History of St Mary Islington

by S. Allen Chambers, Jr.

ST MARY'S
the church at Islington's heart

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Introduction

> *It is probable that very few, compared with the many all over the world to whom Islington is a familiar name, realize the extent and importance of the ancient parish.*

The Rev. J. M. Willoughby expressed this sentiment in The Life of William Hagger Barlow, a 1910 biography of a former vicar of St Mary's. I read the sentence as I was completing my own research on this important and ancient parish, part of the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the church tower and crypt, and the upcoming 50th celebration (in 2006) of the main body of the church, rebuilt in 1956. I immediately bonded with Mr. Willoughby, and realized that what he wrote at the beginning of the 20th century is even more pertinent at the dawn of the 21st. More people than ever now know and enjoy Islington–witness Upper Street any Friday or Saturday night–but fewer than ever know the extent and importance, much less the history and legends, of its ancient parish. Nor do they know the scenes and stories the soaring spire and sturdy crypt of St Mary's have witnessed over the centuries. To help the stones speak, to help the spire and crypt inspire, is the purpose of this narrative. It's a story well worth telling, and–I hope– one worth reading. At the outset, I would like several individuals who have helped me in telling the story: Claire Frankland and Martin Banham at the Islington Local History Centre showed extraodrinary kindness and courtesy, not to mention expertise and efficiency, during my several research visits there. Dan Damon's expertise with the scanner will be obvious from the illustrations that accompany the text. Graham Kings, Vicar, St. Mary, Islington, suggested the project, and tenderly shepherded it throughout, from inception to reality.

S. Allen Chambers, Jr.

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Time out of mind

To put it bluntly, no one knows the origin of the name Islington, nor what it means. A variant spelling appears in some of the earliest records of London's St Paul's Cathedral, and–as with so many English place names–it (or at least a close approximation) also appears in the Domesday Book. The first question William the Conqueror's Domesday chroniclers asked his subjects as they tallied his 1086 land-tax role was "how many hides?" A hide was an Anglo-Saxon term for an indeterminate portion of land, usually from 60 to 100 acres, that could support a family. William's scribes duly recorded that the canons of St Paul's held four hides in the settlement just north of London, carefully noting that one of them "has been time out of mind parcel of the demesnes of the church." In addition to land, the chroniclers counted heads of households, along with their respective positions on the hierarchical social ladder. In the four hides belonging to St Paul's, there were, in order of rank, seven villans, four bordars, and thirteen cottagers. Two other property owners (each holding half a hide) were also recorded, along with two more villans and one more boarder. The recorders confused things from the start by spelling the settlement both as Iseldone and Isendone, but it is obvious that–with fewer than thirty households–it was a very small village. It is equally evident that Islington predated the Conquest.

A hundred years after Domesday, the name appears as Iseldon, and by 1220 as Ysendon. Writing in 1795, the Rev. Daniel Lysons stated categorically that the name Isendune (yet another variant) was a Saxon word signifying "hill of iron." In 1811, John Nelson stated that "few places have experienced more orthographical changes than this village," then proceeded to list two more spellings: Yseldon, and Eyseldon. As with other historians before and since, Nelson sought to determine what the name meant, and–like them–came up short. Citing Lysons's "hill of iron" as one possibility, he suggested "lower fort as" another. Taking up where Nelson left off, Samuel Lewis, Jr., writing in 1842, favored the latter, or lower, suggestion, arguing that the name derived from its relation to Tolentone, or "upper fort," a nearby settlement on elevated ground. Lewis also posited other meanings, among them springs impregnated with iron. Adding credence to this suggestion is the fact that the area abounded in mineral springs (Sadler's Wells, for example), which had been known and used for

ages, perhaps from "time out of mind." Although Charles Harris stated unequivocally in 1974 that "the one thing that seems certain, in the name Islington, is that it has something to do with water," others have postulated that the word Isle might be a dissimilation of the Anglo-Saxon Gisl, meaning hostage, or even a personal name, Gisla.

According to Thomas Tomlins's 1844 history of Yseldon: "towards the end of Henry VIII's reign Iseldon, alias Islington gradually obtained." From 1559 onward, in the Calendar of the Proceedings in Chancery in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, Islington (sans alias) became the preferred spelling. In 1575, a self-styled squire minstrel of Middlesex made a speech before Queen Elizabeth at Kenilworth. Among other things, he declared "the worshipful village of Islington [was] well knooen too bee one of the …best tounz in England, next to London…" Many would say it still is, no matter what it's called, how it's spelled, or what it means.

Without the walls, freedom, or liberty of London

At some point, likely before Domesday, a church was built to serve the thirty-odd households of Islington. Among the earliest references is an 1101 list of Prebendaries of St Paul's. Even though Islington lay about a mile north of the City, "without the walls, freedom, or liberty of London," the living, or right to appoint the vicar, was first held by St Paul's. Apparently William the Norman, Bishop of London from 1051 to 1075, appropriated the living to a Benedictine nunnery (St Leonard at Bromley). A controversy arose during Bishop Gilbert's term (1125-1141), when the nuns challenged the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's, who had reasserted their claim. In the event, the nuns agreed "to hold this church of Iseldon of the canons of St Paul's" and also agreed upon an annual payment of one mark, to be paid in two yearly installments. Apparently the sisters performed their obligation religiously until their convent was dissolved in 1541. Afterwards, private patrons held the living.

Church controversies aside, Islington at the time of the fracas between the nuns and the Dean and Chapter must have been a pleasant, idyllic, rural village. The monk Fitz Stephen, friend to Thomas à Becket, described

London's surroundings sometime between 1170 and 1182:

On the north are fields for pastures, and open meadows, very pleasant, into which the river waters do flow, and mills are turned about with a delightful noise....beyond them an immense forest extends itself, beautified with woods and groves, and full of the lairs and converts of beasts and game, stags, bucks, boars, and wild bulls.

Islington's pastures held herds of cattle, and at an early stage the settlement became known for the quality of its dairy products. Beyond the fields, beasts and game attracted hunters, and from an early time archers claimed Islington's fields and woods as appropriate places to practice their skills. As the village grew in population, another church was built sometime during the 12th century. Concrete (or stone) evidence of it would not surface until three-quarters of a millennium later.

You take the high road, and I'll take Essex Road

In the beginning, Islington, which straddled the Great North Road (or roads), was the first town north of London. Today its southern boundary is coterminous with the City's northern border. In olden times, Upper Street was called the High Street (a short portion of the old High Street remains, parallel to Upper Street north of the Angel Underground). Before there was a High Street, there was a High Road. At the acute angle of Islington Green, a statue of Sir Hugh Myddleton, who brought fresh water to the metropolis with his New River Canal in the early 17th century, presides over a bewildering intersection. At this point, if one faces Sir Hugh, Upper Street passes to the left, and the spire of St Mary's can be seen farther north, surveying the busy intersection from a relatively safe distance. To the right (to Sir Hugh's left), Essex Road veers northeastward. Before the name Essex was applied to the street, in an attempt to add a bit of cachet, Lower Street sufficed as a name. (Both Upper and Lower streets are shown and labeled in Illustration 4). Before Lower Street, it was called Lower Road, and before that, simply the Low Road. For readers still not quite sure where this discourse is leading, keep in mind the oldest-known names of the two highways: the High Road and the Low Road, and the fact that Islington lies

north of London. Beyond lies the greater part of England, and–beyond that–Scotland. It was at Islington, so it is said, where one had to make a decision, and where one could start singing: "Oh, you take the high road and I'll take the low road, and I'll be in Scotland a'fore you!"

A spacious but low structure

Fast forward to 1938, when St Mary's vicar, James Marshall Hewitt, noticed a small stone in the walls of the crypt, a stone which had somehow gone unnoticed over the centuries. It was part of the rubble foundation at the base of the brick walls of the 1750s church, where it had obviously been reused. Its surface measured only 13 x 5 inches, but carved on that surface were two rows of triangles, seven in a row. This familiar zig-zag, chevron, or saw-tooth patterning is characteristic of Norman churches, in fact it virtually identifies the 12th-century Norman, or Romanesque, style. Dr. F. C. Eeles, Secretary of the Central Council for the Care of Churches and a recognized expert in antiquities, was called in to take a look. He declared that the carving was, indeed, Norman, and that it likely dated from 1100 to 1150. This small still voice of history alone, even now visible in the crypt, attests to the existence of a building prior to the church that replaced it.

If little is known about Islington's Romanesque Norman church, a great deal is known about its Gothic successor. When it was pulled down in 1751, a stone was found with the date 1483 carved on it, though a memorial stone bore an even earlier date, 1454. From such evidence, it seems safe to conclude that the church dated from about the middle of the 15th century. It stood for three centuries. Concomitant with its passing, a great deal of antiquarian interest was aroused, though no one argued seriously for its retention. By then it was considered too old fashioned and in too serious a state of decay to remain. The latter proved not altogether true, but by the time that was realized, the building's fate–long in jeopardy–had been sealed.

Descriptions of the medieval St Mary's call it "a spacious, but low structure, in the usual style of our old country churches, and chiefly composed of the rough kind of masonry called boulder, or a mixture of flints, pebbles, and

chalk, strongly cemented together." Measurements confirm that the church was indeed spacious (overall dimensions were 92 x 54 ft.) and low (its height was only 28 ft.). A tower attached to the northwest corner, where it fronted the north aisle, rose 74 ft. As shown in engravings (illustrations 6 and 7), the tower was crenellated and capped at its northwest corner by a small turret. St Mary's tower was similar to many pre-fire church towers in and around London, which, according to Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, the recognized authority in such matters, was the commonest form throughout the Thames valley. A nearby example of the type–a square top with a corner turret dating from the 15th century–remains at St Bartholomew-the-Less in Smithfield, though its crenellations have disappeared. St Mary's tower housed a peal of six bells, which were repaired in 1663, while a clock face set within a diamond-shaped frame embellished its west front. A sun-dial, dated 1708, affixed near the top of the tower on its southern side, bore the motto: "Dum spectas, fugit hora," Latin for "while you watch me, time marches on."

Overall, the medieval St Mary's was Gothic in style, and like most of its ilk, had grown over the years through accretions, additions, and remodelings. Edward Hatton, in A New View of London, (1708) noted that the "arches are Gothical; the windows of the Modern Gothick Order," obviously making a stylistic distinction between the two. In all likelihood, the north and south aisles, which differed in height, had been added to the original nave, but who knows when. A double-gabled extension, masonry on the ground floor and framed above, obscured the original west facade. By 1710 this informal addition housed the parish schoolhouse above the porch, while an adjoining room was used later for lumber storage. Two statues, one of a boy, one of a girl, occupied niches on either side of the first story. At some point, relatively late in the building's three-hundred year history, a small wing was added to the northeast corner. It jutted eastward from the north aisle near the chancel, its brick masonry crudely joined to the earlier boulder walls. Both its roof, and that of the body of the church, were tiled.

So old and decaying a structure

Edward Hatton, in his 1708 volume, A New View of London, damned the

interior of the old church with faint praise, declaring "it cannot be expected any[thing] considerable should be in so old and decaying a structure." Then, somewhat modifying his stance, he admitted: "what I find, is agreeable enough," and proceeded, rather staccato-like, to describe some of its agreeable features:

> *The floor [is] paved with stone and tile, which is higher by 2 steps at the Altar, than in the Body of the Church, which has 3 Iles [aisles]…The roof is divided in Pannels, and (over the chancel) painted; here are good pews of oak, and the church is wainscotted in many places about 7 foot high; but higher round the Communion-Table, painted Olive-colour, and the mouldins gilt with Gold, adorned also with a cornish at the E. end, in the middle whereof is a Glory; over which is a spacious window (wherein appears the ruins of fine glass painting) betn the 2 tables of the Decalogue, depencill'd in black letters on the white wall.*

It is known that a new altarpiece, of which the Glory was presumably a part, had been erected in 1671. The Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, likely postdated 1604, the date of the famous ecclesiastical Canon which decreed for them to be "set upon the east end of every church and chapel where the people may best see and read the same."

Practically all histories of the medieval St Mary's mention monumental brasses depicting former parishioners. Among the most notable were those of Henry and Margaret Saville, she the daughter of Thomas Fowler, Esq., member of one of early Islington's most prominent families, who owned the Manor of Barnsbury. Margaret died in childbirth in 1546, in her 19th year. When the church was taken down in 1751, these brasses were removed and placed in the new building. Remarkably, they remain today as some of the oldest, and most agreeable, tangible witnesses to St Mary's long history

The stones begin to speak

Obviously, a church that stood at least three hundred years witnessed a

great deal of comings and goings. During its lifetime, the village it served changed–gradually at first, more rapidly later–from a rural community to a suburban one. As is always the case in such instances, Islington experienced many growing pains. In 1365, Edward III enjoined Londoners of robust strength to learn and practice archery, and in Richard II's reign, an act was passed commanding their servants to do the same. As has been mentioned, London's archers traditionally came to Islington's fields and forests to hone their skills. With so many archers, things were beginning to get crowded, at least if an imperious decree issued by Henry VIII can be taken as evidence. In 1546, a year before his death, the King decreed that he alone held a prerogative to hunt in and around Islington. Anyone else would risk "the ymprisonment of their bodies, and further punishment at his majesty's will and pleasure." Earlier in Henry's reign a group of Londoners, offended that many of the common fields had been enclosed with ditches and hedges as the settlement continued to grow and take shape, had taken matters–or rather shovels and spades–into their own hands. As a contemporary chronicler recorded: "within a short space all the hedges about the City were cast down and the ditches filled up." The chronicler lauded the Londoners, but theirs was only a temporary victory in the losing battle between old and new.

In her time, Queen Elizabeth I often rode to Islington to take the air, and, on occasion, to visit with Sir Thomas Fowler and other nobles. During her long reign, some of her wealthier subjects built "faire and comely buildinges" in and around Islington to escape the increasingly crowded, increasingly dirty, City. As other less fair and comely buildings began to dot the landscape, Elizabeth–like her father before her–attempted to maintain the status quo. In 1580 she commanded everyone "of what quality soever they be, to desist and forbear" from building any new houses and tenements within three miles from all of the city gates of London. Her proclamation had as much effect as her father's.

The history of Islington and St Mary's involves more than the occasional visit of royalty. For a fuller view, for the stones to speak more fully, the stories of some of the people who lived, worked, prayed, preached, played and fought in the community must be told. Of those associated with the

medieval St Mary's, pride of place belongs to Richard Cloudesley.

A thousand masses… for my soul: Richard Cloudesley

Richard Cloudesley, Islington's greatest benefactor, died in 1517, after devising a lengthy will in January of that year. As is customary, before willing his property and money to various recipients, he provided specific instructions for his burial:

> *My body, after I am past this present and transitory life, to be buried within the church-yard of the parish Church of Islington, near unto the grave of my father and moder, on whose souls Jesu have mercy.*

Presumably his father and moder had been buried near the southwestern corner of the church. Their son's tomb, a rectangular stone slab, unadorned except for a rather matter-of-fact inscription, still rests near the southwestern corner of the present church, close to the present entrance to the crypt. The monument, which the parish maintains, has been repaired and re-inscribed numerous times over the years, and even rebuilt on at least one occasion. In 1813, when Cloudesley's remains were placed in a lead coffin, the stone was repaired and enclosed within iron rails. At that time, the inscription was reworded; the vestry taking the occasion to note that it had erected the tomb "to perpetuate the memory of Richard Cloudesley a very considerable benefactor to this parish." The 1813 inscription was destroyed in 1940, and wording closer to the original now takes its place:

> *Here lyes the body of*
>
> *Richard Cloudesley*
>
> *A good benefactor to this parish*
>
> *who died 9 Henry VIII. anno Domino 1517*

In 2002, parishioners landscaped the area around Cloudesley's tomb and

planted flowers and shrubs with which Cloudesley would have been familiar.

A devout Christian and an honorable man, Richard Cloudesley was anxious almost to the point of obsession to save his soul. One of the items of his will provided 20 shillings “to the high altar” of the church of St Mary, Islington, “for tythes and oblations peradventure by me forgotten or withholden, in discharging of my conscience.” He also left money to the parish priests of Hornsey, Finchley, and Hampstead, as well as St James, Clerkenwell, and St Pancras, “to the intent that they shall pray for me by name openly in their churches every Sunday, and to pray their parishioners to pray for me and to forgive me, as I forgive them and all the world.” In another clause, he called for “a thousand masses [to be] sayd for my soul.” In addition to yet more requests for masses and dirges, he requested that a solemn obit be kept “yearly for ever” in the church at Islington, at which service money be “dealt to poor people of the said parish…to pray for my soul, my wife’s soul, and all Christen [sic] souls.” Perhaps to help parishioners on their way to church to pray for all these souls, he left forty shillings for “repayring and amending of the causeway” between his house and St Mary’s. Inasmuch as medieval roads were often virtually impassable for pedestrians, such elevated walkways, especially when paved, were welcome conveniences. Cloudesley’s causeway still exists as the broad, raised terrace, or sidewalk, on the west side of Upper Street between Liverpool Road and St Mary’s.

Then as now, the things that Cloudesley willed cost money. To pay for the “performance of my will,” he left “a parcel of ground called the Stoney-field, otherwise called the Fourteen Acres,” and directed that “six honest and discreet men of the said parish” be elected to collect the rents and distribute the profits accordingly. Finally, he set the rent of the Stoney-field at £4 per annum, to be collected biennially.

As the name Stoney Field indicates, Cloudesley’s land was not particularly appropriate for agricultural pursuits. In fact, it is often stated that rents realized from it were so small during Henry VIII’s reign (by then the sum had increased to 7£ per annum) that his henchmen ignored it when they wreaked havoc on other charitable endowments. It also survived the keen

scrutiny of the guardians of his young successor," when, in 1548, the first year of Edward VI's reign, commissioners for dissolving colleges and chantries decreed that, for the most part, the funds were being properly administered. Edward's commissioners did, however, redirect a small portion that Cloudesley had assigned to St Mary's Brotherhood of Jesu, which they considered as superstitious uses, to other recipients.

For several centuries, rents from the Stoney Field provided a comfortable, but hardly munificent, income to the parish. Before 1811, the land was let at a rate of only £84 per annum, but that would soon change. Not only did a ninety-nine year lease expire in 1811, the trustees had just become acutely aware of the property's enormous potential, as it had been valued at £22,893 when the Corporation of London attempted to purchase it as a new site for the Smithfield Market. Fortunately for Islington, successors of Cloudesley's six honest and discreet men thwarted that plan and determined on a different use for the property. By Act of Parliament, 26 June, 1811, they were empowered to grant building leases on the Stoney-field. Their timing was well-nigh perfect. Islington was experiencing a phenomenal increase in population, and new houses, as well as new churches, were desperately needed. To make things even better, a survey undertaken in 1769 and reconfirmed in 1811 had determined that the 14-acre tract actually contained over 16 acres. Streets and a square were platted and named appropriately, and stoney fields soon disappeared under terraced rows of solid brick houses. Located in Barnsbury, just west of Liverpool Road, Cloudesley Place, Cloudesley Road and Cloudesley Street commemorate the donor, while Stonefield Street, which leads into Cloudesley Square, commemorates his once hardscrabble property.

In his 1842 history of Islington, Samuel Lewis, Jr., noted that rents from the estate had realized £925 two years earlier, and commented that they provided a remarkable instance of the great increase in the value of land in the vicinity. He would be flabbergasted at today's figures. The Richard Cloudesley Trust, current administrators of the almost five-hundred year old bequest, have proven themselves worthy successors to the original trustees. Current distributions from the estate (some of the property has been sold and proceeds reinvested) average over £600,000. In 2002, grants to twenty-two churches within the ancient parish of Islington totaled

£332,000, while medical grants (authorized in fulfilment of Cloudesley's expressed desire to assist the "sick poor") totaled £412,000. No wonder the 1813 Churchwardens changed the wording on his tomb from a "good benefactor" to "a very considerable benefactor." Perhaps it's time for an even more enthusiastic rewording!

Norished wth her milk: Katherine Brook

While no members of royalty have been buried within or without St Mary's, several who were intimately related to them have. None more intimately associated than Katherine Brook, whose inscription in the medieval church told her story, or at least the part of which she was most proud:

> *Here lyeth dame KATHERINE BROOK, late wyff to Sr. Davey Brook, knoght, Cheiff Baron of ye Kings and Queens Exchequer: wch said Katherine was norish and norished wth her milk ye most excellent Princess Q. Mary, doughter of ye late famous Prince Kinge Henry ye Eight, and of Q. Katherine his lawfull wyffe; wch Kathn decessed at Canonbury, ye 26 of Julii, anno Domini mccccclvi. on whose soule Ihesu haue mercy.*

Duelists buried in one tomb: Wharton and Steward

Richard Cloudesley died at peace with his fellow men and with his maker. Such was definitely not the case with two younger men who also lie buried in St Mary's churchyard, even though they share the same grave. One was closely associated with Royalty, as he was a godson of the King. The parish Register laconically records the two burials, but gives no clue to what happened, or why:

> *Sr. George Wharton, sonne of Ld. Wharton, was buried the 10th of November 1609.*
>
> *James Steward, Esq., godsoone to King James, was buried the 10th*

of November 1609.

