**J. F. BENTLEY IN NOTTING HILL**

*Notes to accompany visit by the Ecclesiological Society on 9th June 2022*

*We are grateful to Father Gerard Skinner and Monsignor Keith Barltrop for allowing us to visit.*

SOURCES: These notes are based primarily on ***Westminster Cathedral and its Architect***, by Winefride de Hôpital (1919). Unidentified quotations are from this. See also Vol. XXXVII of the ***Survey of London*** (North Kensington). Drawings for St Mary of the Angels (mostly by Meyer, but some by Bentley) are at the RIBA Drawings Collection.

JOHN BENTLEY was born in 1839, the son of a Doncaster wine-merchant. The family lived near the great medieval church, from which he learned to love architecture. Bentley took a great interest in the rebuilding by G. G. Scott after it was destroyed by fire in 1853. In 1855 he was articled to the London firm of builders Winslow and Holland, but his skill at drawing persuaded Richard Holland that he ought to be an architect, and he arranged for him to enter the office of one of his clients, Henry Clutton, as ‘a sort of improver’ (1857). HENRY CLUTTON (1819–1893) was a Cheshire man. A pupil of Blore, in the 1840s he was producing such convincingly Puginian works as Trinity College, Carmarthen (1847–8). Between 1851 and 1856 he ‘retained the services’ of William Burges. In 1856 they won the international competition for Lille Cathedral. This marked a decisive turn towards French models. In the same year Clutton decided to become a Roman Catholic. This lost him both the job of restoring Salisbury Cathedral (to Scott), and the association with Burges. He was received into the Church by Manning in 1858. Manning (whose late wife was Clutton’s aunt) promised him that he would be the architect of Westminster Cathedral, and he produced several designs but by 1883 he was blind.

Bentley ‘s work in the Notting Hill area covers most of his career, from his earliest independent work up to 1893 – the year before he was commissioned to design Westminster Cathedral. It provides a fascinating opportunity to study the development of his architectural taste from his early preference (acquired from Clutton) for early French Gothic to his later liking for English Late Decorated, as also the development of his stained glass and ironwork. His passion for colour and fascination with the effects obtained from natural materials such as marble and alabaster, as well as his care for detail, can be seen as unifying characteristics.

Apart from the buildings we are visiting, Bentley’s work in the area also includes the church of Our Lady of the Holy Souls, Bosworth Road, Kensal Town (the second of the (only) five new churches he built, apart from the Cathedral (1881)), and some work at the former Dominican Convent at 317 Portobello Road (now Instituto Español Cañada Blanch). The Poor Clares’ Convent, where he designed the altar (1871) has been demolished.

**ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI, POTTERY LANE, NOTTINGHILL, LONDON W11 4NQ**

<http://www.stfrancisnottinghill.org.uk/>

In 1856 Cardinal Wiseman, Archbishop of Westminster, asked Dr Henry Edward Manning (who had been received into the Church in 1851) to found the Order of the Oblates of St Charles in London. The order had been set up in Milan by St Charles Borromeo. He gave Manning the unfinished church of St Helen in Moorhouse Road as its base. This church had been begun in 1849, to the design of Thomas Meyer, but money ran out in about 1855, leaving a roofless shell and incomplete tower. Manning had the church completed by Henry Clutton, who was the nephew of Manning’s deceased wife, and who himself was received into the Church in 1858. It was opened, with the new dedication to St Mary of the Angels, in 1857.

The Oblates soon decided to build a church in the notorious slum of Notting Dale, to serve the numerous poor Catholics there (mostly Irish), who worked for the most part in the potteries or in pig breeding. In 1849 there were more than 3,000 pigs here, and the people lived in sordid little houses. On a cramped site in Pottery Lane a humble church, in severe 13th-century French Gothic, of stock brick with black brick bands was built in 1859 by Jackson and Shaw to the design of Clutton, and opened on February 2nd 1860. It consisted of nave, apsidal chancel, and north aisle. The priest in charge was Father Henry Augustus Rawes, D.D., of Trinity College, Cambridge. He paid for the church, presbytery and school. Born in 1826, he was ordained in the Church of England in 1853. In 1856 he was received into the Church by Manning, and he was ordained the next year. He was devoted to the Holy Ghost, and in 1877 founded the Confraternity of the Servants of the Holy Ghost. He was the author of several devotional works and hymns. According to Winefride de l’Hôpital, Bentley’s daughter and biographer, ‘Rawes was a mystic, with poetic imagination exalted to things holy and beautiful. From him Bentley derived something of his love of symbolism and a great deal of his spiritual fervour’.

