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## **W. E. Ellery Anderson and St Stephen's Church, Cheltenham**

William Elbert Ellery Anderson and the changes made to the Sanctuary of the Church of St Stephen, Tivoli, on the Eve of the Second World War

by Richard Barton (copyright)

On 8<sup>th</sup> October 1939 a newly-decorated altar and its ornaments were dedicated at St Stephen's Church. Isabel Kirby and Brian Torode, in their history, 'St Stephen's Cheltenham', provide us with the following details:

'The old altar had been lengthened, and the shelf behind it lowered to the level of the altar. A new dorsal and new side wing curtains, and a new frontal, were provided. "The new cross and candlesticks of copper heavily plated with silver stand out well against the background of the red and gold dorsal in the pine-wood frame (decorated with Jesso), delicately carved to stand out in shining burnished gold." Such was the style of the altar piece until 1963, when the present form was introduced. The wing curtains and their pelmets have been removed, but the dorsal has been kept to provide the present reredos.'

The Church was built to meet "the growing needs of the wide and populous district of Tivoli" and for nine years served as Chapel of Ease to Christ Church. The congregation of Christ Church subscribed to the building of St Stephen's in order to "provide a church for the ever growing population of working people in the outlying parts of their parish." The Foundation Stone of the new Church was laid on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1873, and the first service was held on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1874. The new Church consisted of the present Chancel and the intention was to complete this 'Chapel' should the accommodation prove inadequate. Subscriptions were invited for the addition of the nave and aisles in 1881 and these were completed in time for the Consecration of the Church on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1883.

The chancel of the Church was built as a memorial to the first wife of the Reverend Joseph Fenn, Vicar of Christ Church, who died in 1870 and the 'chancel carvings, the reredos and Communion Table, and the altar rails, bear the same memorial significance as the chancel to Mrs. Fenn, while the sanctuary furnishings were a gift from Mrs. Little...' (Kirby and Torode, 'St Stephen's Cheltenham')



St Stephen's Chancel in 1885

An engraving exists of the east end of the Church, dated 1886, which shows that the arcading, now on the west wall stands, formed a reredos and was situated behind the altar, between the sill of the window and the stone shelf which still runs right along the east wall of the sanctuary. According to records, this arcading was removed by December 1897 to its present position. Back in 1886 the Communion Table was small and uncovered, with only an alms dish placed upon it.

Isabel Kirby and Brian Torode trace the story of the sanctuary furnishings in their guide book to the church. They note that by 1897 a dorsal and wings were added to the altar which was decorated with two candlesticks and a cross in the centre, with flowers on either side.

