

Church Buildings Report PM 2718

Pulford, St Mary the Virgin

(609031 CHR)

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PART 1: Summary

OVERVIEW

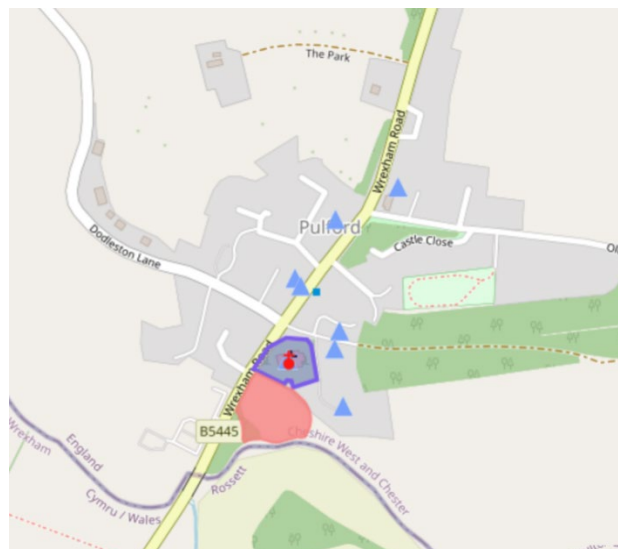


Exterior view of north elevation outside the churchyard

Parish: Eccleston and Pulford	Dedication: St Mary the Virgin	Benefice: Eccleston and Pulford
Deanery: Chester	Archdeaconry: Chester	Diocese: Chester
Population: 845 (365 occupied households)	Index of Multiple Deprivation Rank: 7686 out of 12161 (where 1 is the most deprived parish)	
Address	Wrexham Road Pulford Chester CH4 9DH	
NGR	SJ 375 587	
County	Cheshire	
Local Authority	Cheshire West and Chester Council	
Listing (or other building designation)	Grade II*; Historic England list entry number 1138390	

Other designations	Pulford Conservation Area
Other buildings or land	None
Site/construction history	Parish church. Rebuilt 1881-84 by <i>John Douglas</i> . Banded red and buff coursed rubble sandstone. Steep red tile roofs. Shingle spire and pinnacles. Aisleless nave, chancel with transepts, L-shaped passage connecting the nave and north transept. Spire destroyed by fire in 1991 and rebuilt.
Brief summary: The church is largely unaltered. It features a complete collection of furnishings, including children's pews, showcasing local craftsmanship. Special details such as the staircase through the faux buttress to the children's pews and the recognisable Queen Victoria and Duke of Westminster head stops add additional interest.	
Overall assessment of significance: The church, in the sense of the ensemble of church building, furnishings and churchyard, is of moderate to high significance overall. The levels of significance are more fully defined at the end of this report.	

LOCATION AND SETTING



LHS: view of Pulford Motte and Bailey Castle from the churchyard, looking southeast. (Scheduled monument, list entry number 1012078)

RHS: Map showing the church next to the Welsh border and Pulford Motte and Bailey Castle (in red)

Landscape or townscape setting / context:

Pulford is a rural community five kilometres southwest of Chester. It is located along the Welsh border, which is approximately 150 metres from the church. The village features housing, a hotel, a garage, and a village hall. A busy road between runs through the centre of the community directly past the church. There are good transport links to Chester. The tall spire gives the church good presence from the road.

The Pulford Motte and Bailey Castle is immediately beside the church. It was located at a strategic point where the road from Wrexham to Chester crossed Pulford Brook at the Welsh border. The date of construction is not clear, but it was known to be in existence in c. 1245. It is likely that there was a church near the Castle, but known records for a church on this site start in C16.

