

St Bridget's, Brigham

St Bridget's is believed to be located on a place of worship dating back to 500AD. A number of structures have existed on the site, an early wooden church and possibly a Priory.

The current church has Norman origins and was extensively re-ordered in Victorian times.

Those changes are the basis of the current fabric and content of the church.

The inside of the church in 1907, on a contemporary postcard.



The outside of the church before the Victorian re-ordering.

The Church Today

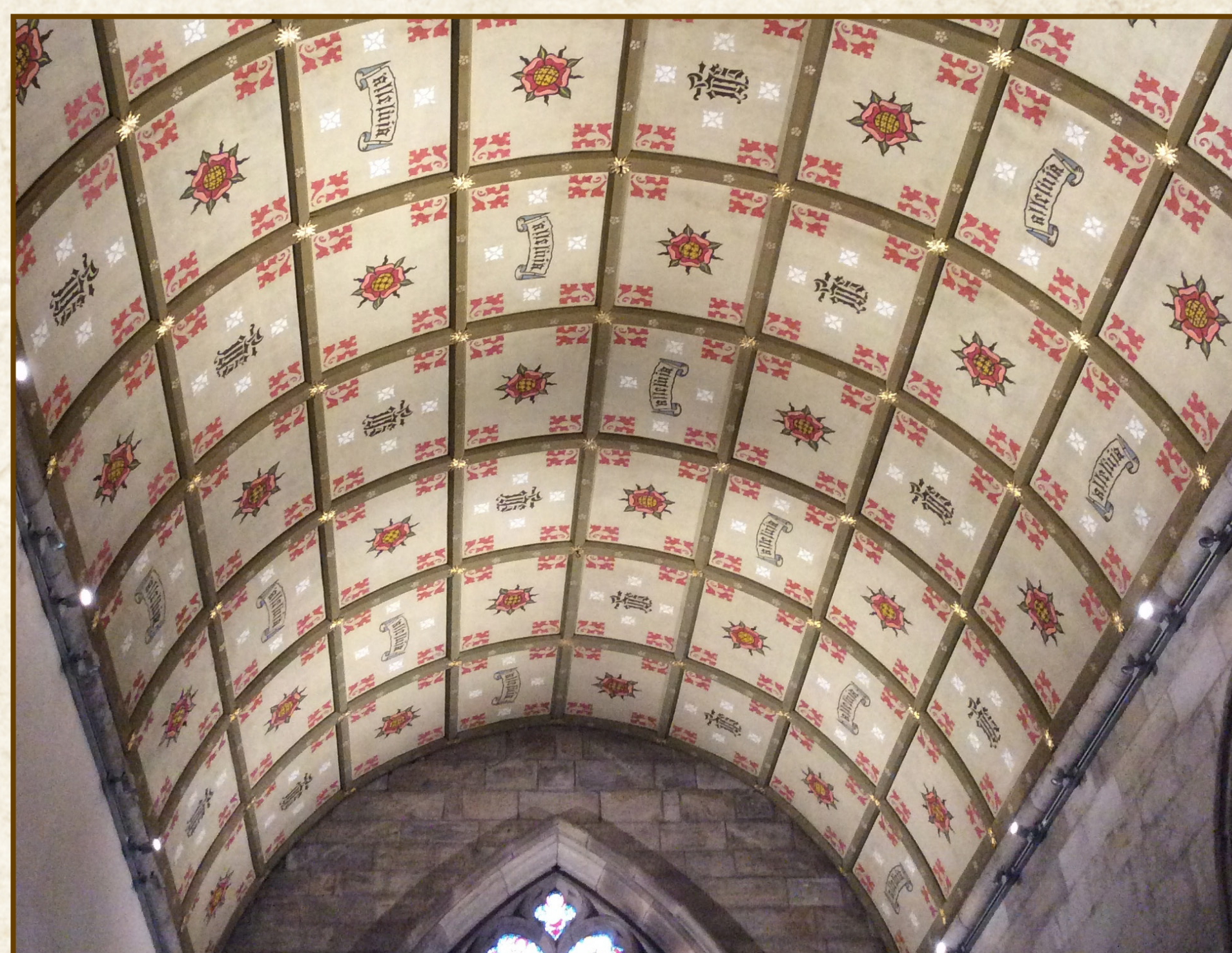
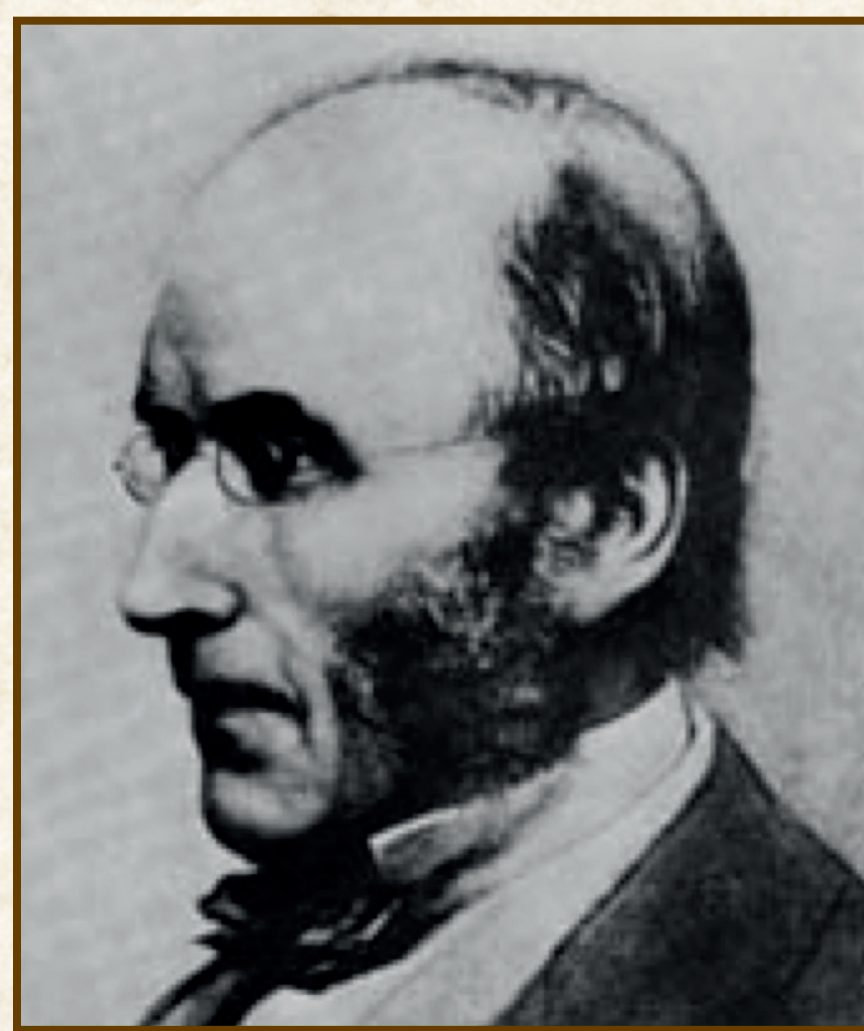
Pictured below, the Chancel, Nave, Lady Chapel and the outside of the church today.



