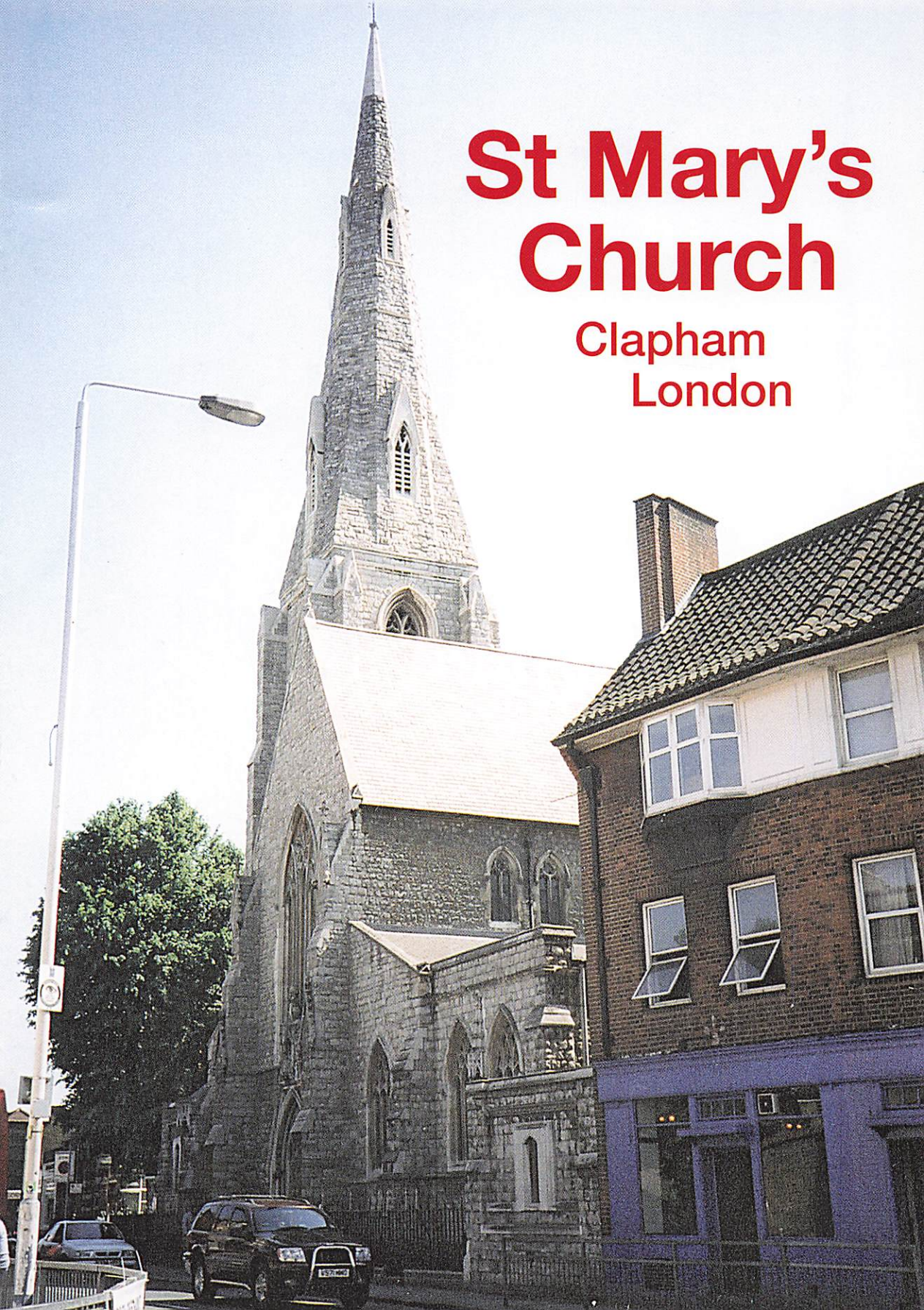
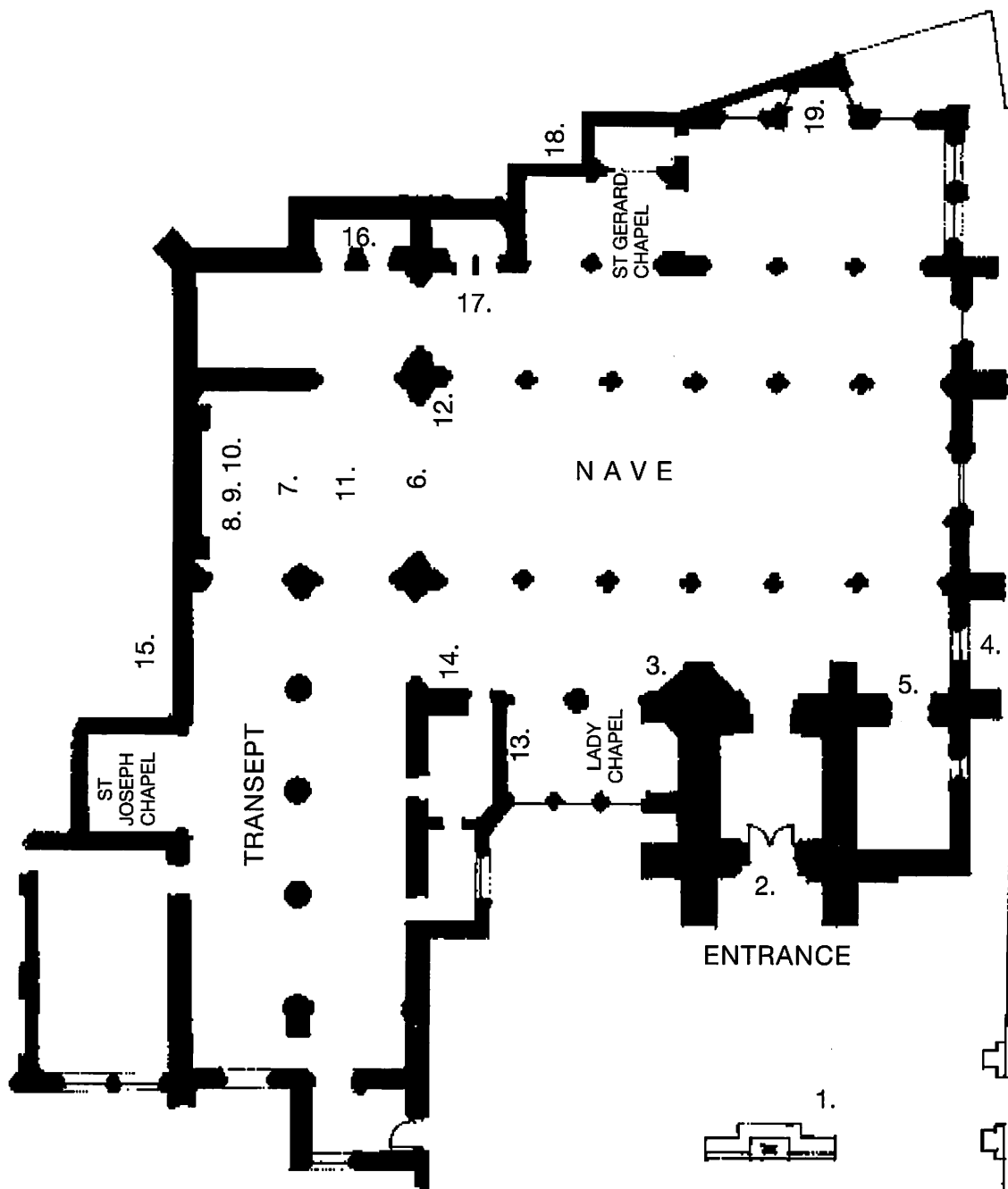