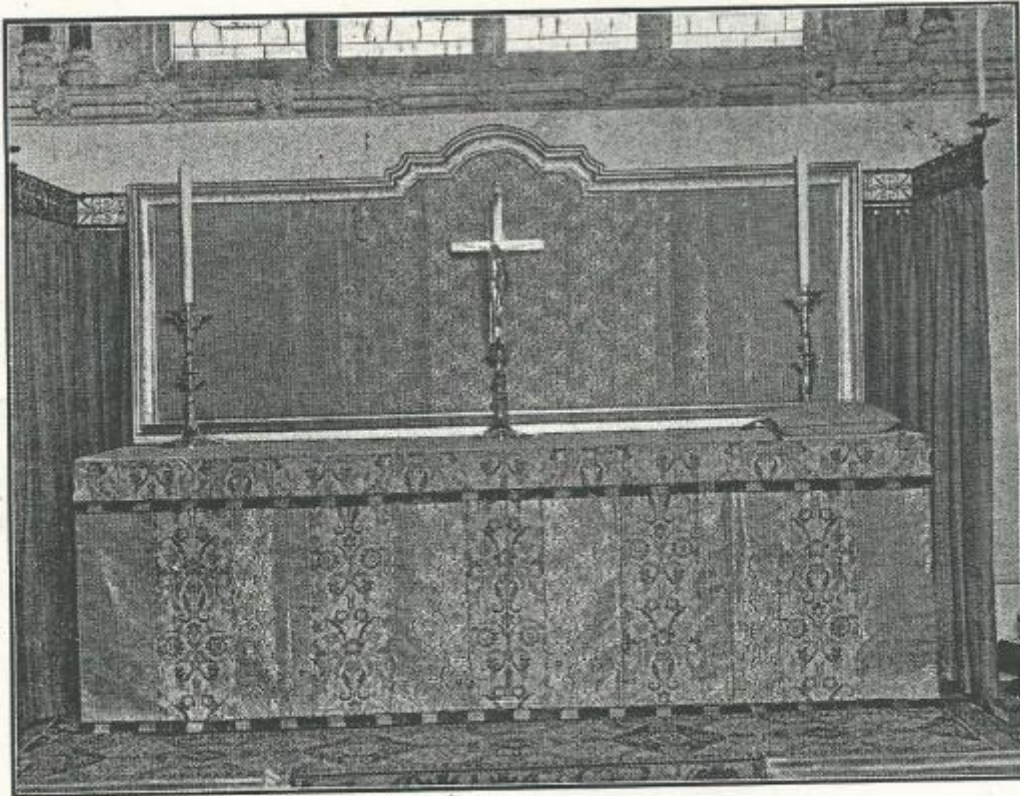


High Altar at St Stephen's 1922

So why were changes made during the 1930s? During 1936 St. Stephen's welcomed their new Vicar, the Rev. Ronald Huntley Sutch. In September of that year he wrote a critical article in the parish magazine indicating his concerns about the High Altar, the East Window, the Sanctuary and the Baptistry. He didn't think that the stoning of Stephen was an appropriate theme for such a focal stained glass window. He wanted to get rid of some ugly red curtains from around the Baptistry and to replace them with panelling as soon as possible. Concerning the Sanctuary there was a suggestion that a dorsal and riddle posts and hangings together with a carved reredos would be most appropriate.

By 1937 Mr. Sutch had contacted the local architect, William Elbert Ellery Anderson, to further his proposals. This architect had already designed the panelling for the Lady Chapel in 1929-30 (see <https://wp.me/p4BX9P-4E>). The design for the re-modelled Sanctuary included dorsal, riddles, angels on poles etc. and it was felt that the arrangement would draw one's eyes to the altar rather than to the murderous scene above. The scheme was delayed due to the Bishop's appeal to parishes for funds for building Church senior schools. A lesser scheme was suggested but this was put on hold. Interestingly only the red curtains were removed from the Baptistry and, although money was donated, no panelling appeared.

In 1938 Mr Sutch repeated his earlier criticism of the East Window saying that, "perhaps someone one day will replace it." At this time Anderson prepared new designs for St. Stephen's Sanctuary which were considered more suited to our needs rather than two years ago. A faculty was applied for in the May for a new dorsal hanging in a wooden frame, a lengthened altar, new riddles, now cross and candlesticks. The Faculty was granted in September 1939 and work commenced.



#### IMPROVEMENTS AT ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH

Alterations have just been completed at St. Stephen's Church, Cheltenham. The high altar has been lengthened, a new dorsal with riddel curtains and frontal has been provided—the dorsal frame being decorated with "Jesso" and burnished gold. A silver-plated cross, with the figure of Our Lord, and two silver-plated candlesticks are placed on the mensa. The work was designed by Mr. W. E. Ellery Anderson, L.R.I.B.A., and carried out by R. L. Boulton and Sons.

*"Cheltenham Chronicle" Photograph, Copies 1/- and 1/9.*

1939.

So what was going on at St Stephen's? Why were the Sanctuary constantly being changed?

The answer is probably two-fold but linked first with a change of churchmanship and secondly with what Peter Anson would trace in his book, 'Fashions in Church Furnishings', 'the adornment of churches from the rise of the Tractarian movement in Britain in the 1830s to the development of the Liturgical movement at home and abroad during the second world war.' Sutch and his architect, William Elbert Ellery Anderson, were both influenced by these changing fashions in ecclesiastical décor.

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## Log tracing the rise in churchmanship at St Stephen's, Cheltenham during the period between the First and Second World Wars

Compiled by Brian Torode

**1918:** Palm Sunday Blessing and distribution of palms and procession.

Good Friday street procession in the afternoon organised by Rev Clease at St Peter's and Rev Hodson of St Stephen's.

**1919:** By popular request a daily celebration of the EUCHARIST began in October. The word first used in Hodson's time. Also long letter of inappropriateness of inter communion and change of pulpits with dissenters.

**1920:** Ash Wednesday, Litany and Communion Service!!!! Sermon by Vicar on the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

**1921:** Ascension Day; Procession around outside of Church with the Gospel of the Ascension read on all four sides of the church.

**1922:** Midnight Mass of Christmas proposed for next year.

**1922: Weekly** Saturday Communion will always be Requiems.

**1923:** August: Vicar addresses criticism of St Stephen's as being too Catholic. Personally I can think of nothing more Catholic than for a family to be united in love for God and for one another. If people are afraid of St Stephen's because of its worship and teaching, why bother to go to church at all?