Our Historic Ceilings

The stunning ceilings of St Bridget's Church, Brigham, were created by the famed architect William Butterfield as part of his restorations between 1864 and 1876. As part of re-ordering the church in 1864, Butterfield created the Nave and Lady Chapel ceilings. At a later date, in 1876, he reordered the Chancel creating a further stunning ceiling.

Butterfield was based in London but travelled extensively – he also worked on St Bees' Priory and built Lamplugh Church, and created and worked on projects as diverse as St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne, Australia, and the chapel at Balliol College, Oxford, and won the Royal Institute of British Architects' Royal Gold Medal in 1884 for 'his revival of Gothic architecture', being described as 'a true master of his craft'.



So what makes the ceilings so significant?

They're made of paint on plaster, rather than on the more common medium of wood.

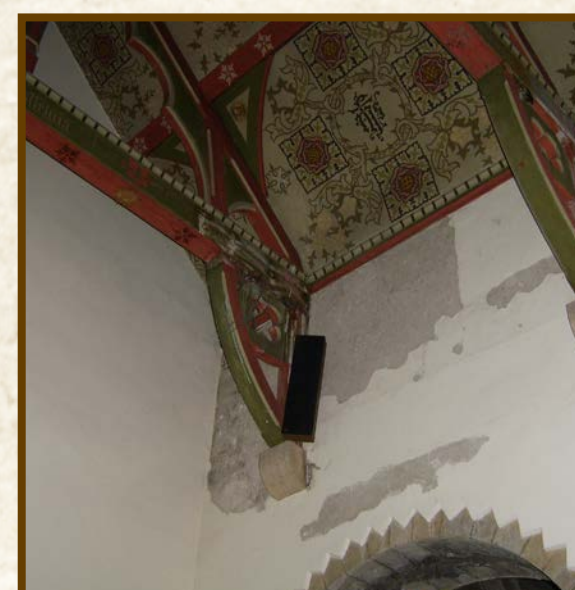
The simple but lovely red, cream and gold design features floral details, with red roses and thorns, and also the words 'alleluia' and the abbreviation 'IHS', commonly acknowledged as an abbreviation of the Greek 'Iesous', or 'Jesus'.



What Made Us Start?

In 2009, as a result of a leaking roof, the ceilings of the Nave and Lady Chapel were damaged. Additionally, roof timbers in the Nave also suffered dry rot. To secure the integrity of the church's fabric, work was commissioned to repair the roof and replace the damaged ceiling plaster and **woodwork**.

So that's where we started. The extent of the internal damage meant a waiting time to allow materials to age was needed.



Once we were watertight we had some decisions to make...

