



IN GOOD HANDS: Pictured at the official handover of the church after its refurbishment are, from left, James Johnson, of architects Barker Associates, Adrian Ward, of church building specialists Bakers of Danbury, URC property manager Pat Neville, Chris Barker, of Barker Associates, and church elder Robert Buss. Photo: OBS 0737357

All things bright and clean again

STEEPED IN HISTORY: Left, from top, An engraving of the church, dated 1860; with a two-tiered gallery and ample curves, architect W F Poulton gave the church interior a feeling of a theatre; the Sunday School foundation stone being laid on July 15, 1914

ONE of the most striking buildings in Bishop's Stortford must surely be the United Reformed Church in Water Lane.

To mark its 150th anniversary last year, the landmark was given a £100,000 spring clean, with one-and-a-half centuries of dirt and grime being removed from the outside and repairs being carried out to the deteriorating stonework and brickwork. Work on the exterior, funded by the sale of two church-owned buildings, has been completed, to the delight of church leaders and the congregation.

Pat Neville, property manager of the Stortford URC, said: "We needed to make sure the outside was properly done, and some time in the future we'll be doing the inside, repainting and decorating, but that won't happen just yet."

"The church was 150 years old - well, 151 now - and we thought it was appropriate to do something for that."

"We've had quite a lot of comments from people saying how much brighter and more cheerful the place looks. Certainly people have noticed and have come in and had a look round."

Work by church building specialists Bakers of Danbury started towards the end of September last year and took five months. The architects were Barker Associates of Manuden.

During the exterior restoration, the building was encircled with scaffolding but remained open for worshippers.

By **Elizabeth Reeve**

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The church was opened in 1860.

It was on the site of an old chapel which, by 1858, had fallen into disrepair and needed £1,200 spent on it. Instead of paying such a sum for repairs, it was decided to demolish the chapel and build a new church costing £2,500 in its place.

This was designed by renowned architect of the time W F Poulton in the Italianate style, with its tall towers, ornate cornices and balcony, and long narrow windows.

The unusual style of the building continued inside, with a two-tiered gallery and pews in a semi-circle facing the altar, giving it a theatrical look.

Two brick pillars that once formed the gateway at the entrance to the church site are still in place either side of the pathway to Florence Walk.

According to local history website www.stortfordhistory.co.uk, these "once supported distinctive wrought ironwork and entrance gates, but all were removed for salvage in 1914 to aid the war effort".

They added: "When the church opened, enough seating was provided to accommodate 850 adults and 300 children."

"The actual membership at the time numbered around 200, but congregations were certainly larger - the Sunday school alone numbering 400 children."

"They were always allotted the top-most gallery."