Clutton was assisted in the building of the church by a young man who had entered his office in 1857 as ‘a sort of improver’. This was John Bentley (1839-1902). His first commissions for the church were an alabaster offertory box, a bracket for a statue of St Francis, and an oak folding chancel seat. Fr Rawes soon realised that the building was too small. According to Fr H.J. Kirk (*Reminiscences of an Oblate of St Charles,*1905), ‘Great efforts were necessarily and successfully made to secure an adjoining plot of ground, though even this hardly sufficed for the intended enlargement of the church, and the building of a Presbytery and schools. Nothing less than genius could have succeeded in adapting so irregular a piece of ground to the proposed plans’. In 1861 Bentley continued the aisle round the apse to form a Lady Chapel, and added a baptistery at the west end of the aisle, as well as building a presbytery and school. Bentley had just been offered a position in Clutton’s office, but bravely decided to set up in practice on his own. Meanwhile, on February 2nd 1860 the church was consecrated.

In March 1861 Bentley designed the altar of St John the Evangelist. He gave the job of painting the panels to the artist Nathaniel Hubert John Westlake (1833-1921), a Catholic convert, whom he had met in the studio of the Belgian sculptor Theodore Phyffers in 1859. Westlake was to be closely associated with Bentley, executing both decorative painting and stained glass to his design, until about 1885, when a professional dispute led to a permanent breach. In 1863 Bentley designed a house for Westlake in the neighbourhood, now 235 Lancaster Road: this was his first complete building.

Wiseman was so struck with the altar of St John that he invited Westlake to lunch. When he heard that Bentley was not yet a Catholic, he promised that if he became one he would baptise him. Eventually, under the influence of Clutton, Rawes and Westlake, to say nothing of an ‘old Irish labourer’ at Farm Street, Bentley was indeed baptised by Wiseman on April 16th 1862 – the first person to be baptised in his new baptistery at St Francis (though the font was not yet installed). He took Francis as his baptismal name, and henceforth signed himself J.F. Bentley.

In 1863 Bentley designed the high altar, for which Westlake again did the paintings. Further works followed: the porch and the arcading of two bays of the chancel were carved in 1864; the ‘arch of the chancel’ was added in 1865, and the sanctuary received painted decoration; in 1870 a canopied niche was provided for the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary; in 1872 stained glass was installed in the baptistery; in 1872-3 the sanctuary was redecorated; and in 1876 brass altar rails, more candlesticks and new heating were provided.

Fr Rawes remained at St Francis until 1880, when he was appointed Superior of the Oblates, and moved to St Mary of the Angels. He died in 1885, and is buried in the spot he had chosen in 1878 in the cemetery of St Mary Magdalen, Mortlake, where he lies close to Bentley, Mrs de l’Hôpital, and Clutton.

In 1882 the church was lengthened westwards. A tribune was constructed over the baptistery, which necessitated the loss of the squints in the Community Room which Rawes considered ‘its great feature’. A new room was added to the Presbytery, which allowed for the accommodation of three priests. In 1896 the church was cleaned and decorated for the Silver Jubilee of Fr Tasker. In 1907 the baptistery was completed with the intended *opus sectile* panels by Bentley’s son Osmond. In 1910 the grilles were added to the baptistery in memory of Fr James Baker White. In 1913 a holy water stoup was put up in the porch for the use of those visiting when the inner door was closed, and a weathercock was placed on the ‘tower’. In 1921 electric light was installed in church and presbytery. In 1958 a new main door was provided at the north end of the church: the porch door was moved and a window put in its place. In 1960, for the centenary of the church, it was painted and decorated under the supervision of Mr Sparrow, architect.

