁸⁵ One of the greatest examples of this is the increased cost

to sit directly behind Mr Warneford.⁸⁶ Previously, the pews closer to the front of the church cost more to hire, as can be seen in the surviving misericord pews which bear lavish carving.⁸⁷ It is thought that Highworth originally had box pews, like those in the village church of St John the Baptist in neighbouring Inglesham.⁸⁸ As this village is in the same modern parish, and retains many indicators of its history, including box pews, sculptures, and wall paintings,⁸⁹ it is possible that these closely match those removed from Highworth. Regardless of what style has been used throughout St Michael's seven-hundred-year history, it is clear that, since permanent seats were installed, they have been repeatedly used to demonstrate the wealth of

⁸⁴ St Marys Church Fairford, Church Pews, Available at: <http://www.stmaryschurchfairford.org.uk/stmarysnewsJan2012.html> Accessed on [10/04/2018].

⁸⁵ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 89-90.

⁸⁶ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 87-8.

⁸⁷ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 41.

⁸⁸ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 88.

⁸⁹ The Churches Conservation Trust, *church of St John the Baptist: Inglesham, Wiltshire* (London: The Churches Conservation Trust, 2016).

different parishioners, something which is far more obvious in larger ecclesiastical buildings, such as Salisbury Cathedral.⁹⁰

The pews are only one example of the physical segregation within St Michael's, with two more obvious separations being visible in the church today – the Rood Screen, and the altar rail. Both of these features separate people throughout the church, with the clergy being given seats in the chancel or directly next to the Rood Screen, and only the vicar administering communion and thus being allowed to pass the altar rail. As these were both paid for by wealthy parishioners (the Hambidge family),⁹¹ they serve as physical indicators of the societal separations in place, and how these are linked with wealth. As both the pews and the screen are being affected by the Reordering, it is unlikely that this physical segregation and separation within the church will survive in the same way, thus weakening the role of the church within the town as a societal indicator.⁹²

Despite this, the church as an institution still has an important moral role in the town. Whilst it retains few of the physical indicators of its role in society, it is still very much active. The Church has always had a role in educating, with wall images, sculptures and stained glass serving to educate the illiterate in Highworth; and the pillars and arches providing links to the Temple in Jerusalem,⁹³ thus further educating the learned. The joint churches of Highworth also funded the first primary school in Highworth, establishing it in 1849,⁹⁴ 21 years before the Education Act in 1870 provided funding for the establishment of schools,⁹⁵ or the Elementary

⁹⁰ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 22.

⁹¹ St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, 20th Century, Available at: <http://www.stmichaelshighworth.co.uk/20thcentury.htm> Accessed on [10/04/2018].

⁹² The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 16, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

⁹³ McNamara, *How to read Churches* (2016), p. 15.

⁹⁴ Beck, *Highworth United Reformed Church* (2005), p. 16.

⁹⁵ Living Heritage, Going to School, Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/school/overview/1870educationact/> Accessed on [10/04/2018].

Education Act in 1891 ruled that all children aged between 3 and 15 could have a state-funded education.⁹⁶ Its role in caring for the poor through alms-houses and later workhouses,⁹⁷ charitable donations, and modern charities such as CAP (Christians Against Poverty),⁹⁸ also show its key role within Highworth in caring for those who lack the means to care for themselves. As an educator and carer, the Church can be seen to be a driving force for good in the town – taking care of its parishioners before the state, or when public budgets are directed elsewhere. This therefore demonstrates that the church, both St Michael's and the institutional Church, still has a very important role in Highworth, as well as in modern Britain, as shown by the close relationship between the church and the government.

Gravestone or floor tile? Burial in the Church

Something that has largely faded from common use in modern Britain is the practice of burial within an ecclesiastical building. For those who could afford it, being buried in the church was to be buried in the most holy of settings, with particular areas within a church being most sought after.⁹⁹ These areas are often associated with the ritualistic aspects of Christian worship, such as the altar where the eucharist is blessed; the choir, where the hymns and psalms are said; as well as under the aisles where the clergy processed and blessed the church. With this popularity for burial spaces within the church came a growing expense for this land, with the altar, the most holy space within the church, carrying the highest fee.¹⁰⁰ Unusually, St Michael's does not visibly seem to have reflected this fashion, with there being few visible grave markers within the church today. Whether this is because the parishioners chose not to be buried inside

⁹⁶ PERFAR, 1891 Elementary Education Act 1891, Available at: <https://www.perfar.eu/policies/elementary-education-act-1891> Accessed on [10/04/2018].

⁹⁷ The Workhouse, Highworth and Swindon Wiltshire, Available at: <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Highworth/> Accessed on [10/04/2018].

⁹⁸ Christians Against Poverty, About Us, Available at: <https://capuk.org/about-us> Accessed on [10/04/2018].

⁹⁹ S. Oosterwijk, 'Food for Worms – Food for Thought', *Church Monuments*. Volume 20: (2005), pp. 40-140, p. 40.

¹⁰⁰ C. Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 59-60.

the church, or because of the subsequent centuries of use and redevelopment inside is unclear, although the fact that they are so popular throughout the rest of the country suggest that it is the latter. The dip in popularity of the church in the 17th and 18th centuries and the damage to the church building this caused probably also led to this lack of remaining grave markers. They could also be hidden by the carpet, floor tiles, or pew beds which cover the floor today. This idea is reinforced by the fact that there are visible grave markers immediately outside of the church's South door, contained within the porch. This implies that there were in fact burials within the church, but that they are no longer visible due to the passing centuries, and/or the variety of materials that cover the church floor today.

