



# St Lawrence Church

LECHLADE-ON-THAMES



Lechlade St Lawrence PCC

Version 2

May 2023

## **Supporting document to the faculty submission in response to the DAC Report dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022**

*This paper sets out the strong need for the relocation of the choir screen which outweighs its moderate significance. We explain why its location to the west end of the church is appropriate and explored alternative locations. We have identified one possible option which we wish to discuss with the DAC,*

### **Proposals to remove the central choir screen**

1. This document has been prepared in response to the observation at the DAC meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2022 (included with its Summary Report dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022)

*Removal of the chancel screen – The DAC delegation considered the feedback from external consultees and concluded that while the PCC have made an argument for the screen’s removal based on their liturgical style and needs, as well as the desire to have an unobstructed view of the East End, the removal of this fine piece would be controversial. It is uncertain whether the success of the reordering as a whole would depend on this particular proposal, although the Archdeacon of Cheltenham expressed his support of the PCC’s arguments. The benefits of the proposed removal of the side screens would bring were unclear. There was a discussion about the merits of moving the chancel screen to the new west gallery, but it was concluded that such a step would decontextualise it and is unlikely to be successful. There was a suggestion that the screen could be altered to fit within the aisle arch leading to the Blaise Chapel and the DAC delegation thought that it was worth the PCC’s consideration as a compromise.*

2. The DAC document dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 commented that and that the committee agreed with one exception (related to the choir screen, considered in a separate note)

*The DAC discussed the PCC’s case for the removal of the chancel screen, as well as the two choir screens at length. Members have concluded that the success of the reordering will not depend on this particular proposal, which has proven controversial with external consultees. Members indicated that they were unconvinced about the need to remove the screens and a vote was held by the Chair to find out how many Members would be prepared to support this part of the scheme, if a formal application were to be considered by them on that day. It was noted that the Archdeacon of Cheltenham, who was absent at the meeting was supportive of this proposal. 10 Members voted against the removal of the screens, there were 2 abstentions, and 1 Member left the room after the previous vote was held.*

3. We have considered the suggestion from the DAC. We have consulted with our archaeological advisor, Mr Chiz Harward, and our architect Mr Richard Codd. Our views are set out below.
4. We have made a detailed case for the removal of the choir screen in Section 7 of the Statement of Need<sup>1</sup>. This is reproduced in Appendix A for ease of reference. We seek to demonstrate that the benefits of worship and mission outweighs the harm caused by the removal of the screen.

### **The choir screen**

5. The choir and parclose screens were installed in 1887 some five years following the F S Waller reordering. This suggests that the screens were not part of the Waller’s vision of this part of the church; they are a subsequent Victorian addition commissioned as a memorial. They enclose the choir and also the north side of the south (Blaise) chapel, defining it as a separate

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of Need V17, Lechlade St Lawrence PCC, March 2023

place of worship. At that time, the south chapel did not exist and was filled with pews. Views of the 1882 reordering before the screens were erected are shown on the figures overleaf.



*Left: the 1882 reordering with open view looking north east to the east window and north aisle*

*Right: the 1882 reordering with open view looking east along the centre aisle to the east window*



### History and significance of the screen

6. The HER record<sup>2</sup> for the Grade 1 church provides a detailed description of the perpendicular design and features and makes only passing reference to the reordering by F S Waller and Son. None of the Victorian additions – the choir screen, floors, screen, and nave pews are mentioned in the listing. The listing includes the 1902 Reredos by Rogers and the 1923 communion rail by Jewson but there is no inclusion of the F S Waller and Son design features.

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<sup>2</sup> HER Record 8202

7. The Statement of Significance, prepared by our archaeologist, has assessed the screen as being 'moderate' being defined as 'usually of local value but classifiable as being of regional significance for its contribution to the building as a whole'.
8. The design of the three screens echo the window tracery with six panels in the central screen and five panels with the same design in the parclose screens. The choir screen has a central opening with cross and decoration above the screen level.

