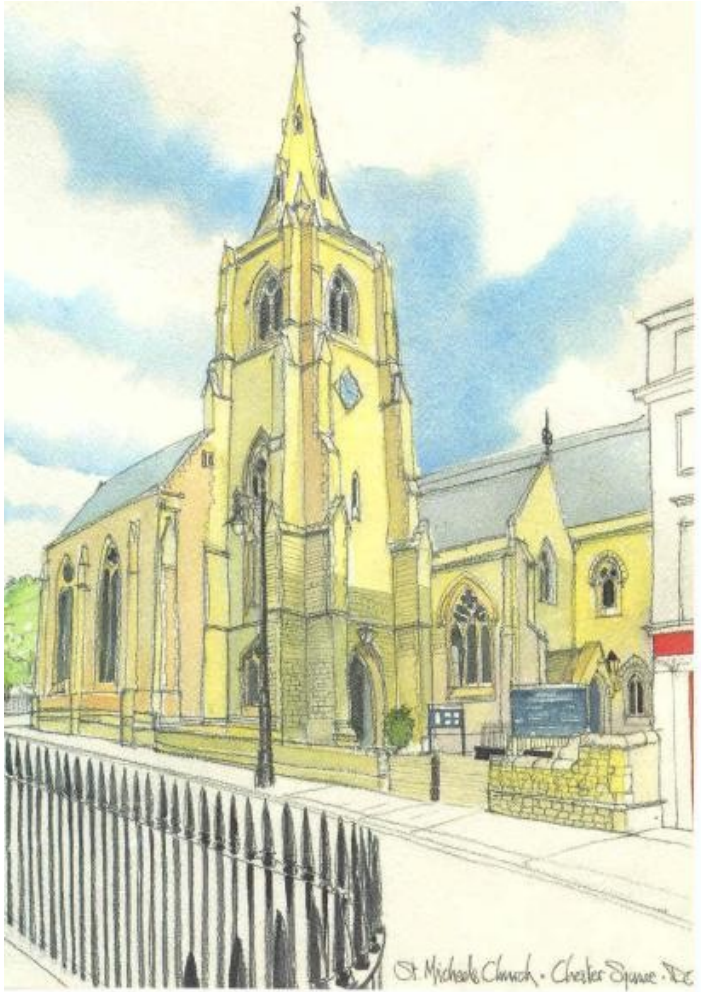


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# st michael's

## CHESTER SQUARE



# Church History & Guide

By Alyson Wilson

## Foreword

Since 1995 it has been my privilege to be Vicar of this very special church.

In this booklet, we celebrate much more than the history of a building. This impressive structure, and its beautiful interior, are made remarkable through the story of the church family, the family of believers, who have worshipped here, proclaiming Christ's Lordship, for over 150 years.

Here I pay tribute to my distinguished predecessors, men like Canon James Fleming, Canon W.H. Elliot, the famous 'Radio Chaplain', Charles Roderick and those I have had the pleasure to get to know personally, Teddy Saunders and David Prior.

I am most grateful to the historian Alyson Wilson, who has written this very informative guide. As you read, I hope you will be interested and intrigued to discover more about St Michael's. I am also delighted that the cost of the publication has been covered by a generous donation.

St Michael's today plays a vital role at the heart of this thriving parish. As we minister to the many needs of our capital city, the St Michael's church family continues to grow. We thank God that he has given us this magnificent church in which to worship him, as we live and work to his praise and glory - *changed lives, touching other lives, making an impact for Jesus.*

With warmest good wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Mambray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

June 2010

Cover illustration by Don Grant

Chester Square was planned in 1828 and built from about 1835 as part of the Grosvenor Estate development of Belgravia and Pimlico. The square is described by Nikolaus Pevsner as 'the most retired and therefore the most satisfying of the Belgravia squares.' The church was not part of the original scheme for the square and a plan of 1840 marks the area as 'intended mews' for the houses in Elizabeth Street. This is the reason for the unusual shape of the site and the fact that the West Door appears uncomfortably close to the back of these houses. The change of plan was probably due to the demolition of the Chapel of the Lock Hospital in Grosvenor Place in 1842, which would have left the residents of the newly developed area without a place of worship.



The Marquess of Westminster donated the freehold of the site to the parish together with a contribution of £5000 towards the estimated building costs of £8,900. His son laid the foundation stone on 20 May 1844. The architect was Thomas Cundy, Junior (1790-1867), who had succeeded his father as surveyor to the Grosvenor Estate in 1825 and

held the position for 41 years. He was also responsible for several other churches in the area, including St Paul's Wilton Place, St Barnabas' Pimlico and St Gabriel's Warwick Square.