The idea that St Michael's originally had burials throughout the Church building is furthered by St John the Baptist's Church at Inglesham which, due to its lack of development and changes throughout the centuries, retains many of its historical markers – such as the grave markers that litter the floor space.¹⁰¹ With a neighbouring church, especially one within the same parish, containing so many grave markers



Figure 9: One of the few surviving grave markers found inside St Michael's today

in its floor, it is even more likely that St Michael's Church did contain several grave markers in its floor, as is to be expected of such a grand parish church, and they have now simply been covered over.

A secondary example of burials within St Michael's can be found within the Warneford Chapel. This familial chapel contains memorials to generations of the same family, dating back to at least 1649. In addition to bearing several memorials which fill the south wall, and a singular

¹⁰¹ The Churches Conservation Trust, *church of St John the Baptist: Inglesham, Wiltshire* (London: The Churches Conservation Trust, 2016).

memorial on the eastern and northern walls, the chapel also serves as the burial site for many members of the Warneford family, falling out of use only when the remaining family who had had connections to Warneford Place (sold in 1902) died in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁰² This clearly shows that, whilst not visible within the church today, it did serve as the burial site for many of the most important and wealthy members of Highworthian society, right through into the 20th century. That this practice is no longer a common one implies that this is yet another example of the reduction in purpose of medieval buildings in 21st century Britain. Similar to many other medieval practices, however, the burial of notable individuals within churches has progressed and changed throughout history, and now, instead of being buried inside of churches, many people are memorialised within them - the most notable examples of this being visible in Westminster Abbey.¹⁰³ Notable individuals are, however, still interred in ecclesiastical buildings, with a previous Dean of Westminster being buried there in April 2018,¹⁰⁴ and Professor Stephen Hawking's ashes being interred there later in 2018.¹⁰⁵

Unlike in the medieval period, the memorialisation of notable individuals in the modern era is not limited to stone wall plaques or busts. One of the more popular methods of memorialisation makes use of a material removed from churches during the Reformation: stained glass. Particularly visible in St Michael's today, stained glass became a favoured tool of memorialisation following the revived interest in medieval art and architecture in the Victorian era. Of the six pieces of stained glass installed in the church,¹⁰⁶ three of them commemorate

¹⁰² The National Archives, Sale Catalogue of the Warneford Place Estate, Sevenhampton, Available at: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/e26bc4df-96d3-430b-af99-658045d3073b> Accessed on [11/04/2018].

¹⁰³ Westminster Abbey, Famous People, Available at: <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/famous-people> Accessed on [11/04/2018].

¹⁰⁴ Westminster Abbey, Ashes of Dr Wesley Carr buried in the Abbey, Available at: <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/press/news/2018/april/ashes-of-dr-wesley-carr-buried-in-the-abbey> Accessed on [30/04/2018].

¹⁰⁵ Westminster Abbey, Professor Stephen Hawking to be honoured at the Abbey, Available at: <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/press/news/2018/march/professor-stephen-hawking-to-be-honoured-at-the-abbey> Accessed on [30/04/2018].

¹⁰⁶ St Michael and All Angels Highworth, 19th Century, Available at: <http://www.stmichaelshighworth.co.uk/19thcentury.htm> Accessed on [11/04/2018].

locals, and another commemorates the death of Prince Albert,¹⁰⁷ demonstrating the 19th and 20th century fascination with memorialisation through stained glass. Whilst this method differs from the method preferred in the medieval period, it does show how the medieval mindset is similar to that of a modern person, with the need for physical reminders, such as stained glass. This therefore highlights that, whilst the method for memorialisation of individuals has changed, it is still a key element within churches and, as such, the need for such a space is still very necessary within communities.

“War! What is it good for?”¹⁰⁸ Memorials!

One method of memorialisation that has not changed through the centuries and is still very much at the heart of community memorialisation, is the memorialisation of war, and the individuals lost to it. With war memorials being among ‘the most ancient of human monuments’,¹⁰⁹ it is no surprise that churches and war memorials are now intrinsically linked, at least in many people’s minds.

¹⁰⁷ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels Church* (2010), p. 95.

¹⁰⁸ Metro Lyrics, War Lyrics, Available at: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/war-lyrics-edwin-starr.html> Accessed on [05/05/2018].

¹⁰⁹ A. Borg, ‘Some Medieval War Memorials’, *Medieval Architecture and Its Intellectual Context*, ed. P. Crossley and E. Fernie (London: Hambledon Press, 1990), pp. 1-18, p. 01.

