



VISITORS GUIDE TO HOLY INNOCENTS CHURCH, SOUTH NORWOOD.

With thanks to David Whisson

During the latter half of the 19th century, South Norwood was a rapidly growing community owing its expansion to a number of factors including the development of the railway service to both the City and the West End of London, the relocation of the Crystal Palace Exhibition Centre from Hyde Park to Sydenham Hill and the growth of Croydon as a shopping and entertainment centre, providing for those with money and leisure, facilities to rival those in London. As a result of this the Parish Church of St. Mark in Albert Road found difficulty in accommodating the influx of new residents. Victorian families tended to be both large and God-fearing.

In 1888 a temporary iron church was erected on the present site in Selhurst Road as a daughter church to St. Mark's while plans were made to build a permanent church in keeping with the prosperous nature of the area. Housing on the North side of the railway line in Selhurst Road, South Norwood Hill, Whitehorse Lane, Oliver Grove, Tennison, Warminster and Lancaster Roads was all substantial and their occupants were able to raise sufficient money to commission one of the most distinguished church architects of the day – George Frederick Bodley, whose sketch design may be seen to the right of the North Entrance door. The tower was never in fact built, but had it been, it would have housed the bell on the South West corner over the font. (Note. A twin church to the same design, including a tower, may be seen in Basingstoke and is dedicated to All Saints) The style is Perpendicular Neo-Gothic, and the building is Grade II* listed.

The Norwood Weekly Herald and Advertiser for 22nd June 1895 provides detailed information about its construction and official opening, and records that the cost 'as it now stands is about £10,000 of which £4,500 remains to be raised'. The paper goes on to name some of those who made specific gifts to the church, but a substantial part of the costs, almost 25% came from one anonymous donor. Seating was provided for a congregation of 800.

On 13th November 1893 Archbishop Benson of Canterbury laid the foundation stone of the present church, which may be seen in the ambulatory behind the High Altar, and on 19th June 1895 the completed church was consecrated by the Bishop of Dover and dedicated to the Holy Innocents – the children massacred on the orders of King Herod (Matthew 2. v16-18.) The design was very much in the High Anglican tradition having a Roman Altar with 6 candlesticks and a Crucifix overhung with a Canopy but this was altered at the end of the 2nd World War to the present English Altar – two candlesticks and room for the priest to move freely round the table. More recently the Nave Altar was introduced for normal use at Sunday Worship bringing the priest and people closer together. Three years after its dedication the first vicar, Erskine Knollys was succeeded by Rev. Bickersteth Ottley. The organ, built by Messrs. Norman and Beard, was dedicated on 18th October 1898, and is a three manual instrument (Swell, Great and Choir) and a full pedal organ which is one of the finest organs in the Diocese. There is a new CD of Southwark's Historic Organs which includes the organ from this church. The installation of an electric pump to replace the original hand pump in 1934 is the only significant alteration to the original design.

Between the two World Wars the population continued to expand with the Elm Park and Norhyrst estates and after Rev. Anderson took up the post of vicar in 1941, it was agreed that Holy Innocents should become a separate Conventional District with Derek Ingram Hill as Priest in Charge. July 1944 saw the only war damage of any significance when a flying bomb fell nearby in Holmesdale Road and some windows required repair. After celebrating the Golden

Jubilee in 1945 and the Cessation of Hostilities after the 2nd World War, further celebrations marked the creation of Holy Innocents as a full parish in 1949, with Rev. Ingram Hill as its first vicar. By the time the church celebrated its centenary however, it had, with the rest of Croydon, been transferred from the Canterbury Diocese to that of Southwark.

Stained Glass and other interior points of interest.

The majestic yet beautiful simplicity of the building is perhaps best appreciated when standing by the West Door and looking towards the Chancel. Above, on the barrel roof are seen words taken from the Book of Revelations of St John, which appear in the book of Common Prayer in the Epistle for Holy Innocents Day, while the words over the Chancel come from the Communion Service. The East Window, which portrays the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus with attendant Angels, with the Crucifixion shown above, and representations of the Holy Innocents below is the work of Charles Kempe, the best of late Victorian stained glass artists. Kempe also designed the window overlooking the Baptistry which represents St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary and St Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist. Moving down the South aisle past the pulpit, which had been in the temporary church, a 20th century window, depicting the finding of the child Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2. v41-52) may be seen to the memory of Ann Wildish, 1907. The Rood screen, which separates the entire West end of the church from the chancel originally had a plain wooden cross, but the figures of Christ, St. Mary and St. John were added in 1945 when wooden tablets were placed on the screen in memory of those who had given their lives in World War II. World War I victims are commemorated by the War Memorial outside the North Wall. All who died are recorded in the Book of Remembrance. To the south of the Chancel is a small chapel dedicated to St Nicholas, best known as Santa Claus and Patron of Children, although his patronage extends to sailors, pawnbrokers and Russia. His symbol of 3 golden balls are to be seen on the altar frontal, the hassocks and the banner as legend has it that he gave a poor man 3 bags of gold to enable him to pay his 3 daughters dowries. The mural of St Francis on the South Wall was donated by the artist, Leonard Matthews, a local stained glass expert, in 1952. The provenance of the oil painting 'Angels and the Dead Christ', situated below the organ loft is not known, but it was restored in 1957 to the memory of Miss Tonge, a local headmistress and life-long worshipper in this church. The Alms Dish was among the artefacts which came from the temporary church. Among the memorial crosses on the south wall of the sanctuary is one to Herbert Hannam, to whom the main lectern is also dedicated, who died of pleurisy aged 32, having been a tireless curate who neglected his health to undertake his duties, part of which appear to have been raising money for the new church at which he was clearly successful. By all accounts a person for whom the description 'selfless' seems quite inadequate.

The Lady Chapel, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, owes much to the family and friends of Caroline and Henry Beck, including the East Window depicting the Annunciation, also the work of Charles Kempe. The Aumbrey a small safe in the North Wall where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved for the sick or others in special need was given in 1944 in memory of Norman Manser, who died on active service during the Battle of Britain and had been a chorister. The statue of Mary and the infant Jesus (with two rabbits) was donated in 1964. The Eagle Lectern was given to Holy Innocents, after Holy Trinity Church closed in 1978 and dates from 1891. In the centre of the north wall of the Lady Chapel is a stained glass window depicting the presentation of Christ in the Temple, in memory of Dorothy Marshall whose features have been copied by the artist to represent St. Anne. This is the most recent stained glass and is supported by two pairs of free-hanging panels depicting the visit of the Magi, the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan, the Crucifixion and Christ arising from the Tomb (Resurrection)

Leaving the Lady Chapel the final stained glass window may be seen above the north side door, dedicated to the memory of William Cooper killed in action in August 1918 and depicting St. Michael the Archangel and St. George the Patron Saint of England. The fitting inscription reads 'He who gives all, asks of his fellow man, completion of the work which he began.'