

St. Mark's Church Stoke-on-Trent



Contents

Pg 3 Understanding the Place & the Community

Pg 4 Location & site description
Overview of St. Mark's

Pg 5 Exterior

Pg 7 Interior

Pg 8 Fixtures and Fittings

Pg 12 Setting and Heritage Context

Pg 14 History & Development

Pg 19 Bibliography & Sources

Pg 21 Acknowledgement

Understanding the Place & the Community



Understanding the Place & the Community

Location & Site Description

St. Mark's Church is located in Shelton, an area within Stoke-on-Trent. The church is situated within a large churchyard, bounded by Wood Terrace to the west, Broad Street to the north, College Road to the east, and Fletcher Street to the south. The principal entrance is from Wood Street, although a secondary, yet also grand entrance, is located on the corner of Broad Street and College Road.

Broad Street is one of the major roads leading into the centre of Hanley, approximately a mile to the north-east. Hanley is considered the commercial core of Stoke-on-Trent and is one of the six towns that make up the federation, along with Tunstall, Burslem, Stoke-upon-Trent, Fenton and Longton.

Commissioners' Churches, 1818 - 1856

St. Mark's was one of over six hundred churches that were built as part of a mass-building programme by the Church of England in the early 19th century. The purpose was two-fold; industrial towns and cities were expanding rapidly as a result of the Industrial Revolution, and there was a growing success of the evangelising Free Churches, especially Methodists.

Two exceptional parliamentary grants were provided, totalling £3million, in order to fund the new churches.

The quality of the 'Commissioners' Churches' was varied - some being the work of architects with national reputations, while others were by local men of variable talent. Most were designed to accommodate large numbers, and many adopted a generally superficial and decorative Gothic style with a west tower or bellcote, galleries and shallow sanctuary: capacity, rather than stylistic authenticity, was the principal consideration.¹

Some of the six hundred churches have been demolished and many were altered in the 19th century to provide a deeper chancel, remove the galleries and remove the original pews.

Today there is greater respect for the sober gravity of their architecture, their innovative structural qualities and their historical importance as the greatest state-funded wave of church building ever seen in England.²

Overview of St. Mark's

A description from *The Borough of Stoke-upon-Trent* by John Ward, originally published in 1843, describes St. Mark's in detail:

'The church is calculated to hold about 2,100 persons, 500 of the sittings being free. It measures, in exterior length, including the tower and chancel, 151 feet, and in breadth, 75 feet.'

It was erected by the commissioners for building new churches, from a design of Messrs. Pickersgill and Oates of York, at the cost of about £10,000, towards which £250 was granted, by King George IV., out of the revenues of the Duchy of Lancaster, and donations amounting to £500 were contributed by Earl Granville, John Tomlinson, Esq., and others.

It was consecrated on the 19th June, 1834, by the venerated Bishop Ryder, who generously bestowed upon it a service of communion plate. The church yard contains rather more than two acres of land, and is enclosed with a low wall, to which the appendage of an iron railing is at present wanting.'

Architect

St. Mark's was designed by John Oates of Oates, Pickersgill and Oates, who unfortunately died before the completion of the designs. He was considered an accomplished architect within Huddersfield and worked on three churches and the Huddersfield Infirmary; his connection with St. Mark's is unknown. It is thought that he trained in Manchester.



St Mark's north elevation

Exterior

St. Mark's was built between 1831-1834, funded partly by subscription, but in the main by a grant from the Church Building Commissioners. With a seating capacity of 2,100, it was the largest parish church in the diocese.

Constructed of stone, the church stands on high ground and is still a dominant feature in this part of the city. Originally there was a square-ended chancel, flanked by a porch and a vestry, with a triple lancet window at its east end; the present apsidal chancel, designed by R. Scrivener and Sons, was added in 1866 when the church was restored.³

The chancel is now deeper, with a heptagonal apse creating a much grander statement. According to the Historic England Listing Selection Guide for Places of Worship, it was a common occurrence for Commissioner's Churches to be extended in this way, presumably as and when funds allowed.

The two chapels on either side of the chancel are thought to be original to the 1831-1834 design as they feature in the drawing by Thomas People Wood.

The church follows the traditional Christian layout, orientated east-west, with the entrance at the western end beneath the tower and the direction of worship towards the apse at the eastern end. St. Mark's is orientated south west-north east; it is assumed that it was preferable, aesthetically, to remain in parallel with Broad Street.

