

Arts and Crafts in Church Architecture

Alec Hamilton - 12 September 2012

Background Notes



Chalice by Henry Wilson (1900); glass by Christopher Whall (1909); altar by Bernard Sleight (1899)

WAHG

Winchester Art History Group

20 Churches you might enjoy visiting

All but six of these are normally open. Those with a keyholder are marked *. Check first. (SJ) means it is in Simon Jenkins, England's Thousand Best Churches. (FoFC) means it is owned by the Friends of Friendless Churches – see their website

First inklings – and a pre-cursor

St Mary, Wreay, Cumbria (Sara Losh, 1840-2)
Original, personal, romantic, intuitive, wild and free. (SJ)

St Martin, Brampton, Cumbria (Philip Webb, 1878) →
Built for an aesthete aristocrat. Glorious Morris glass. (SJ)



St Catherine, Hoarwithy, Herefordshire
(J P Seddon, 1878?-1903)

← *Forceful clergyman client: expert, biddable architect. Came out rather Italian.* (SJ)



St Michael and All Angels, Bedford Park, London
(Norman Shaw, 1879-80)

"a comfortable auditorium where... clear-thinking folk can watch the enactment of the Lord's Supper without loss of self-respect."
(Andrew Saint, 1976, p 210)

All Saints, Leek, Staffs (Norman Shaw, 1885-7)*
Shaw's discontent with Gothic Revival conventionality. Rich without being gaudy.

St Mary, Llanfair Kilgeddin, Mon.: sgrafitti by Heywood Sumner (1887-8)*
A rural idyll: the Monmouthshire Benedicite enriches every surface. (FoFC)

Holy Trinity, Sloane Square, London (J D Sedding, H Wilson, 1888-90)
Bejerman's "cathedral of the Arts & Crafts". (SJ)

Individuality and idiosyncrasy

Wisdom of God, Lower Kingswood, Surrey (Sidney Barnsley, 1891-2)*
Glittering showcase for a City lawyer's Byzantine antiquities. Barnsley's first. (SJ)



St Mark's, Brithdir, Dolgellau, Gwynedd
(Henry Wilson, 1895-8) (FoFC)

← *Are we in Italy? A jewel-box, with magical fittings and woodwork.* (pic by Martin Crampin)

Mortuary Chapel, Compton, Surrey
(Mary Seton Watts, 1896-8)

Are we in Prague? Bands of angels, richly spiritual, but no sign of Christ anywhere. (SJ)

St Matthew, Queen's Cross, Glasgow (C Rennie Mackintosh, 1896-9)
Is this Vienna? Now shorn of its spiritual meaning, yet still uplifting.

St Bartholomew, Brighton, Sussex: furnishings by H Wilson (1895-1911)
Soaring space: rich marbles and gleaming High Church metalwork. (SJ)

Lady Chapel, Gloucester Cathedral: glass by Christopher Whall (1898ff)
The greatest Arts & Crafts glass scheme of all. Try to visit in the morning.

Unitarian Church, Wallasey (Ware, Rathbone, Bromsgrove Guild, 1899)*
Painted angels by Bernard Sleight - like storybook sprites. (Historic Chapels Trust)

A sort of orthodoxy...

All Saints, Brockhampton,
Herefordshire

(W R Lethaby, 1901-2) →

"one of the most convincing and most impressive churches of its date in any country" (Pevsner Herefordshire, p 138)

"oddly timeless, as though it had always been there." (J Blundell Jones, 1990)

"Capriciously quaint: Hollywood meets Hereford homespun." (A Hamilton, 2012) (SJ)



St Anne's Cathedral (RC), Leeds (Eastwood & Greenslade, 1901-4)
Coherent, serene, persuasive.

...then diffusion, indulgence and the seeds of demise

St Mary, Great Warley, Essex: interior by
Reynolds-Stephens (1902-4)*
Aluminium and pewter fittings in a Secessionist vein. (SJ)

Edward the Confessor, Kempley, Glos.
(Randall Wells, 1902-4)* →

Visionary, innovative, whimsical, controversial, complex, yet direct and simple. (SJ)

St Andrew's, Roker, Tyne & Wear (E S Prior, 1907)
A fortress of faith, imposing and stern. (SJ)

St Andrew's chapel, Westminster Cathedral:
fittings by Ernest Gimson, R Weir Schultz (1912)
Intensity of purpose and craft: serene and compellingly strange.