This is clearly evident in St Michael's Church, where there are memorials to war both inside the church, and out. A replica of the cannonball that damaged the west front of the church is on permanent display to memorialise the English Civil War (whilst the original is kept in the safe).¹¹⁰ There is also a memorial to Reginald Warneford VC,¹¹¹ the Brown Family stained glass window,¹¹² and the original town British Legion standards inside the Church,¹¹³ so the high cost of war is never far from the minds of the parishioners who worship at this church. Externally, the Civil War cannonball hole is a physical



Figure 11: The Brown Family window



Figure 10: Highworth War Memorial

reminder of the effects of war on the church itself,¹¹⁴ whilst the town War Memorial provides a permanent reminder of the cost of more recent wars on the town. Situated at the edge of the churchyard since its unveiling in 1921,¹¹⁵ the war memorial stands on consecrated ground, serving both as a marker of respect from the town and as a gravestone for those buried on the Western Front, and to those who were not buried at all. Adding to the significance of its location is the fact that, due to its proximity to the

¹¹⁰ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 66.

¹¹¹ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 112.

¹¹² Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 113-4.

¹¹³ St Michael and All Angels Highworth, 21st Century, Available at: <http://www.stmichaelshighworth.co.uk/21stcentury.htm> Accessed on [11/04/2018].

¹¹⁴ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 63.

¹¹⁵ Historic England, Highworth War Memorial, Available at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1432880> Accessed on [11/04/2018].

Imperial War Museums, War Memorials Register: Highworth, Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/2964> Accessed on [11/04/2018].

Highworth Historical Society, *Highworth Remembers: What life was like in Highworth during World War One* (Highworth: Highworth Historical Society, 2014), p. 31.

church boundary, it is seen regularly by everyone in the town, not just on Remembrance Sunday.

This abundance of semi-religious focal points as memorials to the harsh reality of war demonstrates the continued importance of the church within Highworth. Even if the methods this is done through differ from those of the medieval period, it is still very much a continuation of their practice of memorialisation, so it is only right that it is attached to a medieval site. The fact that both the stained-glass memorial and the whole town stone memorial are inside the Church boundaries clearly demonstrates that, in the mind of the 20th century parishioners, memorialisation and the church are so closely linked that both are part of the church, thus demonstrating how important the church is to the town not just as an ecclesiastical building, but also as a site of remembrance.

Contrasting this idea, however, is the placement of the Victoria Cross Memorial to Reginald Warneford VC, erected in 2015.¹¹⁶ Despite all other war memorials being placed within the church or churchyard, this 21st century memorial was placed in the centre of the modern town: on the podium. By choosing this location, the committee ensured that the sacrifice of war was still remembered by the residents of Highworth year-round, not just near or on Remembrance Sunday. By doing so, however, the committee made a clear statement: religion and St Michael's Church are no longer the main centre of life in Highworth, thus possibly reducing its importance in terms of memorialisation.

This idea of the reduction in need for the church as a site of memorialisation suggests that memorialisation for a medieval person is solely restricted to the church grounds, something which is not true in either Highworth or the wider Christian community. Whilst several examples of this within Highworth did not survive the Protestant Reformation, or have been

¹¹⁶ BBC, WWI VC hero memorial stones unveiled in towns, Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-33035725> Accessed on [11/04/2018].

forgotten through time, there are recorded examples of memorialisation elsewhere around the town. One such example that does survive is Chantry Cottage, on the western side of the town.¹¹⁷ This cottage was paid for as part of the memorialisation of William Ingram, established in 1453,¹¹⁸ when his chantry was also founded in the church. This cottage is thought to be the oldest building in the town and clearly demonstrates that,¹¹⁹ even to the medieval mindset, the church was not the only site of memorialisation in Highworth. As such, the fact that Reginald Warneford's Victoria Cross memorial is not situated in the church or churchyard does not symbolise the reduction of importance of the church in the town, but rather the secularisation of society, suggesting that, while the religious importance of St Michael's has diminished, the importance of the building in the town has not.

Who's really in charge? The Church and the Royals

There are several examples of the secularisation of society, and the impact this has had on St Michael's. Debatably, the most obvious of these is the large royal crest of George III which has been placed on the northern wall of the church,¹²⁰ directly opposite the door used by the main body of the congregation. By placing it here, it is obvious to all that the power within the church is held by the monarch, a tradition which was started by Henry VIII after he was first given power in the church (as Defender of the Faith).¹²¹ The inclusion of the royal crest replaced that of the papacy, very clearly highlighting the transferral of power within the ecclesiastical structure: from the Pope in Rome to the King of England.¹²² Whilst this clearly shows the change in power from a primarily religious leader to a primarily secular leader, the

¹¹⁷ G. Tanner, *Towns and Villages of England: Highworth* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1993), p. 86-7.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 79.

¹²¹ National Churches Trust, Royal coat of Arms, Available at: <https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/what-see-inside/royal-coats-arms> Accessed on [12/04/2018].

¹²² Historic UK, Dissolution of the Monasteries, Available at: <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Dissolution-of-the-Monasteries/> Accessed on [12/04/2018].

monarch is ‘given’ much of their power from God, with Christianity being at the centre of every Coronation of English and British monarchs. Henceforth, the phrase ‘Dieu Et Mon Droit (God and my right)’ has been included at the bottom of these crests,¹²³ demonstrating the role of the monarch as a religious figure, as well as a secular one. As a result of this, the large royal crests that are found in churches throughout the country may have begun as a way of demonstrating the change in leadership of the Church in England, they now serve to show the monarch as a religious figure, therefore not showing the secularisation of society.