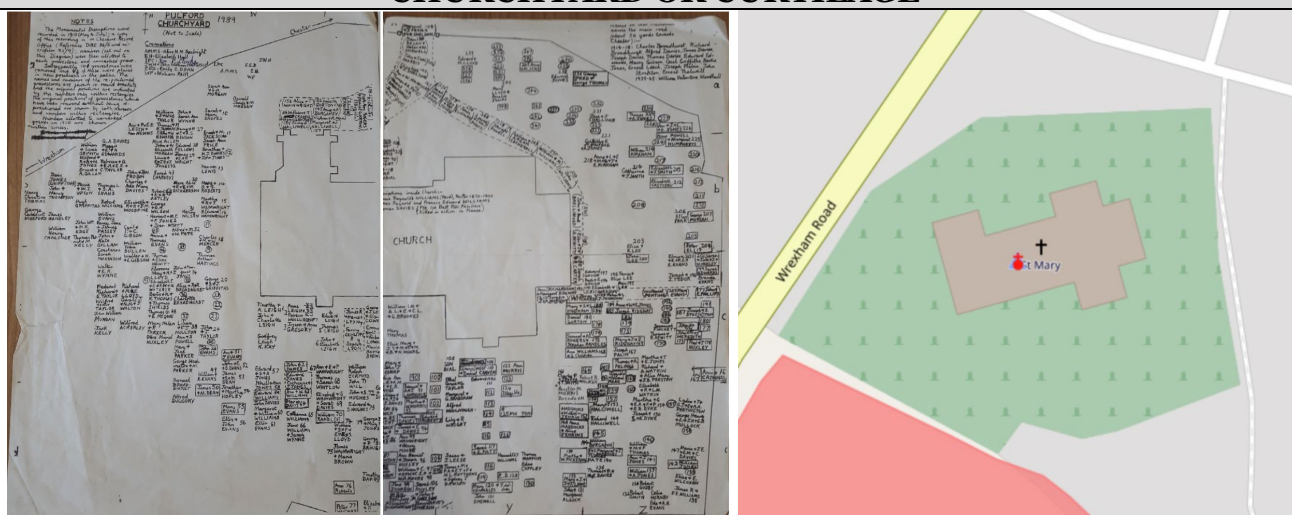
In 1813, the land around Pulford was bought by the 2nd Marquis of Westminster, Richard Grosvenor. The area was developed in the second half of the C19, with work by *John Douglas*. The church itself was rebuilt by *John Douglas* at the expense of the first Duke of Westminster, Richard Grosvenor's son. The land was sold in 1919 and no longer forms part of the estate lands.

Summary of significance / any potential issues

The church makes a positive contribution to the Pulford Conservation Area and its spire provides a landmark along the road at the border between England and Wales. Its connection to the Duke of Westminster and John Douglas speaks to their involvement in the development of the area.

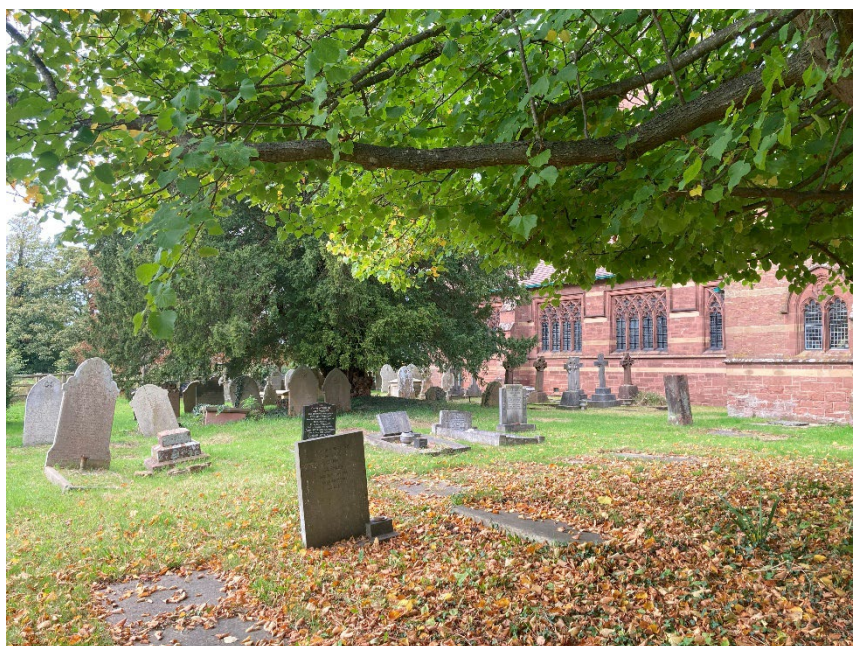
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CHURCHYARD OR CURTILAGE