St Mary's Church

Clapham
London





- 1 War Memorial
- 2 Entrance
- 3 Commemorative Plaque
- 4 Holy Family Window
- 5 Oak screen – Mary Magdalen
- 6 Last Judgement Mural
- 7 Rosary Altar Panel
- 8 Reredos
- 9 Tabernacle

- 10 West Window
- 11 Sanctuary Ceiling
- 12 Pulpit
- 13 Icon of Our Lady
- 14 Angels Window
- 15 Clement Hofbauer Window
- 16 Organ Window
- 17 Judgement Window
- 18 St John Neumann
- 19 St Alphonsus Liguori

The Glories of *St Mary's Church*

Clapham, London

In 1848, there were two small Redemptorist communities in England, one in Falmouth and the other in Blackmoor Park, near Worcester. Fr de Held, a Belgian Redemptorist, was appointed the Superior of the English Mission. On his way through London to take up his appointment in the Midlands, he celebrated Mass at St James Church, Spanish Place. There he met Mr Philips, a Catholic bookseller to whom he explained the aim of the Redemptorist Congregation. Mr Philips suggested that he contact Dr Wiseman who was the Pro Vicar Apostolic of the London District. Bishop Wiseman was known to be looking for a group of men who were "devoted to the task of going from town to town, relieving the overworked local clergy of part of their labours, by giving well prepared and systematic courses of instruction."

Fr de Held was received warmly by Dr Wiseman and they began to look for a suitable property for a new Redemptorist community in London. On 31 July 1848 the Redemptorists took possession of a house in Acre Lane, formerly owned by Lord Teignmouth, a Governor of India and the first president of the Bible Society. The parlour was turned into a chapel, and a round of services began and the parish of St Mary's was born.