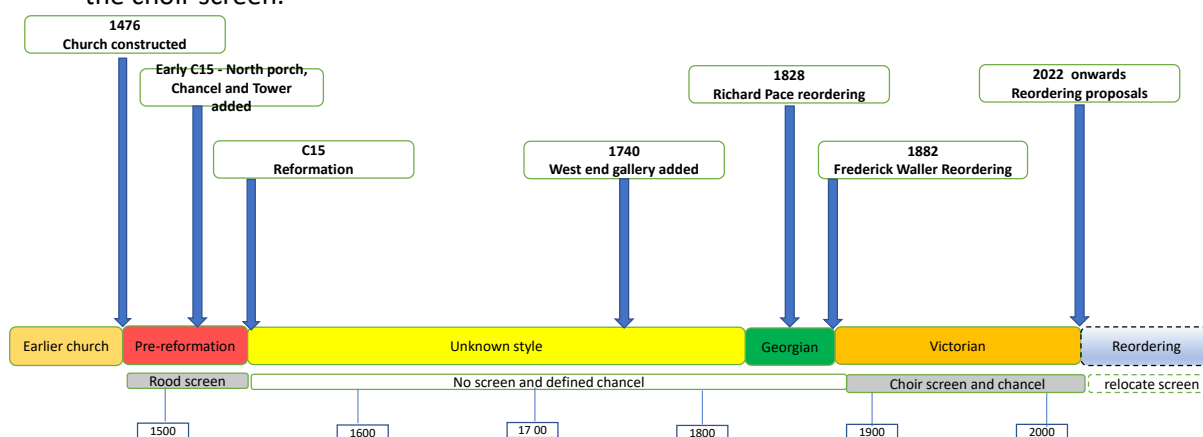
### The need for relocation or removal of the screen

9. There are strong liturgical, architectural and practical reasons for the relocation or removal of the choir screens which we set out below.

### The liturgical need

10. The liturgical reasons have been clearly set out in Section 7 of the Statement of Need by Rev Dr. Andrew Cinnamon and Rev Dr. Andrew Kirk, former Director of the School of Mission and World Christianity, University of Birmingham.
11. While the structure of the perpendicular church has been unchanged over centuries, the internal layout has been altered over 500 years to reflect the form of worship. For the church congregation to be maintained and continue to grow, the internal layout needs to reflect the nature of the services, activities and facilities needed to support this growth,
  - **Worship:** Enable liturgical freedom from the division of clergy and congregation. Put simply, we need to attract new and younger people to our worship and bring clergy and congregation closer so as to worship together rather than being physically separated.
  - o **Mission:** We need to attract and retain new members to the church through attractive open spaces with no demarcations or barriers to worship.

12. For the three centuries between the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and the 1882 reordering, the space between the nave and chancel was clear with an unobstructed view of the altar, the officiating priest and the east window. A timeline is shown in the Figure below. We explain below the valid and convincing reasons why we propose to relocate the choir screen.



13. The internal layout of the church has changed significantly on more than one occasion during the last five hundred and fifty years, reflecting the changing liturgical needs of the church. In 1476 St. Lawrence was part of a wider Roman Catholic Europe where the Latin mass was the central act of worship. It is highly likely that a very substantial rood screen existed in the church prior to the reformation. This would have been highly decorated with saints and biblical figures. The top of the screen would have held the cross/ rood itself. Evidence for this comes from the steps in the alcove in the northeast area of the church adjacent to the current organ, which would have led up to the screen.
14. The momentous religious changes of the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century meant that the focus moved away from a more sacramental form of worship centring on the Mass, to a focus on hearing the Word of God preached and taught. The physical building of St. Lawrence reflected these changes in theology and liturgical practice - pews were places for people to sit and primarily listen, empty niches were devoid of images and rood stairs leading nowhere reflect previous practices.
15. The Georgian style reordering in 1828 installed box pews with doors throughout the church; most belonged to families with a few designated as 'free' pews<sup>3</sup>. The three-decker pulpit was placed part way along the aisle. The parish clerk would occupy one of the lower levels helping with some of the liturgical responses in the Book of Common Prayer, whilst the vicar would preach from the upper parts, with a sounding board helping to amplify his words so the whole congregation could hear properly. A sermon in accessible vernacular English replaced the pre-Reformation Latin Mass, which was unintelligible to the vast majority of the congregation. As the Reformation principles became embedded in Protestant England, the words of Cranmer's Prayer Book and the language of the King James Bible of 1611 seeped into the hearts and minds of English men and women. The church building became a place for the worshipping community to gather and listen, but also to respond via the liturgical responses in the Prayer Book, the Psalms and canticles, and through the relatively recent innovation of English congregational hymns often set to well-known popular tunes. The emphasis was less on mystery, but more on audibility and understanding.
16. The Oxford Movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century felt the Reformation had gone too far, Protestant theology was damaging and the 'beauty of holiness' had to be restored in public worship. This meant substantial changes to the liturgical space of parish churches, reflected in the 1882 reordering. Communion tables were turned back to altars again (and raised and railed off), vestments and hangings were re-introduced, as were new choir screens. The balance now swung back to sacramental worship, away from the preaching of God's Word. The ritual of the Mass/Holy Communion was made more elaborate and focussed on what the priest (together with servers and acolytes) did in the newly separated chancel area. The east end of the building was now 'a holy place', set aside for a special few to enter and 'out of bounds' for most of the congregation. This also reflects a radically different concept of the parish minister- less a preacher and teacher communicating the revealed Word of God, and more of a sacerdotal priest dispensing the sacraments of the Holy Church. The whole focus of the congregation was drawn to the raised altar at the east end. The Reformation was now partially reversed.