Frederick Bingham, in his 1919 Official Guide to the Metropolitan Borough of Islington, provided more information:

> *The churchyard is now a public garden, and in it is the tomb of George Wharton, son of Lord Wharton, and James Steward, a godson of James I, who, after a quarrel at the gaming table, fought a duel at Islington with sword and dagger, both being killed, and, by the King's desire, buried in one grave.*

Samuel Lewis, Jr. waxed poetic on the affair:

> *Some reproachful words having passed between them, being inflamed with a desire of revenge, and having first searched each other's breasts for secret armour, they fought a duel near Islington, wherein they killed each other.*

In addition to reproachful words, letters that passed between the duelists show that Wharton issued the challenge to Steward, whom he called "extreme vaineglorious." In his response, Steward, referring to the gaming table incident, recalled his opponent's "barbarous and uncivil insolency in such a place and before such a company." He then appointed the place and time for their fatal confrontation: "at ye farther end of Islington (as I understand nearer you than me) at three of the clock in ye afternoone." A long and painfully romantic ditty: A lamentable Ballad of a Combate lately fought near London between Sir. James Steward and Sr. George Wharton, Knights, who were both slaine at that time published after the duel provided further details. Stewart had struck Wharton in the face at the gaming table, and the weapons of choice were swords, or rapiers. The King's response, ordering them to be placed together in one grave, somehow seems a fitting resolution to their differences.

An arrow shot at random: Dame Alice Owen

On 26 November, 1613, not quite a century after Richard Cloudesley's death, and four years after the unfortunate duelists were laid to rest, a

wealthy widow of Islington died. She was subsequently memorialized at St Mary's by "a very spacious costly Marble Tomb and Monument of white and veined Marble, adorned with 2 Columns and their Entablament, of the Corinthian Order." The monument, likely the largest and most ornate ever erected in the medieval church, also contained the lady's effigy, a recumbent image surrounded by small kneeling figures of eleven of her twelve children, along with cherubim, fruit and leaves. After naming the lady, her three husbands, her children and their spouses, the lengthy inscription lauded her numerous charitable gifts, to which "the Cittie of London, both Universities, Oxford and Cambridge [and] especialie this towne of Islington can testifie." Regarding Islington, the inscription directed the reader to "a monument of her piety to future ages being extant in the S. end of this Towne, more worthie and largelie expressing her piety than these gowlden latters, as much as deedes are above wordes." The lady was Dame Alice Owen, and her gifts were inspired by a narrow escape that occurred on the outskirts of Islington.

According to the story, Alice Wilkes, a young gentlewoman, while on a stroll with her maidservant near Islington, happened to see a milkmaid at work. Wondering if she could milk a cow, she bent down to give it a try. Upon ascertaining that she could, Alice stood up, only to realize that an arrow had pierced her high-crowned hat. Had she been standing a moment earlier, the arrow would likely have pierced her heart. Convinced that providence had protected her, she vowed then and there that if she ever became a wealthy woman, she would erect something on the very site to commemorate her deliverance. Many decades and three husbands later, she had become a very wealthy woman, or widow. Her maidservant, still in her employ, reminded her of her teen-aged vow, and Dame Alice proved as good as her word.

Edward Hatton, among others, enumerated her many benefices to Islington, especially those near "the S. end of this Towne." One was the Islington Alms-Houses, established to take care of ten poor widows of the parish. To be admitted, widows had to be at least fifty years old and to have lived in the community for at least seven years. In addition to providing 19 shillings per quarter for each widow (with supplements on specified days), Dame Alice directed that each be given three yards of cloth for a gown

once in two years, and that £6 worth of coals be provided annually for the group. Next door to the almshouses stood another bequest: the Dame Alice Owen School. Of its 30 original allotments, 24 were for poor boys from Islington, the other 6 from Clerkenwell. As with all her charities, Dame Alice appointed the Worshipful Company of Brewers (her last husband had been a wealthy brewer) to administer the almshouses and school. A master, or mistress, of detail, she not only enjoined the master and wardens of the company to visit the charities and her tomb in St Mary's once a year, she devised 30 shillings so that they could enjoy a festive dinner on the occasion.

When the medieval St Mary's was demolished, the churchwardens intended to relocate Dame Alice's monument in the new church. Unfortunately, as a later inscription noted, the monument "by length of time and removing, was so much decayed and impaired as rendered it unfit to be replaced." Instead, the Worshipful Company of Brewers erected a new memorial tablet in the church. Its inscription did not record the fact that the surviving parts of the old monument were reassembled and placed over the entrance to the school-room.

The almshouses and school stood, as Dame Alice had vowed, on the site of her youthful escape, "in the S. end of this Towne." The tract extended southward from the Old Red Lion Pub and Theatre in St John Street Road, south of the Angel intersection, and south of the short street that bears her name: Owen Street. The property actually lies in Clerkenwell, just south of St Mary's parish bounds, which undoubtedly induced her to specify that students would be selected from each parish. When the original buildings were demolished in 1840-41, two arrows which Dame Alice had apparently placed were found within the walls, and given to the headmaster. Because the income from her estate had increased substantially by then, the new schoolhouse was designed to accommodate eighty-five boys. The statues from her tomb were moved to the new premises, along with a newly sculpted, somewhat romanticized statue. In 1957, the school generously donated a pew in the rebuilt St Mary's as a new memorial to honor Dame Alice and her Islington associations. Then, in 1976, after a great deal of acrimony, the school moved far to the north of its original location. It now operates in Potters Bar, north of the London Ring Road in Hertfordshire.

The statues, too, made the move, and now occupy places of honor in the new premises. The school paper serves equally to commemorate good Dame Alice and her many charitable works. Its name? The Arrow, of course.

Poor distressed citizens of London: Plague and fire

Islington was out of range of the 1666 fire of London, but fields and pastures between the two places served as temporary asylums for thousands of homeless Londoners. John Evelyn vividly captured the scene for posterity:

> *I then went towards Islington and Highgate, where one might have seen 200,000 people, of all ranks and degrees, dispersed and lying along by their heaps of what they could save from the fire, deploring their loss, and though ready to perish for hunger and destitution, yet not asking one penny for relief, which to me appeared a stranger sight than any I had yet beheld.*

Whether the multitudes asked for assistance or not, St Mary's Vestry minutes record that the church collected the sum of 17£. 19s. and 1d. on 10 October 1666 "for the relief of poore distressed citizens of London, whose poverty came by fire." The gift is made even more impressive when it is considered that many of Islington's citizens were themselves poor and distressed at the time. In 1665, only a year earlier, St Mary's Register listed 593 parishioners who had died of the plague, 94 in a single week.

Those gentlemen shall not officiate: The Wesleys and Whitefield

While John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of Methodism, did not exactly get his start in Islington, St Mary's played a prominent role in his early career, as it did with that of his brother Charles Wesley (1707-1788) and their associate George Whitefield (1714-1770). Their Islington connection was due in large part to the Rev. George Stonehouse, whose family then held the living, and who served as vicar from 1738 to 1740. This represents one of the shortest tenures in St Mary's history, and it was directly related

to the Wesleys and Whitefield.

John Wesley's conversion took place in Aldersgate on May 24, 1738. While attending a religious lecture there, he felt his heart "strangely warmed" by the Holy Spirit. Both before and after, he conferred with Stonehouse, who allowed him the use of St Mary's pulpit, where he preached ten times between the end of October 1738 and March 18, 1739. Stonehouse also permitted Wesley (who had been ordained at Oxford in 1728) to administer communion and baptism. During that time, George Whitefield made a circuit to Wales and the west country, preaching to huge crowds gathered in the fields. John Wesley joined him in Bristol, and–although initially opposed to preaching outside churches, or field preaching–came round when he saw the effect such services had on multitudes that the established church had not reached.

Meanwhile, on 15 April 1739, Charles Wesley, who had also conducted services at St Mary's, and who had, like his brother John, officiated at an adult re-baptism in the church, was confronted by the churchwardens. Acting under the auspices of a somewhat obscure church canon, the wardens asked him to show his license from the Bishop of London, which would have permitted him to preach within the diocese. He was, of course, unable to meet the requirement. When Whitefield returned to London towards the end of April, 1739, only one church, St Mary, Islington, was available to him, or so he thought. At Vicar Stonehouse's invitation, he prepared to preach on Friday, April 27. Forewarned, and again acting under the auspices of the church canon they had used to deal with Charles Wesley, the wardens asked Whitefield to show his license from the Bishop of London. When he was unable to meet their requirement, they physically denied him the right to enter the pulpit. Whitefield held his peace until the service was over, then, outside in the churchyard, climbed onto a tombstone and delivered a sermon "to a prodigious concourse of people." He repeated the performance the following day, apparently to an even more prodigious concourse, then decided to return to the fields. Early on Sunday, April 29, he preached at Moorefields, then–in the afternoon–at Kennington Common, south of the Thames.

For their part, St Mary's churchwardens convened an emergency vestry

meeting that same Sunday to end what they regarded as a potentially disastrous ruckus. Not mincing matters, they chastised Stonehouse as "the real occasion of the frequent disturbances in this church and churchyard, by his introducing strangers to preach in this church." They then appointed a committee of ten (five selected by Stonehouse, five by the churchwarden) to determine a future course of action. On May 6, after approving the committtee's report, the Vestry made its resolution:

> *the Rev. Mr. Stonehouse shall absolutely refuse the granting his pulpit to Mr. John Wesley, Mr. Chas. Wesley, and Mr. George Whitefield, and that those gentlemen shall not officiate any more for him in the parish church or churchyard in any part of the duty whatsoever.*

Denying the gentlemen not only the church but also the churchyard effectively put a halt on Methodist preaching in Islington. Wesley, apparently not one to hold grudges, recorded in his journal on 13 June, 1739, only a month and a week after the decree: "in the morning I came to London; and after receiving the holy communion at Islington, I had once more an opportunity of seeing my mother." His mother was then living in Islington at the home of her daughter Martha and son-in-law, John Westley Hall. In November of that year, perhaps as an attempted retaliation for his rebuke, Stonehouse attempted to have Hall licensed and appointed curate at St Mary's. Again he was thwarted, as the churchwardens implored the Bishop of London not to license Hall "or any other person that has rendered himself disagreeable by being such a common field preacher." Not surprisingly, Stonehouse resigned from his post in 1740. He ultimately settled near Bristol.

For their parts, the Wesleys and Whitefield went on to preach and codify their Methodist principles. In 1778 John Wesley opened his chapel on City Road, between London and Islington, and moved to an adjacent house the next year. In 1781, at the age of seventy-eight, Wesley, once again on the road, was near Bristol and, upon learning that he was within a mile of his old friend, decided to visit George Stonehouse. After spending an hour, he departed, and later recorded in his diary: "he is all-original still, like no man in the world, either in sentiments or anything about him. But perhaps if I

had his great fortune, I might be as great an oddity as he."

Fifty new city churches

Long before the Wesleys and George Whitefield preached within and without St Mary's, the medieval church was considered decayed and in dire need of replacement. Whether surveyor Edward Hatton inspected the church in 1708 with the thought that it should be replaced is not known, though his rather bald statement that it was "old and decaying," along with the timing of his report, suggest as much. Meeting on April 8, 1711, only three years after Hatton published his description, the Vestry ordered "that the parish church be surveyed by two able and skillful surveyors; and that a petition be presented to parliament for the pulling down and rebuilding it." Their timing was dictated by Parliament's Fifty New City Churches act, passed that same year, just as Sir Christopher Wren's new St Paul's Cathedral was being finished. The idea behind the Act was that funds remaining from the coal tax which had been applied to building the cathedral, and which was to end in May 1716, could instead be appropriated to build other churches. As the Act specified, funds were to be used for "fifty new churches of Stone and other proper materials, with Towers or Steeples to each of them, in the Cities of London and Westminster or the suburbs thereof." The Act failed miserably to meet its goal, but several of the twelve churches built under its auspices–notably the six designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor–were stunning architectural achievements. Sir Christopher Wren, a member of the commission established to implement the Act, made an equally important and long-lasting contribution by codifying his ideas for their siting, planning, and design. His ideas would have far-reaching consequences throughout England and beyond.

Very dangerous to the inhabitants: the old church in decline

Like most petitions seeking funds from the 1711 New Churches act, Islington's was denied. Nor did a second attempt fare any better. Inasmuch

as the commission met to consider requests for a number of years after 1711, St Mary's Vestry submitted another petition in December 1718. "Reasons Humbly Offer'd for a Bill to Rebuild the Parish-Church of St Mary Islington," as the petition was humbly titled, began with a not-so factual account of the existing structure:

The said parish-church of Islington, is a very ancient church, having been built above 400 years, is about 100 Foot in Length, and about 63 Foot in Width, and is situated within threescore Foot of one of the greatest Roads of England; the Pavement of the Body of the said Church now lying above Eight Foot below the Level of the said Road.

Above 400 years, in 1718, would have dated the building earlier than 1318. Hardly anyone has ever made that claim, but the Vestry, perhaps in desperation, hoped that "very ancient" would translate as "very needy." The vivid testimony that followed regarding the sorry state of the church certainly gave that impression:

> *The said church hath for many Years been very Ruinous, and in great Decay; so that of Late Years, to prevent the Roof from falling into the Body of the said Church, the same hath been shored up by several great Pieces of Timber, put up in the side-Isles of the said Church, to Support the Walls, which carry the said Roof; which Walls, by reason of the great Weight and Pressure of the said Roof; now over-hang thirteen Inches, from an upright in the Height of 15 Foot, and by the same Pressure, the out-side Walls of the said Church are very much split, and the whole become very Dangerous to the Inhabitants.*

The said Church having been viewed by Experienced Workmen, they find that the same is incapable of being Repaired, but must of necessity be rebuilt.

Keep in mind that this was twenty-one years before George Whitefield was refused permission to preach from the pulpit. Had the Churchwardens refused him on structural rather than doctrinal grounds, they might have

been on surer ground!

As if the many structural problems weren't sufficient to convince Parliament, the Vestry added to its litany of complaints the fact that the church had to support far more poor parishioners than heretofore. That, along with numerous and onerous rates and assessments, made it impossible for the parishioners "to rebuild the said church at their own charge." While the Vestry realized the bill called for 50 new churches, it humbly prayed Parliament to grant Islington leave to rebuild an existing church. It was a nice try, but it didn't work. Instead, after a storm wreaked further damage in November 1720, the old church was repaired yet again. Six years later, in 1726, the turret was also repaired instead of being replaced.

Even as late as 1748, the Vestry seem to have been resigned to maintaining the old fabric, no matter how dangerous it had become. On September 6, they ordered that tiles in the body and aisles of the church be repaired. The chancel, traditionally the responsibility of church vicars, who often augmented meager salaries with handsome fees for allowing interments in this favored location, also needed reworking. When Islington's vicar, Sir Gilbert Williams, refused to pay for the work, the Vestry ordered the churchwardens "with two or three other parishioners [to] take the first opportunity to wait on the Lord Bishop of London to desire his opinion by whom the chancel ought to be repaired and to make a report thereof." As no agreement had been reached by the following spring, the Vestry ordered the churchwardens to "prosecute the presentment in the Bishop's Court against the vicar for not repairing the Chancel." When the issue was finally resolved in February 1751, the decision went against the vicar. By then, however, the issue was essentially moot, as Islington had at last determined it simply had to have a new parish church.

Repairable or not

On 17 April, 1750, the Vestry decided to hold a meeting on the 15th of May to consider how to go about rebuilding the church. At the meeting, a committee was formed, its assigned duty being to wait upon the principal

land owners in the parish to ascertain their sentiments (and their potential contributions, though the minutes were not so blatant as to admit this) regarding the rebuilding. A list of the principal landowners was duly attached to the minutes. On May 30, another committee was appointed to seek estimates for rebuilding the church. In August, "the plan of a new church with the estimate from Mr. Samuel Steemson was laid before [the] Vestry," and the committee was enlarged considerably. Armed with more exact figures, the committee was again empowered to wait on parish landowners, this time to request their consent in applying to Parliament for an act to rebuild the church. In order to be absolutely sure that a new church was needed, and that such could be proven, the Vestry ordered three surveyors to examine the fabric and to determine for once and for all "whether it is repairable or not." On October 24, the three surveyors gave the desired answer, which, more than anything else, seems a reprise of the 1718 litany:

> *the walls in general are extremely out of an upright and are very ruinous, … the timbers to the roof are decayed and extremely bad, likewise the pewing, …the Pavement of the said church is very much under the surface of the road and churchyard. Therefore, we are of opinion, that the whole church is in so ruinous a condition as not to be repaired and must be rebuilt.*

The three surveyors, Benjamin Timbrell, James Steere, and George Ufford, signed their names as witness to their report. Following the expected news, the Vestry applied again to Parliament, and this time their wish was granted. In February 1751, Parliament passed "An Act to enable the Parishioners of the Parish of St Mary, Islington, in the County of Middlesex, to rebuild the Church of the said Parish." At its meeting that same month, the Vestry gave its approval to select a contractor to pull down the old church.

Out with the old, in with the new

On July 13, 1751, the Vestry contracted with Samuel Steemson "for taking down the old church upon his paying the sum of One hundred and ten

pounds for the old materials." As part of the contract, Steemson was also required to clear away the old materials within a month. He almost met that deadline. Although the three surveyors had decreed that it must go, and although during the course of demolition it was discovered that the foundation walls had been breached and dug under for burials in several places, and although the parishioners in their petition had solemnly declared the church to be "in a very ruinous condition," such was apparently not the case. The tower proved so solid that Steemson's workmen were at a loss to topple it. As reported in several accounts, after all normal demolition efforts failed, gunpowder was used in an attempt to dislodge the tower. When this, too, proved ineffectual,

> *the surveyor had recourse to undermining the foundations, first shoring up the superstructure with strong timbers; these being consumed by a large fire kindled beneath, caused the tower to fall to the ground with a tremendous crash.*

At least the old church went out with a bang, not with a whimper!

The trustees seem to have cared not a whit for the fabric of their ancient church, but they were scrupulous in attending to the monuments and graves that London's press saw fit to praise their efforts. Gentleman's Magazine took notice in its September 1751 issue:

> *The gentlemen trustees for rebuilding Islington church are mentioned with honour in the papers, for the care they have taken of the monuments and reliques of the dead, to the shame of some precedents on the like occasion, where the disregard or ill usage of the dust and bones of their fellow Christians have appear'd in a scandalous manner.*

Most of the monuments in the old church were transferred to the new, although at least one, that of Dame Alice Owen, was found to be "too decayed and impaired" to be moved. Ironically, as it turned out, parts of her monument remain while most of those transferred to the new building are now long gone.

Inasmuch as the new church was to be built on the site of the old, temporary facilities for services had to be arranged during construction. Consequently, a month prior to the demolition of the old church, trustees for the rebuilding resolved to “fit up a very large barn, which stands convenient in the town, for a place of divine worship while the church is rebuilding.” Located near the Fox Public House, the barn was rented from the owner and fitted up for its temporary purpose for £100.

The first stone thereof

At their July 13, 1751, meeting, the Vestry not only awarded Samuel Steemson the contract to demolish the old church, they gave him the job of building the new, clearly specifying the prices they were prepared to pay:

church & tower £5622

spire & vane £577

stone balustrade £23

portico in front £97

———

£6319

As is often the case, expenses mounted as construction progressed and as the Vestry approved additional embellishments and furnishings. Still, when the final figures were tallied, total expenditures were surprising close to initial estimates.

Six weeks after Steemson obtained the contract, he had apparently cleared away all the old materials. The first official step in building the new church was then undertaken. Following Biblical tradition, this was the laying of the cornerstone. James Colebrooke, Esqr., largest landed proprietor in the Parish, was given the honor of performing this symbolic duty, as a copper plate affixed to the stone duly attested:

This Church

was Built at the

Expence of the Parish

and

The first stone thereof,

was laid by

James Colebrooke, Esqr.

the 28th. day of August

in the Year of our Lord

1751.

"At the expence of the Parish" was a none-too-subtle reference to the fact that Islington paid for its own new church, with no outside help, certainly none from the 1711 Fifty New Churches Act. While the Act of Parliament for building the new church provided no funds, it did authorize the parish to borrow £7000 on life annuities for the purpose. Annuities were paid by a rate on parish landlords and householders, with landlords paying two-thirds and tenants the remainder. By some stroke of fortune, this method proved highly successful; several annuitants died after receiving only a year's interest, and the last surviving annuitant died in 1785.

Work went swiftly and smoothly. As John Biggerstaff, Vestry Clerk, later recalled: "the building commenced immediately & was completely finished fitt for Divine Service to be preformed therein – and was opened on Sunday the 26th day of May 1754." The work had taken only two years and nine months from the day Mr. Colebrooke laid the cornerstone.

In February 1754, several months before the new St Mary's was completed, Gentleman's Magazine published a drawing, showing the church from the northwest. The brief description accompanying it was not only

maddeningly vague and imprecise, it added insult to injury by misspelling the names of both architect and builder:

> *The exterior part of the edifice is now compleated, and is extreamly neat, and the steeple in particular has an air of elegance and novelty, which makes it universally admired. The inside is to be decorated in proportion to the beauty of the elevation, and it is not doubted but that it will give general satisfaction. The ingenious Mr. Doubikin is the surveyor and architect, and Mr. Stimpson the builder.*

The earliest known view of St Mary's, titled "A View of the New Church at Islington in Middlesex," appeared in the February 1754 issue of Gentleman's Magazine. The somewhat crude illustration, drawn before the church was opened for services, seems to exaggerate the height of the tower, and depicts the receding stages of the spire as a single shaft. The magazine noted that "the exterior part of the edifice is now completed," but the view shows the church without its original semi-circular front porch. Courtesy Islington Local History Centre.