Seven influential figures

John Ruskin (1819-1900)



“I believe the right question to ask, respecting all ornament, is simply this: was it done with enjoyment - was the carver happy while he was about it?”

The Seven Lamps of Architecture, 1849

“All great art is the work of the whole living creature, body and soul, and chiefly of the soul.”

The Stones of Venice I, 1851

William Morris (1834-1896)



“Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.”

The Beauty of Life, 1880

“Simplicity of life, even the barest, is not a misery, but the very foundation of refinement”

Speech, London, 1880

“Art is man's expression of his joy in labour.”

Art under Plutocracy, 1883

Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912)

“I would just as soon build a plain church as an ornamental and costly one...I don't care much for ornament but I do like thoroughly solid and good work, and it is that that costs the money.”

Letter, 20 January 1890

“I am drawing all the fine details for your work myself, ...it takes me some time - but I would rather...do them myself.”

Letter, 24 October 1890

John Dando Sedding (1838-1891)



“an architect by the nature of his calling is intimately connected with the handicrafts: he is...minister and servant of all.”

1890

“No more pumped-out Christian imagery suggesting that Christianity is dead and buried! But, instead, we shall have design by living men for living men - something that expresses fresh realisations of sacred facts, personal broodings, skill, joy in Nature”

Design, 1903

W R Lethaby (1857-1931)

“All art is sentiment embodied in form.” 1893

“Old customary art was a tenderness of mind given to the hard-handed: now art is soft-handed, but hard-hearted”

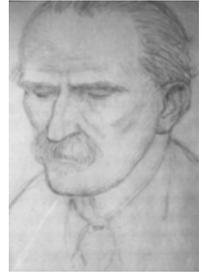
“Design comes by designing” 1893



Henry Wilson (1864-1934)

“Most men I know delegate all the most important part of their work to others. I have not the conscience to do that and whatever work I undertake, I must do myself.” 1897

“The first aim of Art is not to procure pleasure through beauty any more than the first aim of Religion is to procure a comfortable belief for the soul... The function of each is to provide the medium and the means for perfect self-expression...in other words, the realisation of the Divine will.” 1899



Christopher Whall (1849-1924)

“...you will never learn all the joy [of stained glass] in a dusty [work]shop... get a bicycle then – only sit upright on it and go slow – and get away from these bricks and mortar to where you can see ... dandelions and daisies against the deep, green grass; the blazing candles of the sycamore buds against the purple haze of the oak copse ...Did you ever? No, you never! Well – do it then!” 1905



A client's view of Arts & Crafts in a church

“Helped by Mr Spooner [Charles Spooner, 1862-1938] the Committee resolved from the first that they would not be content to put into our little House of Prayer anything cheap or ordinary. Each piece of furniture as it has come has been specially designed and made, and, with hardly a single exception, all those machine-made articles, which may be seen by the dozen in the catalogues of Church Shops, have been excluded. ‘Only the best’, we have said, ‘for the Service of God’s House.’

