

Overview of Section C

Section page

FULL OVERVIEW
REFERENCES

The present church of St. Paul's, Bow Common

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So what do we find within the Gates of Heaven?

As seen already in the various views of the church shown already, the building presents many aspects depending on the viewpoint. I share a frustration with Maguire's St. Paul's Church in Bow Common which I also have with the vast bulk of Michelangelo's St. Peter's basilica in Rome!



Though not easily confused, one of the glories of each of these buildings is its dome (or 'lantern' in our case). It is such a striking feature from any distance and makes one go 'wow' when revealed from within. But as you stand before either building and approach it from the west with the main doors shut, the nearer you get to the building the more the 'dome' seems to disappear completely! Even from the pavement in front of St. Paul's, Bow Common the lantern has almost no impact; similarly, Michelangelo's great dome seems to have disappeared when you look up from in front of the great rank of steps in front of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome!

This aerial view of the church shows why, because even though a 'central' altar is spoken of so often, in fact the lantern and the High Altar beneath are not truly central but off-set towards the west, and the effect on visibility of the lantern can be seen on the two views following and on the small scaled plan earlier on.

Actually, this always worked to my advantage when showing visitors the building who had never been inside it before. I always started from outside the west doors but, because the outside gives



Views of the Lantern from west & east of the church

so little away, all one sees is expanses of featureless brick with precious little to divert the eye and, apparently, little in the way of windows and so one imagines a dark, bleak, cavern within - how could it be otherwise? I have therefore kept visitors, singly or in groups, outside in front of the main doors for too long, just to lead them to a threshold of boredom! There is plenty to talk about in describing what first stood here and the earlier setting of rhubarb fields and then stinking factories when the first church was built on that spot (see later).

However, people can only take so much! To this point the main doors have been kept quite firmly closed so that nothing can be guessed of what lies within. Because nothing can be seen of the lantern, that increases the expectation of a gloomy, stark interior! And then I rumble the doors open and almost

without exception there is a sense of shock, an intake of breath and the one most common word (even uttered by the Duke of York on a visit to the church!), 'Wow!'

Certainly unintended, the building is extraordinarily 'theatrical' in the way in which it reveals itself. There is a sudden impact of revelation of this vast brick box as filled with light and space and sheer volume ('Tardis' is another word used often by first-timers!) when the main doors are rumbled back and all that endless prosaic brick gives way suddenly to a mystery of unexpected spaciousness and shifting patterns of light. Or, there is an even more 'theatrical' way in - via the church porch and then into the space of the building (the 'intended' way in), unfolding layer by layer in an extraordinary parallel/parable of the human journey from darkness to light - something which I began to perceive after many years there.



The papal gardens in Rome and the vicarage garden in Bow Common are the place to go to get a real impression of the extraordinary presence of the 'dome' atop each of these remarkable buildings! Alas, both views are denied to the general public, but I always made a point of taking those especially interested in the building itself into the vicarage garden to show them the very different view of the lantern which one has from there, with that great structure set much more towards ones point of view.

There was always a lot of clicking of cameras at this point and much admiration for the device and its relation to the rest of the building, seen so much more clearly from there.

This striking view here taken by Martin Charles before my time in the parish shows this to great effect. He should also be credited with the two other views on this page.

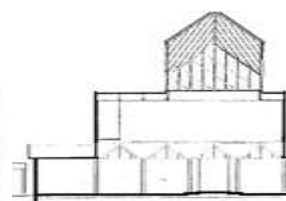
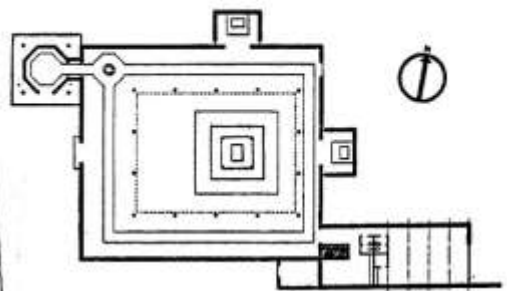
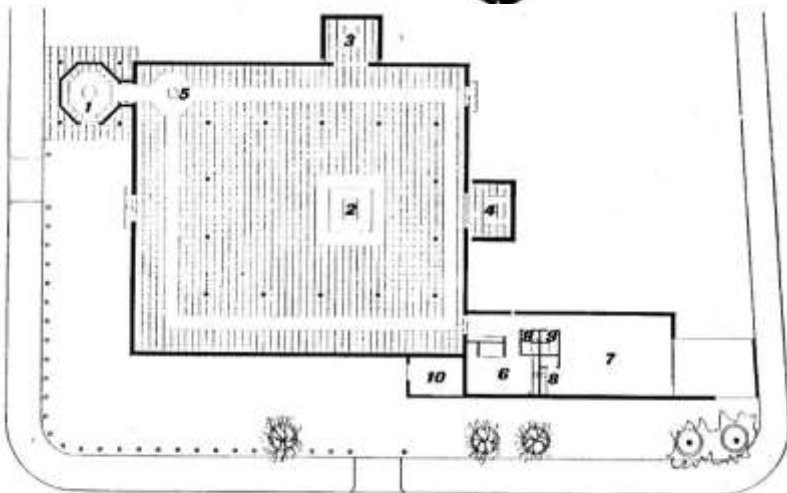
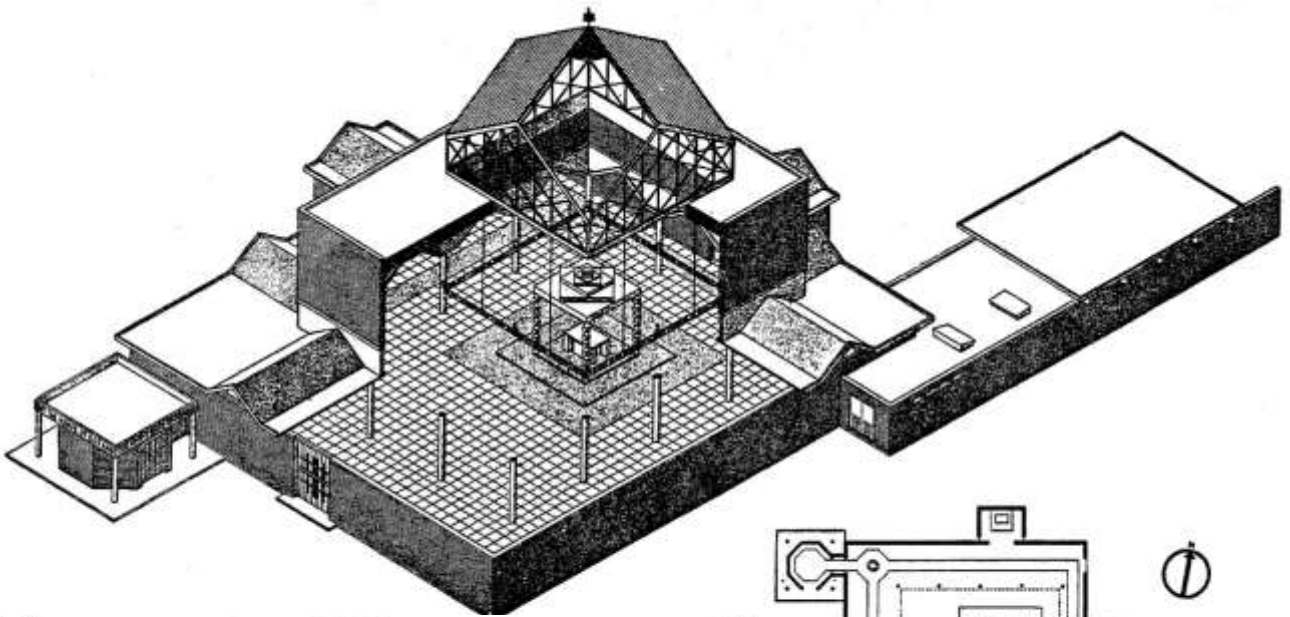
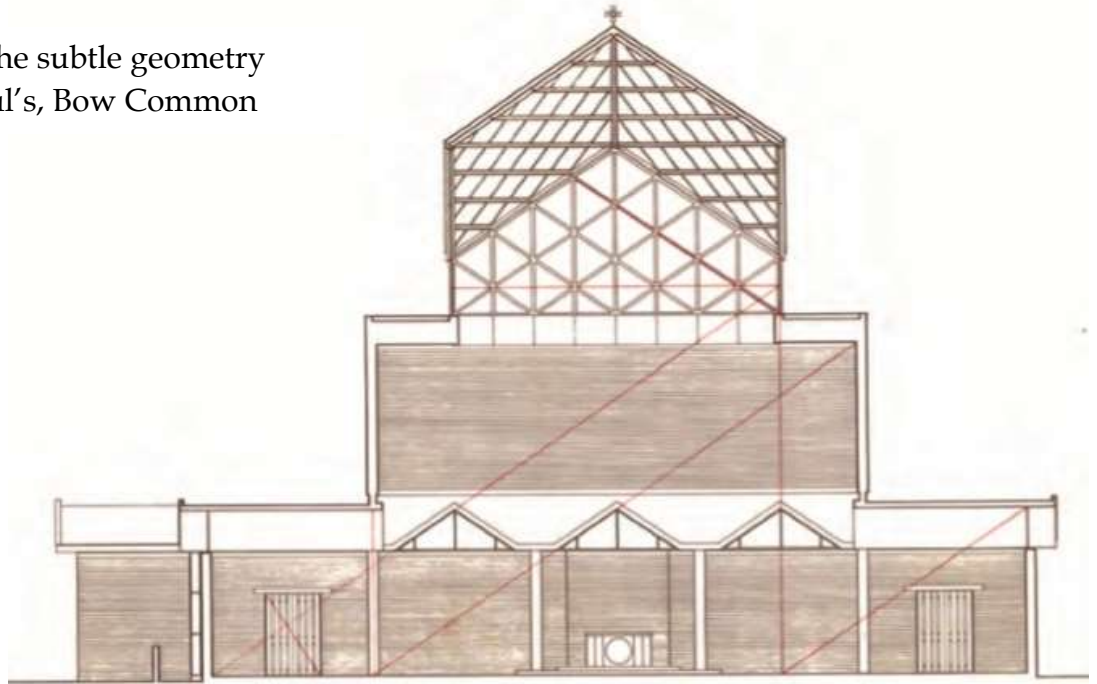
Both the folded-slab undulation of the lower roof line, unbroken on the south side (St. Paul's Way) and the literally eccentric placement of the lantern produces a great variety of external aspects to the building, early ones of which have been shown above and more recent coloured views below.



A building which, at first sight, might seem to give little reason for a second look, in fact, reveals a great deal of interest as one views it from different aspects, from the outside. And there can be few churches with such a striking landscape when seen from the air!
Some of these follow ...



Some of the subtle geometry
of St. Paul's, Bow Common



1. porch. 2. sanctuary.
3. lady chapel. 4. blessed sacrament chapel. 5. baptistery. 6. vestry. 7. meeting-room. 8. kitchen.
9. lavatories. 10. electrical sub-station.

40 20 0 10

Some broad features ...

The earliest 'guide' that I have found to the building is in 'Church Building' in 1962. In that article Bob Maguire opens with these words:

6 'The place of the assembly:

*A church is the place of the assembly of the people of God. It is a holy place consecrated, set apart, for this purpose. It is this characteristic which distinguishes a church from other places, rather than the things which are done there in themselves. These two linked ideas – **the place of the assembly and the Holy place** – are the basis of the design of St. Paul's. In what follows, we hope to show their influence on many parts of the design.*

The bounding wall.

The 12 ft. high brick wall bounding the church at ground level defines the place of the church. The wall is the most important element setting the place apart.

The aisle roofs are of "folded slab" construction having a saw-tooth profile, but the top of the wall remains level. Although quite evidently supporting the roofs the wall can be seen as a clear-cut separate element, containing the space of the church tautly. Because of this tautness we were able to break the continuity of the wall at the chapels without losing too much of its enclosing quality.

The West Doors.

The west doors give a good illustration of the way in which the kind of consideration of function which we have advocated can influence the detailed design of one small part of a building. The doors are intended for ceremonial entrance – for the bishop, for the bride at weddings, for processions. Normally they are kept closed. They therefore differ in size, in the way they are placed in the wall, in construction, and in manner of opening, from the doors of the porch. They are plain boarded doors without any knobs, push-plates or handles (since they are always to be opened from within) and they roll back on sliding tracks. When closed they form a continuation of the wall of the church: they are a piece of heavy boarded "wall" set in the brick wall, the same height as the brick wall and capable of being rolled back in the same plane as the wall. In contrast, the porch doors have glass between their boards, push-plates, and are pivoted; even when closed they invite entry.'

Gerald Adler, however, witnesses to my 'breaking' with Bob Maguire's convention!

²⁹ 'The church has three significant breaches of the perimeter wall. The central west door is reserved for ceremonial use, a distinction found in many parish churches and cathedrals, although the current incumbent, Duncan Ross, opens the wooden sliding door wide when he wants to welcome the outside world in, and 'show off' the surprising interior.'

In 1998 when we began to explore the wider potential of this remarkable building, it all began with the transfer of an exhibition of global textile art by local women, from the Victoria and Albert Museum to St. Paul's, Bow Common. Against all previous practice I had the great west doors opened wide in welcome, as well as to provide a startling impact from what was within, in the exhibition. One Saturday morning, unannounced and unrecognised because I had never met him before, Bob Maguire came to visit this exhibition, 'Shamiana' and subsequently made this comment:

²⁸ 'It could be said - many people do say - that Gresham, and his local church people, and St Paul's, took a major role in the renewal of our worship. So that was the focussed objective we were making for. It was a great, I mean big and important, objective. Looking at it now in the context of what has come about in recent years in this church, I see that its very focus prevented us from seeing the further possibilities of the thing that was built.

My own first introduction to these things was my visit to the exhibition Shamiana and also to meet Father Duncan Ross, of whom I had heard much but never met. The great west doors were wide open, and people of all sorts, many or perhaps most of whom had never been inside a church before, were going freely in and out.'

²⁸ *'Many, too, had no knowledge of Christianity; but the substance of the exhibition, the wide openness, the freedom of space and movement in the building, all combined to convey a strong message of welcome, reconciliation and community bridge-building.'*

I was greatly relieved when it was clear that he could see another potential in those enormous west doors, as being a sign of welcome and openness, as well as an intimate bounding layer for the liturgy and the People of God within.

Gerry Adler, in his excellent book on Maguire and Murray's partnership, says this:

²⁹ *'Rudolf Wittkower was an occasional lecturer at the AA, and his rediscovery of the sacred meaning of Renaissance geometry, explained in *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, 1949, seemed to Maguire as an idealistic student to be applicable to modern architecture. **Wittkower's painstaking exposition of the centralised church plans of Renaissance Italy and their symbolism impressed itself on the young Maguire.***

Maguire and Murray believed strongly in a kind of 'deep functionalism', in which close and accurate observation of rites and human movement (those unaffected by architectural form) would lead to rational and effective building forms. Maguire's student church project was developed by means of drawing coloured pencil arrows in different configurations on the plan, representing clergy and laity in procession, or taking communion, and developing these as a kind of choreography of the new, reformed liturgy. The 'new, reformed



liturgy' was just a means to an end, one which would lead to a well-planned and organically organised place of worship; in the end, though, it is not 'movement' as such that the architecture expresses.'

From whichever angle one views the building the two prominent features are the glazed lantern and the profile of the folded-slab aisle roof framing the lantern as seen from above & providing a 'wave-form' upon which the huge brick 'podium' for the lantern rides when seen from ground level.

Gerry Adler traces the origin of this lower-level roof profile:

²⁹ *'In this scheme the characteristic external feature of the executed church – the folded concrete slab forming the low roof at the periphery – is in evidence. This is a borrowing from his 4th year AA design project for a foundry (see image above). Indeed, the scheme's simple but bold tectonic expression – simpler and bolder in the executed church – owes a great deal to the rigorous expectations of an AA student in the early 1950s in matters structural and constructional.'*

General Principles ...

Gerry Adler helps us frame a context and 'bigger picture' framing the advent of this extraordinary building now appearing in the heat of the East End of London...

²⁹ *'The design of St Paul's, Bow Common, is a curiosity in late 1950s Britain. Some of the stylistic compromises in the scheme initially submitted, such as the traditional Latin cross of nave, apse and transepts, give the impression of a conformist church design of the 1950s, at least as regards its external form. In other respects, the executed design appear to belong in the orbit of 'the New Brutalism', amid the work of the angry young men and women of British architecture.*

Function by itself was insufficient for Maguire; he was interested in style, not in the sense of 'the (outmoded) styles' in the history of architecture, but rather in the sense of doing things with style, in a knowing and sophisticated manner. For him it meant continuing and developing the architectural aesthetic of the day.'

²⁹ *'In Peter Hammond's 'Towards a Church Architecture', a photograph of the floor pattern of Rudolf Schwarz's church of St Anthony's, Essen (1959) has a caption referring to 'the potentialities of the floor as a means of creating movement pattern ... like Maguire's analysis of movement inside a church, this presented urban design as a series of movements & unfolding views, more commonly found in old towns than in new ones.*

In contrast to the polite architecture normal for churches, St Paul, Bow Common, and the later church, St Joseph the Worker, Northolt (1966 – 70), have tough, industrial connotations ennobled into something of great spiritual significance. Their layouts resonate with the new approach to liturgy, emphasising the reality of the Eucharist and the shared participation of priest and people in worship, coupled with an aesthetic of simple, even banal building, connecting Maguire and Murray to contemporary churches by Rudolf Schwarz, and the younger Swiss architect Rainer Senn.

Although the commission for St Paul, Bow Common, was prestigious, it came with a client body constrained by a curtailed budget. Most of Maguire and Murray's clients had similarly limited means and no wish to conceal their position.

As Maguire said at the RIBA annual conference at Hull in 1976: " ...most of the projects which we have been engaged on are at the bottom end of the cost scale and the approach ['to serve life'] suits such work very well; and second because in common with an increasing number of architects and other people we feel some emotional difficulty with the idea of building at a high level of artistic pretention in a world where it is only too obvious that many people haven't either the food or shelter to keep themselves going. So we see our job as craft rather than as a fine art and the aim of most of what we do as the achievement of a high standard of ordinariness."

St Paul's Church, Bow Common, was not only the making of the architectural practice of Robert Maguire and Keith Murray, it was also the most famous and significant parish church to be built in Britain in the latter half of the twentieth century. It crystallised architectural and theological thinking about the form the church should assume in the post-war era. It was a highly symbolic project, the one which would bring the practice critical acclaim.'

First Impressions ...

Before considering features of the church in detail, here are two overall impressions of the building exterior and interior, from ¹²Nicholas Taylor in 1965 and ¹⁸Philip Gibbons in 1990:

Exterior

¹²*'The architecture of a liturgical movement church grows from its altar outwards; architects therefore tend to forget that the general public who pass by see only the outside, looking inwards. It is one of the outstanding merits of St Paul's, Bow Common that, unlike many of the otherwise excellent churches on the Continent, its exterior is resolved into a clear formal expression of its internal functions. The influence of the German architect Rudolf Schwarz is apparent in Maguire and Murray's general approach.*

Their detailing however is more characteristic of the younger 'brutalist' architects in this country: their glorification of 'natural' materials in particular. This devotion to nature is extraordinarily similar to that of the pre-Raphaelite painters 100 years ago: far from being truly 'as found', each surface texture is carefully intensified so as to be larger, truer, more honest than actual life. Aluminium is delicately ribbed, joints between bricks are endlessly raked, steel and concrete are shamelessly exposed.'

¹² *'This is a legitimate approach, and it is no doubt what sparked off Ian Nairn's comparison of St Paul's with Butterfield's multi-coloured brick church of All Saints', Margaret Street: 'It has an astonishingly similar feel - deliberately angular, done with passionate sincerity.'* There is a powerful and romantic analogy between architectural honesty and religious honesty. But is this appropriate for present-day Stepney?

Maguire and Murray have emphasized the 'particularity' of their design; they were convinced that 'it should grow out of the actual life of the real local Christian community' (their italics). But is rough brickwork the actual life of Stepney today? In all honesty . . . formica or bakelite might be nearer the truth. I have a deepening suspicion that, for all its power and beauty, the 'image' of St Paul's is a subtly romantic preconception of the 'Old East End', conforming more to that gnarled railway viaduct nearby than to the affluent, packaged, glossy-but-temporary environment of the new fiat-dwellers who will live next to it next year. Critics have made much of the way the electricity sub-station has been incorporated into the church, claiming it as showing a natural, informal relationship with modern industry; to me it seems formally clumsy and inappropriately self-conscious.

