



Sacred Heart Church Wimbleton A History Guide

By Richard Milward



The nave of the new church was opened on the feast of the Sacred Heart, 17 June 1887. Over the next fourteen years the rest of the building was completed: first the sanctuary and south aisle in 1895, then the back chapels in 1896, the north aisle and sacristy in 1898, and finally the west front in 1901. On the original plan there was to have been a large and impressive tower here, but money ran out and it had to be replaced by twin turrets and a massive, traceried window.

(1) The main entrance to the church is situated under this window. It is notable for a fine Gothic arch which uses different coloured stone and frames a large statue of Our Lady, holding on her lap the child Jesus with an orb in his hand. Just inside the main door are two smaller doors leading to the stairs up the turrets. One turret, however, now houses the electrical motors which power the organ.



(2) The nave is impressive: one hundred feet long and sixty feet high. The pillars are made of Beer stone from Devon, the windows of Ancaster stone from Lincolnshire and the walls of brick covered with plaster inside and knapped flints outside. The two sides of the nave are linked by steel tie-rods, while the roof is double - an inner one of wood, decorated with bosses and supporting the new and very powerful lights, and an outer one tiled and surmounted by a lightning



conductor. Above the pillars are eight statues of Jesuit saints. Looking from the choir loft end of the nave, they are: to the left, John Berchmans; Stanislaus Kostka; Francis Borgia; Ignatius. To the right, Alphonsus Rodrigues; Peter Claver; Aloysius Gonzaga; Francis Xavier. Between each of the statues are angels carrying implements of the Passion.



(3) Looking down the nave from the left side of the sanctuary is a large wooden pulpit, delicately carved with the emblems of St. Peter and the four evangelists. It was designed by Mr. Walters and put up in 1901. On the pillar to its left is a brass plaque to Fr. John Morris who died while preaching at the eleven o'clock Mass on Sunday, 22 October 1893.

On the opposite side of the sanctuary is a large statue of Our Lady of Lourdes. Made of carrara marble, it was designed by Messrs. Rogali of London and placed there in 1896.



(4) The sanctuary was completely reordered in 1990 by the architect, Austin Winkley. Originally it was separated from the nave by altar rails designed by John Bentley, the architect of Westminster Cathedral, and was dominated by a large high altar under a wooden baldachino. The altar rails have now been placed on either side of an enlarged sanctuary, the baldachino has been removed and the old high altar has become part of a Blessed Sacrament chapel. It is now screened off from the sanctuary and the old tabernacle has been raised so as to be visible from the back of the church, with a sculptured panel designed by Jane Quail just below it. The sanctuary is flanked by two special lamp holders, designed by Victor Galliano.

(5) The new high altar was designed by David John who was also responsible for the bronze reliquary underneath containing relics of Roman and English martyrs, including Saints Thomas More and Edmund Campion. The tiled floor was designed by Austin Winkley. The altar was dedicated by Bishop Tripp at a special ceremony on the feast of the Sacred Heart, 22 June 1990. (6) Above the altar is a large rood, designed by Mr. McCulloch of Kennington in 1887. He based the crucifixion with the figures of Our Lady, St. Mary Mag-

dalen and St. John on a rood in the Collegiate Church, Louvain, Belgium. The two flanking angels on wheels (an allusion to Ezekiel's vision of the Lord's chariot) he based on similar figures in a late medieval drawing of the rood-screen at Westminster Abbey. The sanctuary was originally meant to have a stone vault, as shown by the flying buttresses round the apse. In the end it was vaulted in wood, with three large bosses designed by Mr. McCulloch. At the east end of the sanctuary and now revealed in all their beauty are three fine stained-glass windows, designed by Hardmans of Birmingham. They show the Annunciation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.



(7) To the right of the nave is the south or English Martyrs aisle. The Martyrs' altar was erected (as a plaque on the pillar by the Lady Statue states) "to the glory of God and the memory of Fr. John Morris", the priest who died in the pulpit and who was a promoter of their canonisation. It is decorated with statues of some of the Tudor martyrs. They were carved by a Belgian sculptor in 1915. To the right of the altar is another plaque, designed by Victor Galliano, which lists the Forty English and Welsh Martyrs canonised in 1970) and in the alcove a further plaque commemorates three great choir-masters, Fathers Driscoll and Rogers, and Fernand Laloux. Above this is a stained-glass window, designed by Westlake, showing three of the martyrs, Edmund Campion, John Fisher and Thomas More, while in the next window are two great women martyrs, Margaret Pole and Margaret Clitherow. A third window commemorates Fr. John Atkinson who served the parish from 1911

until his sudden death in 1921 and was famed for his love of children. The south aisle is far less ornate than the north, but it is notable for the large plaque to Madame Arendrup, put up in 1977 to mark the centenary of the parish.

