

Parish of St Michael's
Centenary
1906 - 2006



New build

The view from the narthex

Photograph ©Leanne Knight

Introduction



Mgr Jim Overton

It is very fitting that the history of St Michael's Parish should be re-issued during 2006, the year when the Parish is celebrating its first Centenary.

It is, of course, not possible to capture the spirit and character of a parish in a small booklet. Nonetheless, it is important to have a record of the growth and development of our parish. In this history, we can glimpse something of the hard work, sacrifice, faith and trust in God of the priests and the parishioners who built up St Michael's Parish over the years. Each generation developed the parish as a community, worshipping God, handing on the faith to their children, and giving witness to the world of their Catholic faith and of generous giving to those in need. This has resulted today in a community that is vibrant in faith, renowned for its friendliness and generosity, and which is looking forward to the future with confidence and hope.

I hope that this history will give us all a great sense of the wonderful things that past and present parishioners have achieved over the past hundred years, with the help of God's grace and move us to rejoice and give thanks to God for the grace of St Michael's Parish.



Monsignor James Overton
Parish Priest

A Brief History of the parish

- 1293 The first mention of a chapel in Exeforde dedicated to St Michael. It is thought that this chapel was established in Saxon times. Tradition has it that the Knights, on their way to Runnymede to the signing of the Magna Carta, stopped to pray at the Shrine of St. Michael.
- C.1540 During the Middle ages up to the Dissolution of the Monasteries (C.1540) the chapel was served by the parish of Staines.
- 1796 In June the chapel was pulled down and rebuilt.
- 1858 The present St. Matthew's Church was built fifteen yards to the north west of the old chapel.
- 1899 In March in response to a request from Cardinal Herbert Vaughan the Sisters of the Order of the Good Shepherd opened a Convent and an Inebriate Home for Catholic women in the property known as "Ecclesfield" (St. Michael's School now stands on part of this site). The Convent chapel was used for Mass for the few Ashford Catholics, offered by a priest from Beaumont College, Windsor.

On 30th October Cardinal Vaughan appointed Fr Robert Browne as Chaplain.



**Altar in the old church
Feltham Road**

Source Parish archives



**The old church in
Feltham Road
(demolished in 1968)**

Source Parish archives

1906

In January Archbishop Francis Bourne appointed Fr Martin Cave as the first Parish Priest with the brief to build a church for the ever growing Catholic congregation in Ashford, East and West Bedfont, Laleham, Littleton and Stanwell. On 25th August Father Cave obtained land in Feltham Road at a cost of £200.

In October a tender of £257 was accepted for the erection of the church, designed by Leonard Stokes.

On 23rd December Archbishop Bourne opened the new church, dedicated to St. Michael.

**The interior of
St Michael's before
completion in 1960**

Source Parish archives



- 1925 In March Fr Edwin Owen announced that the debt on the church in Feltham Road had been paid off and that, with the consent of Cardinal Bourne, he had contracted a new debt of £2,000 with which he had purchased a house and a site for a new church in Fordbridge Road.
- 1927 Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's drawings of the new church of St Michael were exhibited at the Royal Academy.
- On 13th November Cardinal Bourne laid the foundation stone.
- 1928 On 21st July the new church (incomplete) opened for services. It consisted of the sanctuary, three bays of the nave and sacristies.
- 1938 The nave was extended, but work came to a halt due to the Second World War.

- 1958 Fr Patrick O'Callaghan applied to Cardinal Bernard Griffin for permission to repair the leaking church roof, due partly to damage sustained during the war, and was told to go ahead and finish the church.
- 1960 On 13th March Cardinal William Godfrey presided at High Mass to mark the completion of the church.
- 1968 The old church in Feltham Road (which had been used as the church hall) was sold and subsequently demolished. The new hall and presbytery were built on the Fordbridge Road and Clarendon Road site.
- 2006 The church was reordered thanks to a magnificent £328,000 legacy from a parishioner, Derek Frederick Stephens.
- On 19th November, during the parish's First Centenary Year, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor dedicated the church and the new altar.



