

Exploring St. Andrew's, The Straits

Updated December 2015



An exterior view of 'The Church on The Straits', a shared site that includes St. Andrew's Church of England Church and The Straits Community Church.

The Straits is a small suburban community between Sedgley and Lower Gornal, bordering the Staffordshire countryside. St Andrew's Church is at the heart of this residential area.

The congregation of St Andrew's are a close and friendly congregation who have a wealth of experience and memories.

In a venture that is quite new to the Diocese of Worcester, St Andrew's has entered into a relationship allowing The Straits Community Church, an evangelical Christian denomination, to share its site.

This is an exciting venture. Both churches are faced with their own challenges in trying to spread the Gospel to this unique area, and this agreement means that they are able to pool resources and experiences wherever it is appropriate. What makes this relationship even more special is the difference of the traditions of the two churches, which on the face of it seem far apart.

The agreement shows Christian love, charity and understanding at its best and says a lot about the generosity to be found amongst the congregations of St Andrew's Church and The Straits Community Church.



St Andrew's is proud of its liturgical tradition and would consider itself Anglo-Catholic. Liturgical colour plays a big part. Here is a picture of the Altar and tabernacle arrayed in green (to symbolise growth). A purple altar frontal (used for penitential occasions) and the lectern are both dedicated in memory of churchwarden Pat Green who sadly died while in office in 2007.



(Left) The figure of Christ on the wall behind the altar *(in memory of Jack Marsh)*.



(Right) The Stations of the Cross *(donated by families in the congregation)*. Both were installed while Edwin Myatt was vicar.



Left: The Acolytes' candle stands. Right: Lectern (*made by Colin Clews, a long-time server at St. Andrews*).



(Left) The Ever Blessed Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus (in memory of Mary Davies).

THE DEDICATION OF S. ANDREW'S CHURCH.

(From the "Dudley Herald" of April 4th.)

After being nine years without a Mission Church, the little mining and agricultural district of the Straits, Sedgley, is now in the happy position of having a handsome little Church, which was formally dedicated and opened by Dr. Kamphorne, Lord Bishop of Lichfield.

The previous Mission Church was completely wrecked by mining subsidence nearly nine years ago, and, owing principally to difficulties of finding a safe site, no building has been erected until now. The new Church is built in a modern style of breeze concrete, with rough cast exterior, with plastered walls coloured with art tints,

(Right) The dedication of the church on 4th April 1914 by the Bishop of Lichfield was recorded in the Dudley Herald, and reprinted in Sedgley Parish magazine the following month. The Herald described The Straits community then as 'a little mining and agricultural district'.

The church was completed a matter of months before the First World War, replacing a 'tin mission hut' that was 'completely wrecked' due to mining subsidence. The building has no deep concrete foundations and was not intended to last the Church for more than 25 years – it celebrated 100 years on the site in 2014!

A Dudley Herald article about the church's dedication tells us that the building was 'built in the modern style of breeze concrete, with rough cast exterior, with plastered walls coloured with art tints, green in the chancel and cream in the nave'. Regarding the church furniture, the article continues: 'The church is seated with fumed oak chairs, an oak pulpit and an oak screen'.



A board on the rear wall records Roland Oliver, the first vicar of St. Andrew's, beginning his ministry in 1959.

Before that St. Andrew's did not have its own vicar and services were generally run by curates, with the vicar of All Saints' acting as vicar-in-charge.

In fact, St. Andrew's has not had a vicar since the departure of The Revd Paddy Mitchell in 2003.

Until late 2013, Revd Rob Parker-McGee was Assistant Curate in the Gornal and Sedgley Team Ministry, living next door in the roomy, modern house donated to the diocese for use as a vicarage.

Rob focused much of his ministry in the Straits and took many services at the church. Jan Humphries is a Licensed Lay Minister in the Team Ministry and also lives on the Straits. Much of her ministry is also focused on the Straits.



