

St Simon Zelotes Church, Upper Chelsea

Statement of Significance

Site: St Simon Zelotes, 34 Milner Street, London, SW3 2QE
Parish: St Simon Zelotes, Upper Chelsea
Archdeanery: Middlesex
Diocese: London
Local Authority: Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Listing: Grade II*
Conservation Area: Chelsea Conservation Area
Quinquennial Inspector: Charles Sheppard SCA
Date of last QI: 2023

Proposed Project: Restoration of the Organ
Date of submission to DAC: 31 January 2025



The organ – located at the corner of the East end of the South transept and the Sanctuary



View of church interior East from the Nave



View of West exterior elevation

1. The Church

1.1. Description of the building

Church

St Simon Zelotes was constructed in 1858-59 to the designs of Joseph Peacock in a distinctive High Victorian Gothic style. Situated at the corner of Milner Street and Moore Street in Upper Chelsea, the Church was built as a chapel of ease for the fast-expanding population of mid-nineteenth century Chelsea. At a reported cost of £5,250, St Simon's design attracted comment from the acclaimed poet and Victorian architecture 'defender' John Betjeman:

The Architect has been at such pains to be original and arresting that I doubt whether there is any church interior in London quite so wild and surprising as St. Simon's. Now that its outside has been cleaned it shows up as it should do by contrast with the solid, souring Flemish Renaissance and red brick of Lennox Gardens.'

The dramatic west elevation on Moore Street comprises a small gabled porch at ground level, a recessed multi-light west window, with angled buttresses to either side, and a substantial bellcote at the gable apex that rises well above the Nave roof behind. The west walls of the Aisles are set back from the central composition, emphasising the verticality of the central part of the composition.

This expression continues internally, with a steep-pitched roof to the Nave rising above clerestory windows, and much lower mono-pitched roofs to the adjacent Aisles. An extant Gallery at the west end of the Nave and Aisles formed part of the original building and was accessed via a narrow staircase embedded in the west wall.

The central part of the Church, to the east of the Nave and Aisles, comprises three parallel dual-pitch roofs, which accommodate a central Crossing-type space, flanked by Transept-like spaces to the north and south. Spatially, the Crossing functions as a continuation of the Nave; while the Transepts continue and slightly broaden the Aisles, but with elevated ceilings. A Lady Chapel is accommodated within the North Transept. **The Pipe Organ, the subject of this renovation proposal, fills a substantial part of the east end of the South Transept.**

Beyond the Crossing, there is a central Chancel, with a five-light east window by Lavers & Barraud. A door in the south wall of the Chancel provides access to a small Vestry, from which another door now opens into the adjacent Hall.

Spiral staircases located to the north and south side of the Chancel formerly provided access to Transept galleries, but these were removed in 1896. The staircase on the north is now largely redundant. The staircase on the southside of the chancel is used for access to the organ interior.

In addition to the west entrance, there is another porch to the north of the building, which provides public access to the west end of the Aisle from Milner Street; and a small

door in the east end of the North Transept opens into a passageway to the east of the building.

The external walls of the Church are mostly constructed in Kentish Rag stone, with Bath stone dressings, contrasting markedly with the Classical frontages of surrounding residential buildings. The roofs are finished in clay tiles, with lead flashings and cast-iron rainwater goods.

Residential buildings obscure most of the church's east and south elevations, while the north and west elevations provide distinctive frontages to Milner Street and Moore Street respectively.

Internally, the walls have exposed yellow, red, and blue bricks, arranged in bands and other simple geometric patterns. Bath stone dressings are used for arches, door and window surrounds, and other details; with marble used for the arcade column shafts around the Crossing and Transepts.

While the overall architectural composition of St Simon's has remained largely unaltered since construction of the building in the mid-nineteenth century, various internal modifications have been made over the years to accommodate the changing needs of worship and community use.

This includes removal of the Transept galleries in the late nineteenth century, as referred to above; as well as more recent additions, including the construction of glazed draught lobbies to the north and west doors, and upgrading of lighting and audio-visual equipment.

