

Ely Cathedral

A new altar



Luke Hughes

Furniture in Architecture



External view of Ely Cathedral



Internal view of Ely Cathedral (photos: Richard Dunham)



Octagon woodwork constructed in the 1330s

Ely, with its robust Romanesque nave and astonishing 14th-century Octagon, is one of the jewels of European architecture.

In November 2016, the Luke Hughes team was appointed by the Dean and Chapter of Ely Cathedral to develop designs for a new altar together with a range of choir and clergy furniture. These were to replace an earlier assortment, originally installed in the 1960s by George Pace (with additions to the choir by his assistant, Ronald Sims).

The project was funded by a generous legacy from former Bishop Peter Walker and his late wife, Jean, alongside a substantial donation from the Friends of Ely Cathedral.

The project has been another perfect expression of one of the main tenets of the Luke Hughes design philosophy, that in any quality building the connection between the architecture and the furniture should be seamless.

A major part of the brief was to resolve the logistical handling so that the whole ensemble can be easily removed and stored, in the shortest possible time and using minimum manpower.



Detail of the colours and modelling in the lantern



Romanesque stonework in the Nave

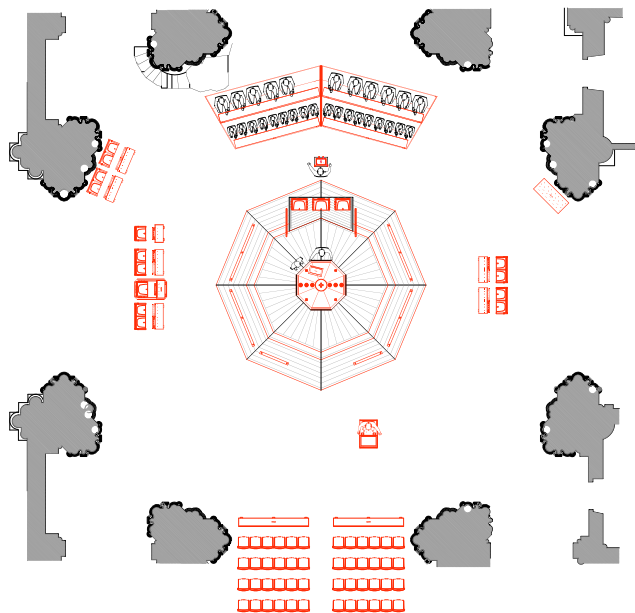
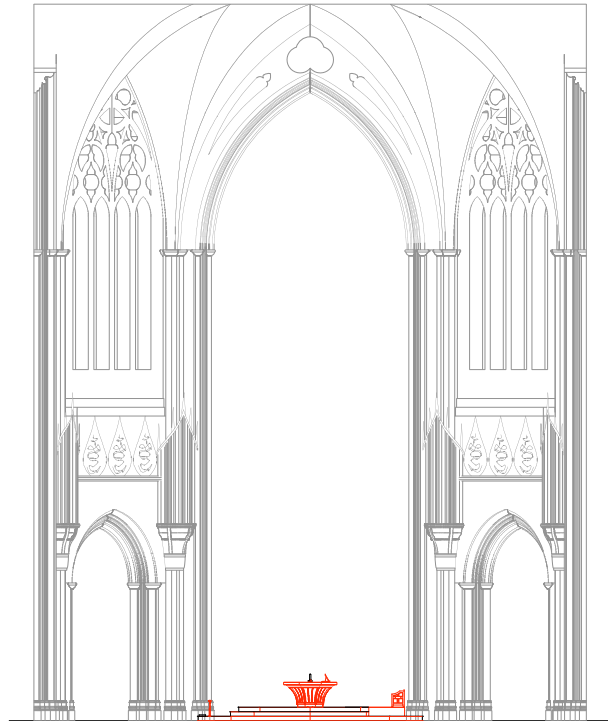
Before

Amongst the design criteria were the desire to rationalise the chequer-board 19th marble paving layout with the liturgical expression of the furniture; to distribute the mobile choir stalls so they can be readily moved away from nave screen when not in use; and to enable both altar dais and choir stalls to be rolled away and stored in the North Transept leaving the internal landscape uncluttered.