The role of the royal family as religious figures can be seen throughout history – both before and after the Reformation. As a ‘Defender of the Faith’,¹²⁴ a title received by many of the English medieval monarchs, they were held in the highest esteem within the catholic church, giving them religious power beyond the secular borders in which they held ultimate power. Regardless of whether they held this title or not, the English royal family were keen to make themselves appear as holy as possible. Whether this was through the founding of religious buildings such as cathedrals, chapels and monasteries,¹²⁵ or by going on pilgrimages,¹²⁶ the royal family made sure it publicly appeared to be extremely pious, regardless of their personal beliefs. Whilst Highworth did not directly benefit from this royal piety, the surrounding towns and counties very clearly did. Many of the towns that Highworth shared trade links with were also centres of extreme religious significance, such as Gloucester.¹²⁷ These sites of religious fervour regularly held royal connections, with various members of the English royal family

¹²³ T. Dobson, *Royal Crest of George III*, Trans. 12/04/2018.

¹²⁴ Historic UK, Dissolution of the Monasteries, Available at: <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Dissolution-of-the-Monasteries/> Accessed on [12/04/2018].

¹²⁵ Kings College Cambridge, History of the Chapel, Available at: <http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/chapel/history.html> Accessed on [12/04/2018].

¹²⁶ Walsingham Village, History of Pilgrimage, Available at: <http://www.walsinghamvillage.org/about/history-of-pilgrimage/> Accessed on [12/04/2018].

¹²⁷ Gloucester Cathedral, Edward II Tomb, Available at: <http://www.gloucestercathedral.org.uk/visit/what-to-see-and-do/highlights/edward-ii-tomb.php> Accessed on [12/04/2018].

founding religious colleges in Oxford and Cambridge,¹²⁸ the first Duke of Lancaster was born in the nearby village of Kempford,¹²⁹ and Edward II was buried in the nearest monastic cathedral at Gloucester.¹³⁰ With these religious sites becoming increasingly connected with the royal family and leading nobles, this led to them becoming established as pilgrimage routes, especially between the cathedrals and monasteries that surround Highworth. Because of



Figure 12: The Commemorative Ceiling at Kempford

this, it is clear throughout history, that the royal family had a positive impact, not a negative one, on the role of religion in the areas around, and by extension in, Highworth.



Figure 13: Empty Statue recesses above the South Porch

The Reformation did, however, have a very noticeable impact on St Michael's Church, as it did everywhere. The Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s and early 1540s saw some of the most controversial changes to religious life in England,¹³¹ and some of the most visual changes to St Michael's in Highworth, as

¹²⁸ Christ Church, A brief History, Available at: <https://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/brief-history> Accessed on [12/04/2018].

Kings College Cambridge, History of the Chapel, Available at: <http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/chapel/history.html> Accessed on [12/04/2018].

¹²⁹ BBC, Gloucestershire, Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/gloucestershire/content/articles/2007/10/02/kempford_church_feature.shtml Accessed on: [12/04/2018].

¹³⁰ Gloucester Cathedral, Edward II Tomb, Available at: <http://www.gloucester cathedral.org.uk/visit/what-to-see-and-do/highlights/edward-ii-tomb.php> Accessed on [12/04/2018].

¹³¹ Historic UK, Dissolution of the Monasteries, Available at: <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Dissolution-of-the-Monasteries/> Accessed on [12/04/2018].

with other church buildings throughout the country. With all religious imagery removed from the church,¹³² these reforms were always going to be controversial. Despite there being evidence that there were saints' images in the alcoves that fill the church, and stone figures in the now empty recesses on the outside of the south porch,¹³³ it is extremely unlikely to ever fully know the full extent of the damage inflicted by the reformation on the church in Highworth. The greatest 'damage' done to St Michael's seems to have been the removal of stone altars which were the focal points in the side chapels and tower,¹³⁴ and also the demolition of the chantry house which was established by William Ingram at the same time as Chantry Cottage.¹³⁵ Regardless of the upset and anger these changes caused,¹³⁶ it does not appear to have led to a reduction in church attendance.

The Civil War caused more damage to the church – both physically and spiritually- – leading to its fortification,¹³⁷ the cannonball damage above the west door, and supposed damage to the interior of the church,¹³⁸ the battles of the Civil War saw a great many changes to St Michael's. The following years saw a great deal of decoration in the church,¹³⁹ but this was followed by a peak in the damage suffered, as well as the vast reduction in the size of the congregation.¹⁴⁰ Even though the church still holds signs of use during these 150 years, such as the royal crest on the north wall, the records of damage the church sustained before its 19th century restoration clearly show that there was a great reduction in the income of the church. The drop in attendance ultimately shows that it is the personal beliefs and politics of the townspeople of Highworth that affects the importance of St Michael's more, rather than the politics and beliefs

¹³² Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 46-9.

¹³³ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 49.

¹³⁴ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 46-7.

¹³⁵ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 47.

¹³⁶ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 50-1.

¹³⁷ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 53.

¹³⁸ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 62-3.

¹³⁹ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 73.

¹⁴⁰ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 82-3.

of royalty. This therefore indicates that, as time passed, the importance of St Michael's did decrease in Highworth, something which cannot necessarily be mirrored nationally.