The Stations of the Cross can be found around the walls of the church. The fourth Station was contributed by the Woodfield Family - Arthur Woodfield worked for the Earl of Dudley and served on the altar until he was 91.

A tradition of dedicated, faithful church-going runs through the St Andrew's congregation. This has been true ever since the Church's foundation.

In the 1960s there were regular working parties, convened by the vicar, who would come in to spruce up the church, do any repairs necessary, paint and varnish the insides and maintain the gardens and paths.

Previously St Andrew's ran a regular Sunday School and held a Sunday School Anniversary Day.

St. Andrew's Church has an 'Anglo-Catholic' tradition, which is slightly 'higher church' than at All Saints'.

At one time it prided itself on offering 'smells and bells' services employing a high level of liturgical symbolism. Edwin Myatt (vicar 1988-94) introduced incense to services when he focussed on improving the liturgical offering of the church.

In more recent times the 'smells' have been reduced, but the 'bells' remain and so does much of the symbolism around the church. There is still opportunity for Incense to be used on special occasions.

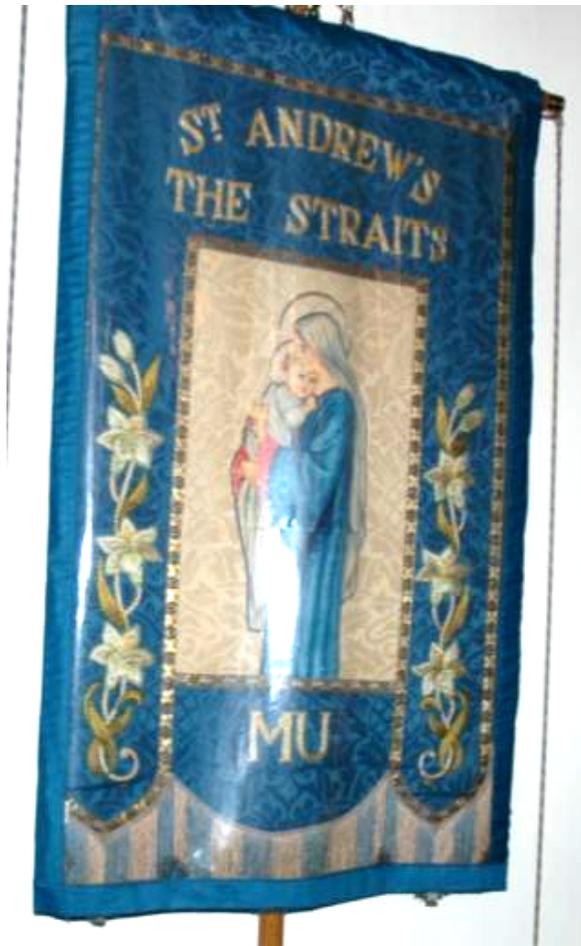
The Blessed Sacrament is usually reserved in the tabernacle behind the Altar. Edwin Myatt was also responsible for making St. Andrew's a parish church and obtaining a licence for carrying out marriages. Before this all marriages had to take place at All Saints' in Sedgley instead. Marriage services are still able to be offered at St Andrew's.

There is a corner Altar on the left at the back of church which takes on special significance on Maundy Thursday. At the evening service the Altar is stripped by the servers and the candles and Altar cloths put away in the Vestry. The clergy then process to the rear of the church with the 'Blessed Sacrament', which is delicately placed on the Altar of Repose with great reverence. The Vigil (remembering Christ's time in the Garden of Gethsemane) takes place facing the rear of the church.

The Book of Remembrance on the altar contains details of members of the congregation who have died. A poignant entry records the deaths of four children (members of the Sunday School and the Church Youth Club) who were killed on Himley Road in 2001.



Prayer corners adorn the back of the church on both sides. A Book of Remembrance records parishioners who have died, and also carries details of the memorials in church and who donated them (*right image*). This corner is transformed into an 'Altar of Repose' on Maundy Thursday.