The principal entrance is from Wood Street through two substantial, grand brick piers, leading to the base of the 36m high tower. A description of the tower can be found in the listing description:

'Ashlar faced 3-stage tower with western doorway with chamfered arch with hood moulds and foliate crocketed decoration. Simple lancet window with shafted responds over. Triple lancets, blind arcading and clock in second stage, paired bell chamber lights with central pilaster above.'

It is to be noted that the tower is in fact four stages.

The proportions of the west elevation are exceptionally elegant and highly gothic.

The nave is divided into seven bays by buttresses and lit by tall lancet windows on either side. The nave, chancel and porches either side are crenellated. Elaborate pinnacles on the corners of the tower, nave and chancel draw the eye up, creating additional height and impact, and alter the overall proportions of each elevation.



South east view of St. Mark's - drawing by Thomas Peplow Wood, 1838



South east view of St. Mark's - drawing by Neville Malkin, 1974



Interior

The principal entrance to the church is at the base of the tower, entering into an octagonal lobby with a suspended ceiling. There is evidence to suggest that this space is vaulted. Access to the tower can be obtained by a small circular staircase off the lobby. From the lobby there is the narthex which has a view to the nave through glass and oak screens. At the south end of the narthex a kitchen has been created with modern partitions.

The nave is lit by the tall lancet windows in the aisles on either side. The cast iron structure is delicate and visible throughout the church. The nave is divided into seven bays and has tall arcades supported on octagonal stone piers. Aisles flank the nave with galleries above. The plaster ceiling to the nave is panelled and follows the same delicate proportions as the iron structure.

Each bay comprises a tall pointed arch with the octagonal stone piers on either side. The balustrade to the gallery spans between the piers on either side, and towards the western end, four of the bays are enclosed by glass screens at ground level.

At the west end the aisles have been enclosed with modern partitions to create meeting rooms. The ceilings to the aisles are raked towards the nave, creating the staged floor to the galleries above. The cast iron structure is visible in the aisles, despite the modern partitions.

The chancel is separated from the nave by an oak screen with highly detailed painted panels depicting religious scenes at low level. The current chancel and heptagonal apse date to 1866 and were designed by R. Scrivener and Sons. It replaced the original square-ended apse, making the liturgically significant east end much deeper and grand. There are three stained glass windows depicting religious scenes behind the reredos, with the other windows mostly clear or lightly coloured glass.

The decorative tiled floor in the chancel and apse is likely to date to this period, when the whole church underwent restoration by Scrivener and Sons.

All interior stonework appears to be painted.



Photos: Brent Sutton



Fixtures & Fittings

There are presently no bells in the church, however there was originally one bell dating from 1833 and a second was added in 1877.

The original dark oak pews are retained in the nave, sitting on raised plinths. There would have been pews on the first-floor balconies, however these have since been removed. The remaining pews have a simple but pleasant profile and have a quatrefoil motif at either end. The majority of the church is carpeted, with only the chancel and apse having a decorative tiled floor. The rear south aisle meeting room has laminate flooring, but the rest of the south aisle is stone flags.

Decoration internally is generally simple and understated. In the later chancel and apse however, decoration is rich and abundant. The crafted timber choir stalls, patterned tiled floor, colourful stained-glass windows and intricate alabaster reredos indicate the richness in decoration, and provide quite a strong contrast with the rest of the church.

The reredos, by George Tinworth, is considered a 'masterpiece' by the Tiles and Architectural Ceramics Society. It is comprised of three panels; the central panel almost life-sized and completed in 1897 as part of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations. The two side panels were erected in 1902 and are examples of Tinworth's later output, providing tremendous depth, with several figures almost free-standing. The altar is carved with what looks like Freemason symbols, although anecdotal evidence suggests they are Christian symbols of the crucifixion. A plaque beneath the reredos states:

This reredos, erected with the aid and contributions from the Freemasons of the Province of Staffordshire, and from some members of the Grand Lodge of England as unveiled by the Rt. Hon the Earl of Dartmouth Rt. Wor. Provincial Grand Master. Oct. 21st 1897.

The Earl of Dartmouth mentioned here is thought to be William Legge, the 6th Earl of Dartmouth.

The altar itself is beautifully carved and has gold mosaic panels at the base.



One of two side panels from the reredos by George Tinworth, 1902



Font



Pulpit



Chancel



Altar

The pulpit is located in the north-east corner of the nave and is slightly elevated. It is pertained to have once had a canopied sounding board, however this no longer exists.

