

A brief history of St Mary's Church

The first church – St Mary's Chapel, 1826

The first church on this site was the privately owned St Mary's Chapel, which was built in 1826 on land given by the Earl of Egremont in the grounds of his residence East Lodge.

Local architect Amon Henry Wilds built it in the form of the Temple of Nemesis near Athens. He designed a similar building in New Road, which survives today as the Unitarian Church.



The first minister – The Revd Henry Venn Elliott



The Revd Henry Venn Elliott (1792–1865) was the first perpetual curate of St Mary's Chapel. He was nationally famous as a liberal Evangelical preacher, and under his leadership St Mary's became one of the most fashionable chapels in Brighton.

A tireless worker, Henry founded St Mary's Hall, a school in Brighton for the daughters of poor clergymen, along with its associated church, St Mark's. He also helped found Brighton College.

Henry's sister, Charlotte Elliott (1789–1871), was a poet and composed many hymns, including the international favourite *Just as I Am* (1835).

The fall of St Mary's Chapel, 1876

When Henry died in 1865, his son Julius inherited the chapel. A mountaineer as well as a vicar, he was sadly killed in a fall in the Swiss Alps in 1869. The chapel then passed to Henry's other surviving son, Charles, who worked in the colonial government in India. In 1875 he gifted the chapel to the Church of England and provided funds to convert it into a parish church.

Building work was underway in June 1876 when the north end of the chapel collapsed, revealing the shoddiness of the original construction. A completely new church was the only answer.



Architect of the new church – Sir William Emerson



Charles Elliott chose William Emerson, a young English architect he knew in India, to design the new church.

Emerson was trained in the Gothic Revival style and his first buildings in Mumbai were closely modelled on 13th-century French Gothic architecture. But in 1869 he visited the Taj Mahal and was overwhelmed by its beauty. From then on, he turned away from a purely Gothic style and strove instead to combine elements of the world's grand architectural traditions in his buildings.

Emerson was President of the Royal Institute of British Architects from 1899 to 1902 and was knighted at the end of his term. He is best remembered for designing the Victoria Memorial in Kolkata. St Mary's is his only surviving church in Britain and his only building to be listed Grade II*.

The new St Mary's Church, 1878



The new St Mary's Church was consecrated on 14 October 1878.

Emerson used a broadly Gothic style, but with significant Oriental and Classical features reflecting his passion for combining architectural styles.

His design was a modern, forward-looking one, with seating for some 900 people with minimal impediments to sight-lines and no chancel screen. The arches of the nave arcade are high and broad, and the nave itself is exceptionally wide and the crossing deep. The result has none of the heaviness of the early Gothic style in which Emerson had been schooled. He built an open, welcoming space that still works remarkably well today.

Building features

St Mary's exists today largely as it was built. It almost completely fills its site, which dictates its unusual north-south orientation. The chancel points north, rather than east, and what would normally be called the 'West Front' actually looks south to the sea.

The church is built on the traditional cruciform or cross plan, though the openness of Emerson's design disguises this. A curved baptistery gives a Byzantine or Romanesque feel to the whole.



The principal building materials are a local red brick with exterior dressings and trims in pink Corsehill sandstone from Dumfriesshire. This colouring echoes Mughal buildings in India, such as Delhi's famous Red Fort, that Emerson so admired.

The interior is of red and buff bricks, with Bath limestone piers and dressings. The nave has a handsome barrel vault roof in dark stained pine, with small oak hammer beams terminating in carved lion's-head finials. The crossing and chancel have exceptionally fine vaulting in red brick.

The windows

The windows are one of the finest features of St Mary's and provide an excellent survey of stained-glass manufacture from 1878 through to the Great War. Makers include George Luxford, Alfred Octavius Hemming, Mayer of Munich, Charles Kempe, and James Powell & Sons.

With the exception of the round Tree of Knowledge window, all the windows were originally set with leaded glass in tints of green. These were made by George Luxford of London and the surviving examples are aesthetic features in their own right. The patterning incorporates numeric symbols, such as pentagons for the five wounds of Christ and quatrefoils for the four Evangelists.



Gradually, the original tinted windows were replaced with the pictorial ones sponsored by members of the congregation in memory of departed family and friends. Most were added between 1880 and 1915.

Fittings and furnishings

St Mary's retains most of its original fittings. There have been additions over the decades, particularly when St Mary's absorbed the neighbouring parishes of St James's in 1948 and All Souls' in 1967.



Font, 1878

The alabaster font has a carved panel by Thomas Nicholls of Lambeth depicting children being brought to Jesus.

It is dedicated to the memory of the Revd Julius Marshall Elliott who was killed in a mountaineering accident in the Swiss Alps in 1869. The basin stands on a shaft of Swiss granite brought from the site of his death.

