

Statement of Significance Example 1 St Oswald, Melchester (Grade II*)

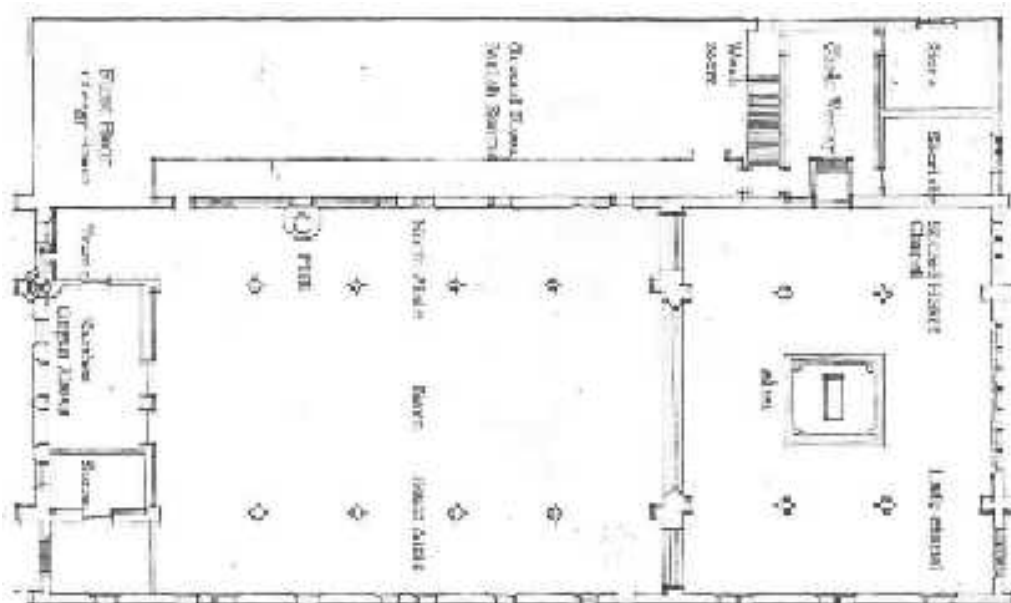
Part I: The church in its urban environment

This is a very large and grandly conceived Victorian Gothic church, in what was in the late 19th century an extremely modest urban residential area. It is a monument to the prosperity of Melchester at the peak of its industrial development. The church is visible from some distance due to the height of its elaborate tower, and stands at the intersection of what remains of the 19th-century terraced housing, 1960's tower blocks, newer housing developments of the 1970's and building sites connected with the current re-development of the area to the south-east. The church stands on Bilbo Street with no curtilage on the north and west sides, and a garden on the south side encompassed by a brick wall to the east and iron railings to the south; no burials. It is not in a Conservation Area, but does have considerable townscape significance.

The church was built in 1880 in the Early English style to designs by J S Crowbar. The benefactor was James Bilbo, a prominent local timber merchant. The church (nave 26m x 10m) consists of a 6-bay aisled nave, narthex, north-west tower, 3-bay chancel and side chapels. Exposed red brick with orange brick dressings, sandstone tracery, slate covered roofs. There is an 11-bay Sunday School, parsonage and vestry range along the north side, which are now used as community and playgroup facilities, and are very popular with the local community, especially young families and the elderly.



Above left, church seen from the north-west, above right interior looking east



Plan of the church adapted from the QIR. (Scale 1:400) North ↑

The church interior is impressive and of considerable architectural and art historical significance, retaining its full complement of original Gothic furnishings, except for the pews which have been replaced by chairs. The marble lectern in the form of an angel by Thwaites is particularly fine. The east window with its excellent stained glass by Bristow & Co is the pride of the parish. The huge Beard and Beard organ of 1895 is considered one of the finest in the diocese. The tower houses a ring of eight bells, dated 1879 and by John Tribbles & co of Loughborough. A copy of Raphael's "La Belle", given by Tom Bilbo in 1912, hangs in the south aisle.

Part II: The significance of the area affected by the proposal

The proposal is to modernise and extend the facilities in the north range of rooms into the north aisle itself. This would involve glazing in the north arcade, inserting partition walls across the aisle and two new doorways through the north aisle wall to give access. Although this will have some visual impact, the screen and partitions would be removable, and there should be no archaeological objections to piercing the late 19th-century brick wall. The font will have to be relocated to the west end of the nave. No other furniture would have to be removed, as the aisle has stood unused for some time, being rather dark due to the presence of the north range of buildings (see appended photographs and detailed plans).

The proposal will have some visual and spatial impact, but this can be minimised by careful design and the use of quality materials.

- Bibliography:** Pevsner, N (1959). *The Buildings of England: Barsetshire*.
 Bilbo, B (1929). *The history of the Bilbos in Melchester*.
 Listing Description.
 Crowbar, J S (1893). *A biography*.
 RCHME survey of Melchester, 1975.