Over the past decade, various improvements have been made to the interior. These include the following projects:

1. Removal of pews from the South Aisle and provision of tea-making facilities.
2. Opening up of the South Transept to create a music space.
3. Removal of the dais and fixed pews from the Lady Chapel to accommodate groups.
4. Removal of pews from the east end of the Crossing for liturgy and performances.
5. New accessible WC and internal access to the Gallery.

In addition, the following repair works were completed in 2022:

6. Repairs following fire damage to the west end, including localised upgrading of lighting and electrics.

1.2 Churchyard

There is no churchyard at St Simon Zelotes.

1.3 Heritage Significance of the building

St Simon's is a Grade II* listed church of the mid-Victorian period, located in Chelsea Conservation Area. The Heritage Listing states that the building's significance relates to its striking architectural design:

“a striking and distinctive composition, it is the most complete surviving work by the High Victorian ‘rogue’ architect Joseph Peacock, which illustrates his very singular application of Gothic forms and motifs; craftsmanship: in the skilfully executed stone carving and restrained and elegant use of polychromy. The Lavers and Barraud east window, set within an intricately carved frame, the distinctive font, and good 1920s oak sanctuary fittings, are of particular note.”

Edmund Harris, author of *The Rogue Goths: R L Roumieu, Joseph Peacock and Bassett Keeling* has described St Simon's as ‘one of the most original churches of its date anywhere.’

1.4. Social and Missional Significance of the building

The church building today is:

- **A place of Sunday worship:** c. 105 adults and c. 22 children worship at St Simon's on a regular Sunday. Most of these adults, and almost all the children, attend the morning service at which the organ is always played.
- **A place of mission opportunities:** baptism services, Christmas Carols, Remembrance Day services and other special services draw irregular and non-churchgoers.
- **A place for regular, weekly school worship:** c.180 boys and 15 staff of Sussex House school attend a regular Friday act of worship at St Simon Zelotes.
- **A place for Christian fellowship and community:** The church building is used on Sunday mornings and evenings for times of conversation over tea and coffee. Every other Tuesday the building is used by a Bible Study group which meets to read Scripture, apply it to life, and pray. At least once a term, the church building is used to host suppers for 70+ church members and their guests.
- **A place for expressing Christian love of neighbour:** The church building is used most Wednesday evenings to host free English classes the church family puts on for 20-40 attendees of varying nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds whose first language is not English.
- **A place of meeting that serves the wider community:** Other than a café based in a building on one of two local housing estates, the parish has no other natural community space. The church is used to host resident association meetings and AGMs, book launches, and special music concerts. During the Queen's Jubilee and

the King's Coronation celebrations, the church was used for cake judging competitions and as a point of focus for activities attended by hundreds.

- **A place for those needing moments of quiet reflection:** the church building is open every day from 8am to 6pm (5pm in the Winter months). Many tourists and local people spend time in the church to pray, reflect or simply be still in a haven of peace in the midst of busy urban life.
- **A place for learning to play the organ:** Sussex House school hold organ lessons in the church, using the church organ, every Monday. This introduces children, who would otherwise have no contact with the instrument, to the organ and its music.

2. The area affected by the proposed organ restoration project

2.1. Areas affected directly

The Pipe Organ: This is located at the east end of the south transept, parallel with the Chancel area. Some pipes are located on the south side of the Sanctuary, overlooking the Lord's Table/Altar.

2.2. Areas affected indirectly:

No area is affected by the project once the work is completed.

The East Side of the South Transept will be temporarily impacted by the simple scaffolding platform with hoist placed in front of the organ for the duration of the project. This will either be present for several days in and leading up to the project's first week, as well as the project's last two weeks, (Option A – see Schedule of Works) or present for the two-month duration of the project (Option B – see Schedule of Works).