The church is built of stock brick, faced with Kentish ragstone with Bath stone dressings in decorated Gothic style. Because of the constrictions of the site, the church is almost square, with a short nave of only three bays and a shallow chancel. This feature, as well as the Gothic internal decoration, the galleries on three sides (now largely removed) which blocked the windows, 'the dwarf overburdened octagonal spire' and various other design features were severely criticised at the time. In 1846, *The Ecclesiologist* concluded a fiercely critical article: 'We are greatly displeased with this church.' As it happens, more recently the shape has been an advantage since it has adapted more conveniently to the demands of contemporary worship.

The original church was intended to accommodate 1200 people. By 1874 the congregation had grown and the church was enlarged to accommodate 1500,

by the addition of transeptal spaces on either side of the chancel. This allowed extra pews to be installed at ground and gallery levels on the north side and on the south a larger vestry and upper choir vestry were formed as well as space in which a new large organ was installed in 1900. At the same time the pews were renewed, and higher quality finishes applied, particularly marble cladding in the chancel.

In 1921 a Memorial Chapel was added on the north side, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (1880-1960) the architect of Liverpool Cathedral and Battersea Power Station and designer of the iconic K2 red telephone box. St Michael's suffered some damage in the Second World War, as a result of which the spire had to be rebuilt and the west window replaced.

### Recent alterations

The demand for more flexible use of space led to the removal of some pews in the early 1960s and the formation of a church room and adjacent kitchen in 1969.

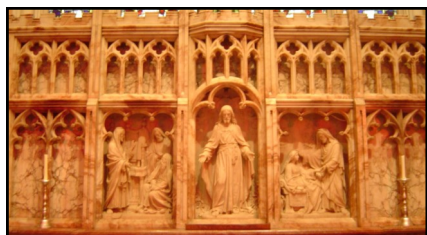
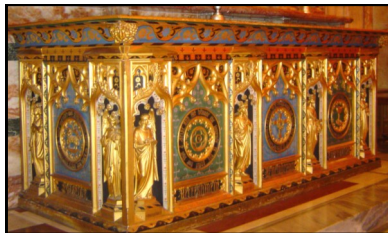
During the early 1990s a major restoration and refurbishment project was undertaken. The main side galleries and the north-west staircase were removed to allow for the creation of a new main entrance from a lobby at the base of the tower. Under the original arrangement there had been five doors which led directly into pews, so one had to enter by a different door according to where one wished to sit. The old pews were replaced with movable upholstered



chairs, a new floor was laid with under-floor heating, and a baptismal pool was built in front of the chancel. New heating, lighting and plumbing were installed throughout. Finally, the large old organ was replaced by a new smaller one in the north gallery. Since then, with the addition of extra floors in the transeptal spaces at the east end, additional rooms have been built on two levels suitable for offices and smaller meetings. These complement the beautiful Upper Room, a prayer room built during the early 1990s renovations. In the summer of 2009 a small room, now used as an office, was built next to the west gallery.

Notice especially:

The **Altar** of 1910 is a table with panels on the front and sides, which are decorated with symbols of the Eucharist and appropriate texts. It is elaborately coloured and gilded. An inscription round the base records that the altar was the gift of 1,007 members of the congregation who each gave one coin towards it - a fitting way of giving according to one's means.



The **Reredos** is one of the most remarkable features of the church. It is of Italian alabaster and was erected in 1910 in memory of Canon James Fleming, Vicar of St Michael's from 1874 to 1908. It is divided into five panels, each of two storeys. The upper storey comprises open arcading, while

in the centre of the lower storey is the figure of Christ, on the left Moses and Aaron and on the right a healing miracle (probably the Raising of Jairus' daughter). The Ten Commandments are incised on the panel on the far left and The Creed and The Lord's Prayer on the far right.

A tablet in the chancel records that Fleming was Chaplain in Ordinary to Queen Victoria and to Edward VII for 35 years and that 'the reredos was erected and the chancel beautified in his memory by his congregation and friends.' Canon James Fleming (1830-1908), who became chaplain to the Duke of Westminster in 1875, was a very popular vicar. He did much to develop the parochial schools and a parishioner gave him £23,500 to build a parish convalescent and holiday home in Kent. He was a friend of leading nonconformists, and a strong supporter of several charities to which he persuaded his congregation to give generously.

The **East Window**, 1892, by Clayton & Bell, shows Christ flanked by angels, the Virgin Mary and St John, with Naomi, Ruth, St Michael, Saul and Jonathan below. The choice of these figures is thought to be because the window commemorates two women of the parish who died of diphtheria, the one while nursing the other. The figure of Ruth is probably a portrait of one of them.





**The West Window**, 1952, by Hugh Easton in memory of Kathleen Lady Alexander, replaces the window lost in the Second World War. It shows Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, surrounded by a crown of thorns, on a background of clear glass. Easton also designed the Battle of Britain windows in Westminster Abbey.

**The Pulpit**, dating from 1878, has been moved from its original position several times. It is hexagonal in form, made of oak and was originally set on a tall stone drum surrounded by marble colonettes. A small plaque within the pulpit commemorates Canon W H Elliott, Vicar of St Michael's, who became well-known when his weekly sermons, preached from this pulpit between 1930 and 1941, were broadcast by the BBC. The plaque records that 'in his memory his friends set up a Trust Fund to help to train men for the ministry.'