Launcelot Dowbiggin: Citizen and joyner

Launcelot Dowbiggin, a name with a wallop! Perhaps Gentleman's Magazine can be forgiven for getting his name wrong. The architect of the new St Mary's was, according to his modestly worded tombstone in the churchyard, a "citizen and joyner of London." He was more than that, as the sufficiently long entry in Howard Colvin's A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects: 1600-1840 attests. The progenitor of three generations of joiners and surveyors, he was born c.1689, the son of Lawrence Dowbiggin of St Andrew's Holborn, gentleman. After serving an apprenticeship in the Joiners' Company, he was admitted in 1711, and became Master in 1756, two years after St Mary's was completed. Earlier in his career, Dowbiggin was involved in a scheme to have George Dance's design for the Mansion House, residence of the Lord Mayor of London, rejected. He lost, but apparently there were no hard feelings, as he was employed as a joiner during its construction. In 1747-8 Dowbiggin was

responsible for rebuilding, and presumably designing, the tower and steeple of St Mary, Rotherhithe, on the south side of the Thames, east of Southwark. Even though he later declared that he modeled his Islington steeple on three others (see “Spires that Inspire”), Rotherhithe’s church steeple is in many respects a simplified version of St Mary’s. Dowbiggin was also busy with another project about the time he had his Islington commission, having entered a competition to design a new Blackfriars Bridge. His design was rejected, but the April 1756 issue of London Magazine illustrated it.

Dowbiggin died July 24, 1759, and, according to contemporary accounts, was buried in the churchyard of St Mary’s, near the east wall of the church. As recorded by John Nichols, the tombstone inscription read:

In memory of

Mr. Launcelot Dowbiggin,

citizen and joyner of London,

who departed this life

July the 24th, 1759, aged 70 years.

Architect to this Church in the year 1754.

In addition to his tombstone, Dowbiggin was also commemorated by a marble plaque inside the church, at the east end of the south gallery. This plaque also noted the interments of his daughter-in-law, Rebecca Dowbiggin, who died March 9, 1798, age 72, and her husband, “Sam. Dowbiggin, son of the above-named Mr. Launcelot Dowbiggin,” who died Nov. 19, 1809, at the age of 85.

By great good fortune, the major portion of the marble plaque that once graced the interior survived the 1940 destruction of the church. With little or no fanfare, it was later remounted in the fourth bay of the crypt, where it remains. Standing in front of the battered plaque, surrounded by the crypt’s sturdy walls and vaults, one is reminded of another monument in

another crypt, not so far away. At St Paul's Cathedral, Sir Christopher Wren's memorial contains a simple Latin epitaph, which translates as "Reader, if his monument you seek, look around you."

Sufficient ornament to the town

Dowbiggin readily admitted to basing the design of his comely spire at St Mary's on spires of three other London churches, two by Sir Christopher Wren (See "Spires that Inspire"). Actually, he, along with most architects, builders, and joiners, owed far more to Sir Christopher than even they knew. Recognized primarily for his architectural practice, Wren also preached his craft, primarily in a long letter addressed to a friend and fellow member of the Commission for Building Fifty New City Churches. In it he basically codified English protestant church design, or, as one critic observed in a more erudite vein, translated the formal Palladian style into English vernacular. The ideas Wren formulated in 1711 took physical effect not only in Islington and throughout England, but also in New England, Canada, Australia, and wherever Anglicans settled. Only with the 19th-century Gothic Revival did his architectural ideas retreat, and then only temporarily.

Wren's architectural promulgations were not only stylistic, they were practical. Regarding the siting and overall design of churches, his generalities and St Mary's particulars are almost uncannily alike:

> *I should propose [churches] be brought as forward as possible into the larger and more open Streets, not in obscure Lanes, nor where Coaches will be much obstructed in the Passage. Nor are we, I think, too nicely to observe East or West in the Position, unless it falls out properly: Such Fronts as shall happen to lie most open in View should be adorned with Porticos, both for Beauty and Convenience; which, together with handsome Spires, or Lanterns, rising in good Proportion above the neighboring Houses, may be of sufficient ornament to the Town, without a great Expence for inriching the outward Walls of the Churches, in which Plainness*

and Duration ought principally, if not wholly, to be studied.

Wren was particularly concerned with the size and shape of churches, and considered it ill-advised "in our reformed religion [to build] a Parish-church larger than that all who are present can both hear and see." Roman Catholics, he contended, were satisfied if they could but "hear the Murmur of the Mass, and see the Elevation of the Host," but Anglicans went to church hear the words of the Sermon and see the preacher [emphasis added]. A church that could hold 2,000 people was, to him, as large as should be considered. St Mary's was well within that range. While the exact number of its original seatings seems never to have been counted, it is known that it and the Chapel of Ease (St Mary Magdalene), both later and larger, together contained 2,500 seatings.

Of course, the placement of the pulpit was paramount in assuring that everyone could hear and see the preacher. Here Wren calculated that "a moderate voice may be heard 50 Feet distant before the Preacher, 30 Feet on each Side, and 20 behind the Pulpit." Extrapolating these figures, he deduced that new churches should be at least 60 feet broad, and 90 feet long. The new St Mary's measured 60 x 108, but the length, ostensibly longer than Wren's recommendation, also included the spacious vestibule .

A light and handsome edifice

John Nelson, writing in 1811, provided a much better description of the new St Mary's than Gentleman's Magazine had. His description is among the earliest, and later writers have freely plagiarized it:

> *Though perhaps not formed according to strict architectural rule, it is nevertheless allowed to be a light and handsome edifice. It is built with brick, strengthened and adorned with stone groins [sic], cornices, & in plain Rustic. It …is adorned at the West end with an elegant spire of Portland stone. The floor is vaulted considerably above the level of the church-yard. The door in front is ornamented with a portico of a semicircular form, consisting of a dome supported by four columns of the Tuscan order, to which there is an*

ascent by a flight of five steps, arranged also semicircularly. The two side doors are from a Vitruvian model, and have a very neat appearance.

Nelson's "groins" were what most authorities call quoins. As with practically every other substantial Georgian-era church, salient corners of St Mary's brick walls were "strengthened and adorned" with stones, or, where cost considerations dictated a less expensive alternative, with bricks rendered, or stuccoed, to appear like stone. The quoins on the facade, typically arranged in alternating long and short blocks, show clearly in the view in Gentleman's Magazine, and still show prominently. "In plain Rustic" does not mean countrified; rather it, too, refers to the stone quoins. Most authorities would have stated that the quoins were rusticated, meaning that they were intentionally made to appear as strong and rugged as possible, their strength and solidity emphasized with chiseled, chamfered edges. Nelson left no doubt about the porch, and, unlike the drawing in Gentleman's Magazine, the engraving published alongside his verbal description shows it clearly. His reference to the side doors being "from a Vitruvian model" is to the Roman architect Vitruvius, whose work was often characterized by intricate scrollwork. Here the magazine drawing does a better job than Nelson's engraving in depicting the shallow projections supported on convoluted, reverse-curve Vitruvian scrolls that provided a modicum of shelter over the side entrances.

As with Gentleman's Magazine and all who have subsequently described St Mary's, Nelson focused on Dowbiggins's steeple:

The steeple consists of a tower, rising square to the height of 87 feet, terminated by a cornice supporting four vases at the corners. Upon this is placed an octagonal ballustrade, from within which rises the base of the dome in the same form, supporting eight Corinthian double columns, and with their shafts wrought with Rustic. Upon these the dome rests, and from its crown rises the spire, which is terminated by a ball and vane.

Dowbiggin admitted that the inspiration for his spire came from three other well-known London churches (see “Spires that Inspire”). Still, his combining and reworking of the motifs is inventive and ingenious, and remains the most admired part of the church.

In his exterior description, Nelson also considered the east end of the church, which few other writers bothered with, and which was seldom illustrated.

At the east end is a window after the Venetian taste, divided into three compartments by pillars of the Ionic order ; but the intercolumns are filled up with stone, and covered on the inside with the painted decorations of the altar.

A Venetian window is an 18th-century term for what is now more frequently termed a Palladian window, named for the famous 16th-century Italian architect Palladio, who popularized the motif. A three-part affair, it consists of an arched central section flanked by two square-headed rectangular sections. Its use as the principal adornment for the eastern end of Anglican churches was typical of the Georgian period.

In closing his exterior description, Nelson noted that “the roof is spanned the whole width of the church, without the support of pillars, and is covered with Westmoreland slates.” A coloured drawing and an engraving, one obviously based on the other, both now at the Islington Local History Centre, show the framing that allowed the roof to be spanned without the support of pillars. The drawing is labeled “Roof of Islington Church, Mr. Dowbiggin. Archt. 1752," while the engraving, which was used as an illustration in a builder’s handbook, is labeled “Carpentry for Roofs. Islington Church.” Each shows a different framing system, the larger of which (Dowbiggin’s) seems, if anything, overly structured. The smaller, lighter version in the coloured drawing is labeled “Roof proposed by Mr. P. Nicholson.” Which system was built is a question that can hardly be answered now, since a flaw in the roof necessitated its replacement early in the 19th century.

In 1787, John Biggerstaff, Vestry Clerk, presented a final tally to John

Jackson, Church warden, showing that final costs exceeded the figure the Vestry had agreed upon in its contract with Samuel Steemson:

The following is the total Expense of Rebuilding the church, & of all materials which are in the inside, vizt:

Contracts	*£6319*
Extra bill to ditto	*£39.10*
The font & communion table	*£35*
The branch or chandelier	*£50*
The clock	*£73*
The dials	*£13.14.11*
Launcelot Dowbiggin, Surveyor	*£105*
Ditto extra	*£18.18*
Churchyard walls, gates, etc.	*£93.10*
Sundry small extras, too numerous to mention.	*£56.17.4*
	_____
	£6804.10.3

Together with later expenses related to the organ and bells, which Biggerstaff did not enumerate in the above list, the grand total came to £7350. All things considered, it was a bargain.

Spires that inspire

In its February 1825 issue, Gentleman's Magazine sought to assist "those connected with the building of new churches" by providing information regarding "the neat spire of St Mary at Islington." The spire, it informed its readers and builders, was

> *a combination formed by the ingenious architect Mr. Launcelot Dowbiggin, from the various beauties of what he esteemed the three handsomest Churches in the Metropolis–St Bride's, Bow, and Shoreditch.*

Dowbiggin was not alone in his admiration of these three churches, and comparisons between them and St Mary's clearly show the ingenious architect's indebtedness to each. Two of the churches–St Mary-le-Bow (1671-80) and St Bride's, Fleet Street (1670-65, spire 1701-03)–were designed by Sir Christopher Wren, and are generally acknowledged to be among his most successful and skillful creations. They should be; they were the two most expensive of the 50-odd churches he designed to replace those lost in the Great Fire of London. Interestingly, Gentleman's Magazine described and illustrated these two Wren churches in 1751, the same year it announced the tower of the old St Mary's, Islington, had been taken down and construction on the new church had begun. Whether Dowbiggin used these particular illustrations (See #21 and 22) for his inspiration is, of course, unknown.

From Bow, Dowbiggin copied the first stage of his Islington steeple, the motif of a circular colonnade above a square tower base. While he reduced the number of columns from twelve to eight, he doubled them front-to-back and rusticated them, likely to give added strength.

Dowbiggin took the design of the top stages of his spire from St Bride's, but reduced the scale mightily. The most familiar elements of St Bride's famous steeple are the five octagonal stages that recede, both in width and in height, as they progress upward to support a relatively small obelisk spire. These ever lessening stages have been compared–generally favorably–to

wedding cakes or pagodas, and have been copied many times in England and abroad. Even so, not everyone has admired them. One critic claims that “one tires of the repetition of stage after stage, only carried by receding in width and height, and slightly in detail, suggesting… the prosaic lines of a drawn-out telescope, and the fear that it will suddenly collapse when least expected.”

Dowbiggin used the St Bride’s motif on an almost miniature scale for the top stages of his spire–in fact, rather ingenuously used the receding stages virtually as the spire–increasing their number from five to six. So far, neither his nor Wren’s work has collapsed.

The third church whose spire inspired Dowbiggin was St Leonard’s, Shoreditch (1736-1740). Designed by George Dance the Elder, it is both chronologically and physically the closest of the three to Islington. Its prodigious steeple has played to mixed reviews. Partisans and parishioners have claimed it to be “light, elegant and lofty, and is –we may proudly say–one of the best in London.” A more jaundiced observer, not a parishioner, regarded it as “a grandiose failure, neither substantial nor airy, neither original nor traditional and all perched anxiously on top of a portico.” From Shoreditch, which was itself modeled on Bow Church, Dowbiggin copied the prominent dome above the circular drum. In Shoreditch, the dome is solid, though with incised ribs; at Islington, it is punctuated by oval openings. The octagonal drum on which the Islington colonnade stands is also similar to Shoreditch.

The spires of the two Wren churches are considerably taller than Dowbiggin’s. St Mary-le-Bow rises to a height of 225', while St Bride’s, Fleet Street, rises to a height of 234'. Shoreditch rises 192' from the pavement of the portico, and Islington rises to a height of 164'.

Dowbiggin listed three well-known churches as having inspired him, but he must also have had a fourth spire, less famous, to be sure, in mind, when he worked at Islington. This would be his own spire at St Mary, Rotherhithe, erected in 1747-48, only a few years earlier, which was mentioned and illustrated in the discussion of the architect.

Several opinions–pro and con–of the spires that inspired Dowbiggin have been quoted. It seems only fair to acknowledge several opinions regarding his own work. As mentioned in the exterior description of the church, Gentleman's Magazine felt "the steeple in particular has an air of elegance and novelty, which makes it universally admired." In 1818, Augustus Pugin and Edward Brayley, after noting that the square tower was "surmounted by a high spire of a peculiar yet graceful form," digressed to discuss the spire's role in leading the mind "to that sublime elevation which the nature of Divine worship requires." They obviously approved. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, whose Buildings of England is generally regarded as the last word on such matters, liked some of it, but not all. Pevsner felt Dowbiggin had achieved "a steeple of characteristic outline and robust detail," but concluded by dismissing the spire above as "an obelisk of weird shape on a weird bulgy foot."

Take a careful look when you next stroll along Upper Street. What's your opinion?

Time marches on (or stands still): St Mary's clock

As construction progressed, the Vestry turned its attention to providing a new clock for the tower. Meeting on July 10, 1753, they directed Thomas Wilkins to form a committee to make arrangements to procure one, and to prepare estimates for its cost. On August 8, Wilkins presented several options: a 30-hour clock, housed in an iron frame, would cost £55. That figure would include three dials, one "minuted," the other two plain, with hours struck on a bell of eighteen hundred weight. The more elaborate dial, depicting minutes as well as hours, would face west to Upper Street, the other two would face north and south. The gabled roof of the church, hard against the east wall of the tower, precluded the possibility of a fourth dial facing the rising sun. For an additional £8, Wilkins advised, the church could procure a clock "to go 8 days," rather than just 30 hours. For additional sums, he offered other options, including the striking of quarter hours on four bells. In conclusion, Wilkins proposed to hire Mr. Ainstworth Thwaites of Boar's Head Court in Greek Street, London, to do the work. After discussion, the Vestry opted for a 30-hour clock, but to sound the

quarter hours on only two, rather than four, bells, for a cost of £73. John Biggerstaff's summary of costs for the new church showed that Thwaites performed his work for the sum agreed upon. Biggerstaff also noted the expenditure of £13 14s 11d for the clock dials. This was slightly more than the initial estimate that John Maxey, painter, had given at the August 8 meeting. He had suggested painting the three dial plates in black:

> *with the figures in proper lines for hours and minutes on the [front] plate and for hours only on the other two, to be gilded in a strong, proper, and exact workmanlike manner for the sum of 12 pounds and 12 shillings the gilding of the several hands included.*

The Vestry agreed to Mr. Maxey's proposal, and by April, 1754, work had progressed to the extent that they directed Steemson to "prepare the necessary scaffolding for painting the dial plates, and such other carpenter's work as is necessary." Presumably a bit of sculptural work was also done at the same time. Twin busts of an aged Father Time, complete with wings, support the consoles that, in turn, support a rounded pediment above the main clock face. On the lesser side faces, where subtle admonitions regarding the passage of time were perhaps deemed not so important, cherubs support the consoles.

In 1828, in order to provide nighttime visibility, the Vestry decided to illuminate the clock. Mr. J. P. Paine, a clock manufacturer of Bloombsury, was hired, and performed so well that the Society of Arts and Sciences awarded him a silver medal "for the simplicity of his invention." A surviving pledge card (with no amount pledged) shows that the main clock face, with its attendant twin busts of Father Time, has stood relatively still over the ensuing years. Unfortunately, the abbreviated summation on the pledge card fails to illuminate Mr. Paine's ingenuous solution, stating simply that it consisted "principally in the clock itself illuminating and extinguishing the light at any fixed hour."

In 1937, in connection with floodlighting the tower, which had recently been restored and strengthened, a metal plate, unseen for years, was found behind a notice board in the porch. It recorded the fact that in 1874 the Vestry resolved to provide a clock for the tower, at a cost not exceeding

£300, to be paid out of the General Rate. After listing members of the Vestry who carried out the resolution, the plate recorded that the clock had been "made by Messrs. Moore of Clerkenwell, and set going on Midsummer Day, 1875." Whether this work concerned the works alone, involved the dials, or referred to an entirely new clock is not known.

Messrs. Thwaites, Maxey, Paine, and the Moores all did their work well. With repairs (some minor, some major), and perhaps a replacement, St Mary's clock has counted the hours and minutes, more or less, ever since the church was built. It was electrified in 1971.

The bells of St Mary's

The several proposals that the Vestry considered in 1753 for a new clock mentioned various ways in which hours and quarter hours might be struck: by a single bell, by two, or by four. Each suggestion, of course, carried a different price tag, but no price tag had to be quoted for the bells, as they already existed and had been paid for long before. Along with the brasses, the bells of St Mary's are among the most venerable objects in the church. Six of the present peal of eight had hung in the tower of the medieval building. They were recast twenty years after the 1754 church was opened for services, when two additional bells were added. As usual, John Biggerstaff provided details:

> *October 15, 1774–The inhabitants in Vestry assembled ordered that the six bells that were hung in the Tower of the Old Church be recast, which was performed by Messrs. Pack & Chapman of White Chapel, at which time several of the Inhabitants being desirous to have two additional Bells to the six, they accordingly entered into subscription, and raised sufficient money to purchase the same which when hung made a set of eight bells, which tho small, yet [are] very harmonious.*

Each bell carries a brief inscription, cast into the metal. Most provide cheer, one admonishes, another addresses married couples, and yet another speaks to the bell ringers. Only the tenor bell, which weighs sixteen

hundredweight, fails to be poetic. Recast in 1808 in order to improve its tone, it prosaically records the date and names of the churchwardens and iron-founder:

> *1st bell: Although I am but light and small, I will be heard above you all.*
>
> *2nd: At proper times our voices we will raise, In sounding to our benefactors' praise.*
>
> *3rd: If you have a judicious ear, You'll own our voices sweet and clear.*
>
> *4th: To honour both our God and King, Our voices shall in concert ring.*
>
> *5th: Whilst thus we join in cheerful sound, May love and loyalty abound.*
>
> *6th: In wedlock's bands all ye who join, with hand your heart unite; So shall our tuneful tongues combine to laud the nuptial rite.*
>
> *7th: Ye ringers all, that prize your health and happiness, Be sober, merry, wise, and you'll the same possess.*
>
> *8th: Cast 1808. Present–Edw. Flower, Churchwarden.Thomas Whittomore, John Blount, Edward Manton. Thomas Meares and Son, of London, Fecit.*

In the late 19th century, during William Barlow's vicarate, a bell-ringers' guild was established. A fire in 1899 that damaged the organ and precipitated extensive renovations to the church also led to their rehanging. By great good fortune, the bells survived the 1940 catastrophe because the tower had been reinforced and strengthened several years earlier. However, for sixty years afterwards, they remained silent. In his Every Day Story of Islington Folk, Vicar Graham Claydon noted apologetically that "sadly the tower will not withstand their being rung–but they are regularly chimed." In more recent years, renewed interest in the

bells has sounded loud and clear. They were rung (as opposed to being chimed) in April 1997, the first time since before World War II. In 1999 the 7th bell was found to have a crack, leading to the repair of all the bells in 2002. Also in that year, the framework that houses them was refitted so they could be lowered, making them easier to ring and helping to reduce vibrations in the tower. In February 2003, a service was held to celebrate this latest renovation of the bells.

Now, every Sunday before services and on special occasions, the bells of St Mary's again ring out, calling parishioners and visitors to come and join in the celebrations they so joyously announce.

