

Church seating - the next hundred years?

Historic Buildings Alliance - 13 Sept 12



A brief introduction to what we do...

- design and make furniture for sensitive architectural settings
- ‘furniture should embellish the space, not embarrass it’
- keep great buildings relevant in a rapidly changing world...
- ... which, ultimately is down to the quality of the furniture...
- 54 Oxbridge Colleges, 19 major public schools, 15 major academic libraries
- 7 national museums, 5 royal palaces, 2 Supreme Courts
- more than 80 parish churches, and 17 major cathedrals

A problem or an opportunity?



2000 years

400 years

100 years

40 years

30 years

20 years

10 years









St Alban's Cathedral



Salisbury Cathedral



St Paul's Cathedral



Exeter Cathedral



Hereford Cathedral



St Andrew's, Alderton



All Saints, Woodford

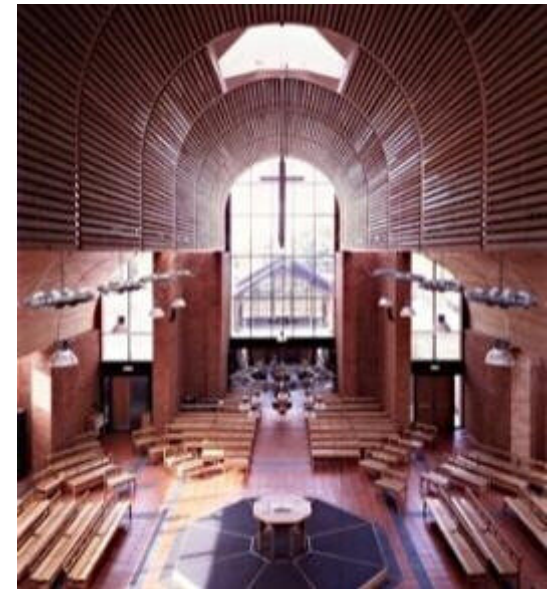
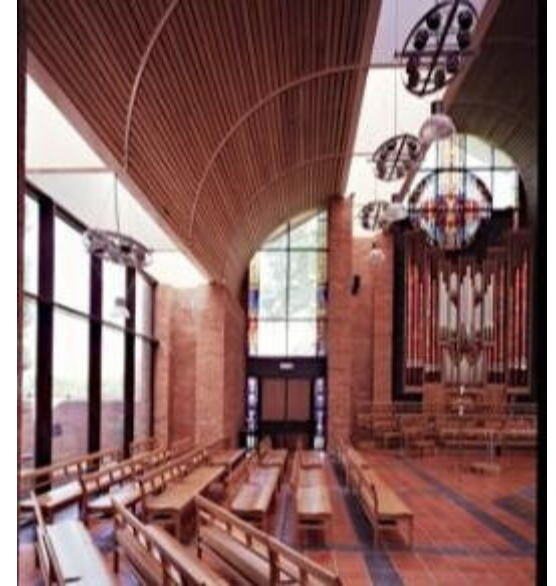




St George's, Bristol



St Barnabas, Dulwich



Design philosophy

- in any quality building, the connection between architecture and furniture should be seamless
- this is particularly true for ecclesiastical buildings... where designing furniture is less about making objects than it is about helping a congregation run a community building, albeit one steeped in sanctity, sentiment and history
- poor design can destroy the sense of the sacred

Westminster Abbey



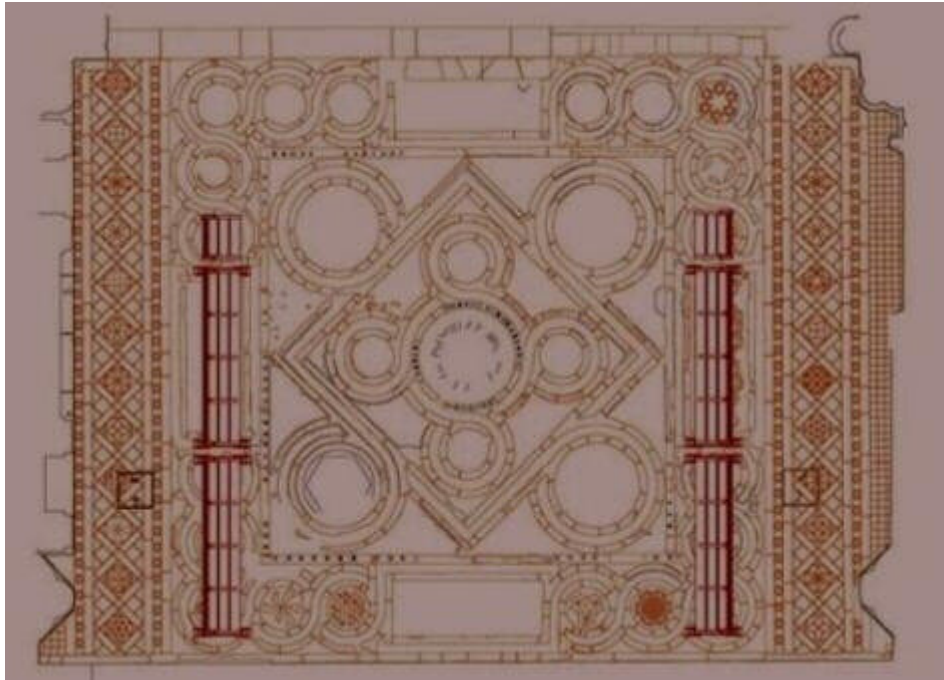
The sanctuary, the Cosmati pavement ... and the furniture