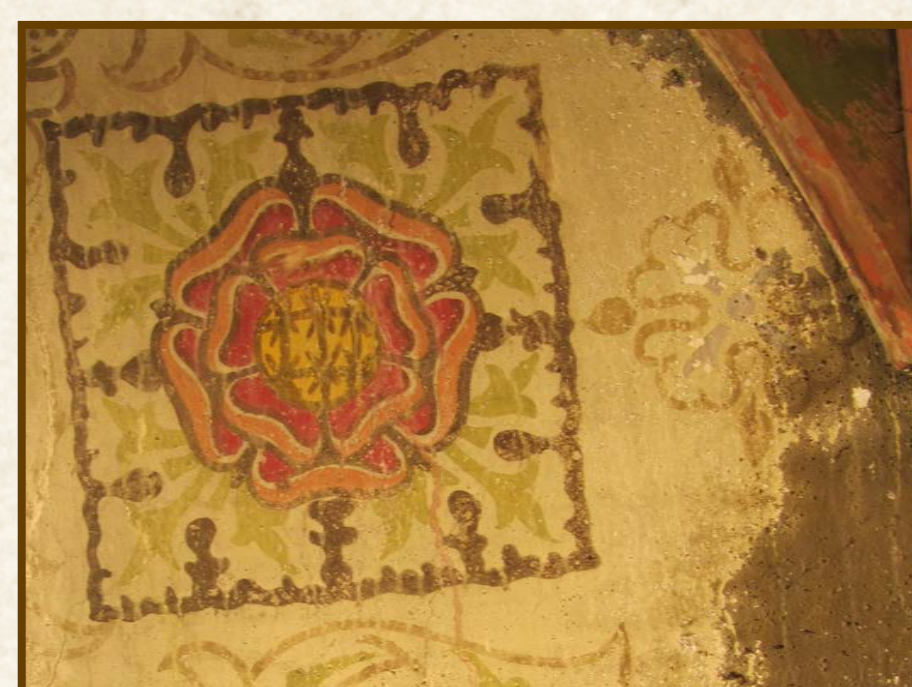
We considered what options we might have for bringing this artwork back to its former glory. It all began with a report from expert conservators Hirst Conservation. They checked out the condition of plaster and paintwork in the Nave and Lady Chapel. As well as measurements of moisture, temperature, etc they took samples of paint.

In considering the significance of the ceilings they advised that they were of national importance and, if restored, would be one of only a few good examples of William Butterfield's work of this type in the country.

They gave us three options:

1. Replace the missing decoration in fresh colour.
2. Replace the missing decoration in colours muted to match the current (dirty) ceiling colours.
3. Clean the ceiling, stabilise the existing paint, retouch the parts that were in poor condition and replace the missing decoration in fresh colours.

The Parochial Church Council took the brave decision of option 3. That was when we launched the project to restore the ceiling to its original condition. The condition is best described by the following images:



Since the Victorian restoration the ceilings had only been cleaned infrequently and folklore says brave parishioners did so by perching on a plank on the crossbeams with a feather duster. The plank was positioned using access from the Tower by the small door high up in the Nave's west wall.

History shows that under William Butterfield's close supervision, the original work was carried out by trusted local craftsmen and the cost was met by donations from local people. Some descendants of craftsmen and philanthropists still live locally. That local philanthropy was something we were able to repeat. Fundraising began in the Summer of 2012 with a sponsored cover-to-cover reading of the King James' bible – which took four days and raised a massive £10,000.

With other local events, funding from the church's coffers and some very generous donations, we were able to make a start. But we knew it was going to take a much more substantial amount of money to complete the project.

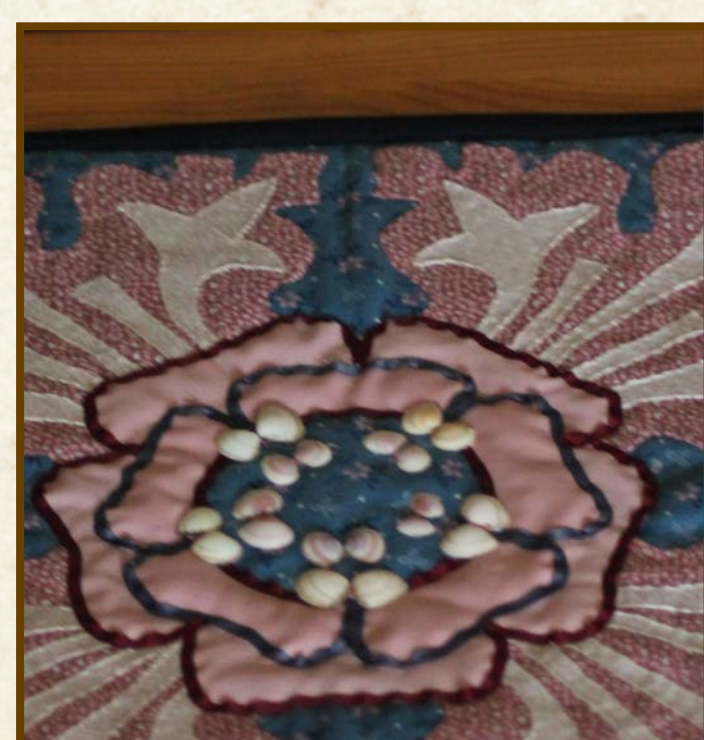
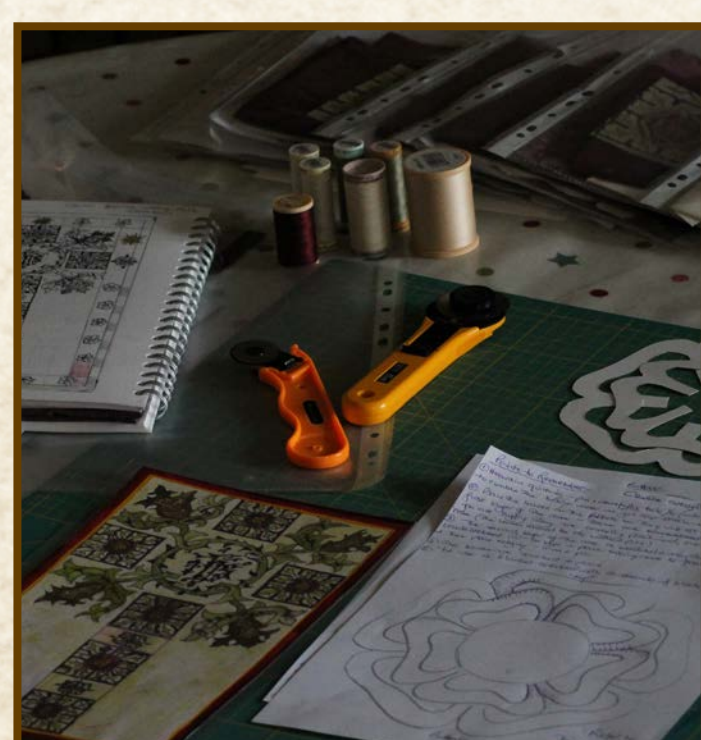
Our Heritage Lottery Fund grant...

