

## A History of St Mary's Church & School



St Mary's church, Kilburn (1856 – 1862) was erected in a great wave of church building to accommodate the needs of the growing population of Hampstead in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The immediate need for the erection of the church arose from the influx to the South-East of the then village of Kilburn as a result of the Greville-Upton development which straddled the London and

Birmingham railway line to the south of the church. The land to the north of the church, which formed part of the manor of Hampstead, was at first known as St Mary's Fields, though within little more than a generation most of this had been built up as part of the Maryon-Wilson development to the west of Finchley Road during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The former Kilburn Priory, which stood nearby, was founded c.1130 to provide a home for three former maids of honour to Queen Matilda, who was Henry I's consort. These ladies – Emma, Gunilda and Christina – were placed under the supervision of the Master, Godwin the Hermit, who had established his hermitage a little earlier on the banks of the nearby Kyleburn. Godwin is said to have been the first known inhabitant of Kilburn.

The Priory lands were bounded at each of their four corners by a mulberry tree. One of these is still growing in the garden of a house in St John's Wood. Kilburn was not a rich house and the (at a remove) royal beginnings were not reflected in its future history. The Priory was dedicated either to St John the Baptist or jointly to St John the Baptist and St Mary. When, in 1856 a dedication for the church was chosen, the choice fell upon St Mary. After the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536 the building was first gifted to The Earl of Warwick and then passed through various hands until it completely disappeared early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A print of 1813 depicts what the remains looked like in 1722.

The foundation stone of the church was laid by Major-General the Hon. Arthur Upton, the first and life patron, on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1856. It forms the base of the pier of the chancel arch on its south side and houses a glass bottle containing an inscription on parchment and then current coins of the Realm. The church architects were messrs F & H Francis and several building firms were contracted at various stages of the construction. The original clerestory windows were of stained glass and were the church architects' gift.

It has been described how after the stone laying ceremony there was a procession up the hill to Hampstead and the singing of the anthem "O how amiable are Thy dwellings".

The first incumbent was the Rev George Read Adam, BA, who took a leading part in the formation of the parish. Though, in practice, the church was an independent entity from its earliest days, it remained formally within the bounds of the parish of St John at Hampstead. The then Vicar of Hampstead was a prime mover in ensuring additional ecclesiastical provision throughout the area. Mr Adam remained Vicar of St Mary's until his death, on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1867, at Lausanne in Switzerland, where he had retired from active work the previous year due to ill health.

The church – nave and aisles only – was opened for divine worship, under license from the Bishop of London on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1857. Regular services were commenced on the following Sunday (Easter Day). That Easter Monday, Messrs Robert Wood Lucas (1816 – 1870) and G L Stanley, who were leaders among the laity for the building of St Mary's became the first church wardens. A memorial brass to the former will be found on the West Wall of the North Transept.

Expenses so far were £3,721 and the sum by that time raised was £2,555. Further progress with the work was delayed until the deficit was cleared. More or less every parish in England was circularised as part of the fund-raising efforts in the latter part of the 1850's. At least two circulars were issued in connection with the "A Million Penny Postage Stamp Fund". The appeal realised over £1,200 (more than 288,000 penny stamps). This may have fallen short of the million stamps hoped for, but it was a

substantial amount and is indicative of the ingenuity of the fund-raising effort of our predecessors. The circular expressed the hope that the recipients would each collect 120 stamps.

When funds became available, building work was continued and the main structure of the church – less tower and spire – was consecrated by the Bishop of London on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1862. The Vicar was unable to attend due to the death of his eldest daughter that day. A fund was set up to enable a stained glass window, commemorating Jessy Adam, aged 10 to be installed in what is now the Lady Chapel. Original church plans indicate that the whole area of the transepts, as well as larger area of the nave than at present, was pewed over. The cost of the works to the time of consecration was £9,858.

The oldest object in the church is a piece of brass in what is known as the Nun's Corner. This depicts a late 14<sup>th</sup> or early 15<sup>th</sup> century Prioress (probably Emer de St Omer) and, together with human remains buried nearby, was discovered in 1857 during local railway diggings. It was described as "The Kilburn Relic" and since 1877 has been mounded on a tablet on the West Wall of the North Transept.

An early feature of the church's decoration are the shields on the ends of the beams which support the nave roof. They are mainly emblematical of the passion.

Among the early worshippers at St Mary's (1862-3) was the future novelist and poet Thomas Hardy. He lived for a while in Kilburn while a young trainee architect in the offices of the future Sir Arthur Blomfield, the designer of St James' church.

The font (presumably mid 1860s) is the work of an amateur sculptor, Miss Henrietta Hornidge, of St Leonards. It is octagonal and has on four of its sides representations emblematical of the Evangelists.

The pulpit (1864) was the gift of the Rev and Mrs G R Adam. It has Caen-stone arches, marble columns and an alabaster slab.