Below: view showing previous furniture (photo: Michael D Beckwith)

Opposite: previous furniture arrangements



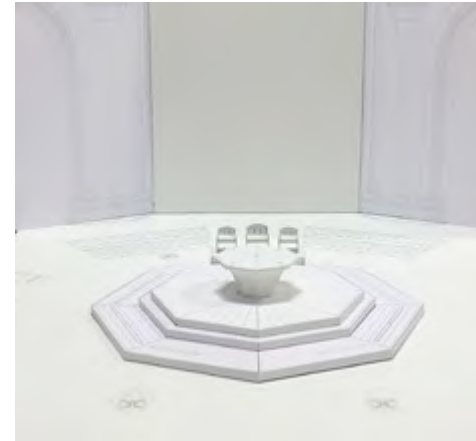


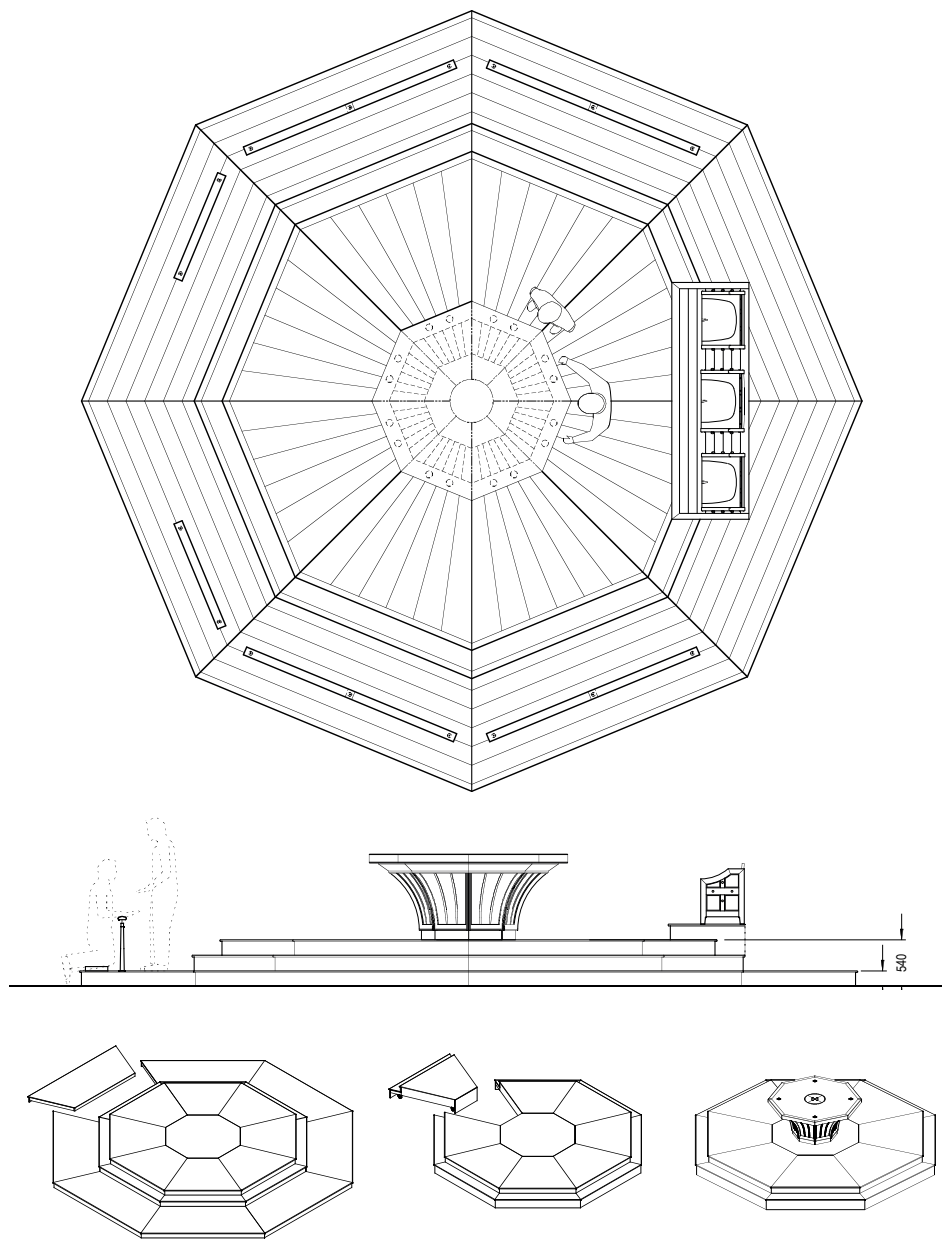
Initial proposals (November 2016)