We received £48,000 from the HLF – and, it's safe to say, we couldn't have done it without them. We told them how important it was that we saved the Butterfield painted ceilings because they were part of the local, regional and national heritage – and the HLF agreed.

As part of our bid, we involved students from two local schools, the Brigham village primary school and Cockermouth's secondary school, and three adult art and craft groups. We wanted to raise awareness of not only our lovely Grade I listed church, but also the special significance of its architecture.

We also trained local volunteers in the building's history so they could be ambassadors and guides for the project's Open Day. We pledged to create this permanent record of the project, to lodge documents with Cumbria's Archive and Record Service, and online, on the St Bridget's website, so that everyone could see what had been achieved.

It's been brilliant to see so many parishioners and members of the community participating in their own special ways. From schoolchildren and their art projects, to adults with a passion for craft and textiles, hundreds of people have got involved.



Work In Progress

Watching the professionals...

Their aim was to preserve the original work as much as possible and, where the historic plaster had disappeared or been damaged over the years, to replace it in a way which matched the original appearance as closely as possible.



We needed some access, the church was completely scaffolded out - but services continued!

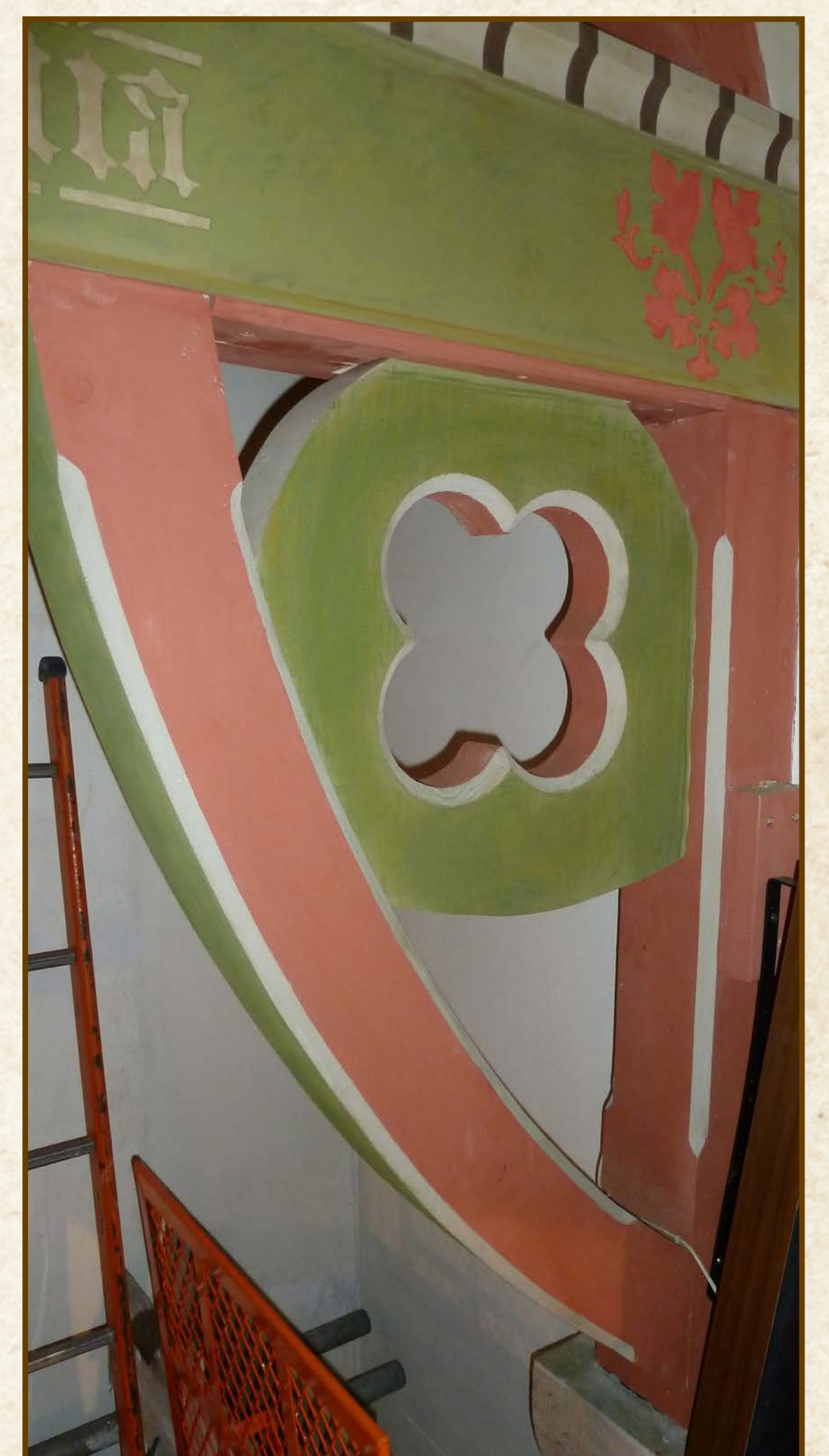


The experts started with some simple dry brushing and vacuuming to clean. Later it got pretty technical, special substances were very gently injected and a stabilising spray was used to consolidate the paint which was left.