Statement of Significance Example 2: St David, Loxton (Grade I)

Part I: The church in its rural environment

Loxton lies in a low-lying rural part of North Bassetshire, between Weare, Blowell and Cryton. The hamlet of Loxton consists of a group of attractive houses and farms clustered around the church at a minor crossroads. Several of the Loxton farmhouses are at least 17th-century in origin, while the drainage and enclosure of the surrounding fields for agriculture have been shown to date back to the 10th century. Loxton and its church are mentioned in Domesday Book as part of the manor of Blowell, which had belonged to King Harold before the Conquest. The hamlet is in a Conservation Area.

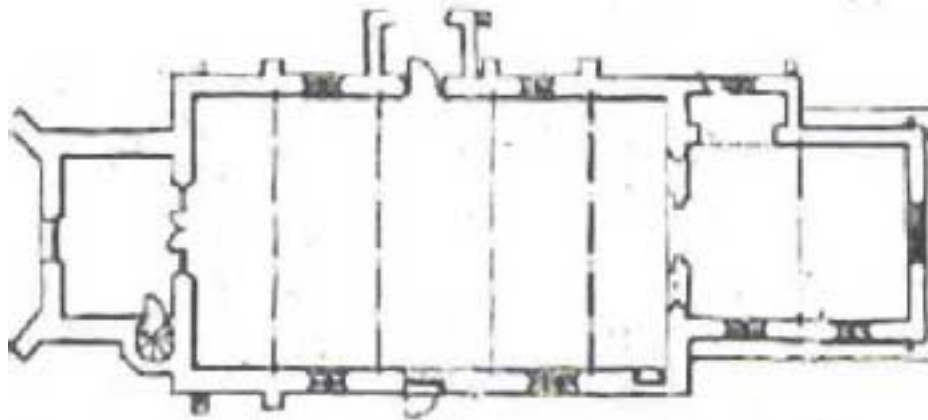
The medieval parish church is of the highest quality and exceptional significance in terms of the architecture, the archaeology of both the building and the site and of its wealth of important furnishings and fittings. It stands roughly centrally on a slight mound within an immaculately kept grassed churchyard with many monuments and headstones of interest dating from the late 17th century, enclosed by a medieval bank and ditch, with hedgerows and sedges deliberately managed to provide a wildlife habitat and of considerable ecological significance.

The church is small (nave 14m x 6.6m), and consists of a 3-bay nave and 2-bay chancel, a west tower, north porch and north-east organ chamber. The walls are of coursed rubble with rough-cast rendering with freestone quoins and dressings. The oak roofs are covered in Cornish slate, with lead over the pyramidal tower roof. The building is dominated visually by the (now leaning!) Perpendicular tower. The architectural details now visible attest a programme of work in the late 14th and early 15th century. The church was restored during the reign of Mary I, in 1557, when the north porch was added, and the present roof installed. Victorian restoration appears to have been limited to fabric repairs, limited and sensitive rebuilding of the chancel and the addition of the small organ chamber.



The church seen from the south (left) and the interior looking east (right)

Much of the furniture including the benches, communion rails and pulpit is of the late 16th and 17th century, while the box pews, bell-frame and tower roof are of the 18th century.



Plan of the church adapted from the QIR (Scale 1:200) North↑

One large bell of the 15th century, hung from an iron girder and no longer rung. Norman (12th-century?) tub font with remnants of moulding around the rim. The font stands on an earlier, possibly Saxon tub font, which has been inverted and plastered over. It has a 17th-century strapwork oak cover. There are ledger stones commemorating the Hippey family set into the stone floor, late 17th-century in date and of high quality and interest. A very fine oak chest stands in the south-east corner on top of one of these, with beautifully carved panels, probably of the early 17th century. Royal Arms of George II, dated 1751. The chancel furniture is Victorian. Marble World War I memorial with soldiers carved in relief. The historic communion plate is kept in a bank safe.

This tiny church is kept in good condition, and there are no serious structural defects. There are no modern facilities within the church and none such are available nearby, as the hamlet has no other public buildings.

Part II: The significance of the area affected by the proposal

The proposal is to install a kitchenette and biotoilet suitable for disabled access into the ground floor space of the tower, which is at the moment empty and unused. This would clearly involve some penetration of the masonry of the 15th-century tower to bring the water in and out, and a shallow pipe and drain run through the churchyard to the road. This would require an archaeological evaluation and development of a mitigation strategy to reduce the impact to the fabric and underground archaeological remains, including burials. The units themselves would be free-standing and removable. There are already double oak doors in the tower arch which enable access to the planned facilities and ensure privacy (see appended photographs and plans).

Bibliography: Pevsner, N (1959) *The Buildings of England: Barsetshire*.
 Tippoff, B (1998) *Roman and Medieval Settlement in North Barsetshire: and (1996) Survey and excavation at Blowell and Loxton, 1996*. In: *Barsetshire Archaeology II*.
 Listing description.
 VCH for Barsetshire, p 245-247