

Gongs

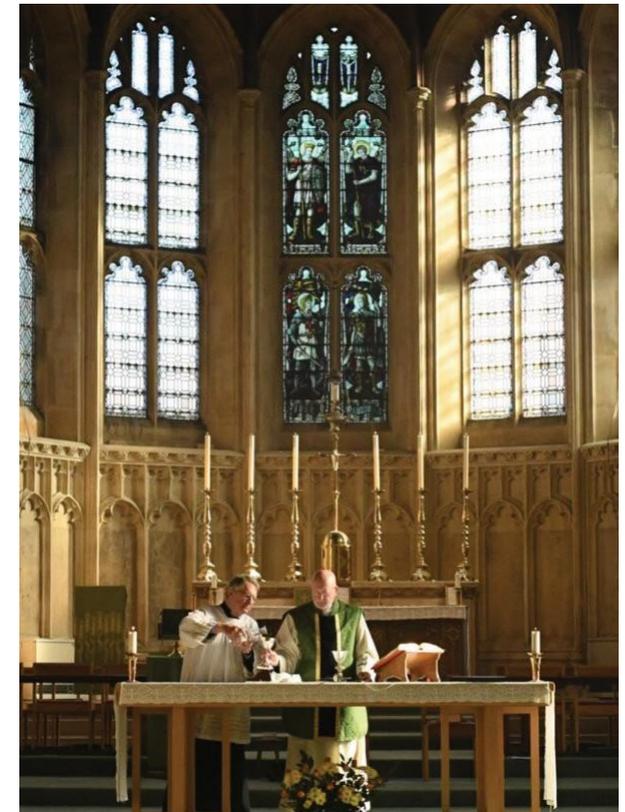
All Saints' Catholic Tradition

'The parish is torn in two through sides being taken'

Mr James could take no more. The church sidesman had over the years seen many things that had disturbed his protestant tastes.