Lack of contact with the new East End is most emphatically betrayed when the Church is seen from the north-west: not only does a simple industrial lightning conductor throw off balance a whole wall of that beautifully crafted brickwork, but above the porch, an octagon under a square canopy (rather over-detailed in any case), a giant inscriptional frieze displays the same calculated irregularity as the tablets in the aisles of Coventry Cathedral by the same sculptor, Ralph Beyer. It announces portentously:

TRULY THIS IS NONE OTHER BUT THE HOUSE OF GOD - THIS IS THE GATE OF HEAVEN.

The lettering has revealingly been described as having 'a kick, like Victorian pub lettering'. Precisely - not modern coffee bar lettering. (This preference for the old-fashioned and rough can even be seen in the fatal preference of progressive vicars for Rockers instead of Mods.) All this could perhaps be justified as a protest against the surrounding community (the Early Christians versus an enemy world), but this is not what the architects have said they intended. Curiously, the contracting firm responsible for the superb brickwork was Bovis Ltd., whose principal activity is the erection of glossy multiple Stores for Marks and Spencer and Woolworth's.'

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¹⁸ *'The external features strike one by their severity and angularity: the high lantern rests on a box-like cube, surrounded by a complex of aisles, hall and parish house. The need for cleaning and repair is sadly obvious and the interior space comes as an astonishing surprise. The entrance under the inscription "This is the House of God..." in lettering by Ralph Beyer leads into the Font Area in the north aisle - a symbol that works, though if one were building today a deeper font with running water would be a fitting addition?*

The aisle surrounds the central space, built not only for processional use but as a zone of entry - a concept that might be of significance today when so many who come to visit churches have great hesitancy in joining the main congregation. The Altar under its ciborium commands the central space, and the corona which defines the sanctuary area helps focus attention on the space where ambo, altar and president's seat are positioned.

The judicious use of local materials - block and tackle of the font cover, the paving slabs and flint bricks - contrast well with the simple opulence of the venetian glass in the corona, the wood and silver processional cross, the ciborium itself and the splendid mosaics. It is an intriguing fact that photographs taken at the time when this building was most influential do not show the mosaics - an essential part of the architect's original intentions.'

Interior

¹² *Whatever one's psychological doubts about the outside, the interior of St Paul's is a masterpiece of disciplined liturgical space, in its rectangularity quite different from the free-flowing spaces usually associated with recent Continental churches (and attempted by English architects at their peril). In the square sanctuary beneath the lantern stands the altar, raised on two steps. The area is defined principally by the flood of natural light from above; there is also a steel corona with sconces for sixteen candles, which can be lit at festivals; the floor beneath is paved with white bricks; and above the altar itself there is a steel-framed ciborium (canopy) with a roof of translucent marble formed with strips of green serpentino and white Sicilian.*

All these features in unison are extremely successful in focusing attention on the heart of the liturgical action. There is, paradoxically, more difficulty in doing this in a centrally planned church, with its wide open spaces, than in the traditional basilica with its directional emphasis on the east end. There are grounds for criticism in detail: the corona seems to be hung too low, and its complex outline is reminiscent of revived Art Nouveau (or neo-Liberty, as the Italians call it); the ciborium is too closely tied to early Christian precedent (San Clemente), though the steel and marble go well together; Jessie Harrison's altar frontal emphasizes only the West and east sides of the Holy Table, for which an all-round pattern would perhaps have been more suitable. Particularly successful is the underside of the lantern, with its dark blue steel framework and green wood-wool panels.

The congregational space, although in fact quite small, has a sense of scale which is altogether unusual in recent English architecture. The central rectangle seats about 200 people. The surrounding aisles could seat 300 more. The capacity of 500 was specified in the War Damage repayments; the way that the architects have split up the space is realistic (given the small congregation in the parish at present) and also architecturally effective.

The folded slab roofs of the aisles lead easily into the central space without any division being felt (G. E. Street did the same thing in stone at All Saints, Clifton, in 1864--8). At the same time the aisles are marked out in white paving for their use in processions (a feature particularly asked for by the parish). The floor is other-wise of simple precast concrete flags, pink and white, broken only by heating grilles.

Close to the entrance is the octagonal font (a repetition in form of the octagonal porch); it has a satisfactory, if rather distant, relationship with the main altar. There are also two side altars, in chapels formed by projecting outwards two single bays of the aisles. The relationship of these to the central space is much less convincing; it has in any case been found that the congregation prefer to hold small services at the main altar, so it is possible that the chapels could have been omitted.

The serene enclosure of the 12-ft. bounding wall is damaged by the 'leakage' of space out of the main body of the church into these chapels. This is perhaps the one point at which a disciplined sense of priorities was lacking; it is the ruthless suppression of the irrelevant which is otherwise so striking at St Paul's – and until the completion of such buildings as the Leicester engineering laboratories and the Economist building in St James's made it so exceptional in recent English architecture.

There is also a rare unity between architecture and furnishing: Keith Murray worked as a designer of church furnishings before becoming Robert Maguire's partner. The prismatic glass light fittings, hanging from brackets above the apex of each arch, are equally successful whether lit or unlit. One of the advantages of so much bare brickwork is that works of art can be gradually added, keeping it as a background; the crucifix by William Figg high up on the south wall is a good beginning.'

¹² *The organ case of timber on the west wall is strong and simple and beneath it there is a special area of artificial lighting for those with weak sight (this avoids obliterating the careful direction of natural lighting towards the altar). In spite of the scarlet cushions and marble ciborium in the sanctuary, there is a lack of colour in the church generally; this will be radically altered when mosaics, depicting worshipping angels and designed Keith Murray have been installed in the triangular spandrel panels of the arcade (a special War Damage payment covers these and work is in progress).*

These mosaics will, if successful, concentrate attention more into the lower part of the building. At present the eye strays too often to the flat ceiling of acoustic tiles around the lantern; this, with its machine-made perforations, clashes with the substantial craftsmanship of the other materials. Another solecism is the fair-faced concrete of the aisle roots, which has weathered badly; it is surprising, given their Brutalist preferences elsewhere, that the architects did not specify board marking to give a mature texture.

Generally the church works well as a setting for the Mass, even though the congregation is still, even after five years, very small. The acoustic resonance of the building rather exaggerates the isolation within it of a small group of people, On the other hand, the space is exceedingly flexible. Maguire and Murray have managed an ingenious middle way between the usual alternatives of puny chairs or massive pews. They have designed elegant four-person seats, which can easily be moved as required. At a service these seats can be clustered closely round the sanctuary, sermons being preached informally from the altar steps.

Possibly the sanctuary is a little too broad; the seats tend to remain in the conventional, frontal position. The greatest achievement in the design of this church is the way in which flexibility and growth have been built into its system, while at every time of day or night, empty or full, the space around the altar has a real sense of holiness, an atmosphere which can be sensed but not described, and which is radically different from the tepid, sentimental comforts of most recent English churches. It is truly 'a place set apart'; even though it is in the midst of a rapidly changing, restless community, it forms a still centre of thought and feeling – with the strong enclosures of bare walling and paving which have always marked out sacred places.'

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¹⁸ *'The benches are movable and capable of seating 200, but smaller numbers feel at home and fully in contact with celebrant and ministers. The overall effect is of a space that draws the worshippers inwards, a place that helps participation and gives room for prayer. It suffers a little in what used to be the normal English greyness, and sunlight streaming through the lantern brings a great enhancement. The inclusion of two small chapels, one in the north wall and the other in the east provoke comment. The designers themselves stated that "The result is partially successful, but this is certainly one of the points over which we now feel we would try for some further clarification".*

The sacrament chapel in the east wall was placed there in accord with parish tradition. It answers in a particular way a problem that remains important in any Roman Catholic building, namely the place of reservation for the Blessed Sacrament. Though the idea is meritorious, the chapel intrudes too much into the central worship space and might have been better positioned away from an axial connection with the main altar.

The Lady Chapel in the north wall was intended as a weekday chapel, but in a space defined by the liturgical and theological principle of "one church, one altar," two smaller altars seem superfluous. The use of a weekday chapel in such a well organised space can be questioned (unless of course winter heating proves to be too costly) and the sacrament could be replaced on a pillar. These are minor comments reflecting attitudes that have evolved from the forward looking vision of places like Bow Common.'

Elements of the Church:

It was a firm and clear part of the design and 'theory' of the building that the large 12 foot high sliding wooden west doors were not the normative entrance to the church. The idea of an unbroken outer enclosing 'membrane' was an essential element and as we have already learned the west doors were seen as two large planes of sliding boarded wall. As mentioned above, the doors could be used for ceremonial purposes but otherwise the intended entrance to the church was through the octagonal church porch.

As I suggest later, this opens to us a real parable of progression on a journey from light to darkness and I fully embraced their intention in my years of ministry in the church. However, as already mentioned, from 1998 we found that Bob Maguire's principles of '**inclusive**' space for liturgy which is essentially relational, also embraced perfectly other and non-liturgical areas of a community's wider life which are also essentially relational.

It soon became clear that in these ways of using the building, those great doors could seem excluding and not inviting – a barrier to the otherwise open invitation which was being offered to the community. Again, as mentioned, this all began with the transfer of an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in central London to our unknown East End church and, indeed, hundreds of people attended over the months in which it was open. Knowing and respecting how intentional Maguire and Murray were in all that they did, I agonised long and hard over what my instinct was telling me, which was that the west doors should stand open a statement of 'unconditional welcome' to all who passed by.

In the event I think that instinct was right and it was a great relief to receive affirmation of this from Bob Maguire who, as we have heard, visited the exhibition and saw this how this worked for himself! Even so, at first it gave me pangs of concern that I may have 'misused' both the building and the way in which it should be entered – albeit that this was not for liturgical use. My early years at the church were quite strictly 'constrained' by the various traditions which had been established in the previous decades since the church had been built! However, as time went on, it was especially rewarding to witness the wonder of those who had been there a long time, at the flexibility and undiscovered potential of their church and, indeed, for us all to journey together in unknown and untried directions!

However, in normal liturgical usage the Porch is the entrance way and leads us on to a journey of discovery of a remarkable place and a remarkable space!



The Church Porch:

In 1962 Bob Maguire wrote:

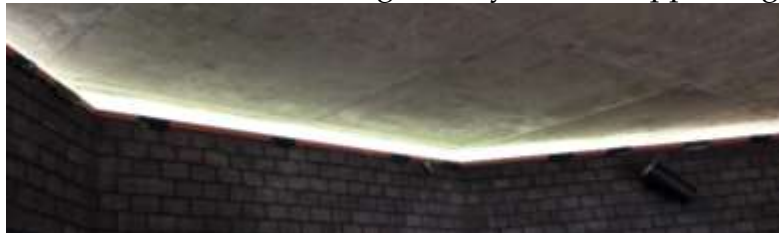
⁶ *'The entrance:*

We believe that the entrance to a church is important to its character as a set-apart place. Traditionally the narthex makes a place of transition between the world outside and the church.

The porch at St. Paul's is intended to fulfil a similar function. There was a problem here in that the porch had also to meet the practical need of a draught-lobby, which means having doors at both ends. A door on the "outside" needs something extra if it is to function effectively on a symbolic level as a main entrance, and this is the main raison d'etre of such devices as the classical portico and the Gothic open south porch. At St. Paul's we combined the ideas of the porch and of the narthex in a deliberately mannerist way. The roof on columns forms a portico, an outward-looking entrance place. Under this, and detached from it, stands the octagon of the narthex, an enclosed space. From here one passes through a short "tunnel" which pierces the bounding wall of the church.'

There are many small surprises as one explores St. Paul's, Bow Common! The church porch provides the first of these. With a square roof, accentuated by lintels which indicate a box-like shape and 4 supporting pillars (the one to the right of the entrance doors cleverly also being a downpipe to drain the square roof!), the 'sense' one has is of entering a cubic structure. But once through the porch doors one finds oneself in a very clear octagonal structure which, to some, is a surprise, as is the transition from the noise and traffic of Burdett Rd., into a still and even slightly mysterious place, even before the main interior has yet been seen.

The unrelenting brick is still present and surrounds the visitor but there is a small but remarkable feature as the brick walls give way at their upper edges to a continuous glazed strip all around.



The roof truly seems to float above the brick walls! I have shown countless groups of primary school children around the church and have truly caused them to wonder about this remarkable sight of a heavy floating roof! Most have

known that I was a physicist before I was ordained and I have let them into my great secret that this was Fr. Duncan's anti-gravity machine! The clever reality, of course, is that the 4 external support pillars are not at all visible from within the porch and even very intelligent adults who hadn't noticed them on the way in has had a furrowed brow, wondering however that roof can be supported – certainly not on a narrow strip of glazing!

I began the first six years of my ministry in the neighbouring parish of St. Dunstan's, Stepney, the ancient 'Mother church' of the East End, founded in Saxon times. I only once looked inside this church in all those years and until I did I had assumed that the porch was, in fact, a baptistery! There seemed to me to be something of an echo of the great external baptisteries of Florence, Pisa or Parma, but here connected by a narrow neck of brick. Of course it isn't – yet once you are inside the porch, to my mind there is a strong presage of the first object that you



next encounter as you leave the porch and enter the church – which is the font. Alas, the growing amount of efflorescence at the lower level inside the porch walls has increased as the drainage system has failed, and also because the porch was added after the main church's damp course had been set and sits mostly above that (or so I have been told by a number of builders!).



The layout of flooring in the porch is exactly that which surrounds the font just a few steps away and in the centre of the porch floor is an enigmatic **red octagonal shape** – the colour very likely being the ‘bull’s blood’ tone of the porch lettering, but now faded and worn after over 50 years of footfall. The octagon in the floor has exactly the same footprint and dimensions as does the font – an octagon 50 cm along each edge - and seems to ‘prepare’ one for what is to come as one progresses into the church and that same pattern of flooring re-appears but this time with the font standing in that octagonal space. See later image also.

Before leaving the church porch and moving into the church it is worth making mention of the inscription on three sides of the porch with which this whole description began. As mentioned, this is a quote from the Book Genesis in the Old Testament and the resonances of those words have also been described. Mention has already been made of Ralph Beyer whose work this is.

Porch Lettering:

There is nothing in the surviving sparse church archive about Ralph Beyer’s commission for the porch lettering, and very little that I have found in the literature. Of course, as seen earlier, it was Ralph Beyer’s association with Keith Murray in their work at St. Katherine’s Foundation which carried through to St. Paul’s, Bow Common. One reference of 1997 made this comment:

²¹ *‘The one playful gesture was Beyer’s lettering around the projecting porch: ‘TRULY THIS IS NONE OTHER BUT THE HOUSE OF GOD. THIS IS THE GATE OF HEAVEN.’ Banham and Nicholas Taylor felt that Beyer’s work belonged to an older tradition, while it caused Andrew Saint to place the building within ‘the compromise of styles worked out by Sir Basil Spence for his churches and cathedral at Coventry.’ But in Maguire and Murray’s work it is significant that such rare mannerist touches are reserved for details which contradict but do not overwhelm the classically-inspired main body of the composition.’*

In 1998 when the church began to be used for a wider use than its primary liturgical function I made the first attempt at having the lettering renewed. After 40 years it was much worn and, as seen below, looked very shabby indeed. I have seen two articles about urban decay which showed



the neighbouring tower block of Elmslie Point with the shabby porch lettering in the forefront and the porch caught on a bad day with a lot of weeds sprouting in front! I was much in touch with Keith Murray at that time and asked him to

propose a matching modern colour for the lettering to be repainted. Keith was a perfectionist and in consultation with Bob Maguire they agreed on a colour. He even sent me a sample of the colour but then was not satisfied with the manufacturers’ estimates of how long such a paint would last!



He was also (rightly) concerned that the flaking paint should be removed in a very careful manner which did not damage the surface which then had to be repainted. Striving for such perfection, Keith



then left London and moved to Dorset and I never heard any more. Sadly, he died in 2005 at the age of 76. By the time the church approached the 50th Anniversary with all the celebrations planned, the porch lettering was in even worse state.



With advice from Bob Maguire and our excellent Church Architect, John Allan of Avanti, the work was finally done and the transformation was quite astonishing, as the before and after views show! The skilled craftsman (with the unforgettable name of 'Brian the Brush') who worked on this, fully understood the job to be done. There has been discussion earlier of what has been called 'New Brutalism' and St. Paul's, Bow Common not strictly being a pure brutalist building. Nevertheless, the importance of the materials used has been paramount and a feature of cast concrete, for instance, can be the presence of tiny air bubbles on the surface. These speak very much of the 'materiality,' if I could express it that way, of the material used & a conscious 'raw' (brutalist) feature of it.



I was impressed by the sensitivity of this restoration which did not attempt to disguise the 'concreteness' of the concrete lettering but somehow to 'celebrate' it. The detail of the paint work shown here demonstrates this, that the 'bubbles' left in the raw concrete face of the lettering were not filled in but left to show the essential materiality of the concrete. Such tiny details are barely noticeable but show a real understanding of and respect for Beyer's original intention and, I was told, had been observed carefully in the decayed painting and replicated by Brian the Brush.

I felt a huge sense of responsibility for this, the most visible (even if small) restoration of what had been an original feature of the church. I had total trust in the judgement and eye of our church architect of the time, John Allan of Avanti Architects, and in the skill and sensitivity of Brian the Brush but felt personally responsible. The 50th Anniversary celebrations went stunningly well and, unexpectedly, I received a letter some weeks later which gave me great assurance on this restoration! It came from Ralph Beyer's widow who had been invited to the celebration.



Hilary Beyer married Ralph in December 1960 after the lettering had been completed but held this work in high regard. It was a privilege to welcome her and her two daughters and son-in-law to the church. She, too, was delighted to be there and wrote to me very honestly:

'I was apprehensive of Ralph's letters being restored but I should not have worried. I think you and the restorers have done a magnificent job and with Bob's help have chosen the right colour, so we were greeted with the words when we got out of the bus. I wish you continued flourishing and feel grateful that the church – which was such an important innovative building – is in such enthusiastic hands.'

What a relief it was to read those words!

There has been some ambivalence in critiques of the porch lettering: Thus, Elain Harwood:

²⁴ *'The one playful gesture at St Pauls was Beyer's lettering about the projecting porch: TRULY THIS IS NONE OTHER BUT THE HOUSE OF GOD. THIS IS THE GATE OF HEAVEN. Banham and Nicholas Taylor felt that Beyer's work belonged to an older tradition, while it caused Andrew Saint to place the building within 'the compromise of styles worked out by Sir Basil Spence for his churches and cathedral at Coventry.'* But in Maguire and Murray's work it is significant that such rare mannerist touches are reserved for details which contradict but do not overwhelm the classically-inspired main body of the composition.'

She also refers back to Beyer's work at St. Katherine's Foundation & forward to Coventry Cathedral:

²⁴ *'The original design (for the chapel at St. Katherine's) won in competition, was by Keith Murray and his silversmith brother (not so! Michael Murray (silversmith) was not related to Keith Murray!): Robert Maguire helped them draw up the scheme, and admits to being inspired by Soane. Most dramatic is the wrought iron construction set over the altar carrying six candles and a hanging pyx. This skeletal frame was originally partially covered by fabric, making a more solid corona, but this was removed at some time between 1967 and 1974. There were to be no candles on the altar itself. It was, however, carved with a long inscription by Ralph Beyer, the son of a distinguished authority on the incised lettering and symbols found in the catacombs at Rome, Professor Oskar Beyer. Henry Cooper, Master of the Foundation, claimed proudly that this was 'perhaps the first free-standing altar in modern times'. It combines many liturgical themes: it is centrally placed, its decoration comes from the earliest Christian sources & the employment of a Jewish sculptor embodies ecumenism. Beyer was to use the same symbols at Coventry, where he was introduced to Spence by Sir Nikolaus Pevsner the next year.'*

It is interesting to note resonances here with what was to come in Bow Common – an iron suspended corona bearing candles but no candles on the altar beneath.

Donald Williamson had slight reservation:

²⁰ *'One small criticism is that although lettering created by Ralph Beyer for the text at the entrance is arresting, it is at best disjointed compared with the communication breakthrough he achieved soon after at Coventry.'*

Tanya Harrod comments:

²⁵ *'Ralph Beyer was the only artist craftsman to be given a commission. At Coventry he carved in stone but at Bow he used humbler materials. The sight of Beyer's dramatic inscription THIS IS THE GATE OF HEAVEN, 'shutter-cast in concrete over Murray and Maguire's bleakly functional porch made manifest the power of 'celebrating the ordinary.''*

Gerald Adler:

²⁹ *'... powerful geometric forms. That confident brickwork. The high lantern. And the words carved into its facades by Ralph Beyer - necessary, perhaps, for the Basil Clarkes of the world - proclaiming 'This is None Other than the House of God', and - just in case I might have mistaken the church for a cockney outpost of Basil Spence's Kensington Barracks, 'This is the Gate of Heaven' above the entrance.*

When, as a sixteen year old, I finally passed through this Heavenly Gate, I was taken aback. St Paul's was not the site of a Damascene conversion (on the road to Limehouse), but it was a building that enabled me to connect Modern architecture with what had gone long before it. The great central space was one I linked with the interior of Hawksmoor's St Mary Woolnoth. Perhaps it was perverse to compare Maguire and Murray with the English Baroque, yet St Paul's has remained one of my favourite of all city churches ever since.'