An elegant plainness: John Nelson's description

As with the exterior, John Nelson's 1811 description remains one of the earliest and best verbal accounts of the original interior. Surprisingly, he began with the ceiling, then worked from top to bottom, and from west to east:

> *The ceiling of the church is vaulted and disposed in a circular form in the centre, around which it is divided into compartments enriched with wreathed mouldings of flowers, &c. in stucco. The galleries are supported by Tuscan pillars, and are painted on the front in imitation of oak wainscoat. They contain 62 pews, framed of fir, and at the West end is a very handsome and good–toned organ in a mahogany case, placed here, by the direction of the trustees for the new church, at the request of the inhabitants, in 1772.*

After descending to the main floor, he continued:

> *The pews in the area of the building…are 91 in number…and in the christening-pew is a neat marble font. The pulpit, reading desk, &c. are of mahogany, and the sounding-board is supported by two Corinthian columns. The altar-piece is composed also of the same wood, divided into compartments by pillars and their entablature of the Doric order. The Decalogue, &c. is painted in golden letters on a black ground; and above the pediment, in the place of the windows,*

> *is a chaste and appropriate painting, representing the annunciation, having on each side emblems of the Law and the Gospel in chiaro-'scuro. These were painted by Mr. Nathaniel Clarkson, an inhabitant of Islington. The church throughout exhibits an elegant plainness.*

Nelson's verbal description can be augmented by several illustrations, all of which attest to the accuracy of his account. An undated watercolor, now at the Islington Local History Centre, provides an endearingly naive, detailed view of the chancel. As Nelson reported, pillars dividing the altarpiece, or reredos, into compartments supported a full Doric entablature. The view clearly shows "the Decalogue, &c.", or the Ten Commandments, in their broken-pediment frame above the communion table. By "&," Nelson was referring to the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed, which were contained in pedimented frames to either side of the Commandments. Canon 82 of 1604, which required that the Ten Commandments be displayed at the east end of every church and chapel, also directed that "other chosen sentences [be] written upon the walls… in places convenient." While no Canon specifically required the Lord's Prayer and the Creed to be the "other chosen sentences," they almost universally were in post-Reformation English churches. Together, the three texts contained the essentials of Christian morality, Christian prayer, and Christian belief.

Above the pediment, the east end of the church featured the Palladian, or Venetian, motif that Nelson had remarked upon in his exterior description. Here, as on the exterior, the order was Ionic, rising above the simpler Doric of the altarpiece in proper vertical architectural hierarchy. More often than not, such Palladian motifs framed windows, which Nelson was obviously aware of in noting that the painting at St Mary's was "in place of the windows." The painting of the Annunciation by Mr. Clarkson, whose "day job" was sign painting, was not an original feature. It and the emblems of the Law and the Gospel (apparently cherubs holding texts), which Clarkson also painted and which filled the rectangular side panels, were added towards the end of the 18th century. While the Annunciation was fully coloured, Clarkson painted the emblems in Chiaro-'scuro. More generally rendered as chiaroscuro, the Italian word translates literally as "bright dark." Paintings and/or textual passages executed in this manner were in

black and white, with occasional shading.

Somewhat surprisingly, neither Nelson nor other writers mentioned the handsome altar rail, which shows clearly in the watercolor. Supported by delicate wrought-iron balusters, with central gates defined in circular patterns, it closely resembles the still-extant altar rail in St James's, Clerkenwell, Islington's neighboring parish to the south. Dating from 1792, St James's may well have been modeled on St Mary's. In addition to the finely detailed wrought-iron rail, its east end also features a Doric reredos, complete with the tablets, surmounted by a Palladian window, filled, as Islington's later was, with stained glass.

Nelson's opinion that Clarkson's Annunciation was "chaste and appropriate" was not shared by everyone. Augustus Pugin's drawing, which he published in 1818, shows the interior of St Mary's crowded with parishioners. Edward Wedlake Brayley, who wrote the lengthy caption, depended greatly on Nelson's account, but differed markedly in his opinion of Clarkson's talent, or lack of same: "Over the altar-piece, in place of the east window, which was designed in the Venetian taste, but has been filled up with stone-work, is an indifferent painting of the Annunciation." Brayley also noted that the ceiling, "formerly carved and vaulted, [had] within these few months (since the annexed view was taken) …been altered and made flat, in consequence of some defect in the roof: the pews also have been enlarged, and the Church newly painted."

Thanks to Brayley's parenthetical note, and to a comparison with a floor plan drawn in 1787, we know that Pugin drew the interior as it was originally, or almost as it was then. His view, taken from the west from an imaginary vantage point mid-height between the main floor and the gallery, shows a handsome Georgian sanctuary with Tuscan columns marching down either side to the eastern wall. Diamond-shaped hatchments, likely transferred from the predecessor church, show prominently on the end walls above the galleries. A corruption of the word "achievement," a hatchment displayed the heraldry of a deceased person. Obviously, only prominent parishioners merited such memorials. In his 1811 History, John Nelson noted that the church contained funeral hatchments belonging to the families of Pullin, Wilson, Moorhouse,

Blackstone, and Burton.

Pugin's view also shows a virtual forest of memorials on the eastern walls flanking the chancel arch. Most of these had been taken from the old church, and provide visual evidence of the care the trustees had taken "of the monuments and reliques of the dead," which both the papers and Gentleman's Magazine had praised. Only the Saville and Fowler brasses seem to have been somewhat neglected in the move. Daniel Lysons reported in 1795: "at the east end of the north aisle are the figures in brass of Henry Saville and Margaret his wife, daughter of Thomas Fowler, Esq. The inscription and part of the figures are concealed by a pew." Fortunately, according to Samuel Lewis, Jr., they were later relocated to a safer and more prominent position:

> *The…brasses… were until recently on the floor of the chancel, half covered by pews, and in danger of becoming still more mutilated than they at present are; but in 1836 they were removed to their present positions, against the walls of the north and south aisles, under the direction of John Nicholl, esq., then warden.*

The 36-light brass chandelier, or branch, which Biggerstaff reported as having cost £50, figures prominently in Pugin's view, as does the elegantly ornamented ceiling, vaulted around the upper tier of windows. Perhaps the most unusual feature in the view is a long double-faced pew in the broad center aisle. Arranged on an east-west axis, this uncomfortable bench, or slip, pew, which was not an original feature, provided its occupants with good views of their brethren in the family boxes across the aisle on either side, but afforded no direct line of sight to the pulpit or communion table. At St Mary's, Islington, the long pew was added to accommodate the growing number of congregants. At St Mary, Rotherhithe, a similar arrangement had been made somewhat earlier, but for a different reason. According to a history of that parish, the church had "a row of benches for the poorer sort in the Middle Aisle." This would likely have satisfied Sir Christopher Wren, who wrote in his 1711 letter that "a church should not be so fill'd with Pews, but that the Poor may have room enough to stand and sit in the Alleys, for to them equally is the Gospel preach'd."

A very handsome and good toned organ

In his 1708 A New View of London, Edward Hatton described the medieval church, and curtly recorded “no organ.” Nor did the new church contain an organ when it was completed in 1754. In his 1787 account, John Biggerstaff noted that it was not until 1770 that “the inhabitants in Vestry proposed to the Trustees to have an organ erected in the church.” After receiving approval, a committee of five trustees contracted with Messrs. Byfield & Greene of Holborn to provide an organ. The contract price was £400 and the organ was delivered early in 1772. As was typical, it was located in the center of the west gallery, its position pinpointed in the gallery floor plan that William Wickings drew in August 1787. One of the clearest views of the instrument is shown in an early 20th-century postcard. Pipes were arranged in a handsome mahogany case, the central panel topped with a broken, swan’s-neck pediment, centered with a carved crown.

According to all accounts, the instrument was “a very handsome and good toned organ.” It should have been! John Byfield and Samuel Green were among London’s most prominent and skillful 18th-century organ builders, though, instead joining forces as they did at St Mary’s, more often worked separately. Three generations of Byfields, all named John, worked in the craft. A 1744 organ case by one of them survives in the church of St Botolph, Aldgate, while St Botolph, Bishopsgate, has a 1764 organ by Byfield, George Wilcox and Thomas Knight. That the latter organ and the one at St Mary’s may have been quite similar is indicated by their dates (only eight years apart), and by the fact that the organ at St Botolph cost only £16 more than the one at St Mary’s. In 1776, four years after his Islington work, Byfield was called to St Paul’s Cathedral to modify the organ there.

For his part, Samuel Green is known to have built church organs at St Mary-le-Bow, St Katherine-by-the-Tower, and St Mary-at-Hill, among many others. In addition to building new instruments, both men were frequently called upon to repair organs in churches in and around London. After Samuel Green’s death, his widow continued her husband’s work by keeping

the organ at St Michael, Cornhill, tuned and in repair.

One of the most familiar tunes in the Anglican Hymn Book is “Belmont,” which is generally played to accompany William Cowper’s words, “There is a Fountain Filled With Blood.” The tune was composed by St Mary’s organist on the original organ.

Byfield and Green’s console and pipes served St Mary’s for just over a century, until the organ was enlarged and rebuilt by George M. Holdich in 1873. Although Holdich undoubtedly built many new church organs, his forte seems to have been reworking earlier instruments. In addition to his work at Islington, he rebuilt organs at St Mary-le-Bow, St Mary Aldermary, and St Dunstan-in-the-West during the 1860s and ’70s. Unfortunately, his Islington organ lasted only a quarter-century. The 1899 fire, which wrought serious damage to the organ, necessitated its rebuilding.

Conforming to an act of parliament: the royal coat of arms

Inasmuch as Pugin’s 1818 view is towards the east, it does not show the organ, which centered the west gallery. To either side of the mahogany case holding the pipes, pews were reserved for the charity girls and boys. Had Pugin drawn this area, he would undoubtedly have depicted the pews filled with children. He would also have shown the Royal Coat of Arms of George II. Displaying the Arms of the reigning monarch at the time a church was built was a requirement following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. However, the requirement did not specify where they were to be displayed, nor of what material they were to be constructed. Painted on canvas, sculpted in stone, worked in plaster, or carved in wood, they were more often than not larger and far more prominently displayed than at St Mary’s, where they were attached to the balustrade of the west gallery, in front of the organ.

Something strange occurred with the Royal Arms in Islington, but it is unclear if the occurrence involved the Arms of George II or Arms from the old church, hence of an earlier monarch. On Easter Sunday, 1757, three

years after the first service was held in the new church, the Vestry was presented with a problem when they were informed that Mr. Steemson, the builder, "refuses to deliver up the King's Arms which he took down out of the old Church." Being of opinion "that the said King's Arms... properly cleaned and affixed against the tower at the West end of the Church will be an ornament thereto, and also conforming to an Act of Parliament made for that purpose," the Vestry ordered the clerk to deliver a copy of the report to the Trustees and requested them to take action. In the event, Mr. Steemson must have done the right thing, as no further mention is made of the issue. Still, one wonders if the original intent was to display two sets of Arms, one outside the church, one inside, one of one monarch, and one of another.

Two on the aisle

At the same April 1754 meeting in which the Vestry directed Mr. Steemson to prepare scaffolding for the clock, they deputized the churchwardens and nine trustees to form a committee to assign seats in the new church. A month later, on May 14, the committee reported back to the Vestry with two seating plans, one for the main floor, one for the gallery. Both were approved.

In time-honored Anglican tradition, pews at St Mary's were not free, but had to be purchased, and those who could afford the best pews got them. Generally, pews closest to the altar and pulpit, where their occupants could be see and be seen by other parishioners–or maybe even play a game of cards–were considered the most desirable, hence the most expensive. In the country, Lords of the Manor often built their own private pews in the parish church. On occasion they even constructed wings extending from the nave or chancel, which held their pew and seats for their retainers. To insure that the proper persons sat in their proper pews, pew openers (the 18th -century equivalent of ushers) were appointed. With the increased accommodation that their new sanctuary afforded, St Mary's Vestry decreed that three pew openers could take care of the main floor, while two could handle the galleries. For the time, the assignments seem remarkably egalitarian, or at least remarkably non-sexist. William Whiston,

church Sexton, was appointed to seat parishioners “for the middle isle [sic]),” while Hester, his wife, would attend those in the south aisle. Robert Brice was appointed to the north aisle, while two gentlewomen, Hester Misfield and Elizabeth Wilkins, took care of the galleries. Pew opening was not merely an honorary position. Vestry records show that pew openers were paid, though not particularly handsomely, for their services.

The appointment of the pew openers on May 14 was timely, in that the church was opened for worship two weeks later, on Sunday, the 26th of May. As far as is known, except for those who had to stand because of the crowd, everyone was properly seated. While the original seating plan has apparently not survived, two from the end of the 18th century, one showing the main floor and the other the gallery, are preserved in London’s Guildhall Library. A companion plan, not reproduced, gives the names of pew holders as of 1787.

The pulpit: front and centre

Pugin did not highlight the pulpit, but a circa 1850 lithograph by John Corbert Anderson depicts it prominently, as do early photographs. As was typical in 18th century Anglican churches, the clerk’s desk, reading desk, and preaching platform were combined into what is generally termed a “three-decker” pulpit. The origin of the form can be found in Canon 82 of 1604, which required parishes to provide not only a platform for preaching the sermon, but a seat from which the service might be read. The clerk’s desk, the lowest part of the triumvirate, was for the parish clerk, whose duties included leading the congregation in responses, and sometimes in singing as well. An authority on such matters has described, perhaps a bit dramatically, the way three-deckers were utilized:

> *At the lowest level the clerk would ‘line out’ the metrical psalms; on the intermediate level the parson would read the service; and like a miniature Moses, he would mount the Sinai of the canopied pulpit at the topmost level to thunder forth the will of God in a sermon.*

A canopied pulpit was one that had a sounding board. The board, generally wooden and part and parcel of the pulpit, helped amplify the sound by projecting it toward the listeners, keeping it from bouncing off the ceiling. As Nelson noted, St Mary's sounding board was originally supported by two Corinthian columns. At some time during the 19th century, it was taken down, but it was later replaced when the pulpit itself was moved.

As ponderous as it was prominent, St Mary's pulpit proclaimed through its scale and position as loudly and as clearly as any sermon preached from it that the spoken word was the most important part of the church service. Raised high above the floor, St Mary's pulpit enabled the vicar to address congregants in the galleries just as directly as those on the main floor. For a century and a half, from 1754 to 1904, St Mary's pulpit stood firm and tall in the center aisle, not to one side as was more often the case. That location, however, did not meet with universal approval. At its October 17, 1754, meeting, less than six months after the first service was held in the new church, the Vestry was called upon to settle an argument. Proponents of the "old way" argued that "the pulpit…is placed in the Middle Isle which is thought to be inconvenient as there is very little room left for the people to pass and the view of the Altar is greatly intercepted." Just so everyone would know where they were coming from, those in favor of the change reminded the Vestry that "the pulpit of the Old Church was placed on the North side of the chancel."

The question was then posed: "Can the pulpit by order of Vestry be removed to any other part of the Chancel that shall be thought convenient, without the consent of the vicar, or must the Churchwardens apply for a faculty," i.e. a decision from a higher authority? The answer, which the secretary duly recorded, was that the pulpit could not be summarily removed, that it indeed would be necessary to apply for a Faculty. If the higher authority (i.e. the bishop) thought it necessary, he could order the pulpit to be removed, even without the vicar's consent.

Good for the vicar! Reading between the lines, it seems obvious that he was not in favour of the proposed move. Reading even more finely, it seems obvious that there was far more to the proposal than merely a practical one. Parishioners could reach the altar on their way to

communion via the side aisles if the pulpit blocked the main aisle. And, as far as intercepting the view of the altar, that piece of furniture, as it was regarded at the time, was far less decorous than the pulpit. Obviously the vicar's views, along with (one trusts) the majority of the parishioners, prevailed. The pulpit would remain in the center aisle. This original relationship of pulpit to people, not to mention pulpit to altar, was an auspicious arrangement in a church that would become known as "the Cathedral of Evangelicalism."

Sermons not so great and noble

The Rev. Sir Gilbert Williams, Bart., was vicar when the 1750s church was built, and it was he who defended the location of the central pulpit. At least one hearer, who chose to remain anonymous, deemed the first sermon Williams preached from his lofty new perch worthy of commendation. Gentleman's Magazine published his letter in its June 1754 issue:

> *Your subject was truly great and noble, and every one who heard it, must confess with me, that it was treated with suitable dignity; for myself, I must acknowledge the great pleasure I receiv'd, in being confirm'd in the opinion I had form'd of the excellency of our establish'd church; and, of the importance to religion, of having stated times, and places set apart, for the celibration [sic] of public worship; and this pleasure was not a little encreased [sic], at seeing such a number of well-dispos'd people, solemnly joining in that act, which so gloriously distinguishes our nature from the other parts of the creation.*

One can hope that the sermon, which was apparently never printed, was less wordy and shorter-winded than the unnamed correspondent's letter! Unfortunately, the sermons preached by Williams's successor were even more long-winded.

George Strahan served as St Mary's vicar from 1772-1824, an extraordinarily long pastorate of fifty-two years. As Graham Claydon charitably noted in his Every Day Story, Strahan "was wise, learned and kind

but not famed for fervour." One of the most persistent tales in Islington lore is that parishioners often played cards during Strahan's sermons. That some of those sermons were said to have been written by his great friend, one of the most famous proponents of the English language, indicates that it was his delivery, not subject matter, that was the problem.

Dr Johnson's other Boswell: Dr George Strahan

Dr. Strahan's great friend was none other than Samuel Johnson (1709-84). James Boswell, Johnson's noted amanuensis, recalled that his patron often visited Islington for the benefit of the good air, and almost always included a visit to Strahan at the vicarage. Strahan attended Johnson on his deathbed, and after the great lexicographer's death, performed a last favor for his departed friend. Unbeknownst to most of his acquaintances, Johnson had long been in the habit of observing certain days (his birthday, New Year's, Easter, etc.) by composing and jotting down prayers and meditations for his own use. He had no thought of publishing them until a year before his death, when the Master of Pembroke College, his Oxford alma mater, persuaded him that he should. Realizing that he would not be able to undertake the task at that late date, he gave the accumulated verses to Strahan, along with instructions for committing them to a publisher. Strahan fulfilled his friend's wish in 1785 with Prayers and Meditations, composed by Samuel Johnson, LL. D., and Published from his Manuscripts. In closing his preface, the good prelate recorded: "I have now discharged the trust reposed in me by that Friend, whose labours entitle him to lasting gratitude and veneration from the Literary, and still more from the Christian world." He signed his preface: George Strahan, Islington, August 6, 1785. To insure that no one would question the authenticity of the work, he deposited the original manuscript in the Pembroke College library.

As might be expected, Johnson's thoughts are full of common-sense wisdom, tempered by healthy doses of irreverence and self-flagellation. On his 51st birthday (Sept. 18, 1760) he wrote:

RESOLVED, D[eo] j[uvante],

To reclaim imagination

To rise early

To study religion

To go to church

To drink less strong liquors

To keep a journal.

To oppose laziness, by doing what is to be done to-morrow

Rise as early as I can

Put books in order

Scheme life

That the Good Doctor's resolutions were not entirely successful is shown by confessions he wrote on Easter Eve the following year:

> *Since the communion of last Easter, I have led a life so dissipated and useless, and my terrours and perplexities have so much encreased, that I am under great depression and discouragement; yet I purpose to present myself before God to-morrow, with humble hope that he will not break the bruised reed.*

Certainly George Strahan should be remembered more for publishing Dr. Johnson's meditations and for many other services he rendered posterity than for his lackadaisical sermons.

Well done, thou good and faithful servant: The Revd Philip Quaque

Philip Quaque was born in West Africa sometime around 1740. As a boy he met–and obviously impressed–the Rev. Thomas Thompson, the first SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) missionary in Africa. Thompson, who labored in the field for five years before ill health forced him to resign, had concluded that Africans, rather than Englishmen, would be the most effective missionaries in their native land. Consequently, it was at his instigation that Quaque–then in his early teens–and two other young Africans came to England in 1754 to be educated and trained. Quaque's companions died in England, but he thrived. In 1760, he was baptized at St Mary's, Islington, and five years later, on 1 May, 1765, the Bishop of London ordained him a priest. He thus became the world's first black Anglican priest. In all likelihood, his ordination service was held at St Mary's. So, too, may have been his wedding, which took place the day after his ordination.

When, in the autumn of 1765, the SPG sponsored Quaque's return home, he became not only the world's first black Anglican priest, but the world's first black Anglican missionary. From then until his death in 1816 he spent half a century spreading the gospel in Africa, as well as acting as catechist and schoolmaster. It was tough going, to say the least, and he suffered both personally and professionally. His wife died during his first year in Africa, and his second wife also died within a year after their marriage. His third wife survived him.

Unfortunately, his years in England had altered him in unexpected ways. He felt estranged from his own culture, and was no longer able to converse in his native language. Not only did Quaque feel isolated from his own community, from which he had obviously grown apart, he was not accepted by white colonials, many of whom were engaged in the nefarious slave trade. Even though he was the sole Anglican clergyman in the Cape Coast area, his primary, if not sole, contact with white colonials was to officiate at their baptisms and burials. Still he labored on, as letters to his sponsors, the SPG, testify. His letters also testify to the lack of support the SPG provided. Still he persevered, and he is regarded as a pioneer of the church in western Africa, where it now flourishes. Truly, it may be said of Philip Quaque: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Mr Birch's wicker basket

In the spring and early summer of 1787, strollers along Upper Street who happened to look upwards saw a very strange sight. The spire of St Mary's, then only thirty-three years old, seemed to be bandaged with a wickerwork tourniquet. It was not applied to heal any existing wound, however, but was there more in the nature of preventive medicine. In the late 18th century, thanks in large part to Benjamin Franklin's seminal experiments with kites and keys, it became known that bolts of lightning, heretofore considered uncontrollable forces of nature that could cause a building to be destroyed by fire, could be rendered harmless if their electrical charges were safely grounded. Throughout America and England, iron lightning rods soon rose above chimneys, roofs, towers, and steeples, offering their protection.