The oak canopy was added in 1927 in memory of Thomas Moppett, parish clerk, and Ada Crouch, Sunday School teacher.

Pulpit, 1878

The pulpit of French Caen limestone was designed by William Emerson and the panels modelled by Thomas Nicholls of Lambeth. It was the gift of Elizabeth Catherine Grant of 45, Upper Rock Gardens, in memory of her sister Frances who died in 1876.

Three large carved panels depict episodes in which Christ reveals his identity to unsuspecting companions: the *Woman at the Well*, the *Supper at Emmaus*, and *Doubting Thomas*.

The three smaller panels show the *Fall of Man* (a dead tree with a skull and axe), the *Tree of Knowledge* (Satan entwined about the trunk overlooked by an owl, the personification of Wisdom), and the *Tree of Life* (with a bird eating fruit).



Stone Reredos, 1893 & High Altar, 1929



The finely carved stone reredos depicts the resurrected Christ appearing before the Marys at the tomb. It was funded by the congregation and installed in 1893 in memory of Harriette, wife of the first incumbent of the new church, Rev. Arthur Thornhill Waugh.

The high altar of carved stone depicting the Adoration of the Magi was paid for by a bequest from Miss Ethel Cranmer. Ethel was the only child of George Cranmer, a merchant navy mate who died in Bombay in 1882. She lived

for many years in Brighton with her widowed mother Fanny.

Lectern, 1878

The brass eagle lectern was made by Thomas Potter & Sons of London. It was presented to St Mary's by Caroline Porker Franz in memory of her late husband Johann Christoph August Franz (1808–1870), a physician from Dresden who settled in London.

Corona Lights and Chancel Standards, 1878

The nine wrought-iron coronae, originally plumbed for gas lighting, were made by Hart, Son, Peard & Co., ecclesiastical metalworkers of London and Birmingham. When the lights were converted to electricity in 1922, they lost their attractive perimeter lights and the decorative chains that hung beneath. Hart's also made the two large brass chancel standards, old gas lights that were converted to candlesticks when the church was electrified. The altar rail of wrought iron and brass, with lion's-head finials, similarly came from Hart's.



Choir and Clergy Stalls, 1878

The choir and clergy stalls, of American walnut, were made by W.H. Lascelles & Co., of London. The choir stalls feature finely carved representations of angels, musicians, and singers beneath fish-scale canopies, while the clergy stalls or sedilia are carved at either end with the figure of a large, watchful owl.

The presence of owls, representing Wisdom, in the round window and on the pulpit as well suggests that sedilia were carved to order, presumably to William Emerson's design.

Pews, 1878

The pews are of pitch pine, stained a chestnut colour and varnished. They were made by George M. Hammer & Co., 'School and Church Furnishers', of 370, The Strand, London. Originally, the pews filled the nave, crossing, transepts, north and south aisles, and spaces behind the choir stalls. Many have been removed over the years so that only about half survive today and not all in their original place.

Organ, 1878

An organ by Henry Bevington & Sons of Soho, London, was installed in old St Mary's Chapel in 1855. This survived the chapel's collapse in 1876 and some pipes from it were incorporated in a new, larger instrument built by Bevington in time for the opening of the new church in 1878. In 1904 it was given a thorough overhaul and four new stops were installed; it was reopened at the end of the year by Sir Frederick Bridge, organist of Westminster Abbey.

Today it is regarded as a fine example of a Victorian organ and of Bevington's work in particular. The wooden pipes in the transept case are painted with scrolling foliage populated by birds, a visual echo of the songbirds in the foliated capitals of the pillars beneath the organ loft.



Chapel of Remembrance/Lady Chapel, 1924



The Chapel of Remembrance was created in 1924. It has a carved and painted wooden memorial tablet bearing the names of the men of St Mary's who died in the Great War and an altar with gilded riddel posts and hung with damask curtains. The altar was given by Eric Pope in memory of his two brothers, both war casualties.

In 1927 carved oak screens were erected along the north and west sides of the chapel. These were the work and gift of Maud Frances Drummond (1876–1966), carved in memory of her husband John Henry Roberts who died in 1925. The Victorian carved oak screen behind the altar was installed in 1980. It came from the redundant All Saints' Church in Lewes.

Outer Choir Vestry Screens, 1924

Screens and a door of carved oak were installed behind the choir beneath the organ loft and at the end of the north aisle to create an outer choir vestry. The other side of the choir was not enclosed until 1980.



St James's Chapel, 1949

The St James's Chapel and its memorials was installed in the north transept when nearby St James's Church was readied for demolition. It comprises a Great War Memorial and two brass plaques, including one to the memory of the Revd John Purchas, a controversial Anglo-Catholic Ritualist who was perpetual curate at St James's from 1866 until his death in 1872.