And, way back in 1965, Nicholas Taylor:

¹² *'.. above the porch, an octagon under a square canopy (rather over-detailed in any case), a giant inscriptional frieze displays the same calculated irregularity as the tablets in the aisles of Coventry Cathedral by the same sculptor, Ralph Beyer. It announces portentously: TRULY THIS IS NONE OTHER BUT THE HOUSE OF GOD - THIS IS THE GATE OF HEAVEN. The lettering has revealingly been described as having 'a kick, like Victorian pub lettering'. Precisely -- not modern coffee bar lettering. (This preference for the old-fashioned and rough can even be seen in the fatal preference of progressive vicars for Rockers instead of Mods.) All this could perhaps be justified as a protest against the surrounding community (the Early Christians versus an enemy world), but this is not what the architects have said they intended.'*

A near miss - the church and the aftermath of September 11th 2001

The church porch became the site of potential disaster in 2001 when all could have been lost. After the terrifying attacks on the Twin Towers and elsewhere in the USA on '9/11' (11th September 2001) the world was reeling in shock. In a community such as ours with a majority Muslim population, tensions were understandably high. The community stood together, but a couple of weeks after September 11th, suddenly the church found itself on the front line of these tensions, though this is still quite unknown to most people, even now.

There was furious knocking early one evening at the vicarage door, with a passer-by urging me to go around to the front of the church where, he said, the church was on fire! I rushed around to the front of the church and, indeed, amid billowing smoke, fire engines were in attendance, hosing down both the porch doors and the main west doors of the church. The remnants of petrol bombs were still present and it was clear that the church had suffered an arson attack. A witness claimed he had seen some Muslim boys shouting out the praises of Osama Bin Laden and then throwing petrol bombs at both church doors - I think the only such attack in



London. It was vital not to raise tensions even further and so I kept a very low profile on this and there were no press reports or 'leakage' into the already tense neighbourhood. It is no exaggeration to say that was one of the most stressful points of my incumbency!

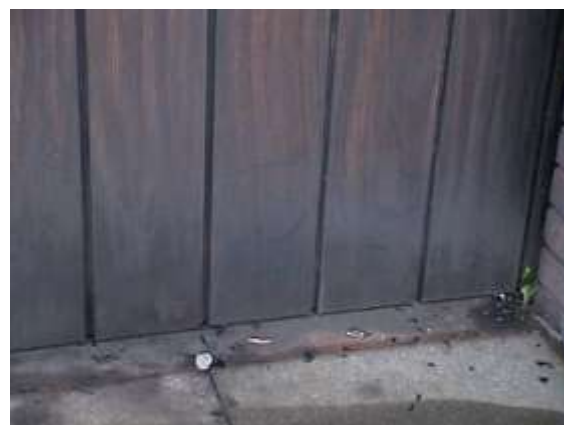


Fortunately, to the casual observer already dark oak does not show much effect of having been burned. Even church members passed by and did not notice (see accompanying images)! The main large west doors were not damaged but the porch doors were charred and cost over £3000 to repair.

The wonderful congregation, mostly of local people whom I feared might now show a negative reaction against our Muslim neighbours, truly astonished me. The united feeling was that it was now even more important that the community should hold together. I stressed that the vast majority of our Muslim neighbours were people

of peace and people of faith. My personal Muslim fiends were horrified and vowed that if they found the boys who had done this they would bring them to my door to show contrition.

The congregation's response was not outrage and vengeance but, rather that they wanted to understand Islam better as well as our mostly Bengali Muslim neighbours. I then took 40 people on a visit to the East London Mosque, an Understanding Islam course was supported and Sylheti classes organised in the church hall (Sylheti is the most familiar dialect used by our Bangladeshi population). Their message was that, as Christians, we recognise our Muslim population as our close neighbours in faith. Just as there are those who have brought shame on Christianity by violence and a perversion of their faith, so there are Muslims who are capable of doing the same. I was immensely proud of our congregation! But it was a narrow scrape!



This is all so long ago now that it is probably safe to complete the story which was never fully told at the time, except to my Bishop. I was sitting at the bus stop on St. Paul's Way just opposite the church some months later and two Bangladeshi lads came up to speak with me. They made it clear that they were friends of the petrol-bombers and that *I* had been the intended target and *not* the church building! They declared that 'innocent Muslims had died (in 9/11 I guess) and therefore innocent Christians *had* to die.'

The petrol bombers had thought that I lived in the church, hence the attack on what they thought were my 'front doors'. To put it lightly, this was a most unnerving experience for me! And, realising that they were actually doing something very risky in front of witnesses, in threatening my life, they both fled shouting, 'Next time, right?!' The irony struck me at the time that actually we were of like colour and like origin - Calcutta (where I was born) was part of the old East Bengal and so close to Bangladesh - but these lads had gravely misunderstood both their own religion & mine. We probably *shared* far more in our experience of living as non-white people in this society than separated us. Although the congregation or community did not learn of this personal threat to my life, nevertheless what this event did, in the bigger picture, was to bring to prominence for my congregation the urgency of cohesion and greater understanding in the face of extremists of every kind. In all the community use of the church since 1998 and in all our community partnership the church has been in open solidarity with our Muslim friends and neighbours and all this act of violence achieved was to strengthen that solidarity. Had this incident taken place in the middle of the night it could have been very serious indeed but, thankfully, was spotted and the fire services attended promptly. Thus, St. Paul's Bow Common survived for this account to be written today!

The Font

In 1962, Bob Maguire notes:

⁶ *'The font: The font is the first thing encountered on coming into the church; it confronts people coming to Church. Its form is related to that of the porch.*

It is large and is kept full of water - the heavy slate cover is raised when the Church meets for the Eucharist - and as one comes in the light in the central space of the church is reflected in the water. These things are brought together to bring to mind the baptism by which members are incorporated into the Church and the relationship between baptism and the Eucharist.'

In 2002 he also said:

²⁶ *'The font was just inside the door. This is a traditional position and neither we nor the parish had re-thought it, as*



we did in our very next church. But we had to re-think the form of the font. We came to the conclusion that the real symbol, in baptism, is the water itself. So our fonts have always been straightforward containers for water - a lot of it.



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At Bow Common the bowl is a 19-gallon standard Doulton's stone-ware 'copper' cast into a block of concrete; when the slate slab is raised by a (5 cwt) chain-hoist bought from a nearby docklands firm, the broad surface of the water reflects the light from the lantern, as you enter.

The cover is raised every Sunday morning, and the font kept full.'

On entering the church today the font is certainly as described in 1962 and later – a concrete octagonal shape 50 cm across each face and 90 cm high. However, in the images shown here, a fairly prominent feature described above appears to be missing!

Where is the huge slate font lid and the lifting gear?



In 2004 it had been discovered that the whole of the considerable area of the high level internal ceiling acoustic tiling contained asbestos, just before a major repair programme was embarked upon for a number of building problems, including a complete renewal of the external high level flat roof. These then had to be replaced urgently and, thankfully, funds were raised and works were carried out in 2005 (more of this later). Below is a view of the church at that time, filled with scaffolding.

The roof leaks of four decades were now cured and the building has been watertight at high level ever since. However, right in the middle of the works, on a random basis two Tower Hamlets Anglican churches were selected to have a spot check by the Health and Safety Executive! One of them was St. Paul's, Bow Common! It felt

about the last thing we needed with the church filled with scaffolding and a great deal of building equipment and high level access in evidence. The very efficient and excellent lady who carried out the inspection satisfied herself on every count, including giving a pass to our use of glowing charcoal for incense, the likes of which she had never seen before! All was well until she came to **the font!!**



She was rightly concerned that the huge weight of the Welsh slate font cover was hauled up and down on an industrial hoist which



had never had an engineering check since it was installed in 1960! It was a very fair observation and slightly alarming as I was the one person who was most at peril every time it was raised on a daily basis and at baptisms!

A formal order was given to have a thorough engineering test made on the whole arrangement with the font scaffolded up to the level of the roof above it, for such tests to be carried out every 2 or 3 years and for the risk to be covered with an increase on our annual insurance! Much gloom followed.

During my years at the church and subsequently, the church had always paid its way but with little in the way of surplus. It was simply something we could not afford to do as yet but the prospect of the font being decommissioned was an unhappy one.

The inspector readily agreed that we could adopt a Plan B, which would be to remove the font lid and the hoist and support chains. In 2015, once again the church is engaged in costly and major roof and drainage works (all donations gratefully received!) but hopefully one day the font cover will be reinstated and the drama of raising the lid will once again be marvelled at! Views of the font before this happened are shown here.



In the views here, the font is shown before and after the slate lid was removed. The hoist (shown left) was made locally when the London docks were still very much in business and industrial items such as these were manufactured nearby.

The plate still remains bolted into the roof above the font but the heavy slate font lid is now laid aside. The green bag contained the hoisting mechanism and is in storage, ready for the day when the lid will rise again!

As an interesting post-script. It was only in my final years at Bow Common that I learned of an

early intention of Maguire and Murray to decorate the underside of the great Welsh slate font cover! Learn more in the section on Charles Lutyens and the mosaics!

In 1995, Maguire wrote this about the font and his rationale for it:

¹⁹ *'Thinking back to 1957, there was a real problem with the designing of ritual objects for churches, which was that they were expected to carry a load of popular symbolism. I say 'popular' because I think that is what it was, but it had become enshrined in all the literature – official and advisory, art criticism, guide books and so on – so that a font, for example, was seen not only as an elaborate arty-crafty object, but to be the bearer of so – called symbolic art – John the Baptists, fishes, wavy patterns and the like.*

There was a problem. These are an integral part of the developed iconography of the Christian Church. People said, you cannot just throw them out. The problem was what had happened to them. Let me illustrate this, at some severe risk of over – simplification, by what has happened to the popular perception of angels. Here we have a mosaic from San Vitale at Ravenna, of the three angelic figures who visited Abraham.'





19' Centuries later, a very different and without doubt popular perception, from Bavaria, of angelic character. And here a late twentieth-century example from a Christmas card, again without any doubt the popular perception.

So what do you do? You could start your own re-education programme, as Eric Gill did. And in fact, with angels we did start something like that later at Bow Common, with Charles Lutyens' mosaics which represent the heavenly host joining with the congregation in praise of God. But, as designers, with something like a font we felt we should try to think it out anew, and so we applied the same procedure of observation as to the church generally.

Fonts are there for baptism, and their utilitarian function is to hold water. For a large part of its history the Christian Church built separate, special buildings for baptism. It was that important. The fonts are of two main types. The early ones were designed for total immersion and many are cruciform and sunken, with steps down into them, and a lot of water. The symbolism is totally aligned with the liturgical action – you went down to die a death to the old self, to rise from the water reborn. Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection are vividly recalled. This font, at Kélibia in Tunisia, is such a font – a cross, evolving into, or from, a water pool shape.

The rather later fonts are great water-containers, and it seemed to us significant that the baptisteries are most often circular or octagonal or some other regular polygon approximating to a circle, and centred on the font, which is usually of similar plan-shape to the building.

With the abandonment of total immersion the cross symbolism declines and the water is emphasized; Jesus' own baptism in the waters of the Jordan becomes the model. So when we look at baptism now, everything points to the water itself being the symbol to be emphasized, and the font is to be designed as an expressive context for water so that means first not just a teacupful, but a lot.

When one looks at water – containers, one is struck by the frequency with which they are circular or near – circular. Ponds, pools, bowls, puddles, fountains turn out to be round with remarkable regularity. The heraldic symbol for water is a roundel, with those wavy blue and white stripes in it. This grand little triumphal arch at Baeza, standing inexplicably in wellie – boots in water, has chosen a quatrefoil – four half-circles rather like the Kelibia font – for its pool. So we decided that our rather minimalist font would be a lot of water in a round, quite earthy container.'

¹⁹ *We discovered Doultons made a beautiful industrial stoneware hemisphere with a plug-hole, to hold the curious quantity of 19 gallons (which turns out to be a firkin) and we put this into a cylinder of concrete, or sometimes brick. They are kept full of water, and at Sunday services the lid is taken off so that as you come into the church, the light beyond is reflected in the wide surface. These fonts are much liked by the congregations that have them. But there is a question. Water is also fun stuff, ask any child. Architects of the past knew how to make fun with it. Beyond the serene surface of the lower fountain bowl at Caprarola, the water staircase bubbles and sparkles. Parapets at Villa Lante, all manner of high-jinks at Villa d'Este, use water in a way which brings it to life.*

The phrases 'water of life', 'life-giving water', and others, occur throughout the New Testament, symbolic of the new life of the Spirit. So should the font, or the baptistery, be a more dynamic affair? Some have now tried this, and the results so far have merely looked rather vulgar. So is it that it is inappropriate, and if so, why? Or is it that I am still, in spite of all I have said this evening, inhibited by those churchy admonitions concerning 'decency' and 'the fitting' – in other words, still clinging somewhere to Mr. Richards' dignity and repose?'

As in every feature of the church described in these pages, the various architectural elements presented here have an essential, practical and primary function and are not just 'nice' pieces of design. The font is above all the place of Christian initiation and is designed to be the first object that one encounters on entering the church, as the Sacrament of Baptism is the first act that a Christian encounters on entering the Christian faith. These images below bear testimony to this primary function:



The Concentric Bounding 'Layers' of the Church

In my personal reflection on how the building 'works' I think very much of a journey from 'darkness to light' as one moves from outside on the street (where the light *seems* to be) to the very heart of the building where the 'Holy of Holies' stands - the heart of what one truly encounters within the 'Gates of Heaven' and where the Real Light is found, in comparison with which 'earthly light' is mere darkness. There are three concentric 'zones' which one negotiates on entering the church on a progressive journey from 'darkness' to the 'Place of Light,' each zone 'accessed' through an embracing boundary - a bounding 'membrane'- (or 'plane' as Maguire says) of enclosure. And very deliberately, as one progresses towards the light, each 'membrane' becomes more and more porous and opens to us the 'Place of Light' at the heart of the building. We are invited and drawn in towards the Light.

Some pages back, as the 'Broad Features' were identified, the first of these 'membranes' was described - the 12 ft. high expanse of enigmatic brick walls, bounding and embracing all that lies within. They give nothing away unless you take the trouble to stop and to look within - to take even a few steps inside the Gate of Heaven. And if you start to do this, via the normative way-in, through the church porch, you immediately find yourself at the font and beyond it you can see the 'Place of Light' at the heart of the building, though there is yet a journey to go on to get to that place, through two more boundary planes or 'membranes', each of which delimits a very defined 'zone' of activity and meaning. (The encircling and much more 'transparent' colonnade forms the 2nd 'membrane and surrounding the Holy Place is the totally transparent 3rd 'membrane - marked by the outer edge of the lantern, down through the iron corona to the change of floor texture at ground level - more of this later.)

Once one has taken the decision not just to pass by the building but to enter it and embark upon this progressive journey from 'darkness to light', the boundaries and barriers between you and the 'Place of Light' become progressively more transparent.

In 1995 Maguire said this about this first element of 'setting apart' a sacred space:

¹⁹ 'It is usually achieved by the use of certain archetypal architectonic devices. They can occur naturally. Pagans, for example, recognized the arrangement of trees in some places as awesome, forming what they saw as a sacred grove. Circles or squares of stone or other materials, once set up, begin to acquire the curious characteristic of setting a place apart, a place which was not recognizably there before. Formalized into columns, architectural systems with which we are familiar begin to take shape.

The temple at Segesta is fascinating because they abandoned it when it had only got this far - they actually built the archetypal peristyle first. The rhythmic colonnade encircles and encloses and sets apart the place, but also relates outwards, sometimes more emphatically so if, for example, the place set apart is also a symbol of civic unity and pride. If we take the Parthenon's peristyle, not stylistically but as an archetypal form, and turn it inside-out, then we have the reverse effect: an intensification of the privacy of the set-apart place. So much so, that the word cloister has become a verb: to cloister, to be cloistered. And one can observe that wherever mankind has felt the need for spiritual refreshment through withdrawal from the world and contemplation, this archetypal form occurs: independent of date and geography, and style, and religion.

'You will have spotted that there is another architectonic element here - the cloister has a back Wall, and it is this bounding Wall which is doing the heaviest job of enclosing. Obviously also related to fundamental needs for security, the boundary wall attached to itself rituals concerning place-making and identity - beating the bounds, for example, and in the Christian rite for the consecration of a new church there is a procession around the walls in which the bishop anoints the wall at twelve places. The New Jerusalem, an archetype of heaven in the Book of Revelation, has four Walls and twelve gates, three on each side. Gates through the wall are also of great significance, and so we have, across all cultures a tremendous invention of portals, marking the solemnity of going from non-place outside to place within.

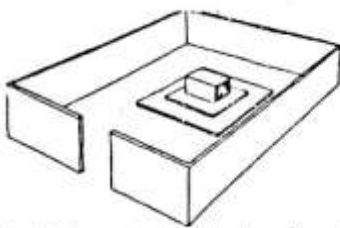
At the Barcelona Exhibition in 1929, Mies van der Rohe showed how you could use the wall in its purest form to modulate and mould space, leading the eye and the body through a continuum in which enclosure gradually gathers, places loosely delineated at first, through degrees of definition, in which the ideas of 'outside' and 'inside' are deliberately lost, until without the slightest vestige of a portal one finds oneself within the complete enclosure of the little pool and its statue.'

¹⁹ 'So we have a perceived symbolic function – the need to 'set apart a place' - and a set of architectonic devices, timeless and essentially non-stylistic, for doing just that, but with different degrees of emphasis, subtly different nuances. For a modern parish church, the question is how to achieve the right balance.

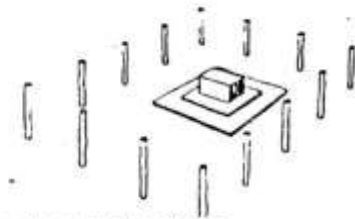
In the hypothetical project for a Roman Catholic church which preceded the Bow Common design, I had experimented with a diminutive bounding wall and rather thumping pillars as supports for a heavily emphasized diagrid roof – all very overbearing and in need of a rethink.'

Thus, though the outer boundary could not be more solid and opaque and unrevealing – that expanse of solid brick, the next boundary is dramatically more transparent – the encircling **colonnade** within the church. This layer is very clearly delineating the boundary between two defined zones, and yet it seems also to invite one forward and inwards. Bob Maguire describes his intention and meaning in creating this 'device'.

⁶ 'The colonnade: (1962) (Bob Maguire)



Setting apart: two kinds of enclosure given by a wall and by a colonnade



The characteristic action for which the church was built is the Eucharist; it is the Eucharist which gives the primary pattern of relationships within the church. Although the building had to seat 500 people as a condition of the War Damage payment it was necessary to design it in such a way

that a much smaller congregation would not feel lost in it, since until the surrounding area is re-developed the congregation is unlikely to rise above 200. This defined a problem the solution of which now interests us even where the same condition does not obtain, because there will always be times (such as on weekdays) when a small congregation needs to worship in a large church: it should not be taken for granted that a separate chapel is always the answer.

At St. Paul's we have put a colonnade on all four sides of the central space. This and the clerestory wall above it make a second plane of enclosure and the space within it is a comfortable size for congregations from 200 downwards (downwards, it has been found, to about 10 people). The columns form an effective enclosure because they are white and the sides facing inwards are very brightly lit, compared to the wall beyond. On the other hand when the congregation extends into the aisles the columns do not effectively cut people off from the action in the central space, firstly because the light is much brighter there and so draws attention inwards and secondly because the strong corrugations of the aisle roofs "throw" the space of the aisles towards the centre of the building. This is quite unlike the aisle of a Gothic building, where the vault-form of the roof runs in the longitudinal direction making a distinct space, a compartment with its own directional "pull" unrelated to the place of the altar. The columns in themselves help in the making of the sense of "place" in the building.'

Bob Maguire (1995):

¹⁹ 'St Paul's, Bow Common, uses two devices, the bounding wall and the encircling colonnade. But it uses them in a way which achieves other objectives at the same time. The columns are slender, but they are white, and lit mainly by top light from the centre. One therefore feels well enclosed when one is in the central space, the colonnade reading as the main enclosing element, yet when one is in the ambulatory, as for example in San Stefano Rotondo, one does not feel excluded by the columns because of the light drawing one, as it were, to the central space. This means that small congregations and large ones both feel the church is the right size for them.

Also, the ambulatory has the spatial character of being a continuous processional delineation of the set-apart place as a whole. Consonant with this, there is a processional path set in its floor. I should add that this East End parish now has a greatly reinforced tradition of doing processions.'