### Present needs

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<sup>3</sup> Plan of church 1828, Gloucestershire Archives D2593

17. A parish church building today needs to be adaptable to differing forms of worship for different members of the church family - from a more contemporary worship style, utilising advances in digital technology in the main body of the church, to a more traditional Book of Common Prayer service, often with a robed choir. These different styles of worship and wider community events can only be achieved through a more adaptable seating arrangement. This needs a warm, well-lit and welcoming worship space, retaining the natural beauty of the medieval structure, but without unnatural barriers between people. This will greatly help in encouraging more people to attend (who might have been discouraged by the existing format of the building) and reaching the local community with the love of God in Jesus Christ.
18. Holy Communion in our main services is now usually celebrated in the nave using a small wooden table, lending a sense of accessibility and immediacy to the congregation, which is now much closer than when the sacrament was celebrated at the far east end of the church. It is now more of a shared family meal than some remote and distant event taking place far away, orchestrated by an elite group of separated people. The prevailing view of the present worshipping community is that we should seek to remove barriers between the clergy and congregation, as we are all the People of God. Holy Communion is open to all as a sign of God's grace and welcome. This stance differs from a more sacramental Anglo-Catholic ecclesiology of Victorian times which sought to emphasise the distancing between laity and clergy.
19. We live in a much more democratised society, where many old social barriers are broken down and the local parish church needs to reflect that loosening of restraints. The choir screen was intentionally erected by the Anglo-Catholic movement to separate the people and divide the church space. It is no longer appropriate to the needs of the present church community and does not represent the thinking and theology of the vast majority of those who attend public worship. The relocation of the choir screen acknowledges the past history of the church, but at the same time frees up the church building to better reflect the faith of the present-day worshipping community. We do not believe that the needs of the present church community are best met by retaining choir screens which prioritise the Victorian phase of the building over and against enhancing the original medieval simplicity and the mission imperative of the congregation.

### The practical need

20. The practical needs are driven by:
  - **Acoustics:** Our Director of Music states that the choir screen constrains the full sound of the choir to be projected into the main body of the church. In addition, for concerts where a larger choir is split by the screen there is difficulty in achieving consistent timing. In effect, the screen presents a barrier when a large choir has to locate both in front of and to the rear of the screen.
  - **Audio visual:** the church makes increasing use of a screen and projector to show words of hymns during worship, illustrate talks and sermons, and to use video to highlight special projects, updates from mission partners and similar events. We see this growing use of multimedia as an important part of our mission to a society which is much more image focussed than text focussed. The location of the choir screen prevents the fitting of a large projector screen with storage above the chancel arch for regular use in services and other

events. The screen would unfold from the arch so not to be unduly visible when raised. With the choir screen removed, the projector screen would be located to the rear of the chancel arch. Otherwise, the projector screen would be located in front of the arch in a suitably designed housing.

- **Capacity for the school:** At regular points throughout the year, the children of St. Lawrence CofE primary school come to St. Lawrence Church for worship and concerts. This is a precious and strong link between school and church, of precisely the kind that the diocese and wider Church of England are keen to foster. However, we struggle to accommodate a school of 200 pupils, plus their parents, with the screen acting as a barrier for both movement and sight. Removing the screen would enable all the children to take full part in concerts and services without being crammed in front of the screen or hidden behind it, both of which interfere with the events themselves, and the wider sense of welcome and inclusion that we want to give to children and parents alike.