The altar was hidden behind a rood screen, the choir was robed, the vicar's vestments were worryingly ornate. The service was sung.

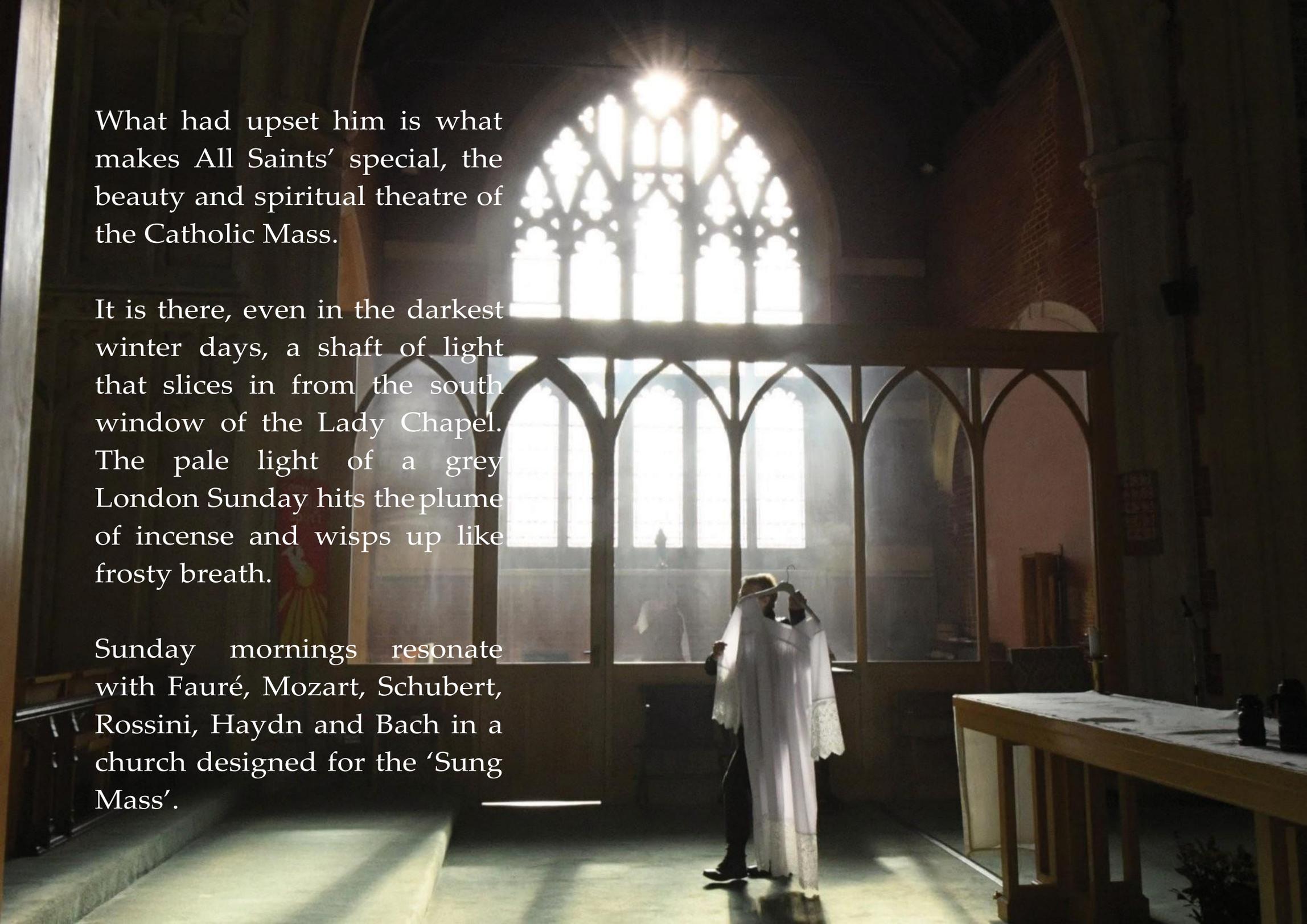
All of these things he had coped with but the introduction of a Sanctus Gong in 1934 was too much for him to bear. He left and he was not alone.