The Mirfield Fathers ran a Parish Mission in October 1923. Fr Horner and Fr Humphries were the Missioners.

A set of white silk vestments was given as a memorial of the Mission by some members of the congregation.

**1924:** January: the Bishop has been consulted and has told us that 'The Sacrament may be reserved at St Stephen' for the sick as may be required'.

CORPUS CHRISTI celebrated for the first time, with two services of HC.

**June 1924:** at the Diocesan Conference: The Bishop said that some wild things had been said about vestments and of the disloyalty of priests who wear them. He said there were more than 70 parishes in the Diocese where vestments are worn and he found among these priests were the most loyal and devoted and spiritual sons of the Church. Vestments do not give

meaning to the service, they take their meaning from the service. On the question of reservation of the Sacrament he declared publicly his own rule to the question: He allows it.

There are some who think we at St Stephen's are rebels and Romanizers. It is good to know that our Father in God, does not think so and has publicly said so.

**July 1924** The Anglo Catholic Pilgrimage to the Holy Land was attended by Mrs Hailstone. She brought back for St Stephen's a beautiful Crucifix for the Lady Chapel which she had laid on the Holy Sepulchre that it might be consecrated indeed by that hallowed place.

**1924:** Sale of work in aid of The SSJE, the Cowley Fathers.

Sept 23<sup>rd</sup>. Day of intercessions for the Conversion of England – part of Anglo Catholic Congress initiative.

December – a meeting of parishioners to explain the Retreat movement.

**1925**– Preacher at Harvest Festival evensong, The Prior of Pershore Abbey, Dom Bernard Clements, a monk of the Caldey Community which later became Prinknash. Dom Bernard remained in the C. of E. His visit to St Stephen's was to assure people that monastic life in the C. of E. was NOT a thing of the past. Set of Green Vestments given.

**1926:** Long list of wants – Black Vestments, Mortuary Candlesticks, Pall, red Cope, black Cope, Credence for Lady chapel, silver cruets, white vestments for everyday use, Leather Alms bags, Processional cross, Vestment chest. (A set of red Vestments was given in September.)

Two special collections for the SSM at Kelham and the Mirfield Fathers.

**1926**– All Souls' requiem- names to be given to Vicar prior to the service. Mirfield Ordination Candidates Fund, Society of the Sacred Mission, Kelham, Bussage House of Mercy, St Catherine's Home.

Rev R J Keble came as curate. Rev Robert Keble was the great grandson of the Rev Thomas Keble of Bisley and great nephew of Rev John Keble of Fairford and the Oxford Movement.

Rev Robert remained at St Stephen's until 1936 when he was forced to retire on health grounds.

Palm Sunday Procession given high profile.

Easter Confessions introduced.

**July 1927: March** English Hymnal first used, more Eucharistic.

Altar Servers Guild Service at St Stephen's- the Chapter of the Corpus Christi et Beata Virgo Maria.

Celebration of the Feast of the Falling Asleep of the BVM

Gift of Red cope ordered from Watts, London.

Needs: Processional cross, Vestment Chest, Sanctus bells or gong for sounding at consecration; silver censer-incense is to be used with our Bishop's permission; Mortuary candlesticks – all had been given by the October Dedication festival.

**1928:** Altar Servers' three day retreat in Gloucester

St Stephen's was encouraged to support the work and publications of the Anglo Catholic Church Literature Association.

June – special festival of Corpus Christi service with a Mirfield Father preaching. St Barnabas Day celebrated by a member of the Fiery Cross Association.

June 20<sup>th</sup> ECU Festival held at St Stephen's.

GSS Festival at St Stephen's. Later, GSS Servers from St Stephen's attended the Annual Festival at Holy Trinity, Knowle – a bastion for catholic worship. They were immensely delighted.

Fr Vernon of the Society of Divine Compassion preached on Sept 30<sup>th</sup> the Sunday before the ECU Annual Festival. The Primus of Scotland and the Abbot of Pershore were present at the Festival at Prestbury attended by St Stephen's.

A new silver chalice was given in which jewels from three rings were set.

The Church Congress was held in Cheltenham for the first time and was well attended by St Stephen's

Requiems for All Souls and Armistice were held.

Brother Herbert of the Cowley Fathers gave a talk on the South African Colour issue.