In 1981 Fr Oliver McTernan became parish priest. He removed the altar rails, and the frames of the Stations of the Cross, and sold off numerous items, some of which have been returned. He sent the collection of over 200 Bentley drawings to Sotheby’s, but they were withdrawn from sale and are on loan to the RIBA Drawings Collection.

Works were recently carried out by Fr Skinner. The painted decoration was carefully restored in 2019-20, by International Fine Arts Conservation Studios, under the supervision of Anthony Delarue. The organ, acquired in 2017, was built for the 1851 Great Exhibition by J.W. Walker. The case was designed by R.R. Banks and Charles Barry Junior, and carved by James Rattee. The pipe decoration was designed by Thomas Willement.

**GUIDE**

Within the courtyard, the school is on the left, the presbytery in front, and the church on the right. In 1861 Bentley designed a ‘devotional cross’ to stand here, but it remained unexecuted. It would have had a quadruple red marble shaft, and a Crucifixion with Saints Mary and John. The bust of St Francis is by Arthur Fleischmann (1982), who also made the fountain. The PRESBYTERY is cleverly fitted onto the difficult site, and is a striking example of High Victorian design, in striped brick with stone dressings. The pyramidal turret has a splendid iron finial, based on French examples such as those on the House of Jacques Coeur in Bourges, illustrated in Clutton’s *Illustrations of Medieval Architecture in France* (1856). The interior has chunky woodwork. On the staircase newel is a brass crucifix. The lower part of the SCHOOL (now the parish centre) appears to be original, but the rest must have been rebuilt c.1910, apparently to the design of either H. Francis Tasker and Slater, or Osmond Bentley. The corner turret gives it character. The playground is on the roof, as on the original school.

At some date between 1866 and 1871 a former Methodist chapel in Silchester Road was bought to accommodate another school. In 1870 Bentley made a design for a ‘Church House’, with schools and chapel, for the site, but it was not built. In 1894 he designed ‘new closets’ for the school, which was closed in 1983. In 1914 the infants’ school in Treadgold Street, designed by Osmond Bentley, was opened. It has since been replaced.

The CHURCH porch was extended in 1957. HIGH ALTAR: 1863. Inlaid marble and glass mosaic, and mastic inlaid in alabaster. Frontal painted with the dead Christ. Ark-shaped tabernacle, the brass door with engraving, enamels and jewels. Reredos painted with Abel, Noah, Abraham and Melchisedech. The exposition throne is supported on what Mrs de l’Hôpital calls the Hound of Heaven, its canopy surmounted by a pelican in its piety. The piscina is by F.A. Walters, 1917. The artist of the painting on the right (the Nativity between Saints Thomas More and John Fisher) is unknown: it dates from 1949. The brass altar rails installed in 1876 have gone. The PULPIT is decorated with paintings. The STATIONS OF THE CROSS were painted on slate in 1865-70 by Westlake, the style ‘a kind of modification of the German school of the 16th century’. In 1877 Westlake published *The Way of the Cross*, a devotional manual containing engravings made from the cartoons for the paintings, with prayers by Fr Rawes. In his introduction, Westlake claimed that this was the first series of painted Stations ever made in Britain. The wooden frames were removed in 1981. The statue bracket by the west door, carved in 1860, supported a statue of St Francis, but this has gone. Statues of St John and St Joseph were carved by Blanchard, a Belgian member of the Guild of St Luke. The crucifix, ‘in a bold and masterly manner’ (*Building News*) is by Theodore Phyffers (1870), who had helped to carve the stalls in the cathedral at Antwerp, and was brought over by Pugin to work on the Palace of Westminster.