Chapter 3: Medievalism and Modernisation

As has been discussed in the previous two chapters, the Victorian parishioners responsible for the renovation of St Michael's closely followed the trend for medievalism, attempting to closely imitate the medieval features of the church which had been removed during the 16th century reformation. In this chapter, some of the elements of medievalism which still heavily feature in St Michael's today will be studied, with a strong focus on how they create a relationship between the church, the townsfolk of Highworth, and its history. As many of these elements are being changed during the Reordering that is due to take place in the summer of 2018,¹⁴¹ the impact of these changes will be debated, before closing with a brief study of the creation of national laws and changing perceptions, and the impact these have had on the church.

One feature of the modern St Michael's which was replaced in the 1940s,¹⁴² adding an additional interpretation of medievalism, was the Rood and the screen beneath it. Situated in the archway between the pulpit and the high altar, this screen effectively further divides the church and obscures the crucifix floorplan of the church, which had already been greatly disguised by the permanent pews. Despite this, its location has led to it being one of the most recognisable features of the church, as well as one of the most heavily photographed. This creation of an additional focal point in the church has only been heightened in recent years by the attachment of a projector screen onto the archway either side of the screen, onto which the

¹⁴¹ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

¹⁴² St Michael and All Angels Highworth, 20th Century, <http://www.stmichaelshighworth.co.uk/20thcentury.htm> Available at: Accessed on [13/04/2018].



Figure 14: The Rood Screen and Chancel

service books and hymns are projected at every church service. As a result of this, the Rood Screen has become an integral part of the church, and many do not believe that the church would look appropriate with the removal of this screen. However, the screen being one of the most recent architectural changes to the church means that, as far as the diocesan council and Historic England are concerned, there is little harm in removing the screen.¹⁴³ An indication of how much the church and its contents matter to the town can

be seen in the outrage generally expressed towards both the removal of the pews and the Rood Screen.¹⁴⁴ This collective anger by a great portion of the town clearly shows how much the town still cares about St Michael's, even if only as a historic building and a centre of town identity.¹⁴⁵ The fact that the church is revered only as a historic building can be seen in the excitement generated by many of the parishioners towards the modernisation of the church itself, rather than the perceived damage to the church.

Alternatively, this strong opposition and its recognition by the PCC can be seen as an indicator of the strong relationship between the townsfolk and the church, and the importance both parties place on it. Through the continued inclusion of the Rood Screen in the reordering plans,

¹⁴³ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 16, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ E. Dunn, 13th Century Building to get a 21st century makeover, Available at: http://www.swindonadvertiser.co.uk/news/9604706.13th_century_building_to_get_21st_century_makeover/ Accessed on [13/04/2018].

it is clear that the diocesan council wanted to ensure that this relationship remained as strong as it is currently, suggesting that whilst the church is essential to the town identity, the town as a whole has a strong input on the church and any changes made to it. Because of this and the importance placed by many on the artefacts in the church today, regardless of their age or historical significance, has led to the church keeping the screen, although admittedly in a different place.¹⁴⁶ By moving the screen to the other end of the aisle and the rood to the north wall each part will remain as an essential decoration in the church, but not obscure the shape of the church, or prevent its multipurpose use.¹⁴⁷ This relocation will, however, reduce the focal nature of the rood which is currently so strong, likely reducing the importance it currently holds, thus further weakening the importance placed on the church as a religious building, given that the rood depicts Jesus' crucifixion.

The same can be seen in the removal of the majority of the pews, with only very few being retained, once again in a different location within the church.¹⁴⁸ As the pews fill up the majority of the floorspace in the nave, they are viewed as a key part of the makeup of the church, ignoring the fact that they have only been in situ for approximately the last one-hundred and fifty years,¹⁴⁹ a mere 15% (minimum) of the time there has been a church on Highworth hill.¹⁵⁰ The removal of the pews is, however, where much of the anger directed at the church has stemmed from, once more dividing the town. Those who use the church regularly as a place of worship look forward to the replacing of the worn pews, whilst those who view St Michael's

¹⁴⁶ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 16, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

¹⁴⁷ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 03, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

¹⁴⁸ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 01, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

¹⁴⁹ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 93.

¹⁵⁰ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 15.

as purely a historic building are angered at the removal of one of the main and ‘essential’ aspects of the church. Regardless of how the removal of the pews is viewed by the townspeople of Highworth, the emotion directed towards the Reordering that their removal has caused clearly shows the importance placed on St Michael’s within the town, even if many only view the church as a building, not as a site of worship.

Another element of the religious medievalism which is prevalent in St Michael’s today has already been discussed at great length earlier in this work. One of the biggest differences between the protestant churches of the 16th–18th centuries in England and the catholic churches of medieval England is the lack of colour.¹⁵¹ Where the medieval church was colourful, the post-reformation church was plain. Where the medieval churches saw the architecture as a useful tool for the religious education of the masses, the post-reformation era saw them as a distraction to parishioners who were meant to be focusing all of their attention on the sermon being preached from the plain wooden pulpit.¹⁵² This could be attributed to the vast decline in the size of the congregation, and the overall state of the church building. Thus, it could be suggested that there is a tangible link between the colourful, cheerful state of medieval churches, and the importance the church holds within a community. This is arguably because of the emotional link forged between the people and the imagery, with the images remaining unchanged for generations,¹⁵³ only added to when funded by the community themselves, rather than being state funded. When the church was a plain, undecorated building there was little reason for the townsfolk to care about it, something which has been partially undone in Highworth through the redecorating carried out as part of the 19th century renovations which saw the installation of a few stained-glass windows, and the decoration of pillar recesses and

¹⁵¹ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 49.