Westminster Abbey, restoration of the Cosmati pavement



Westminster Abbey - Cosmati pavement (c.1260)



30mm variation

Westminster Abbey, *sacrarium* seating



Westminster Abbey



The Royal Wedding



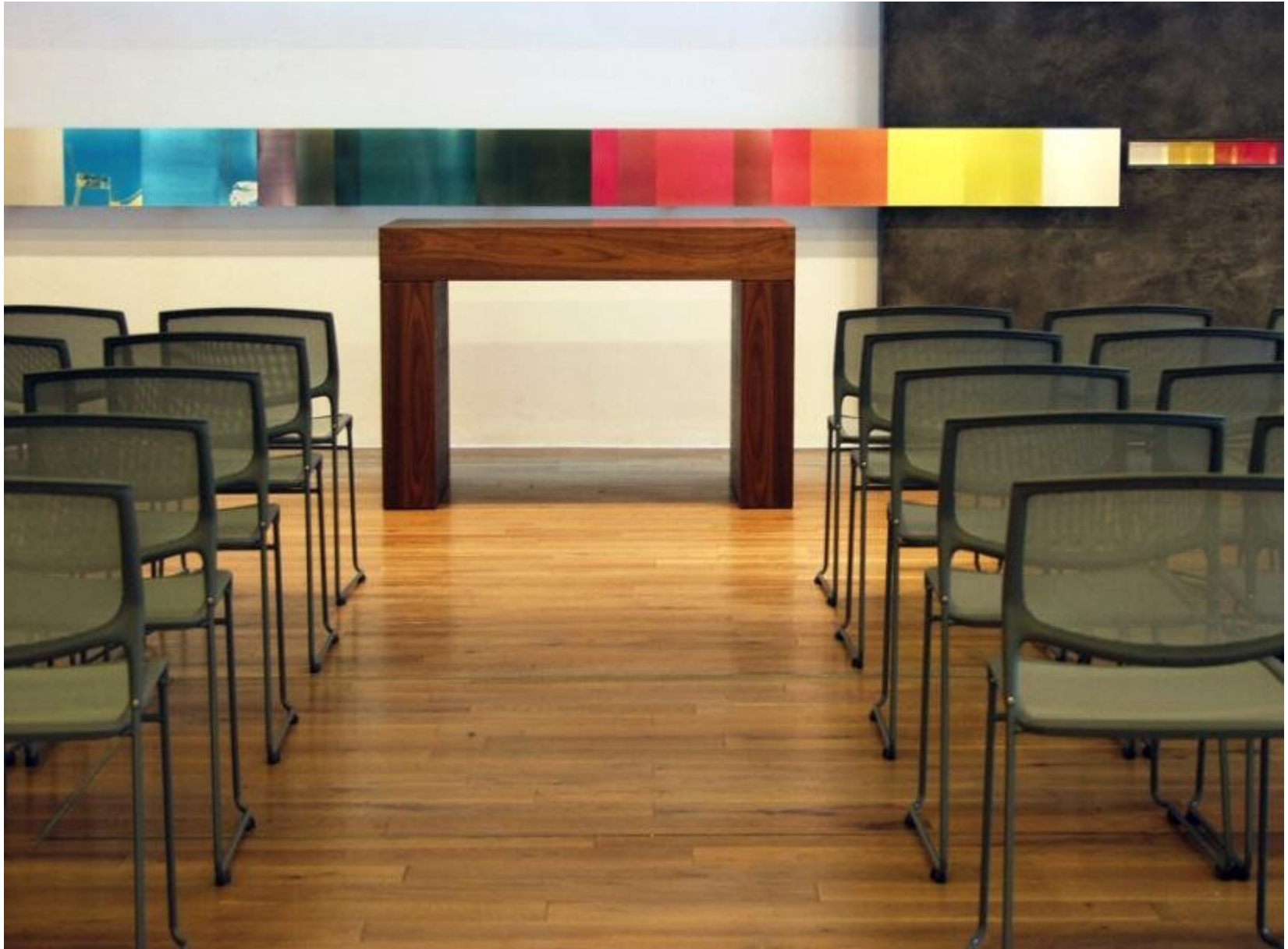
The Papal visit



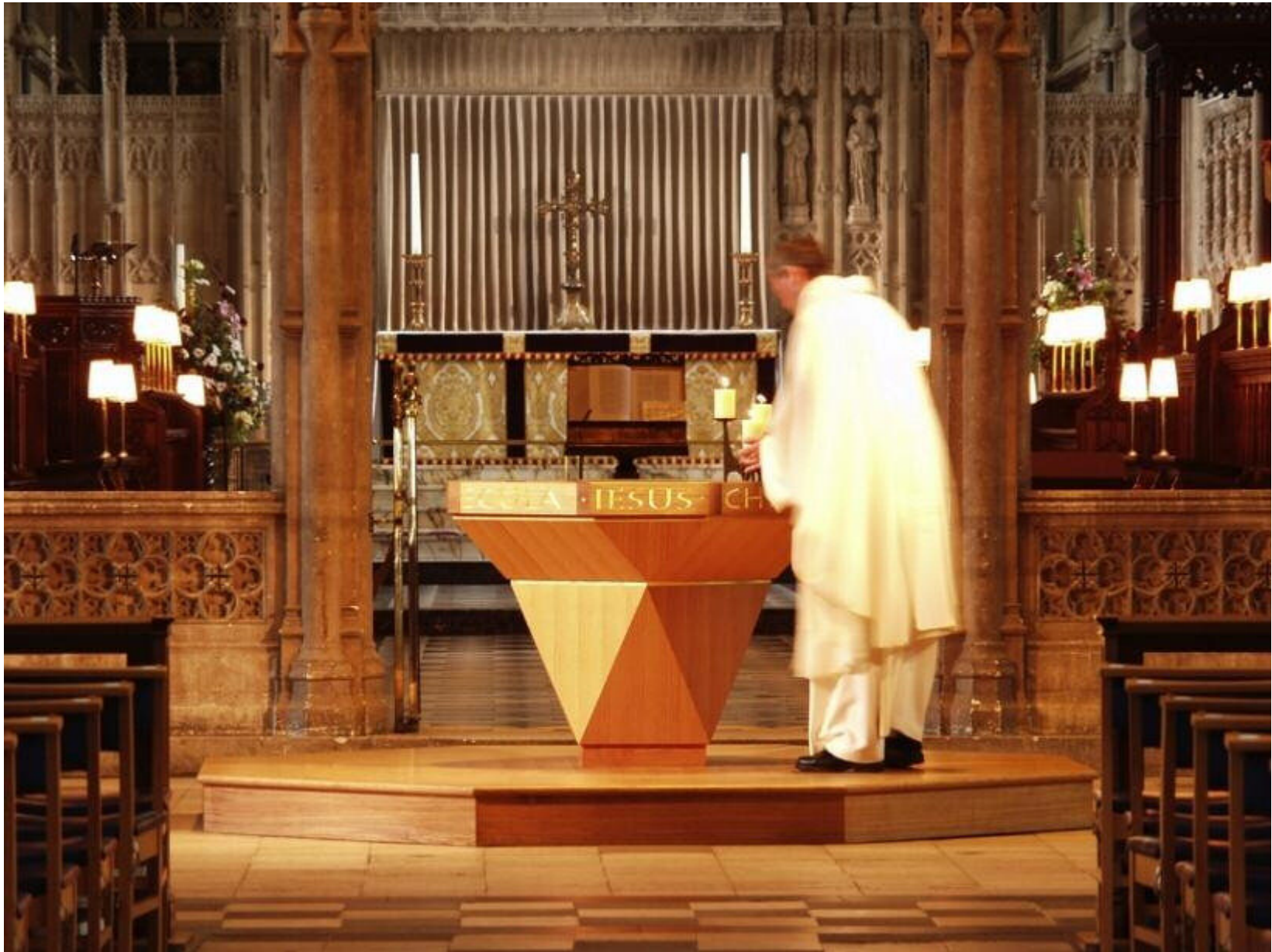
Clare College, Cambridge



Westbourne Grove



Bristol Cathedral - Millennium altar



St Alban's Cathedral



St Alban's Cathedral



Problem or opportunity? We're not alone!

- 47,000 places of worship; 19,000 listed
- 44% have toilets; 37% have refreshment facilities
- huge opportunity to make churches the centre of communities, whilst still retaining their character as places of worship
- General Synod now actively encourages broader use of churches (2009)
- new report, published in April 2011 by National Churches Trust:
[\(<http://nationalchurchestrust.org/explore-and-discover/national-survey.php>\)](http://nationalchurchestrust.org/explore-and-discover/national-survey.php)
- new English Heritage guidelines 2012 - 'New work in historic places of worship' <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/new-work-in-historic-places-of-worship>

What we might all seek to avoid ...