*LHS: Churchyard burial plan c. 1889 provided by the PCC.
RHS: Churchyard as outlined on the Church Heritage Record.*

Area	Approximately 2870 m ²
Burials/ashes interments	Marked burials and internment of ashes dating from C17 to recent. Gravestones have been used as paving stones to create paths in the churchyard. There is a high likelihood of unmarked graves. One grave maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. For more information see: Private G A Davies War Casualty Details 2746940 CWGC .
Status	Open churchyard. The parish are looking to close the churchyard while keeping an area open for the internment of ashes.
Archaeology	None recorded on the HER. There is potential for archaeology due to the church's proximity to Pulford Castle.
Trees and plantings	- The churchyard is laid to grass - There are mature deciduous and coniferous trees. - Hedges form the boundary on the east and southeast side of the churchyard.
Habitats and species	As a greenspace in a rural area, the churchyard will be a habitat for wildlife and species. The MAGIC database highlighted the following habitat areas: - Woodland Priority Habitat Network - Farm Wildlife Package Area - Breeding area for Grey Partridge and Lapwing
Access & parking	- There is a Council owned car park outside the churchyard. The Council was informed that the parish can use the car park, but it was not confirmed if there was a formal agreement. - A level paved path leads from the Council car park and main north gate to the primary entrance under the tower on the northwest side. - A path made of grave slabs leads from the north gate around the east side of the church and up to the war memorial. - A path made of grave slabs runs from the east-facing south transept door to a gate on the east side of the churchyard. - Level access to the north porch. Two steps up to the south transept door.



Top: churchyard looking northwest

LHS: West side of churchyard looking south; RHS: east side of the churchyard looking southeast

Description

The churchyard surrounds the church on four sides with burials concentrated on the west, south, and east sides. The memorials date from C17 to recent with the majority being C19 and C20. Further grave slabs have been used to create pathways. There is a lantern cross First World War memorial on the north side of the churchyard.

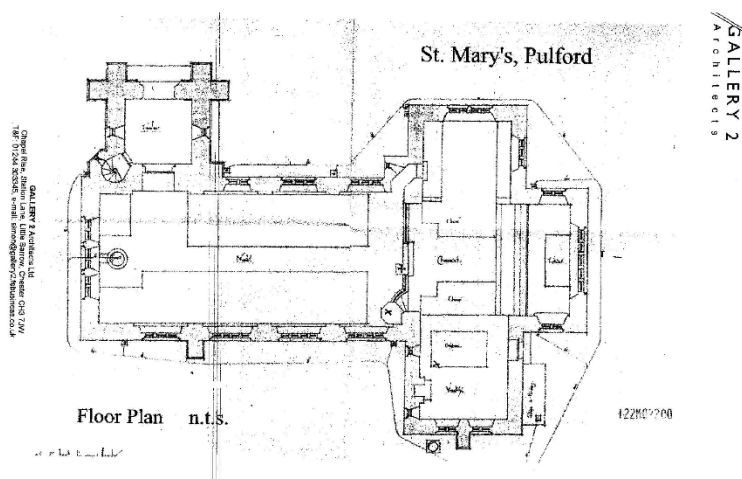
The north boundary is a sandstone wall. The northwest boundary is a high hedge. A wooden post and rail fence forms the west boundary between the church and the Castle. The south and west boundaries are hedges. The churchyard is laid to grass with mature trees. There are several memorial benches which make the churchyard a pleasant space to spend time.