Most of the windows were originally (or within a generation) of stained glass, though many of these were destroyed by wartime bombing. Fortunately, all of those in the chancel and Lady Chapel and most in the transepts survived, though the direction of the blast would have seemed likely to have caused otherwise. The East Window (Clayton and Bell), which is one of the most notable features was installed in 1883, a fund for it having been commenced in 1863. The most recent window (to Mr R J Pitcher, a former organist and choirmaster) was installed some years after the war.

The church was completed to its original external design in 1871 and 1972 when the tower and spire were erected. An article dated 1875 shows the height of the tower as 61.5 feet and that of the spire as 80 feet. A Clock and Bells fund was endowed by Mr S J Housley in 1879. Until some thirty years ago the clock operated by a hand-winding mechanism which enabled chiming by means of a hammer striking each of the bells. The mechanism is now electrified and the original mechanism has been placed to one side in the clock chamber.

Though school premises in the area have existed since 1833, i.e. before St Mary's was built, it was decided in 1867 that proper arrangements for a Parochial School should be set in hand. The existing school in West End Lane became available in stages between 1870 and 1874. Further facilities became available within a generation. 1972 was chosen as the mean year for the celebration of the centenary of St Mary's School.

The first confirmation to be held at St Mary's took place on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1875. At a confirmation in March 1879 there were 200 candidates.

The patronage of St Mary's had initially been with General Upton for life. In 1876 it was vested in the Church Patronage Society. General Upton died in 1883.

The former vicarage, adjacent to the church, was erected on a site in Priory Road in 1878, at a cost of £2,695. It was one of the first buildings in the area to the immediate north of the church and was on land gifted by

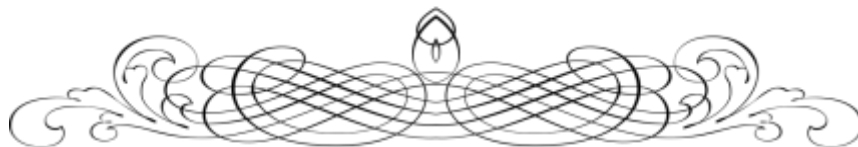
the Lord of the Manor. In recent time it has been converted into flats and a new vicarage has been built in the garden of the former premises.

Mission buildings were erected in Netherwood Street in the succeeding years and a site was secured for a permanent church to be built where St James' church now stands. An iron church was erected thereon, and in 1887 the present St James' church was built. A separate parish was assigned out of what had hitherto been part of St Mary's parish.

Further acts of beautification and improvement took place throughout this period at St Mary's. The carving of the capitals and corbels was completed, the oak choir stalls and reading desks and ornamental screen in the arch of the organ (in its original position) were installed and a tessellated pavement was laid in the chancel. The memorial brass concerning this will be found in the North Transept. The Reredos was erected in 1884.

St Mary's Hall was opened in October 1980 by the then Member of Parliament for Hampstead, who gave the clock which at one time hung on the front of the gallery. The site was another gift to the church and the building was vested in the Trustees of The Bishop of London's Fund.

A further stained-glass window was installed in 1892. This was the gift of Mr & Mrs R J Cooper and is placed in the North Transept. Mr Cooper was admitted as a Freeman of the Farriers Company in 1874 and was a Sherriff of the City of London in 1895-96. This latter was during his period as Church Warden.



In the later years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, major works were carried out at St Mary's. It is one of the first churches to have had electric light which was installed in 1897.

The War Memorial (on the Priory Road frontage of the church) was unveiled by the Bishop of Willesden on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May 1920.

A Girl Guide Company was formed in 1927 or 1928 and the Guide Flags were placed in the church in 1931.

An Altar Cross in the Lady Chapel was presented in 1930 by a former curate at St Mary's, who had become Bishop of the Falkland Islands. The Children's Corner was dedicated on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1931, and that year works took place to celebrate the impending 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of the church.

At the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary service in February 1932 the purple gowns and an earlier style of the caps formerly used by the ladies in the choir were first worn. The credence table was dedicated at Easter that year.

Probably inspired by the early "Million Penny Postage Stamp Fund", a scheme in aid of the Endowment Fund entitled "The Million Farthings Scheme" was completed in 1930 (within ten years of launching). A "Sunday Halfpenny Scheme" was then commenced.

In 1930 it was reported that many of the older school children were still evacuated to the villages of Yardley Hastings and Hackleton, and a place near Northampton where St Mary's school had gone in late August 1939.

Wartime blackout regulations made it necessary for the evening services to be held at 3 pm and there is a 1941 report that the Vicar had held services on Sunday nights in a shelter in Kilburn High Road. There were fortnightly visits to Kilburn Park Tube Station. That same year the Cub Mistress wrote that "in all her twelve years service with the Cubs she had never attended such a live church".

The vergers' son (as a member of the Home Guard) had been given responsibility for ringing the church bells in the event of invasion. There is a report of a five-day wartime cookery demonstration being held in the hall.

In 1944 a new style collar was introduced for the choir ladies. Hitherto, it had been round. That same year a long-felt desire to form a branch of the Mother's Union was brought to fruition. Mrs Kay, wife of one of the ten Church Wardens was the first enrolling member. The celebration in 1984 of the branch's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary was a notable occasion.