The organ and organ chamber is located in the south aisle at the eastern-most end. The National Pipe Organ Register lists the original organ was built in 1881 and it is not known to what extent the original organ remains following an entry in 1991 by Ward and Shutt. The entry states that it 'incorporates pedal flutes from Norman and Beard organ of St. John, Hanley'.

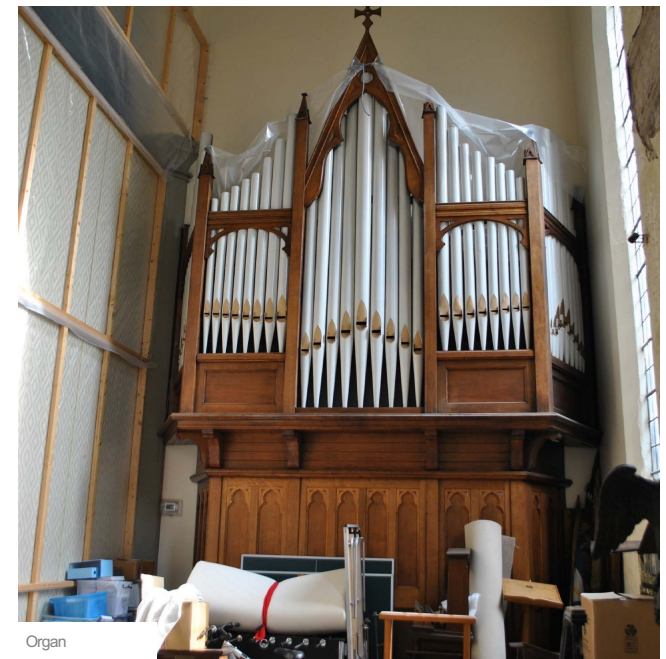
The font is located in the south-west corner of the nave and has an elaborately carved timber font cover.



Central panel of reredos



Lectern



Organ



View of nave from gallery.
Photo by Brent Sutton.

Setting

The large plot that St. Mark's was built on indicates it was an important church within the parish. As well as the fairly elaborate external features such as the pinnacles and crenelated façades, the grand entrance piers to the church are a statement of St. Mark's presence to passers-by on the street.

Opposite St. Mark's is an area of open ground used as a car sales and servicing centre, whereas once the church once looked on to rows of terraced houses, possibly with views of the countryside beyond due to its elevated position. To the east of St. Mark's is a number of car sales garages and beyond is the commercial centre of Hanley.

The former Rectory was built in 1851 and is now used as a mosque. The Rectory is located on Rectory Road, west of St. Mark's. A church hall was built in 1915 and is now converted into flats/ bedsits. The church hall is located on the corner of Rectory Road and Bedford Road.

St. Mark's Church Heritage Context

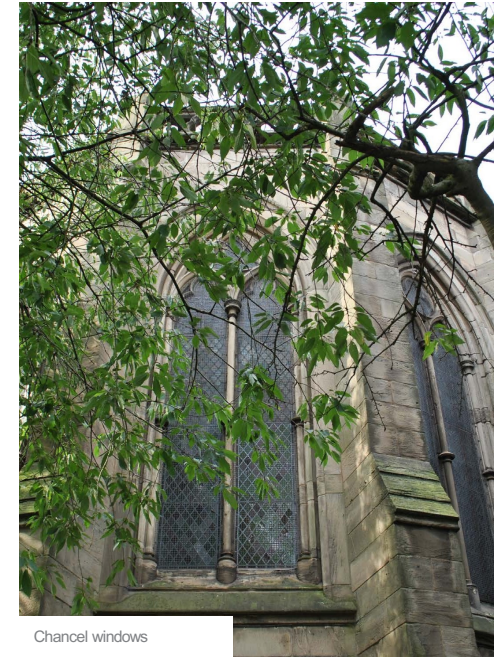
St. Mark's is listed at Grade II, meaning it is of special architectural and historic interest. Grade II listed buildings represent 91.7% of all listed buildings in England.

St. Mark's is a Commissioner's Church, of which over 600 were built and some are now demolished. According to the Listing Selection Guide for Places of Worship, many, including St. Mark's, have undergone extensive alteration in the late 19th century. The quality of the Commissioner's Churches is described in the guide as uneven, some being the work of architects with national reputations (for instance, Sir John Soane and Sir Robert Smirke), while others were by local men of variable talent⁴. In this context, St. Mark's designation is congruent with its Grade II status, with the three Commissioner's Churches by Soane listed at Grade I.