St Mary's churchwardens decided their 164-foot spire–then, as now, the tallest object in the vicinity–needed such protection. Since the tower base, which had begun to show signs of settling, was being strengthened with three tiers of iron tie-rods, it seemed an opportune time to install a lightning rod. The work would involve removing a 42-foot flagstaff that had been attached to the southwest corner of the tower in 1776, then affixing a rod, or conductor, from the top of the spire to the ground. There, any electrical charge that might strike the spire would be dissipated. Thomas Birch, known to history as an "ingenious basketmaker," who had just completed a similar project at St Albans, was chosen to do the job. His price was certainly right; he proposed to charge St Mary's only £20. Basing his work on an earlier, similar effort by another contractor at St Bride's, Fleet Street, whose tall spire had been damaged by lightning in 1764, Birch encased St Mary's spire with a scaffold of wicker work, extending some 77 feet from the flat deck atop the square tower to the top of the spire. The wicker work, formed of willow, hazel, and other easily-bended sticks, contained a spiral flight of stairs around the spire. According to its creator, "the ascent was as easy and safe as the stairs of a dwelling-house."

There were several methods in Birch's seeming madness. His ingenious contrivance obviated the need for more expensive and more dangerous

scaffolding. And, inasmuch as the stair was easy and safe, spectators could be comfortably accommodated. In effect, they were almost blindfolded until they reached the top, so there was little apprehension of acrophobia as they mounted the enclosed spiral stairs. In fact, it was customers, rather than his bargain-basement fee of £20, that provided Birch his margin of profit. Advertisements, tantalizingly addressed "To the Curious," soon appeared in various London papers. A typical example appeared in the Morning Post on June 13, 1757:

> *Those ladies and Gentlemen who have not had an opportunity of viewing the ingenious basket-work constructed round the spire of Islington church, … are desired to take notice that this most ingenious yet simple and secure invention will be exhibited for the satisfaction of the curious, from ten to twelve in the morning, and from three to seven in the afternoon. And as it can only be shown within the before-mentioned hours, and the term of performing the contract with the parish expires in a few days, when the whole apparatus will be taken down, the proprietor, Thomas Birch, hopes the public in general will take an early opportunity of seeing this very uncommon performance. Admittance sixpence.*

Some 2,000 members of the public in general ascended the spire, and Birch is said to have received more than £50 in admission charges. One person known to have climbed to the top was the Rev. John Swertner, a Moravian minister, who soon published a panoramic view from the tower. Looking southward, it shows Sir Christopher Wren's spires of London, dominated then as now by the dome of his St Paul's Cathedral.

Presents from different gentlemen (and a lady)

While the 1787 repairs centered on strengthening the tower, interior changes taken then were sufficiently involved that the church had to be closed for five months. John Biggerstaff approved whatever changes were made, which cost a total of almost £800. After they were completed, he remarked on the "elegant & neat church, which neatness was much heightened by the several presents from different Gentlemen within these

three years." Matthew Clarkson's paintings, which have been discussed, were among those he enumerated:

> *1) A very elegant velvet pulpit cloth & cushion richly trimmed with gold lace & fringe, given by Samuel Pullin Esq.*
>
> *2) A very neat & elegant crimson velvet cloth & cushions all trimmed with gold for the communion table and a carpet to cover the Altar both which were presented to this parish by Jos. Manwaring, Jun. Esq.*
>
> *3) And at the east window is a very Capital painting representing in the Centre the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary and on each side emblems of the Law & the Gospels, presented by Math. Clarkson Esq. designed & executed by himself. The curtain over the same was given by Mrs. Eliz. Pickford, Cross Street.*

Given the various opinions of the Annunciation (Nelson liked it well enough; Brayley truly disliked it, while Biggerstaff thought it a "Capital" work), one wonders if Elizabeth Pickford's curtain was often drawn across it.

Some defect in the roof: 1818 repairs

Edward Brayley, who composed the caption for Pugin's 1818 view of the interior, was somewhat cryptic in noting "some defect in the roof," with no further explanation. Whatever the work involved, it was extensive enough for the vestry to solicit bids from several contractors to undertake the project. David Hale of Islington's Lower Street gave the low bid, and his offer of £1915 was accepted. In addition to the structural work that Hale's estimate covered, church officials took the occasion to authorize additional repairs and refurbishings to the bells, organ, furniture and ornaments. The total came to the very precise figure of £2687 17s 8 3/4d, quite a bit more than Mr. Hale's estimate. However, for once, increased costs were not a problem. Thanks to the rate authorized to pay for the work, the church had enough money not only to cover Hale's costs, but enough to enable the churchwarden "to pay several bills which had been outstanding for some

time" as well as current expenses. Unfortunately, practically no one seems to have thought the work, especially the parts connected with the ceiling and the roof, improved the look of things. Thomas Cromwell, more critical than most, even questioned its necessity:

> *The general beauty of the interior was much impaired by some alterations made in 1818, when the building was newly roofed. The present ceiling is inferior in construction and design to the one which it was thought necessary to remove; and the filling the lobby with pews, and thereby preventing access to the galleries and the middle of the church from the side doors, darkened and encumbered the entrance, and is attended with some inconvenience to the congregation.*

"Filling the lobby with pews" was obviously an expedient to provide additional seating. The fact that it was done only four years after the Chapel of Ease had been opened, (see "Sons and Daughters") speaks all too clearly of Islington's early 19th century growing pains. Those pains would continue, as Islington–and all of London– grew by the proverbial leaps and bounds throughout the century. That growth would not only affect living parishioners, it had its impact on the dead as well.

Grave matters: St Mary's church gardens

St Mary's Church Gardens surround St Mary's Church on three sides. Here, flower beds, winding pathways and benches provide welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of Upper Street. Scattered about the gardens, under numerous giant London Plane trees that provide shade, isolated table tombstones silently and eloquently tell of a former usage. Less visible at first glance, but equally indicative, are vertical stone slabs stacked two, three, and four deep against the walls of adjacent buildings, including the garden walls of Church Cottage, formerly the Sexton's house.

Sir Christopher Wren would undoubtedly have approved of St Mary's Church Gardens. In his oft-quoted letter of advice to the Commissioners for Building Fifty New City Churches in 1711, he dealt with their surroundings,

specifically regarding burials:

> *I could wish that all Burials in Churches might be disallowed, which is not only unwholesom, but the Pavements can never be kept even, nor Pews upright: And if the Church-yard be close about the Church, this also is inconvenient, because the Ground being continually raised by the Graves, occasions, in Time, a Descent by Steps into the Church, which renders it damp, and the Walls green, as appears evidently in all old Churches.*

Officials at St Mary's would take their time in taking his advice, but they would do so, eventually.

Originally, as was the case with most parish churches, St Mary's was virtually surrounded by its churchyard, or burial ground, which originally contained 1 acre and 20 perches. An act for enlarging the church-yard, authorized by Parliament in 1793, added 3 roods and 2 perches. The enlargement provided space for additional burials for a time, but it, too, soon began to fill up. From 1814, parish burials also took place in the much larger churchyard attached to the Chapel of Ease in Holloway Road (See "Sons and Daughters").

Without making too fine a point, one can almost visualize the increasingly crowded conditions of the churchyard by comparing views and drawings of the church on a chronological basis. By the mid-19th century, the ground was almost unbelievably congested, with stones leaning helter-skelter, some virtually supporting others. While the delineator of the engraving shown as illustration #38 enjoyed a great deal of artistic license, including an exaggerated sense of scale, his macabre depiction at least demonstrates how crowded the churchyard had become.

Writing in 1835, Thomas Cromwell noted that conditions were so bad that "it was very recently necessary to give public intimation that the oldest [tombstones] would be removed, unless restored at the expense of the friends of the deceased parties, in order to make room for such new tomb-stones as should be required to be erected." Again, this proved only a short-term solution In 1854, Samuel Lewis, Jr., writing in Islington as it Was

and as it Is, echoed Cromwell. He contrasted the old, medieval St Mary's, surrounded by its pleasant churchyard, with the new:

> *The breeze of heaven blew fresh and sweet over the graves of former generations, and the simple villagers had no cause to deplore the prospect of crowded interments [sic] meeting their gaze from the windows of their dwellings.*

Fortunately, by this time, changes were in the wind. Two years before Lewis penned his complaint, the Burial Act of 1852 had banned further interments in metropolitan areas, and St Mary's churchyard was soon closed. In addition, the act authorised vestries to establish burial boards, and gave them power to acquire new property. The Islington Burial Board, appointed in 1853, purchased 30 acres in East Finchley, then on the outskirts of London, and shared the cost of erecting a chapel and laying out the cemetery with the Parish of St Pancras. The St Pancras and Islington Cemetery, or Finchley Cemetery, was enlarged in 1876, and exists today as a well-tended rural cemetery. Again, Sir Christopher Wren's prescient thoughts can be felt. Having unequivocally stated in his 1711 directives where burials should not take place, he asked a rhetorical question, then answered it:

> *It will be enquired, where then shall be the Burials? I answer, in Cemeteries seated in the Out-skirts of the Town…A Piece of Ground of two Acres in the Fields will be purchased for much less than two Roods among the Buildings: This being inclosed with a strong Brick Wall, and having a Walk round, and two cross Walks, decently planted with Yew-trees, the four Quarters may serve four Parishes, where the Dead need not be disturbed at the Pleasure of the Sexton, or piled four or five upon one another, or Bones thrown out to gain Room.*

While the new cemetery began to used for new burials right away, it would be several decades after the Finchley property was purchased before existing graves surrounding the church would be moved there. St Mary's Church Gardens were established in accordance with provisions of the Metropolitan Open Space Act of 1881. After the hoarding (temporary

fencing erected to shield the work of removing the graves to Finchley) was removed, the churchyard was landscaped, then opened to the public on May 16, 1885. Several tombs, including that of Richard Cloudesley, to be sure, were allowed to remain in situ. In fact, the four churches then deriving benefits from his Stoney Field bequest shared the £25 expense of having his stone restored. (see "A Thousand Masses ...for my Soul" and "Sons and Daughters"). Fortunately, several of the most detailed histories of Islington, including John Nelson's 1811 work and Samuel Lewis, Jr.'s 1842 volume, contain a wealth of information on individuals buried in the churchyard, and transcriptions of many of the inscriptions.

In 1998, £640,000 (of which £367,000 was awarded from a Heritage Lottery Fund grant) was expended on enhancing the immediate surroundings of the church. Yorkshire porphyry paving and replica Victorian-era bollards (with SMI on them) demarcating the drive were among the new amenities in front of the church. To the sides and rear, the gardens were restored and refurbished. As time goes on, St Mary's Church Gardens are being increasingly appreciated. One recent additions to the landscaping is a magnolia, planted on Holocaust Memorial Day, 27 January, 2003. So far, it seems to be thriving.

The vindictive spirit of a rebellion: Mrs Mary Bell

With the primary exception of Richard Cloudesley's tombstone, inscriptions on the others remaining in St Mary's Church Gardens are illegible. As mentioned above, thanks to early historians, many were transcribed before the combined forces of snow, acid rain and other pollutants erased them. Many were of more than passing interest, though space allows for mention of only a few.

No inscription was more poignant than the one that marked the last resting place of Mary Bell, as it spoke volumes about the turbulent times in which she lived. Samuel Rousseau recorded it and other inscriptions for John Nichols, who published them in his Antiquities of Middlesex and Surrey:

This

stone is placed here, to

distinguish the spot, where the

tribute of filial tears must be ever due

to the memory of

Mrs. MARY BELL,

a Lady eminent for the practice of every

Christian virtue.

Her days were marked with

misfortune, and her sole comforts arose

from the hopes of attaining a better life,

and the dutiful affection of her children.

She was born in his Majesty's colony of

Rhode-Island in North America, and lived

there honour'd and belov'd by all who knew her

till, in the year 1779, and in the 50th year of her age,

she was obliged, tho' a widow with eight

children, to quit it and take refuge in

Great Britain,

from the vindictive spirit of a Rebellion,

whose object is the destruction of its Empire

and the destruction of its Glory.

She died of the small-pox on the 16th of September,

Anno Domini 1781.

Of cabbages and Cooke: Thomas Cooke

In all likelihood, Thomas Cooke, a.k.a. "Cabbage" Cooke, takes the prize as the least mourned individual ever buried in St Mary's churchyard. He died in 1811, and a few years later William Chamberlain told his story in a small booklet whose title's parenthetical appendage gives away a good part of the sordid "plot": The Life of Mr. Thomas Cooke, Late of Pentonville (A Miser). In this unflattering biography, which enjoyed at least three editions, the author presented to his public "the life of a man, whose existence, through the long period of eighty-six years, was unmarked by one good action; thus laying before the world a picture of selfishness and groveling vice." In addition, Cooke's biographer hoped the telling of his subject's "deformity will excite the proper degree of abhorrence, which avarice, hypocrisy, low cunning, and meanness, going hand in hand, and uniting in one person, so justly cry for."

Cooke began his working career in his native Norwich as a porter, but soon inveigled his family to pay his passage to London, where he arrived with eight shillings in his pocket. In the metropolis, he became an excise inspector at a Tottenham paper manufactory, where he noticed a number of fraudulent practices going on. After the proprietor died, he informed his widow that he would report the situation to the authorities unless she married him. His less-than-romantic "offer" was accepted.

The Cookes lived in White Lion Street, Pentonville, where Thomas converted what had been a flower garden into a cabbage patch, to grow his favorite comestibles. To fertilize his cabbages, "he would sally out in moonlight nights with a little shovel and a basket, and shovel up the horsedung that had been dropped in the course of the day in the City-road, until he had loaded his basket." Unfortunately, this did not insure a constant supply, and he was often seen "by the neighbors, whose windows

looked into his garden, squatting over his cabbage-plants early in a morning, and manuring them in person." He soon became known as Cabbage Cooke, though his neighbors might easily have applied worse epithets (and probably did).

According to his biographer, the verb "to give" formed no part of Cooke's vocabulary. He weaseled his way into houses at dinner time, insuring future invitations by assuring his hosts that he would remember them, or their children, in his will. By the time he was on his deathbed, his parsimonious ways were so universally known that only one doctor would attend him in his final illness, all others refusing to be taken in yet again. (Although Chamberlain, a surgeon in Clerkenwell, did not admit it in his book, he may well have been the one doctor who practiced the Hippocratic oath). In the week prior to his death, which occurred on 26 August, 1811, Cooke tried to bargain with Mr. Bodkin, Islington's undertaker, for a cheap coffin. His perverted hope was thwarted when Bodkin informed him that the amount he suggested was less than the amount the parish normally paid for coffins for paupers in the workhouse! In spite of his expressed wish that he "be buried under the Church of St Mary Islington, by the side of Doctor Shirley, in a manner not expensive," Cooke was buried in the yard, not in the vaults of the crypt. Though his executors provided a more expensive coffin than he wanted, the service was hardly a solemn occasion:

> *The mob, who attended the procession from his house to Islington church-yard, did not treat his remains with any very great respect; nor did he go to his grave without the execrations of the multitude; some of the fair sex had provided themselves with rotten cabbage-stalks for the occasion, which they threw on the coffin when lowered into the grave, observing, that as he was so fond of cabbage in his life-time, he should have some to take with him to the other world.*

When Cooke's estate was settled, it was found that he died "possessed of a property of one hundred and twenty-seven thousand, two hundred and five pounds, three per cent. consolidated Bank annuities" Most of his considerable fortune went to various almshouses, some in London, others in Norwich, Kings Lynn, Reading, and Exeter. He also bequeathed, "at the

desire and recommendation of my friend Doctor Lettsom, to the Governor and Directors of the Society for the Recovery of persons apparently drowned, called the HUMANE SOCIETY, Fifty Pounds." In an asterisk following this notice, Chamberlain informed his readers that Cooke had always promised Dr. Lettsom he would leave £500 to the Humane Society. (See "The Resuscitation of Persons Apparently Dead"). Perhaps proving that he had occasionally meant what he said when he promised to remember children in his will, he devised considerable legacies to the children of various acquaintances. Children of his relatives received "all the rest, residue, and remainder of [his] estate." To St Mary's, he left absolutely nothing.

The resuscitation of persons apparently dead: William Hawes

The good news was that Cabbage Cooke remembered the Humane Society in his will; the bad news was that, even though he had shown one of its directors a copy of his will with the sum of £500 written in it, when the actual will was probated, the figure had dwindled to £50. Ironically, the founder of the Humane Society, who died three years before the Miser of Pentonville, shares space with him in St Mary's Churchyard. The ceremonies attending the burial of William Hawes (1736-1808) could hardly have contrasted greater than with Cooke's. According to Gentleman's Magazine, Hawes was buried on 13 December, 1808, attended by three mourning coaches carrying members of his family and friends, including William Chamberlain, Cooke's biographer. Managers and Directors of the Royal Humane Society joined the procession at their own expence, and later erected "a neat and elegant Tablet…highly creditable to an ingenious young artist, Mr. John Mallcott," in St Mary's Church.

William Hawes, born in Islington, attended classes in a school administered by John Shield. In 1773, continuing the narrative from the December 1808 Gentleman's Magazine, "he became deservedly popular, from his incessant zeal in calling the attention of the publick to the resuscitation of persons apparently dead, principally by drowning." His early efforts were ridiculed, as few believed in possibility of resuscitation. Hawes persevered, and

announced that he would reward anyone who rescued a seemingly drowned person between Westminister and London bridges, if they would give him immediate notice.

Hawes saved many who were apparently dead, paying the rewards out of his own pocket for a year to those who gave him notice, and even rewarding those who brought victims that he could not resuscitate. Dr. Thomas Cogan, concerned that his friend's fortune would soon be depleted by such generosity, had also realized that lives could be saved by resuscitation, and the two men agreed to combine their efforts to bring the public's attention to their cause. They each invited fifteen friends to join them at the Chapter Coffee-house in 1774, and the Humane Society was organized. Soon, humane societies were established in Europe, America, and Asia.

For some unremembered reason, officials of St Mary's, and/or its vicar, seem not to have been overly encouraging of Hawes's efforts, even though Islington benefitted greatly from his good work. According to Gentleman's Magazine, after each annual meeting of the Humane Society, Hawes would begin to make plans for the ensuing year. One of his self-appointed tasks was to nominate succeeding stewards, update the list of subscribers, and solicit "Churches and Preachers for the benefit of his favourite Institution." The author of the article went on to assert that his not being able to obtain for that purpose the grant of the churches of two or three opulent parishes, which he had long been anxiously soliciting (particularly that of Islington, where a very large proportion of the Society's rewards is unavoidably applied) was a circumstance that gave him more uneasiness, and preyed more upon his mind, than can easily be imagined.

In addition to founding the Royal Humane Society, Hawes served as its registrar, and wrote a number of works on medicine. He deserves to be remembered as one of Islington's most famous citizens, and one of St Mary's most distinguished parishioners.

Universally respected and venerated: John Nichols

The fact that Gentleman's Magazine gave such extensive coverage to Islington may well have to do with the fact that its long-time editor was born, bred, and buried in the community, literally within a stone's throw of St Mary's.

John Nichols (1744-1803) first saw the light of day in an Upper Street house adjacent to the old King's Head Tavern, opposite St Mary's. Like William Hawes shortly before him, he received his rudimentary education from Islington schoolmaster John Shield. In 1757 the thirteen-year old Nichols was apprenticed to a well-known printer, William Boyer the younger, under whose auspices he received far more than the rudiments of classical instruction. In 1766 Bower took his former apprentice into partnership, and when he died in 1777, willed him a portion of his estate. The next year Nichols began his association with Gentleman's Magazine, and from 1797 until his death in 1803, a period of 34 years, he was its editor and publisher. Under his leadership the magazine, which began publication in January 1731, became one of the most respected journals of its time. Today, it serves as a convenient and invaluable reference to events, people, places, and buildings throughout the world. Its range was universal, and, under the guidance of Nichols (or Sylvanus Urban, Gent., the nom-de-plume he and other editors of the magazine gave themselves) it eclipsed all other periodicals of its type.

Nichols's work on the magazine did not preclude other literary accomplishments. By 1790 he had completed eight volumes of his monumental Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica, followed in the next decade by two supplemental volumes. Volume 2, on Canonbury, contains a great deal of valuable information on Islington and St Mary's. In 1795 Nichols published the first two parts of The History and Antiquities of the Town and County of Leicester, which he considered his most important work. In 1815, the last of eight folio volumes that comprise his Leicester history was finished.

In 1803, at the age of 59, Nichols wrote a brief and charming sketch of his life, referring to himself in the third person:

In the summer of 1803, he in a considerable degree withdrew from

the trammels of business, to a house in his native village, where he hopes (Deo volente) to pass the evening of a laborious life in the calm enjoyment of domestic tranquility; and that his earthly remains may (at a period which he neither looks forward to nor wishes to anticipate,) be deposited with those of several near relations, whose loss he has long deplored, in the church-yard where many of his happiest days were passed in harmless sports.