¹⁵² Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 47.

¹⁵³ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 91.

the high altar.¹⁵⁴ As the church gained life once more, so the attendance grew, demonstrating a direct correlation between the familial memorials on display in the church, and church attendance. This correlation illustrates that St Michael's has historically relied on the patronage and interest of the locals to maintain its status and importance in the town, and likewise, the locals rely on the church to provide the town with a sense of identity, and to act as a symbol of town pride and heritage. As a result of this, it is clear that the church and the town both heavily rely on each other, signifying that the church still remains vitally important to Highworth in the 21st century.

The exterior of the church also bears signs of how important the church was to Highworthians in the past through a feature that now defines the church tower: the clock. There has been a method for telling the time on the exterior of the church for centuries, starting as a sundial, and progressing to a hand wound clock, and eventually a self-wound, mechanical clock in 2003.¹⁵⁵ The main clock dials on the tower, however, renewed the medieval importance behind the placing of the church at the pinnacle of the hill: it could, and still can, be seen throughout the town. This was especially important when the railway reached Highworth from the nearby railway town of Swindon in 1883.¹⁵⁶ In order for the trains to run on time in a pre-electronic age it was essential for there to be a clock that ran to the correct time near each station.¹⁵⁷ In Highworth, this clock was chosen to be on the church tower, which is a clearly visible monument, and already had a clock mechanism installed. The updating of this clock mechanism therefore shows that St Michael's was important to Highworth, both as a site of worship which remained unchanged, but also in an industrialising, modernising Britain.

¹⁵⁴ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 94.

¹⁵⁵ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 122.

¹⁵⁶ Highworth Historical Society, Highworth Light Railway, Available at: <http://www.highworthhistoricalsociety.co.uk/highworth-archives/highworth-light-railway.html> Accessed on [13/04/2018].

¹⁵⁷ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 96.



Figure 15: The forgotten medieval doorway in the North wall.

The Reordering seeks to ideally increase the importance of the church in the community once again, restoring the church to use as a community space, with many of the modern features that would be desired in a hireable space. Through changes such as the removal of the pews, Rood Screen and organ,¹⁵⁸ as well as the addition of an extension through a medieval doorway found in the North wall,¹⁵⁹ it is the aim of the PCC to transform the church into a larger, more versatile space. By doing so, it is believed that the church will become one of the

largest indoor spaces in the town, thus increasing its use in the town. These changes will also ideally prevent the church being viewed purely as a church which is only to be used at weddings, funerals and on Sundays, but rather as a building which is open to all, all of the time. It is also believed that these changes will hold positive benefits for the parishioners who already frequently use the church, as it will make the church a more comfortable environment to worship in, as well as making worship more accessible and flexible. Through the addition of an extra toilet building and a larger kitchen, the church aims to become a more family friendly space, suitable for the needs of modern parents and their children, something which differs from the church currently, which only has a small kitchen and single toilet.¹⁶⁰ Each of these changes aim to address the younger population of Highworth and to ensure that the church

¹⁵⁸ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

¹⁵⁹ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 08, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

remains of use to them, thus ensuring that the church remains important to an increasingly diverse town.¹⁶¹

The second demographic that the church aims to appease through this Reordering are the elderly and the disabled.¹⁶² Currently, the church presents a multitude of challenges to the physically disabled, with there being steps between the south door and the aisles, the aisle and the chancel, and the aisles and the pews. Each of these steps greatly reduce the amount of the working church that can be accessed by a physically disabled person, not including the lack of seating available for them with fixed pews filling the entirety of the nave. Whilst there is a ramp enabling people with physical disabilities to enter the church, this ramp is heavy and often leads to these individuals being singled out as they cause disruption to the flow of people entering the church. Through the levelling of the floor throughout the church, the amount of people who can access the church as a historical building and as a site of worship is intended to be increased, thus once again making the church accessible to a larger proportion of Highworth's population. The levelling of the floor also serves a secondary purpose – it allows for the church to have underfloor heating installed,¹⁶³ keeping the church warmer, and ensuring that this warmth is spread evenly throughout the church, rather than being focused on the areas surrounding the metal pipes and heaters which are the only source of heating in the building.¹⁶⁴

It is not uncommon to see much of the congregation remaining in their coats throughout the service in an effort to remain warm, so it is hoped that, along with the installation of cushioned

¹⁶¹ UK Census Data, Highworth 2011, Available at: <http://www.ukcensusdata.com/highworth-e05002156#sthash.wVz03QwZ.dpbs> Accessed on [13/04/2018].

¹⁶² The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 03, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

¹⁶³ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 01, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

¹⁶⁴ Heritage Group website for the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers, St Michael's Parish Church of Highworth Wiltshire, Available at: http://www.hevac-heritage.org/items_of_interest/heating/churches_&_chapels/highworth_church/highworth_church.htm Accessed on [17/04/2018].

chairs with straight backs (which can be moved around where necessary) will make the church more comfortable and encourage the elderly back into the local church.¹⁶⁵ The common themes with each of these changes are accessibility and comfort, an increase in which will ideally ensure that the church is suited to the needs of a wider variety of the townsfolk and meet the needs of an increasingly diverse town. By doing so, the PCC is attempting to ensure that the church remains important to as much of the town as possible, suggesting that it is currently not so important to the town as anything other than as a source of history.

