

St John the Evangelist Notting Hill



A Short History and Visitors Guide

In 1821 James Weller Ladbroke (d. 1847) and his architect Thomas Allason (1790 - 1852) began plans to build an estate on the land lying to the east and west of the southern end of what is now Ladbroke Grove. At this time however, Notting Hill was too far from London for a large housing development to be viable and instead, in June 1837 in the face of much local resistance, a local entrepreneur opened the 'Hippodrome' - a race course - in the area, using the hill now occupied by St John's Church as a natural grandstand.



The race course was not a success and closed in June 1841 by which time pressure to develop the land for housing had returned.

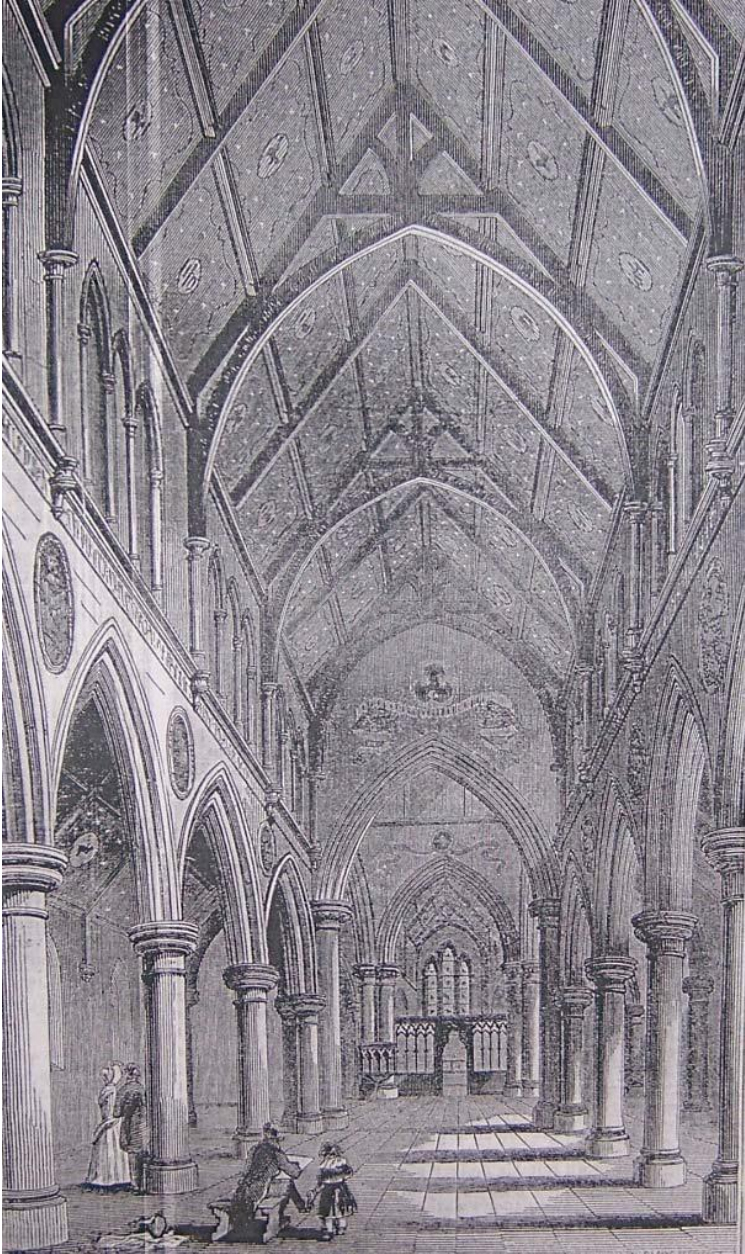
In plans drawn up in 1843, both the architect for the western section of the estate and the architect for the eastern section had designed a church for the top of the hill. In what appears to have been a compromise, the church was placed in the western section,

but the commission was given to John Hargrave Stevens, the architect for the eastern section. Conspicuously situated with the land falling away on three sides, the church became the centrepiece of the Ladbroke Estate and can be seen to advantage from many locations in North Kensington.

Designed in the Early English Style, the church was built to accommodate 1,500 worshippers, of whom 1,100 would pay pew rents, and 400 would be 'free sittings'. The spire is markedly similar to that of St Mary's Church, Witney (Oxfordshire).

John Sinclair, Vicar of Kensington and Archdeacon of Middlesex laid the foundation stone on 8 January 1844 and the Bishop of London Dr Charles Blomfield consecrated the church - dedicated to St John the Evangelist - on Wednesday 29 January 1845. In 1845 the ceilings were 'adorned with painted symbols of the evangelists, and scripture sentences rubricated' (see page 4). In an indication of the speed of development of the area St John's was the first of 19 new parish churches built in Kensington during Sinclair's incumbency (1842 - 1875).