Paint samples were sent off for analysis and templates of the patterns were made for replacement in the lost and badly damaged areas.

The matched paint was used on the ceiling and matched pastels were used to colour the woodwork. Compare below with the earlier image of the raw wood after replacement.



We had some visitors...

Writer and BBC broadcaster Eric Robson visited as part of our documentary preparation.



The Right Reverend James Newcome (Bishop of Carlisle) also visited us for the documentary and as our Bishop.



So important were our activities that we were able to secure the involvement of historian James Perry, of Lancaster University. James investigated the detail of the Victorian restoration using the list of original subscribers. By looking at individuals on the list he was able to prepare a report entitled 'Brigham and Greysouthen: Our Victorian ancestors who shaped the parish' - a socio-economic investigation into the lives of subscribers of the 1865 Butterfield renovation of St Bridget's church in Brigham, West Cumberland'

Present at our Open Day, he was able to answer questions. He also delivered his report as a presentation to an audience of about 100 people. His report can be read through a link on our website at www.stbridgetsbrigham.org.uk.

To complete the project we raised an additional £10,000 to install the new lighting scheme so that you can now enjoy the ceilings in all their glory.

The Work's Completed

We couldn't wait to open our doors to the community and show off the results of the project when the work was complete.

So many people had been involved, including some local quilt makers who created the Butterfield-inspired wall hanging you see in the church today (read about it in the booklet on the adjacent pew).



The Bishop of Carlisle's Dedication Service...

And finally, we had a rededication service in church, with the Bishop of Carlisle, The Right Reverend James Newcome.



The Open Day...

We held an open day in the church so that people could come to view the ceiling and meet our newly trained guides who could talk them through the work.

We even had a cake!



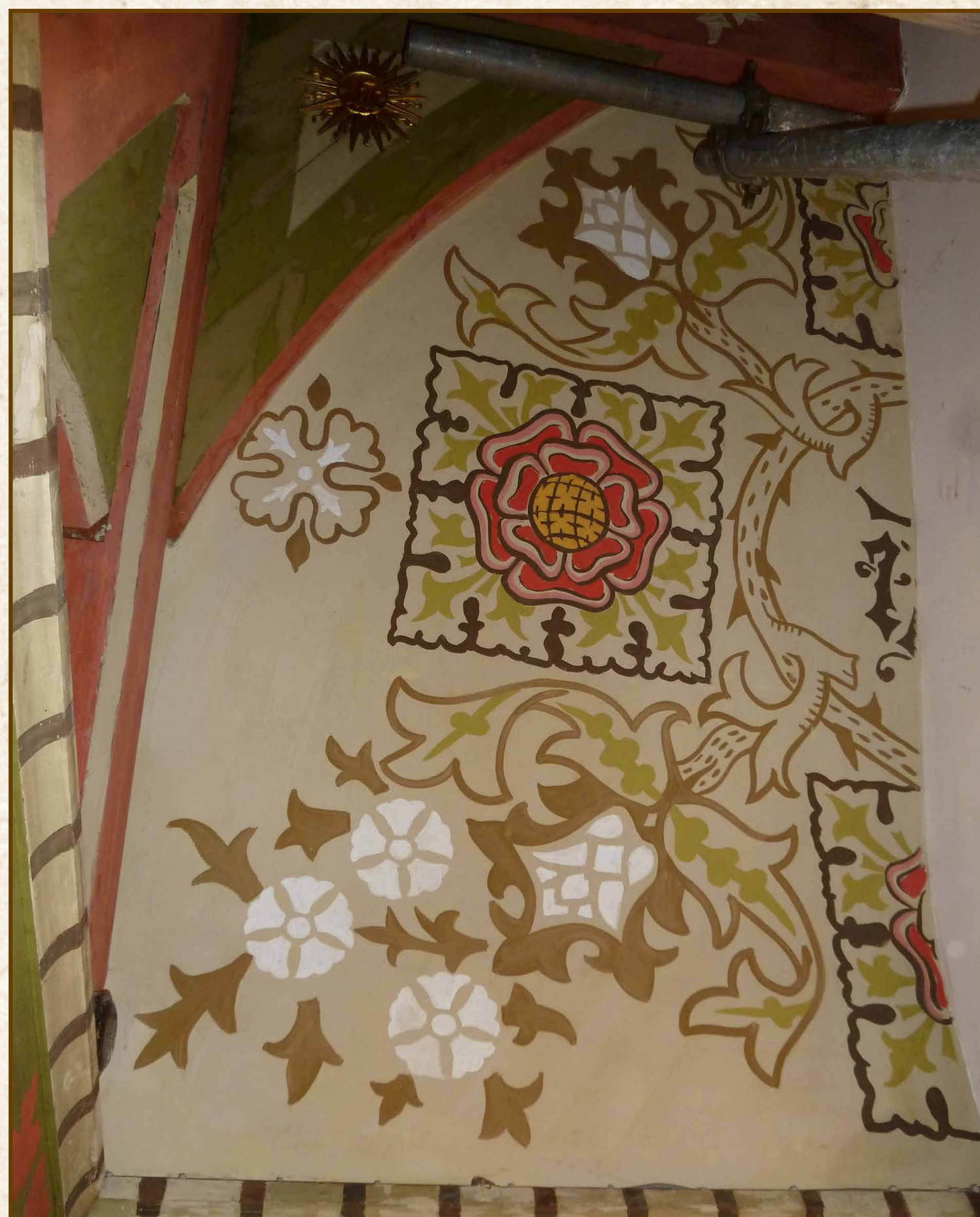
Countless other people have also come through our doors to see the results of all the hard work.

