

The Parish Church of St. George, Coundon, Coventry.



An illustrated History and Guide

The information contained within this little booklet has been compiled from Church archive material, press cuttings, photographs, service sheets and other sources. It is not intended to be a complete history of every aspect of our church life through the last eighty years. **J.M.**

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www.stgeorgescoventry.org.uk

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The First Church 1929 to 1939



The temporary building known as the Church of St. George was the first-fruit of the Coventry New Churches Scheme. The largely wooden building came into use on Saturday the 23rd March 1929 and was designed for use as both a church and a parish hall. At one end was the Chancel, furnished through the kindness of friends, including a folding screen, which could be closed off when the building was being used for purposes other than worship. The other end of the building held a stage, some small side rooms and a kitchen which were used for social and other events.

St. George's New Church Building Fund was inaugurated on 31st December, 1929 and the first church wardens and church council members were elected on the 23rd February 1930.

The district which the building was intended to serve was carved out of the four neighbouring parishes of St. John, St Nicholas, St Thomas, Keresley and All Saints, Allesley.

The Reverend Robert Jones, who came to us from Earlsdon, was the first priest in charge in the period from 1929 to 1934, before becoming Vicar of Attleborough, Nuneaton in 1935.

In June 1934, The Rev. William (Bill) Bell Wilson, also from Earlsdon, arrived to take charge and on the 1st January 1935, the district became a Legal Parish with Bill Wilson installed as the first Vicar. He was to serve at St. George's Church for the next 37 years. In 1935 the Vicarage in Mosley Ave. was completed and a pipe organ installed in the church.

Early in 1937, the Bishop's Appeal for building new churches was launched and St George's was to benefit from the funds generated. The church's first curate, the Rev. George Bennett, was appointed, in the same year.

The architect Nugent Cachemaille-Day (1896-1976) was commissioned to draw up the plans for a permanent, brick built church to serve as a replacement for the temporary wooden building which was to remain in use until 1985, when it was replaced by the new coffee lounge and garden space. (Cachemaille-Day was also to design the post-war neighbouring church of St. Frances, Radford, but in a much more modern style.)

The new church of St. George was planned with a large Baptistry at the west end in the form of a tower, surmounted with a tall spire, which, rising to nearly 100 feet, fulfils in a special way the symbolic meaning of spires and points the way through Baptism to Heaven. This octagonal spire, the last one to be erected in Coventry, with its unusual method of construction, was built up of light timber on a platform frame principle and covered with small Portmadoc slates. The roof is covered with the same material.

The roof itself is supported by a “Diagrid” - reinforced concrete piers and ribs, a feature commonly found in other of the sixty-one churches, designed by the same architect. The simple concrete font is capped by a wooden suspended font cover, rising to a height of 21 feet and topped with a cross made by the church builders, E. Harris & Son.

Externally the Church is finished with specially selected rustic bricks, with the window tracery being carried out in the same bricks, but manufactured in special moulds to the required shape and filled with leaded lights. On the south face of the tower, above the porch, is an incised medallion carving of St. George and the Dragon, cleverly designed by Mr. G.H. Deeley to fit in with the bonding of the brickwork.

The foundation stone of the partially built church, was laid by Lord Iliffe, on Sunday, November 27th, 1938 and blessed by The Bishop of Coventry, The Right Reverend Mervyn Haigh. The builders completed the rest of the church but without the sanctuary and vestries, in the next six months. With the Bishop's fund and through our own fund-raising efforts, the New Church Fund stood at £4,122 at the time of the Consecration, with the PCC agreeing to borrow a further £1000 to complete the spire. We would have to wait until after the war to complete the building in its current form, when additional funds had been raised.

The Church was Consecrated on the 1st of June 1939 by the Lord Bishop, the last Holy Communion Service having taken place in the wooden church, the day before.

The Second Phase 1939- 1967

Within months of the church's opening, the nation was at war with Germany and everyone's way of life changed forever. In early 1940, our vicar Bill Wilson, joined the Royal Air Force as a chaplain, leaving the Parish in the capable hands of our curate, Rev. George Bennett. But it was the night of Thursday 14th November 1940 that was to have the biggest impact on the City of Coventry and in some small measure the future of St. George's Church. The night saw the German Luftwaffe launch Operation Moonlight Sonata, the destruction of Coventry, on an unsuspecting city. Coventry was subjected to the longest continuous air raid of the Second World War, with 550 German aircraft dropping bombs on the city for eleven hours.