Summary of significance / any potential issues

A pleasant green churchyard with good views over Pulford Castle. It makes a positive contribution to the Pulford Conservation Area. On the site visit, people were observed enjoying the space and resting on the benches.

M

CHURCH BUILDING



LHS: Aerial view of the church and churchyard. 2025 Google Maps, Airbus, Bluesky, Infoterra Ltd & A/S, Maxar Technologies. RHS: Plan of the church from the 2021 QIR. Gallery2 Architects.

Dimensions	Internal floor dimensions not measured on site. The area of the exterior footprint (aerial survey recorded on the Church Heritage Record) is 409m².
Form and constituent parts	Four-bay nave, chancel, north transept, and south transept screened as a vestry, north-west tower.
Building materials	Exterior: Walls: red sandstone, bands of lighter stone; roofs: red tile Interior: Ceiling: plaster between oak roof trusses; walls: bare sandstone; floors: red quarry tile, wood blocks below the pews, organ and in the vestry. Chancel is carpeted.
State of repair based on latest Quinquennial Inspection Report	Report: Simon Malam, Donald Insall Associates Date: March 2021 Summary: <i>The majority of items highlighted as requiring attention in the previous QI have been addressed. Redecoration of cast iron rainwater goods is required next to prevent corrosion and the need for replacement of components, similarly redecoration of other external metalwork is required.</i>
Additional site visit notes	The building appears to be very well cared for and in good condition. The Council was informed onsite that roof slates are slipping. The main concern is the oil boiler which is at the end of its life.
Heritage at Risk Register	The church is not on the Heritage at Risk Register.
Building services	Supply and connections: Electricity, water, mains sewage Installations: Sink and handwash station with cold water. Oil-fired boiler. Floodlights and wrought iron chandeliers.
Facilities	No WC or kitchen.
Security	Fire extinguishers, lightning conductor
Access & accessibility	- There is a ramp at the base of the tower which provides an accessible entrance to the nave. - A hearing loop is provided and is promoted through signs in the nave.

	- The chancel is up three steps. The sanctuary is up two steps. - There are three steps up from the nave to the children's pews
Evidence of archaeology & burials within church	Since the church is on the site of earlier churches and beside a C13 motte and bailey castle, there is high potential for archaeology throughout the site, including burials under the Victorian fabric.



Exterior view of south transept and chancel from the southeast, and main northwest entrance

Description (exterior):

The church is red sandstone banded with lighter cream stone. The roofs are steeply pitched with red tiles. There are original ornate cast iron rainwater goods.

The church was built in 1881-1884 by *John Douglas* replacing an earlier church on the site which had fallen into disrepair. The tower is supported by angle buttresses. The clock faces the north. The tower is topped by a shingle spire with four pinnacles and four dormers. The spire was seriously damaged following a fire in 1991 and was rebuilt.

The primary entrance to the church is under the northwest tower. The west window is six lights with hexafoil and cinquefoil tracery. The east window has five lights with a hoodmould and angel head stops. The nave windows are rectangular with three and four lights and elaborate tracery. The south transept has square headed windows with quatrefoils and trefoils. The north transept window is plate tracery with four lights and Star of David tracery above.



Interior views looking East and West

Description (interior):

The nave is entered at the northwest via a porch under the tower. The threshold is a step up, but it is navigated by a sturdy ramp. The nave door under the northwest tower is framed by head stops featuring Queen Victoria and the First Duke of Westminster.

The primary space is an aisleless four-bay nave. The walls are exposed red sandstone with lighter banding. Pevsner describes the interior “of the highest quality and extreme restraint.” The ceiling is dark oak rafters and braced collar roof structure with plaster. The floors are red quarry tiles with wooden pew platforms. The chancel has encaustic tiles interspersed with the quarry tiles and red carpet.

The chancel is up three central steps with a low wall to either side. The transepts are at chancel level. The south transept is screened off as the organ chamber and vestry. The north transept has children’s pews. The south transept is also accessed through an L shaped corridor from the nave. The sanctuary has a square headed trefoil piscina on the north side and a two-seat sedilia on the south side. There is a blind arcade across the east wall behind the reredos.

