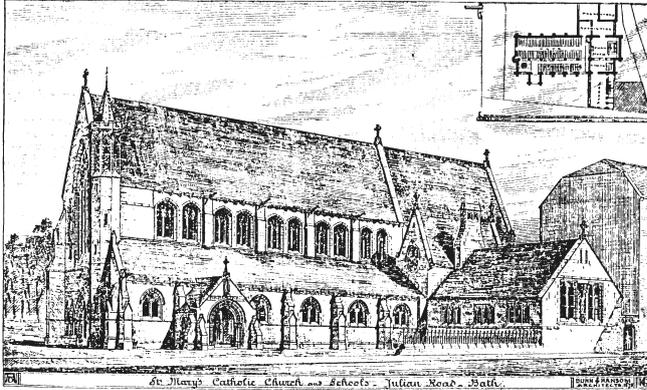


A SHORT HISTORY AND GUIDE TO ST. MARY'S, CHURCH OF OUR LADY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS, JULIAN ROAD, BATH

After worshipping from 1831 in a succession of chapels in the Julian Road area, the Church purchased the present site of St. Mary's for £1870 and in 1879 the foundation stone was laid by Archbishop Errington. The Church was consecrated on Tuesday May 3rd 1881 by Cardinal Manning with solemn and impressive ceremony.



The church was designed in the English Decorated style by Dunn and Hansom of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The unbalanced single aisle on the south side is as designed and one on the north side was not intended. The building was never completed, whether due to lack of land or money, or both, is not known. The original plans included an extra bay with an impressive entry door with stained glass window above at the west end, the whole embellished with a strange little pinnacle. A school building is shown adjoining the Lady chapel with a house for the clergy on the north-facing wall of the

sacristy. None of these things were built but the temporary wall of cheap local brick still exists at the west end of the church as do rough unfinished panels of stonework where the school and priests' house were to have been appended. The arched doorway in the Lady chapel which should have lead into the schoolroom now serves as the background to the centenary clergy memorial.

The church was built by a local contractor, Mr Joseph Bladwell, at a cost of £7000. This included a sum of £1600 for the carvings, a large amount at a time when the Headmistress of the School was paid a yearly salary of £75. They were carved **in-situ** by Mr Roddis of Birmingham and exhibit the highest standard of craftsmanship. Nowhere in the church is any figure or piece of foliage exactly like any other. It is said that there are 110 carved heads in total inside and outside the church, not including those on the Stations of the Cross.

The carvings were cleaned in 2005, each being laboriously coated with a latex composition, which after drying was stripped off taking the dirt of more than a century with it. The end-result is outstanding and the true beauty and significance of the carvings is evident again.

We start our visit at the east widow above the sanctuary which is dedicated to Our Lady, Help of Christians, surrounded by the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary.

Below is carved in latin in high relief “**+Mary has been taken up into heaven: rejoicing angels praise and bless the Lord Alleluia: the Virgin Mary has been taken up to a celestial Dwelling Place+**.”

The twelve carved heads overlooking the chancel are said to represent characters from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Perhaps you can identify one or more of the heads.

On either side of the throne for the Blessed Sacrament are painted statues of two guardian Archangels, **Gabriel** and **Michael** and larger statues of the parents of the Blessed Virgin, **St. Joachim** as a shepherd and **St. Anne with Mary** as a child.

The door to the sacristy is flanked by the heads of **St. John** and **St. Anne** in reference to Mr John Hanson Sperling and his wife, who defrayed the cost of the chancel and the sacristies and possibly much more.

Opposite, above the capitals of the arcade is a row of seraphim with musical instruments with flames rising between their wings. Stained glass clerestory windows of Old Testament characters above the seraphim were replaced with clear glass after the 1942 air-raids.

On the north side of the chancel arch is a statue of **Our Lady** crushing the serpent's head, liberally decorated with fleur-de-lis, the emblem of Our Lady which recurs constantly throughout the church.

