Condition report and recommendations for repair.

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Church of St. Mary, Therfield.
Grade II listed.
12/06/25.

Pitch pine pulpit.

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Introduction:

This report has an emphasis on the careful, mindful and considerate approach to assessing the condition of the pulpit in the grade II listed Church of St. Mary, Therfield and offer recommendations for its conservation and repair. The aim of the report is for it to be a functional and useful reference in the current and future care and maintenance of the pulpit.

Description of the condition report and recommendations for repair:

Following a detailed visual inspection of all the accessible woodwork, I have collated these findings in this written report. This includes descriptions of each areas condition starting with the north side (1) and moving in a clockwise direction when viewed in plan. In the following sequence: exterior face, interior face, side by side, main upper section, followed by the lower plinth section.

Detail photographs are included to support the written condition report. I also recommend that further photos are taken of the pulpit throughout the repair and conservation process. Especially where further observations on the condition are noted.

The recommendations for treatment and repair focus on the careful and considerate conservation of the furniture. Only where deemed necessary have treatment and repairs been suggested and with the minimum of intervention.

General observations and notes on condition:

The pulpit is constructed of pitch pine joinery with oak boards for the floor. It has been moved from a previous position in the church, from observing how the mouldings abruptly stop in certain areas. Lower section of pulpit, below the floor of the pulpit has been previously adapted, likely when it was moved to its current position. There are areas of flat panel that do not match the raised and decorative panelling elsewhere.

Six-sided construction consisting of framed, raised panelling. The top rails to a number of panels (4no. at upper, 1no. at lower) have a curved detail, which is constructed from a single solid piece of wood. Above this curved bolection top rail, is a stepped/raised decorative detail to the planted moulding running around the pulpit. This decoration is again made from one solid piece of pine rather than constructed of sections. Above this moulding is a line of dentils running below the top cornice moulding.

Each panel frame is a mortise and tenoned and pegged construction. The ends of the pegs can be seen at each joint. There is evidence of the pulpit having once been painted (now stripped). Remnants of the paint can be seen across most panels. Drawing pins found in various places on the pulpit.

The interior of the upper section has been decorated with dark graining paint effect. Two number panels have evidence of additional rails, now removed with unfinished timber revealed. Wires from reading lamp and microphone have been routed along the stiles of the panels.

The pulpit floor is constructed of two wide boards of oak. There is also a separate stepped section leading from church floor level to the platform of the pulpit. Constructed of raised panels and bolection mouldings. From observing the joinery, this looks to be adapted from elsewhere or added at a later date.

The whole pulpit construction has come away from the wall where it was once tied into the masonry. The metal ties are still fixed to the woodwork of the pulpit.

There is much evidence of woodworm in various areas of the pulpit. This damage is both pre and post decoration. However, at the time of inspection, I can see no evidence of this being live or fresh. No signs of frass.

Overall dimensions:

Side 1:
Upper - 1200mm H x ?
Lower – 800mm H x ?

Side 2:
Upper - 1200mm H x 540mm W.
Lower – 800mm H x 500mm W.

Side 3:
Upper - 1200mm H x 540mm W.
Lower – 800mm H x 585mm W.

Side 4:
Upper - 1200mm H x 580mm W.
Lower – 800mm H x 475mm W.

Side 5:
Upper - 1200mm H x 555mm W.
Lower – 800mm H x 380mm W.

Steps section:
800mm H x 820mm L x 680mm W.

Condition report.

Main upper section:

Side 1 (north side).

Interior face:
Evidence of an additional rail having been removed. Presumably this was added at some point to give extra support to this panel. Whole panel/frame quite loose. Right hand stile in poor condition with splits, breaks, areas of damage and missing timber. Movement detected to the whole frame. Metal tie that once fixed the pulpit into the masonry is now loose and free of the wall. Gap between capping piece and top rail. Return piece at right hand side is a later addition. Evidence of old hinge locations to the right hand stile.
Exterior face: inaccessible due to proximity to wall.

Side 2.