It quickly became clear that a church needed to be built in the area. Mr William Waddell, a pupil of Pugin, was commissioned to draw up plans for a Gothic church to hold about 400 people. The foundation stone was laid on the Feast of St Alphonsus, 1849. Twenty-one months later on 14 May 1851 the church was opened.

The opening of the church was not without incident. Clapham had hitherto been a centre of Protestant Evangelicalism. Understandably, a Catholic church built in such a prominent position near the Common was not received well by the local Protestant community.

On the day of the opening, Fr de Held and the Redemptorist community had to rise early and bless the church at 5 a.m. to avoid the possibility of confrontation. Later that morning, High Mass was celebrated by Dr Cox of St Edmund's, Old Hall. The preacher was Cardinal Wiseman. The organist and choir of St George's Cathedral provided the music.

For the last one hundred and fifty years, St Mary's has continued to be a place of public worship and private prayer for parishioners and non-parishioners alike. It has been made holy by the prayers of many. May our prayers continue to hallow this place for many generations to come.



St Mary's

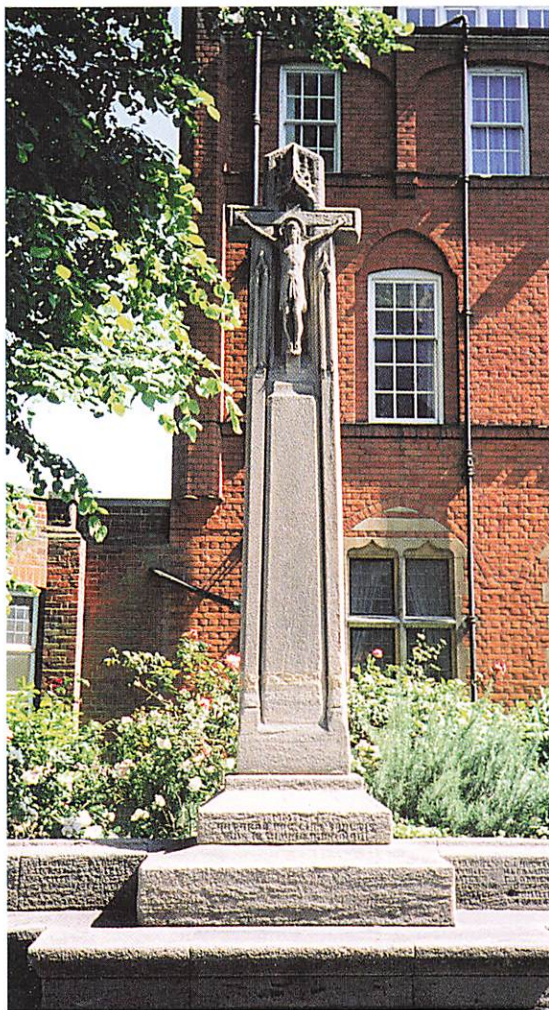
. . . Our Immaculate Lady of Victories,

St Mary's or to give it its full title, Our Immaculate Lady of Victories, "one of the finest Victorian churches in South London",⁽¹⁾ designed by William Wardell, was opened in May 1851. It is a listed building grade II*.

Before you enter the church note the Celtic Cross War Memorial, the work of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (1920) and sadly the worse for wear with the ravages of weather and air pollution. Look up at the fine spire, 172 feet in height. The difference in stone colour just below the weather vane is the consequence of a repair to damage done by the wires of a rogue barrage balloon in the Second World War. High in the tower hangs a complete peal of eight bells: the only Catholic church in London to possess such. Each bell has a dedication: The Blessed Virgin Mary, St Joseph, St Michael, St Alphonsus, St Teresa of Avila, St Gregory, St Margaret Ward, St John Neumann.

(On the inside front cover there is a ground plan of the church.)

As you enter notice the decorative arch over the huge wooden doors and at its apex the bas relief of Christ crowning his Blessed Mother; also the elegant rib-vaulted work in the porch. On your immediate left as you go through the main door up on the wall you will see a marble plaque commemorating the first resident priest in Clapham since the Reformation, Fr Denis Sheahan. As an army chaplain he ministered to soldiers in the Crimean War (1853), dying, along with many others there, of disease.



(1) Cherry & Pevsner, Buildings of England, London 2: South 1983



Now turn to your right and go to the stained glass window at the back dedicated to the Holy Family and showing scenes from the childhood of Christ. On the right of the window there is a fine oak carved screen portraying St Mary Magdalen with the jar of precious ointment used to anoint the feet of Jesus. It was originally sited elsewhere and formed the front of a confessional.