¹⁹ 'From the glimpse I gave you of the other church plans and interiors, you will have seen that the use of the virtually unbroken bounding wall, and the ring of columns standing within it, combined – usually – with a square or near – square plan and daylighting from above, so arranged that you see lit surfaces – these are the means of achieving what we would call the character of a set-apart **place**. Others have said it is the element usually missing in modern churches and refer to it in terms such as a feeling of awe, religious atmosphere, the numinous, a sense of the holy. Over a period of time, the use of daylight, within the space given by the delineating wall, became the important means ...'

'The Colonnade: (2002) (Bob Maguire)

⁶ 'One vital point about St Paul's and about all our subsequent churches. Most discussions about planning for modern liturgy start with assertions about seeing well and hearing what is going on; and so, proceeding within the classic modernist rational disciplines, churches usually end up without columns (which are said to get in the way of the view) and often with plans which are wedge-shaped like lecture theatres, or half-round or nearly so like an amphitheatre, or of course (Liverpool Roman Catholic Cathedral being the most flagrant example) circular.



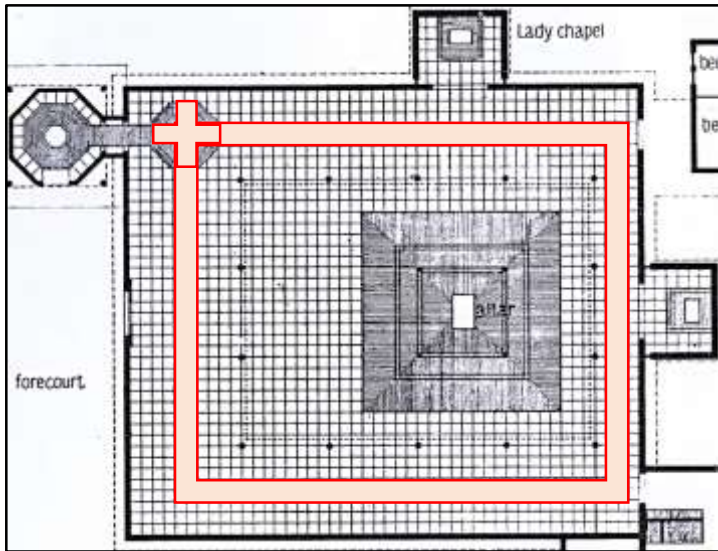
Consider for example the cloister - a backing wall and a colonnade or arcade, arranged around a rectangle. As different in style and proportion as, say, San Giorgio Maggiore and Monreale, or Gloucester. Cloister - the very word - 'to cloister' has become almost synonymous with 'to set apart'. Yet take the same two elements and put them the other way around a rectangle and you have: a peristyle - very good for large public processions around the outside. St Paul's, Bow Common, uses these two devices, **the bounding wall and the encircling colonnade**. But it uses them in a way which achieves other objectives at the same time. The columns are slender, but they are white, and lit mainly by top light from the centre. One therefore feels well enclosed when one is in the central space, the colonnade reading as the main enclosing element, yet when one is in the ambulatory one does not feel excluded by the columns because of the light drawing one, as it were, to the central space.

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The Processional Way:

St. Paul's, Bow Common, like all religious buildings, is an architectural space which visitors of any faith or none can find themselves exploring – especially this remarkable building which has been recognised nationally for what it is. It hardly needs saying that it also primarily exists for its own faith adherents and as a place of welcome for any who are on a journey of faith. They come at various stages of exploration of faith – from the curious, the cautious seeker and explorer to a fully committed faith member.

Over the 18 years I spent in the parish I often both observed and accompanied people on their exploration of the church building I noticed a certain quality in the way in which the building 'invites' one onto the journey from 'darkness to light' which also parallels the journey of seeking spiritual light or a central focus for faith.



Classically, churches once often had a **narthex**. This had the form of a lobby, or a screened off entrance area and sometimes the font was placed here or, in such famous examples of the magnificent cathedrals of Florence or Pisa, as entirely separate buildings away from the main church. In this model a sharp line is drawn between baptised believers who are fully initiated members of the Christian congregation and those who are 'seekers' and even those in preparation for full membership - the catechumens. Those Christians who have been cast out of church fellowship for misdemeanour and who wish to return - the

penitents - are also in this category. None on that side of the sharp line would be permitted entrance into the nave of the church. If there was a screen they could look through it into the main church but could not enter until either baptised or granted absolution and then reconciled. Indeed, in the Liturgy of the Eastern churches the Deacon would cry out, 'The doors! The doors!' before the recitation of the Creed so that those not yet in full communion with the Church could be excluded by the shutting of the doors and not allowed to participate in the recitation of that full statement of Christian belief and membership, which is what the Creed truly is.



I think that it may not be too fanciful to see this first outer 'ring' of the church layout as having a resonance with this idea of the narthex, though never has there been any suggestion of non-believers being restricted to this area and not allowed any further in! Nevertheless, as seen on the marked out pathway on the plan above, there is a generosity in the building inviting one in just to circulate around this pathway and to look into the areas of greater 'commitment' within, without being required to do so. I have seen both in people exploring the building and in people exploring faith, an early preference for a 'safe distance' from the heart of the matter! It is quite possible to explore the fringes of faith and to

spend as long as one needs 'circling' any further commitment! In an interesting way the processional path does have an echo of the function of a narthex but in a very generous way, not separated by a solid screen or doors from the activities of the Christian faith - hearing Scripture, preaching, praying, receiving the Sacrament of Communion. Instead, the 'separation' is the next very porous 'membrane' of the colonnade through which one can see the 'things of the faith' but entering only if or when one is ready.



This 'parable' suggests that while circling and observing and considering, on this 'narthex-like' pathway, a choice and a possibility is offered regularly on every circuit, with the font placed exactly in that pathway - should a point of decision be reached, to go further and to enter within. Even if fanciful, there is (for me) a certain telling resonance with the ancient ordering of churches. And, indeed, for all who are fully members of the church this is not an 'excluded' area for them but an important processional pathway.

You may have read previously of the consultative way in which Bob Maguire and Keith Murray worked with Fr. Kirkby's congregation during the design process for the church. The space being used for worship was the church hall in which much experimentation went on, well ahead of its time. We learn that Maguire and Murray would bring models of what they were proposing to show the people for their comments and responses.



Easter Day 2008



50th Anniversary of Consecration 2010

The tradition at St. Paul's, Bow Common has been of a 'High Church,' catholic-minded 'flavour' for generations. Indeed the first church standing on this site was 'notorious' for its ritualist ways (see later). One of the much loved features of the more catholic tradition is the **procession** – an indoor journey of faith and celebration, a mini-pilgrimage. The devotion, especially during Lent, of the Stations of the Cross is one such example. This has its roots in

ancient days where Christians who would never have the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land could do so within their own church by processing to 'visit' representations of the sites they would have venerated on the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem on a sacred procession around the walls of the church. And churches of all traditions which celebrate weddings also have bridal processions which have become an important feature of a weddings for many now! I mentioned at the beginning of this whole account how critically and negatively St. Paul's, Bow Common has been regarded by traditional brides!

And so when Maguire and Murray showed an early model of what they had in mind for the church, we are told that an unnamed lady in the congregation had reservations about the lack of much of a central aisle up which to process. She made a comment along the lines of 'But we do love our processions, don't we, Father?' Maguire and Murray took this to heart and broadened the outer 'passage' between the colonnade and the boundary walls and created an ambulatory or processional way. In 1962 Maguire said this:



6 'The processional path.

Besides their function as seating space, the aisles are designed for processions. In the tradition of worship of this parish processions have been found to be valuable. They help to unite the congregation for worship. The paved processional path around the four sides of the church, like the bounding wall and the columns, contributes to the character of a set-apart place, and this contribution becomes more realised

during a procession: the members of the Church trace out the boundaries of the place which represents them, make it more real to them and so making their incorporation in one body more real to themselves. The processional path also helps to relate the font to the whole space of the church.'

Similarly:

¹² '... the aisles are marked out in white paving for their use in processions (a feature particularly asked for by the parish).'

¹⁹ '... there is a processional path set in its floor. I should add that this East End parish now has a greatly reinforced tradition of doing processions.'

²⁶ '... there is a processional path set in its floor. I should add that this East End parish has a great tradition of doing processions.'



Whoever that lady was, possibly even making what was a slight criticism of a church without a 'proper' long central aisle, her comment led to more than the processional way around the perimeter of the church walls. Inevitably it widened the 'viewing' distance of the inside of the church walls and created an ideal exhibition space for art works hung on those walls, which we discovered to much astonishment in 1998 and ever since, after the exhibition 'Shamiana' was relocated to St. Paul's, Bow Common from the Victoria and Albert Museum in central London!



Whoever could have foreseen this totally unintended consequence of 'inclusive space' as the prime design intention for the church? As Bob Maguire wrote on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary in 2010: 'We were designing a church for a new vision of Eucharistic worship. New, but in fact ancient and original, the inclusive and also the defining act of unity of the whole People of God, the Christian Church. It is difficult now to remember how, in those days of the 50s, the Holy Communion service was attended by congregations who spent much of their time in private prayer with their heads bowed or even in their hands.'

By contrast, we were trying to build a church which would encourage true relationships in the liturgy – priest to people, people to one another, priest to God and people to God, the worship of the whole Church together. Encourage, but not cause; because it is only people coming together with understanding and faith which bring those relationships to life. We now (by and large) take all that for granted, and so it could be said – many people do say – that Gresham, and his local church people, and St Paul's, took a major role in the renewal of our worship. So that was the focussed objective we were making for. It was a great – I mean big and important – objective.



Looking at it now in the context of what has come about in recent years in this church, I see that its very focus prevented us from seeing the further possibilities of the thing that was built.'

The unintended consequence of Maguire's design intention led not only to a remarkable path of pilgrimage but also to what I heard described by many as superb gallery space for the many works of 'people's art' which were displayed on those walls over the years since 1998.

Seating:

In 2002 Bob Maguire said this:

²⁶ *'This is the crux of the planning of St Paul's, that no seats were ever shown on any plan: the idea was to leave this to the parish and to provide them with moveable seating (in this case four-seat bench pews of lightweight, since church chairs at the time, as indeed now, were hideous) and the sanctuary enjoys immense space. Moreover, the parish had been experimenting liturgically - not with alternative texts (this was after all 1956) but with ways of expressing what might be summed up in the phrase 'the priesthood of all believers'. Of realising itself as One Body - the same principle as informed the architectonic forms defining the space.*

What it had arrived at was that during the Synaxis, or Ministry of the Word, the congregation would sit. There would be a certain amount of movement as, for example in the Catholic tradition, there would be a procession with lit candles at the reading of the Gospel, which would take place at the western end of the church. Preaching would be from the floor, westward of the altar.

Then, at the beginning of the Ministry of the Sacrament, the entire congregation would leave the seats and stand in the great space gathered around the altar. They would stay there until they had received communion, which they also did standing. When everyone had received communion - and not until, as we do at a meal - they would return to their seats.

It really is for this reason that St Paul's was revolutionary. That was all, already, in place, in the hall in which they had been worshipping. Where we came in was to interpret that extraordinary understanding of what it was all about, in terms of the physical reality of a building.'

In 1962 he had said: ⁶ **Liturgy as movement:** *The liturgy may be seen as a movement towards the place of the altar: in other words the incorporation of the individual person into the sacrificial life of Christ, or movement towards the transfiguring light. In a Gothic church, this movement is a pilgrimage in one direction, west to east, from the font to the altar. At St. Paul's the movement can be seen as movement inwards, starting from the font through the procession to the place of the synaxis (the seating, the place of reading and preaching of the Word) to the sanctuary; and within the sanctuary, more specifically, the place of the altar.'*

Seating.

⁶ *'The seats are designed to be movable. They take the form of 4-seat bench pews, partly because of the minimum requirements of the London fire regulations for movable seating; in practice they overcome many of the disadvantages of both pews and chairs. They can be moved easily by one person yet stay put when placed. Their detailed design was intended to make them unimportant in the space of the church: we see them as a convenience rather than as a vital part of the design. The backs have been kept low to make them a good height for kneeling and to prevent them from being barriers between people in the congregation. In use these bench pews have been arranged in a number of different ways. With the present number of seats (200) it is possible to clear the floor of the church completely because the 50 benches can be placed in a single row against the perimeter walls.'*

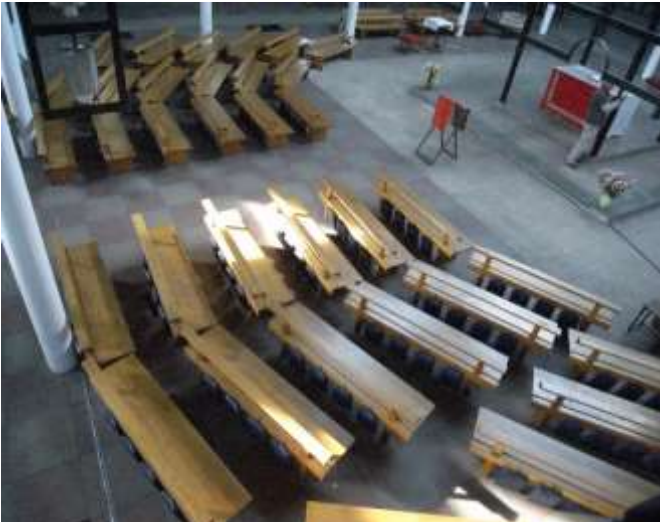
Also:

¹⁸ *'The benches are movable and capable of seating 200, but smaller numbers feel at home and fully in contact with celebrant and ministers. The overall effect is of a space that draws the worshippers inwards, a place that helps participation and gives room for prayer.'*

²² *'Within an almost square plan, the altar is brought forward and surrounded by pews on three sides, effectively engaging a more immediate relationship with the congregation. Portable seating allows up to 500 people to be accommodated with the use of the lower aisles. Flexibility is essential for not only does it remove the problem of a small assembly feeling lost within a lofty space or being surrounded by a lot of empty seats, but it enables the building to be used for other functions and gatherings.'*

In the first 'zone' there is journeying and movement along the processional way, 'circling' the 'Place of Light'. In this second zone of seating, there is sitting and listening and preparing - a zone of 'reception.'

A Flexible Space, easily reconfigured ...



Regular seating configuration



Seating Palm Sunday 2012



Seating for School Dance Performance 2003



Seating for Good Friday 2008



Passover Meal (Seder) 2008



From 2013-2015 the church continued in use after part of the lantern ceiling fell in and most of the church was out of bounds. The flexibility of the seating made this possible.

Bob Maguire 1962:

⁶ *'Preaching and reading.*

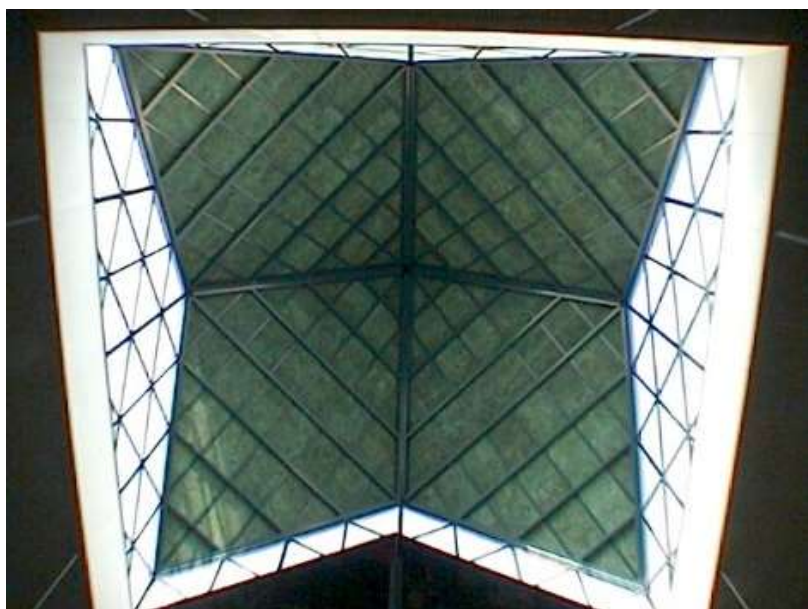
There is no pulpit at present. Originally we intended to have a fixed pulpit and then it was decided that its best position should be found by experiment after the church was finished. It has, however been found that while the congregation is still comparatively small a pulpit would be no advantage for preaching. At the moment preaching is generally done from the altar steps and there is a good relationship between preacher and congregation.

As the congregation grows, it may become necessary to provide a pulpit but we have learned that this would best be a movable piece of furniture like the pulpits common in English churches in the early post-reformation period. This would have the advantage that it can be put in different positions according to the occasion. The Gospel is read from the middle of the congregation; a new folding lectern is being made.'

The Sanctuary ~ the 'Place of Light':

Earlier I mentioned there effectively being '**zones**' within the church – zones of meaning as well as zones of purpose. At the heart of the second 'seating' zone people gather for worship or, as in recent years, for other common activities. But, mindful of the founding principles of this place as designed for liturgy, and also as 'The House of God,' beyond, and at its heart, is what has been called the '**Place of Light**' – both literally, with light pouring through the lantern above, as well as metaphorically. This is the goal and destination on the 'journey' from darkness to light, into which the building invites us.

Unlike the **axial** progression in classic Gothic-style churches, from west to east, to the 'Holy of Holies' in the sanctuary, in this church the progression is '**radial**,' from any point on the perimeter to the central sanctuary. If this is the Gate of Heaven, then this heart of the building, where the sanctuary is found, must be the dwelling place of the Most High, the Holy of Holies. Indeed, encircling that place is the 'Heavenly Host' whose sole purpose is to attend the Most High for eternity. Incredibly and astonishingly, it is to such a Place that we, mere mortals, are drawn and invited by Love Itself.

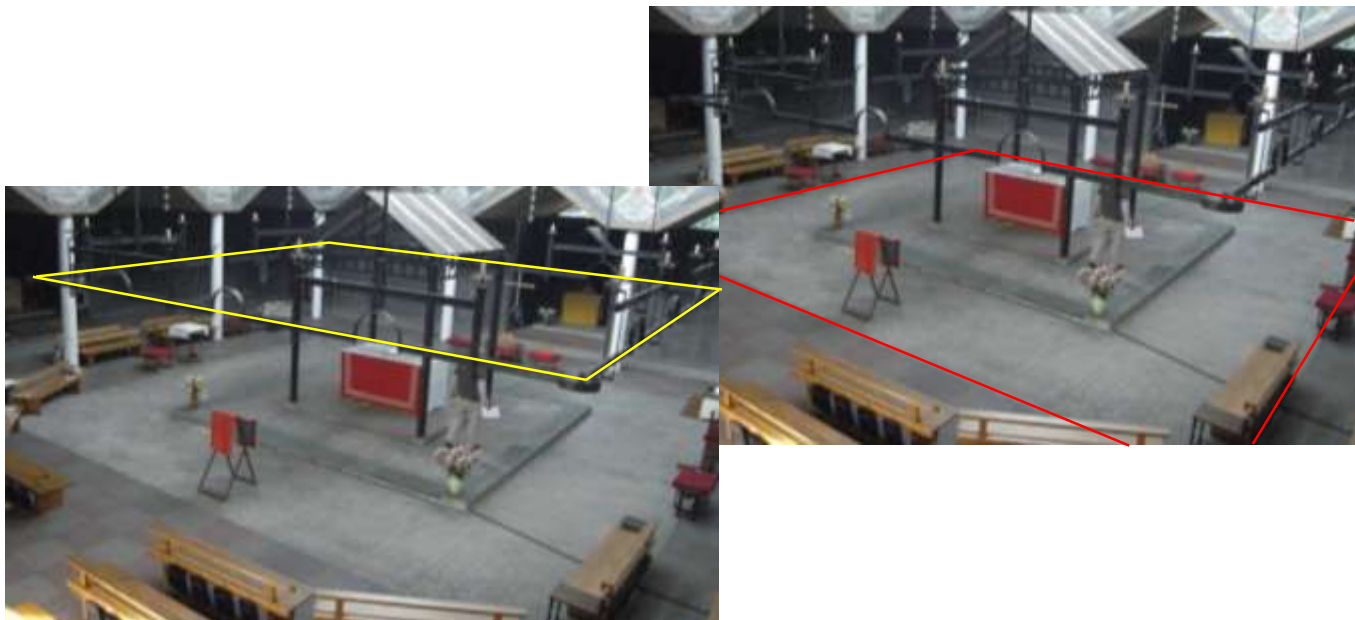


Completely unlike the very solidly established boundaries marking (and even 'guarding') the sacred place in most churches – boundaries marked by rails or a rood screen or, in the Eastern tradition, an iconostasis – in St. Paul's Bow Common there is indeed a boundary and a 'plane of transition,' but here it is totally transparent! To reach this holy space we have first to penetrate solid brick walls.