By 6.15am on the morning of Friday 15th, seventy five percent of all the buildings in Coventry were either damaged or destroyed. The city had lost its beautiful medieval cathedral, destroyed by incendiary bombs.

In Coundon, many lives were lost in Three Spires Ave and on Crampers Fields where the Air Raid Wardens were killed, when a land mine struck the area. The local cinema was hit and the shops destroyed. The vicarage survived, as did the new church and the wooden hall, though all were damaged. On Saturday 16th November 1940, Rev George Bennett wrote the following:

"The place was a terrible mess! The great air raid had left the streets and houses very much the worse for wear: Debris everywhere. Our church hall had been serving-as it had done many times before as a rest centre. But now it looked a pitiable sight. The ceiling was in and there were gaps in the walls. The Church, too, was in a bad way but it still gave sufficient cover to some hundred people, twenty dogs and two or three cats, all of them homeless. The hole in the roof made it rather cold but people curled themselves up in blankets and saw that the older folk were warm in the few old beds we'd managed to find. The furniture was in a very higgledy-piggledy state.

There was a wedding fixed for twelve o'clock. At five minutes to the hour I went outside. I remember wondering if the couple would come, if, indeed, they were both still alive and in what part of the building we could have the Service if they did come. A long line of cars rolled up to the kerb. I went forward to greet them, wondering at the time how beautifully kept these wedding cars were. I'd just reached

the pavement when out of the leading car stepped the King!
Unnoticed!

You could have knocked me down – as the saying goes- with a feather! When I'd 'come to' I found we were shaking hands. How friendly he was, and how very confident was his smile!

The people in the Church didn't notice him for a time. I remember seeing an overturned milk bottle at his feet and the remains of someone's dinner on the step of the font. Then someone looked towards the door and saw him standing there and the folk crowded around him.

The King stayed with them for about ten minutes. A cheery word and a hand-shake to those who could get nearest. He enquired about their homes and their families and gave sympathy and advice to any who asked.

We threaded our way through to the Church Hall—over overturned chairs and broken tables.

He enquired of the spirit of the people and wanted to know how many had lost their homes, if they were being adequately looked after and where the children had been sent. Every little thing was his concern. He missed nothing. In the Church Hall he stood for a few moments gazing at the wreckage and through the holes in the roof to the sky beyond.

"The foundations seem all right" he said, "you will be able to get it repaired"

At half past twelve he left. We went down the steps from the Church Hall, round the side of the Church and out onto the road. By this time a crowd had gathered and as he said

good-bye a woman in the crowd began to sing: 'God save our gracious King.' The others took it up. I tried to join in but there was a lump in my throat.

Truly a gracious King, I thought. There was no doubt about the effect his visit had upon all who were there. One could feel it in the cheers that were shouted as the long line of cars went on their way. As I turned back towards the Church a young man touched me on the arm. "We've just come for our marriage," he said, "I'm sorry we're late."
G.L.B.



When the war ended in 1945, Rev. Bill Wilson returned from the RAF and Rev. George Bennett moved on to pastures new, becoming chaplain to St. Andrews Hospital in Northampton.

On 29th September 1949, the new Compton organ was dedicated along with the Lady Chapel Screen and other furnishings, in the presence of the Bishop.



With the Hall and Church having been repaired, the social life of the church resumed with an annual production by the St. George's Players in the Church Hall until this once again suffered severe damage, this time by fire that destroyed the stage and dressing rooms

The Christmas Bazaar returned, and the annual Carnival with crowning of the Carnival Queen took place in the early 1950's, raising funds to make the necessary repairs after the fire.

Twenty-one years after the Consecration the new Sanctuary was constructed at a cost of £4000, adding another 20 feet to the length of the church and incorporating a window on the east end wall. The vestries were built at the same time but were single storey buildings and not the two storeys originally envisioned by the architect.