Before proceeding down the centre aisle, look up at the chancel arch, above the sanctuary. There you will see a large wall painting of the Last Judgement: Christ accompanied by Our Blessed Lady, St John the Baptist, and the apostles. This is the work of J. Settegast (1854) of Koblenz, Germany. Working from scaffolding and in very poor light, it took him almost six months to complete the work. His letters to his



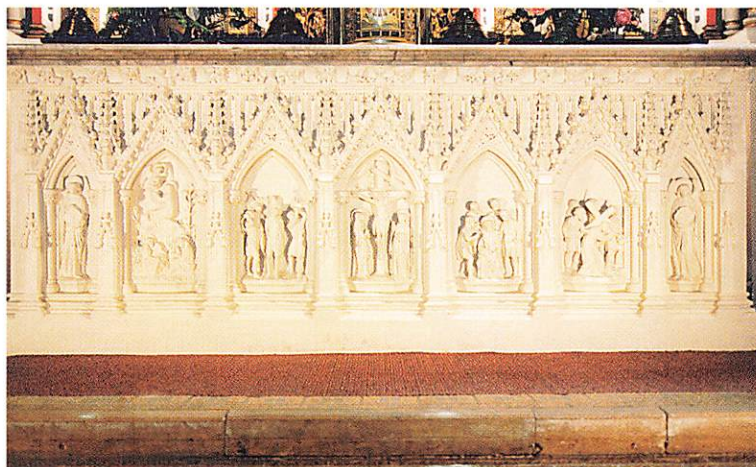
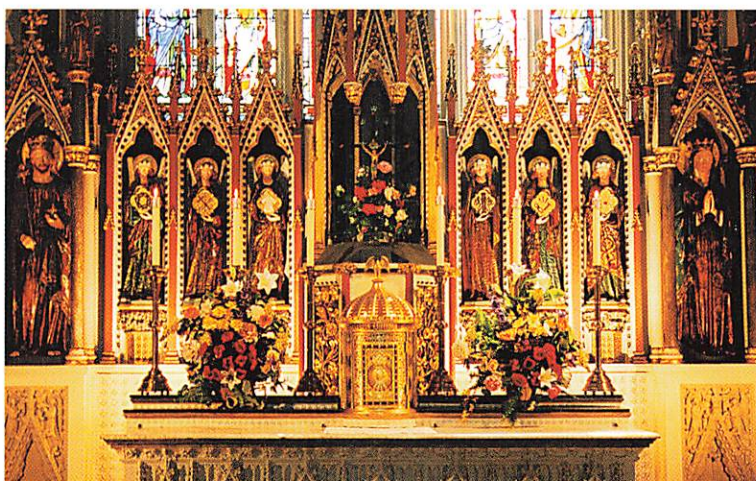


wife back in Germany provide an interesting social comment on the London of the mid-nineteenth century. By 1926 it had deteriorated so badly it had to be restored. This work was carried out by J. Linthout of Bruges. He repainted it on canvas, section by section, and superimposed it on the original. To right and left at the top of the twelve pillars of the nave are to be seen the heads of the apostles.

Suspended from iron brackets high up on the walls of the nave are onion shaped pierced gilded metal light fittings made to John Francis Bentley's individual specification and design. Bentley was an eminent Victorian architect, (1839-1902) and former parishioner of St Mary's. Among his greatest achievements must be Westminster Cathedral. However his influence in St Mary's, a treasure house of his work, is as profound as you will see.

Stand before the steps to the sanctuary. *(Please take care not to go onto the sanctuary, it is alarmed for security reasons.)*

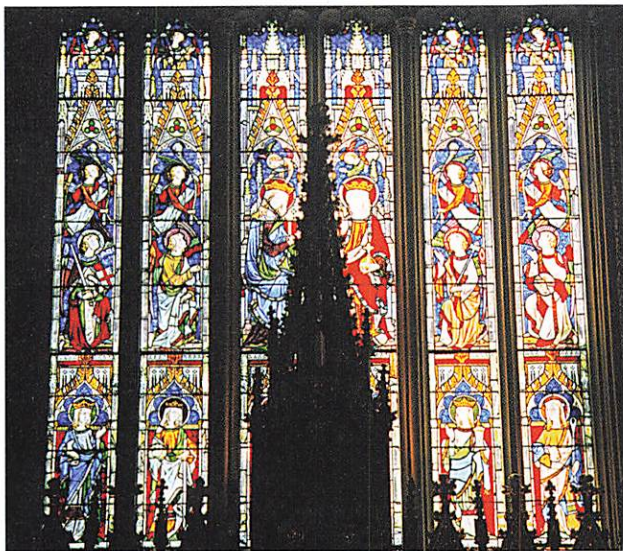
The panels on the face of the original High Altar depict the sorrowful mysteries of the Holy Rosary. Behind the tabernacle on the reredos are figures of six angels showing the instruments of the passion of Jesus. The crowned figures on either side are the Holy Redeemer and Our Blessed Lady and, below them, panels of the Annunciation and the Angel Gabriel.