The church suffered from the blast of a bomb explosion in West End Lane in June 1944. This shattered the west window and the clerestory windows. A further incident in Mortimer Crescent added to the damage.

A PCC meeting had been convened for Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> May 1945 (VE Day), but was deferred for a few weeks. It is probably that a service of thanksgiving was held that evening.

The early years of peace saw the arrival of a new Vicar, his predecessor having established a record length of service (twenty two years) at St Mary's. A conscious effort was made to welcome returning ex-servicemen.

Considerable effort was deployed in the immediate post-war years in some repairs to the structure and the replacement of various formerly stained glass windows. Cathedral glass was used for the window, though a few fragments of the original may still be found at the top of the westernmost window in the north aisle. Fortunately, the east window and some other stained glass in the chancel and transepts escaped harm.

During the 1950s a Christmas tree used to be erected outside the south door of the church. This was additional to the one which stands inside the church, near the pulpit. At this time, wooden candle holders were provided to enable each pew and pillar to be illuminated by candlelight at the time of the carol service and throughout the Christmas season.

The Club Room over the Church Hall was decorated and furnished as a Second World War memorial. A wall plate records this. In 1959 a booklet entitled "This Is Your Church" was printed and published as part of St Mary's role in the "Mission to London" launched by the diocese that year. The front cover was largely occupied by an aerial photograph of the church and surrounding neighbourhood. It contained various illustrations of interior features and external views.

A Pioneer Church, made up of younger members of the congregation and other youth groups, flourished at St Mary's during the 1950s. Of course, such groups had existed at earlier stages. An amateur dramatic group of church members was active at this time. Several photographs of their performances exist.

The first half of the 1960s was largely occupied by celebrations and resultant activities in connection with the centenary of the consecration of the church. The actual centenary fell on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1962, and the Great Bible now in use was gifted to the church at that time.

Major works of interior stone cleaning and redecoration had to be delayed until c. 1967, though they were among the principal features of the occasion. Part of the east pillar to the south side of the nave had been test-cleaned in advance. It became known as "The Sunday School Pillar", as that is where the funds for that particular job had been raised. The freshly cleaned appearance of the pillar showed up brightly against the ten generally dark interior stonework and acted as a reminder of the work still needing to be carried out. Sections of the scaffolding which was erected inside the church were moved about as the works progressed, hence, part of the church was always available for worship.

Boards recording subscriptions to earlier funds were removed from the porch and were remounted in the Memorial Vestry towards the end of the 1960s, and at around the same time, several rows of pews at the back of the church were removed to facilitate movement there. Originally the pews had reached almost to the doors between the nave and the south and west porches. Similar alterations have since been made at the eastern end of the nave, where a raised platform to house a Nave Altar was installed.



In 1968 the Church Wardens' Wands were moved back to their present position at the centre of the Nave. They had previously been placed well forward on pews bearing the inscription "Church Warden" on the backrests.

Since the early 1970s what is either the architects model of the church, or a model made by an early parishioner has stood on a small table at the back of the Nave. It is housed under a glass dome of the Victorian type.

The school centenary was celebrated in 1972, the actual construction of the premises in West End Lane having taken place between 1870 and 1874. The centenary celebrations included a special church service. Allowing for staff, pupils and their families, former pupils and parishioners at large, it was estimated that the congregation numbered 800 on that occasion. The church, including transepts, was full.

A spate of hooligan damage during the first half of the 1970s included serious harm to two stained glass windows. There was serious risk that part of the inscription on the Cooper Window in the north transept and a picture of a former organist, which formed part of the Pitcher Window would be lost, however, it was found that a record of the working of the inscription on the former had been deposited in the local library, presumably c. 1930. An earlier attempt to reconstruct the missing words by an examination of entries about the family in the parish registers had proved fruitless. A photograph of the latter was obtained from a member of the congregation: this enabled a keen amateur photographer to make slides of Mr R J Pitcher's likeness. These in turn enabled stained glass artists to restore the work.

The organ console, which had stood behind the choir stalls on the north side of the cancel was moved to its present position on the south side of the nave during the second part of the 1970s. The pipes and organ chamber remain in their original position.

There was much thought during the second part of the 1980s concerning the future formal composition of the parish. This was resolved in mid-

1990 when an Order in Council was made, officially creating the parish of St Mary with All Souls. The practical association of recent years had been formally recognised.

1987 saw the building a new vicarage in the garden of the old 1978 building. After a decade of neglect, the former house had become uninhabitable. It seems that the idea of a “vicarage in the garden” had been mooted in the 1960s. Oddly enough, it was subsequently found possible to right the aches and pains of the old building and convert it into flats.

During 1988 the bulk of earlier registers and other records of both St Mary’s and All Souls churches were transferred to the Greater London Record Office. Various bound volumes of annual statements between 1868 and 1896 and volumes of magazines for the early years of this century are on loan to the Local History Collection at Swiss Cottage Library, where other material about the church can also be found.