What you miss from the floor...

This is what it looks like up close.



It was discovered that a 'beautification of the ceiling', commissioned by parishioners, was carried out in 1896 by a Cambridge artisan. We believe that this is what the ceiling decoration would have looked like.



See the above southwest half panel of the Nave ceiling, compare it with the other Nave ceiling panel decoration. What's the difference?

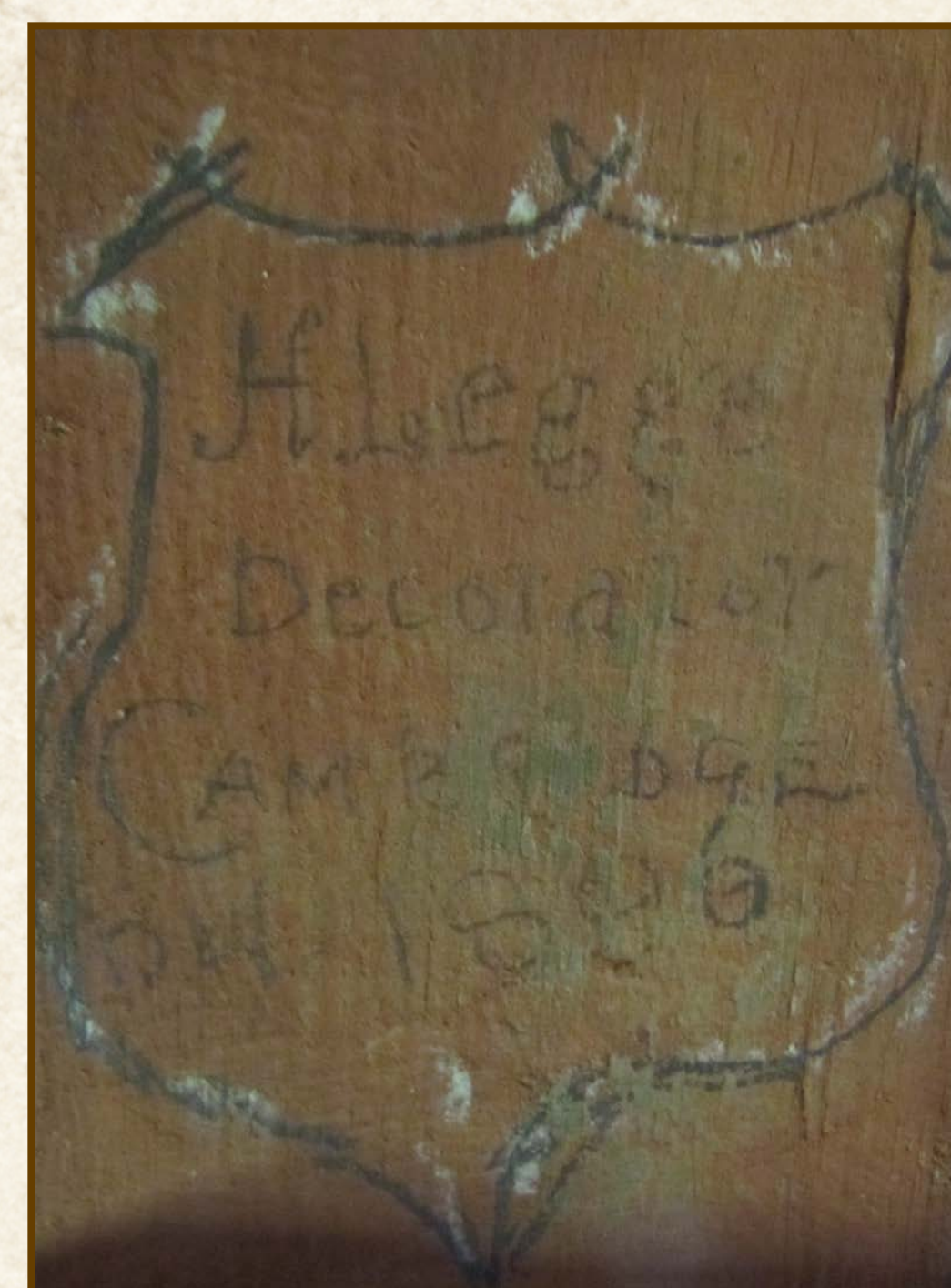
See a model of the lead stars that adorn the ceiling on the window sill adjacent to the wall hanging.



There are a number of centre designs to the roses. Can you identify them or perhaps spot some more?

People got there before us...