Dedication of the new altar, November 2006

Photograph ©Marcin Mazur

The present Catholic Church of



Gilbert Scott's Church of St Michael's today

Photograph ©Michael Nolan

The foundation stone for St Michael's church was laid on 13th November 1927 by Cardinal Francis Bourne. The first Mass was celebrated on 21st July 1928, when the Cardinal opened the first portion of the church.

The nave was extended in 1938, but building work was halted because of the Second World War and it was not until 1960 that the tower, side chapels, choir gallery and west end of the nave were completed. This was marked by High Mass celebrated by Cardinal William Godfrey on 13th March 1960.

The church was designed by the architect, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, R.A., who was articled to Temple Lushington Moore, an architect closely associated with church building and restoration. He understood, therefore, that the Christian Church's movement from Central Rome to Western Europe was demonstrated in the Romanesque style. It was this style that depicted the crucifix as a replica of Christ's death.



St Michael's interior before reordering work

Photograph Parish archives

The altar of the early Christian church was located at the east end with the priest facing east. Giles Gilbert Scott, therefore, orientated his church as near as possible towards the east. This also allowed for any extension of the nave as required and the plan view being in the form of a cross - the Lady Chapel and St Joseph's Chapel forming the cross members. The most striking feature is the raised sanctuary, which gives it such a dignified and impressive appearance.

The height of the sanctuary not only serves an artistic purpose but is also liturgically correct, as the very meaning of the word altar is 'a high place'. The raised sanctuary has the practical advantage of enabling the whole congregation to have an unimpeded view of the altar, whilst the lifting up of our eyes leads us to lift up our hearts also.

St. Michael's



Foundations in place for the narthex

Photograph ©Michael Nolan

On the north side of the sanctuary is a brass sanctuary lamp, in which a candle burns continuously, signifying that the Blessed Sacrament is reserved within the tabernacle. The high altar is placed at the rear and the top of the sanctuary on which sits a polished bronze tabernacle, designed by the architect. It was presented to the church by Mrs Owen, the mother of Fr Edwin Owen, who was the Parish Priest from 1924 until 1944.

To the right hand side of the altar is a stone piscina for the ablutions after Communion, and to the left is the aumbry, cut into the stone and designed for the storage of holy oils used during the administration of Baptism, Confirmation and the Sacrament of the Sick. These two features are of Romanesque design.

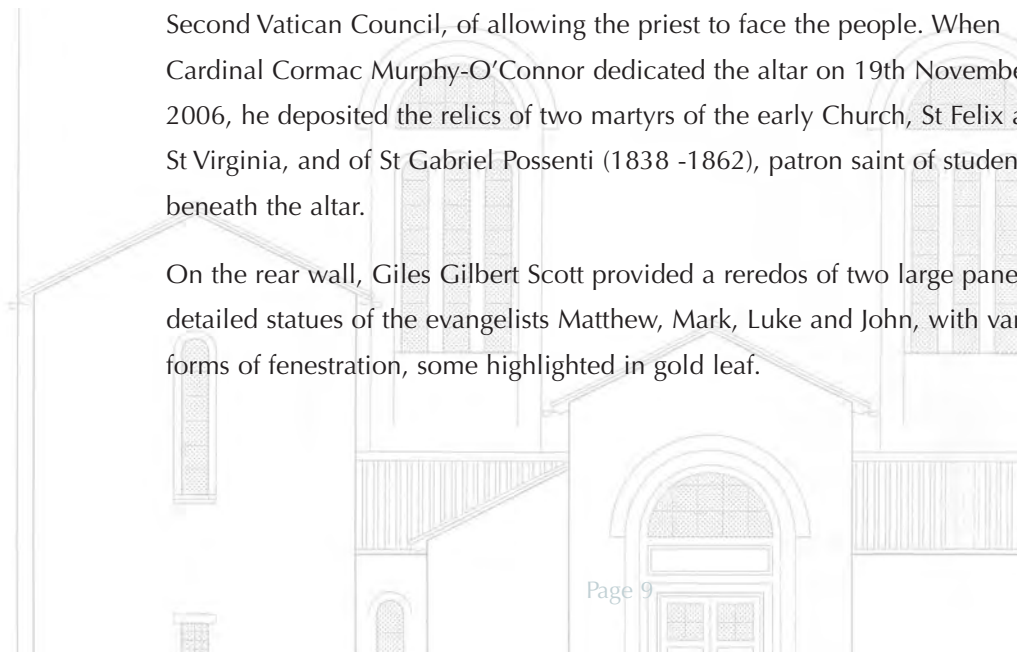
At the base of the sanctuary a new stone altar, designed by George Mathers, the architect responsible for the 2006 reordering of the church, follows the traditional early Christian practice, restored under the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, of allowing the priest to face the people. When Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor dedicated the altar on 19th November 2006, he deposited the relics of two martyrs of the early Church, St Felix and St Virginia, and of St Gabriel Possenti (1838 -1862), patron saint of students, beneath the altar.