**The Baptismal Font** is of unpolished Purbeck marble. In a twelve-sided dodecahedron format and decorated with lilies, it was designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott in 1934. It stands near the entrance to the Memorial Chapel and is still in regular use today for smaller christening services.

A **Framed Card from Queen Mary** to a member of the congregation is located in the church office. Queen Mary (1867-1953), the wife of King George V (1865-1936), regularly attended Morning Service at St Michael's and always sat in the front pew on the south side. She entered by the South Door, which became known as the Queen's Door. The card commemorates her long association with the church.

In the churchyard is the **Foundation Stone** of the church of St Philip's. This was built as a sister church to St. Michael's in 1886-88, in Buckingham Palace Road. It later became a Russian Orthodox Church and was demolished in 1956 to make way for an extension to Victoria Coach Station.

**The Memorial Chapel**, 1921, by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott commemorates parishioners who died in the First World War and their names are inscribed on the oak panelled walls. The inscriptions were regilded in 2000. Above the panelling is a dado of unpolished Purbeck marble, inscribed in Celtic lettering with the words of John Milton: "Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail or knock the breast; no weakness, dispraise or blame, no contempt, nothing but well and fair and what may quiet us in a death so noble."



The windows of the Chapel incorporate the arms of our allies during the First World War, including Japan (the imperial chrysanthemum), Russia (the Romanov crest), Italy, South Africa and the United States of America. The oil painting over the altar in the Chapel, in the style of Van Dyck, shows St. Martin of Tours dividing his Cloak with the Beggar. The subject marks the fact that Armistice Day, November 11<sup>th</sup>, is the feast day of St. Martin of Tours. At the other end of the Chapel is a painting of the Virgin and Child, after Murillo. Also in the Chapel are three crosses from war graves in the Low Countries.



**Memorials.** Among several memorials are a portrait roundel in low relief within an alabaster gothic frame to **Canon James Fleming** (d.1908) - see above; an elaborate green alabaster monument with two cherubs holding a laurel wreath and a gilded monogram on lapis lazuli to **Sophia Jane Ferguson** (d.1928); a red stone rectangle edged with polished black marble to **Joseph Harriman Hamilton** (d.1881) vicar of St Michael's from 1848 to 1871 and a large classical aedicule with fluted pilasters and the arms of **Arthur John Graham Cross** (d.1906) a major benefactor of the church.

A board beside the organ lists the church organists including, from 1861 to 1867, Arthur Sullivan (1840-1900). He was later to become renowned as a composer, particularly of the comic operas known as The Savoy Operas, with librettos by W S Gilbert. He also wrote the tune for one of the best known of all Victorian hymns, *Onward Christian Soldiers*.

**St. Michael's today** has an all-age international congregation. At the heart of its worship and Bible teaching is the desire to bring the light and life of Christ to a needy world. For information about our services, courses and events please see the church noticeboard or visit: [www.stmichaelschurch.org.uk](http://www.stmichaelschurch.org.uk)

Vicars

1846–1848	William Harrison	1847–1854
1848–1871	Joseph Harriman Hamilton	
1871–1873	Rowley Hill	1861–1867
1874–1908	James Fleming	1867–1870
1909–1920	Joseph Gough McCormick	1870–1871
1920–1930	Robert Andrew Mitchell	1871–1872
1930–1941	Wallace Harold Elliott	1872–1877
1941–1952	Frank Hay Gillingham	1877–1888
1953–1971	Charles E.M. Roderick	1888–1896
1971–1984	Edward G.H. Saunders	1897–1902
1985–1994	David Prior	1902–1922
1995	Charles Marnham	1922–1949
		1949–1953
		1953–1973
		1973–1975
		1975–1976
		1976–1977
		1977–1980
		1981–1983
		1983–1985
		1985–1986
		1986–1996
		1996–2009
		2009–

Organists

1847–1854	John Hopkins
	Walter Hay Sangster
1861–1867	Arthur Sullivan
1867–1870	Franklin Taylor
1870–1871	George Lissant
1871–1872	J.W.E Dinelli
1872–1877	G.R. Egerton
1877–1888	Charles Garland Verrinder
1888–1896	Edward Woodall Naylor
1897–1902	E.G. Mercer
1902–1922	Thomas James Crawford
1922–1949	Reginald Goss Custard
1949–1953	George Metzler
1953–1973	Guy Eldridge
1973–1975	Ian Hall
1975–1976	Keith John
1976–1977	Stephen Wellington
1977–1980	Robert Gower
1981–1983	Martin Hollingworth
1983–1985	Christopher Enston
1985–1986	Robin Sheldon
1986–1996	Noel Orchard
1996–2009	James Hearn
2009–	Mark Edwards

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