2.3. The significance of the area directly affected: The Pipe Organ

The current organ was rebuilt and electrified by JW Walker & Sons in 1994. It was originally installed in 1925, replacing an even earlier organ that dated back to 1859 (with additions and alterations made in 1883). We believe that the current winding system also dates from 1994. The organ is therefore not an essential element of the building's original High Victorian Gothic style, though its exterior is in keeping with it.

However, the organ is significant because of its importance to the worshipping life of the church of St Simon's. St Simon's principal service is the Sunday 10am choral BCP service (Morning Prayer or Holy Communion) and the organ always accompanies music at this service. The organ is also used for the weekly Friday service for Sussex House school.

2.4. The significance of the area indirectly affected temporarily by the proposal: the South Transept.

The South Transept forms an integral part of the Church's Gothic design, incorporating the bold polychrome brickwork that is found throughout the interior; a tall lancet window in the south elevation; and the pipe organ at the east end.

The South Transept, however, is unusual in that it has been given less prominence in the overall architectural design than other parts of the building. Internally, it is a functional space, having only a single lancet window with a clear leaded glass in a simple geometric pattern.

While the South Transept therefore has an important functional purpose, particularly in relation to the organ, it is not prominent in the overall architectural composition.

2.5. Impact on the area directly affected: The Pipe Organ

The functional impact on the organ is 'high' and positive, however the aesthetic or heritage/architectural impact on the organ is 'low' and negligible. No change of note is being made to the external appearance of the organ (other than an additional draw stop and a re-engraved draw stop). Internal parts being replaced date back to 1994 rather than the earlier 1925 instrument. The Bassoon 16' is being returned to its earlier 8' pitch. Pipes last cleaned in 1994 are being cleaned.

2.6. Impact on the area indirectly affected temporarily: The South Transept

The impact on the South Transept is negligible and temporary. The simple scaffolding with hoist put in front of the organ will be up for a matter of weeks (under either Option A or B outlined in the Schedule of Works). This scaffolding will not impact any feature of the South Transept beyond obscuring a view of the organ exterior for the duration of the period it is in place, and when the organ pipes will in any case be absent. The scaffolding will not impact functionality as it will only prevent access to the organ, which will not be in use during the restoration work.

Sources consulted and used:

Nicholson & Co April 2023 Report

Mander Organ Builder July 2023 Report (not actioned by the PCC, see Statement of Needs)

Previous Statement of Significance Submission from February 2024 for a separate project

Appendix 2: Historic England Listing for the Church of St Simon Zelotes

Official list entry

Heritage Category:

Listed Building

Grade:

II*

List Entry Number:

1266245

Date first listed:

24-Jun-1954

Date of most recent amendment:

12-Jan-2015

List Entry Name:

Church of St Simon Zelotes

Statutory Address 1:

Church of St Simon Zelotes, Moore Street, Chelsea, London

Location

Statutory Address:

Church of St Simon Zelotes, Moore Street, Chelsea, London

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

County:

Greater London Authority

District:

Kensington and Chelsea (London Borough)

Parish:

Non Civil Parish

National Grid Reference:

TQ2767678899

Summary

Anglican church built 1858-9 to the design of Joseph Peacock. Built by White of Pimlico.

Sculpture by John Lewis Jacquet.

Reasons for Designation

The Church of St Simon Zelotes is listed at Grade II* for the following principal reasons:

* Architectural interest: a striking and distinctive composition, it is the most complete surviving work by the High Victorian 'rogue' architect Joseph Peacock, which illustrates his very singular application of Gothic forms and motifs; * Craftsmanship: in the skilfully executed stone carving and restrained and elegant use of polychromy. The Lavers & Barraud east window, set within an intricately carved frame, the distinctive font, and good 1920s oak sanctuary fittings, are of particular note.