Summary of significance / any potential issues

Essentially unaltered, spacious Victorian interior. The nave and transept are fully pewed, lending itself to traditional worship.

M-H

FURNISHINGS



LHS: suite of children's pews in the north transept
RHS: C17 wooden tablet to the Burganey family

Brief summary of furnishings:

The furnishings form a complete collection and are almost all original. Some key pieces are highlighted below:

- Oak pews with squared and carved ends, including children's pews.
- Wood furnishings carved by *Edward Griffiths* including half-octagonal oak pulpit, choir stalls, eagle lectern and organ screen.
- West and east windows by *Heaton, Butler & Bayne*.
- Stone font with four marble columns.
- Wrought iron font cover and communion rails by *James Swindley of Ecclestone*. Wrought iron oil-lamp brackets.
- C17 wooden tablet to the Burganey family. Members of the family are buried in the churchyard. The tablet was lost when the church was rebuilt in the 1880s but found at an auction 70 years later.
- Ringing boards dating from 1886 onwards

Summary of significance / any potential issues

The complete set of Victorian furnishings original to the building are significant and children's pews contribute to their importance.

M-H

NEARBY CHURCHES

Eccleston, St Mary 5.39km NE Status: Parish church, same parish as Pulford, St Mary Designations: Grade I, Eccleston Conservation Area, Grade II listed churchyard gates, piers and wing walls. Description: 1899 by GF Bodley, at the expense of the 1st Duke of Westminster. Coursed red sandstone, pitched leaded roof. Aisled nave and chancel, west tower, south porch, north vestry. Complete set of furniture and glazing. Glass by Burlison and Grylls. Tomb to the 1st Duke of Westminster. Facilities: Carpark, Accessible WC, Hearing loop Services: 2nd and 4th Sunday: HC. Activities: Choir practice, messy church. More information and calendar available on their website: ecclestonandpulfordchurches.org Overall significance of building: high.	 Jeff Buck / CC BY-SA 2.0
Dodleston, St Mary 2.55km NW Status: Parish church, same parish as Higher Kinnerton, All Saints Designations: Grade II, Dodleston Conservation Area, Grade II lychgate canopy and wing walls Description: Rebuilt by John Douglas, 1870. Lower stage of tower C16. Red sandstone with grey slate roofs. Nave with north aisle, chancel, north vestry, north porch, west tower. Medieval coffin fragment. Royal coat of arms, 1660. Font and monuments C17. Late C19 stained glass. Facilities: Accessible WC, kitchen, hearing loop Services: 1st Sunday: morning worship; 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th Sundays: HC. Activities: Coffee mornings, craft group Overall significance of building: moderate.	 Jeff Buck / CC BY-SA 2.0
Higher Kinnerton, All Saints 5.22km WNW Status: Parish church, same parish as Dodleston, St Mary Designations: Unlisted Description: 1893 by Douglas & Fordham. Ruabon brick with grey slate roofs. Central tower with broach spire. Organ believed to be the first designed by Robert Hope-Jones. Facilities: kitchen and toilet Services: 1st Sunday: Morning worship; 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th Sunday: HC. 3rd Sunday: Breathe worship (contemporary). Activities: coffee morning Overall significance of building: low to moderate	 Jeff Buck / CC BY-SA 2.0

ASSESSMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY AND POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE

Context for the present report:

The Diocese has provided the following context for the present report:

Pulford St Mary (Grade 2 listed) is in the parish with Eccleston St Mary (Grade 1 listed) and the parish are unable to sustain both the churches. Pulford St Mary joined the parish with Eccleston St Mary in the 1970s but whilst Eccleston St Mary receives funding help from the Duke of Westminster's estate, Pulford St Mary does not receive any financial assistance. They have been advised the Eccleston trust fund cannot be used for Pulford St Mary. The parish have commented that if Pulford St Mary were to be closed, it was expected that the parish would break even. It is considered that Pulford St Mary is now surplus to requirements in the parish. It is understood that the existing oil boiler is near the end of its life. There is a low level of regular attendance (of around 16). Only one member of the PCC now lives locally, in the parish. No events are held there now, and there are no toilet facilities. Pulford no longer has a school, and there is nothing else of interest in Pulford apart from the Grosvenor hotel and the garage.*