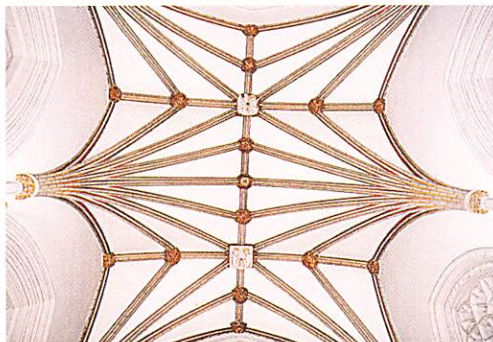
The tabernacle is of beaten copper with rich blue *lapis lazuli* and delicate tints of mother of pearl for its adornment. Designed and completed shortly before Bentley's death in 1902 it was the gift of Miss K. Mahony in memory of her parents. It is crowned with the figure of the pelican drawing blood from its breast to feed its young: a eucharistic symbol. The floor of the sanctuary is made up of ochre coloured tiles of elaborate and varied design.

In the great west window overlooking the sanctuary can be seen Christ the King crowning the Blessed Virgin Mary; the intensity of the colours matching the strongly coloured figures described below.



On the right of Christ we see the Archangels Gabriel and Uriel holding an image of the sun. On the left we see St Raphael with a fish and St Michael. Below them are images of Virgin Martyrs: St Agnes with a lamb, St Catherine with a wheel and sword, St Cecilia with a harp, St Lucy with a dish, St Barbara with a tower and St Agatha with pincers.

Surveying the sanctuary from lofty niches are the four Evangelists, the Prophet Isaiah and the Spanish Carmelite nun St Teresa of Avila.



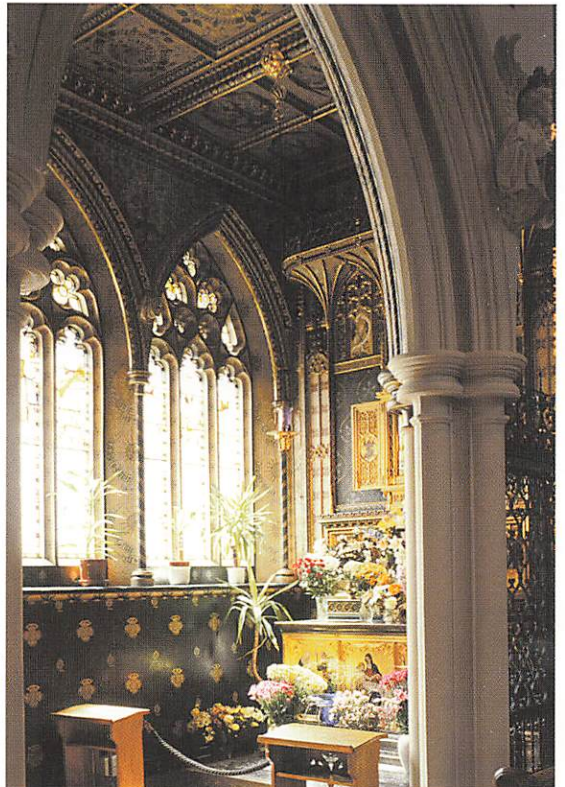
The ceiling of the sanctuary has strong but delicately gilded ribs and vaults which meet in two foliate bosses similar to those over the main door, depicting Christ crowning his Blessed Mother.

Three of the Evangelists can be seen in panels on the pulpit. The pulpit is surmounted with a tester and a suspended white dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit, the inspiration of the preacher and reader of the word.

On the left enter the ornate side chapel in Gothic style, dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, the work of Bentley, a delight of design and originality completed in 1884. It is judged by some to be his finest work. The icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, an early copy of the original in the Redemptorist church of San Alfonso in Rome, has been venerated in this church since 1867. The delicate hues of the traceried windows portray famous women of the Old Testament, Eve, Sara, Rebecca, Rachel, Deborah, Ruth, Abigail, Esther and Judith.

Colour is used sparingly and the white painted and stained glass gives a wonderful silvery golden hue. The windows suffered damage during the Second World War but were skilfully restored by Veronica Whall.