At the entrance to the LADY CHAPEL is the offertory box of inlaid alabaster installed in 1860. Left of the arch is the statue of Our Lady, also by Phyffers (1870). Given by Westlake, it was said by him to have been based on one at Notre Dame in Paris. In the elaborate canopied niche Bentley ‘obtained a very precious and refined effect by the juxtaposition of various coloured marbles and crystals’ (de l’Hôpital). The two statues used to have crowns. That on the BVM was made in 1919 by Charles Farris, and was of silver gilt set with precious stones. That for the Christ child was made by Bernhard Witte of Aachen, well known for his work at Buckfast Abbey. They were sold in 1981. The marble ‘step’ below the statue was added in 1923 (E.H. Major, architect). The ALTAR OF ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST was designed in March 1861. It is of alabaster, marble, glass mosaic, and mastic inlay. The paintings are by Westlake (his first work for Bentley). The *Building News* described them as ‘interesting in a technical view, having been painted in encaustic on slate, the effect being thoroughly ecclesiastical’. Westlake’s designs were exhibited at the Architectural Exhibition in Conduit Street in 1861. The reredos shows St John giving communion to the BVM, while the frontal shows John, with eagle and palm, and Daniel, with lions, looking rather cramped. Westlake later told Mrs de l’Hôpital: ‘Your father was with Clutton for a long time, and was ingrained with early ideas when first I met him. I, on the contrary, was ‘nuts’ on the Italian *quattro centi* [sic] as painters – see the first work we did together, St John and Our Lady’s Communion at St Francis’s. Your father put in the diapered background to give it an earlier *taste*’. The carving (as, apparently, all the rest) was by Thomas Earp, of Lambeth. The LADY ALTAR, of alabaster, also has paintings by Westlake, which show three of the Seven Dolours of Our Lady, with the remaining four on either side. They were ‘rescued from utter destruction’ by René de l’Hôpital (husband of Winefride) in 1911. The mensa has paintings of archangels, Our Lady of Sorrows, and four busts of Virgin Martyrs (Agnes, Catherine, Cecilia and Agatha). The alabaster piscina dates from 1863.

In the north aisle are CONFESSIONALS, carved in 1865 by Arthur Hayball of Sheffield. Bentley thought them much inferior to those by Earp which were formerly in the baptistery.

The BAPTISTERY dates from 1861. In his *History of the Gothic Revival* (1872), C.L. Eastlake wrote that it ‘as the production of a young architect then little known to fame, was much admired. There is a breadth and simplicity about the design which distinguished it from previous work, as well as from much that was executed at that time. In the character of the capitals, the treatment of the font, and other details a tendency to depart from English tradition may be noted, and this is the more remarkable because the architect, like many others, has since retraced his steps and is now emphatically insular in his taste’. It is stone vaulted, with shafts of red and Irish green marble. It was described by the *Building News* in 1863 as ‘very effective’, and promising to be ‘one of the most complete little chapels in England’. The baptistery was only completed in 1907-10, by Bentley’s son Osmond, following the woodcut published in Eastlake’s book (also published in the *Building News*, 22 (1872), p.17) – a woodcut over which his father had taken great pains. The stone-carving was completed, by Hardman’s, who also made the new grilles. Two *opus sectile* panels were also executed. A tablet on the north wall commemorates the work. Bentley was the first person baptised here, on April 16th 1862, by Cardinal Wiseman. The font had not yet been installed: it has a red granite bowl on green marble columns, with a tiled platform. The oak cover was designed in 1865, as Bentley’s thank-offering for his conversion, and executed (as a gift) in the organ-building workshop of his friend, T.C. Lewis. In 1882 a tribune was added over the baptistery, reached by a staircase from what had been intended to be the dining room of the presbytery.

STAINED GLASS: although Mrs de l’Hôpital says that the only glass designed by Bentley was the two windows in the baptistery, in fact the windows at the east end of the church were designed in collaboration by him and Westlake, and executed in 1863 by the firm of Lavers and Barraud, which Westlake had joined in 1860 (he became a partner in 1868, and later head of the firm). On the north side, from the east, are St John, St Mary Magdalen and St Agnes. On the south side is St Augustine. (Mrs de l’Hôpital dates this to 1872, but it must surely be earlier.) These windows are excellent specimens of High Victorian glass, with intense colouring and bold drawing. The baptistery windows, by the same firm, represent St John the Baptist and St Charles Borromeo (1873). The word *humilitas* in the latter is the motto of the Oblates. The window on the south side representing St Francis is by Westlake’s daughter Teresa (1926).