As the author of his memoir, published in the Dec. 1826 issue of Gentleman's Magazine, remarked: he still "had before him twenty-years devoted to as arduous labour as any which he had ever sustained." In the year following his soi-disant retirement, Nichols was elected Master of the Stationers' Company, evidence of the esteem in which members of his profession held him. He died unexpectedly in November 1826, after spending a quiet day with his family in Highbury Place, and, as he wished, was buried in St Mary's churchyard. His tomb, in the southeastern corner of the churchyard, was carefully preserved when the park was landscaped in the 1880s. The original inscription included this summary of his life and works:

Within the vault lie the remains of

JOHN NICHOLS, Esq., F. S. A. Lond. Edinb. and Perth,

(son of EDWARD and ANNE NICHOLS, of this parish,)

Author of the HISTORY OF LEICESTERSHIRE, and numerous other works,

and for nearly half a century editor and printer of

THE GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE.

His long life was passed in useful and honourable activity,

and he died universally respected and venerated, Nov. 26th, 1826, in his 82nd year.

Nichols's desire to be buried with several near relations, whose loss he had so long felt, referred to his two wives, both of whom had predeceased him, several of their children (three of whom died as infants), and a few other relatives. All share his burial vault. Without doubt, Sylvanus Urban would be pleased that neighborhood children today continue to pass happy days in harmless sports in the churchyard-cum-park.

Church Cottage: from soup to nuts

Church Cottage, a diminutive brick house also known as the Sexton's House and St Mary's Cottage, stands modestly near the southeastern corner of St Mary's Church Gardens. Walls of the tiny enclosed garden that surround it have numerous illegible tombstones stacked against them. The house's address, Church Path, or St Mary's Path, refers to the ancient footpath that wends its way between the Church Gardens and later buildings to Upper Street.

Little seems to be known of the origins of the little building, though its vernacular lines and additive form bespeak great antiquity. Jim Connell, in An Illustrated History of Upper Street, Islington, published in 1989, states that it dates from the time of Queen Anne. It shows in the background of many drawings of the medieval church, and its outline is shown in the earliest printed map of Islington, dating from 1735. As far as is known, it seems to have been built to serve as a dwelling for the church sexton, and early views show a sign labelled SEXTON affixed to its walls. In addition to being shown in Matthew Skinner's 1788 engraving (see illustration # 35), it is the subject of a charming 1839 watercolor by C. H. Matthews, now at the Islington History Centre, which shows it largely unchanged from its current appearance. In this painting, a sign affixed to the cottage has two words written on it: BAKER and SEXTON. This should not be taken to indicate that it ever housed a bakery. Rather, it housed John Baker, St Mary's sexton and grave-digger at the time.

Two years after Matthews painted the cottage, another artist, A. Shepherd, pencilled a sketch, which he titled "The Old Sexton's House, Islington Church Yard, 1841." As Matthews had done, Shepherd also took care to

show the BAKER/SEXTON sign. His view proves that the two years intervening between the two views had been prime growing seasons. A small tree, barely more than a sapling in the Matthews watercolor, has grown by leaps and bounds in Shepherd's sketch.

In the late 19th century, the cottage served not as the Sexton's cottage, but as the church's soup kitchen, providing nourishing sustenance to Islington's poor and needy. A limestone tablet announcing "Islington Soup Kitchen founded 1863," along with the names of the churchwardens, was affixed to one of its walls. Activity in the kitchen was somewhat sporadic after that, but an 1895 advertisement in the Islington Gazette, complete with a pun, shows that it was once again in full operation: "The Christmas motto for St Mary's Soup Kitchen will be 'Peas on earth, good will to all men.'" In 1898, and again from 1904 through 1920, the "Soup Society" paid the church an annual rent of 5£ per year for use of the cottage. Mrs. Luck, the cook, received a total of 8£ 4s 6d for making the soup, which contained meat, peas (of course), and other vegetables and condiments. A surviving report proudly notes that during the winter of 1903-04 a total of 7,031 quarts were made, followed the next winter by 7,234. At some point, a one-room addition, built to house a large oven and two large soup containers with hinged lids, was built adjoining the cottage.

Time and tastes change, and the soup kitchen closed in 1912. The one-room addition was demolished in 1951, to be replaced with a sitting room and bathroom for the curate and his family, who then occupied the house. David Shepherd, well-known English cricketer, occupied the cottage when he was curate, but its best-known inhabitant was George Carey (see "Curate to Canterbury"), who lived in the cottage during the early 1960s. In 1977, when the church needed funds to build the neighborhood center, the cottage was sold. Unfortunately, this proved to be short-sighted economy. In the winter of 2003-2004, the cottage was again put on the market. Advertisements proclaimed it "the oldest residence in Islington," a distinction that actually belongs to another building, Canonbury Tower. The asking price? £695,000. That would buy a lot of soup, and even more nuts.

Sons and daughters: St Mary Magdalen, St John's, St

Paul's and Holy Trinity

During George Strahan's long vicarate, St Mary's made its first serious attempt to grapple with the problems of Islington's burgeoning population. In fact, building the Chapel of Ease, the first of many churches established during the 19th century to address the problems of overcrowding, was one of Strahan's most important legacies. The necessary Act of Parliament providing for the chapel and an additional burial ground was passed in 1811. The act empowered the trustees to raise the sum of £15,000 by annuities, and authorized them to raise double that amount if necessary. The cornerstone was laid on June 16, 1812, and two years later, on August 17, 1814, the Bishop of London consecrated the chapel. First known as St Mary's Chapel, Holloway, it was designed by William Wickings, at the time Surveyor to the County of Middlesex. Wickings was the surveyor who drew the floor plans of the parent church of St Mary's.

Unfortunately, the trustees borrowed even more than the Act allowed and costs of the building amounted to more than double the amount authorized. Both the design and cost overruns during construction (which Wickings supervised) were censured, but, beyond the loss of several reputations, ultimately no one was penalized. Thomas Cromwell was particularly brutal in his assessment of the design:

Both in length and breadth , it exceeds, by several feet, the dimensions of the parish church; but will not bear comparison with that structure as to architecture. It is, in truth, little more than a mass of brickwork, with a squat tower, emerging from a mountain of roof at one end.

Most critics allowed that, while the exterior was nothing to write home about, the interior was at least spacious, comfortable, and presentable. On the other hand, Paul Pry at Hillhausen, a delightfully cynical 1827 diatribe, poured a hundred and seven stanzas of vitriol on the situation. The first two stanzas give the general tone:

> *Yon dear-bought pile, some call 't a barn,*

(Heaven spare the pious founder)

Resounds their fame, as loud as can

A THIRTY THOUSAND POUNDER!

For sacred use 'twas built, I wot,

But, since the world's beginning

No pile on earth hath been so curs'd,

Or caused such dreadful sinning.

As St Mary Magdalene, the former chapel, now its own parish church, still presides over a large, lovely churchyard, formerly a burial ground that served both the chapel and the mother church.

The Chapel of Ease soon became as woefully insufficient as St Mary's in accommodating the increasing numbers of Anglican worshipers in Islington. Consequently, in May 1825, only slightly more than a decade after the chapel was consecrated, Commissioners of the Parliamentary Act "for building and promoting the building of additional churches in populous parishes," made arrangements for three additional churches in Islington. All were begun in 1826 and completed and dedicated in only three years. Of course, Paul Pry remained cynical:

I find you're building churches three,

All to uphold the Trinity:

Rare times, I ween, when people starve,

To cram them with divinity.

Three churches at one haul–good lack!

For this sectarian people!

Much rather they, you'd clothe their backs,

Than treat them with a steeple.

In January 1829, Gentleman's Magazine gave a far more positive opinion: "great credit is due to all the parties concerned in the work; to the parish particularly, for the selection of a style of architecture peculiarly adapted to ecclesiastical buildings." Architecturally, the three new churches were good, if not outstanding, examples of the Gothic Revival, which, thanks to the work of both ecclesiologists and romantics, was eclipsing the Georgian mode as the preferred style for Anglican churches worldwide. It was certainly the style generally employed in designs of the Commissioners Churches, as those built under auspices of the 1825 Act of Parliament are known. All three of the Islington churches were designed by Charles Barry, who soon went on to greater fame as architect of the new Houses of Parliament, made necessary by a fire that destroyed the old. Barry won the commission over 96 other contestants.

Two of Barry's churches, St John's, Upper Holloway, and St Paul's, Ball's Pond, are essentially architectural twins. Built of brick and stone, both have a nave and side aisles, with Gothic windows separated by buttresses, and both have prominent towers.

St John's and St Paul's were virtually identical inside as well as out. Each displayed the Royal Coat of Arms in stained-glass, centering the window over the altar. St John's contained 1,782 seatings, of which 750 were free, while St Paul's had 1,793, of which 817 were free. Together they more than doubled the seatings at the mother church, St Mary's, and daughter chapel, St Mary Magdalene.

Trinity, the largest of the three new churches, and by far the closest in proximity to St Mary's, contained seating for 2,009 parishioners, with 858 free. The Church of the Holy Trinity, Cloudesley Square, as it was named, was modeled on King's College Chapel, Cambridge, one of the recognized glories of English Perpendicular Gothic architecture. Trinity was also, in

effect, a monument to Islington's chief benefactor of old. Built in the center of the square that bore his name, the church stands near the center of Richard Cloudesley's former Stoney Field. Unlike the other Commissioners' Churches in Islington, its eastern window does not display the Royal Coat of Arms. Rather it shows a gentleman in 16th century costume, kneeling, and surmounted by a canopy. Beneath the figure, an inscription lauds Cloudesley, the gentleman depicted, and enumerates the details of his bequest.

Thanks to Cloudesley's bequest, the parish paid £12,000 of the costs of the three new churches, while the remaining £23,000 was supplied from funds authorized by the Parliamentary Act. In 1832, another Act of Parliament directed that rents from the Cloudesley estate would henceforth be divided into four equal parts; one to St Mary's, the other three to the three new district churches recently completed. St John's and St Paul's continue as active Church of England parishes. Trinity Church, perhaps too close to the parent St Mary's to stand on its own, now serves as the Celestial Church of Christ.

As the 19th century progressed, church building in Islington continued at an even brisker pace. By 1851, there were 14 Church of England places of worship in the parish, with 15,548 sittings, 6,454 of which were free. That these numbers were now meeting the needs can be gauged from figures calculated on Sunday, March 30, 1851, when the total morning attendance was 13,268. St Mary's many sons and daughters were doing their best to fulfill their important mission.

Power enough for Islington and Calcutta: Daniel Wilson, Sr

Except for the chapel of ease, the numerous Anglican churches built in Islington during the 19th century were not due to George Strahan, nor erected under his vicarate. They were fruits of the labours of his two successors, a dynamic father-and-son team who together occupied the vicarate from 1824 until 1886. And, if Strahan had notably failed to inspire from the pulpit, the sermons preached by the first of the twosome spread

the Word far and wide, propelling St Mary's into the front ranks of Evangelical Anglicanism.

Even though his vicarate lasted only eight years, from 1824 to 1832, Daniel Wilson (1778-1858) remains one of the most noted and beloved prelates ever to have served St Mary's. The son of a wealthy London silk manufacturer, he married his cousin Ann, whose father had purchased the church patronage in 1811. At his death in 1821, Ann's father bequeathed the living to his son-in-law, and when George Strahan died three years later, Wilson appointed himself vicar. He preached his first sermon on July 2, 1824, but it was not an auspicious beginning, as ill health postponed his taking full charge of the parish until the following November. In addition, many parishioners initially resented Wilson's "self-appointment." Others opposed his Evangelical leanings, already well known from his work in Oxford and London. From all accounts, however, his gentle but firm manner soon triumphed over all complaints. When he left Islington even those most opposed initially had been converted to his numerous worthwhile causes.

When Wilson arrived, Islington was growing at an heretofore unprecedented rate. A fine sense of the situation and the growing pains the formerly rural town was experiencing is afforded by the first verse of a poem titled "Suburban Sonnets," published in Hone's Table Book of 1827:

Thy fields, Fair Islington, begin to bear

Unwelcome buildings and unseemly piles;

The streets are spreading and the Lord knows where

Improvement's hand will spare the neighbouring stiles.

By 1821 the population stood at 22,417, with only St Mary's and St Mary Magdalene serving its parishioners. Wilson's immediate response was to hold more Sunday services at St Mary's. At the time there were only two services: one in the morning and one in the afternoon. In addition to an 8:00 a.m. communion, Wilson initiated an evening service, at which all pews were free. For the first time, anyone could sit wherever he or she

liked. What began in Islington as a virtually unheard of innovation eventually became conventional throughout the church. The fact that the parish could boast of 6,454 free sittings in its fourteen places of worship by 1851 could not have happened without Wilson's initiative.

Even the two additional Sunday services Wilson launched were little more than "first-aid" treatment for a condition that needed a major operation. On March 18, 1827, for example, he observed that St Mary's was so crowded that as many as four hundred people had to be turned away. Fortunately, help was already on the way. In 1825, as discussed in "Sons and Daughters," arrangements were being made for three additional churches in Islington. More would soon follow.

That Daniel Wilson's sermons were worth hearing was attested to by many accounts. Noted for his vigorous style of preaching, characterized by short, often pungent, sentences that he hoped would goad his hearers, Wilson always hit his mark. "But though men might smile, they never slept," one biographer has commented. Early in his career, ill health had compelled Wilson to preach while sitting, rather than standing. This practice became habitual, and at St Mary's he traditionally sat on a high stool within the pulpit, his feet resting on canes, carefully wedged and out of view of the congregation. This arrangement in effect raised him to the height of someone standing in the pulpit. When he actually did stand, which he often did to emphasize a point, some thought he had the appearance of a giant, others that he was about to fly out of the pulpit. Either way, it was dramatic, and had its desired effect. Certainly Wilson was no miniature Moses when he spoke from the pulpit, and no one ever played cards while he preached.

Among other accomplishments during his Islington years, Wilson established the Islington Clerical Meeting, later Conference. From an initial meeting of thirteen clergymen (he and twelve others) held in the vicarage on 4 January 1827, the conference grew swiftly in size and importance. Its annual conferences soon became the largest and most influential gatherings of Evangelical Anglican clergy and a focus for Evangelicalism in the Church of England. By 1880, over 300 clergy attended its annual meetings, and by the turn of the 20th century, over 1,000 attendees was

the norm. Meetings were held in Islington, in consecutive larger halls, until the time came when no borough premises was large enough. In 1920, the 93rd annual meeting was moved to Church House, Westminster, which then became its home. Along with the change in venue came an official name change, from Meeting to Conference. The conference ceased holding meetings in 1983, but they have recently been resurrected.

It was also during Wilson's Islington pastorate, on 31 January 1825, that the College of the Church Missionary Society opened its doors. This was the Established Church's first missionary seminary in England, and its graduates did their part to spread the Evangelical message throughout the world. The institution was housed in a large building several blocks north of St Mary's. Thomas Shepherd didn't care for the building (which has been demolished), though he appreciated the cause it served:

It looks more like the baldness of northern Calvinism, than the chaste beauties of the simply decorated church of England… It consists of a centre and two wings, without a single attempt at architectural decoration… It is however a plain, substantial, useful building, adapted to a very laudable purpose.

Wilson's personal life during his Islington years was marked by numerous tragedies. His wife died in 1827, only three years after he arrived at St Mary's. Three of their six children died in their early years, and another son soon followed.

In 1832, when he was fifty-four years old, Wilson was appointed Bishop of Calcutta. At that time, as his biographer, Josiah Bateman, sagely observed, "the See of Calcutta (which extended from India to Australia and included Burma and Malay as well) was not a prize to be coveted, but a great sacrifice which most avoided." Not Daniel Wilson, Sr.

Charles Woodward, a parishioner at St Mary's, took the occasion to write Wilson to say how much Islington would miss him. Wilson responded on March 29, 1832, assuring his friend that "He that holds the stars in his right hand, and walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks, has grace and power enough for Islington and Calcutta." A committee appointed to

present a memorial to their beloved vicar determined to give him "some article or articles which, being in every day use, would most frequently bring to his Lordship's mind the kindness and good wishes of his late parishioners." They decided unanimously to present a silver inkstand and a timepiece. For his part, after thanking the chairman for the gifts, Wilson wrote: "may I beg of you to appropriate the draft on the other side to the purchase of a stock of Coals, to be distributed in the ensuing winter…for the comfort of the Poor, in such proportions, and at such times, as may be judged, by you and the Committee, as most beneficial?" The draft was for a hundred guineas.

Wilson, both a great and a good man, returned for a visit to Islington in May 1845, staying with his son in the familiar vicarage. He returned to India in August 1846, then died in Calcutta on Jan. 2, 1858, age 80. He is buried in that city's St Paul's Cathedral, which he founded.

In his father's footsteps: Daniel Wilson, Jr

Daniel Wilson, Sr., began preparing his son for the vicarate even before he preached his own first sermon at St Mary's. On 5 June, 1824, the day after the Bishop of London instituted him to the vicarage, Wilson wrote his son:

> *I wish to interest you as early as possible in the solemn charge of thirty thousand souls, which is now laid upon me. Upon you, my dear boy, this charge will devolve some day if you live.*

The vicarate of Daniel Wilson, Jr. (1805-1886) was as long as his father's had been short. While the senior Wilson served for only eight years, his son enjoyed a pastorate of fifty-four, from 1832 until 1886. He is not remembered as the dynamic preacher his father was, but he was even more of a church builder, taking the term literally. When his father assumed the vicarate, as he wrote his son, there were some 30,000 people in Islington. When the younger Wilson died in 1886, there were 350,000! Islington was the largest borough in London, and one of every twelve inhabitants of the metropolis called it home. Islington had 40 separate Church of England parishes, most of which were founded during the time

Daniel Wilson, Jr., served the parent parish of St Mary's.

Early in the younger Wilson's vicarate, and largely through his influence and support, the Church Pastoral Aid Society was established. Its mission was to increase the number of clergy, to appoint laymen to help in duties not exclusively ministerial, and to foster the Evangelical point of view. The Society purchased the patronage of St Mary's in the 1850s, ensuring that successive vicars would be Evangelical. Wilson also continued to work with the ever-growing Church Missionary College, and with the Islington Clerical Conference, which his father had inaugurated.

It pleased the Lord: Samuel Ajayi Crowther

Samuel Ajayi Crowther (ca.1806-1892), the first Black Anglican bishop, was a Yoruba, one of the oldest and most advanced tribes in the region that comprises today's Nigeria. As a teenager, Ajayi, or Adjai, became something of an entrepreneur, raising poultry and produce. His fledgling enterprise was cut short when, in 1822, he–along with other members of his family–were abducted by Muslims, taken to the coast, sold to Portuguese slave traders, and put aboard the misnamed Esperanza Feliz, bound for America. The third day out, a British ship captured the Esperanza and freed its human cargo. Ajayi was then taken to Sierra Leone and placed in a missionary school. As he later wrote, "about the third year of my liberation from the slavery of man, I was convinced of another worse slavery, that of sin and Satan. It pleased the Lord to open my heart." Baptized in Africa on December 11, 1825, he was given the name of an English clergyman, Samuel Crowther, one of the first members of the Church Missionary Society.

It then pleased the Lord to send Crowther to England, specifically to Islington, where he studied at St Mary's Parochial School, then located on Liverpool Road. Returning to Sierra Leone in 1827, he enrolled as the first student at the newly established Fourah Bay College. So rapid was his progress that he soon became an assistant teacher, then a schoolmaster. In Church Missionary Society reports of the time, he was frequently described as a faithful and efficient promoter of missionary efforts. Crowther was

particularly concerned about the effect of trafficking in whiskey and the slave trade, which–though formerly abolished in 1838–continued in the interior of the continent. He returned to Islington in 1842, where he trained at the Church Missionary Society's college (see illustration #50). The next year, he was ordained at St Mary's, then returned to Africa.

In 1851, Crowther returned to England for a meeting with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert to discuss the slave situation. His eloquence resulted in a British expedition to the Niger, which Crowther joined, and which helped mark the end of the African slave trade. Among other accomplishments, Crowther was proficient in languages, which aided him immensely in his Evangelical work. He was the chief translator of the Bible into the Yoruba language, and composed both a Yoruba grammar and dictionary.

In 1864, he was called once again to England, this time for a singular honor–to be ordained a bishop of the Anglican Church. His promoters, anxious that he obtain a university degree before being consecrated, cited his several publications as proof of his knowledge. With almost universal consent, he received his degree. Then, on June 29, 1864, in Canterbury Cathedral, he was consecrated Bishop of the Niger. Among those in attendance was the former captain of the British ship that had rescued him from bondage forty-two years earlier.

Upon his return to Nigeria, Crowther continued his work with humility and devotion. Old ways still remained, however, and his work–as had been the case with Philip Quaque before him–was often met with frustration and defeat. Still, he carried on, until his death at Lagos on January 9, 1892. He had fought the good fight for some sixty years. Among all men associated with St Mary's, Samuel Ajayi Crowther deserves to be remembered.

A genuine, hard working man: William Barlow

Before publishing the first volume of Life and Labour of the People of London, editor Charles Booth interviewed members of the city's clergy. Of St Mary's vicar, he said: "in spite of a rather unpleasant temper I should say Dr. Barlow is a genuine, hard working man." Indeed he was! William Hagger

Barlow (1833-1908), vicar from 1886 to 1902, brought St Mary's into the 20th century with a bang. Although he did not remain in Islington to see the completion of his long-sought renovations to the church building, he realized many other accomplishments during his tenure.