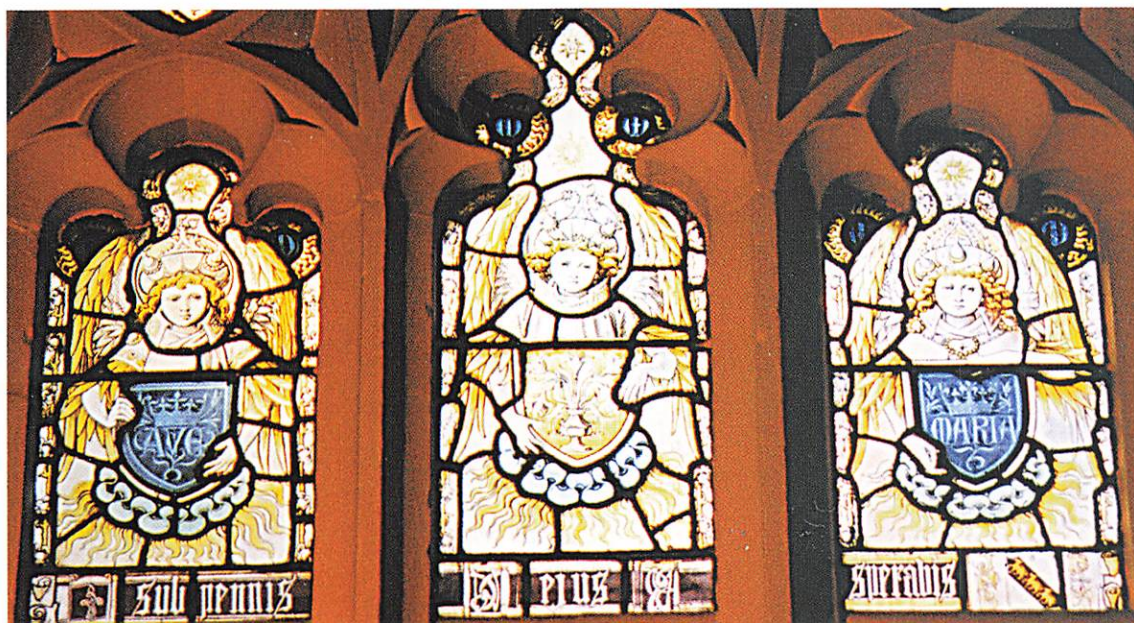
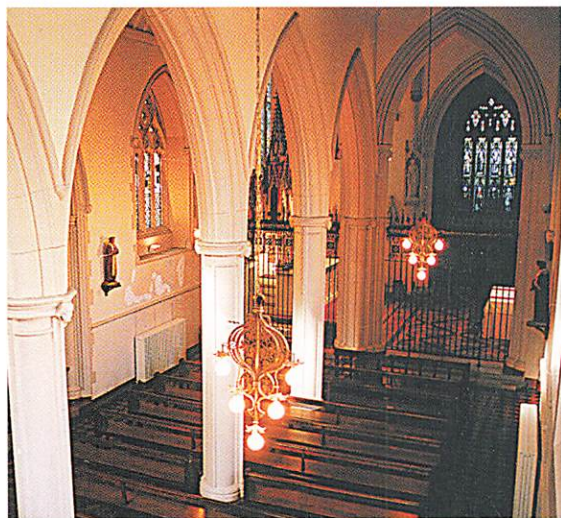
Every surface is richly decorated with stencilled walls and ceiling. The ceiling panels above the altar feature the six winged seraphim of the Apocalypse. The remainder are taken up with titles attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary, devised on scrolls and enclosed by rose wreaths. The artist was Mr Peace of Chelsea. The sanctuary lamp is silver, made to a design by Bentley. The altar is of Derbyshire fossil marble. The subject of the central panel of the