1929: February: A most beautiful design has been chosen for the processional cross, being given in memory of Rev C McArthur. In silver, showing Christ robed in glory, crowned, reigning from the Tree. A number of jewels given, eight opals in a circle around the figure, and eight more on the boss. The crown of the figure will be diamonds, and the bed of the cross set with fine crystal in centre set round with moonstones. Dedicated Ascension Eve. Jewels were gifts from ladies of congregation.

The Bishop of Ballarat, Australia, preached in October and also Fr Adams of the SSJE, Cowley Fathers.

Mr John Urwin has been accepted for Holy Orders – an altar server – at Lichfield Theological College. St Stephen's will support him and the Anglo Catholic Ordination Candidates Fund will provide his College Fees.

**1930** – June 23<sup>rd</sup> – panelling in Lady Chapel Sanctuary was dedicated, together with the carved doors for the aumbry and four statues under canopies. The inscriptions between the windows have been removed and carved on the panel west of the credence. Miss Bagnall Oakley paid

for these alterations and beautifying of the Chapel. Gifts made to the Church – Weekday Violet vestments; and tunicle for the Crucifer.

**1931**– Reservation is now in the Lady Chapel. During last year, 281 home communions have been taken to the housebound.

The Angelus is to be rung daily at noon and at 6 pm, by a rota of volunteers. Copy of Angelus in the Magazine, with explanation. Bell dedicated on Sunday 5th July. Frequent use of new 1928 BCP (not approved by Parliament as too catholic) but used by many churches of our tradition.

Gift of purple penitential cope.

August's visiting preacher was Vicar of All Saints Margaret Street, at that time the stronghold of Anglo Catholicism.

**1932**– Start of preparations for centenary of the Oxford Movement celebrations in 1933. Lots of publicity and encouragement to participate.

**1933**– Crowded audiences attended lectures at Ladies College on the history of the Oxford Movement. Bishop announced that principle Diocesan celebration will be at Fairford on July 11<sup>th</sup>. On 14<sup>th</sup> July at Cheltenham Town Hall, a public meeting will be held with Bishop in chair and Rev J. W. C. Wand, Dean of Oriel College Oxford, and W. I. Croome esq, of Bagendon House, will also be present. Special Communion at St Stephen's on July 14<sup>th</sup>.

Novena of prayer for reunion of Christians observed at St Stephen's.

St Stephen's celebrated 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Consecration and Principal celebrant at Eucharist was Fr Hart of Mirfield. The whole week of celebrations began with a Quiet Day conducted by Fr Hart and a Procession through the streets of Tivoli for all Church organisations. Parishioners and workers of St Stephen's took part. Rev R. J. Keble, Rev E. D'Alessio were robed in Copes and Birettas. Rev Addenbroke supported by cope bearers, acolytes, tunicled crucifer and banner bearers.

Thereafter, the pulpit was taken at least once a year by one or other of the overseas or local Bishops – Honduras, Australia, Africa and even our current twin Diocese of Dornakal in India.

**1934**– Advert to attend High Mass at Tewkesbury Abbey for CU Festival.

Station Day at St Stephen's for the Anglo Catholic Congress. Prayers offered for the Conversion of England to the True Faith.

Announcement of amalgamation of ECU and Anglo Catholic Congress under title of Church Union, in defence of the spread of the Catholic Faith and Revival in the C. of E. To be hoped St Stephen's will support and become members. Vicar of Tewkesbury to come and preach about new structure.



**1935**– Rev Robert Keble, curate, appointed Secretary of the C.U. Money donated to purchase four Requiem Candlesticks of wrought iron and copper.

June – the Choir of St Mary of the Angels came to St Stephen's. The boys were all from London slums. They were accompanied by Fr Desmond Morse Boycott, who had founded the school on Anglo Catholic principles.

Church Union pilgrimage to Tewkesbury Abbey led by Fr Robert Keble. 40 members from St Stephen's attended and our banner and censer, recently given, were much in evidence.

**1936**– Tewkesbury Pilgrimage for the Conversion of England- Graphic 12.9.1936

Rev Addenbrooke, though retired, will continue to hear Friday Confessions.

Chronicle – Induction photo of Canon Sutch 8.2.1936

Rev Sutch enthused about 1928 Prayer Book and recommended its purchase. Some alterations to services using the PB of 1928 two days per week. Palms on Palm Sunday to continue as well as confessions. Novenas of Prayer to be continued as well as links with Mirfield Fathers.

**1938** New setting of the **MASS** being learned – Martin Shaw.

For a fuller account see 'Oxford Movement in Gloucestershire': <https://wp.me/p4BX9P-2R>