When we are within, these then give way to an open colonnade inviting us to move further towards the 'Place of Light'. And, when we approach that holy place there is nothing to impede our progress. But it

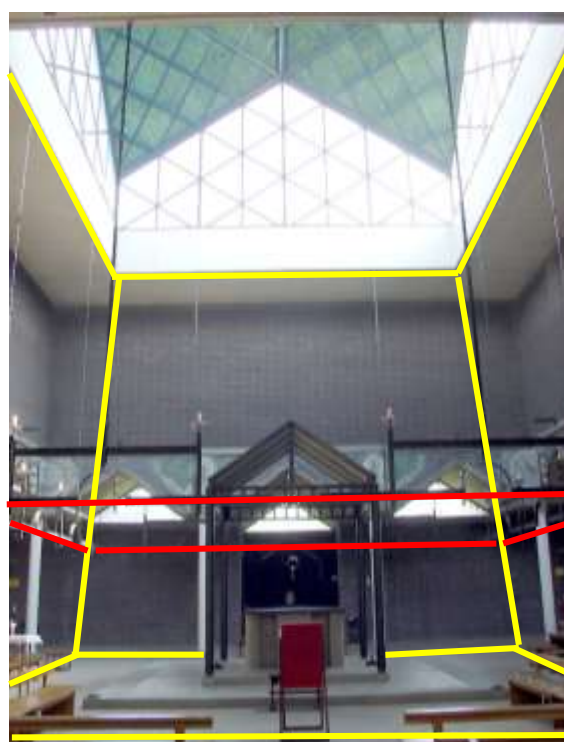
clear where the boundary lies and to see the markers of this inner sanctum we have both to look upwards and also at our feet!

There is a real but transparent plane of transition marked by the high level boundary of the edge of the **lantern** (shown above) and then, lower down, the line of the iron **corona** (yellow lines below) and, at our feet, the change in flooring material from flagstones to a **brick surround** to the altar (red line below).



For me, as I grew to know the church through use of it and also reflection on how it 'worked,' this is more than just an architectural device! There is an unintended but powerful statement here for me about the Christian vision of 'access' to the Divine. Christianity, along with Judaism and Islam and other faiths, has always proclaimed the 'otherness' and the supreme holiness of the Divine Being, beyond our comprehension and totally beyond our direct access or approach. This utter holiness has been expressed tangibly and architecturally by the 'Holy of Holies' within a temple or sanctuary. Walls, forbidden zones, curtains, extremely limited access open only to the High Priest, severe penalties for trespass - all of these 'guard' the Holy Place' from the presumption of mere mortals daring to approach the Divine Being. And then Christianity came along with a bold and even shocking theology inverting all of this! Not just of mortals reaching out to touch the Divine but, far more shockingly, of the Divine reaching out to touch human lives from within! One who is exactly as we are - fully human - and yet who contains and embraces the fullness of Divinity within Himself, reaches out to humanity. The veil has been torn, the walls have been breached and the barriers broken down but - Christianity claims - radically, from *within!*

For me, this radical claim of Christian belief of 'Divine demolition' of the barriers which keep mortals from the Eternal seems to be echoed in the way the sanctuary is marked in this church. Indeed the Holy remains holy - Christianity is not a religion of 'Divine matiness,' where the Divine is confused with the material and the human and it is all one Holy mess - but our 'access' to the Divine and what is Holy is now unblocked and unhindered. My reflection on all of this considers how the whole journey from darkness to light, from separation to integration with the Holy, is presaged from the moment one enters from the church porch. This particular definition of the sanctuary also gives it a very 'vertical' component which literally 'raises the roof! This great 'cube' of the sanctuary pushes itself up above the lower level of the church roof and onwards and upwards as the 'Holy Place' reaches up and proclaims itself silently for all to see - an act of 'invitation,' far from a privatised religion, secreted only for the initiates and insiders to have access!



The great 'Cube' of the Sanctuary

The church reveals and invites and offers us a pathway, increasingly unhindered, if we but take the **first step**. Indeed, as we enter through the porch – whether as total stranger, pilgrim or curious enquirer – the first step we take places us **literally** onto the octagonal extension into the porch of the white brick processional way which continues around the first zone of the church! Whether we just circumnavigate the inner zones or pause to receive Baptism and then progress ever inwards is entirely our choice! But the invitation is made from the moment one enters the church! None of this was intended consciously by its designers and creators but such was the integrity of their overall vision – not just the architectural vision – that this all seems to me to hold together.

In 1962 Bob Maguire wrote:

6 'The place of the altar.

The church is the place of the assembly of the people of God, called together by the Word of God. Seen from another point of view it is the place of the altar table. Traditionally this has been seen as the symbol of Christ in His Church, both because it is the place of the Eucharistic offering and because of its association with the idea of "the stone which the builders rejected", "the corner stone". It is the fixed symbol of the relationship between Christ and His Church.

At St. Paul's, it was our object to relate the whole space of the church to the place of the altar. We believe that the detailed disposition of seats is far less important in achieving this relationship than is currently thought; the relationship is primarily determined by the organisation of the space of the whole interior. This is perhaps best illustrated by saying that anyone standing or sitting anywhere in the whole building shall feel related to the place of the altar by means of the arrangement of floor, wall, roofs, columns, intensity and direction of light, and so on; all those things which mould and shape the three-dimensional space. And it is the character of this space which is the true architectural character of the building, far more important than any of the bits and pieces which shape it. **The design of the place of the altar developed from two considerations: that it is the place of Calvary and that it is the setting of the table of the mystical banquet – the sacrificial place and the place of communion.**

*The ciborium over the altar has a similar function in maintaining the balance between the complementary concepts of the meal and the sacrifice. This balance becomes more difficult to achieve when the altar is "in the midst" (not the middle) of the Church. The ciborium sets apart the place of the altar just as the bounding wall sets apart the place of the church; **sets apart but does not cut off.** (This has been borne out in practice despite many predictions to the contrary during the time between the completion of the church and the installation of the ciborium.) The ciborium is a lightweight structure with thin steel columns and the marble roof spans by itself; the idea of the tent has influenced us, and the structure is technically "moveable".'*

And so we arrive at the heart of the church, the destination to which we have been drawn from our very first step inside the church, the Sanctuary, the 'Place of Light,' the Holy of Holies but also the Table of Communion and Fellowship. Bob Maguire says this:

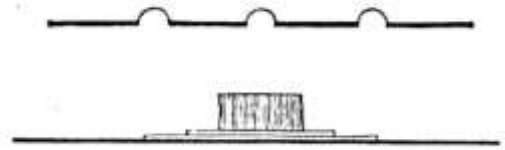
6 'The sanctuary is defined at three levels; by paving on the floor (but at the same level as the floor of the church), by a hanging corona with candles for festivals, and by the lantern in the roof through which comes most of the daylight in the church. The "normal" way to define a sanctuary is by steps and rails. Our objection to this method is that it cuts off the sanctuary from the rest of the church tending to make the Eucharist appear as something performed by those in the sanctuary and observed by those outside; a dramatic performance.



*The white paving bricks run out to a line beyond the corona, making a gentle transition. The corona makes a strong definition of the sanctuary space, but does not create a barrier; in fact, the three semi-circular "arches" on each side exemplify the idea of movement into the sanctuary. At communion the laity actually go into the sanctuary and kneel on the first step. The corona is related in space to the lantern above. It extends the space of the light-filled lantern downwards and emphasises the fact that **the sanctuary is the place of light.** The pattern of natural lighting in the building was for us an important part of the design. We believe that the way in which light falls on surfaces is more important than major artistic efforts spent on the windows themselves, and all the windows of the church are of clear glass letting in uncoloured daylight. In particular, the white columns of the church pick up the light and emphasise the light-filled quality of the interior.'*

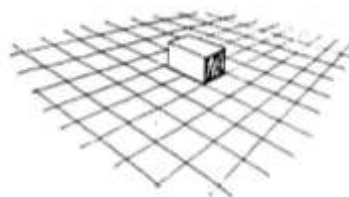
²⁶ 'The central space, as you see in a plan, is three bays wide and four bays long, and the altar in its square sanctuary space, and the lantern directly above it, are centred on the three bays by three bays towards the east end. **Incidentally, the three by four proportion governs all the principal relationships between elements in the building.** There is nothing pseudo-sacred about this, but it does, as Alberti or Palladio would say, lend harmony to all the parts.

Hanging from the edge of the lantern opening in the flat ceiling is a square corona supporting lights; this is made of off-shelf rolled steel sections (as are the steel sections of the ciborium) and it works like a series of balance-arms on fulcrums. I should say that I was very keen on Alexander Calder at the time (as I am still) and was making serious mobiles. **The corona and the lantern over define the sanctuary area:** there is no step and no communion rail, only a change of paving material.

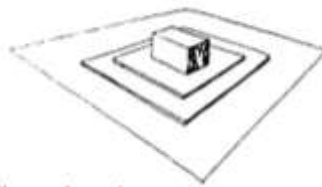


Steps:

There are however two steps up to the altar. Put an altar on the floor of the church, and it looks as if it could be on casters, able to be trundled anywhere like a buffet trolley. Raise it on a step or two, and the worrying sensation



The effect of putting an altar on two steps



has gone. But steps have been such a subject of church rubrics in the past, especially relating to the sanctuary of a church, where various numbers of steps from time to time have been laid down precisely. On looking into these the reason appears to be the analogy with the holy hill, hilltops having been seen as very holy

places, even symbolically in the Old Testament as the dwelling-place of God, as in Psalms 15 and 24.

Assuming that such symbolism still has some deep-seated psychological or spiritual meaning - and I think there is a good case to be made - the question for us was 'How many steps to make a symbolic holy hill?' At Bow Common we came up with the answer, two, which is one less than both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church were stipulating at the time. Actually I now think one step is enough to fix an object spatially. But it does not make the object special. If you are designing a cenotaph, or the Albert Memorial, as designers have always known, you need more than one step. This is never much talked about, I think perhaps because designers have recently found themselves unable to produce rational defensive positions: but since under the regulations (in themselves admirable) for designing for the disabled, level floors or at best ramps are becoming the norm, architects have found themselves missing something from their vocabulary which in retrospect seems more vital than they thought.

There is a baldachin over the altar. Now, this is a very unmodern thing to do, because of the rationalist argument that columns get in the way of the view. The real purpose of many canopies, from those over statues on the outside of cathedrals to Prince Albert sitting out in Hyde Park, is to enhance the importance of the person or object or activity covered. An altar is necessarily limited in size because its height is fixed, and when you bring the altar off the east wall, it becomes a Wall if it is of any great length. The canopy gives visual importance to something which is of great intrinsic importance but dimensionally slight.'

In 1962 Maguire had said:

⁶ 'We decided to set the altar on two rather than the more usual three steps. Three steps is an archetypal image of a hill (the hill of Calvary) and is complete in itself. This completeness, we believe, tends to cut off the place of Calvary from the rest of the church, suggesting a dissociation of the action of the priest from that of the people in the liturgy.

If, however, two steps are used the general floor level of the church becomes one of the three levels; priest and people are on the hill together, although still in a hierarchic relationship. If, on the other hand, we had set the altar table down on the general floor level, this would "speak" of the meal but not of the sacrifice. An altar set on too many steps (characteristic of most Gothic Revival churches and continued in many modern churches) speaks only of the sacrifice.'

In 1999, Tanya Harrod commented on the Sanctuary:

²⁵ *'The corona was made up of standard rolled steel sections bolted and welded by a construction firm (Fig. 397). The steel beams of the ciborium were also of high quality. If tugged, the corona oscillates, an intentional feature which for Maguire made pleasing allusion to mobiles by*



Alexander Calder and for Murray made manifest an eleventh-century description of lights moving in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.



There were little touches of luxury. The candle sconces on the corona were of purple glass, specially made in Murano. The ciborium was roofed in thin sheets of serpentine and white Carrara marble. The altar was of plain concrete but the altar cloth was of 'Thai silk designed by Murray and embroidered at Watts & Co.'



This is a very early interior view of the church (possibly taken at Harvest-tide 1960 to judge by the harvest sheaf resting against a pillar).

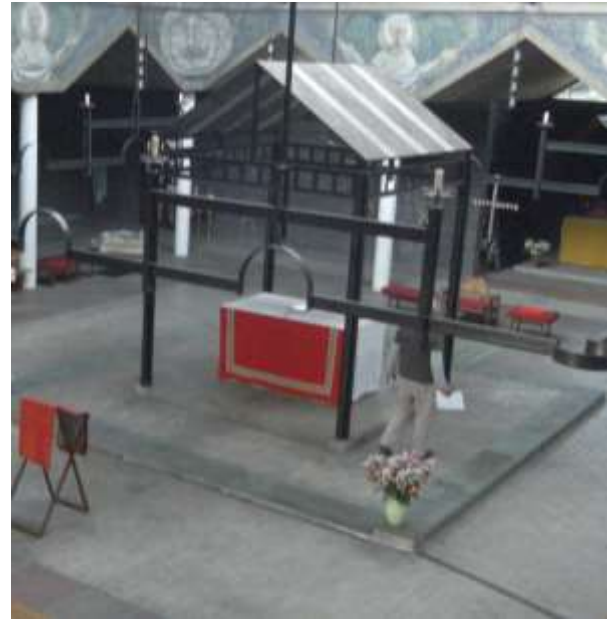


The spandrels, designed to receive the mosaics of the 'Heavenly Host,' remain blank. Keith Murray was to have executed these but now in partnership with Bob Maguire as Maguire and Murray, they both went on to design other churches and buildings. The commission was handed to Charles Lutyens who worked on this enormous project from 1963-68 to produce the remarkable work we see today - very likely the largest contemporary mosaic in Britain, and possibly the largest mosaic in the country executed by one person.

The church was consecrated on 30th April 1960 without the mosaics and also without the organ yet in place or, as can be seen here, the ciborium or baldachino yet erected. From earlier images in this account it is clear that the High Altar was used without the canopy to begin with.

From what I heard from the few members of the congregation who went back to those early days there was resistance to the installing the ciborium! They rather liked the openness of the High Altar on its own and did not want the fussiness or embellishment of a canopy! Feistiness was a feature of some of that early congregation and remained alive and active even up to my time as Incumbent as I learned in my first three years at Bow Common! But their rebellion did not prevail and the ciborium was installed.

The Altar and Ciborium (Baldachin):



In his work on Maguire and Murray, Gerald Adler says this:

²⁹ *'Maguire's understanding of functionalism in architecture included fostering and representing the life within. The idea of 'form finding' is amplified to take account of intangible and psychological factors. In the church of St Paul's this means inter alia placing the altar in a forward position towards the middle of the church, raised up onto a dais. As Banham wrote in his review of the church:*

"The Liturgical Movement sets ... [the architect] a double functional problem to be resolved in a single solution: to create a functional space ... to house the priest and the congregation in the celebration of the ritual, and a symbolic space ... to house the altar ... This double objective might be achieved by applying symbols to a functional structure, but that would simply be window-dressing. The outcome is only architecture if the functional and symbolical are indissoluble."



*The design and location of the **altar** goes to the heart of what Maguire and Murray were seeking in their rethinking of the church in terms of liturgy' The altar is 'the place of Calvary [as well as being] the table of the mystical banquet – the sacrificial place and the place of communion?' The design of the altar therefore involves an inevitable compromise between its symbolism as the hill of Calvary, the place where the crucifixion occurred, and that of the dining table, most famously depicted as the scene of Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper.*

The altar sits on a square platform raised two steps up from the general floor level of the sanctuary, in other words, one step less than the usual representation of the hill of Calvary. This is sufficient to make the altar a space apart, while still insisting that it is part and parcel of the sanctuary, located amid the congregation. Two other devices frame and focus the altar: the ciborium or canopy, and the corona or hanging crown above. The communion rail, the 'separating fence', as Murray called it, is entirely absent. The ciborium harks back to Early Christian practice and is a canopy framing the altar. It gives a certain

intimacy to the Eucharist service, beneath a tent-like cover with connotations of the temporary.'

²⁹ *'Made of standard steel sections and roofed in two kinds of simple spanning stone, **serpentine and white Sicilian marble slabs**, it is reminiscent of the ciborium at S. Clemente, Rome, a distant cousin of the Jewish wedding canopy, the Chuppah, and the temporary booth known as the Sukkah, which forms a focus for festivities at the festival of Tabernacles. It symbolises that, while the crucifixion took place at a specific place (Calvary), one may encounter God anywhere.*



This strong inward focus culminates in the hanging corona, fabricated again from standard rolled steel sections. The flat bars of the steel structure provide myriad places for candles to be placed. Although not at first obvious, the flexibility revealed by a slight touch shows how this structure related to Maguire's interest in Alexander Calder's mobiles.'

Maguire (1995):

¹⁹ *'Some of our churches have a baldachin over the altar. Now this is a very unmodern thing to do, because of the rationalist argument that the columns get in the way of the view. Some of the parishes felt that, so did not have one, and some felt it was just too popish. I have to say that I think baldachins are often a good thing, and that particularly St. Matthew's, Perry Beeches and St. Joseph's, Northolt, need one.*

Canopies are, of course, useful for keeping the weather off, but their real purpose is to enhance the importance of the person or object or activity covered. It can be a saint (I like the economy of this one: just two canopies for three saints) or a little crucifix, or the Sultan while he admires the view, or the ceremonial taking of tea, or the playing of music in the park (where you also get the advantage of acoustic reflection), or the carrying of the Blessed Sacrament in procession (this is of solid silver and it is in Baeza Cathedral) or Prince Albert sitting out in Hyde Park. What all these canopies have in common is their symbolic function - they give visual importance to something which is itself of great intrinsic importance but is dimensionally slight.

This can easily be appreciated in St Peter's, Rome. An altar cannot for anthropometric reasons be higher than one metre. Even if you make it very long, which is anyway inconvenient, it will be totally insignificant in a space as vast as St Peter's. The baldachino corrects this, and it does so by symbolic means that we all take for granted.

At San Clemente there is not the problem of the scale of the surroundings to the same extent. Cosmati altars, however - like Early Christian altars - are normally the sensible and most symbolically suitable size, about two metres by one metre by one metre high (that satisfying double cube) and this really very small object is given command of the whole space by the baldachino which itself is quite complex in its symbolic functioning: this top part sitting on the architrave beam is of course a peristyled temple - place set apart within set - apart place!

*The simple baldachins at Bow Common and Crewe both owe much to that at **San Clemente**. Bow Common's altar is vertically under the lantern, as I have already said, and in a way the lantern - and the corona which hangs from its periphery - already serve the same symbolic purpose. But at Crewe it would be difficult to imagine the altar without its enshrining canopy. In neither case, incidentally, has anyone ever complained of the columns obscuring their view.'*

Standing space. (Maguire 1962)

⁶ *'The sanctuary and the space immediately around it are sufficiently large to enable the whole of the congregation to stand or kneel around the altar for the Eucharist proper. i.e. from the offertory onwards. Many people concerned with the development of the responsible acts of the laity in the liturgy have felt that in order to achieve this it is necessary for the members of the Church to stand around the altar itself for the Eucharist.'*

I'm not sure this was done on a regular basis by Fr. Kirkby but in my time in the parish it was a wonderful experience to gather the whole congregation around the altar for major festivals.

There are two altars in Italy with ciboria over them which resonate closely with that at St. Paul's, Bow Common. The 12th century altar of San Clemente in Rome (below left), in particular, was seen to embody perfectly what Maguire was looking for. The earlier 10th century altar at Sant' Elia, north of Rome, is very similar in form (right).



It is hard today to relocate our minds and our responses to this building to the time in which it was built. Maguire and Murray truly were mapping new territory which nowadays is seen as an obvious and familiar landscape. The barriers had been raised for centuries and lay worshippers knew their place. The sanctuary was to greater or lesser extent an exclusion zone into which the chosen few were admitted because of their status or role. A bit of an extreme synopsis but not totally inaccurate!

'Inclusive Space'

As seen already in the section on the Liturgical Movement the status quo began to be challenged well before St. Paul's Bow Common was even thought about, but when it appeared it embodied the more open principles in a radical and 'holistic' way. I say 'holistic' because of our discovery in recent years that Maguire's principle of '**inclusive space**' underpinning the design of the church purely for liturgical use is also, in fact, effective for other uses in the 'whole' life of a community.

Once one sees how essentially relational liturgy is, it is not surprising that other relational activities of a gathered group of people is also aided and enhanced by a principle of '**inclusive space**' – or '**relational space**' as I have come to see it.