What had upset him is what makes All Saints' special, the beauty and spiritual theatre of the Catholic Mass.

It is there, even in the darkest winter days, a shaft of light that slices in from the south window of the Lady Chapel. The pale light of a grey London Sunday hits the plume of incense and wisps up like frosty breath.

Sunday mornings resonate with Fauré, Mozart, Schubert, Rossini, Haydn and Bach in a church designed for the 'Sung Mass'.





Services begin with clouds of incense and a procession of priests in ornate vestments. The wooden panel at the back of the nave is what used to be the rood screen. There is a prominent statue of the Virgin Mary. To anyone with a knowledge of the Church of England, the clues are all there, this is 'Anglo-Catholic' Britain. It is a building that recognises that while homilies and hymns are outward expressions of faith so too is the building and its art a pathway to God. Candles, carvings and music convey a spirituality that is unspoken and unsaid.

This is a church that takes music and beauty seriously. In 1994, the organist Geoffrey Hanson reported that the choir had mastered 26 settings for the Mass.





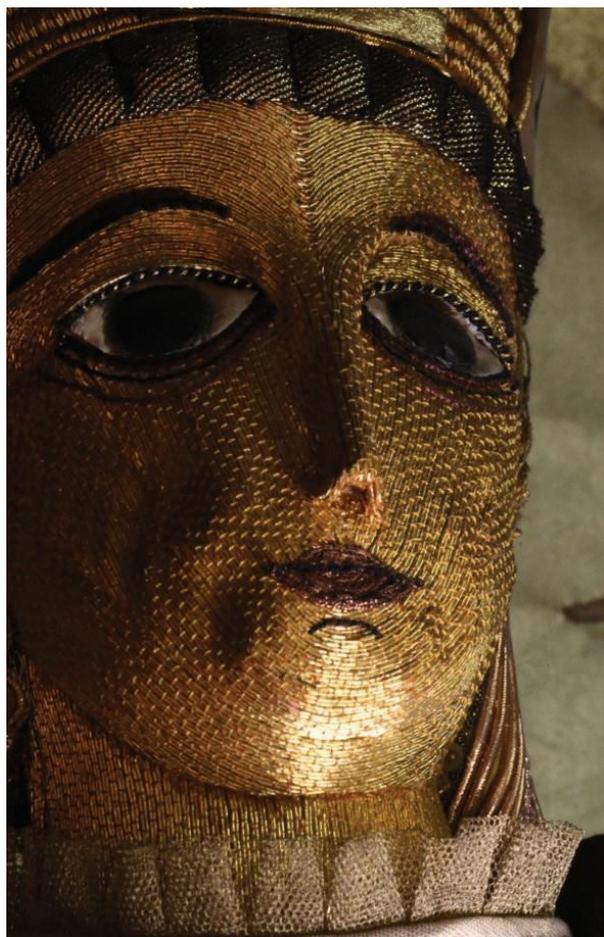


All Saints' has many artworks and statues. There is, near the font, the small black faceless figurine of Francis of Assisi, a work by a local sculptor, Naomi Blake.

Born Zisel Dum in Czechoslovakia in 1924 she lost 24 members of her family in the Holocaust.

She, herself, survived Auschwitz. St Francis is faceless, a reminder of the suffering of history's faceless millions.

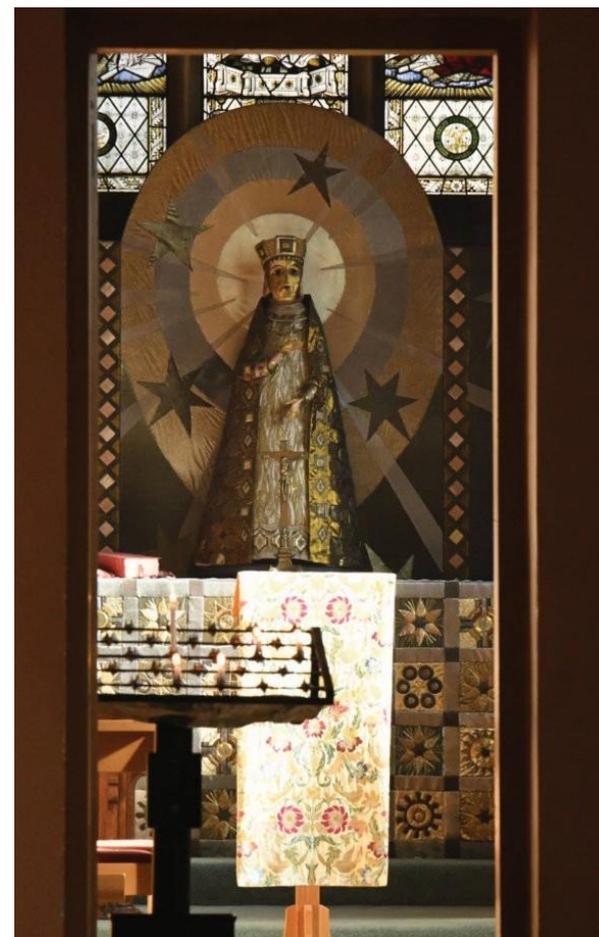




Inside the Lady Chapel, there is the startling sight of the Golden Madonna by the famed ecclesiastical embroiderer Beryl Dean. The commission was a gift from one of the church's most stalwart supporters Enid Branchdale, however, even she was rather surprised when it arrived. The 'Golden Madonna' was one of Beryl Dean's last works.

Beryl had through her life transformed the look of ecclesiastical needlework. Her enthronement cope for Robert Runcie is truly a thing of beauty. The wide eyes of the Madonna (built around an old lampshade) were certainly an innovation for All Saints'.

It has over the years inspired a mixture of wonder, puzzlement and with one or two children a sleepless night or two. I am a fan, others have their own views about 'Scary Mary'.