Five years later, the Sanctuary finally got its hoped-for stained-glass east window, thanks to the generosity of Mrs. Kathleen Harrison J.P.

The window designed by W.T. Carter-Shapland and affixed by F.A. Wilkins & Co. Ltd, was in memory of her mother and father, the late Alec Turner O.B.E, J.P., a former Mayor and Mayoress, (1943) of the city. He served the city as Councillor and Alderman for 33 years and was the first Master of the Coventry Freeman's Guild and chairman until his death in 1960 aged 88.

The theme of the window concerns the Redemption of Mankind and in the centre panel the Risen Lord stands triumphant above a scene depicting the Fall, where Adam and Eve are shown with the serpent.

Three images of the patron saints of the adjoining parishes together with Saint George are depicted in the outer panels. The sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation are depicted on the lower panels. In the right-hand bottom corner are the coat-of-arms of Coventry and a memorial inscription to the Alderman and his wife. Their favourite spaniels look on from the corner.

The window was dedicated on 7th November 1965, by the Rural Dean of Coventry North, the Reverend T.B. Anderson.





Two years later, 5th November 1967, Archdeacon E.A. Buchan, dedicated the new choir stalls, in the Chancel, with picture designs by H.R. Hosking, and thus the church building was complete.

Later additions to the church include the Lady Chapel wall aumbry in memory of Mr. Edward Pitt.

The “Last Supper” tapestry based on the Leonardo da Vinci mural, which now hangs on the back wall of the Lady Chapel was produced by Mrs. Louise Mole with a little help from other members of her family



For the church's Millennium project, the main altar in the Sanctuary was upgraded with a fine oak replacement.





Our old wooden chairs, many of which had seen service in the original wooden church, were replaced with the current blue, upholstered seats, which, though more comfortable, has reduced the designed seating capacity of the building.

An up-to-date sound system with an induction hearing aid loop, together with a screen and projector have also been installed.

Timeline - Clergy

1929 to 1934 Rev. Robert Jones

First Priest in Charge of Coundon District. Later Vicar of Attleborough, Nuneaton.

1934 to 1970 Rev. William (Bill) Wilson

Priest in Charge and first Vicar of the new parish of St. George. (Retired 1970)

1938 -1946 Rev. George Bennett

Curate – Served as Priest in Charge while the Vicar served as chaplain in the RAF. Later chaplain to St. Andrews Hospital, Northampton. Died 1978.

Mr. Oscar Hemming Lay Reader and Scout Master

Mr. Ernest Carter Lay Reader.

1971 to 1976 Rev. John Key

Vicar and Rural Dean 1973-1974

Later- Vicar of St. Stephens, Redditch. Then – Diocesan Ecumenical officer for New South Wales, Australia.
(Retired 1996)

Rev. Derek Stiff

Curate 1972 to 1976 Later – Rector, Snape, Sternfield & Friston, Suffolk. Hon. Canon from 1995. Rector, Lavenham with Preston, Sudbury, Suffolk.

Rev. Brian Gant

Curate 1976. Later - Priest in Charge, St. Mary's, Maldon, Essex. – Later – Canon.

From 2001 Training Officer for the Archdiocese of York.

Timeline-Clergy

1976 to 1984 Rev. John Cooke

Vicar Later- Vicar of Holy Trinity, Leamington Spa 1984 - 1994. Hon Canon - Coventry Cathedral. (Retired 1994)

Rev. William (Bill) Edney Curate (NSM)

Mr. Jack Gannon Reader

1986 to 1993 Rev. Martin Grieg

Vicar. Later- Vicar of Crawley, East Sussex then Rector of Maresfield, East Sussex from 2001 (Retired)

1994 to 2008 Rev. Laurence(Laurie) Janicker

Vicar (Retired 2008)

Rev. Pam Stote

Curate (NSM) 2000 – 2003

Later – Priest in Charge, St .James, Whitley, Coventry from June 2003 (Retired)

Miss Shirley Trafford Reader to present.

2008 to 2017 Rev. Alison Evans

Vicar. Area Dean 2016-2017.

Later - Vicar of Attleborough, Nuneaton 2017 to present.

2018 to present Rev. Jennifer R. Wickham Vicar.