Development of altar

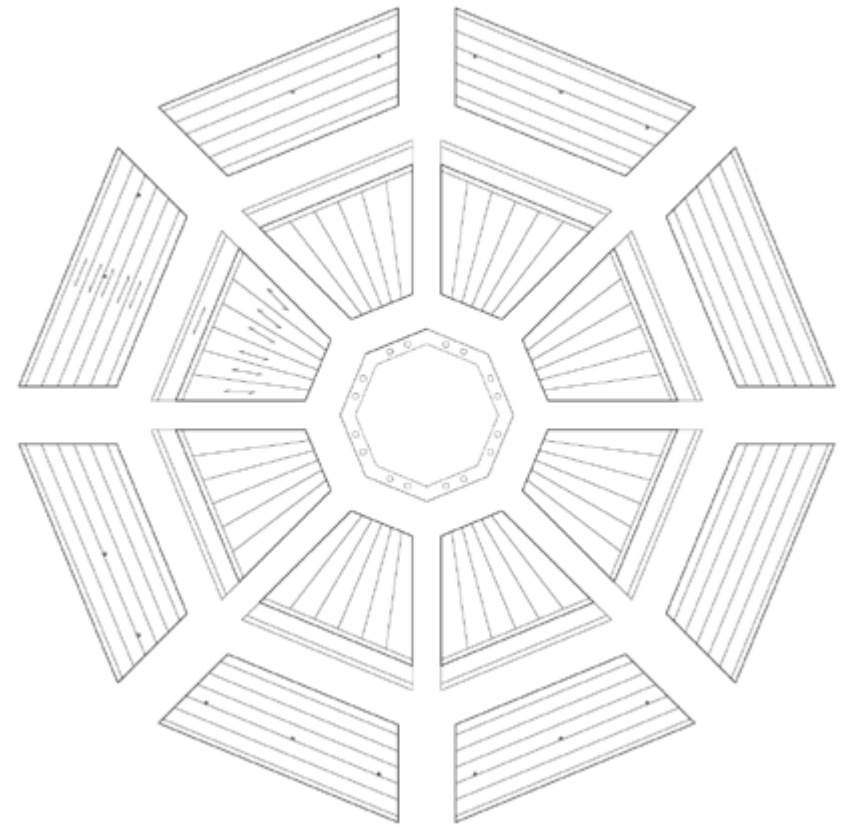
One of the problems of working in this particular cathedral interior is the sheer scale of Ely, not just from the length of its nave but also from the size of the arches supporting the Octagon.

Sight-lines and area circulation were finely tuned using a combination of models, mock-ups and regular review with the clergy and vergers.

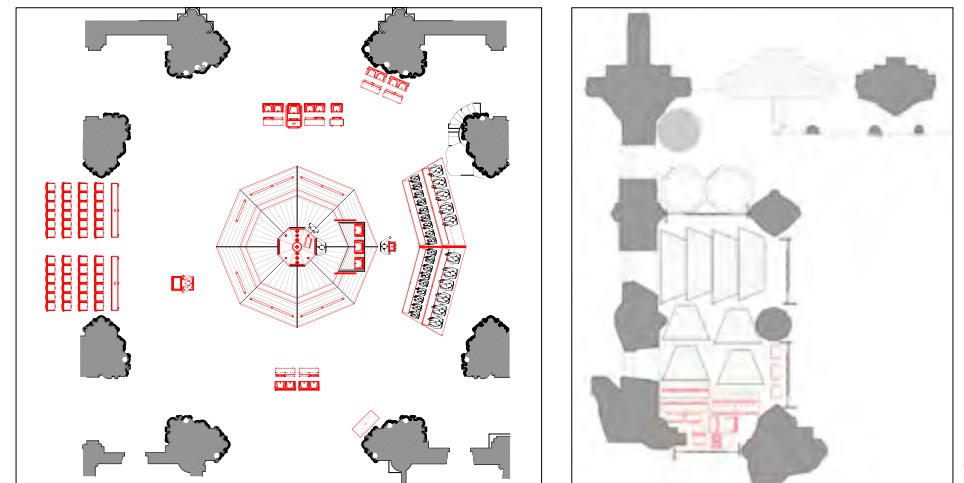




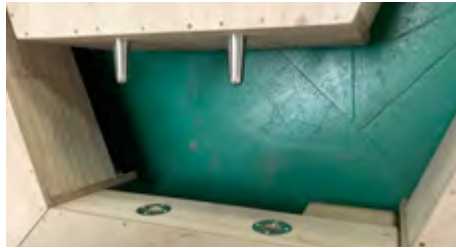
The design of the *predella* (or altar dais) incorporates a series of interlocking mobile sections which can be manoeuvred by the vergers using looped steel pull-handles. All these sections and the choir's stalls were designed to be shunted between the Romanesque columns of the North Transept.