In a lecture of 1995, Maguire said more about this:

*19 '... certain kinds of interior space ... possess a definable character. The trouble has been to find the words actually to describe this definable character. I have opted for '**inclusive space**'. Inclusive space is a space within which, wherever a person is situated and no matter how many others are also in the space or where they are situated, that person feels included in whatever is going on.'*

¹⁹ 'I remember first having this conviction about an interior architectural space in the Pazzi Chapel (in Florence), which also probably rates – and of course it is an absurd statement really – as my favourite building ... To move from the humble to the immense, Hagia Sophia has this quality.' – still has it, despite the distraction of the Qu'ranic texts and other more geometrically disorientating additions.

The size of this space is enormous. As anyone will know who has ever tried to design a space in which a very large number of people are to gather, yet which needs to retain a feeling of intimacy, the task seems entirely self-contradictory. Yet Hagia Sophia not only achieves that, it goes a step further and has this quality of being inclusive space as I have defined it.



Santa Fosca (Florence) (Image: Wikipedia)

Naturally one wonders why this should be, and it is of some help to observe the entirely different spatial character in the Suleyman Mosque just up the road, of similar size and with an almost identical basic plan and structural arrangement, yet lit in such a way that all surfaces receive an equal amount of light, the whole building being knowable at a glance, the spatial delineation of the structural form being almost of incidental interest, and no part of this vast and beautiful hall having any differentiation.



Hagia Sophia(Istanbul) (Image: Wikipedia)

At Hagia Sophia, the great central space is held in firm yet light delineation by structural components which exist within a continuum of somewhat ambiguous space and all is defined by light, both inside and out ... in Hagia Sophia there is the feeling that the structure and the space and light are all one thing, totally dependent on each other and making a place which includes one's own self as an integral part, and so joins one in a general oneness with others there.

This is no accident, and relates to the Pauline theory of the oneness of the Church, the idea of each person as a member in the anatomical sense, of the Church as the mystical Body of Christ. The Eastern Orthodox have a theology of sacred space as they have one relating to the function of icons.

We have been looking at Byzantine buildings, but there are many examples in Western Christendom which possess the characteristics of inclusive space.. but it is so hard to define. One can, it seems, only recognize it when one sees it. 'Aha, you may say, all these buildings have domes. But there are hundreds of buildings with domes that do not have it. One thing seemed clear: they are all buildings with a centralizing structure, rather than a structure (like a nave vault, for instance) which has rhythms which lead the eye in one direction. They pick up your attention, as it were, and relate it back to the space enclosed. And there is also the function of light, in some way dissolving the mass of the structure while allowing it to define the space in that proper spatio-structural way which I believe to be the essential architectural quality.

To create such a space for a modern church, what one is searching for is an appropriate centralizing structure which one then has to handle using certain qualities of light. At St Paul's, Bow Common, this is not yet really an integrated structure; the great lantern sits in a flat ceiling, its method of support hidden away, but geometrically directly above the sanctuary area.'

In 2002 Maguire returns to this defining principle:

²⁶ 'One last but vital point about St Paul's and about all our subsequent churches. Most discussions about planning for modern liturgy start with assertions about seeing well and hearing what is going on; and so, proceeding within the classic modernist rational disciplines, churches usually end up without columns (which are said to get in the way of the view) and often with plans which are wedge-shaped like lecture theatres, or half-round or nearly so like an amphitheatre, or of course (Liverpool Roman Catholic Cathedral being the most flagrant example) circular.'

²⁶ *'Liturgy, however, is not lecturing, nor theatre, nor is it a circus. And if one produces a building whose spatial characteristics have been developed for one of these uses, liturgy will tend to be forced down that road ~ it can easily become, through misunderstanding, a kind of lecture seminar, and in particular, theatre. Throw in a fervent choir and an ambitious organist, and parish worship aspires to the Albert Hall.*

The nature of Christian worship is otherwise, and the Eucharistic liturgy properly involves complex relationships between all present (and of course I include God in that). But this does not itself generate architectural form. However, these complex relationships actually seem to look after themselves - the liturgy itself being the dynamic relationship generator - in certain kinds of interior space which, we observed, possessed a definable character. The trouble has been to find the words actually to describe this definable character. I have opted for 'inclusive space', that is a space within which, wherever a person is situated and no matter how many others are also in the space or where they are situated, that person feels included in whatever is going on.

Buildings in which I have experienced this with intensity are the Pazzi Chapel, Santa Fosca at Torcello, Hosios Loukas near the road from Athens to Delphi. It is independent of style, and it resists easy prescriptions like 'a dome will work'. It is a question of the way structure defines space, and the way the delineation of that space is achieved by quality of light. But one cannot generalise; and if I say that we have found that centralising structures (and I don't mean centralised plans) seem to offer the best possibilities, I have to qualify that at once by saying that there are many that don't, and conversely there are wonderful historical examples that defy that description. Inclusive space has been our quest in all our subsequent churches, with various degrees of success.'

As I grew to know and explore how this remarkable building 'works,' fanciful as such a notion might seem, I genuinely came to understand that the building has a genius in recognising certain obvious but essential things. Thus, churches are nothing without people, and people are nothing without relationships. Architecture can either work with and enable, or go against and negate that basic truth and purpose in a building designed to bring people together not just as spectators.

In the case of St. Paul's, Bow Common, the building has a genius of understanding this and opens itself up and enables relationship, either relationship with your fellow worshippers and with the Divine, or relationships socially when people gather. It's always best that people should be in relationship and the architecture of this space encourages and enables that, even when strangers gather. Relationships need space and in this extraordinary building there is 'verticality' and there is volume and there is also intimacy and these things are an essential part of relationship, whether with the Divine or with your fellow, and somehow this building understands that & provides & encourages all of that.

From what I have understood, liturgy is meant to be a 'dialogue' and interaction between the presiding ministers and the gathered laity - and together, with the Divine Being. In the first half of the Liturgy there is the 'Liturgy of the Word' centred on what goes on at the lectern, just inside the sanctuary and forward of the High Altar. From here confession is led and absolution given, Scripture is read, preaching is done and intercessions led. Essentially, for all of this the High Altar is disregarded! I heard from Keith Murray about how the altar was not dressed until after the action moved from the lectern to the altar at the Offertory. And when the priest moved to the altar, so did the laity, to stand in the great brick paved space defining the sanctuary and able to hold the whole congregation.

The longer I came to know the extraordinary geometry and purposeful design of the sanctuary the more I grew to arrange the liturgy around its purpose. From the very beginning when I discovered what the duality was, which the High altar embodies, I knew that this was a remarkably revealing sacred space.

The significance of the High Altar

At first sight the structure of the High Altar is puzzling and even complicated – certainly I have never seen an altar like it. There are two distinct elements of support holding up the fine slate slab of the altar stone, incised with the traditional five consecration crosses. There is what is, basically, a cruciform concrete block, upon which the slate slab rests exactly.



But there are also four legs supporting the corners of the slate slab, set in the angles of the solid cross-shaped central support. This could seem like a serious example of over-engineering, of belt and braces! The altar slab could more than adequately be supported *either* by the legs or the central cruciform support. There seems to be a degree of redundancy here!

Not so! As already indicated above by Maguire and also by Adler, there is a dichotomy of view about the nature of the Sacrament of Holy Communion – the sacred meal of Bread and Wine re-enacting the Last Supper and instituted by Christ and repeated ever since, in obedience to his command.

One view is that it is the Meal of Christian Fellowship at which, indeed, Christians believe Christ is mystically present. A table is the appropriate place at which to celebrate such a Meal.

The other view sees this as the offering of Sacrifice, the self-Sacrifice of Christ, which in the tradition of the Jewish Temple made expiation for human sins and renews our oneness with God. A sacrificial slab is appropriate for this to be done, in this case very appropriately supported by a cruciform pedestal.

Each of these views is embodied in altars which are simply tables with legs, or in altars with a stone 'sacrificial' slab upon which the Bread and Wine are offered as the Body and Blood of Christ. As in so many matters of faith we are expected to opt for 'either/or' – for one interpretation as 'right' which somewhere hints that any other interpretation is 'wrong.'

One of the many saving carry-overs from which I have benefitted in my former training and career as a physicist, is the sheer **mystery** of reality! Physics is a deeply humbling discipline as it challenges so many of one's black or white views of reality. Thus we discover that light acts **both** as a wave **and** as particles; that mass is **also** pure energy; that particles truly can be in many places at the same time ... and so on. People of faith can often lack a basic humility, to **allow things to be – maybe – what they truly are rather than we would like them to be/believe them to be**. Thus, within the mystery of that central action of faith which takes place at an altar, there is **BOTH** an act of fellowship at the table of communion **AND** an offering of sacrifice, of self-giving and self-offering, both of Christ and of those who gather around that altar.

Remarkably and with a simple unadorned 'materiality,' the High Altar at St. Paul's, Bow Common disposes itself for both these vital understandings, as the place of self-sacrifice and the place of intense and profound communion, one with another and each with Christ. This 'duality' of meaning is barely noticed as the altar is covered throughout the year except from Maundy Thursday night to the Eve of Easter Day. But then most important things lie unseen beneath their externals!

The Standing Space



One of the 'defining planes' of the sanctuary is the change of floor surface, from the large paving slabs of the seating area to the **brick paving** also found in the processional way. This forms what Bob Maguire calls the '**Standing Space**' in 1962 and liturgically is one of the most potent signs of liturgical revolution proclaimed by this church!

For centuries long the people of God have known their place and that has been very firmly in their seats or standing spaces as the holy mysteries are performed by the priest at the altar. However, the rather radical message of *this* church and of its sanctuary is that when the priest moves to the altar **so do the people**, to stand around him (or now, thankfully, *her!*) while the elements of Bread and Wine are consecrated and then received, before returning to their seats. This is no longer a sacred zone forbidden to the People of God!



Not intended, but for me meaningful as I have stood at that altar, is that the simple brick paving of the people's 'standing space' does not change into precious marble or some more noble flooring material or even carpeting as the sacred altar is approached. Insignificant as it must seem, nevertheless I have so often been aware of this further solidarity between priest and people that we stand on the same simple kind of ground, even at the most sacred moments of the liturgy. Hierarchy and status are levelled as we stand together before the loving Divine Presence.

My experience of this building was one of giving enormous freedom for liturgy. Examples have already been shown of how readily the seating and layout of the church can be reconfigured. Something gradually dawned upon me as we celebrated in church the events of the last week and the Passion of Christ. For the first several years I used the High Altar as the place for all the holy days to be celebrated – the Last Supper, the Passion and the Resurrection.



And then the obvious struck me, which was that originally, all those events took place *away* from the Temple or any synagogue or sacred place, but instead right in the midst of the people. That feels very significant, that if these deeds were pivotal and for our Salvation then they took place not in the Holy of Holies but in the midst of ordinary life – just as the whole Christian story began not in a royal palace or the Temple but in a poor manger.

So after Palm Sunday, for the last several years of my time in the church, the Sanctuary was abandoned & the liturgy took place on the floor of the church in the midst of the people; the Last Supper, the Raising of the Cross & the lighting of the Easter (Paschal) Candle. And in all of these liturgies I made sure that the Altar stood as a 'bridge', straddling the interface (yellow line above) between the white brick Sanctuary flooring and the People's seating space of paving slabs (shaded area). In many churches and, indeed, in many religious views – even those of some Christians, these are utterly different and excluding zones – the sacred and the secular; the Holy of Holies and the Human zone; Heaven and the here and now which every one of us experiences. Christ on His Cross is laid down as a bridge across this uncrossable divide. And, indeed, these great events of Holy Week are the building blocks of this bridge and, for Christians, truly make the kind of bridge between earth and heaven which this building is so good at proclaiming and celebrating!

Chapels:



As mentioned before, the initial impact that the church has on newcomers is due, in part, to finding almost the entire volume of the building revealed for view. It seems to me that this was the intention of Maguire and Murray but not that of Fr. Kirkby! He was not one to give way on what he felt deeply about and this was one such case.

In the catholic tradition the reserved Sacrament of the consecrated Bread and Wine at the Mass would be afforded a chapel in which to be reserved, with a sanctuary lamp burning constantly. Also, the Blessed Virgin Mary is held in high honour and a 'Lady Chapel' has long been a place of honour for her in churches and cathedrals.

From what I understand, Fr. Kirkby cited the precedent of there having been both a Sacrament Chapel and a Lady Chapel in the earlier church which stood on that site.



Sacrament Chapel



As described in a later section, the first St. Paul's, Bow Common, was notorious for its ritualist reputation and a strong Tractarian influence. Indeed the church was built with a rather inflammatory empty niche on the western street front which would have been provocative in 1858 when the church was built, suggesting that maybe a statue of Mary might one day be placed there! By the time it was destroyed in the War there may well have

been such chapels in the old church and Fr. Kirkby would have had ample contemporary accounts of what had been in the church which he only knew as a ruin.

However, I remember conversations with Keith Murray in which he still expressed reservations about the chapels being there at all. 'One church, one altar' and therefore one focus – this was the basic formula for this and later churches by Maguire and Murray. And it seems likely that Fr. Kirkby's wishes prevailed and resulted in the Sacrament Chapel (above) and Lady Chapel (right)!



Lady Chapel

In 1962 Bob Maguire wrote this:

6 'To fulfil its symbolic function, the altar must be unique in the church. In this parish, however, there was a tradition of reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in a tabernacle at an altar; the need for a Lady chapel was also felt strongly, and for a separate chapel for weekday celebrations of the Eucharist. We have provided two chapels, one on the east and the other on the north side. The relationship of these chapels to the space of the church was complicated by two opposed needs. The first was the consideration of the uniqueness of the altar in the church which suggested that the chapel should be entirely separated. Against this it was felt that the Blessed Sacrament should be reserved in the space of the church, and that the Lady chapel should not be a space divided off completely. Consequently we have made a discontinuity in the bounding wall of the church at each chapel, and built the chapel "outside" the wall, but run the vault of the aisle roof through to link the chapel to the church. The result is, we think, at least partially successful, but this is certainly one of the points over which we now feel we would try for some further clarification of the programme, were we doing it again. Although the chapels have been provided, it is interesting that even when congregations are very small people prefer to gather at the main altar.'

Gerry Adler also comments:

²⁹ *'The two other openings are for chapels, one for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in a tabernacle at an altar; the second for a Lady Chapel used as a separate chapel for weekday celebrations of the Eucharist. However, Maguire was careful to give the perception that these two chapels were 'outside' the church by introducing vertical slots of glazing that interrupt the U-shape of their enclosing walls. This enhances the focus on the central sanctuary, and ensures that the altar is not compromised in its significance.'*



I think that I do agree with Maguire and Murray's reservations about the chapels. The aerial view above shows a slight awkwardness as the chapels roofs 'poke out' from the rest of the building and are asymmetric not being balanced to south or west by similar elements. However, I think that Maguire ultimately got his way by pretty totally dissociating the chapels from the church proper - as Gerry Adler mentions above! The walls of each of the chapels has no connection at all with the rest of the main church walls and effectively they sit in the vicarage garden or the council green land alongside the church!

This adjacent views show that that the external bounding walls of the church simply carry on across the chapel entrance and then stop enough to permit entrance! What would have been a gap between the three independent and free-standing



chapel walls and the main church boundary wall has been glazed and, as a further kindness, the folded slab lower perimeter church roof stretches out over the chapel walls to provide cover. Otherwise, the chapels, structurally have nothing to do with the main church buildings! Even when in use for small communion services, it is only the priest who fits inside the chapel and for greatest comfort the congregation has to sit on benches in the main church at the entrance to the chapel, so not a happy arrangement, really. The High Altar, I found, 'worked' very well even with a single figure congregation in the main church.

There is (for me) a revealing little detail in the way in which the main church walls form an entrance to each of the two chapels. These views of the left hand entrance to the Lady Chapel show the main perimeter wall of the church simply carrying on past the chapel perimeter wall as if ignoring this structural intrusion! And as one zooms in on the detail of how the top of the wall deals with the chapel roof it can be seen that no concession is made and no attempt either to stop at the point at which the roof starts to slope away, or to rise up to meet it. That little gap seems to me like a bit of a protest from the main church walls that it does not recognise the intrusive chapels and protests that its otherwise unbroken embrace of the whole building has been broken in this way! Twice!





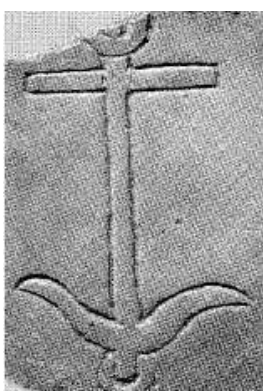
Similarly, at the entrance to each of the chapels is this coloured threshold - like the previous detail never mentioned in any write-up of the building but surely purposeful, as is every detail of this church. It seems to me to underline that each of the chapels is basically a piece of the external world and mark 'entrances' to the church from without (compare the octagon in the church porch which acts as a threshold to the church. Like the octagon in the porch, these thresholds seem to be painted in the 'bull's blood' hue that we find in the lettering and fascia at high level.

Much as everywhere else in the building, apart from

with the porch lettering, unadorned cast concrete is what one sees in all three altars of the church (even if veiled in frontals) with slate slab tops. Not so the front of the Sacrament Chapel Altar, however! When I arrived in 1995 I didn't even know that this decoration was on the altar until my first Good Friday in 1996 when the altar was stripped! I then noted a strong disapproval from those who had been there from the beginning, of this blatant piece of Christian symbolism in a building otherwise devoid of any kind of ornamentation or symbols (except on the 'President's Chair, shown below'). It was a bit of a mystery to me but I was the 'new boy' and had no strong feelings about it.



I was aware that this symbol was an early Christian symbol and had seen it in the Catacomb of San Callisto in Rome on the Appian Way dating back to the 2nd - 4th centuries. Such a petroglyph



is shown here. It represents the 'anchor' that Christ is to the believer in stormy times. I could only imagine that rather like the very simple stylised figures on the President's Chair this, too, was by Ralph Beyer and reflected his great interest in the art of the catacombs, derived from his father's deep knowledge & interest in the same subject. Why it should be there with no other symbolism anywhere in the church puzzled me but I could live with that!



A few pages earlier were shown two ancient altars in Italy, in particular that of San Clemente in Rome from the C12. Looking at the High Altar in Bow Common it is evident that was inspired by the altar at San Clemente which stands some distance above the grave of St. Clement in Rome. Thus, around 2010 I visited San Clemente while in Rome and, though I had been there many times before, for the first time I was struck not only by the strong echoes of that altar at St. Paul's, Bow Common, but also this time by the emblem carved on the pediment at the front of the altar! Shown here, it is exactly what appears on the Sacrament Chapel at Bow Common, though set back some distance from the High Altar in 'San Clemente' style! Now I really was puzzled!



Could that emblem on the Sacrament Chapel altar be derived from San Clemente and from its altar and not just be a one-off 'random' piece of Christian symbolism unmatched anywhere else in the church? St. Clement was tied to an anchor and drowned in the Black Sea and thus the anchor became his symbol. But, there is no connection at all between St. Clement and St. Paul's, Bow Common. Indeed, Clement may well have been mentioned by St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians and he was a very early Bishop of Rome, martyred around 99AD, but such a link would be extremely tenuous and not strong enough to embody it in Bow Common.

This account is being written in spring and summer 2015 and while contacting Bob Maguire with some queries as I was writing this, I mentioned to him the mystery of the large symbol on the Sacrament altar - was it his idea or Ralph Beyer's? Was it anything to do with St. Clement and, if so, why? Or, was it the early Christian symbol and, if so, why? I had just been to Rome and had visited San Clemente and taken an (illicit!) photograph of the ciborium over the High Altar.

He e-mailed me thus on 27th April 2015:

'Dear Duncan

Thank you for sending the really good photo of the ciborium at S. Clemente. Yes, it is one of my very favourite things of any kind! And certainly the inspiration for St Paul's.

There is quite a difficult form/symbol problem in designing a ciborium. I've always argued the case for one on the grounds that a canopy lends symbolic importance to an object (any object - Prince Albert sitting out in Kensington Gardens, the Pope or a bishop in procession etc.) which is physically small in the scale of its surroundings. With modern congregations, the argument seldom succeeds (hurrah for Gresham) because the rationalists say the columns will get in the way of seeing what's going on.

However, once you accept the idea, there is the problem of form. Especially in the UK's weather, it's usual to put up a gazebo tent over the sandwiches etc., and there are so many shapes/structures one could use which are redolent of other, usually utilitarian purposes. Somehow, S. Clemente's answer is just exactly right.

Castel Sant'Elia: I vaguely remember going there, but cannot recall anything at all.

About the anchor. This is a mystery to me too. I can't imagine myself putting an anchor on a sacrament altar. If I were to be pressed to put some relevant symbol on (which as you mention is against my feeling about such things) it might be a chi rho, but not an anchor. Where is it? Inset into the concrete (like the porch lettering), or incised either into the concrete (difficult to do, and definitely later) or the slate? It would not have been Ralph Beyer's idea, although it could be his handiwork.

Also, the symbolic link with S. Clemente must be entirely coincidental - and amazingly tenuous! Certainly not my way of thinking about such things, nor Keith's.