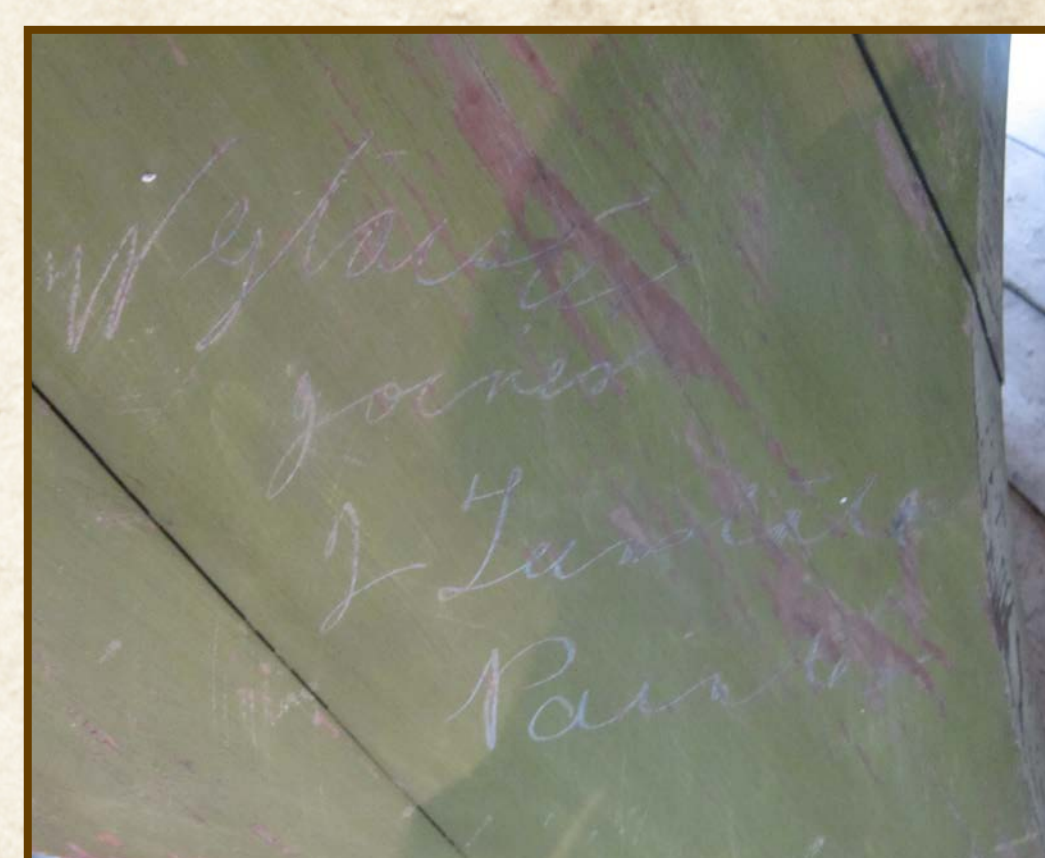
Discovered on timbers in the Nave ceiling void. The signature of H Legge, Decorator of Cambridge, dated December 1896. This answers a query over who probably carried out that 'beautification of the ceiling'.



Can you spot any other 'mistakes'? Below are examples:



J Glaister - joiner and JL Tunstall - painter also signed. Both are local names and until the 1990s there was a decorating business trading in Cockermouth under the name of Tunstall.



What's Next?

Well, when we have collected the time, energy and money – we have big plans! They all involve work:

Our gorgeous windows and stained glass



Among our list of projects are plans to clean the ceiling in the church's chancel, a project which will cost around £25,000, but which would restore the entire church's ceiling to its original glory.

If you'd like to find out more about this major restoration project, and other interesting things about the church visit our website www.stbridgetsbrigham.org.uk.

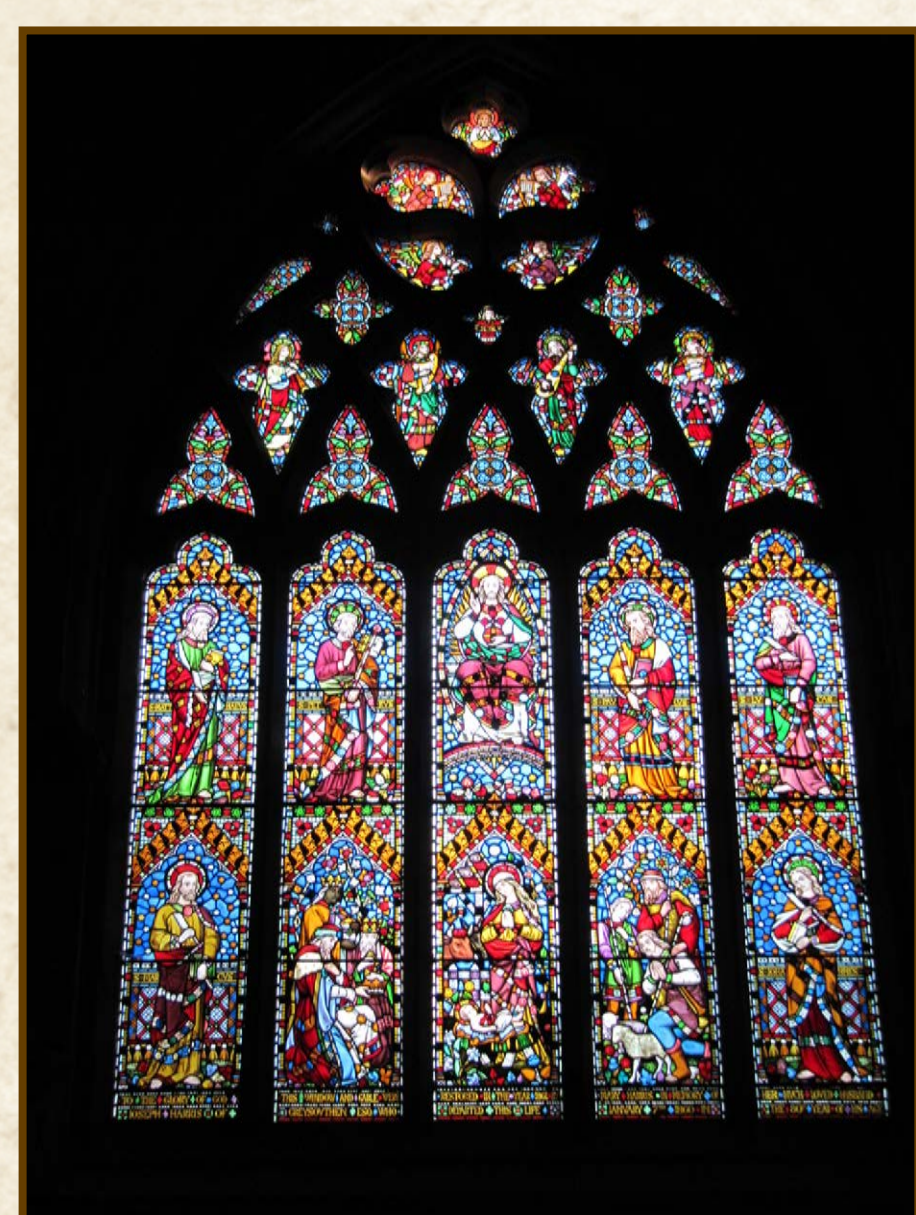
If you have a smart phone click any of the QR codes situated around the church, and you'll be taken to the relevant website page. On the website you can even watch a documentary about the story of the work.