In a more local context, there are many more Grade II listed Commissioner's Churches, with only a handful at Grade II*.



Entrance from Wood Street



Chancel windows



Brick boundary wall to churchyard



View north from churchyard



Churchyard looking west

History & Development



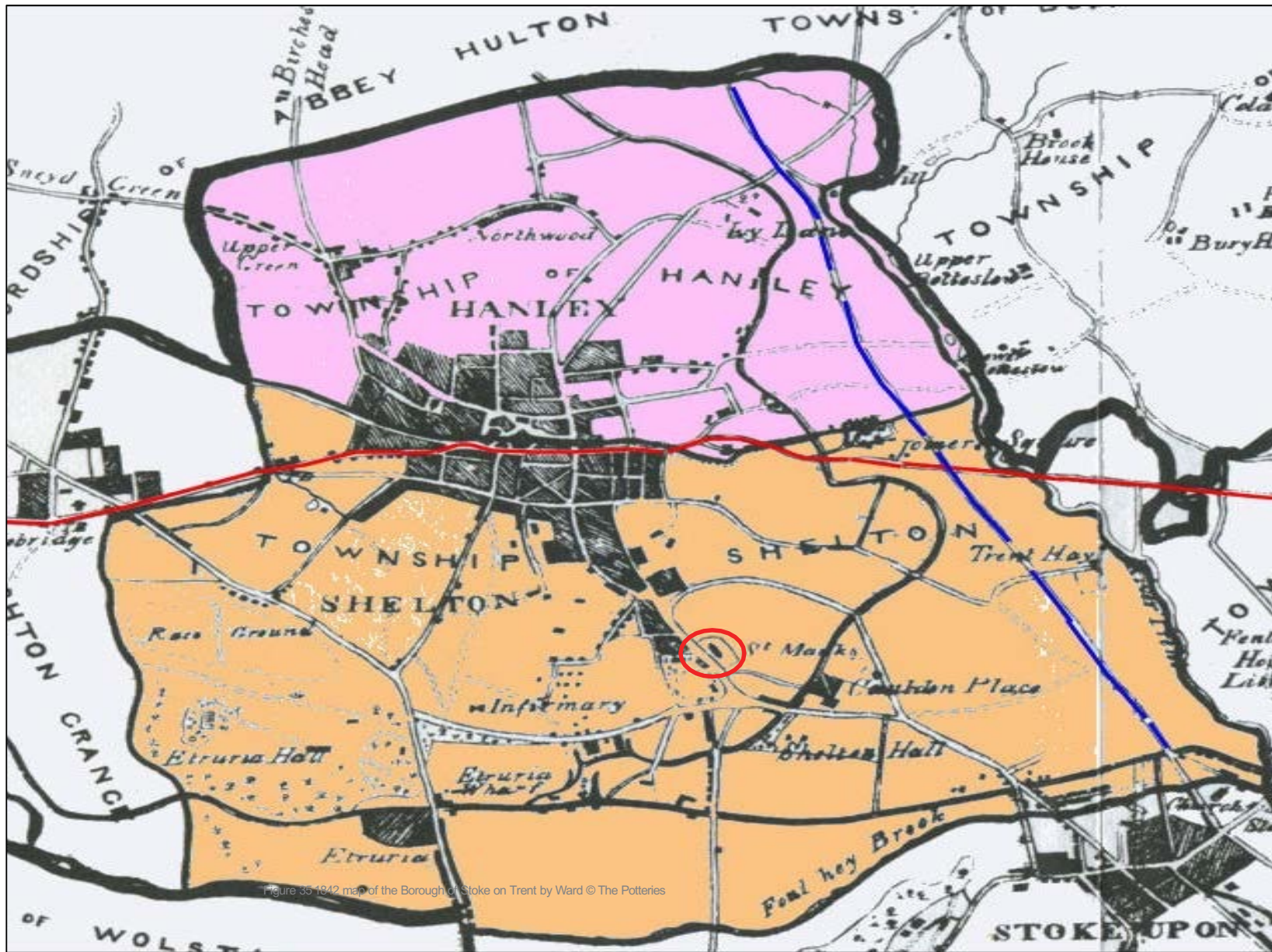


Figure 35 1842 map of the Borough of Stoke on Trent by Ward © The Potteries

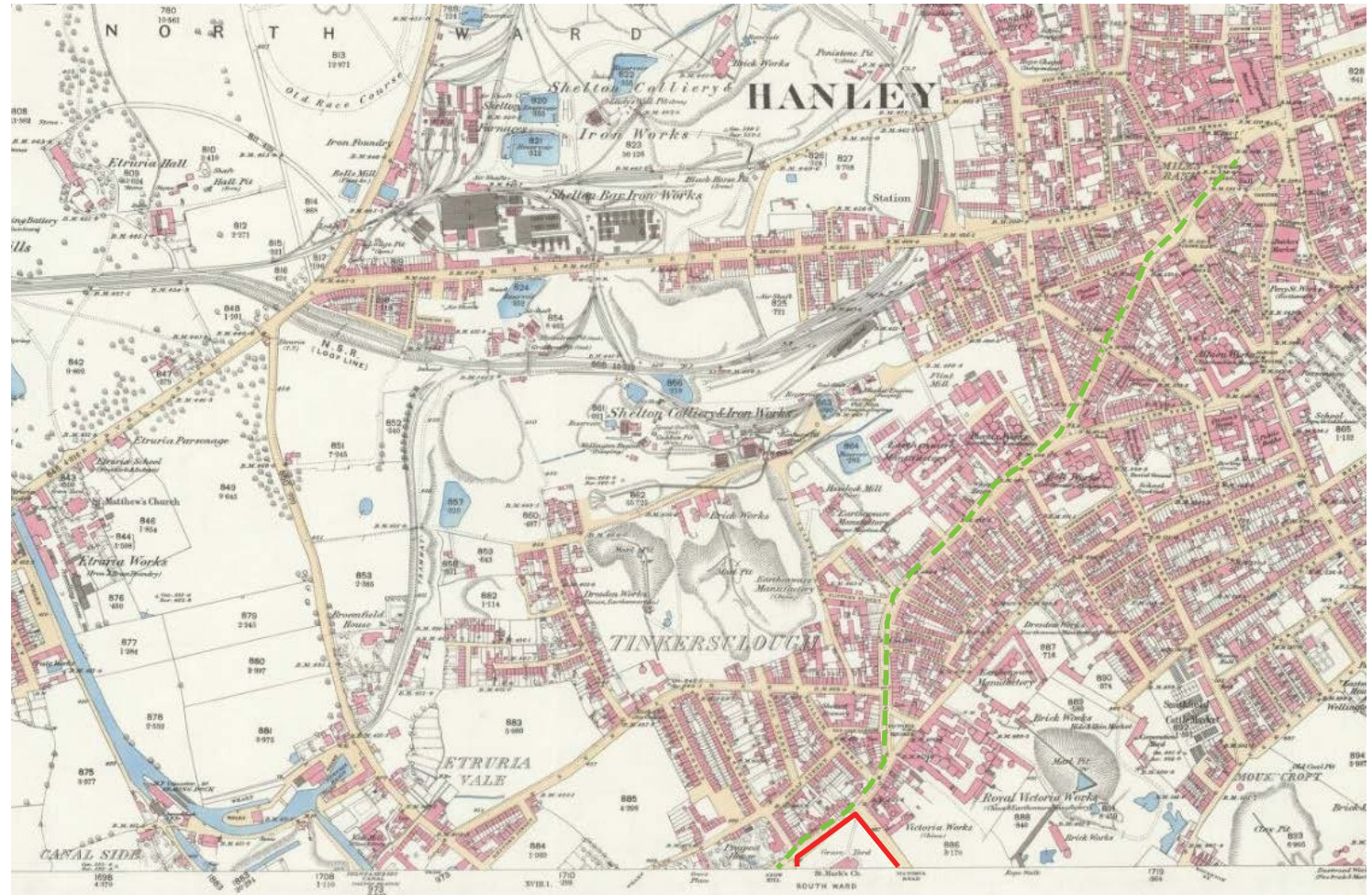
History & Development

Historic Maps

Geologically, Stoke is described as an outcrop of quick-burning coals, clays, and marls, and it is this character of the subsoil that initiated the growth of the local pottery industry. The six towns that eventually formed Stoke on Trent - Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke-upon-Trent, Fenton and Longton - are informally known as the Potteries.

In 1910 the six towns became a federation, as a result of urban growth and municipal change beginning in the early 19th century. This was the first union of its type in the UK and the only such event to take place until the 1960s.

Stoke-on-Trent then became a city in 1925.