Very mysterious. I can't think of an explanation.'

A mystery indeed, and one which may not ever be solved if Bob Maguire is now puzzled by it and almost all of the other main 'players' in this story are now no longer here to offer suggestions!

Beyond the main volume of the church there is little more - an electricity sub-station built in to the south perimeter, the usual facilities, a bank of electricity meters plus a sacristy and a modest sized church hall with a small kitchen area. These will be visited later. However, as an integral part of the design of the church, the **mosaics** are a major feature of St. Paul's, Bow Common.

The Mosaic of the 'Heavenly Host'



As already mentioned, Bob Maguire was architect for the church and Keith Murray was to have executed the huge mosaic of the 'Heavenly Host' which they had designed to be an essential part of the interior design. The important thing was to have the church built and open for use and this took perhaps less than a year with the Foundation Stone laid in December 1958 and the church open late in 1959 though not consecrated until 30th April 1960. But, as already seen, some of the now prominent features were not yet in place, such as the organ, the ciborium over the altar and, most importantly, the mosaic. This was an essential part of the 'meaning' of the building and not just decoration. It was intentional and even though not yet present when the building was consecrated, blank spaces were left upon which they would be created.

In 1962 Bob Maguire wrote this:

6 'Above each column the triangular spandrel panel of the concrete beam will be decorated with mosaic. These panels will represent angels, with their hands lifted up in the ancient position of prayer the position of prayer of the priest in the Eucharist. Their function in the symbolic pattern of the church is to present the idea of the church as the heavenly place (this is heralded by the inscription around the porch).

The angels will play their part particularly when the church is empty helping those alone in the building to be aware of the relationship between their worship and the worship of heaven.'

In private correspondence with me in 2009 about the 'First Design' for the church, Bob Maguire, referring to the earliest days of the planning of the building, said this:

27 'The arrangement was that I would design and supervise the contract for building the church, and Keith would design and execute £8,000-worth of glass mosaics, also to be paid for by the WDC in lieu of the stained glass of the bombed church. £8,000 was an immense commission then – the whole church was valued at £50,000.

... Keith is also credited as 'consulting designer' under his artist's alias Keith Fendall, as we were naturally in constant discussion on how to produce a building that would carry that huge amount of mosaics as an integral part of a space for Eucharistic worship. It was important to us both that the mosaics should not feel 'tacked on' but to be part of the total concept.

It was Keith's idea that they should depict the Heavenly Host in constant adoration, and surround the Christian people, and this seemed to go well with the idea that I had developed of a wrapped-around colonnade defining an ambulatory enclosing the central space on all four sides.

The breakthrough came when I had the idea of the balanced-cantilever spandrels above the columns which provided a 'blank canvass', wing-spread shaped, and which doubled up as the beam from which folded-slab ambulatory roofs could 'hang'. We then had a total-surround virtual space which could be inhabited by angels, slightly recessive, not dominating.

This was slightly compromised in the first design because the corner panels were not wing-spread shaped, but many, many other things were worse compromises.'



Very early images of the church showing blank spandrels awaiting the mosaic of the 'Heavenly Host' which Charles Lutyens was to create single-handedly between 1963 and 1968.



In 1990, Keith Murray wrote:

¹⁷ 'St. Paul's was built using a War Damage payment which provided only enough money for a "plain substitute building" to replace a bombed nineteenth century Gothic church, formerly on the site. The War Damage Act distinguished between money for buildings and for stained glass, and at St Paul's the stained glass payment was used to cover the cost of the mosaics.

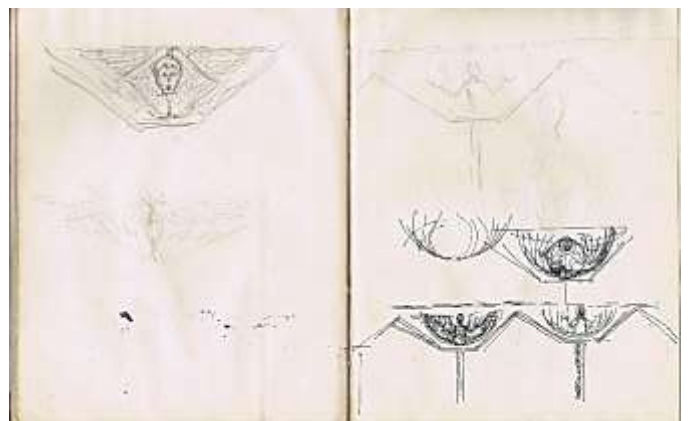
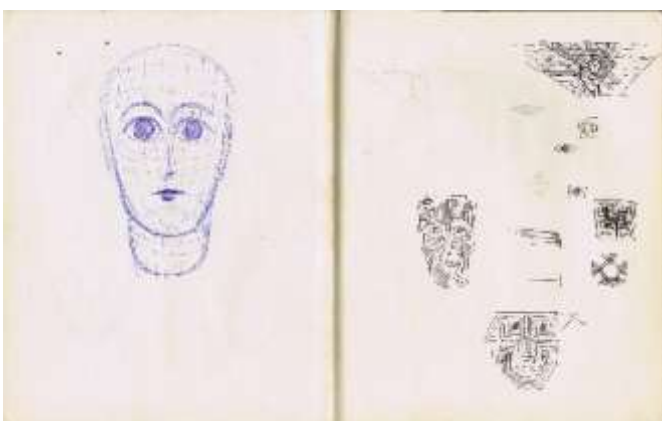
The Church was redesigned several times. Initially there was to be a baptistery with a large stained glass window. A sketch was made for this: a desert scene, with a distant baptism, seen through a flock of flamingos standing in the Jordan. Later, glass set in concrete units was considered for the upper walls of the building, each unit including an angel. As built, the spandrel panels between the folded concrete aisle roofs were designed for the angels with out-spread wings. A design by Keith Murray was approved by the Diocesan Advisory Committee.

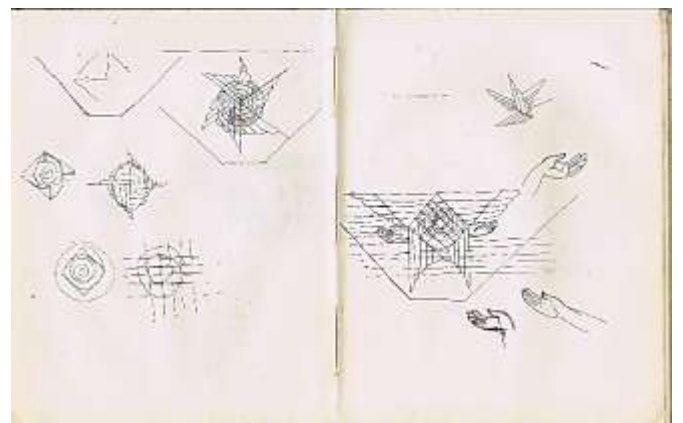
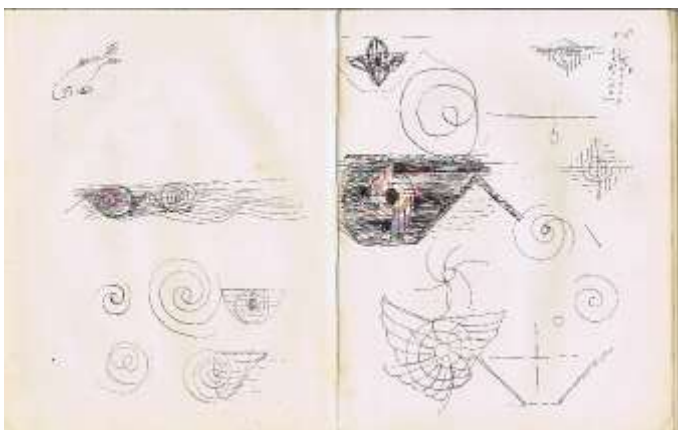
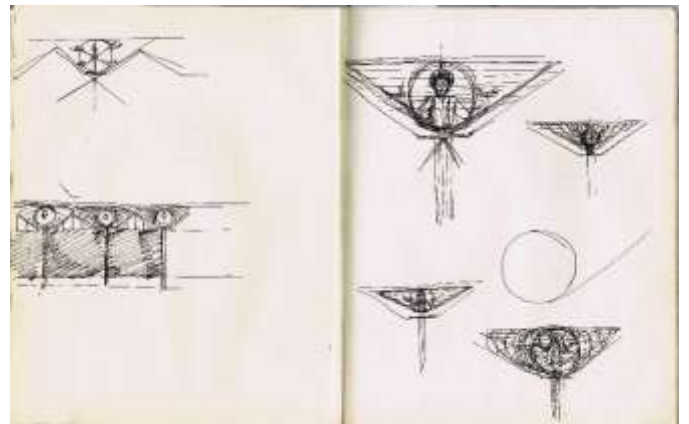
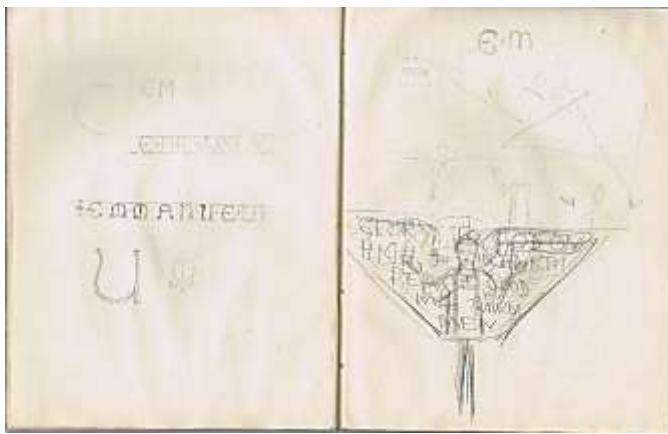
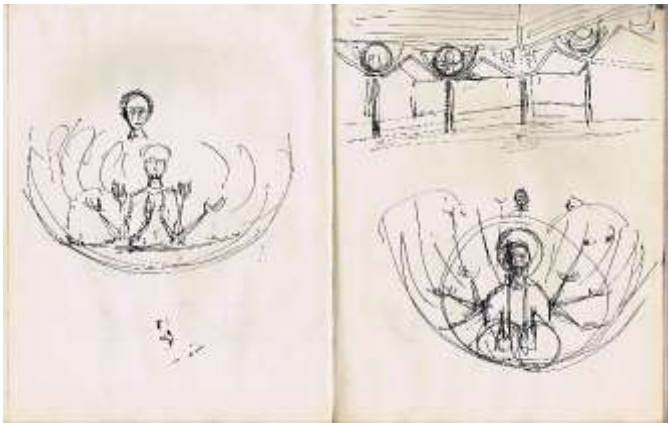
After prolonged negotiations the War Damage Commission accepted that mosaic could be counted as "stained glass". Charles Lutyens was asked to take on the commission for the mosaics.

The church is designed to be "a place set apart", where the Church - priest and people- gather for the Eucharist. The mosaic angels brings to mind the participation of the Church "in the liturgy celebrated in heaven by the angels and saints", not only when the Church is gathered together but when the building is empty. In the architecture of the Church the angels seem to support the upper walls and roof, as the angels in the choir of King's College Chapel carry the vault. The angels stand in the space created by their receding green-blue mosaic ground as the figures in Byzantine mosaics stand within the golden space around them. Where much of twentieth century religious art is restless, the angels are still: they do not impose themselves and seem to achieve their liturgical purpose almost subliminally.'

In the event, things had moved on and before 1959 had ended the new practice of Maguire and Murray had come into being. Keith Murray had worked on the design of the Heavenly Host and some of his sketches can be seen below. However, the newly formed practice could not afford him having to take even a couple of years out to execute the mosaics at Bow Common. The commission had to be handed on and it was with **Charles Lutyens** that the task now lay.

From 1957 onwards Keith Murray had been evolving a design in notebooks. In 2011 Gerry Adler Began his research for his excellent work on Maguire and Murray with a visit to St. Paul's, Bow Common. I introduced him in my vicarage to Charles Lutyens and he had meanwhile visited Keith Murray's widow and borrowed his notebooks. These extracts come from them:





Charles Lutyens: b 1933



I had the great privilege and pleasure of getting to know Charles and Marianna Lutyens as personal friends and of working with Charles at St. Paul's Bow Common. When it became clear that Keith Murray would not be able to execute the mosaic of the 'Heavenly Host,' intended as an integral part of the church, it was to Charles Lutyens that Maguire and Murray turned for this important commission in 1963. His work is one of the great treasures of the church and, I believe, of national importance as well as being, very likely, the largest contemporary mosaic mural

in the UK. All that follows comes from Charles Lutyens' own account of how the Heavenly Host came into being, both from a paper of 1989 and then an edited version for an article about this work in 'Andimento', the Journal of BAMM (the British Association for Modern Mosaic) in 2012. Both are very revealing and well worth reading.

Charles Lutyens is great nephew of the great Sir Edwin Lutyens and spent his childhood during the War in Berkshire and at school in Shropshire. During his time at Bryanston School in Dorset he decided to become an artist. He studied oil painting and sculpture at the Chelsea, Slade, St. Martin's and Central Schools of Art in London and at the age of 24 in Paris with Andre Lhote. He worked mainly in oils but also with clay, wood stone and, of course, mosaic. His one major perspective in all his art is a reflection on what the human experience is, of 'Being in the World.'

He says this ...

³¹ *'Maguire and Murray, knowing the serious and personal nature of my creative work as a painter and sculptor, approached me in 1963 concerning the implementation of the mural. They did not know any mosaicists, but they felt that they could talk with me; I was, of course, very interested. Consequently they asked me to make a design for this work. There was already a concept for the commission: that the Angels of the Heavenly Host were to be haloed, dressed in white and to stand in an open attitude of worship, as at the moment of the consecration of bread and wine. I soon realised that I had a serious problem. Angels of the Heavenly Host are defined as being Angels in the attendance of God only, as distinct from Messenger Angels, Guardian Angels and other man-visiting Beings.*

As a young artist in the Fifties, I experienced the prevalence of abstraction and the absence of the representation of the human figure. After centuries being central in art, I wondered whether, after two World Wars, Man could no longer look at himself and was banished from canvas and stone. I determined to uphold his human presence in the world, to paint and create images that evidenced his existence. It followed that I could only make images from my own experience, hence the title of my recent exhibition 'Being in the World'. As an artist this has been my central concern ever since.'

Lutyens describes with enormous honesty and integrity his approach to this work which he clearly didn't want to be a tribute to his artistic genius but much more an expression of the reality of the 'Heavenly Host' which he was struggling to make present on those 800 sq. feet of blank space and fully integrated with the vision of Maguire and Murray for the rest of the church. In his account of the painstaking (and at times painful) creation of the mosaic there is such a sense of his struggle to remain true to his brief, not imposing his own designs or aesthetic upon what he was so committed to allowing to emerge and 'appear' in its own right.

³¹ *'Thus, in 1963 my integrity was challenged: by what authority could I make an image of the Angels of the Heavenly Host? I had never seen an Angel. I became chillingly aware of what seemed like arrogance and conceit in assuming access to God's Heavenly Throne. I was seriously considering not going through with this commission. I had been exploring the subject with pencil and paint and in the process I showed my work to the architects, who commented that it was good to see, because it showed what they did not want!'*

³¹ 'I asked them whether I could not instead portray Messenger Angels or such like, even - throwing away my own values - whether I could depict them in abstract form, but they confirmed that this mural had to depict Angels of the Heavenly Host.

As an artist I have always worked through the reality of my own experience and because I had never seen an angel I was in a great dilemma. I was required to make a design which necessitated me to create an image for which I had no basis of experience. How was I to carry out this work and remain true to myself? I had certainly never seen an angel who administers to man, how then was I to experience an angel of the "Heavenly Host", who stand at the throne of God and administer only to him. Yet, I had accepted the commission. I felt it presumptuous and arrogant of me to have done so. It seemed to suggest in me some kind of intent of self-elevation into God's presence to have a glimpse of these special and divine beings, simply so that I could represent them in mosaic in St. Paul's church, London E3. And yet, what alternative? I was angry with the angels and their demands.

On this I returned to my Workplace and wept. I felt as I did on my first day in school when I was given an open book and told to read it. I could not read and in my helplessness and failure, I cried. It was out of the question for me to make Angels derived from mediaeval Angels or the representations of Botticelli, the Pre-Raphaelites or Christmas card angels. These Angels had to be relevant and meaningful to our times or it was not worth doing. Clearly, in the last resort this was a question of faith today & particularly of where I stood.

Having read about Angels in the V&A library and in the stories of the Old and New Testaments, it was dawning on me that Angels 'appear' and that the person to Whom they appear does not know beforehand what they will look like. So I began to develop a scheme of colours which I felt was sympathetic to Angels and could be an environment from which Angels could 'appear'.

The architects spoke of the necessity that this mural should not appear to detach itself from the substance of the building, but should, while existing in its own terms of colour, design and the imagery, actual and symbolic of the Spirit and Faith, rest on the plane of the wall's surface to form part of the containment of the sacred space.

While they waited for my images & indication of my intent, I came and told them that it was not possible for me to provide them with a design, for while it may be an appropriate & time-tested convention that Angels have haloes and are dressed in white and so forth, it was outside their nature and practice to be seen before they 'appear'. Any design therefore would preclude the possibility of it being an Angel. Liking my colour scheme the architects, acknowledging that I could not provide a design, said, 'Then, "appear" us an Angel.'

This was an extraordinary leap of faith on their part as commissioners of the mural. From a place of not knowing, they committed themselves to the expense of sending me to Murano, Venice, with £500 to purchase the tesserae with which to 'appear' the Angels.

As it turned out, I remained on the island for two weeks, transferring my colour scheme onto sample strips with which the manufacturer, Hugo, Donna et Figlio, could match my chosen colours, of which there were 700, to their vast stock of smalti. Also, there was the impossible task of calculating and deciding on the quantity and proportions of each colour in the order, without actually being in possession of a design.

On completion, after placing the order, I went to see the famous mosaics of Ravenna and Rome, making enquiries and seeking advice from mosaic studios there. I soon concluded that I needed either to take a full three years training in mosaic methods or return home and get on with the work. I did the latter.

I was living with a number of families and single people in London who had chosen to live together as an extended family. In order to live our commitment we met each week as a group to work through (rather than avoid) the personal and inter-personal difficulties and differences that inevitably arose in the course of our shared lives. The nature of the response and enquiry of the group was such as to create an openness through which the experience of pain, realities of self and life and of being human would be encountered ... During the execution of the mural itself I tried to keep in touch with this experience and remain myself in a state of openness.'

³¹ 'It was 1964. The spandrels had been empty since the church was consecrated in 1960. Preparation for the work began.' 'On the arrival of the first order of materials in England I proceeded, on the request of the architect, to 'appear' an Angel on a panel in their offices. I made a head and torso which they saw and liked. They suggested that we put it up in the church and they then asked that I finish the panel. I did this in a mixture of paint and tesserae. **They found this 'Sketch Angel' good and asked me to 'appear' a further Angel, this time directly onto the wall of the church. In this way the commission was officially begun, still without a design, but I had a colour scheme inside my head.**



I made a 16 ft. long mobile platform from builders' scaffolding with three levels, the lower two for the materials.' 'I scoured shoe shops for boxes, collected flower pots, milk cartons ... I put up there two boxes of mixes. I'd look in the box and wait and see which colour I liked; it was all instinctive.... The 700 colours were sorted into boxes of single colours, each colour containing up to 25 tones. The tesserae were pre-cut, on account of time, from their original dinner-plate size glass form, interspersed with some irregular uncut pieces. I found a ready-made cement of the right consistency purchasable in a tin with which to work on the vertical surface of the wall. I had to make my own tests as the manufacturers would not provide me with a guarantee. ...I researched into pre-mixed commercial cements until I found one I could use. I discovered that the scaffold with its platforms loaded was too heavy and too long to manoeuvre round corners and church furniture. With a hacksaw I cut the scaffold into two. ... Fortunately, I was just able to move the loaded platforms single-

handed. I and an assistant spent 4 weeks in a dust containing plastic tent to hammer the paint from the concrete surface and make a key for the finished work. I gathered tools, the cleaning acid, made an 18ft long brush, rigged up heating and light. I placed the first stone, it was not visible from the church's floor. And so the mural began.

It was necessary, before applying the tesserae to the wall, to remove the smooth painted surface of the spandrels, providing a key for the cement. Having prepared the first panel, I applied a palm's width amount of cement and laid the first stone. I no longer remember where or for what part of the image this stone was placed. I remember climbing down, removing the ladder and shunting the platform away in order to look at this first stone in celebration of the event, but it was not visible from the ground!