Interior face:
Evidence of an additional supporting rail once having been in place across panel, now removed. Some evidence of woodworm, before and after decoration. Slight gap where top rail meets capping piece. Old screw holes and pin holes. Nails fixing the mouldings to the outer face can be seen on the interior and have been bent flat.
Exterior face:
Generally in good structural condition. Paint removal has been less successful here with remnants of finishes still present. Slight gap where curved detail of bolection moulding meets top rail of panel.

Side 3.

Interior face:
Slight gap where top rail meets capping piece. Reading light cable has been routed down this panel and pinned in place. Some evidence of woodworm damage pre and post decoration, but does not appear to be live. This is mainly to the bottom rail and right hand stile. Old damage to surface of top rail pre-decoration, may have been present since pulpit was first made.
Exterior face:
Hole drilled through top rail, likely a redundant cable route. Top cornice moulding stops abruptly, likely where it once met a wall in a previous location. In good structural condition, no movement of any concern. Slight shrinkage gap where bolection moulding curved detail meets top rail. Damage to very outer edge of capping/cornice, particularly at the mitre joint.

Side 4.

Interior face:
Slight gap where top rail meets capping. Some evidence of woodworm damage pre and post decoration, mainly to the top edge of bottom rail. Microphone cable has been routed down stile and fixed in position with pins and mastic. Book rest is a modern addition –screwed to top of pulpit.
Exterior face:
Top of right hand stile has a split. No movement observed. Curved bolection moulding detail has split, this may be because of the grain direction causing short grain in this area. Damage to outer edge of capping/cornice, mainly at mitre joints. Moulding at meeting with lower plinth section has fresh damage at right hand edge.

Side 5.

Interior face:
Extensive woodworm damage to both stiles. Very fragile and spongy in certain areas. Slight gap where top rail meets capping. Capping piece shows evidence of old woodworm damage. Despite its condition, this panel appears to be in solid structural condition. Evidence of old mortise position or latch location to left hand stile.

Exterior face:
Stile at right hand edge is fragile and damaged from previous woodworm presence. Quite vulnerable to further damage due to its position beside the opening to the pulpit. Moulding at the meeting with lower section is missing. Slight shrinkage gap between curved bolection moulding detail and top rail of frame. Where stiles of side 4 and side 5 meet the corner angle has been rounded/worn from approx. 650mm height, down to bottom rail.

Pulpit floor.

Area of woodworm damage (180mm x 110mm, 800mm x 100mm). This does not look to be live but is fragile and vulnerable to further damage. Movement detected in the boards particularly where they meet one another.

Lower plinth section:

This looks to have been heavily adapted over the years. Not a coherent design. Some basic flat panels have been added at side 2 and side 3.
Length of moulding below panel 2 has been added and left unfinished where it meets next section of moulding (see photo 1230).
Raised and fielded panel below panel 3 has no curved detail to top rail. This top rail does not align with top rail of side 4 beside it. Panel at side 5 is similarly misaligned.
Skirting moulding is damaged especially along section of steps. Also some woodworm damage here. Note: the stone floor does get very wet here during cleaning.
Old carpet tacked to steps and held in place with pinned wooden strips (see photo 1239).
Major gap where main pulpit structure meets steps section.
The extent and condition of the internal structure behind the lower plinth section and beneath the pulpit floor is unknown at this time. I could observe that there are some very loose supporting timbers inside, but couldn't get a clear inspection.

List of photos:

Description.	**Photo ref.**
Side 1 (north).	1224.
Side 2.	1221 – 1223.
Side 3:	
Damaged mitre.	1225.
Lower section.	1231
Side 4:	
Damaged mitre.	1226 – 1227.
Damage to lower moulding.	1228.
Side 5:	
Rounded/worn corner.	1229.
Lower section.	1232.
Dentils.	1220.
Moulding detail.	1219.
Bolection moulding detail.	1216 – 1218.
Abruptly stopped mouldings.	1214.
Stair section with woodworm damage.	1233.
Gap between main pulpit and steps.	1234.
Internal structure below pulpit floor.	1235 – 1238.

Moisture meter readings:

Area tested.	Moisture content (%).
Skirting mouldings at meeting with church floor.	13.5.
Moulding on steps section.	11.6.
At woodworm damage to pulpit floor.	13.1.
Side 5 – woodworm to outer stile.	10.8.
Side 5 – woodworm to inner stile.	12.5.
Upper section capping piece.	10.0.