PAINTED DECORATION: the sanctuary was decorated in 1865, but in 1872-3 it was redecorated and the ceiling painted by Westlake (including two angels holding scrolls). In 1896 the church was redecorated by John Whitby, to designs by Bentley. The Lady Chapel was redecorated in 1915 by Osmond Bentley. Only fragments of these schemes have survived redecorations in 1926 (by G.N. Watts) and 1960 (by A.J. Sparrow). The present colours date from 1982.

FURNISHINGS AND FITTINGS: Bentley designed an oak folding chair for the sanctuary (1860-61); an iron offertory stand for the Lady Altar; a processional cross; a music stand; candle-branches and candlesticks (those for the high altar dating from 1864); vestments; a tabernacle veil; red and purple frontals; red, white and purple veils; a processional canopy with applied heraldic ornament in coloured satins on a white ground, with poles (1865); hangings for the reredos; a banner; reliquaries (1863); a press for altar frontals (1864); and more candlesticks. Of these, the processional cross, the canopy poles, and possibly one or two other articles, survive. The finest object designed for the church was a magnificent monstrance in richly jewelled silver gilt (1864), of particular interest as the only Byzantine design made by Bentley before Westminster Cathedral. According to Mrs de l’Hôpital, he ‘lavished infinite pains’ on it. In the same year, Fr Rawes published a book of essays and poems with the title *Sursum*. The dedication runs: ‘I put this book under the protection of St John the Evangelist ... and of my father St Charles Borromeo, and I dedicate it to those members of the congregation of St Francis of Assisi, Notting Hill, who in their love for the Blessed Sacrament have given a monstrance to Our Lord’. The monstrance was shown in the 1971 exhibition of church art. It was sold in 1981, and bought by Mrs Hull Grundy who presented it to the City of Birmingham Art Gallery.

An object not designed by Bentley was the crucifix which used to stand on St John’s Altar. This had stood on the high altar of the chapel of the Tuileries Palace in Paris, from the reign of Louis XVIII until 1871. It was presented to St Francis’s in 1909. It bore the arms of France. Its authenticity was vouched for by the former chaplain at the Palace. It was sold in 1981. The church also possessed a chalice said to have belonged to Cardinal Wolsey.

**Sources**

Winefride de l’Hôpital, *Westminster Cathedral and its Architect* (1919); *Survey of London, Vol. 37: North Kensington* (1973); Sarah Thomas, *St Francis Pottery Lane* (1984). The drawings for the church are at the Royal Institute of British Architects Drawings Collection.

A lavishly illustrated Guide to the church by Peter Howell and Fr Gerard Skinner was published in 2020.

**ST MARY OF THE ANGELS, MOORHOUSE ROAD, BAYSWATER**

<https://www.humilitas.org/>

In 1849 the only Catholic church between Marble Arch and Harrow was a small school-chapel in Westmorland Road (now Moorhouse Road.) In that year two ladies undertook to build a church on an adjoining site. An obscure architect called Thomas Meyer (of

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28 Bloomsbury St) produced designs in March 1849 for a large and elaborate Gothic church vaulted throughout, and with a tall pinnacled spire (see above). In April a scheme for a less lofty church followed, then in October the vaulting was omitted. Work began, and seems to have continued until about 1855. Then the good ladies’ money ran out, leaving a roofless shell and an incomplete tower. Meanwhile, in 1851 the new St Helen’s School-Chapel had been opened.

In 1856 Cardinal Wiseman, the Archbishop of Westminster, asked Dr Henry Edward Manning to found the order of Oblates of St Charles, for missionary and educational work in N W London, giving him the unfinished church as a base. (It had been considered as a possible site for an Oratory by J. H. Newman.) Manning had the church completed at great speed, by Henry Clutton. Opened in 1857, it was much simpler than Meyer had intended. Manning, with his dislike of Gothic, ‘did his best. . . to transform the interior into the semblance of an Italian church by hanging curtains and pictures over the traceried windows.’ There was no East window, in accordance with the precepts of St Charles Borromeo.