Barlow was already familiar with Islington and with Evangelical ways before he arrived officially at St Mary's, having served as principal of the Church Missionary College from 1875 to 1882. During that time he, or students from the college, lectured at the church's Sunday evening services.

For the first two years of his incumbency, Barlow took as his vicarage a house on Canonbury Place. In 1888 the parish bought a plot of land immediately north of the church, fronting Upper Street, and in 1897 built a new vicarage, which continues as both the home of the vicar and as church offices. When Barlow arrived, St Mary's was using a remodeled Gaskin Street chapel, dating from 1860, as the Church Hall. In 1890, this was replaced with a new purpose-built hall, with a 600-seat capacity. Named the Bishop Wilson Memorial Hall, it served the parish in good stead for a number of years, particularly as a temporary sanctuary soon after it was completed, and again from 1940 to 1954. Eventually the hall, like its predecessor, had to be replaced. This was accomplished in two phases: in 1977 a new games room was built in the vicarage garden, after which the old hall was taken down and a new building, formally opened in 1979 as St Mary's Neighbourhood Center, was erected on its site.

Both buildings were designed by the eminent Victorian-era architect/engineer, William Henry Barlow (1812-1902), whose exact relationship to Vicar Barlow has not yet been determined. The brickwork at the vicarage is identical to brickwork on the walls of Barlow's best-known work, London's St Pancras Station of 1868. There Barlow, in partnership with R. M. Ordish, designed the phenomenal train shed, whose arched roof was, for twenty-five years, the world's widest unsupported covered span. The shed continues to shelter trains and passengers, and is becoming ever more appreciated as the St Pancras neighborhood is revitalized.

Vicar Barlow did not remain to see his major architectural enterprise at St Mary's, which dealt not with appendages, but with the church itself,

accomplished. He did, however, get the ball rolling. On Sept. 10, 1894, the Islington Gazette published an inquiry: “What has become of the grand old peal of bells belonging to the Parish Church?...Are the Islington bells cracked?” No, but they needed rehanging and the tower needed strengthening once again. Their silence was regarded as symptomatic of a number of problems that needed addressing. While the Wilsons had expended much energy on new churches, they had apparently neglected the old. A year-and-a-half after its inquiry, on May 5, 1896, the Gazette greeted its readers with an article titled “The Restoration of the Parish Church.” Beginning with the statement that “nothing has concerned the vicar and his churchwardens more deeply during the past few years than the [proposed] restoration,” the article posited that there was likely no church in the parish in greater need of embellishment than St Mary’s. This was quite likely true, but the word “embellishment,” rather than “refurbishment” or “restoration” was no doubt a word very carefully chosen. The Gazette announced that a circular recently issued by the vicarage claimed that some parishioners were in favor of a wholesale replacement of the church, a project that would be prohibitive, unless large donations were forthcoming. Assuming (correctly) that such donations would not be forthcoming, the Gazette instead offered a few suggestions that would bring the old church more in harmony with modern ideas. Obviously, the suggestions emanated from Barlow’s new vicarage, and, just as obviously, every one of them had already been carefully planned. Some suggestions (rehanging the bells, repairing the tower, reconstructing the organ) were necessary; others (lowering the seats, adding a chancel or apse, adopting “some simple style of decoration... for the walls”) were very much in the “embellishment” category. All would help make the church more liturgically correct, at least according to ecclesiological tenets. While all of the itemized suggestions would be accomplished within a few years, the Gazette sorely underestimated the costs in predicting a figure between £4,000 and £5,000.

As it turned out, Barlow’s intentions were facilitated by two very unrelated and unexpected events. The first was an 1899 fire that partially destroyed the organ. In reporting the calamity, former curate J. M. Willoughby showed his architectural proclivities by rhetorically wondering why anyone

had bothered to extinguish the fire, as it might otherwise have destroyed the church. As he intimated, this would have made a complete replacement not only necessary, but mandatory! At any rate, the insurance payments realized from the fire damage became a handsome “nest egg” to help pay for the desired embellishments. These would be accomplished early in the new century under the aegis of Dr. Barlow’s successor.

In 1902, Barlow left Islington, having been appointed Dean of Peterborough Cathedral. As Willoughby explained, his reluctance to press the issue of remodeling the church and to see it to completion while he had been vicar had been prompted by two interrelated causes: his realization that the parish itself could not pay for the project and the fact that the Cloudesley leases were about to fall due, after which additional income from newly negotiated leases would provide sufficient funds.

Dr. Willoughby’s testimonial to Vicar Barlow is rich and full. One story that he retold could only have been first told by his subject. As the vicar was walking along Upper Street one fine day, he was greeted by a little girl with the familiar “Hullo! Dr. Barlow.” Never one to fail to stop for a chat with a parishioner, whether old or young, he stooped down to meet her gaze, and took the occasion to inquire gently why she was not at school. Her reply, uttered in tones of triumph: “Got a holiday; grandfather’s dead!” Charles Booth seems to have been mistaken in thinking William Barlow had a bad temper.

Into the Twentieth Century

Mention was made of two events that precipitated the remodelling of St Mary’s. The first, the fire that destroyed the organ, occurred in the last year of the 19th century. The second, even grimmer, occurred at the outset of the 20th. An appeals leaflet the church issued in 1903, only hinted at the problem.

Portions of the building require immediate attention if they are to be rendered structurally secure. The interior arrangements fall far short of the minimum standard of decency and comfort demanded by the simplest

taste of the present day. Owing to its insanitary condition the Church is now closed by order of the health authorities.

After parishioners had complained of noxious odors emanating from below, specifically from the crypt, the Medical Officer of Health for the Borough of Islington had been called in to investigate. The coffins in the crypt turned out to be the cause, and on the Medical Officer's authority, the church was closed in October 1902. The coffins were then removed and relocated to the church's large plot in the Finchley cemetery.

This untenable situation inaugurated the vicarate of Charles James Procter, who served as vicar from 1902 until 1921. In spite of the fact that he served almost twenty years, Procter's name does not often crop up in histories of the church. If nothing else, he at least carried out the necessary work on the building with great ability.

The work undertaken at St Mary's was typical of alterations to which any number of Georgian-era churches were subjected, though most had succumbed at an earlier date. (St Mary, Rotherhithe, for example, had its pews lowered and a deep chancel created in two operations, one in 1876, one in 1888). "Victorian vandalism" it has been called, and a 1950s book, Churches the Victorians Forgot, indicates by its very title what its author thought of such architectural shenanigans. Deep chancels became the fashion of the day. Choirs came down from the west gallery, with the organ often joining them in their eastward progression. With the installation of new furnaces (or with installation of furnaces for the first time), tall box pews, which had afforded a modicum of protection from drafts on cold winter Sundays, could be cut down or replaced altogether with lower "slip" pews. As the altar now became of paramount importance, pulpits became the major casualties of such remodelings.

All things considered, St Mary suffered from a relatively mild case of ecclesiologicalitis. Its organ remained in the rear gallery, most of its clear glass windows remained clear, and early-20th century church officials were every bit as conscientious as their mid-18th century predecessors had been in assuring that the mural monuments accumulated over the years remained in situ. Sir Arthur W. Blomfield, RA., architect, carried out his

work with great respect for the old fabric, even reusing parts of old fittings in his new arrangements.

As expected, the most drastic alterations were reserved for the east end of the church. Here, the original end wall was breached and a deep chancel was built, extending far beyond the old "footprint." Even so, the original reredos was relocated at the east end of the new chancel, as was the framework of the Palladian "window," which had already been fitted with an actual stained-glass window depicting the Transfiguration. (No one seems to have complained that Nathaniel Clarkson's painting of the Annunciation had disappeared by this time, nor do accounts tell when it happened.) New wings flanking the chancel were built to house clergy and choir rooms, lavatories, and, most importantly, a muniment room in the basement to house the parish plate and other treasures.

Concomitant with the deep chancel, the original "triple- decker" pulpit was removed from its central position, where it would have obstructed the view of the new chancel and its embellishments. The top third (the preacher's portion) was re-erected north of the entrance to the new chancel, a location that some partisans had desired when the 1754 church was new. The old sounding board, or tester, which had been removed at some point in the past, was found and reinstated. In place of the old reading desk (originally part of the triple-decker pulpit), a lectern in the form of a brass eagle was installed. In the realm of renewal, rather than embellishment, electric lights were put in, the bells were rehung, and the fire-damaged organ was rebuilt.

The facade of the church was also changed. Dowbiggin's semi-circular portico, supported by four Tuscan columns, which fronted the central tower base, was removed and replaced by a much larger porch of the Ionic Order, now extending across the entire facade. Few could argue against this being a real improvement. The welcoming porch, broad and deep, continues to afford both literal and figurative shelter to those who enter the church. The shallow, segmental pediment over the entrance contains a handsome full-relief sculpture of the Nativity. The new porch also sheltered secondary doors, opened in spaces that were originally windows, flanking the main entrance. These doors are now closed, though their frames

remain. They led directly to new stairs to the galleries, allowing the removal of several old, inconvenient doorways inside.

With the work completed, the church was reopened and reconsecrated on April 20, 1904, by the Bishop of London. By the time the project was completed, according to The Standard, the cost was nearly £13,000, quite a bit more than the Gazette's original estimate. Costs were largely paid by a loan raised on St Mary's share of the Cloudesley bequest. Once again, Islington's medieval landowner had proven himself "a very considerable benefactor" to his parish.

An ounce of prevention or a cornerstone in thin air

Even after the major refurbishment of 1903, minor changes continued to be made to St Mary's during the first two decades of the 20th century. In 1905, the old marble font was replaced by a large, ornate marble statue of a kneeling angel holding a bowl. The work of an Italian sculptor, the font was dedicated in 1905 in memory of the parents of vicar Procter and his wife. Providentially, as it would turn out, the old font was put in storage in the new muniment room. In 1910 a memorial window was placed in the chancel to honour former Vicar Barlow, who had died at Peterborough in 1908. Several years later, the crypt, newly empty after the coffins were removed, was commandeered to serve as an air-raid shelter in the 1914-18 war.

At war's end, a handsome, open, wooden rood screen, supported by Corinthian columns and surmounted by a cross, was installed on top of the marble chancel rail. Its form, with a segmental arch over the central opening, echoed the form of the new front porch to a fine degree. On the frieze to either side of the arch facing the congregation, a prominent inscription told why it was there: TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF ISLINGTON MEN WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR 1914-1918. On the side facing the chancel, the names of those who fell were inscribed. With all due respect, even though the new screen was certainly a fitting memorial, it was yet further evidence of the non-evangelical spirit that began to pervade St Mary's at the time, at least architecturally. Never

before, nor since, had its nave and chancel, its people and its priests, been so separated.

By the third decade of the 20th century, in spite of the work conducted only 30 years earlier, certain areas of the church once again needed structural attention. In 1935, architect Thomas F. Ford, FRIBA, determined that the steeple was in danger of collapsing unless it could be immediately repaired. While inspecting the octagonal colonnade at the base of the spire, Ford had discovered that several of the columns were badly deteriorated. Iron dowels let into the tops of each column, which secured them to the spire, had rusted, thus throwing them so out of line that pressure had broken two of the capitals. In addition, Ford determined that Dowbiggin's original design, though the steeple had stood for over 180 years, had allowed for very little margin of safety in regard to wind pressure. Consequently, the spire was leaning towards the south. Work was undertaken immediately after Ford's inspection, and on April 9, 1936, the Islington Gazette told its readers that replacement of the stone on the last pair of columns had been completed at an estimated cost of £1,500. The Gazette also informed its readers of an unusual ceremony that had taken place a day or so earlier, essentially the laying of a cornerstone in the air. Accompanied by Vicar James Marshall Hewitt, Churchwarden Arthur N. Dove, and several others, the Bishop of Stepney had ascended the tower, via its spiral staircase, to the platform below the steeple. There, utilizing two ladders, officiants had climbed to the platform surrounding the colonnade, where the bishop pronounced the stones "well and truly laid." Mr. Dove, whose firm had done the work, explained what had been accomplished (See "Wings of the Doves."). Neither he nor the bishop, nor anyone else assembled high above Islington that April day, could have foreseen how providential the repairs would prove to be.

In 1939, three years after the steeple was repaired, work was undertaken on the muniment room, adjacent to the crypt and vestries. This time, the work was not precipitated by structural weakness. Rather, it was authorized as an ounce of prevention: to make the space as secure as possible in the event of enemy bombing, as World War II had just broken out. Again, Churchwarden-cum-builder Arthur Dove supervised the work, which consisted primarily of strengthening and reinforcing the ceiling with metal

struts. The church registers, the old marble font, the silver communion plate, and the mace were stored within the room.

When fighting began, thought was given to again opening the church crypt as an air-raid shelter, as had been done during earlier in the century. Fortunately, as it turned out, neither church authorities nor Islington town officials approved the plan.

Though the earth be moved

On Saturday, September 7, 1940, the London blitz began, as enemy planes turned from daylight to night attack. For 57 consecutive nights the bombing of London was relentless and unceasing. On Sunday, September 8, the second day of the blitz, St Mary's curate, James Marshall Hewitt, conducted morning and evening services as usual. For the evening service he selected the first and second verses of Psalm 46 for his text:

> *God is our hope and strength: a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear though the earth be moved, and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea.*

On Monday, September 9, at sunset, wave upon wave of bombers flew over London, continuing their air-borne terror. This, the third day of the blitz, would be St Mary's day of reckoning. At 10:20 p.m., Hewitt remembered, he and his wife were in the basement kitchen of the vicarage.

> *All of a sudden, one bomb seemed by its sound to be coming directly toward us. There followed the noise as of a great building gradually tumbling in collapse. On making my way to the hall door I could see in the fading light the mass of debris piled high, but the tower and spire still standing.*

Miraculously the vicarage withstood the blast, though all its windows and doors were blown in.

A newspaper clipping dated 26 November, 1940, pulled no punches

regarding the damage the bomb had wrought:

> *The church received a direct hit. The bomb apparently exploded near the communion rails and brought the roof and galleries crashing down. The main body of the church was completely wrecked.*

In a poignant reflection written years later, Moyra Smith, the Hewitts' daughter, recalled:

> *My father had a great love for the old church. He had been vicar since 1932 and had made a study of its history. When the men came to clear up the debris, he was anxious to save as much of the historical artefacts as possible and offered to pay them something for each tiny piece of value, whether stone or glass or brass, that they brought him.*

Specifically, Vicar Hewitt was concerned about the two memorial brasses, one dated 1540, the other 1546, that had survived from the medieval church, and that had been carefully reinstalled in the 1754 building. Convinced that they lay buried beneath all the debris, he told the foreman in charge of clearing the site that he would give a reward for any fragments that were salvaged. His hopes and prayers were answered: "there came a thrilling moment one day when I was called to the site, and shown a slab of marble with a large portion of a brass attached. All the fragments, not many in number, were at length recovered."

Actually, far more than the Saville brasses remained. As workers continued to clear the debris, it was found that the original Royal Coat of Arms had miraculously survived, along with all the objects stored in the muniment room. This included the silver plate, consisting of two flagons and two patens, dating from ca. 1630, the 1808 mace, with silver gilt figures of the Virgin and Child, the brass lectern, which had been installed in 1892, and the 18th century marble font. The later angel font had been completely destroyed. Parish registers, also in the reinforced muniment room when the bomb struck, survived, but were later removed to Somerset House, then to Oxford, for safekeeping until the war's end. In addition, several wooden columns that had supported the galleries survived and could,

perhaps, be reused, if the church were to be rebuilt.

Obviously, the tower remained, but at this early date it was by no means sure how long it might continue to stand. Only after a thorough inspection was made was it determined to be structurally sound. The work undertaken four years earlier had stood the test, but, even though the tower could remain, what of the destroyed church it once adorned? Would it be rebuilt? Would the parish continue as a viable institution? These questions could hardly be answered while the war still raged. All could that be accomplished for the time being was to wrap the tower in scaffolding for protection. Only after the conflict was over could proper assessments be made and answers given. South of Islington, in the City of London, so many churches were destroyed that no one expected all could be rebuilt, nor was it clear how many of those that could would ever house active parishes again.

Islington held its collective breath. Finally, on June 14, 1945, the Islington Gazette, quoting St Mary's own Monthly Messenger, heralded good news: "under the Diocesan Reorganization Scheme, St Mary's would remain an active parish, and the church would be rebuilt." Vicar Hewitt gave thanks "that the witness of St Mary's is to be continued," and announced that £300 had been contributed to the rebuilding fund. In a rare bit of editorializing, tinged with artistic concern, the Gazette concluded: "the tower, with its spire, still stands, and we trust that the familiar structure will remain, though it may present a problem to an architect charged with designing the new St Mary's Church." Fortunately, the architects selected more than met this challenge.

The marriage of two minds: Seely and Paget

It would be difficult to have selected a more perfect team to design the new St Mary's than Henry John Alexander Seely, Lord Mottistone, OBE, FRIBA (1900 -1963) and Paul Paget LRIBA (1901-1985). They were among the most prominent and prestigious mid-20th-century British architects, and their firm, Seely and Paget, was noted particularly for its ecclesiastical work. The fact that they obtained so many church commissions was hardly

fortuitous.

The two men met at Cambridge during their student years where Seely, but not Paget, studied architecture at Trinity. As Paget recalled years later in a delightful interview with Clive Arlet, published posthumously in 1987 in the Thirties Society Journal, “it was just the marriage of two minds, I mean we became virtually one person.” As far as responsibilities were concerned, Seely was the design principal, while Paget saw to the organizational aspects of the practice. This included correspondence, personal as well as business. Seely’s stepmother heartily approved: “Oh Paul, we do like John’s letters now. Of course we realize that you write them all.”

Both men were from prominent families, and readily acknowledged that their early success was in large part due to their standing, and to their family connections. Their first commission, in fact, was for a family project, the restoration of Mottistone Manor, Seely’s family home on the Isle of Wight. His father, General Seely, approved the plans, but decided to let another, more prominent architect, vet them. Sir Edwin Lutyens not only approved, but complimented them with a pun: “Well, boys, you’ve got it absolutely right. Mottistone Manor–and you’ve kept it modest in manner.” The manor, hardly modest, is now a National Trust property. In the extensive grounds, a small, cedar-shingled retreat where the partners spent working weekends has been restored and furnished as it was when they stayed and drew there.

Thanks to Country Life, which published an article on their work at Mottistone, the partners received their first real (rather than family-connected) commission in 1926. Paget was twenty-five years old at the time, and Seely twenty-six. In 1930, the partners moved to Cloth Fair, opposite the famous church of St Bartholomew-the-Great in Smithfield. In restoring their office/dwelling, they commissioned the artist Brian Thomas to paint a scene. Paget’s father and poet laureate John Betjeman soon moved to the street. Paget’s father, retired Bishop of Chester, felt that the Seely family was doing more than its part to help the budding young architects, so began to call in his chips as well. He was so effective that at one time the firm had fourteen City of London churches under their care.

It was from their Cloth Fair office that the partners conducted the impressive corpus of restoration work necessitated by the 1940s bombing of London. Among the destroyed churches for which they provided restoration drawings were All Hallows-by-the-Tower, St Andrew's, Holborn, and St Bartholomew-the-Less. In addition, they were in charge of restoration work at Lambeth Palace (London residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury), and the Deanery and Canons' Houses at Westminster Abbey. They were also in charge of cleaning St Paul's Cathedral, where both partners served as Surveyor to the Fabric.

Seely's obituary, published in The Builder (January 25, 1963) noted that he became a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1932, and that he was at one time the only practicing architect sitting in the House of Lords. Among the few specific commissions his obituary singled out for praise was St Mary's:

As clearly as any project the firm ever carried out, their work at St Mary demonstrates their skill and proficiency at combining the old and new to produce a work that respects the past while making no apologies for being a product of its own unique time and place.

Seely's obituary in the Times (19 January 1963) acknowledged the "painstaking skill and knowledge" that their work at St Mary's had shown.

Hugh Rowlands Gough, Bishop of Barking and subsequently Archbishop of Sydney, Australia, who had served as St Mary's curate from 1928 to 1931 and as vicar from 1946 to 1948, deserves credit for selecting Seely and Paget as architects. As he stated in an article published in the Islington Gazette on December 12, 1947, the architects "have entered heart and soul into [the project]." Certainly Vicar Gough had. It was due largely to his indefatigable efforts that plans to rebuild began in earnest.

The Cathedral of Evangelicalism

And how soon they began! On November 30, 1947, the Islington Gazette published an article by Churchwarden Arthur N. Dove (see "Wings of the Doves") giving a short history of the church and announcing plans to

rebuild. Two weeks later, the previously-mentioned December 12 article gave more particulars. Noting that the architects had already drawn plans, which had been exhibited the week before, the article promised that "the new building will not be losing its old well-remembered lines. Its massive tower, for instance, will stand the landmark it has been for so long." The Gazette reporter who had written the June 1945 article must have breathed a sigh of relief at this assurance. While differences in detail are apparent between the church as first planned and as later built, in retrospect it seems remarkable at how many of the initial concepts were carried through to completion.

The December 12, 1947 article questioned when rebuilding would begin, to which Rev. Gough matter-of-factly answered: "nobody knew at all." Realizing that construction would take at least three or four years, probably longer, he suggested that 1954 would be an appropriate target date, as it would mark the 200th anniversary of the opening of Dowbiggin's church. Gough also announced that a booklet would soon be published in the form of an appeal.