I looked 360 degrees around the church at the fourteen panels that waited, as inanimate things do, for the 800 square feet of wall to be covered in every small part with mosaic pieces. I had, in this panel, to discover a skeletal design that would serve as a basis on which to hang the glorious colours of each individual 'appearance' on each panel throughout the church. During the creation of this panel it became clear to me that I could not 'bend' an Angel around any corner, but the commission required the introduction of an Angel in all fourteen spandrels.'



³¹ 'After consideration I concluded that the four corners of the mural would contain representations of the four elements, Earth, Air, Fire and Water, because these reach back to the Creation into which Man has looked through the ages for his beginning and for evidence of God, and because they express the qualities and feelings of Man himself.'



The 'Earth Creature' (in the south-west corner) above, with its right eye (upper right) and missing left eye (lower right) up to May 2011 when it was completed (see later)!



The 'Fire Corner' (above the font in the north-west corner) – not a creature unlike the other elements – and shown in more detail to the right.



The 'Water Corner' in the south-east corner) – a whale-like creature leaping up with open jaws.

(shown to the left)



The 'Air Creature' to left

(at the north-west corner)

³¹ 'On entering the church through its octagonal porch over which is written in red letters; TRULY THIS IS NONE OTHER THAN THE HOUSE OF GOD + THIS IS THE GATE OF HEAVEN, one is confronted by the Font which, when uncovered for baptism, reflects the light from the lantern roof over the altar space.

Above it I placed the element of Fire to acknowledge baptism also by desire. It is at the Warm area of the church behind the worshippers. In the Water corner I did a Fish with open mouth reaching its head up out of the waves, crying up to the sky. In the Fire corner, Fire is depicted, on account of its heat and power to consume, as subdued, like embers; the Air corner holds the image of a Bird with an angry red beak, which seems to be descending as if to land. It was done without drawings; the whole thing appeared in the making. The centre of the panel representing Earth, 'matter', is held together by cellular shapes that gather loosely to define the head of a Beast. It is not entirely clear; I liked the idea of seeing and not seeing. These were the last things I did.

There emerged changing colours around the church: the reds of the Fire corner, browns of the Earth corner and the Earth Angel, blues and violets of the Water and Air corners, providing a progression of warmth and cool between the east and west ends of the church, startling in comparison and contrast. There also unfolded a subtle pattern within the panels which progressed colour from the central area of the Angels upwards and outwards to meet at their extremities.

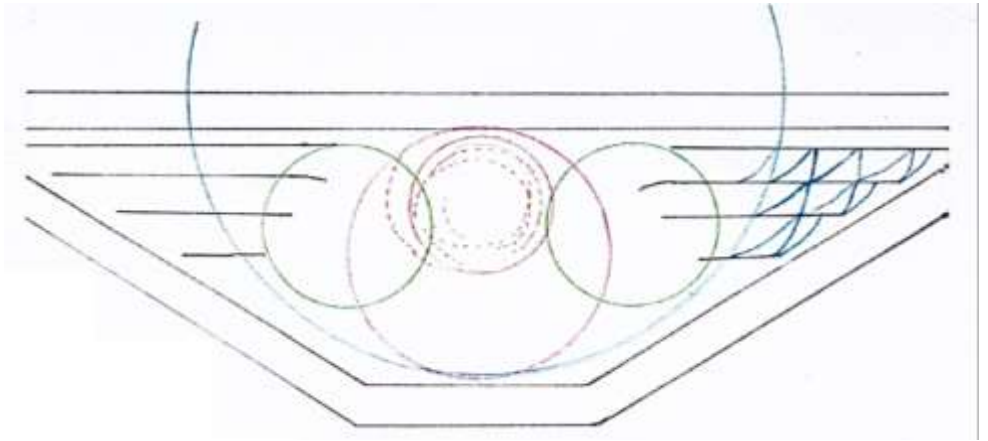
While the first image took shape and form over a period of 4-5 months the whole mural was taking shape in my mind. A structure developed in this first panel through which I tried to convey openness. The halo orbs the angel's head with open space. The mosaic spreads to another encircling shadow of a colour change, surrounding his being to his waist, from which two circles split to roll apart to the boundaries of the angel's open and embracing arms. These circles are sent as one in an upward and outward movement by open hands in a lightening of colour to arc up into the wall above.

This shape of opening and openness became the structure that I drew with the help of a **plywood template** onto the wall in all the panels.' (plywood template seen below in a detail from a late image 1967/68)



In 2011 Charles Lutyens produced a very helpful sheet for visitors to the church to understand some of the ideas behind his mosaic. The diagram below depicts the structure of circles which evolved early on as a common format for each of the Angels of the Heavenly Host.

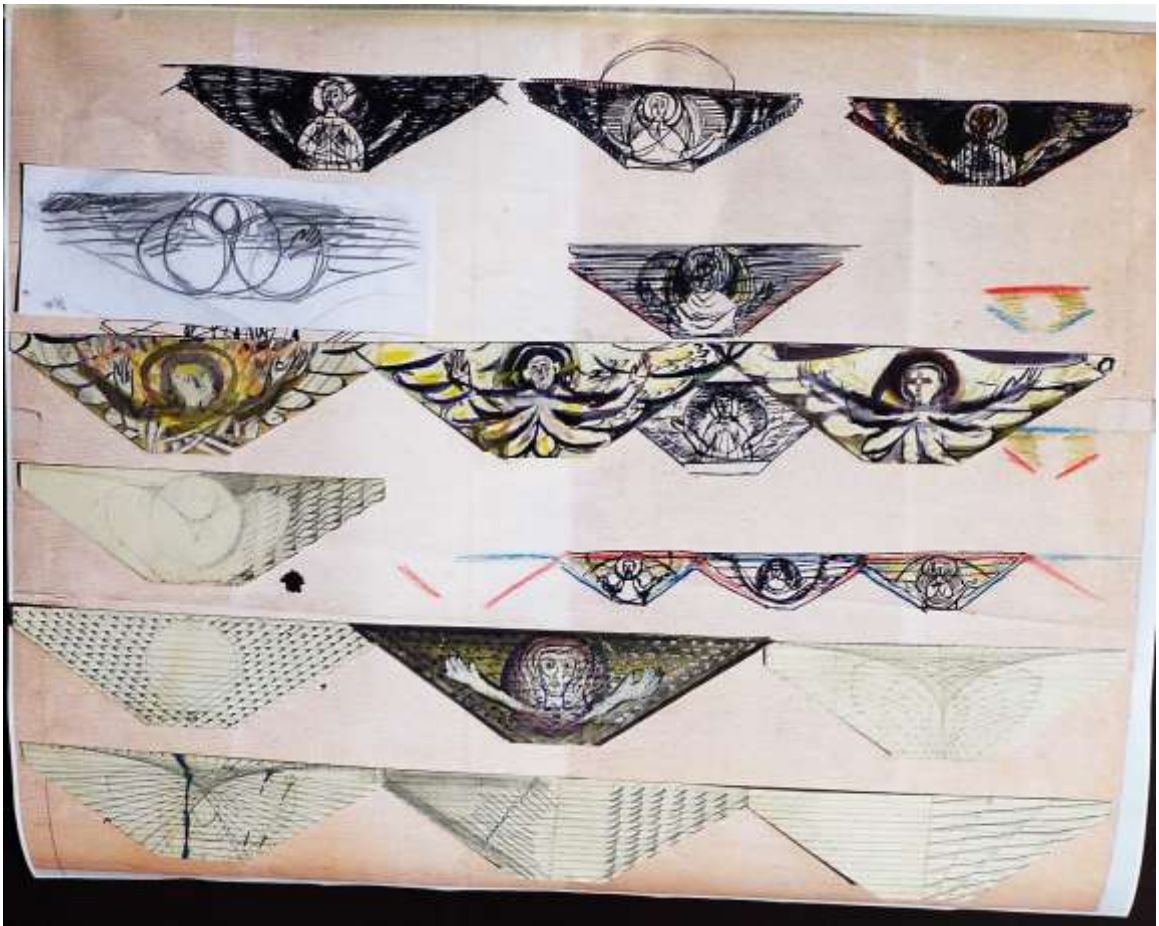
'From the centre of each image interplaying circles reach upwards and outwards with lines through the wings spreading horizontally in a continual connection between the Angels, allowing for 'openness'. It seemed that this structure held also "my acceptance of the anxiety of not knowing and not pre-determining the 'appearance' of the Angels".'



Each panel is individual in colour, expression, and in drawing.'

Aware of Charles Lutyens as the considerable artist that he is, in 2011 his family and I prevailed upon him to present a retrospective exhibition of his life's work called, 'Being In The World,' at St. Paul's, Bow Common. It showed the breadth and depth of his reflection and observation of his place in the world as an artist. It also bought together some early sketches and ideas for the mosaic which was also very much a part of that exhibition. Some of these are shown here.





Five pages or so earlier there was mention of what Lutyens called the 'Sketch Angel' produced for Maguire and Murray as an indication of what was in his head and then the first angel actually to be created on one of the spandrels. These flanked what was to become the 'Fire Corner,' above the font and where the Fire mosaic was to be created.

³¹ 'So the first Angel on which I was working I came to call Fire Angel and its margins took on the redness and heat of fire & his clothes and halo took on flame-like shapes & the greenness in which he stood, a hint of warmth. This first Angel has remained, until now, almost half a century later, my favourite Angel of the ten.



It was during work in this panel that, dissatisfied with a considerable area between the Angel body and arm, I cut out what represented two weeks' work. I realised that I could not do this again. I had placed each individual tessera with feeling and intuition, allowing the colours, as it were, to 'call me.' To remove an area such as this did not accord with my chosen method of working, to be 'open to what comes,' which was the means by which, with hope and expectation, the images of the Angels would emerge. As an artist and maker of the mosaic it was not my job to criticise what 'appeared' or to determine myself what should replace it; nor could I practically afford again to cut out what represented time, money and emotion.

In the process of developing the 'Sketch' Angel and the Fire Angel, and moving on to work on other images in the church, the skeletal structure emerged. There are horizontal lines, as if between the wing feathers, joining the Angels together around the church and echoing the dark horizontal lines between the bricks of the wall above. There are circles in the approximate, ambivalent position for the haloes, which hold the faces of Angels, and the central circle from which two others open up to left and right; there is the Circle created by these and defined through the lights from the Angels' hands rising into the wall above. These structures became clarified and confirmed as a basis for all the panels. (see diagram, two pages above)

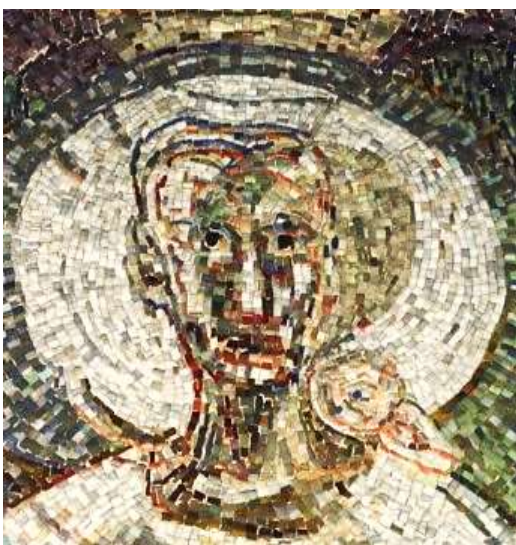
The Fire Angel, being the first, was a complex task where, without experience, I had to find my way. After the Fire Angel was largely established with a whole week creating his left hand, the first hand of the mural, but well before the panel was complete, I shunted the platform across the floor to establish the framework on one of the opposite panels and later again a third. At the point when several panels had been started and this sketch design became clear, I made a template from sheets of ply-wood to the shape and area of a spandrel, with which to transfer the design rhythmically around the church in a series of dots with coloured dye. At an early stage I also made a long, long brush, with which I could reach from the floor to stab the surface of the concrete and make marks from a distance.' (see small image, three pages above)

Thus, for 5 years, single-handedly for the far greater part, Charles Lutyens went on a remarkable and costly journey of discovery, refusing to compromise on remaining open to what was to be 'given' or to 'appear.'

³¹ *'Five years is a long time. On my daily one hour's journey crossing London from west to east and returning, I read all twelve volumes of Churchill's The Second World War. Re-ordering of tesserae was made, but certain colours became unobtainable over time*

There were days when it was so cold that cement froze to the wall. There were changes of the community and congregation, while old terraced streets were knocked down to build balcony blocks. There were questions in me about Angels and the colours black and white and questions as to how, standing on the floor below, I could see into the palms of the hands above. So I depicted one hand of the right-hand Water Angel to appear as if seen from below. I did not like it, so I decided to drop the question as it introduced complications I did not want.

People in the congregation would comment on the Angels, even saying that one or the other moved or looked or winked. The Priest's housekeeper, Winnie Wyatt, who every day brought me a cup of tea and two biscuits, used at times to take me by the arm to an Angel and speak about him. There was one in particular, to the left of the Water corner, of which, on one occasion she said, seeing what I recognised as two random stones in a circular gap, that there was a baby on his shoulder. Some while later, I completed the area and left for her there the image of small baby.'



'Winnie's Angel' amazed visitors when I showed it to them - such visible openness to the total commitment of Charles Lutyens to what was waiting to be given him to embody in the mosaic. Winnie

was acknowledged by all as a godly woman and there is an icon in the church dedicated to her. When the icon was blessed during my time at the church both Fr. Kirkby and Charles Lutyens returned to the church and



Charles told the story of 'Winnie's Angel.'

I remember two other examples of Charles Lutyens using what was 'given' to him in creating the mosaic. I remember him telling me that as he created the angels he wondered why they were appearing as white figures. One of the angels therefore is depicted as a black angel but he was not satisfied with the end result, but is still there as it was given. This image of the mosaic is poor, alas.



This angel is on the north side of the church. At the east end the 'Air Angel' long puzzled me as it seemed to be an angel with two faces - one in profile and one face on. When I asked Charles about this he simply said that it was 'given' and so had to 'appear'!

When looked at from below there is an impression of the cranium of a skull projecting from the left side of



the angel's face and an eye and mouth to the right of the face.

Five years had passed and time and money were running out. ³¹ *'There were frantic times, taking on assistants and finding it necessary to ask a really good one to leave because his 'beautiful' technique of work was standing out from the norm, & another to leave because he announced that he had not come to make me tea. These were brief interludes. And so, as time does not stop, the church became increasingly infused with colour. The areas of naked concrete became smaller & fewer. Images became complete & panels joined up.*



Towards the ending, after years of solitary work, Maria from Seville, young volatile, passionate, who had never drawn or painted or had anything to do with mosaic, joined me to bring the mural to completion. She was able to lay the tesserae in harmony with and indistinguishable from my own. As the mural came to an end and we were completing work in and around the Earth corner, the money for

its making was running out.'

In 2010 some 42 years after she had last seen it Maria Roncero came to visit the mosaic with her son, Jèsus! It was such a delight to meet her!

Charles Lutyens reached the end of this journey in 1968 and he felt dissatisfied. This had been a long journey under difficult personal circumstances with his marriage having broken down just beforehand and access to his children not possible. I remember him telling me that he tried not to complete any one figure before the others in case all his depression was contained in that figure. And yet what emerged out of all his striving gives no hint of any of that and they truly are strong spiritual figures who show none of the cost of their maker's travails.

I learned early on of Charles' feeling of his work being unfinished though it was not until maybe 10 years later that I heard about the blank 'protest' patch of unfinished mosaic. But I think it was in 1998 that he and Marianna called into the church with son, Ben, and maybe other family members. They had been on a Lutyens family reunion and were passing through. And then something happened for Charles and he wept copiously. He said that he now loved his work and was astonished by it! More than that he wanted to 'own' it and to sign it! I remember he got a ladder and climbed up to the Fire corner and examined the Fire Angel closely. It was a memorable and deeply moving moment.

And then in 2010 I discovered that Charles was working in his studio in Oxford on a huge and remarkable figure - the Outraged Christ. I half arm-twisted and half invited him to bring it to Bow Common and display it in the church. With it I also insisted that there needed to be a display of his life's work in a Lutyens' Retrospective and all of this was planned for 2011. But first, I felt strongly that he now needed to complete his work on the Heavenly Host some 22 years after he left his empty patch of cement! And so on 30th June 2010 he ascended a ladder to the Earth Beast and carried out investigations!



This view shows the top of the ladder leading up to the two 'eyes' of the Earth Beast (circled) - one completed in 1968 the other a patch of blank cement, soon to be completed!

In fact it was nearly a year later on 9th May 2011 that Charles and Marianna came once again to St. Paul's, Bow Common with buckets of tesserae and cement and that purposeful look in his eye!

There were no issues with this being a listed building as nothing was being altered but simply that an artist was finally completing his unfinished work - albeit after 43 years!

There is a unique record from that day of the of the completion of the 'Heavenly Host' and these views show some moments from the three hours in which the work was finally completed.

I was expecting Charles to give the Earth Beast its second eye in the style of the first eye and had no idea what he was intending to do, though I should have remembered that turnabout day of fulfilment in 1998 when Charles had declared his intention!

This time there was no great scaffolding arrangement but simply the church ladder and a ladder rack to hold buckets of tesserae and cement and the like and Marianna Lutyens and the Vicar in attendance as required.

In the views which follow the ladder can be seen and the empty patch before Charles climbed up to do his work. Then appears the first clue as to what he intended to do with the blank cement patch now marked up! The rest shows the progress of the work and then the final descent of the artist, his work now finally completed.



Charles Lutyens ascends to complete his mosaic. Then (above) the letters 'CL' can be seen marked on the area to be worked!



The Earth Beast has its second eye at last – with Charles Lutyens having finally signed his largest work of art – with the letters 'CL'



5.25 pm May 9th 2011
The artist descends the ladder and has now completed his work, some 47 years after beginning it!

Little known is that the first idea Maguire and Murray had was for Charles to decorate the **underside of the font** with mosaic!



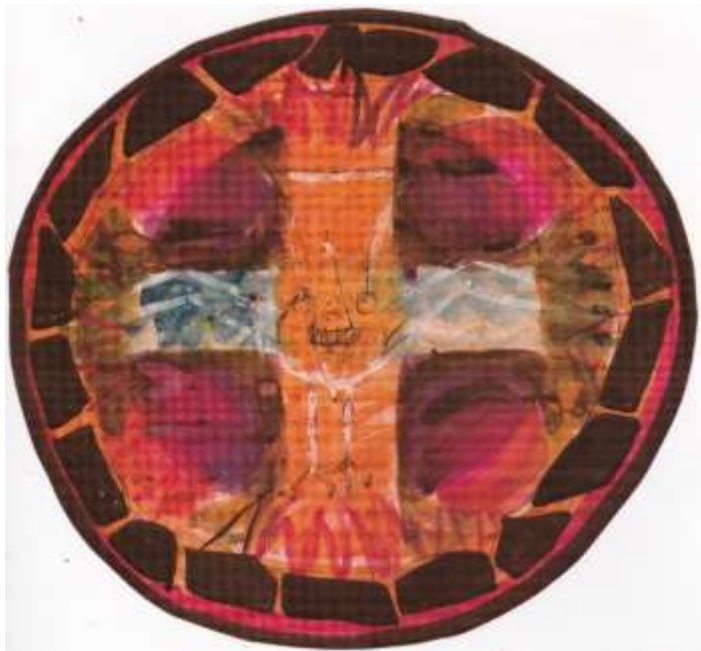
The font has already been described and its large and hugely heavy slate lid, once hoisted up by block and tackle and now laid aside until the church can afford to put it back. It is entirely undecorated. Part of the 'journey' into the church via the porch entrance involved an encounter with the font with its lid raised high so that a glimpse of the light-filled lantern beyond could be had in the surface of the water in the font kept filled high. The 'norm,' therefore, was for the font lid to be raised when the church was occupied - much higher than shown here. This also enabled the holy water in the font to be readily available as a 'holy water stoup' for any who entered & wished to sign

themselves with the sign of the cross - a familiar devotion for catholic minded Christians. I kept the lid raised throughout my time until 2005 when the font lid had to be taken down.

This means that the underside of the font would be visible for most of the time and a decorative mosaic scheme was considered for it but never executed! Knowing the mind of Bob Maguire I feel sure that pure decoration would not have been reason enough to do this as this is a very spare building and everything is there for a reason. Indeed, in 1962 he said, *'In contrast to the "industrial" materials, a small amount of richer materials have been used. For instance, the roof of the ciborium is in serpentine and white Sicilian marbles; the candle sconces on the corona are of amethyst glass, specially made in Venice'* and, of course the coloured glass tesserae of the mosaic of the 'Heavenly Host.'

Charles Lutyens made at least 6 sketches for the underside of a font cover two of which are shown here but wasn't totally convinced by the idea! They were never executed.

(Itteshad Hossain's 16m clip of 30 May 2015 on You Tube, 'Angels of the Heavenly Host' logging Charles Lutyens lecture in church is well worth viewing. There is a link to it on the church website.)



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