### Architectural need

21. The perpendicular design of the church is unchanged from its original structure with large, magnificent windows to the east end and north and south aisles. This creates an open aspect to the building. The effect of the rising sun through the east windows at early communion services enhances the ambiance of the architecture and the wonder of God's creation. This view has been present for over three centuries before the erection of the choir screen. The relocation of the screen would restore the original architectural features and proportions of an uninterrupted nave continuing into the chancel and sanctuary.
  - **An open and welcoming space:** the perpendicular church design with tall walls, columns and large windows can be made more welcoming by opening up the chancel. Removal of the choir screen would make the chancel available as part of the main worship space.
  - **The east window:** The view of the exceptional east window from the nave is obscured by the choir screen. Opening out the view of the east window from the nave would remove the harm caused by the screen installation.
  - **Foreshortening:** The relocation of the screen would restore the original architectural features and proportions of an uninterrupted nave continuing into the chancel and sanctuary. Simon Jenkins in his book on England's Thousand Best Churches comments that '*a heavy Victorian screen shields the chancel and thus obstructs the view of the East window*'.<sup>4</sup>
  - Sir John Betjeman commented that<sup>5</sup>:  
*'LECHLADE St Lawrence: Modestly placed in the corner of the market place of this pleasant town, St Lawrence's is one of the great Perpendicular 'wool' churches, all 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century with a splendid chancel roof, fine bosses and corbels, angels, a blacksmith, wrestlers and evangelists' symbols.'*

*The 19<sup>th</sup> century screen detracts from the spacious interior.*

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<sup>4</sup> England's Thousand Best Churches, Simon Jenkins 1999

<sup>5</sup> Betjeman's Best British Churches, Sir John Betjeman and Richard Surman. reprinted 2011.

- Leaving the choir screen in place would cause harm in foreshortening the aspect into the chancel and sanctuary. There was strong support from the initial consultation for relocating the screen which would provide a clear aspect to the chancel and sanctuary.

22. The perpendicular design of the church is unchanged from its original structure with large, the photographs below reflect the evolution of the east end from the 1828 reordering to the present.

- **The 1828 reordering**  
The open east aspect of the sanctuary windows was in place post-reformation and unchanged in the 1828 reordering.

*Right: view looking east to the chancel, circa 1830; note that no screen was in place in the Georgian reordering*



- **The 1882 reordering**  
The 1882 reordering increased the floor level of the chancel and choir pews were installed. The reordering with the new choir pews retained an open aspect to the east end as shown on the photographs. Note the lighter aspect of the east end with a clear view of the east window emphasizing the perpendicular architecture.

*Right: view looking east to the chancel, circa 1882; this was post reordering and before the screen was installed*







*Left: view looking southwest from the chancel, circa 1882; this was post reordering and before the screen was installed. Note the open aspect of the chancel with light streaming in from the windows.*

*Right view looking east from the nave, circa 1882; this was post reordering and before the screen was installed. Note the full aspect through the nave and chancel to the east window.*



○ **The 1887 screen**

The screen was added in about 1887. This had the impact of significantly foreshortening the west-east aspect of the church; the unobstructed length of the church was reduced from 30m to 19m, some 37%. With a 14m width of church, this gives a nearly square nave and aisles. The current screen was designed by F S Waller and Son with a design which reflected the tracery of the windows. Two parclose screens were added to north and south at the same time to fully enclose the chancel. The screen was installed circa 1887 as part of the Victorian reordering as a memorial to W.A. Robbins, a former resident, by his widow.

The photographs show how the chancel has been separated as a usable space from the nave by the partitioning.

*Right view looking east from the nave, circa 1912; this was post reordering with the screen installed.*



*Right: recent view looking east from the nave. Note the foreshortening of the aspect from the nave to the east end compared with the pre-1887 view when the screen was not in place.*

The relocation of the screen would restore the original architectural features and dimensions of an uninterrupted nave continuing into the chancel and sanctuary. Simon Jenkins in his book on England's Thousand Best Churches comments that '*a heavy Victorian screen shields the chancel and thus obstructs the view of the East window*'.<sup>6</sup> There was strong support from the initial consultation for relocating the screen which would provide a clear aspect to the chancel and sanctuary.