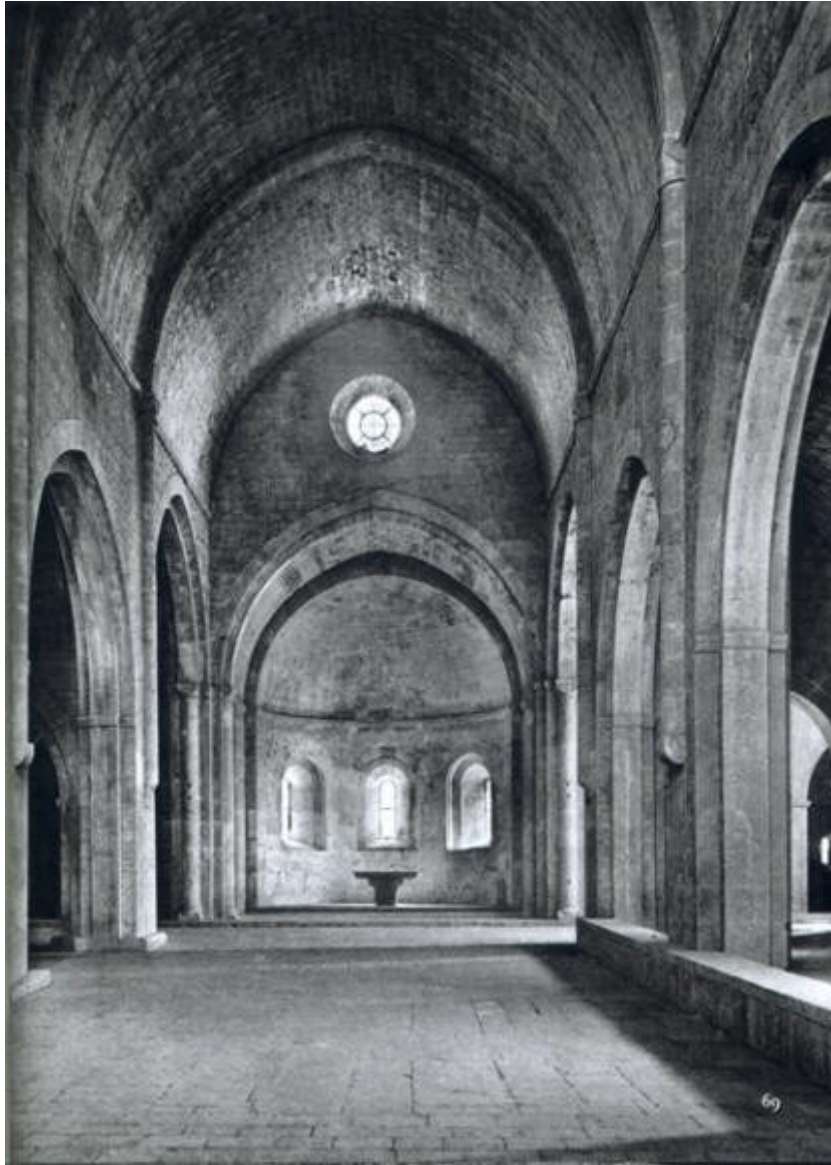
Key concerns of parish churches

- ... (apart from lead-theft!)
- WCs and refreshment facilities
- efficient heating (preferably underfloor)
- adaptability of space/ removal of steps/ DDA
- generation of income streams
- engaging those who do not necessarily come to services

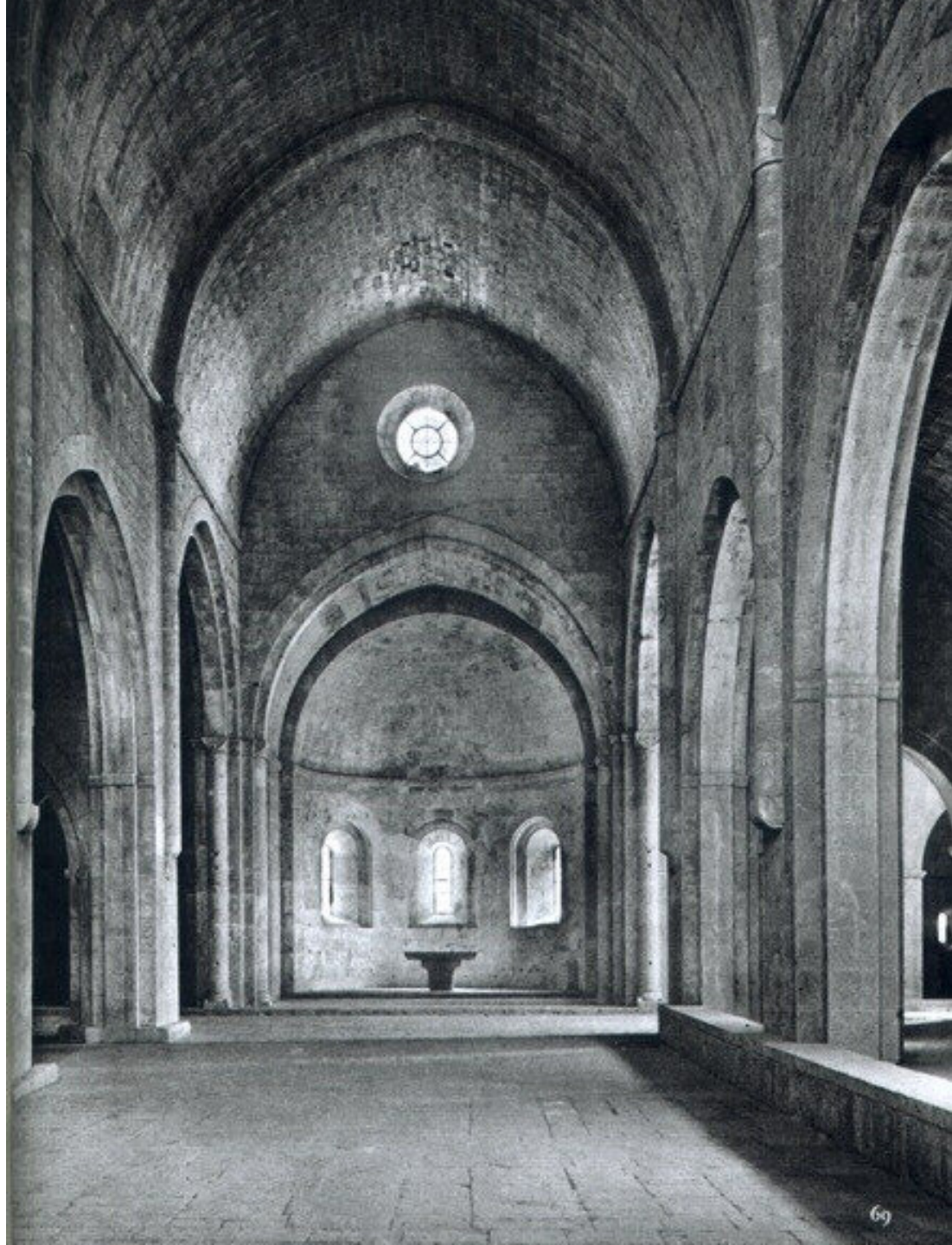
Church seating - the next hundred years?