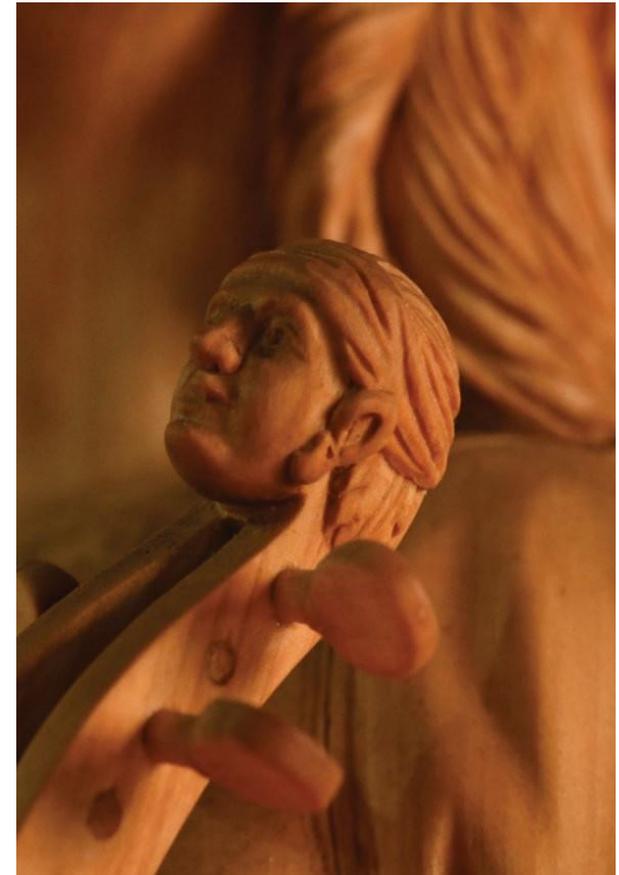




Then, there is the wooden statue of St Cecilia, the Patron Saint of Music.

With her head cast heavenward and her hands clutching a viola da gamba she is one of the physical signs of the church's passion for music.

Carved by Susanne Küster, it was commissioned by the late Jane Ryan (an eminent viol player) in memory of her husband, Dietrich Kessler, the much-loved and talented Swiss-born stringed instrument maker and collector of viols. Dietrich and Jane lived in nearby Fortis Green and worshipped at All Saints'.





The architecture of the church owes much to the 19th century move to return to some of the lost beauty of the middle ages. The Cambridge Camden group, the architectural wing of the 'Oxford Movement' produced a booklet 'A Few Words to Church Builders.' To read it is to understand All Saints'.

Here is their list of requirements for a church to fulfil the liturgical duties of the Anglo-Catholic rite.

The church name ought to make reference to a Saint. There must be a nave and chancel, ideally built in the Early English style. The chancel must be at least two steps higher than the nave. There ought to be a rood screen to keep the chancel free of 'irreverent men and women.' Pulpits should be unobtrusive; prayer takes precedence over preaching.

The list goes on and at every point you can tick off all the elements in the original design of All Saints' when it was finally 'completed' in 1912.





Of course, it is worth remembering that in the 1890s when All Saints was being built there was still considerable ill feeling about 'tractarians,' Anglicans who wanted to return the church to its original Catholic roots. Indeed, some had found themselves imprisoned for their beliefs. They were seen by some as a sinister secret society.

Nevertheless when its first vicar, Fr Armitstead arrived he was clearly an adherent of what one member of the PCC called the 'High Church school of thought.' The church always had a small parish and it is clear that there was from the beginning a considerable number of worshippers from outside the parish boundaries who were here for its distinctive form of worship. However, it also reflected a wider shift in liturgical fashion. Christ Church in North Finchley also had an organ, a robed choir, choral singing and other elements that might have caused outrage earlier in the century.

What is certain though is that from the beginning of its independent existence all of its priests were drawn from Catholic Anglicanism and were taking worship in one direction. Fr East's introduction of bells and a gong in the 1930s was followed in 1939 by incense and by this point no one raised an objection.

But even fifty years later there was a final echo of the earlier disputes. A member of the congregation had taken to loudly declaiming against the 'Marians' from the back of the nave. She had even accosted the Bishop during one of his visits. It was agreed that someone should sit with her and gently try to persuade her to allow the worshippers to attend Communion in peace.