When the church was completed in January 1845 it stood in relative isolation - with only numbers 2 - 4 Lansdowne Crescent, two terraces of houses on Ladbroke Grove, and the vicarage (now 63 Ladbroke) for company - looking out to the north and west on open fields. Fears that the church had been placed too far out in the country proved unfounded however, and within three years nearly all of the houses to the south and west of the church had been built.



In 1994 a purpose designed parish centre was built under the western end of the church. A major engineering project, the church was temporarily supported on concrete pillars while the Undercroft was excavated. The Undercroft opened on 3 July 1994, and was dedicated by the Bishop of London Dr David Hope on 29 January 1995, the 150th anniversary of the consecration of the church.

The third Christian millennium saw renewed energy at St John's. In 2000 the outside of the church and spire were completely cleaned and repaired. In 2003 the South West Porch and door were restored to use. In 2004 a new bell was installed and the font was restored. In 2005 the church commissioned icons from the Coptic iconographer Stephane Rene of Christ, the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. In 2007, new seating was installed and the Western garden was enclosed and landscaped. Disabled toilets were installed in the church in 2009. In 2012, the Sacred Space Gallery was relocated to the South Transept, the 1960's central dais was removed, the pulpit and tester restored and placed in their original position, the Font was relocated in the main body of the Church, and the organ was restored and relocated in the North Transept in a twenty-first century case. In 2013, new doors will be installed at the south and north entrances, together with a disabled ramp. An exhibition on the history of Notting Hill, together with this church and organ, was created in 2013 in the North Transept. Do visit it, the only history of Notting Hill found in Notting Hill.

Future plans include the creation of community rooms at Gallery and floor level at the west end of the church.

St John's was built in 1845, as a witness to the Christian faith at the heart of the community, and present and future plans aim to enhance that role. We hope you enjoy your visit.



Church Architects: (1845) John Hargrave Stevens (1805/6 – 1857) & George Alexander (1810 – 1885)

Reredos Design: (1890) Sir Aston Webb (1849 – 1930) Webb's work includes Admiralty Arch (1911), Buckingham Palace east facade (1913), Royal Naval College at Dartmouth (1899-1904).

Reredos Sculpture: (1890) Emmeline Halse (1853 – 1930) (The Call, The Revelation (1888) & The Commission (1890))

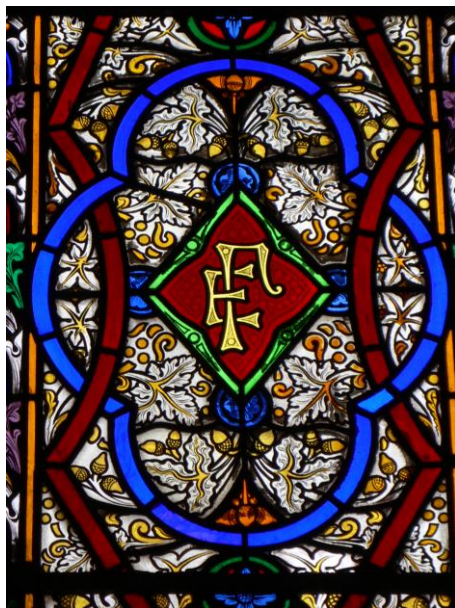
Stained glass:

W Gable, S Aisle: (1845) Artist: William Warrington (1796 - 1869)

E Windows: (1900) Artist: Charles Earner Kempe (1837 - 1907)
(note the wheat sheaf in the border of the panel depicting St Michael & the angels with wings of peacock feathers).

N Aisle: (1903) Artist: Herbert William Bryans (1855 - 1925) (St Cecilia; note the greyhound rebus).

The lancet window in the north wall of the chancel is a memorial to Edward Fletcher (1798/9 - 1861) showing the Fletcher and Coffin family coats of arms. "EXSTANT RECTE FACTIS PROEMIA" translates as "the rewards of good deeds endure".



The east windows are a memorial to Eleanor Isabella Gell (1824 – 1860), the only child of Rear-Admiral Sir John Franklin (1786 – 1847). Franklin participated in the battles of Copenhagen (1801) and Trafalgar (1805). He is remembered as an Arctic explorer and the discoverer of Canada’s North-West Passage.

Monuments:

S Chancel: James Duncan Thomson (1787 – 1851) (East India merchant)

N Chancel: Rev Edwin Proctor Denniss (1799/1800 – 1854) (incumbent who died of cholera)

N Aisle: Philip Edward Webb (1885/6 – 1916) (son of Sir Aston; note the spider’s web rebus)

S Aisle: Robert Lancaster (d 1917) (Sir Osbert Lancaster’s father).

Organ: Installation: (1846) J C Bishop. Enlargement: (c1880) Hele & Company (London & Plymouth). Some of the organ pipe work dates from 1800, when it was installed in a Gray organ in Holy Trinity Church, Clapham. The composer Charles Edward Horsley (1822 – 1876) was organist between 1853 and 1857. Gillian Constance Weir (b1941) was the organist in 1964. The present Director of Music is Ben Atkinson.

June 2013