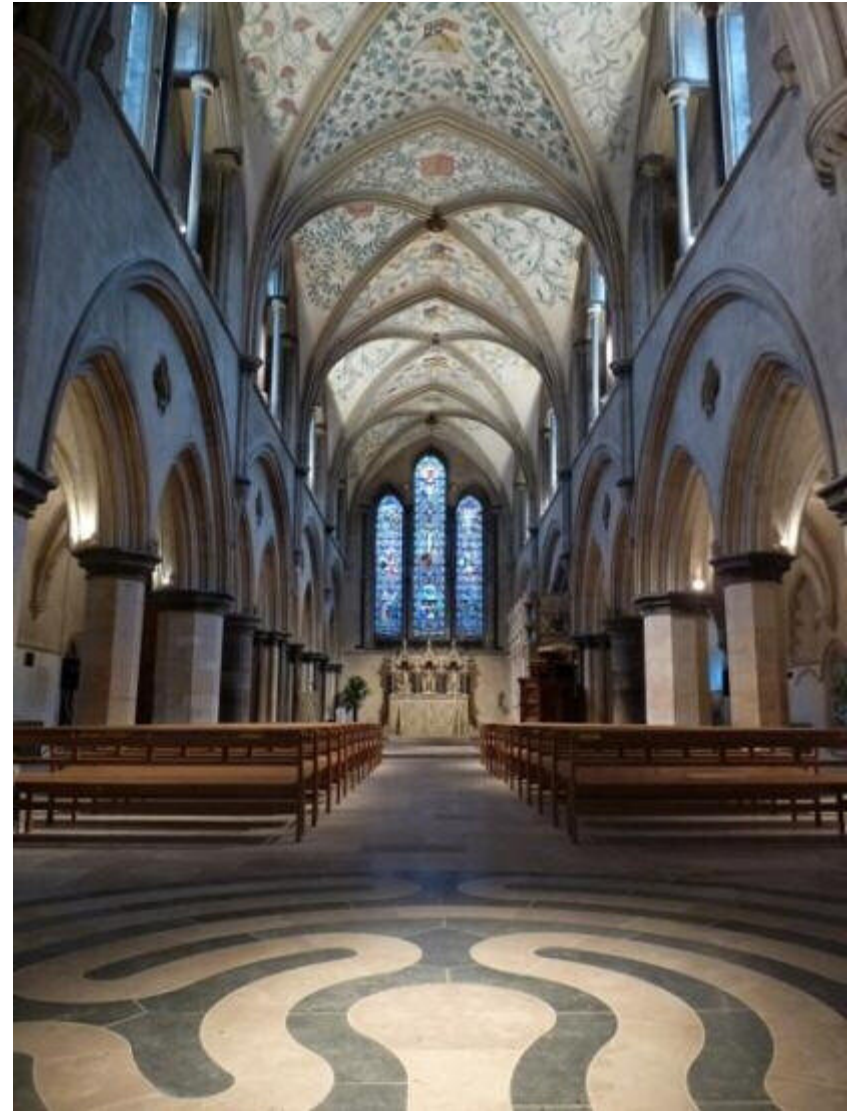
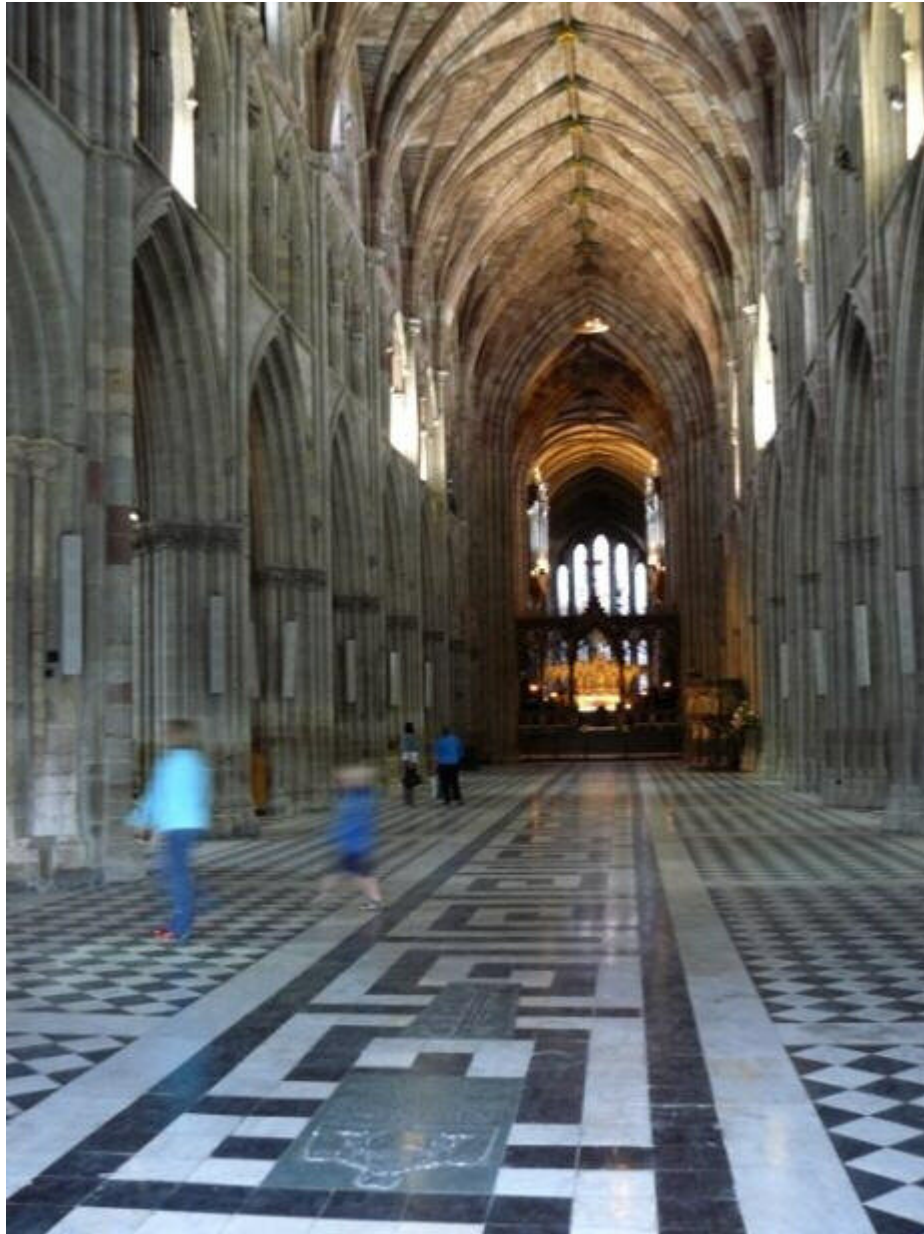
In the beginning, there was no seating...