<sup>6</sup> England's Thousand Best Churches, Simon Jenkins 1999

### **Outcome from the consultation**

23. There was strong support from the 2021 consultation with the community for the relocation of the choir screen, with 88% of the regular church attendees and 79% of the community in favour of relocation of the screen.

### **We have responded to initial comments from the DAC and amenity societies**

24. We originally proposed to remove the choir and parclose screens and choir furniture, as suggested by one DAC member, to create an open area for worship with new and moveable modern choir furniture and open out the Blaise (side) chapel for multi-functional use. We saw that this type of reordering was successfully carried out at Holy Trinity, Bradford on Avon and at St Michael's Highworth. We however accepted comments made by the Church Building Council<sup>7</sup> on the initial consultation and decided to defer any changes to the chancel area to a later date.
25. For this faculty submission, we are now proposing to retain the chancel area, parclose screens and Waller and Son-designed choir furniture; this includes retaining the encaustic and geometric tiles in the chancel. These are all elements of the Victorian 1882 reordering. We are also retaining the side (Blaise) chapel which was consecrated in the 1954.
26. We still consider that there is a strong need to relocate or remove the central choir screen, added in 1887, for the reasons set out above. We discuss below the alternative options for re-siting the screen.

### **Preferred location for the choir screen**

27. We had originally proposed relocating the screen at its full width to the rear of the gallery where the original organ was placed. While the DAC considered this to place the screen would remove its contextual significance, its location would maintain the screen within the church and allow its historic significance to be clearly seen. Our view of the contextual significance links back to the liturgical significance with we have explained above.
28. We do not believe that this relocation of the Victorian choir screen will harm the historical and architectural significance of the church building. Rather, it will emphasise and enhance the original intentions of the medieval design, with its fine perpendicular stonework, symmetry and airy lightness. The heavy Victorian re-ordering placed a greater emphasis on imposing a sacramental ideology rather than enhancing and highlighting the original medieval form.
29. Our re-ordering plans are an integrated whole. Because of the introduction of a new gallery at the west end containing the necessary toilet and kitchen facilities, the resulting foreshortening means that we need to make the east end of the church and the chancel area as adaptable and open as possible. The retention of the central choir screen would make the whole building feel confining and not consistent with an open and welcoming church. Removing the screens would allow uninterrupted views of the east window and the levelled floor would give a sense of space of openness and welcome. It also means we have a flexibility for different types of worship

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<sup>7</sup> Lechlade St Lawrence Proposed Reordering, Church Building Council, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2021

service, from traditional to informal, from small-scale to large annual events such as Remembrance Sunday or our nativity play on Christmas Eve.

30. We note in the nearby St Michael's church in Highworth, a shortened version of the choir screen was relocated to the west end of the nave. The Chancellor commented that *'the removal [of the screen] would enhance the historic significance of the original cruciform shape of the original church building by enabling the chancel to be visibly re-united to the rest of the church'*.<sup>8</sup>



*Right: St Michael's Highworth – screen located at the west end of the Nave.*

#### **Alternative locations for the choir screen**

31. We have considered alternative locations for the choir screen which we discuss below.

- **The south chapel:** locating a shorter length of the choir screen within the arch for the south chapel would present similar difficulties as its current position. The screen would mask the wonderful view of the Lazarus window behind the altar. Attending an 8.00am communion service on a sunny Sunday morning, the light through the window is magnificent and a reminder of God's creation.

It might be possible to locate elements of the screen on the rear wall of the chapel and below the window. the advantage would be to retain elements of the screen in the context of the Victorian reordering yet provide the benefits set out in Option 1 above.



*Right: Lazarus window in the south chapel*

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<sup>8</sup> ST Michael's and All Angels, Highworth – Judgement, Consistory Court of the Diocese of Bristol, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2016

- **The north parclose screen:** place the upper part of the screen on top of the north screen by the organ. The screen design for the front and side screens are the same. In moving the top section of the screen to above the north screen would retain the workmanship of the upper screen itself. The remainder of the front screen could be removed as the examples of workmanship are retained in the side screens. Some of the lower screen panels could remain in place or used to the rear of the side chapel. The advantage would be to retain elements of the screen in the context of the Victorian reordering yet provide the benefits set out in Option 1 above.