(8) There are three more stained-glass windows in the Ambulatory to the right of the sanctuary. They show Jesuit saints: first Alphonsus Rodriguez, then Peter Claver and finally John Berchmans. The ambulatory leads to the three chapels in the apse. Each commemorates a Catholic family, important at the time the church was built.

(9) The first chapel, dedicated to St. Joseph, has an altar given by the Jimenez family. They were among the early parishioners and lived at Lindisfarne House off Copse Hill. The statue of St. Joseph portrays him carrying a church, as patron of the Universal Church, and a lily, as a symbol of purity. The stained-glass windows on either side of the altar show incidents in the lives of St. Joseph and of the Old Testament Patriarch Joseph. The left-hand window was put up "in memory of a loving wife and mother, Emma Louise Honnard"; the right-hand one commemorates Joseph and Anna Maria Hirst. The paintings round the chapel are by Mrs. Sydenham, a recent parishioner.



10) The middle chapel, dedicated to the Sacred Heart, originally housed the fine marble altar from Madame Arendrup's house in Cottenham Park. Sadly this was broken up in 1968 and replaced by a new, free-standing altar. On the wall behind it there is now a large fibre-glass statue of the Sacred Heart made by Michael Clark. The stained-glass windows, however, were untouched. They were put up in 1897 "by the congregation of this church" as a memorial to Edith Arendrup's son, Axel, who had recently died aged only twenty, and "as a thank offering to his mother". Axel appears dressed as an altar boy in the bottom left-

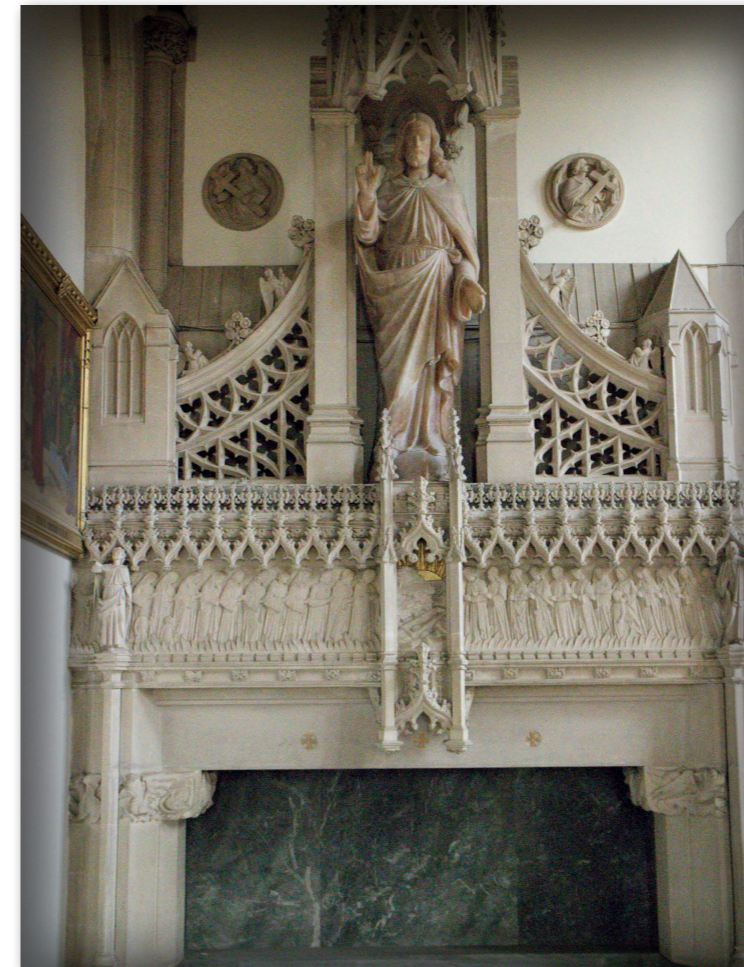
hand panel, along with a series of saints to whom his mother was devoted - and the Pope at the time, Leo XIII. Also in the chapel is a modern painting of the Crucifixion by Victor Galliano.



