

Holy Trinity Smethwick

Section 1: Brief history and description of the church building, contents, churchyard and setting

Holy Trinity Church in Smethwick proudly bears witness to the history of the area, from the exterior blackened by the soot of heavy industry to the family vaults of the great and the good in the crypt. Its windows are testimony to the artistry of Smethwick stained glass, to the early patronage of the church, to the damage caused by bombing in the Second World War and, through glass lovingly imported from the four other Smethwick churches that came together to form the Parish of the Resurrection, to the changing demographics of the area.

Built in 1838, Holy Trinity was Smethwick's first Parish Church. Originally designated as the parish of North Harborne, the church had "a neat cruciform structure in the lancet Gothic style, with a lofty spire" and stood, as the church still does "on an eminence in the northern part of Smethwick"¹ which was the more prosperous part of the town. With the growing size and importance of the town through the 19th Century, the original church was considered too small and, apart from the tower and spire, was rebuilt in 1887-89 to the design of Francis Bacon of Newbury ². The new design, incorporating much of the Tixall stone of the original church, provided a chancel with north vestry, nave with aisles under separate roofs, and south porch. It was identified as the civic church for the Borough of Smethwick, before the town was incorporated first into Warley and then into the Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell.

The church is set in a prominent position on a rise at one end of the High Street. The surrounding church yard remains an important green space of lawns and mature trees. The remaining grave stones in the churchyard have largely been laid flat. A lichgate was erected on Church Hill Street in 1914 by 'The Brotherhood', a men's group who had, the previous year, erected an outside alter in the angle between the chancel and the south aisle for their outside services. Although of limited intrinsic architectural value, the church's position and scale make it a valuable part of the townscape.

The exterior of the church remains largely unchanged since 1889, other than the dormer windows added to the nave in 1934. However, this belies the major reordering of the interior over the subsequent years. What was once a single space (other than the north vestry) has been divided to provide a narthex, the Lady Chapel, the church hall, a parish office / vestry, kitchen and toilets, as well as a small suite of offices for rental. This leaves a nave, chancel and sanctuary as our main worship space, which comfortably accommodates our regular Sunday congregation and can seat up to 250 people. The overall arrangement provides well heated spaces suitable for different types of use by the church and others well beyond Sunday morning worship.

¹ History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire, William White, Sheffield, 1851 cited at <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/STS/Smethwick/HolyTrinity> accessed 10/09/18

² <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol17/pp123-129> accessed 10/09/18