*Right: Upper section of choir screen above the north parclose screen*

- **In the north aisle in front of the organ:** the north side arch is narrower than the south side and only a couple of panels could be placed here. The organist needs to access the organ. Maintenance of the organ also requires access. This is not a feasible option.
  - **Move the screen further into the sanctuary:** this does not meet the liturgical case presented in the Statement of Need and would still obscure the east window.
32. One feasible option is to place elements of the choir screen to the rear of the south chapel and behind the altar to form a reredos. We shall be pleased to discuss this option with the DAC.

## Summary

33. We have demonstrated that there is a clear need to relocate the screen which outweigh the historical significance of the screen. In considering the removal of the screen, we ask the DAC to take full recognition of the fact that:
- The screens were not envisioned as part of the 1882 re-ordering, by Waller. They were a later addition, designed as a memorial to one parishioner.
  - The screens were not considered of sufficient significance to be included in the HER record for the Grade 1 listing of the church.
  - There is local precedent for the relocation of a choir screen elsewhere within the church (see section 17, regarding St. Michael's, Highworth).
  - The screen has been considered independently, and before any re-ordering was considered by the church or PCC, by Simon Jenkins as detrimental to the architecture of the building as a whole; he notes that it 'obstructs the view of the East Window.'

- Removing the screen returns the eastward aspect of the church to its original design, which is how it has been experienced for most of the life of the building, including by worshippers and visitors in the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, and most of the nineteenth century.

In contrast, by removing the screen we **enhance** the building:

- **Visually** by opening up the eastward aspect of the church and allowing a better appreciation of the glories of the fifteenth-century building.
  - **Aurally** by creating a more flexible space for the choir, allowing them to be better seen and heard, and giving more room for a larger choir at special services and concerts.
  - **Liturgically** by integrating the whole space of the church into one, in line with our inclusive understanding of the grace of God (which also drives our wider proposals to make the church building accessible to all).
  - **Missionally** by increasing the flexibility of the space inside the church, and allowing it to accommodate a variety of outreach events, in line with the Church of England's stated aims for witness and mission.
  - **For worship** by making it possible for us to install fit-for-purpose AV equipment (including a projector screen) that reflects the need for a congregation in the twenty-first century to use the full range of God-given means of communication in weekly worship.
34. We have responded positively to the Church Building Council suggestions and limited the extent of reordering in the chancel to the relocation of the choir screen. In mitigation and to recognise it as an example of 19<sup>th</sup> century workmanship, we propose to retain the central screen and relocate this to the rear of the gallery at the west end. This was where the original organ was located. There is precedent for this relocation at the nearby St Michael's church, Highworth which we explain above.
35. We have looked at other options to locate the screen within the church; all except one have their disadvantages. The one possibility is to locate a shortened screen against the wall to the rear of the south chapel, acting as a form of reredos; we would be pleased to discuss this further.

### **A comment from our independent reviewer**

*It is hard to know what motivated the people who placed a screen, where one had never been before. It might be justified to suppose that the theological/liturgical influence of the 'High-Church' Oxford Movement, which had already been seen in the neighbouring Parish of Fairford and other surrounding Parishes also arrived at Lechlade.*

*For the Oxford Movement the most sacred part of the church was undoubtedly the sanctuary, where, according to high church doctrine, the sacrifice of the mass was offered up to God on behalf of the congregation.*

*At the time of the Reformation, the English reformers, according to their own doctrinal interpretation of the Lord's Supper, removed all the altars and substituted in their place, wooden tables. This was to signify that the minister was not a priest ordained to offer a sacrifice (connected to an altar), but a presiding presbyter who led the people in the communion meal which followed Jesus' last meal with his disciples before his crucifixion. In other words, the emphasis was on Jesus' gracious gift in*

*inviting and hosting (through the minister) his people to enjoy the gift of life, represented by the bread, and the benefits of his shed blood. That is why in recent years Holy Communion has been, almost universally in the C of E, celebrated from behind the table, with the celebrant facing the people of God, rather than from in-front with the back to the rest of the communicants.*

*In this sense there was no part of the church building that could be deemed more holy than any other. The choir screen partitioned off one part of the church as though it were a place of more veneration than any other.*

*If this hypothesis has any merit, then it would be interesting to know whether the place of administering the sacrament, before the screen was erected, was a wooden table or a stone altar. I am not sure whether any existing photo of that time could answer that question.<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> Rev Dr Andrew Kirk