(11) The final chapel, dedicated to Our Lady, has a fine altar given by the Donaldson family who lived in Neri House next to the church. The right-hand window commemorates Philip Donaldson, a Midshipman in H.M.S. Barfleur, "who died from wounds received in action at Tientsin, China, on 2 July 1900 in his nineteenth year". He is shown with the family patron, St. Philip Neri, in one of the lower panels. The left-hand window is a memorial to J. F. Wegg-Prosser, member of another leading Catholic family, who died in 1914. The large triptych on the right-hand wall of Our Lady of the Way is the work of three artists. The central panel is signed E. Botoni 1896, the left J. Hardman & Co. and the right A. Pippet, Solihull. On the opposite wall is a fine picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, made in Rome about 1920 and put up in memory of David Byrne, killed in action in September 1918. Above in the stone vault is a large boss of the Coronation of Our Lady.

(12) Three other large coloured bosses in the sanctuary vaulting are visible from the ambulatory by the sacristy. One shows the Sacred Heart; the others have the letters IHS (Jesus in Greek) and XPS (Christos, also in Greek). Above the sacristy door there is a large win-

dow overlooking the sanctuary along with a small door which leads into space. The window was originally meant to light "a community tribune" in which Jesuits could pray undisturbed, but it has long been covered over and the room is now used for meetings. The door once led to a small organ loft at a time when the choir sang from benches on the sanctuary, before they moved to the west end in 1912.



(13) Just beyond the sacristy, at the top of the north aisle, is the Holy Souls altar. It was made in 1915 as a memorial to Fr. William Kerr, the founder of the Jesuit Mission in Wimbledon, "who for more than thirty years laboured with untiring zeal for the salvation of souls", as the plaque on the wall proclaims. The reredos was designed by Mr Drysdale and shows Christ blessing souls in Purgatory, while angels blow trumpets at each side.

(14) The north aisle, along with the St. Ignatius chapel and the Baptistry, were paid for by a wealthy widow, Caroline Currie of Coombe Hill. The timber ceiling is very fine, as are the stone vaults in the chapel and baptistry. The Stations of the Cross, based on drawings by John Bentley, were donated by members of the congregation listed on a plaque below the first station.

(15) The St. Ignatius chapel contains a medallion of Mrs. Currie who died in 1902. Above the marble altar designed like a Roman altar of the sixteenth century, is a large painting of the saint and round the walls are a series of paintings made in 1904 by Albert Chevallier Taylor of incidents in his life. The stained-glass window above (put up in 1924 as a memorial to Frederick Wessell) contain further scenes from his life, as well as from that of his friend, Sr. Francis Xavier. The chapel is vaulted in stone with large decorative bosses.





(16) At the end of the aisle the Baptistry has a large stone font with a carved wood cover. The wrought iron gates were erected in 1909 to commemorate the work of a recent Rector, Fr. O'Hare. The three stained-glass windows were put up in 1918 in memory of Lieut. J. F. and F. P O'Brien "who gallantly laid down their lives in the Great War". In the vaulted roof are two more stone bosses: of the Baptism of Our Lord and of the Holy Spirit.

(17) Another memorial to the Great War, the marble Pieta, lies just outside the Baptistry. It was given by Mrs. Smail of Donhead Lodge to commemorate all the old boys of Wimbledon College who were killed in that war. But she disliked the "inadequate" oak surround on which the names of the dead were meant to have been inscribed and so the memorial was never finished.



(18) At the west end of the church is the choir loft. It was erected in 1912 to house both the choir and a large, powerful organ built by Walkers. Unfortunately, the size and position of the organ and its many pipes have meant that a view of the fine west window is blocked inside the church. By the steps leading up to the choir loft, however, is an interesting stained-glass window. It is a memorial to Lewis Eyre, member of an old Catholic family, and his wife, Margaret Lady Haggerston, who lived in Edge Hill before the First World War. They are shown kneeling on either side of the cross, each with their family coat of arms and watched over by their patron saints. The Church of the Sacred Heart is a fine building, full of history. Primarily, however it is a house of prayer. As such it has more than fulfilled the hopes of its foundress Edith Arendrup. A

detailed history of the church, "Portrait of a Church, 1887 –1987", can be obtained from the Parish Bookshop, price £2.00.