

All Saints' Church, Oval Way (a short history)

All Saints' Church is nearly 100 years old. The foundation stone was laid on 7th December 1912, and the completed church was consecrated on 17th May 1914. As the contemporaneous local newspaper reports of both events explained, the Church is in "a part of Gerrards Cross within the parish of Chalfont St Peter" and is a "daughter" church of that Parish. It was built to meet the needs of the then new residential area which had grown following the construction of what is now the Chiltern Line and the opening of a new railway station at Gerrards Cross in 1906.

All Saints' is only about one-third of the church originally proposed and designed by Temple Moore, a leading ecclesiastical architect of the time. He favoured large churches, dominating the surrounding area, as frequently found on the Continent. So his design comprised a central aisle, with two side aisles, accommodating about 700 persons, together with a small tower. It would have occupied almost the whole of the present church site. But for financial and other reasons, it was decided to build only the north aisle immediately, leaving the other two aisles and the tower to be added at some date in the future (which has never happened). So All Saints' looks rather lop-sided and its high south wall, which would have connected to the other parts of the proposed church, is comprised largely of arches which have been 'temporarily' bricked in.

Originally, only one window was constructed in the south wall, at the eastern end to afford light to the chancel. But over the subsequent years, three other attractive stained glass windows have been added. The last of these is the 'middle window', dedicated to St Cecilia, the patron saint of music, installed in order to celebrate the centenary of All Saints' through the generosity of several contributors and in particular Dennis Franklin, for many years organist and choirmaster at All Saints'. (See photograph on back cover.)

A feature of many of Temple Moore's designs was 'asymmetry', i.e. the deliberate avoidance of architectural symmetry, and All Saints' contains many examples of this. Look, for instance, at the interior arches; some are rounded and others are pointed - and the pointed arches differ in the angle of the point. Observe too the 'voussoirs' (decorative double thin bricks in the heads of the arches); these are all set at right angles to the line of the arch, but they are unevenly spaced and sometimes differ in numbers on either side of the arch. As well as painted ceilings and exposed brickwork and stonework, Temple Moore also favoured rustic 'adzed' woodwork. Several of the fixed furnishings, such as the imposing chancel screen and pulpit, are examples of this. They give the interior of the Church a distinct 'Arts and Crafts' character.

"For there's something in the painted roof
And the mouldings round the door
The braw bench, and the plain font
That tells of Temple Moore."

(From 'Perp Revival i' the North', by John Betjeman)