--- Broad Street

Staffordshire XII.13 [Newcastle Under Lyme; Stoke On Trent]. Revised 1865 to 1878. Published 1879

In 1841, a decade after St. Mark's was built, Pigot's Typology of England described Shelton as 'a township in the parish of Stoke, contiguous to Hanley, or which indeed, it forms an important portion, and its manufactures and police regulations are similar to those of the town...Extensive gas-works are in this township, which also contains some valuable charitable scholastic institutions.' Pigot proceeds to paint a picture of Shelton: 'Races are held annually in the neighbourhood. In this township are the potteries and the beautiful villa Etruria, erected by the late Josiah Wedgwood Esq.'

The first available OS map of 1879 shows the numerous industries surrounding St. Mark's and the sprawl from the town centre of Hanley. Broad Street is one of the arterial streets into the centre.

Broad Street, the road forming the northern boundary to St. Mark's, was previously High Street (certainly in 1843) but by the OS map in 1898 the street had been re-named. It is assumed to avoid confusion with High Street in the north of Hanley.

The 1898 OS map shows the vast number of terraced houses surrounding St. Mark's that would have formed the congregation. Broad Street remains a main arterial road into Hanley. The large areas of open land are mostly occupied by industry.

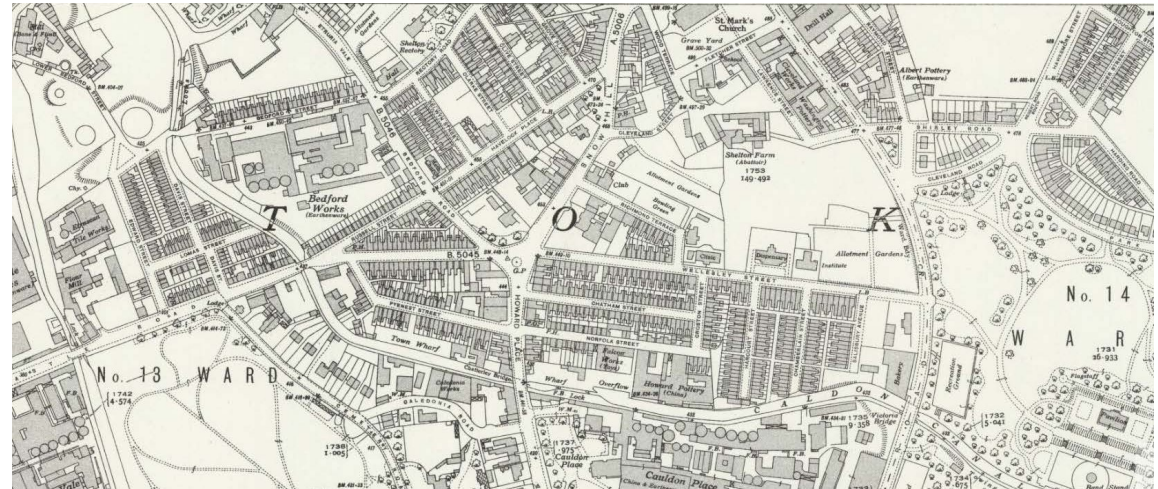


St. Mark's is identifiable by its large churchyard. The church and its setting does not change throughout the OS maps. Whilst the area surrounding St. Mark's has changed physically, socially and economically, St. Mark's has remained a constant feature in the townscape.

OS map data does not allow a full picture of St. Mark's, with the site split across two maps. From 1924 it is not possible to view the full site, with part of the site being published in different years. The two maps on this page from 1940 and 1951 therefore only feature the southern part of the site.

They capture surrounding development and Shelton Rectory associated with St. Mark's on Rectory Road, a little to the west of the site.

There is very little change to the area between 1940 and 1951.



Staffordshire XVIII.1 [Newcastle Under Lyme; Stoke On Trent]. Revised 1937. Published 1940



Staffordshire XVIII.NW [includes Stoke on Trent.]. Revised 1945 to 1947. Published 1951 1 to 6 inch

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Endnotes

- 1 Places Of Worship: Listing Selection Guide, pp.7-8 Places Of
- 2 Worship: Listing Selection Guide, pp.7-8 Hanley: Churches | British
- 3 History Online.



Architects | Masterplanners | Heritage Consultants

All information in this document has been taken from the 2021 Conservation Management Plan undertaken and written by project Architects Buttress as part of the Under One Roof Project.

<https://buttress.net>