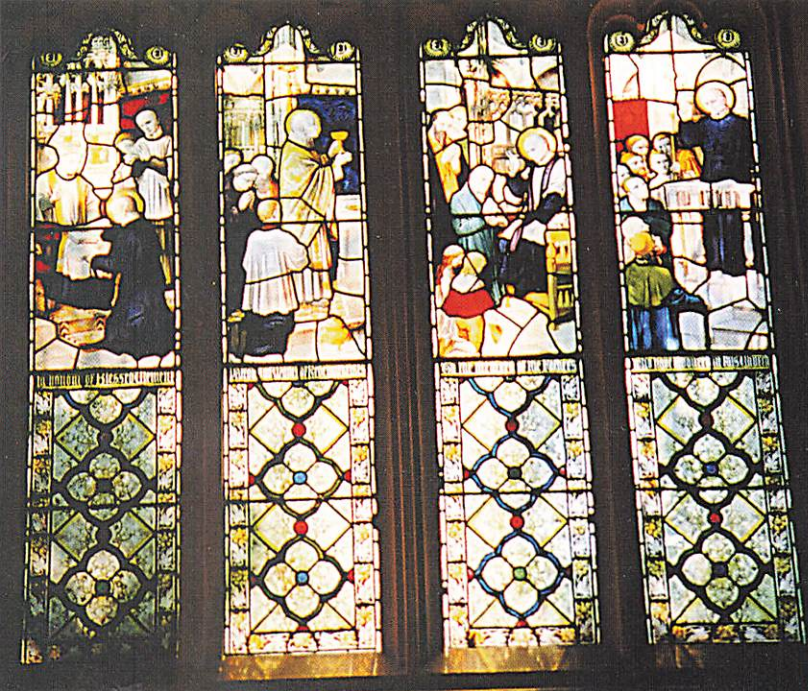


the frontal, painted on slate, is the *Pietà*. The deep strong blue background is suggestive of the deep waters of Mary's sorrows, as she holds the broken body of her son. The icon is housed in a splendid gilt and burnished triptych. Richly painted kneeling seraphs adorn the wings of the golden triptych. The chapel is partially enclosed by a beautiful gilded wrought iron grille.

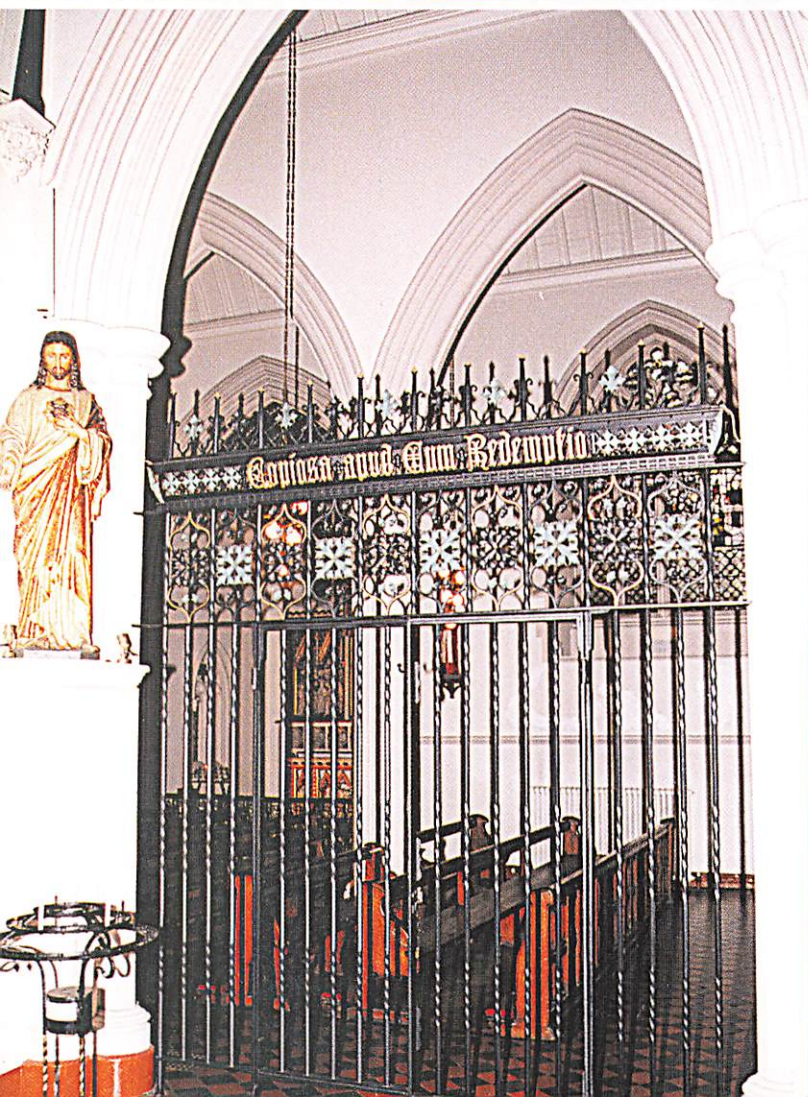
Don't miss the delightful angels' window above the confessional just beyond the Lady chapel.

A spacious and airy transept to the left of the sanctuary was designed in 1894 by Bentley to accommodate the growing number of worshippers. The simple benches are of fumed oak. Bentley's onion-shaped delicately traceried light fittings are repeated here. On the right is the shrine of St Joseph with scenes from the childhood of Christ on the altar panels and in the stained glass window. The vaulted roof is flanked on both sides with a frieze of crowned angels.