Adjacent, the door leading to the sacristy has carved heads of **St. Aelphege** and **St. Winifred**: there are both St. Aelphege's and St. Winifred's wells in the parish.

The nave arcade has five arches although six were originally planned. The carvings here are particularly fine. Starting from the chancel arch, the figures are

Gabriel, points his finger having lost the traditional lily from his right hand

Michael, with his sword and balance

Raphael, carrying a fish. This column has four heads of the green man, a very ancient folk-lore figure and of both pagan and Christian significance.

Uriel, carrying a book

Barachiel, carrying a basket of roses.

Above the last capital, resting inside the block of stone, as Michaelangelo said when referring to an unfinished statue, another figure awaits carving, thought to be **Jehudiel**. With the angel on the last capital of the original plan **Sealtiel**, this would complete **Our Lady and the Seven Archangels**, based upon a sixteenth century Sicilian fresco and a church in Rome.

In the Lady Chapel, earlier dedicated to the Sacred Heart, is a beautiful altar of sixteen varieties of marble, the work of a famous Roman artist, Leonardo and formerly at the earlier chapel at Montpelier.

The 1942 bombing destroyed much property immediately around the church with serious loss of life, including two killed in the church porch and two in Burlington House in the church grounds. Although badly damaged, St. Mary's was spared and after repairs continued to serve and support its people.

Anyone present at its opening in 1881 returning in the immediate post-war years would have noticed few if any differences in the building and its liturgy, its use of Latin and in its services.

All this altered in the late sixties with the profound changes brought about by Vatican II. Latin was replaced by English, the centuries-old liturgy was totally revised and the laity became much more involved in every aspect of the Church's life, most notably in the celebration of the Mass itself. This necessitated changes to the layout of the Church to bring the building into line with the latest thinking and with which we marked the centenary of its opening in 1981.

To involve the congregation more deeply in the sacrifice of the Mass and to emphasise their participation in it, the altar was brought forward facing the people and the communion rails removed. The font was moved from near the door of the church to the front so that the whole congregation may be involved in the Sacrament of Baptism. At the same time the original pews were replaced with comfortable seats, the choir stalls in the sanctuary and the pulpit removed and the greater part of the church carpeted. A warm, welcoming atmosphere replaced the heavy Victorian ambiance.

Also to mark the centenary, in 1985 the eight panels in the reredos were filled with paintings of saints and martyrs by artist John Armstrong. As elsewhere in the church, most of these have local connections. The four outer panels portray holy men associated with the Diocese of Clifton:

St. Aelphege, a local Saint, Abbot of Bath and Archbishop of Canterbury, martyred by the Danes

St. Dunstan, born at and Abbot of Glastonbury, who crowned King Edgar in Bath Abbey AD 973.

Blessed Richard Whiting, Abbot of Glastonbury, martyred on the Tor

Blessed John Thorne, also of Glastonbury, martyr

The inner panels are of **St. John Bosco with Blessed Dominic Savio**, **St John Vianney**, the Cure of Ars, **St. Margaret Clitherow**, martyr and **St. Vincent de Paul**.

Most outstanding of the many features of St. Mary's are the five frescos, depicting **The Annunciation**, **The Visitation**, **The Nativity**, **The Marriage Feast at Cana** and **The Deposition from the Cross**. Notable for their vivid colours and size, they were painted in 1997 by Fleur Kelly, a parishioner and artist employing the ancient method of painting "in fresco", that is whilst the underlying lime mortar is still damp.

To learn more about the frescos, please refer to the red booklet which gives full information including their spiritual significance, the ancient technique employed in their painting and the references to many aspects of the life of the parish and the families of our parishioners contained in them.

We hope you have enjoyed your visit to St. Mary's and found it spiritually rewarding. Should you want more information, including the times of Masses and events in the parish, you will find our web-site www.stmarysbath.org.uk helpful.