Mobile sections stored in the North transept



The prototype of the sections of the *predella* was built from plywood, and much attention was paid to the quality of the castors to ensure they moved easily. This was then trialled in the cathedral, both for assessing the scale and ease of use. It was also an opportunity to invite comments from the Fabric Advisory Committee and the Cathedrals Fabric Commission before the final decorative details were developed.



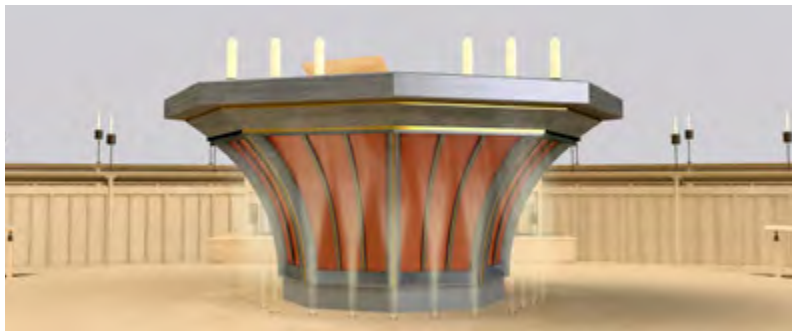
The dias and altar mock-up at Ely Cathedral



Colour

The detailed designs of the altar evolved after the review process, with a series of investigations of different materials, colour and decoration – all with the view to being as readable not only for its liturgical purpose at the very far end of the Nave but also as close up around the steps of the *predella*.

A colour scheme evolved that reflected some of the stone colours in the paving and monuments around the building and the gilded ribs of the ceiling structure. The carved details around the top of the altar were an abstracted representation of eels, the local monopoly of which contribute greatly to the wealth of the pre-Reformation Benedictine medieval monastery of St Etheldreda, after which the city is named.

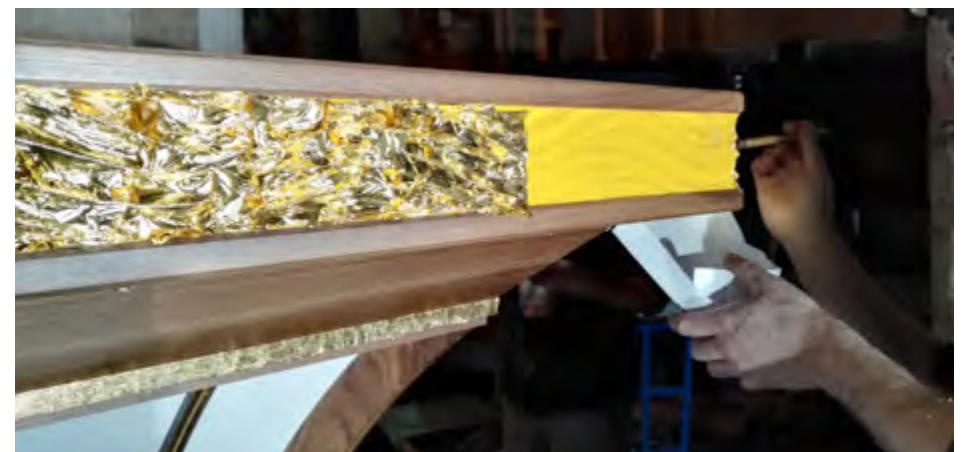




The designs of the clergy seating were loosely derived from the throne of Charlemagne, now in the cathedral at Aachen but formerly in another famous octagonal church, that of St Vitale, built in Ravenna for the Emperor Justinian in the 6th century.



The altar was made by Mornington Day. The carved eel decoration was carried out by Gyorgy Mkrтчian and gilded by Phil Surey. The side panels were painted by the artist, John Maddison.





The central Octagon 'Lantern Tower' above the altar



Candlemas service (photo: Ely Cathedral)



'We are in this for permanence, for eternity, so our furnishings, while being flexible, have to signal something of that as well... Luke Hughes's designs provide that noble look and effect of permanence'

The Rt Rev and Rt Hon Lord Richard Chartres KCVO, Bishop of London (June 2012)









Design, Engineer & Deliver

Luke Hughes comprises a team of specialists who design, engineer and deliver furniture for notable buildings. Their combined actions define and fulfil the needs of clients by providing tailored or bespoke furniture for places of learning, business, worship, culture & leisure.