No images of the finished ceilings are necessary as you CAN see them for yourself - just look up. Ask to see it with just the up-lighters on - they illuminate the wall hanging too.

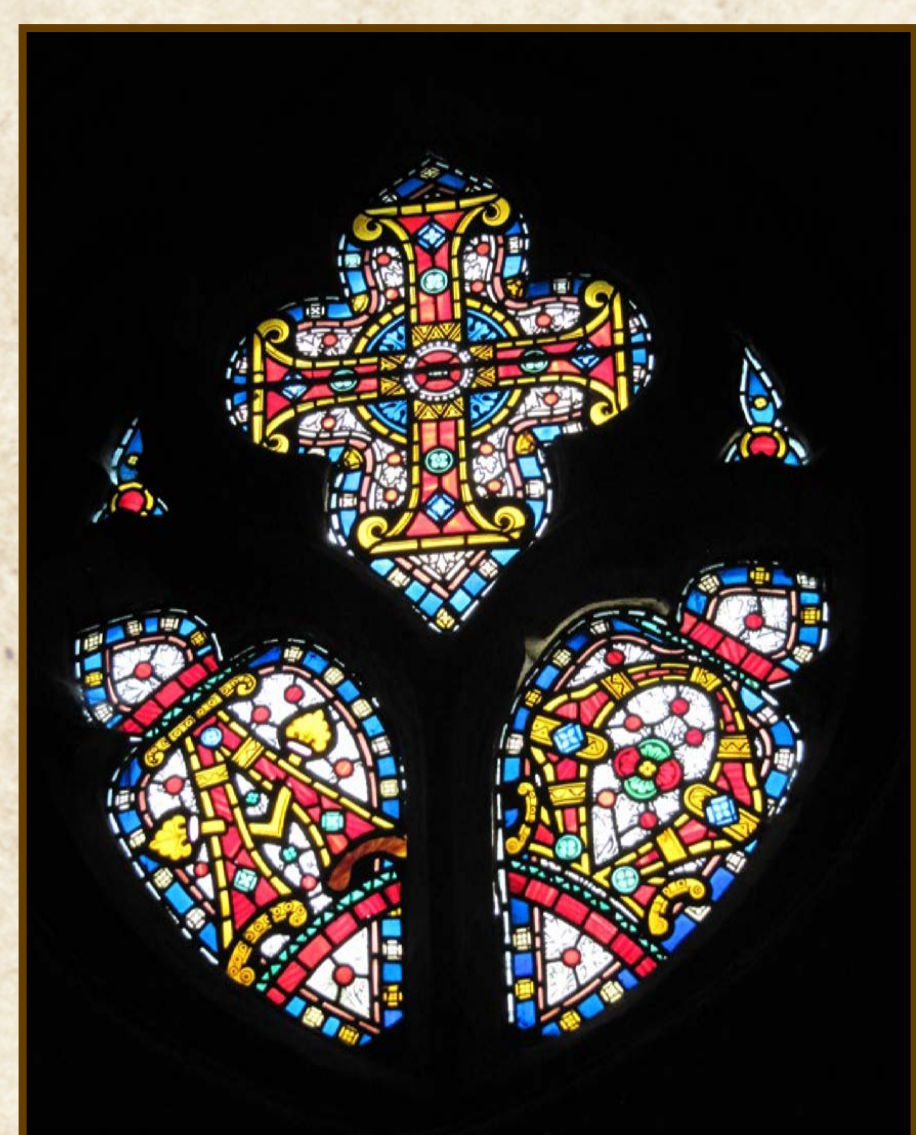
The best time to see the ceilings is at dusk, the church leaves a truly amazing memory.

If you would like to be part of St Bridget's Church's future, please make a donation here in the church.

Why not become a Friend of St Bridget's and make a donation on the website at www.stbridgetsbrigham.org.uk?



Chancel ceiling



Tower and bells