On the rear wall, Giles Gilbert Scott provided a reredos of two large panels of detailed statues of the evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, with various forms of fenestration, some highlighted in gold leaf.



George Mathers, the architect responsible for the 2006 reordering of the church

Photograph ©Michael Nolan





The nave from the sanctuary

Photograph ©Michael Nolan

On its sides, two large wings of patterned square panels complete the high altar decoration. These wings are hinged and from the beginning of Passiontide until the Easter Vigil they are closed, completely covering the decoration.

To the right of the rear of the sanctuary there is a small doorway which leads down to the sacristies below the sanctuary floor.

On the north and south sides of the sanctuary are openings in the shape of small Roman semi-circular arches with internal columns. The columns, with spiral lines ascending, have bell-moulding top and bottom with the cap including details of both plants and rams' horns within its embellishments.

Beneath these openings are two raised stone platforms. Until the introduction of an altar facing the people, these platforms were used for the reading of the Epistle and Gospel and for preaching.



Sacred Heart

Photograph ©Leanne Knight

The statues placed on decorated stone corbels along the nave walls and the statues in the Lady Chapel and St Joseph's Chapel are carved in Canadian pine and gilded in an original style by the distinguished Austrian woodcarver Anton Daprè and his sons. The statues represent saints throughout the life of the Christian church. The first statue carved was of St Therese of Lisieux, designed by and executed under the direction of the architect.

Along the length of the north and south side aisles and across the west end of the church are placed the fourteen Stations of the Cross in terracotta. In 2006, the First Centenary of the parish, these were refurbished and painted in pastel colours.

The black wrought-iron light fixtures were originally located in the nave and were transferred to the side aisles during the 2006 reordering of the church.

At the west end of the church are the choir gallery and organ loft. The organ itself was not included within the original design but purchased from a disused church in Egham and rebuilt in 1974.

From the choir gallery, looking towards the sanctuary, the beauty and design of the church can be fully appreciated. Looking upwards the decorated roof can be seen with the division between the pre-war building and its completion in 1960. The internal walls of the church are dressed in brown Hornton stone.



The baptismal font

Photograph ©Michael Nolan

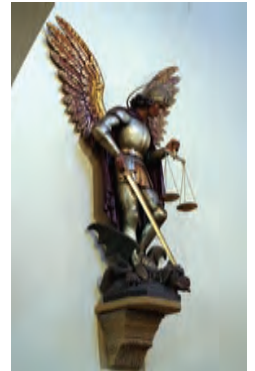
The octagonal baptismal font, near the main entrance to the church, reminds us that Christ rose on the “eighth day” of the week, a day outside normal time, like the eternity we will share with Christ through our baptism.

Opposite the main entrance to the church is a timber statue of St Michael the Archangel with one foot placed upon the devil after defeating him in battle. St Michael is the patron of the church.

The main feature of the exterior is the square tower, which has open windows with arches to allow the sound of the church bells to ring out.

The tower is capped with a hipped roof in Sicilian tiling to suit the existing church roof covering of special Italian tiles. The external walls of the church are faced with Dutch bricks.

The main entrance of the church was designed to be a porch built at the south-west angle of the church. This was realised finally in 2006 when a narthex was built as part of the reordering of the church. The entrance to the church grounds is through a brick-built lych-gate.



**St Michael
the Archangel**

Photograph ©Leanne Knight



The tower

Photograph ©Leanne Knight