Stations of the Cross

The fourteen large Stations of the Cross were painted by Hove artist Harry Mileham (1873–1957) between 1918 and 1934 for the Church of St Thomas the Apostle in Davigdor Road. They were transferred to St Mary's when St Thomas's was declared redundant in 1993.



List of the Pictorial Windows

Note that the directions used here are liturgical ones, treating the chancel as if it points eastwards and the two aisles as north and south. The list begins in the sanctuary with the first pictorial window to the left of the altar, and then follows around the church in a clockwise direction.

Sanctuary

1886: Adoration of the Magi/Mary Magdalene anointing Jesus's feet, by Alfred O. Hemming & Co., Cavendish Square, London

1886: Crucifixion/Raising of Lazarus, by A.O. Hemming

1886: Resurrection/Charge to Peter, by A.O. Hemming

Sacred to the memory of Louisa Elliott 1877 (on Resurrection window)

Louisa Jane Elliott (née Dumbell), the first wife of Sir Charles Alfred Elliott, died in 1877 aged 34.

Rose Window

1878: Tree of Knowledge, by George William Luxford

This was the first pictorial window and was likely designed by William Emerson. It echoes a design seen on the pulpit of Satan coiled around the Tree of Knowledge with two owls, the personification of Wisdom, seated in the branches above. By the trunk is the Latin phrase: *a sapientiae* ('of wisdom'). The motifs around the roundel are passion flowers.

Sacristy lobby

1915: *Saint Wilfrid*, by James Powell & Sons & *Saint Oswald*, by James Powell & Sons

The windows were sponsored by Mrs Mary Pope in memory of her husband, Reginald Barrett Pope, and two of her sons, Cyril Montagu and Reginald Thomas Buckingham, who were both killed in the Great War. St Wilfrid was the founder of the first bishopric in Sussex; St Oswald of Northumbria is one of the patron saints of soldiers.

South Transept

1884: Blessed Virgin Mary, by A.O. Hemming

In memory of Richard Baird eldest son/of Richard and Agnes Baird Dawson 188[?]

Richard Baird Dawson, died in 1877, aged 2. His mother Agnes Baird Dawson was the niece of Alfred Octavius Hemming and may have provided his introduction to St Mary's.

South Aisle 1

1884: Marriage at Cana, by A.O. Hemming

The window is dedicated to Letitia Sophie Waugh who was the mother of Revd Arthur Thornhill Waugh, vicar of St Mary's from 1873 until 1894.

South Aisle 2

1885: Sermon on the Mount/Feeding of the five thousand, by A.O. Hemming

To the glory of God and in loving memory of Susannah Sarah Burmann/this window has been erected by many of her former pupils

Baptistery 1

1884: Jesus healing the blind man/Blind man at the pool of Siloam, by A.O. Hemming.

The window was dedicated by Lydia Augusta Trasenster to the memory of her brothers James Stuart and Emilius Augustus Tulk who died in 1881 and 1882 respectively.

Baptistery 2

c.1878: Presentation at the Temple, attributed on stylistic grounds to G.W. Luxford

In loving and grateful memory of Robert/Chalmers the offering of his grandchildren

Baptistery 3

1885: Christ blessing children, by A.O. Hemming

To the glory of God and in loving memory of/Eliza Prangley herself blessed of the Lord/this window is erected by those whom she/blessed and helped in his name 14 Sep 1884

North Aisle 1

1897: Lois and Eunice with Timothy/Priscilla and Aquila with Apollos, by James Powell & Sons

To the glory of God and in loving memory of William Aldwin Soames/Laura Sophia Soames and their daughter Laura Soames 1897

North Aisle 2

1883: Mary at the Sepulchre/Christ appears before Mary, by Burlison & Grylls

In memory of Emma, beloved wife of Edward Bell of this/Parish born December 26th 1800. Fell asleep December 6th 1880

North Aisle 3

1906: Crucifixion with St John and St Mary, by C.E. Kempe & Co.

Remember ye in the Lord/His servants Sarah,/Harriett & Lizzie Prangley/in loving recollection/of whom their sister/Annie Prangley dedicates/this window MCMVI.

North Transept, Top, 1 and 3

1989: The Tempest, by Anne Goodman

Created by Anne Goodman of Angmering using surviving fragments from the two lancets that had been blown out in the 1960s.

North Transept, Top, 2

1881: The Ascension, by Franz Mayer & Co., Munich

The window is dedicated to the memory of Elizabeth (c.1802–1879), widow of Charles Delmé-Radcliffe, Rector of Holwell in Bedfordshire. The windows to either side of it were similarly decorated to make a three-light whole in 1883, but were blown out in the 1960s.

North Transept, Below

1953: Beheading of St James/St James the Major/Calling of St James, by Messrs. Barton, Kinder & Alderson, Brighton, to the design of Francis Skeat.