Revd G H Aitken, St Christopher’s Haslemere, October 1904

Culture and religion in Britain 1840-1895

A selective and wildly over-simplifying timeline

- 1840 Act of Parliament “for better enforcing Church Discipline”.
- 1850 “**Ritualism**”: Revd W J E Bennett at St Barnabas, Pimlico, introduces a rood screen and a stone altar: reminders of pre-Reformation liturgical practices. (Just one example of many)
- 1862 Virginia Woolf’s father, Leslie Stephen (1832-1904), leaves holy orders on the realisation that the story of Noah’s Ark is not literally true.
- 1874 **The Public Worship Regulation Act**
Backed by Disraeli: “a Bill to put down Ritualism”.
Modification of the existing Court of Arches into a criminal court, with powers of imprisonment.
- 1870s Numerous criminal trials of Anglican clergymen for wearing coloured vestments, using altar crosses, etc etc.
- 1870s Founding of **Jehovah’s Witnesses**, **Christian Science** and **Theosophy**
- 1878 **The Salvation Army** (founded 1865) starts to wear uniform.
- 1881 Secular amusements: first number of **Tit-bits**.
- 1883 Church as social engineers: founding of **The Boys Brigade**.
- 1883 **The Bitter Cry of Outcast London** (1d pamphlet):
“The Churches are making the discovery that seething in the very centre of our great cities... is a vast mass of moral corruption, of heart- breaking misery and absolute godlessness.”
- 1883 Canon Samuel Barnett (1844-1913) initiates the “Settlement Movement”: to re-connect the church and working people through the intellectual world of the old Universities and public schools.
- 1883 Harrow School mission church in Acton (architect **Norman Shaw**)
- 1884 **Toynbee Hall**, Whitechapel. Founded by Barnett as an educational and cultural centre for working men.
- 1888 **Holy Trinity, Sloane Square** (architect John Dando Sedding)
- 1888 Mrs Ward Humphry Ward (1851-1920) publishes **Robert Elsmere**: her best-selling novel about a clergyman who loses his faith when he realises he cannot believe in miracles.
- 1890 She founds University Hall: “an attempt at Christianity without Christ.”
- 1892 **Architecture, Mysticism and Myth** (W R Lethaby)
- 1894 Aubrey Beardsley becomes Art Editor of **The Yellow Book**.
- 1912 The moment, according to Betjeman (writing in 1933), when ‘arty-craftiness became an expensive joke.’

Books you might perhaps find interesting

Excellent (and inexpensive) introduction to Arts & Crafts

Greensted, Mary, *The Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain*
(Osprey/Shire, 2011)

Best big surveys

- Blakesley, R P., *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (Phaidon, 2006)
Callen, Anthea, *Angel in the Studio: women in the Arts & Crafts Movement*
(Astragal, 1979)
Cumming, E. & Kaplan, W., *Arts & Crafts Movement*
(Thames & Hudson, 2002)
Davey, Peter, *Arts and Crafts Architecture* (Phaidon, 1995)
Kaplan, W (ed), *Arts & Crafts Movement in Europe and America*
(Thames & Hudson, 2004)
Livingstone, K. and Parry, L. (eds.), *International Arts and Crafts*
(V&A, 2005)
Richardson, Margaret, *Architects of the Arts and Crafts Movement*
(Trefoil, 1983)

Individual artists with church-y connections

- Cormack, Peter, *The Stained Glass of Christopher Whall* (Boston Public
Library, 1998/2007)
Crawford, Alan, *C R Ashbee* (Yale University Press, 1985)
Kirk, Sheila, *Philip Webb* (Wiley/Academy, 2005)
Manton, Cyndy, *Henry Wilson, Practical Idealist* (Lutterworth, 2009)
McCarthy, Fiona, *William Morris, a life for our time* (Faber, 2003)
Rubens, Godfrey, *William Richard Lethaby* (Architectural Press, 1986)
Saint, Andrew, *Richard Norman Shaw* (Yale, 1976; 2010)

There are as yet no published books on Randall Wells or E S Prior.

Websites

There is an archived website on J D Sedding, based on work by Paul Howarth: <http://jdsedding.freehomepage.com>
Sarah Sullivan is compiling a website on Harrison Townsend:
<http://www.charlesharrisonsontownsend.org.uk>

Arts & Crafts in churches in Hampshire

All Saints, Thorney Hill

(Detmar Blow, 1906)

Murals by Phoebe Anna Traquair (1922)

See <http://digital.nls.uk/traquair/artist.html> ↓



Church Crookham

Glass and sgraffiti by
Heywood Sumner (1900)

(Photo by John Vigar) ↓



And, for completeness – I am not sure these ‘are’ all Arts & Crafts:

SS Peter and Paul, Exton: furnishings, glass by Charles Spooner, 1891

St Agatha, Landport, Portsmouth (J H Ball 1895 + H Sumner, 1901)

A new lease of life – and reconstruction: see <http://www.stagathas.net>

St Clement, Bournemouth (J D Sedding 1871-3; Henry Wilson 1890-3)

The exterior of the tower is exciting – the interior of the church less so.

Annunciation, Bournemouth (early work by Giles Gilbert Scott, 1905-7)

A very detailed history at www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~pencot/history.htm

Holy Spirit, Portsmouth (Micklethwaite and Nicholson 1902-24;

bombed; substantially restored by Dykes Bower, 1956-8)

1890s fittings from a church by Temple Moore.

St Aldhelm, Sandleheath (very simple, by Charles Ponting, 1907)