History

The development of eastern or Upper Chelsea as a residential suburb was well advanced by the mid-C19, necessitating the creation of chapels-of-ease to supplement

the parish church of Chelsea, and in turn several new parishes with their respective churches. The parish church of St Simon was built at the initiative of Henry Virtue Tebbs and John Martin as 'one among other similar means of appropriating a munificent legacy bequeathed to them by William Coles, a much respected inhabitant of Chelsea', as commemorated by a wall table inside the church. The Builder (20 August 1859) reported that the money was raised 'through the exertions of the Rev'd R. Burgess, rector of Upper Chelsea' and that the first incumbent was the Rev'd Scott Moncrieff. The foundation stone was laid on 8 June 1858, and the church was consecrated on 21 March 1859. The total cost was £5,250. The dedication had changed to St Simon Zelotes (the Zealot) by 1881.

The architect was Joseph Peacock (1821-1893), whose early church work, characterised by singular, often wilful, deployment of Gothic motifs and angular forms, led the architect-historian HS Goodhart-Rendel to number him amongst the 'rogue architects' of High Victorian Gothic who departed from the strict academic medievalism promoted by the Ecclesiological Society, and by so doing gained considerable opprobrium from that body.

Details

Anglican church built 1858-9 to the design of Joseph Peacock. Built by White of Pimlico. Sculpture by John Lewis Jacquet.

MATERIALS: Kentish ragstone laid in random pattern; Bath stone dressings; clay tile roofs.

PLAN: five-bay nave with a half-bay incorporating a western gallery; north and south aisles; a shallow chancel; a north-east vestry and an organ chamber above. The plan is quasi-cruciform, in that the two eastern aisle bays (originally containing galleries, removed in 1896) broaden out slightly, and are taller than the aisles proper, forming, with the corresponding nave bays, a transept-and-crossing-like arrangement that is functionally a continuation of the nave and aisles. Within the re-entrant angle of the chancel and north transept is an octagonal stair turret that served the north gallery. A corresponding larger turret on the south side contains the vestry, organ chamber and south gallery stair. A spiral stair serving the west gallery, built into the thickness of the nave's south-west corner, is entered via a doorway between the aisle and angle buttress.

EXTERIOR: designed in a distinctive Geometric Gothic style. Steep pitched roofs aligned east-west, the 'crossing' roof is slightly lower than that of the main nave; those of the 'transepts' and chancel are in turn slightly lower; pentice roofs to aisles. A heavy double string-course at lower level continues around the entire building. The west elevation is framed by over-scaled offset angle buttresses and surmounted by a similarly over-scaled bellcote with paired pointed bell openings and a vesica piscis. The shallow gabled porch has a trefoil-arched entrance on slender shafts; to either side of the porch are angular lancet windows. The west window is set within a large recessed blind arch whose mouldings 'die' into the jambs; the interior is carved with surface diaper ornament. The trefoil-headed window consists of paired two-light windows with hood moulds and carved stops, separated by a stepped buttress with an empty canopied niche; the head is inset with a rose window. A close precedent to this arrangement is seen at William Butterfield's St Matthias, Stoke Newington (1851). The clerestory

windows are in the form of barbed trefoils, a recurrent motif; below the eaves is a band of dog-tooth mouldings. The aisles have paired and single lancet-arch windows with trefoil traceried lights, hoodmoulds and carved stops, and a frieze of diaper ornament below the eaves. The north porch, framed by buttresses, has a pointed arched entrance on ring-moulded shafts and a steep gable breaking through the eaves. At the head of the left-hand buttress is a carved beast; other beasts occur at eaves level around the building. The transepts, which outwardly resemble chapels, have sheer north and south walls pierced by three very narrow lancets, and traceried windows on the east and west faces. The five-light east window is outwardly of rectangular form, with a separated triangular light marking the apex of the blind arch on the inner face. Original planked doors with iron strap-hinges to the entrances, except the west porch, which is modern. Attached to the end of the north chancel wall is a low wall and gabled entrance with wrought-iron gate and railings, providing access to the north and south galleries and vestry. INTERIOR: the walls are faced in polychromatic brickwork: white Suffolk brick with contrasting red and black brick banding, forming crenellated patterns around the arches, and a cruciform pattern in the chancel. The interior is described from west to east:

The west gallery has a close-boarded front with a crenellated parapet. The distinctive stone font, of pronounced barbed trefoil plan, is carved with a diaper-pattern, foliage and dog-tooth ornament, carried on a shaft inset with black marble columns. The nave arcade capitals have dog-tooth moulding, and the arches hood moulds with carved stops. The clerestory windows are set in four-centred arches with deep embrasures, with geometric pattern stained glass. The aisle floor is set with red and black quarry tiles in a chequer pattern. The nave roof is of arch-brace construction with scissor-bracing passing through the collars, intersecting curved wind-braces, carried on slender shafts with foliate corbels. The five western bays are separated from the two-bay 'crossing' by a large arch on compound piers with angel corbels; and the corresponding aisles from the 'transepts' by paired asymmetrical triangular arches on a marble shaft; the taller inner arch is stilted on one side. The transept arcades are given greater embellishment than the preceding bays, with a large quatrefoil pierced in the spandrel, a central marble-clad pier, and capitals of naturalistic foliage and lilies. The roof of this area is of collar and rafter construction, also with curved wind braces, carried on carved foliate corbels. On the north wall is an WWI war memorial consisting of a paper Roll of Honour in a glazed oak frame with a coved cornice and brattishing; the lower frame added to commemorate the Fallen of WWII. Pine benches have been removed from the west end of the nave, but otherwise survive intact; these have chamfered ends and brass umbrella guards and drip trays. Choir benches in the easternmost bay may be contemporary with the refitted sanctuary (it is unclear whether a choir area figured in Peacock's original plan). The octagonal stone pulpit, accessed from the chancel by a stone stair in a trefoil arch, has black marble nook-shafts to the angles; the faces are carved with elongated trefoil panels inset with the symbols of the four Evangelists and the sacred monogram. To the right of the chancel arch is a stone tablet carved with a trefoil arch within a mandorla commemorating the trustees and benefactor. Inset high up within the angle of the chancel and south wall is an aperture in the form of a niche with a gabled and crocketed head, lighting the south gallery stair. The chancel arch is carried on clustered shafts with ring moulds.

The chancel has a canted wagon roof. The oak sanctuary fittings, installed in the 1920s,

form an integral scheme of altar, reredos, wall panelling, fixed seats and communion rails, intricately carved with openwork and blind tracery in flowing Gothic style, brattishing and foliate banding. The frieze to either side of the altar is carved 'FOR AS OFTEN AS YE EAT THIS BREAD AND DRINK THIS CUP YE DO SHEW THE LORD'S DEATH TILL HE COME (1 Corinthians; 11.26). The floor has red quarry tiles inset with encaustic tiles. The doorway to the vestry and stair on the south side has a shouldered arch. The oak organ case, which is set within a tall four-centred arch, has a central projecting canopied pipe tower bearing the figure of an angel, and openwork traceried carving, resting on a stone balcony with an openwork quatrefoil parapet and cul-de-lampe. The organ itself was replaced in 1994.

The east window arch is of three moulded orders and consists of five lights with trefoil traceried heads and slender black marble shafts; the upper section is blind with intersecting tracery, the interstices intricately carved with foliage ornament. Stained glass by Lavers & Barraud depicting the life of Christ in nine subjects.

Modern kitchen fittings, internal porches and floor surfacing at the west end of the church are not of special interest.*

* Pursuant to s.1 (5A) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act') it is declared that these aforementioned features are not of special architectural or historic interest.

This List entry has been amended to add sources for War Memorials Online and the War Memorials Register. These sources were not used in the compilation of this List entry but are added here as a guide for further reading, 30 October 2017.