The Church vs. the State. Who will win this time?

In recent years, the Church has frequently been forced to choose between remaining a beacon for good in an ever more equal society and remaining true to its core beliefs. Whilst society can adapt and change based on what its core belief is – that is to say, the beliefs of the many – the same cannot be said of the Church. Constrained by biblical teachings and medieval rulings, the Church is often unable to change in such a manner. Recently, however, there has been increasing pressure placed upon the Church to equally embrace all of society – whether they be men or women, heterosexual or homosexual, married or divorced. These are all concepts which have been widely accepted by the majority of the British public, and discrimination based on these factors is now enshrined in British law as highly unacceptable.¹⁶⁶ In moves to counteract the inflexible nature of the Church, British law in the past two decades has taken an increased role in what was traditionally only in the remit of the Church: marriage. The passing of the Civil Partnerships Act in 2004 created a legally binding, nationally recognised method for two gay people to bond with each other, in a way similar to that of a traditional marriage.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, p. 03, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

¹⁶⁶ Gov.uk, Discrimination: Your Rights, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/discrimination-your-rights> Accessed on [17/04/2018].

¹⁶⁷ Legislation.gov.uk, Civil Partnership Act 2004, Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/33/part/2> Accessed on [17/04/2018].

This act was then furthered in 2013 with the passing of the ‘Same Sex Marriage Act’ which not only made provisions for the secular marriage of homosexuals, but also confirmed that no member of the clergy could recognise these marriages as unlawful.¹⁶⁸ These acts have made a great impact in the Church in Britain as it massively weakens one of its core beliefs: that only a man and a woman could get married.¹⁶⁹ Unfortunately for the Church, it still refuses to vote in favour of gay marriage, seeing it in conflict with some of its most holy teachings as it is directly forbidden in the Bible.¹⁷⁰ Where these Christian laws have caused outrage, these changes to the secular laws of Britain have seen great celebration throughout the country and are seen as signs that Britain as a nation is gradually becoming more accepting and more open to ideas which are contrary to those of the Church,¹⁷¹ thus weakening its importance, not just in Highworth, but throughout the nation.

Contrary to this, there are historical examples where the Church did eventually change its opinion and teachings, recognising that society has changed and that the Church must change with it or risk becoming obsolete. In 2002, the General Synod (the ruling decision-making body for the Church of England) formally voted to recognise what had legally been possible since the marriage of Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn in 1533 – that individuals who had divorced could remarry during the lifetime of their ex-spouse.¹⁷² Despite this ruling, it was decided that it was not acceptable for Prince Charles (the future head of the Church of England) to get remarried

¹⁶⁸ Legislation.gov.uk, Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act 2013, Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/30/section/1/enacted> Accessed on [17/04/2018].

¹⁶⁹ The King James Bible, Leviticus, 18:22.

¹⁷⁰ C. May, Church of England to discuss same-sex blessing, Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41701458> Accessed on [18/04/2018].

¹⁷¹ J. Bingham, David Cameron welcomes first gay marriages, Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10730806/David-Cameron-welcomes-first-gay-marriages.html> Accessed on [18/04/2018].

¹⁷² General Synod, Marriage in Church after Divorce, Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/marriage%20in%20church%20after%20divorce.pdf> Accessed on [18/04/2018].

in a church when he married Camilla Parker-Bowles in 2005,¹⁷³ as both parties were divorced. The Queen (his mother) also did not attend the Civil ceremony as it was deemed unacceptable for the current head of the Church to bless such a union.¹⁷⁴ This therefore indicates that, despite it being legal and recognised by the Church of England, it was not accepted by the upper-class members of British ecclesiastical society. This can also be viewed as a sign of the ever-evolving nature of the Church in its opposition to the state, as Prince Harry is due to get married to Meghan Markle (a divorcee) in St George's Chapel,¹⁷⁵ Windsor on the 19th May 2018.¹⁷⁶ Whilst this marriage differs from that of Prince Charles as Harry is unlikely to ever become King and the head of the Church of England, the fact that a member of the royal family is getting married to a divorcee with all the royal family present (including both the current head of the Church, as well as the next three heads of the Church of England) demonstrates a great deal of progress within the Church.¹⁷⁷

The same is proved through the increasing rights of women within the Church of England. Traditionally, women (as the descendants of Eve) were not allowed to hold any role within the Church of England. This has been rapidly changing, however, and there are now several female bishops within the Church of England. Mirroring society, and following a great deal of pressure,¹⁷⁸ the Church voted to allow female deacons in 1985, then female priests in 1992,

¹⁷³ BBC, Charles and Camilla's Wedding Day, Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4428161.stm> Accessed on [18/04/2018].

¹⁷⁴ BBC, Q&A: Queen's Wedding Decision, Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4289417.stm> Accessed on [18/04/2018].

¹⁷⁵ J. Rach, Revealed: The subtle reference to Meghan's divorce that was included on the Royal Wedding invitations (and why it's another sign the monarchy is 'moving with the times'), Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-5553565/Prince-Harry-Meghan-Markle-wedding-invite-includes-subtle-nod-divorce.html> Accessed on [18/04/2018].

