



Church seating

The History of seating at Knowle

Originally, medieval churches would not have had any, or very limited seating. The need for seating developed as, post the reformation, preaching became a much more important part of the worship of God.

It is not known when seating for anyone other than the clergy and members of the college was introduced into Knowle but there were box pews in the 18th Century. Most of these would have been dedicated to use by specific local families, very much on the basis of status.

In the 19th Century, as a result of growth in population, there was a movement across the country to increase the amount of seating in churches and grants became available from the Incorporated Church Building Society (ICBS) for churches to increase the number of seats and in particular the number of “poor seats”; seats available for anyone attending rather than being available only for designated families.

This move coincided with the decision to establish Knowle as a Parish in its own right, and our building thus becoming a Parish Church for the first time, after 450 years, in 1860. This was also a time when the development of automatic wood carving machines meant that large, simple pews could be purchased cost effectively from a number of ecclesiastical suppliers in Birmingham.

Our current church pews are the result. They are designed with very straight backs partly because this allowed more rows to be fitted into the space, and partly because the emphasis was as much on ease of kneeling as on comfort when seated. They are made of oak imported from Latvia through the port at Riga and machine made in the Midlands.

Although the church successfully applied for and obtained a grant for these pews, the view of the ICBS assessor was not complimentary, describing the scheme as having little to commend it. The ICBS also called for the medieval choir stalls to be retained in the building against the view of the Rector of Knowle who regarded them as in miserable condition and taking up valuable space!

For Future Generations

The Victorian pews are increasingly unsuited to the way we use the church and make it very difficult for users of mobility aids and children’s buggies. Whilst some appreciate the ordered appearance they present, an increasing number of people see them as uncomfortable, unwelcoming and a restriction on how the building can be used both by the church and other local groups.

Our vision for a more welcoming and adaptable space has led to the current plans to remove the victorian pews and replace then with a design of chair that will be familiar to anyone who has recently visited many of our wonderful cathedrals.

Available from a number of suppliers, modern church furniture is designed to be light, comfortable and also to stack as many as 50 seats high in a special cradle.

We have not yet specified a particular design and will consult with church members later in the project about the particular design, the number of chairs with arms and other specific requirements.



Chairs linking