Legacy

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System number:
422089

Legacy System:
LBS

Sources

Books and journals

The Victoria History of the County of Middlesex: Volume XII, (2004), 250-258
Pevsner, N, Cherry, B, The Buildings of England: London 3 North West, (1991), 560-61
Stamp, , Amery, , Victorian Buildings of London 1837-1887 An Illustrated Guide, (1982), 54-55

Websites

War Memorials Online, accessed 30 October 2017
from <https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/196076>
War Memorials Online, accessed 30 October 2017

from <https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/196072>

War Memorials Register, accessed 30 October 2017

from <http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/12170>

War Memorials Register, accessed 30 October 2017

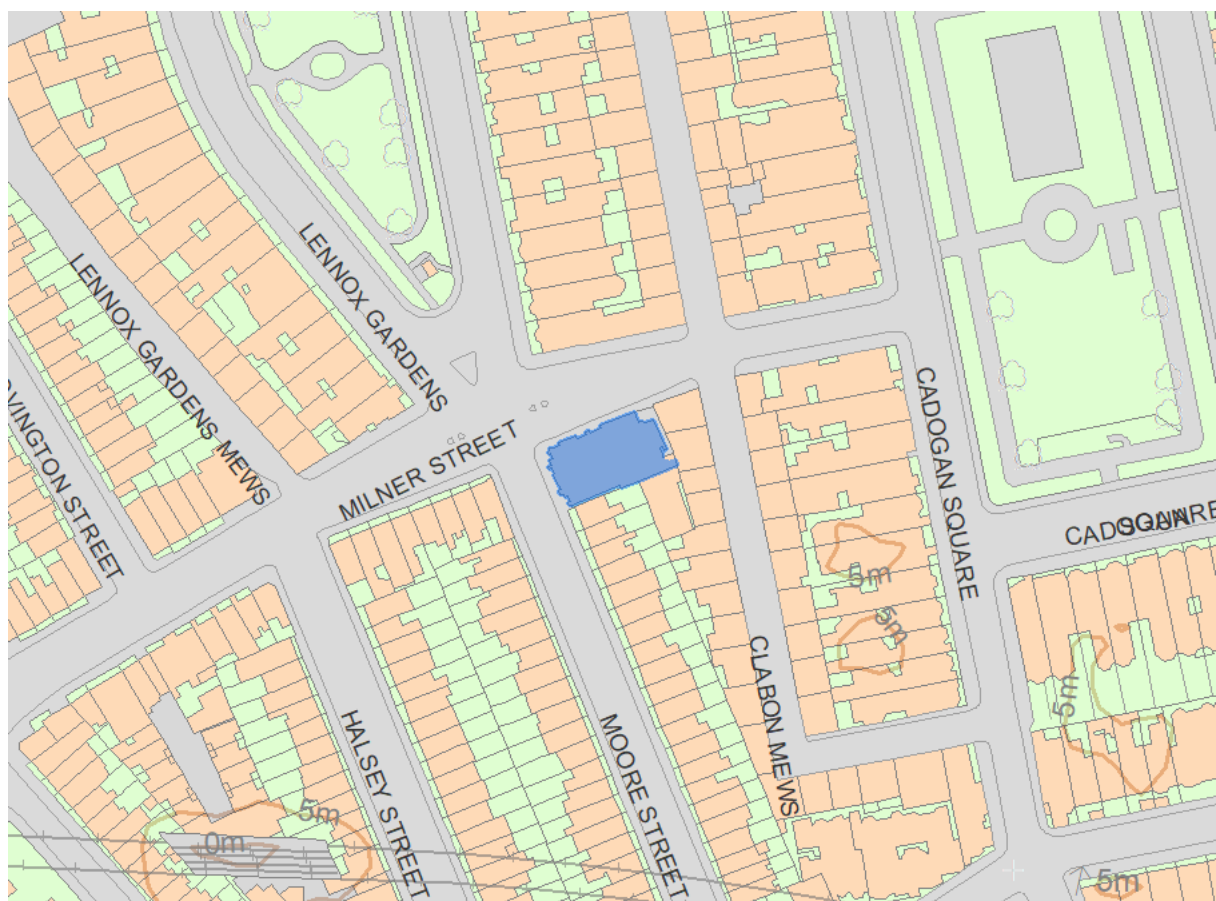
from <http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/47533>

Legal

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Map

This map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. This copy shows the entry on 30-Jan-2025 at 01:31:54.



End of official list entry