...and the floors were designed to be seen...



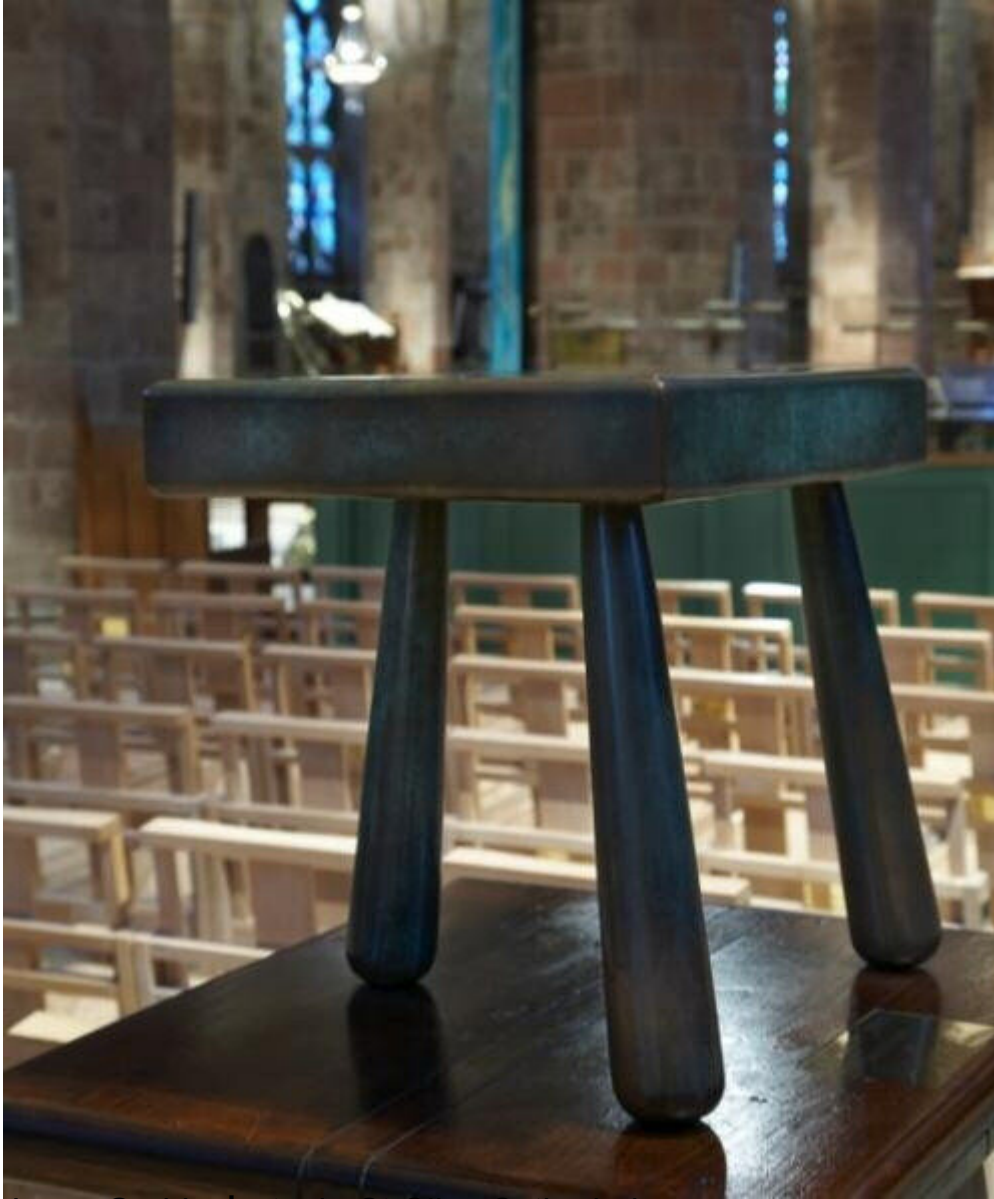
...not obscured...