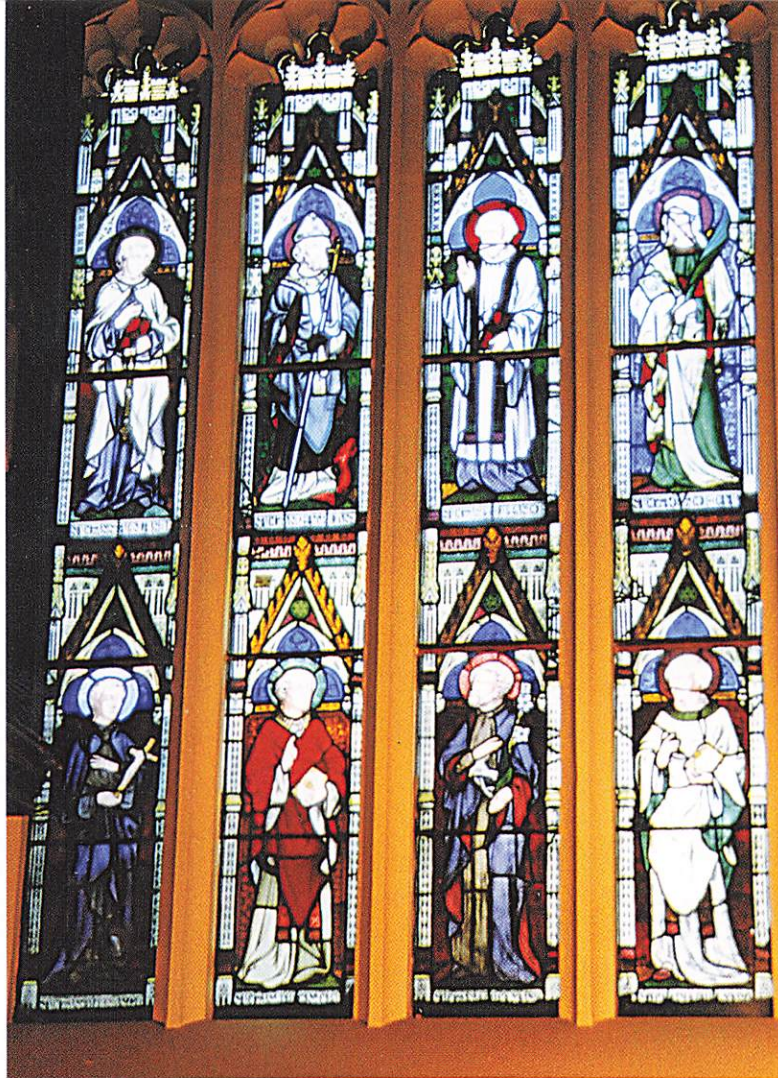
Two martyrs from the English Reformation stand like guardians over the transept: St Thomas More, Lord Chancellor under Henry VIII and St John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, both executed in the Tower, 1535. The one stained glass window in the transept illustrates events in the life of a Redemptorist saint, Clement Hofbauer, patron of Vienna, who died in 1820. His disciple Frederick de Held (as mentioned in the introduction) brought the Redemptorists to Clapham in 1848. The window is dedicated to Redemptorists "who have laboured in this church".



The transept is separated from the sanctuary by elegant iron grilles with scriptural texts in foliate upper panels designed by Bentley, one of them being placed there as a memorial by his widow after his death in 1902. A brass plaque on the floor records this.

Cross the church to the North side. Pause in front of the organ and look at the window to the right of it. It portrays St Stanislaus Kostka, St Aloysius Gonzaga, St Patrick, St Teresa of Avila, St Francis Jerome, St John of Nepomuk, St Philip Neri, St Francis Xavier.

In front of you is the statue of St Therèse of Lisieux who died in 1897, aged 24, a French Carmelite nun, doctor of the Church and patroness of the Missions. To the right, above the confessional, are three small stained glass windows: Christ as Judge with the sword of justice, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Recording Angel with the Book of Life.



Further on and to the left is the shrine of St Gerard Majella, a Redemptorist brother who died in 1755. The window and panel illustrate scenes from his life. Osmund Bentley, the son of John, designed this shrine and chapel (1910) with its fine rib-vaulted oak ceiling, foliate bosses and colourful heraldic shields. These shields were of the Redemptorist Congregation and former Bishops of the Dioceses of Southwark and Westminster who had strong associations with this church. Individual floor tiles bear the letters G and M, the initials of Gerard Majella.

A portrait of St John Neumann, a Redemptorist and first Bishop of Philadelphia, USA (d.1852), hangs in this shrine.

In the panelled recess is a more recent addition, a statue of St Alphonsus Liguori, Bishop and Doctor of the Church, who founded the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer or the Redemptorists in the Kingdom of Naples, 1732.



This booklet has been compiled to commemorate the one hundred and fiftieth year of the parish of St Mary's, the pastoral ministry of Redemptorists in Clapham over those years and the re-opening of the church in May 2001 after its refurbishment and restoration.

Your tour is now complete and although you will have enjoyed some of its treasures, it is worth recalling that this is a place where faith is celebrated in worship. The parish community gathers here daily to praise God and celebrate the Eucharist. It is more than a building; it is God's house, built and maintained for the honour and glory of God. May you be enriched by your experience here and may God's blessing stay with you.

Kevin Callaghan C.Ss.R.

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