Since its inception in London's Covent Garden in 1981, the company has been shaped by the vision of its eponymous founder and grown into an organisation dedicated to keeping buildings relevant in a rapidly changing world whilst maintaining their architectural integrity and evoking their genuine character. Accordingly, the aim is for the furniture to appear as though it has always been there; the building is the stage and the contents bring it to life.

Our client list is our witness, the performance of the spaces within buildings our legacy.

Places of Worship projects

All Saints' Church, Carshalton
 All Saints' Church, Woodford
 Arundel Cathedral
 Benenden School Chapel
 Boxgrove Priory
 Bristol Cathedral
 Canterbury Cathedral
 Chapel of St. John, Tower of London
 Chapel of the Resurrection, Valparaiso University
 Charterhouse School Chapel
 Chichester Cathedral
 Church of the Holy Rood, Holybourne
 Church of the Holy Spirit, Southsea
 Clare College Chapel
 Community Synagogue of Rye
 Congregation Beit Simchat Torah Synagogue, New York
 Derby Cathedral
 Dorchester Abbey
 Ely Cathedral
 Epsom College Chapel
 Exeter Cathedral
 Hereford Cathedral
 Holy Trinity Cuckfield
 Hurst Pierpoint College Chapel
 Jesuit Care Centre, Christchurch
 Keble College Chapel
 Leicester Cathedral
 Mucknall Abbey
 New North London Synagogue
 Newark Song School
 Newcastle Cathedral
 Portsmouth Cathedral
 Rochester Cathedral
 Sheffield Cathedral
 Shrewsbury School Chapel
 Shrewsbury School Chapel
 Southwark Cathedral
 St Alban's Church, Romford
 St Albans Cathedral
 St Andrew, Holborn
 St Andrew's Church, Alderton
 St Andrew's Church, Feniton
 St Andrew's Church, Southwark
 St Andrew's Church, Stapleford
 St Andrew's Church, Surbiton
 St Augustine's Parish Church
 St Barnabas Church, Dulwich
 St Bartholomews Church, Otford
 St Catherine's Church, Burbage
 St Clement Dane's, The Strand
 St Dunstan's Church, Madison
 St Dunstan's Church, Mayfield
 St Francis at the Engine Room
 St George's Chapel, Windsor
 St George's Church, Bloomsbury
 St George's Church, Bristol

St George's Church, Oakdale
 St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh
 St Gregory and St Martin Parish Church
 St Joan of Arc, Highbury
 St John the Baptist Church, Tisbury
 St John's Church, Berwick St John
 St John's Church, Blackheath
 St John's Church, Notting Hill
 St John's Church, Preston
 St John's Church, Shirley
 St Joseph's Church, Hackney
 St Lawrence Jewry
 St Luke's Chelsea
 St Machar's Cathedral
 St Margaret Pattens
 St Margaret's Church, Bethersden
 St Mark's Swindon
 St Mary and St Giles Church, Stony Stratford
 St Mary Magdalene Parish Church
 St Mary the Less Church, Durham
 St Mary the Virgin, Ideford
 St Mary the Virgin, Oxford
 St Mary-at-Hill, Billingsgate
 St Mary-le-Bow, Cheapside
 St Mary's Church, Ealing
 St Mary's Church, Easton
 St Mary's Church, Ifley
 St Mary's Church, Kempston
 St Mary's Church, Shroton
 St Mary's Church, Somers Town
 St Mary's Church, Twickenham
 St Mary's Church, Woodbridge
 St Mary's House, Brighton
 St Mary's, Fairford
 St Mary's, Houghton-on-the-Hill
 St Marylebone Parish Church
 St Matthew's Church, Wilton
 St Michael and All Angels Kingsnorth
 St Michael's Church, Stourport
 St Paul's Cathedral
 St Paul's Church, Croxton
 St Paul's Church, Mill Hill
 St Peter & St Paul, Uppingham
 St Peter Port Parish Church
 St Peter's Church, Flushing
 St Thomas's Church Wells
 St. Bart's, Wilmslow
 St. Mary's, Ealing
 St. Mary's, March
 St. Peter ad Vincula, Tower of London
 Temple Church
 Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Columbia
 Westbourne Grove Church
 Westminster Abbey
 Westminster Synagogue
 Winchester Cathedral

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This page: view of altar within Ely Cathedral
Cover: external view of Ely Cathedral, image credit: Andy Sharpe