Occasionally, there were benches for special occasions...

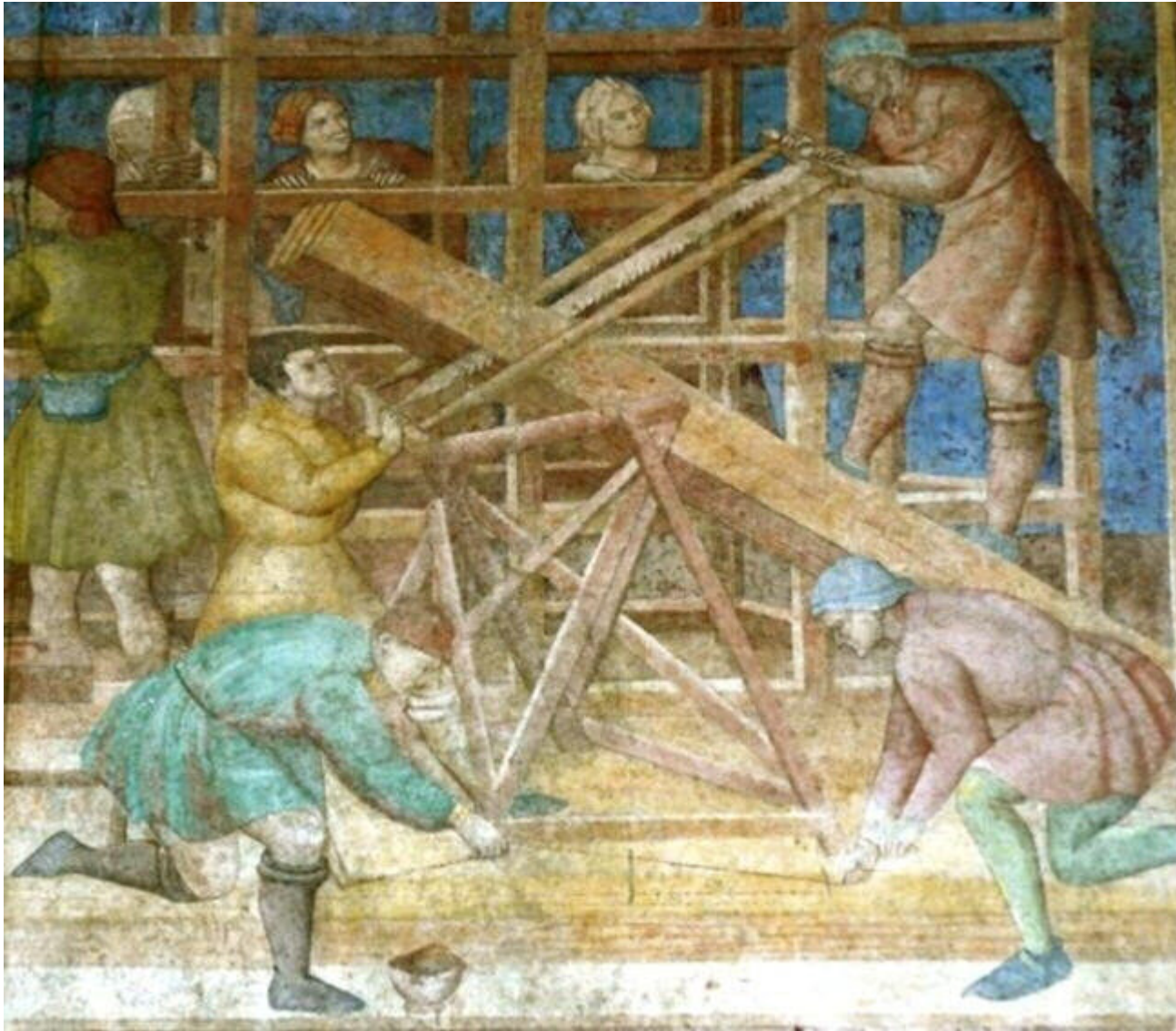


... or the congregation brought their own stools...



Jenny Geddes' stool - St Giles Cathedral,
Edinburgh

The reason? Conversion of timber was a laborious process...





... so seating was expensive in both timber and labour



After the Reformation, the Word prevailed (note: no altar)



The communion table became a simple affair, without relics...



...(and, interestingly, there is increasing demand for it still to be so)...



... and the role of the communion rail was to keep the dogs out...