Fundraising had already begun, and by October 30, 1947, the £300 announced in June 1945 had grown to £1,909. By January 1948, the fund had increased to £2,250, but by September 1950, the tenth anniversary of the bombing, the figure stood at only £4,500. Obviously more had to be done, even though the major portion of the cost of rebuilding (£100,000) would be borne by the War Damage Commission.

Under Gough's aegis, a thirteen-page brochure titled St Mary's, Islington, was printed to introduce parishioners and other potential contributors to the proposed new building, and to launch an appeal to raise £25,000. Hewitt, former vicar, composed the beginning essay, in which he discussed what had been destroyed and what had been spared. He gave particular assurance that the two brasses, which he had been so instrumental in preserving, would find an honored place in the new St Mary's.

The remaining half of the brochure consisted of drawings (an exterior side elevation with an interior elevation of the west wall, an interior perspective looking east, and a floor plan)* and two short essays, both of

which refined earlier statements published in the Gazette. In the first essay, Vicar Gough described the proposed building from a symbolic point of view, declaring that "Islington Parish Church has for long been regarded as something in the nature of the Cathedral of Evangelicalism." Consequently, the new church would be truly congregational in character, a principle that had been carried out by the architects at his request. The choir would be at the west end, where their presence would not "distract the congregation by behavior or appearance." No matter the choir's behavior, good or bad, its placement at the rear meant there would no longer be any need for a deep chancel. Gough took care to note that the congregation would find nothing between themselves and the Holy Table–not even a pulpit–nor would anything be placed on the Table in the way of decoration. Instead, flower arrangements would be in niches on the east wall. Unlike Dowbiggin's church, however, with its central pulpit, the new St Mary's would contain a pulpit and lectern, virtual architectural twins, which would flank the approach to the Holy Table.

* Presumably these plans and elevations are the drawings that comprise the 3 sheets of architectural plans now (June 2004) at the RIBA Library, described as "plans, elevations and interior elevations." All architectural drawings in the RIBA library are currently being transferred to the V&A Museum, and will not be available until December 2004. In addition to drawings catalogued under the name of the architectural firm (Seely and Paget), other Seely and Paget drawings of St Mary's are in the Dove Brothers collection at the RIBA.

In the second essay, the architects assured readers that the "imposing 18th-century tower and steeple [had been] the determining factor" in their design. On the other hand, inasmuch as Dowbiggin's design lacked the pure classicism typical of its time, they felt they could be allowed the same individuality of treatment as he had enjoyed. In other words, while they intended to retain the general lines, proportion and plan of his church, they would seek to provide a building that would be a product of its own time as well.

Specifically, the architects planned to raise the new building on the old foundations, thus keeping the same dimensions and proportions. Inasmuch

as they envisioned no galleries, there would be no need for a double row of arched windows on each side elevation. Instead there would be only one row of six tall windows on each side, insuring an abundance of daylight. Only at the east end did they propose to depart substantially from the 18th century ground plan. Here they would widen the church with short, matching transepts, or wings, extending north and south. These would essentially change the overall shape from the original rectangle to one resembling a capital letter T. Externally, this would provide a broadened east end overlooking the garden, which the architects felt would "offer a fine setting for a memorial which might well record, by symbol and by name, the sacrifice of those from the neighbourhood who gave their lives in the two world wars." Perhaps ironically, the proposed war memorial is one of the few major items initially proposed that never materialized.

How many bricks will you buy?

With post-war demands for money for every conceivable project running at all-time highs, fund-raising for St Mary's continued at a slow, often discouraging rate. On the other hand, men such as John Betjeman offered their help. On October 18, 1954, the Telegraph published his classified advertisement soliciting contributions, which could be sent to his attention at the vicarage. In addition to the 13-page brochure, the church issued another, shorter pamphlet in 1954. Titled "Let Us Rise Up and Build" it appealed for £20,000, as £5,000 had already been secured. This pamphlet added a gimmick to the fund-raising efforts. As Maurice Wood, who had replaced Gough as vicar, posited: "2/6 pays for a brick. How many bricks will you buy?" Another gimmick to raise money, one that reverted somewhat to past practices, is discussed later in "Right Church, Right Pew."

Sufficient bricks had been bought by March 1,1954, for construction to begin. As Vicar Wood later noted, at least three things of note happened on that date: the world's first hydrogen bomb was detonated, Dr. Billy Graham began his Greater London Crusade at Harringay, and "a handful of workmen quietly and unobtrusively began the task of rebuilding the ancient parish church of Islington." Not quite so unobtrusively, as it turned out. Wood, His Worship the Mayor of Islington, Hugh Gough (now Bishop

of Stepney), churchwardens, choir, and congregation were there to pray for them and to cheer them on. Maurice Wood was unduly modest in simply noting Billy Graham's crusade. He had been the instrumental Anglican organizer for the event, continuing St Mary's participation in the Evangelical tradition.

The workmen's first task was to clear the remains of the former church, and to ascertain what, if anything, could be preserved of the ancient walls. When it was determined that the crypt walls were largely broken and leaning outwards, they had to be partially pulled down and rebuilt. Meanwhile, the original vaulted ceiling of the crypt was temporarily–and carefully–supported.

By early December 1954, work was in full progress. Writing for The English Churchman, Wood observed the scene from the vicarage windows: "As I write these words I can hear the hum of the cement mixer and I can see the electric hoist taking materials 60 feet up to men working at that level around the concrete pillars and the whole site is a constant hive of activity."

On March 8, 1955, to mark the first anniversary of the rebuilding effort, the Islington Gazette reported that the reinforced concrete pillars had been completed and were supporting concrete beams that spanned the full 60-foot width of the church. The Gazette's reporter was astonished to learn that some 600 tons or more of concrete had already been used. Construction photographs taken at the time show the concrete pillars, which form the wall structure between the windows, but which, of course, are no longer visible behind the brick facing. The Gazette concluded its report by noting that more obvious signs of progress would soon be visible, when the brick walls began to rise. Before long, the brick walls were complete, and soon after that, they were roofed.

More lovely than ever imagined

At last work was complete enough to schedule a service of rehallowing and rededication. Maurice Wood vividly recalled the long-awaited event:

Every corner of St Mary's was packed to the doors, and many were

still outside, when on a mild but windy evening of 17th December, 1956, Dr. Montgomery-Campbell, Lord Bishop of London, knocked three times on the great door of St Mary's with his Pastoral Staff .

Upon admittance, the bishop conducted Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Gloucester, into the church and the churchwardens delivered the keys to him. The bishop then consecrated the several parts of the church: the font, lectern, pulpit, and holy table. The architects, the Dove brothers, Noel Mander (see "Satisfied Clients in all Parts of the World"), and all the others responsible for the new church, were there. Many sat in pews sponsored by individuals, organizations, other churches, and even–in one instance–a football team (see "Right Church, Right Pew).

Finishing touches still remained, but the church was essentially complete. On February 8, 1957, Vicar Wood, writing in the Islington Gazette, declared "the church is more lovely than we ever imagined it could be."

As the short guide available in the church vestibule states, visitors to St Mary's "will be struck by the lightness and warmth of the building…and its simplicity." Just as the architects had envisioned, the room is full of space, light and harmonious colour. To the right of the vestibule, as one enters the church, in an area housing stairs to the balcony in the old church, is a small prayer chapel, now used as a creche during Sunday morning services. On its walls the medieval brasses of the Savilles are prominently displayed. A clear glass wall between it and the church admits light and allows a view of the main sanctuary.

The extraordinarily open interior impresses everyone who enters. At the east end the chancel is framed by four columns of Ashburton marble, with stylized palm-leaf capitals. The focal point of the chancel–in fact, of the whole interior–is the enormous gilded cross behind the altar. Murals painted by Brian Thomas, who titled his work Eight Attributes of Christ, surround the cross. From top to bottom, the four murals to the left of the cross show Christ as: the

Son of God (the manger), the Healer (the miracle worker), the Servant (washing the feet of a disciple), and the Conqueror (the empty tomb). Murals to the right of the cross show Him as: the Shepherd (the parable teacher), the King (riding into Jerusalem), the Saviour (the Last Supper), and the Master (commissioning the disciples). Brian Thomas also painted the large mural on the west wall, depicting the Last Judgement. Darkened oak pillars in the west wall, below and to the sides of the mural, once supported the gallery in the old church. As had been hoped, they were reinstated, though their role is no longer structural, but decorative. Thomas also worked in stained glass, and his best-known commission in that medium is the great East Window in St Paul's Cathedral, installed as part of the post-war restoration there.

The pulpit and lectern stand, respectively, to the left and right of the shallow chancel, which they help define. Virtually identical in scale and design, they are covered with twin canopies, or sounding boards. Above them, inscriptions are etched in glass. Built into the new lectern, the brass eagle from the 1903 renovations serves as the actual desk from which Holy Scripture is read. Beneath it, and in front, the 18th century marble font serves its original purpose.

Satisfied clients in all parts of the world: N P Mander Ltd

Just as the 1770 vestry sought the services of the best available talent when they selected an organ builder, so, too, did their 1950s counterparts. Noel Mander is one of the great names in 20th-century English organ building. Self-trained, he founded the firm N. P. Mander, Ltd., which eventually took over at least two former rival organ builders. In the 1950s and '60s, with a blanket commission from the Diocese of London, Mander enjoyed a virtual monopoly in building, rebuilding, and repairing organs of churches that had been bombed and burned during the war. Because of his general commission, he was able to move organs from one church to another, which he often did when a church had been declared redundant and no longer needed an instrument. Mander often salvaged fragments of

cases as well as pipes, incorporating them into new instruments. Indeed, the pipes of St Mary's organ were originally in the church of St Mary, Boudon Street, Berkeley Square, which was demolished.

Perhaps the best indication of the extent of the firms's work can be taken from a full-page advertisement in Tom Hornsby's Of People, Buildings & A Faith. After noting that the firm had installed St Mary's organ, and that all work was done under the supervision of the principal, the advertisement proudly announced: "we have satisfied clients in all parts of the world." To prove the point, the advertisement then proceeded to list examples of their work, among them St Paul's Cathedral, York Minster, Westminster Abbey (the chapel of Henry VII), and Eton College. Because they had worked with organs in so many of Christopher Wren's city churches, Mander was selected to build the Winston Churchill memorial organ in the chapel at Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, where Sir Winston gave his famous "iron curtain" speech.

In the 1950s rebuilding of St Mary's, it was first intended that the organ pipes would be divided into two sections and placed on a western gallery in carved cases, recalling the woodwork destroyed in the blitz. The architects' presentation drawing of the west wall (see illustration #70) shows the intent, with handsome, almost baroque, cases housing the pipes. In the event, this scheme was abandoned, at least regarding the cases. The gilded "dummy" pipes that front the two organ chambers on the west wall are cased within virtually unadorned frames. Behind are almost 1500 speaking pipes (1,498, to be exact) ranging in length from one inch to sixteen feet. The console, on the left side of the nave, near the rear, has three keyboards. Two are manual, and the third is the pedalboard.

The wings of the Doves

That the new St Mary's turned out so lovely is due not only to the architects, but also to the contractors. The contractor, or undertaker, was one of London's, if not all England's, most prominent firms. Equally important, the Dove Brothers were Islington's own. Even more importantly,

the family had been associated with St Mary's for generations.

As beautifully recorded in David Braithwaite's Building in the Blood, John Dove (1751-1823), progenitor of the family firm, started work as a carpenter in Sunbury-on-Thames, a Surrey village southwest of London. His son, William Spencer Dove, began working in Islington in the 1820s, while three of William's sons (John's grandsons) formed Dove Brothers in 1852. Frederick, youngest of the three, assumed the mantle of leadership in the early 20th century, and was in turn followed by his son, Frederick Lionel, who became a Churchwarden at St Mary's. Under the latter's aegis, the company's work force numbered 600 by 1930. With his death, the fifth generation took command in the person of Lt. Col. William Watkins Dove (1897-1967). He was a soldier, builder, and antiquary, and under his direction the firm gained a reputation for expertise in restoration work. Arthur Dove, William's younger brother, who served as a Churchwarden at St Mary's for more than 24 years, was the last family member to head the firm. When he retired in 1970, the family's links were severed.

In addition to the fact that two family members served as Churchwardens, the firm's connections with St Mary's and Islington were equally long-standing. The firm's 19th century account books list numerous small commissions such as "altering pulpit door, easing pew doors, repairing belfry floor," etc. During the 1860s, a frenetic decade of church building throughout London's expanding suburbs, Dove built six churches in Islington alone. In 1901 the firm opened its workshop and yard in Cloudesley Place. Among the various facilities at their extensive yard was the Joiner's Shop, where, during World War I, the patriotic work force produced mahogany airplane propellers. As has been mentioned, it was thanks to Arthur Dove that anything of the 1754 St Mary's survived the bombing of World War II.

Reminiscing in 1955 on the firm's accomplishments, William Dove first listed several individual commissions, then concluded by stating that the company had built "churches galore." Dove also restored churches and cathedrals galore, including St Paul's, where the firm reinforced the piers supporting the dome in 1915. Interestingly, Dove Brothers restored two of the three spires that had inspired Launcelot Dowbiggin in his design for St

Mary's spire: St Leonard's, Shoreditch, after being struck by lightning in 1920, and St Mary-le-Bow on two occasions: first in 1931, in connection with rehanging the famous Bow Bells, secondly in 1956-61, when the steeple was rebuilt following war damage. As mentioned in "Spires that Inspire," William Dove personally supervised the latter work.

As evidenced at St Mary-le-Bow, the firm's reputation for quality restoration work stood in good stead when the nation turned to repairing and rebuilding its ancient monuments after the damage inflicted during World War II. At the time they were constructing the new St Mary's, Islington, Dove were concurrently rebuilding Temple Church (1948-1958), All Hallows-by-the-Tower (1948-1957), where Seely and Paget were architects for the reconstruction, St Lawrence, Jewry (1954-57), and St Clement Danes, reconsecrated in October 1958.

Proof of their good work at St Mary's is evident throughout the building, but one detail personifies their involvement in the most fitting way imaginable. Dove not only donated the church's new altar table, the family firm had a hand in its design as well. There, fluttering among various classical details and embellishments, fly a flock of four beautifully carved, gilded doves, wings and all.

Right church, right pew

When St Mary's first opened in 1754, pews were sold and proceeds were used to help fund the building of the church. In something of a reversion to this practice, one of the many ways used to garner funds for the 1950s rebuilding was to "sell" pews to various individuals and/or corporations. This time, however, purchasers, or sponsors, were given no proprietary rights to their pews. Instead, modestly penned credits were discreetly stenciled in white letters on center-aisle pew ends, recording the names of donors. Some of the letters have become faded after a half-century, but a visitor can still discern the great variety among the sponsors. Trustees of the Dame Alice Owen School sponsored one of the pews. One of the four clergy pews was sponsored by the Church Missionary Society, the others by three of London's most prominent churches of the Evangelical Anglican

tradition: All Souls Langham Place, Holy Trinity Brompton, and St Paul's Portman Square. In the case of another pew, there hangs another tale.

In 1886 a football club was founded at the Royal Arsenal in Woolwich, south of the Thames. In 1913, the team, known as the Woolwich Arsenal Football & Athletic Co., moved from southeast London to north Islington. Specifically, the team leased a six-acre sports ground from St John's College of Divinity in Highbury. The move was precipitated in large part by better transportation facilities available at the new site (the Gillespie Road tube station was nearby), but it was also something of an act of faith. Several losing seasons at the first location had discouraged ticket-paying fans, who were urgently needed to insure the team's survival. In the first program distributed at the new home, manager George Morrell noted that, while the team had failed to hold its place in the First Division, the situation was much more deserving of sympathetic commiseration than even the mildest condemnation. The team, he assured potential fans, was composed of good fellows, anxious and determined to succeed. Morrell concluded by stating that "with the loyal support of our followers, we will win through in the end, and ere long you will, I trust, see football at Highbury well worthy of the greatest city in the world." By 1919 the club was back in the First Division, and by 1925, thanks to further successful seasons, the team purchased the property it had been leasing. In 1932 the Gillespie Road station was renamed to honor the winning team: Arsenal.

What has this to do with St Mary's? Highbury is in Islington. The next time you go to church, take a look at the twelfth pew from the rear, on the right-hand side of the nave, if you are walking towards the chancel. Or, should you approach from the chancel, it's the fourth pew on the left. Whichever way it's approached, it's one of the best seats in the house, and it was donated by Arsenal. Perhaps it would be stretching a point to claim Arsenal as St Mary's own, but the team has certainly made Islington proud over the years. One wonders if this is another St Mary's first. How many football teams have sponsored pews in their parish church?

From curate to Canterbury: George Carey.

In 1962, a young man and his wife arrived in Islington. Having recently

graduated from the evangelical London College of Divinity, George Carey had been offered the position of curate at St Mary's. Under the vicarate of Peter Johnston, himself then newly arrived in Islington, St Mary's had continued its role as a leading Evangelical parish, but Johnston wanted to insure that pastoral care to its parishioners remained a priority. Consequently, one of Carey's assigned duties was to visit members of the congregation. He was required to make twenty-five calls a week, then, early each following week, had to report his efforts to Johnston. To the amazement of Islington's chief social officer, early in his work Carey inquired as to the needs of the handicapped and the elderly, with the aim of coordinating church and community efforts. No one had ever thought to do this before. Sunday school was another responsibility given to Carey, and with the help of parishioner Liz Salmon, he made it an important and thriving part of St Mary's mission.

Post-ordination training (which Carey and others of his ilk often irreverently referred to as "potty" training) was another requirement of young curates. Having heard that this training was not particularly effective, Carey asked the Bishop of London if he could instead pursue a master of theology degree at King's College. Receiving permission, he focused his studies on the Roman Catholic Church, which served him in good ambassadorial stead as he advanced through the ranks of the clergy.

During the time he was curate at St Mary's, Carey and his wife, Eileen, occupied the church cottage. Although he complained that the house was very damp, they reared "three very healthy children in it."

In 1962, the Careys left Islington, as George had accepted a position at Oak Hill Theological College, whose Principal was then none other than Maurice Wood. From there Carey continued his career as priest and educator. After serving as Principal of Trinity College, Bristol, he became bishop of the diocese of Bath and Wells, and–in 1991–the 103rd Archbishop of Canterbury, serving in that position until 2003.

In his recently published autobiography, Know the Truth, Carey recalls his Islington years with affection and gratitude. "St Mary's was–and continues to be–a leading London church," he declared. He remembers Peter

Johnston with particular affection, both for his wisdom and his wit. Regarding the latter, Johnston selected the hymns for the last St Mary's service at which Carey preached. Following the sermon, he arose to announce the last hymn: "Begone, Unbelief, our Saviour is near!"

Into the Twenty-first Century

Forty years after its rebuilding, St Mary's needed a new roof. The original presentation drawings by Seely and Paget clearly show that a pitched roof was intended from the beginning, but a more economical flat roof had been substituted. As so often happens, it was false economy, or a case of being "penny wise, pound foolish." As Graham Claydon, then vicar, stated in the February 3, 1994, issue of the Islington Gazette, a new roof would cost in the range of £100,000, and would involve the biggest fund-raising effort since the 1950s rebuilding. As it turned out, Claydon's estimate was less than half the ultimate cost, but the full amount was raised. Not only was it raised, at the same time St Mary's managed to donate funds amounting to a tenth of the cost–the Biblical tithe–to building projects in the Third World. On August 15, 1996, the new slate roof, designed by Julian Harrap, architect, was dedicated.

One of the few things the new church did not have provision for after the war was adequate and secure space for the parish registers. After all the care that had gone into their preservation during wartime, they had been relocated to a cupboard. According to letters preserved in the Islington Local History Centre, access was not easy. Apparently, anyone wishing to see the registers and other historical documents had to climb over several boxes to reach the cupboard, but they could do so only when Miss Johnson, who held the key, was available. The chief librarian of Islington Central Library, who found the situation deplorable, made an offer: Would the vestry allow the library to take the records, clean and preserve them, and keep them on permanent loan? Because many of the records were civic, rather than ecclesiastical, in nature, they would augment the library's holdings on a number of subjects, especially Islington's tax rolls. Eventually, these and other parish records were placed in the library. The Islington Local History Centre, currently in the Finsbury Library at 245 St John Street,

now holds the vestry minutes dating from 1662 to1900 and parish registers dating from 1557. There, under excellent care, they comprise the single-most valuable source of written records on the church.

This history of St Mary's, Islington, began with a quotation, and it seems fitting to end with one. In 2001, the Islington Society sponsored the publication of a book by Alec Forshaw, titled 20th-Century Buildings in Islington. Its entry on the rebuilt St Mary's is not only accurate, but even moving:

> *The rebuilding by Seely & Paget in 1955-56 was remarkable for its time, given the limited funds and rationing of building materials. ….the exterior is outwardly unadventurous, in brick and with safe Georgian proportions to the windows. It provides an excellent subservient setting to the baroque tower but gives little clue to the inside. Tall fluted pillars of grey marble with palm leaf capitals separate the nave and chancel, but the whole space is lofty, wide and magnificent. The clear glass in the windows frames lovely views of trees and sky. Julian Harrap replaced the cheap and failing flat roof in 1994, reinstating the original pitch, which improves the composition. The whole is beautifully floodlit at night, a beacon in the bend in the road and at the heart of Islington.*

Long may it be so!

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