Interpretation of readings:

All readings taken from the woodwork can be interpreted as dry. However, the higher readings in particular should be monitored to observe whether the moisture content rises at certain times of the year. I would also suggest trying to keep the floor area immediately surrounding the pulpit as dry as is practical during cleaning.

Recommendations for conservation and repair.

If feasible it would be best to remove the pulpit to my workshop to carry out the repairs. Beginning with stabilising the woodwork, following a full assessment of the internal supporting structure. Refixing, repairing or replacing any loose, damaged or missing supports and braces.

Specific repairs to particular areas:

Side 1 (north side).

Piece-in repairs and scarf repairs to missing timber or severe damage to right hand stile. Explore whether this frame and panel has any weak joints and carry out repair as necessary. This frame and panel may require dismantling with repairs to be carried-out to the mortises, tenons and pegs to build-in strength into the structure. Further work may include scarf repairs to damaged or missing timber and gluing and clamping splits or breaks.
Assess the condition of the exterior face that is currently inaccessible due to its proximity to the stone wall.

Side 2.

Fill old redundant screw holes with matching timber or coloured wax as necessary. Gently remove any major areas of remaining paint from previous stripping. Trial a small area using burnishing cream. Only use small tools to carefully remove excessive areas of paint.

Side 3.

Plug redundant cable hole with matching timber, grain and colour. Piece-in repair to damaged mitre joint of top moulding. Match timber and grain. Stain with earth pigments to match colour of existing woodwork.

Side 4.

Piece-in repair to damaged mitre joint of top moulding where it meets Side 3. Clean-up microphone cable route. Remove mastic and refix cable where necessary. Piece-in repair to damaged moulding at junction with lower plinth section.

Side 5.

Woodworm damage: Initially treat particularly fragile areas with Paraloid B72 dissolved in acetone or other suitable solution. Piece-in scarf repairs to extensive damage, matching timber and grain. Make new length of moulding to precisely match the profile of the missing piece. Determine whether the presence of the old redundant mortise position in the stile is detrimental to the strength of this panel and frame. If deemed necessary, piece-in repair to match timber and grain, but still allow for this historic joint detail to be seen and understood. Piece-in scarf repairs to fragile areas of woodworm damage to stile.
Stain all new wood and repairs with earth pigments to match colour of existing woodwork.

Pulpit floor.

Further explore how fragile these oak boards are. If salvageable, first treat woodworm damage with Paraloid B72. Piece-in scarf repairs to particularly damaged and fragile areas. Match timber, grain and colour to existing woodwork. Further support boards below if required.

Lower plinth section.

Piece-in scarf repairs to damaged moulding of skirting. Further investigate the internal supporting structure and repair, refix, replace timbers as necessary to safely support the structure. Replace any missing moulding pieces from the end of the panelling. Remove old carpet from steps section and further assess condition.

General repairs and conservation treatment:

Any useless panel pins, drawing pins or other redundant fixings will be removed. Areas of previous paint finishes still present will be initially cleaned with burnishing cream and if necessary, with small tools. Old areas of pale filler to be coloured out with earth pigments and matched to existing woodwork. Repairs to joints will be carried out using scotch animal hide glue, which is historically correct and reversible. Breaks, splits or piece-in repairs to be carried out with Titebond III. All woodwork to be gently cleaned with a three-part reviver consisting of: equal parts linseed oil, acetic acid and methylated spirits.

All areas of treatment will be trialled in a hidden area first, to test whether it is a viable method for the rest of the woodwork.

Further works if required (TBC):

Clear beeswax to all woodwork. And/or microcrystalline wax to all woodwork. Where some of the mouldings stop abruptly, these could be pieced-in with matching timber and matching mouldings to finish these areas neatly (photo ref: 1214, 1215). Where two sections meet and have been reused or repurposed from elsewhere creating an awkward detail (photo ref: 1230), these could be pieced-in and finished correctly as a mitred joint.

I would also recommend re-bedding the metal tie back into the masonry to further secure the whole pulpit structure and prevent it being unintentionally moved.

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