CBC's assessment of sustainability and potential for change to facilitate continued worship use:

The Council was informed on site that the decision to consider closure was a difficult one for the PCC but had been on the horizon for many years. The parish is split across two churches and Pulford, St Mary does not benefit from the support or facilities which are available at Eccleston, St Mary.

It was clear that the church building is loved and well cared for. The church is open daily and visitors came into the building while the Council was conducting its visit. The parish participated in Heritage Open Days and there were interpretation materials and signs available inside and outside the building. Overall, the building appears to be in good condition, but the oil boiler is at the end of its life. The PCC expressed concerns that replacing it would be expensive, especially with a net-zero alternative to oil. There may be grant funding available for net-zero heating solutions and the PCC may wish to contact the Chester Diocese Net Zero Carbon Project Officer, Airren Martin (Airren.Martin@chester.anglican.org), in the first instance. The lack of facilities is also challenge. There could be scope to install a toilet and servery at the rear of the nave.

There had not yet been a public consultation at the time of the Council's visit. The PCC anticipated some challenging discussions since rumours were already beginning to circulate locally. If there is local opposition to closure, this could be a key moment to start a friend's group and engage support. Those who may not attend church could be willing to support the building when faced with closure. There is an active local history group which has an extensive website and produced an interpretative panel outside the church, so they may be able to help galvanise support. There could also be an opportunity to partner with the Grosvenor Hotel to offer a large audience venue for events, retreats and conferences. The Council would encourage the PCC to continue reaching out to the estate of the Duke of Westminster given the historic ties to the church. The Church Buildings Council may be placed to provide high level support on this matter.

Key message from the Church Buildings Council:

The parish find it difficult to find the funding and peoplepower to maintain two highly listed church buildings. Replacing the boiler is an upcoming expense and the lack of facilities are an issue. Despite these challenges, St Mary is a beautiful and well-maintained church suited to traditional worship.

This report was compiled by Heather Townsend on 10 October 2025 after a visit to the site on 30 September 2025. Approved by the Church Buildings Council at its meeting on 27 November 2025.

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Where the closure of a church for regular public worship is to be considered by the Mission and Pastoral Committee of the diocese, the Church Buildings Council is required to provide a report as set out in subsection (7) of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. The present summary report is considered to fulfil this requirement.

The advice given above concerning the potential for change to the building is not binding and any proposals would be subject to faculty following consultation with the DAC and others as required. The CBC is ready to advise further where the parish and diocese wish to develop options for sustainable worship and mission use. If there is a specific need to that end, a fuller gazetteer and assessment of the church can be supplied in the form of part 2 of this report (*Detailed assessment and significance*). In the event of a recommendation for closure being approved by the bishop, part 2 of this report (*Detailed assessment and significance*) will be prepared and circulated to the diocese and Church Commissioners. In addition, part 3 (*Statutory Advisory Committee advice on change*) exploring the suitability of the church for preservation and the scope for adaptive re-use or demolition will be prepared for the Church Commissioners as and when required.

The levels of significance referred to in this report are in line with those promoted in the Church Buildings Council’s published guidance note *Statements of Significance and Statements of Needs* (see <http://www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/guidance-advice/statements-of-significance-need>) and the guidance note on *Conservation Management Plans*. In summary:

High (H)	important at national to international levels
Moderate-High (M-H)	important at regional or sometimes higher
Moderate (M)	usually of local value but of regional significance for group or other value (e.g. vernacular architecture)
Low-Moderate (L-M)	of local value
Low (L)	adds little or nothing to the value of a site or detracts from it