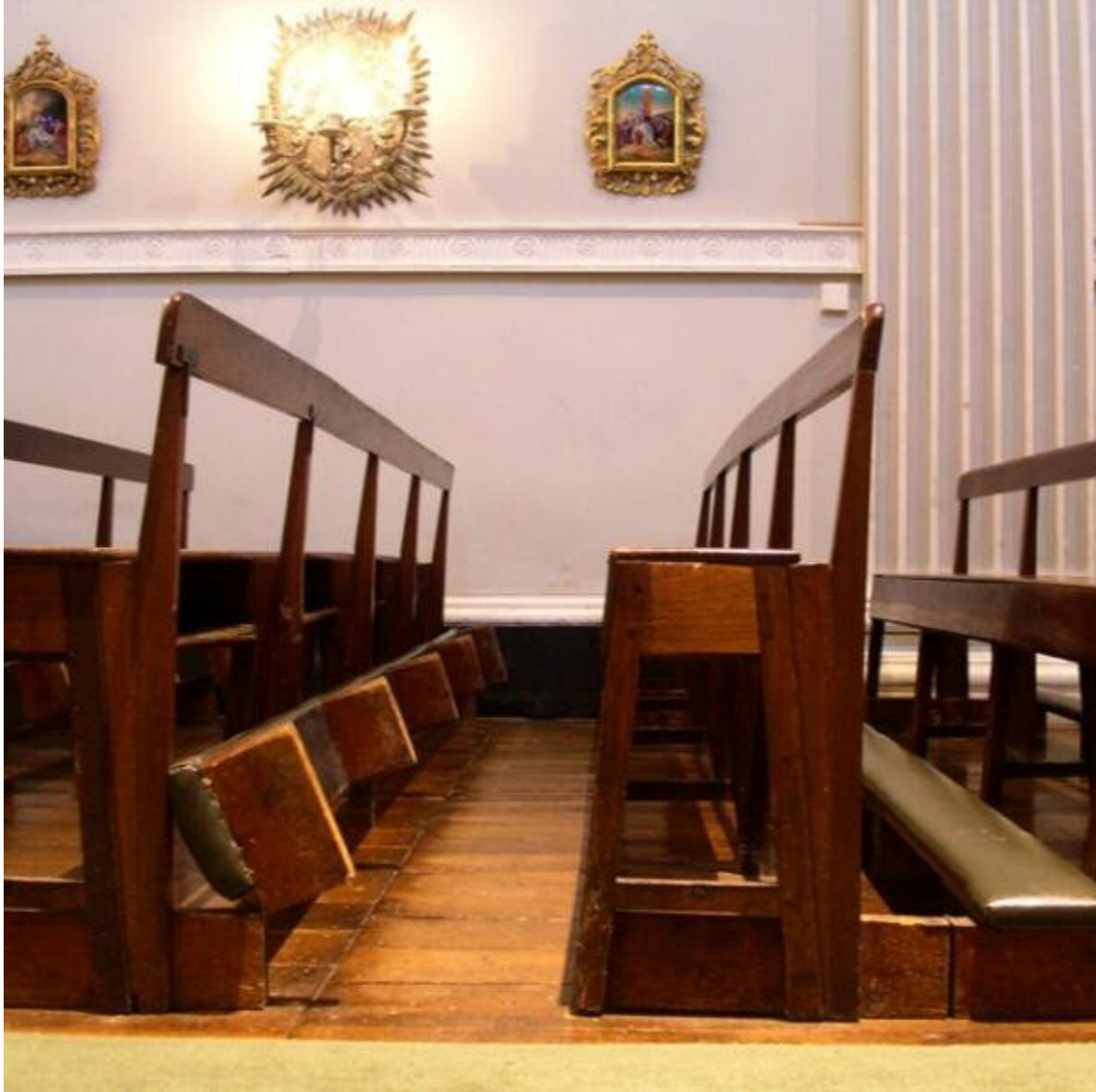
The Laudian Revival of 1630s saw the introduction of box-pews...



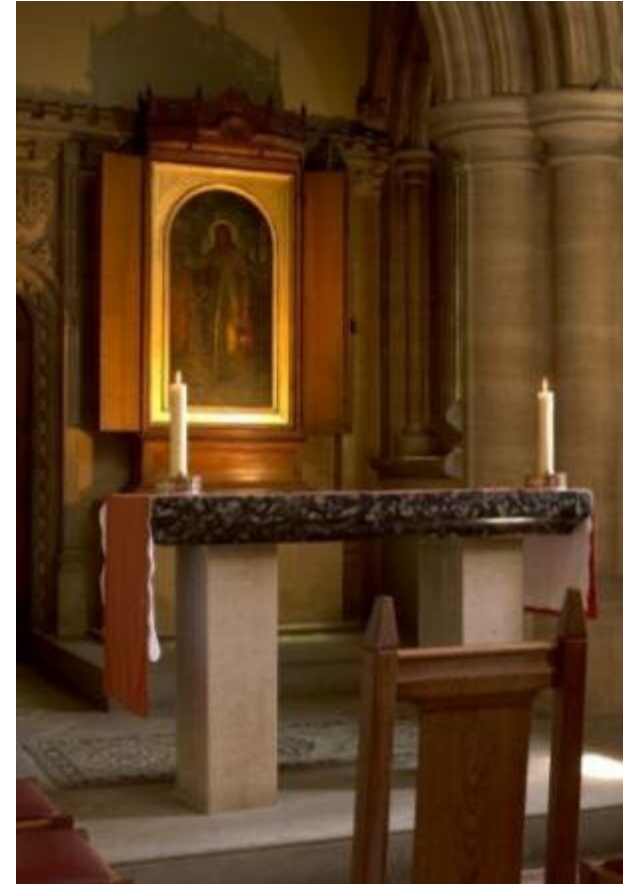
...which became increasingly sophisticated in 18th century



The later 18th century - some allowances for comfort in family chapels



The Oxford Movement and the Gothic Revival



The Oxford Movement and the Gothic Revival ...in rural areas

