

The Church of St Paul, Bedford

Provision of High Mass sets in green and purple

Statement of Significance

Part I

St Paul's, Bedford is the largest church in the diocese after the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban. St Paul's is a Grade I listed building (the National Heritage List for England) and is designated by the Church Buildings Council as a Major Parish Church and is a member of the Major Churches Network (formerly the Greater Churches Network).

Most of the church fabric dates from the 14th and 15th centuries; the transepts, crossing, spire and north nave aisle being added in the 19th century, when the north wall and porch were moved and rebuilt further out. The chancel or quire was also remodelled at this time, including the introduction of a notable screen by Bodley and altar rails and furnishings by the Bromsgrove Guild.

St Paul's is the Civic Church of the Borough and County of Bedfordshire, set centrally within St Paul's Square, itself within a conservation area in the heart of the town. The church also contains the Mayoral and civic stalls of the borough. Its iconic spire and setting by the River Great Ouse provide the classic view of Bedford.

St Paul's is of significant historical importance, both locally and nationally. John Wesley preached his "Great Assize" sermon here in 1758. St Paul's became the BBC church during the Second World War. The daily service was broadcast from the Trinity Chapel between 1941-5, and the Archbishops of Canterbury and York came to St Paul's to broadcast to the nation and world in a service for the National Day of Prayer in 1941.

While first and foremost a parish church, St Paul's evidentially exercises a substantial extra-parochial ministry to the town, borough and county as well as to the diocese. St Paul's usually hosts the Annual Justice Service for Bedfordshire; services of national commemoration and celebrations as requested by HM Lord Lieutenant for the County and by the elected Mayor for the Borough; as well as services for a variety of schools and voluntary organisations, both within the county and also for the wider East of England region. It is also the church of the Bedfordshire Regiment. St Paul's is also a major venue for diocesan services: in recent years hosting the inauguration service for the Bishop of Bedford in 2012, and the farewell Solemn Choral Evensong for the Archdeacon of Bedford in January 2019.

St Paul's offers a cathedral style liturgy in the modern Anglo-Catholic tradition, through its regular services of Choral Eucharist and Choral Evensong and the regular Sunday Eucharist. The dignified liturgy, in the 'modern catholic tradition', is enhanced with fine vestments and incense, and also a semi-professional choir and professional Director of Music who play a central role in the worship offered at St Paul's. This liturgical and musical tradition is much valued by very many people who attend, either as regular worshippers from the town and beyond, or as visitors to occasional and special services.

St Paul's is already a member of *Cathedral Plus*, became a member of the *Major Churches Network* in May 2019 (the successor of the *Greater Churches Network*), in recognition of the church's size,

and diocesan and national significance within the Church of England and the role it plays within the county and Eastern Region.

Part II

On entering the church, the eye is drawn first to the nave altar on a broad dais with attractive black and white chequered flooring before the fine Bodley screen with its rood, the screen decorated in hues of green, orange and gold. The church's liturgical activity takes place here on most Sundays. The eye is then carried by the black and white chequer patterned floor through the screen and chancel or quire to the High Altar at the far east of the building, which is the visual and liturgical climax of the church. Both the nave altar and the high altar are the foci for Eucharist worship which, on major festivals and celebrations, is celebrated as a choral 'High Mass', i.e. with three ministers: celebrant, deacon and sub-deacon. The crucifer is often arrayed in a suitable tunic over the customary alb. The large Trinity Chapel to the south of the chancel or quire is used for weekdays celebrations of the Eucharist.

When vestments are available, the vesture permitted by canon law is worn: chasuble, dalmatic and tunic. With permission from the DAC and by Archdeacon's Letter, the church recently acquired a gold set in traditional damask, to replace the white festal set which had previously been damaged. A red set has been borrowed when needed. However, sets in the liturgical colours of green and purple are not presently available.

It is accordingly proposed to commission two further sets in traditional design in classic damask: one set in green for Ordinary Time, and one set in Purple for the Advent and Lent seasons. The fabrics have been chosen carefully and sympathetically with the architecture and decoration of the church in mind: in the case of the green set to pick up on the greens, golds and orange hues of the Bodley screen, and the in the case of the purple set to pick up on the Sarum blues of the Advent and Lent altar frontal in the Trinity Chapel. The impact of vestments of beauty upon the building and the liturgy is viewed as most positive, and consonant with the styles and ambience of the existing architecture and fittings.