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ General Synod, Marriage in Church after Divorce, Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/marriage%20in%20church%20after%20divorce.pdf> Accessed on [18/04/2018].

¹⁷⁸ Reuters, Welsh Anglicans allow women bishops, pressure mounts on Church of England, Available at: <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2013/09/13/welsh-anglicans-allow-women-bishops-pressure-mounts-on-church-of-england/> Accessed on [19/04/2018].

and most recently to allow female bishops in 2014.¹⁷⁹ This gradual acceptance of female clergy demonstrates that the Church is gradually making changes to its laws in the wake of societal changes and movements in order to remain relevant, open, and important in 21st century life. In a society which increasingly disassociates itself from organisations which are seen as discriminatory, these changes are essential if the church wishes to retain such a vital role in British society.

Each of these modern ideas have caused great celebration, both within ecclesiastical communities, and within communities as a whole. Whilst it is important to recognise the positive changes the Church has made, and the changes it is currently debating,¹⁸⁰ it is important also to recognise that, to many, these changes fundamentally change what the Church is, and disagree with Christian teachings, thus degrading the importance of the Church for some. Despite this, those who support these changes and modernisations to the Church are more populous and, as these changes portray the Church as a modern and accepting institution, they are likely to demonstrate that the Church remains important to many, and that these changes allow for the Church to remain so.

¹⁷⁹ J. Bingham, Women in the Church of England: a century of waiting, Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11368767/Women-in-the-Church-of-England-a-century-of-waiting.html> Accessed on [18/04/2018].

¹⁸⁰ C. May, Church of England to discuss same-sex blessing, Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41701458> Accessed on [18/04/2018].

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are a great deal of factors to consider when studying the importance of anything to a society, least of all when discussing the importance of something which is so integral to a society. With Christianity having existed for two thousand years, and the Church of England for the past 500 years of this,¹⁸¹ it is indisputable that it has some level of importance to British society, even if this importance is in largely non-religious ways. Despite this, the role of the Church in 21st century Britain remains debatable, and its position in society is more unstable now than it has been since its creation. As such, each individual element of what makes up the Church is important and can often be seen in its physical manifestation – that of the parish churches and chapels which are so abundant in England.

This dissertation set out to study each of the three elements (architecture, society, and modernisation), to see how these impact on the importance of one specific church, and then to, eventually, use these findings to refer generally to the Church of England. By viewing St Michael and All Angels Church, Highworth as both an individual building, as part of its surroundings, and as part of the larger, institutional Church the importance of the Church in the 21st century has become clear. Regardless of the amount of changes a church has undergone in the years which have passed since its foundation, the role of the medieval church remains unchanged within society. Now, more than ever, local landmarks stand firmly as a sign of the history of an area, and of a country, becoming an unchanging identifier for the area and proving that, when an area unites, it can withstand anything. This is especially true of medieval buildings such as St Michael's which have survived some of the worst periods of British history, with the building bearing reminders to this history. In Highworth, the church serves as a site of memorial, both to those lost in war and in peace. The modern developments such as

¹⁸¹ The Church of England, History of the Church of England, Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/church-england-glance/history-church-england> Accessed on [20/04/2018].

the pews, Rood Screen and millennium window also serve as markers to the passing of time and,¹⁸² regardless of the controversial nature of such, the changes that have to be made in order to remain as relevant today. This often leads to the church becoming a symbol of local and national pride, as well as an indicator of local and cultural identity. From the stone St Michael's is built out of to the names inscribed on memorials and grave markers around the church there is one thing that is undeniable: the church in Highworth is the church of Highworth. Created from stone quarried locally, and with instantly recognisable surnames giving names to the stained-glass windows and the side chapel, St Michael's is clearly the creation of its past, and, through the Reordering, seeks to become a creation of its present. Whilst remembering the culture and history of an area is undeniably important, it is essential for St Michael's, and the rest of the institutional Church, to constantly evolve and change in order for it to remain relevant and retain the importance which has led to it being such an important building in the first place.

Therefore, despite the reducing importance of religion in society, and the pressures society applies to the Church, it is clear that the history of St Michael's and the heated debate its reordering has caused can prove one thing: medieval buildings are still as important today as they were when they were built,¹⁸³ even if the ways in which they are important have changed. In spite of this, it will be very interesting to see what impact the changes made to the church will have on the townsfolk of Highworth, and whether they, like the 16th century reformation, have a damning impact on the church in Highworth,¹⁸⁴ or if, like the 19th and 20th century renovations, they have a positive impact that supersedes generations.

¹⁸² St Michael and All Angels Highworth, 21st Century, Available at:

<http://www.stmichaelshighworth.co.uk/21stcentury.htm> Accessed on [28/04/2018].

¹⁸³ The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, A Petition for a faculty for St Michael and All Angels, Highworth, Swindon, Available at: <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/ff4c1ccf-3cc7-4e7b-969d-0dedb8c7d8b1/st-michael-and-all-angels-faculty-judgement.pdf> Accessed on [26/04/2018].

¹⁸⁴ Lawton, *A History of St Michael and All Angels* (2010), p. 47.

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The King James Bible, Leviticus, 18:22.

The King James Bible, Luke, 24.

The King James Bible, Matthew, 16:18.

The King James Bible, Matthew, 21:12.

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