Clutton also built a large Community House, on the site of the School-Chapel, in (perhaps surprisingly) a very severe and tough early French Gothic style. The details (especially inside) are quite bloody-minded. (In 1868–9 Bentley added an oratory at the back at first-floor level. It is now used as a dining-room, and the altar of painted wood (designed 1870), tabernacle, and ‘a little stencilled decoration for the roof’ have gone.)

Bentley was first called in in 1864 (the year before Manning left on becoming Archbishop). He added a timber belfry to the unfinished tower. He intended to add more to it – though not a spire – but the present top stage was added post-1920. Between 1868 and 1893 he did a great deal of work to the church. Structural additions included an outer N aisle, providing two chapels, in 1868–9 (still French Gothic in style); an outer S aisle, with built-in confessionals, in 1872–4 (now in English Gothic); a new timber roof (involving new stone gables) over the whole church (1872); the Chapel of the Relics at the E end of the inner S aisle (1875); and the vaulted Chapels of the Holy Ghost and St Charles at the E ends of the two S aisles (1887). Bentley ‘s work is richly and sensitively detailed, with much fine stone carving. Most of this was until recently spoilt by unbelievably garish painting, but this has been removed.

**The description of the fittings** is arranged topographically. All the communion rails (by Bentley, c.1876) were removed in the drastic 1970s reordering, but those in front of the sanctuary have been replaced. Unless stated otherwise, the stained glass is Bentley’s, the earlier glass made by Lavers, Barraud and Westlake; the later (after his breach with Westlake c.1885) with George Daniels as cartoonist and John Sears as glass-painter.

**W end: Baptistery**: Iron railings and gates 1868, in 12th-century style. Font long gone.

**Mortuary Chapel**: (under tower): iron railings 1872.

**S aisle**: windows: St Anthony 1875; St Thomas 1877; two others 1880.

**Lady Chapel**: Carved corbels representing the Annunciation. Tiled pavement and wrought iron grille 1876. Windows (O.T. types of BVM) 1874 – very light and bright compared with the N aisle windows. (Fr Rawes advised: ‘Whatever you do, put a sufficiency of clothing on Eve, or the people will always be scandalised when they look at the window’.) Altar not by Bentley.

**Chapel of the Relics**: E wall elaborately carved with crucifix and angels. Tiled pavement and stained glass 1876. The altar is presumably one of the eight designed for the church by Clutton. The wall recesses formerly contained relic cupboards (to house relics brought from Rome by Manning), the central one with richly painted doors (by Westlake). Grilles 1875.

**Sanctuary**: Suspended crucifix 1872 (formerly on a rood-beam). High altar, reredos and E window 1914, by Jones and Willis. Grilles to N chapel after 1875. New altar and font by Ormsby of Scarisbrick.

**Chapel of the Holy Ghost**: Stained glass (Pentecost) 1888. Altar, reredos, iron screen between this and St Charles’s Chapel (1912), iron and marble pavement all by George Power.

**Chapel of St Charles Borromeo**: Stained glass 1888, compared by H. W. Brewer with the 15th-century glass at York. He especially praised the leading and the silvery hue of the white glass. ‘Subdued and quiet brilliancy’. Two side windows (English Martyrs) 1893. Oak aumbry cup board by Bentley (containing a chasuble of St Charles). Bentley’s electric light standards have gone. Altar by F. W. Tasker, 1903; reredos ‘a little later’, by Hardman and Powell.

**N aisle**: Window at E end in memory of John Hungerford Pollen (who lived at 11 Pembridge Crescent from 1858 until his death in 1902), the designs reused from his set of windows for the chapel of Studley Royal (now in St Wilfrid’s, Ripon). Four lancets with 13th­century type glass 1871–5. Altar of the Sacred Heart 1874, of alabaster marble, and vitreous mosaic. The three panels painted by Westlake have been replaced with crude mosaics. Altar of St Joseph also1874, with paintings by Westlake. Both altars have suffered the ‘concertina ‘treatment. Statue group of St John and the BVM by the Irish sculptor J. R. Kirk (brother of Fr F. J. Kirk, author of *Reminiscences of an Oblate of St Charles* (1905), and of *Some Notable Conversions in the County of Wexford*).