The St. Andrew's Mothers' Union Banner

A Mothers' Union banner hangs on the back wall between the two corner Altars. The MU is still active at St. Andrew's and is merged with the MU at All Saints' for meetings and activities.



Left: A Team Ministry banner made around 1994/95. There was a gap in Team Ministry working, before the current Team arrangements began again in 2005.

Centre: The font and Paschal Candle. **Right:** The Kitchen and Choir Vestry just off the vestibule portico. This was refurbished in 2006.

On the right towards the front of the church is the baptismal font, bearing the date 1871. This has survived from the days of the old Victorian tin mission hut. It has the great advantage of being small enough to be moved to different positions as the liturgical need of the church changes. A few years ago it was situated towards the back, but is now prominent towards the front.



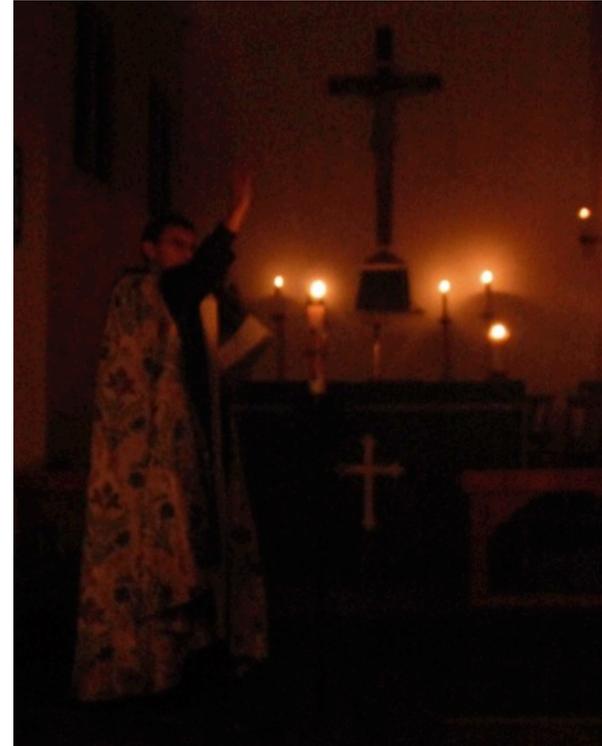
(Left) This white chasuble is worn to celebrate the Holy Eucharist during Christmas, Easter, or on a day commemorating a saint who has not been martyred. **(Right)** A green chasuble for Ordinary Time. Chasubles are Eucharistic vestments worn in all but the 'lowest' of Anglican churches when celebrating the Holy Eucharist. At St Andrew's they are usually worn for all Eucharistic worship.



(Left) A purple chasuble worn during Advent, Lent, Requiems and other penitential occasions when the Holy Eucharist is to be celebrated. (Right) A red chasuble, worn on days commemorating Martyrs. On the Patronal Festival, St Andrew's Day, this chasuble is worn.



An alb in the vestry. An alb is a Eucharistic vestment, usually worn over a cassock and under a Chasuble. In the Church of England, Albs are worn for all Eucharistic services.



Left: A cope with gold clasps, used in processions, for weddings and sometimes for baptisms and evening worship.
Right: Fr Rob, a former Assistant Curate who left in 2013, leading an Ancient Lucernarium (Blessing of the Light) Sunday evening service wearing a gold cope.

St. Andrew's has an active congregation. Average attendance at the 9.30am Sunday morning Eucharist remains remarkably consistent as does the Wednesday 7pm Eucharist.

The Little Angels Mothers' and Toddlers' Group in the Church Hall on Monday mornings is very successful, running nearly at capacity. Most of the families come from the Straits area. On Monday afternoon there's an exercise group, run by a community nurse.

Whilst the vast majority of people on the Straits do not attend St Andrew's regularly, they clearly have a great fondness for it and value it. They remain very supportive. The services that traditionally do well elsewhere in the country also do very well at St Andrew's too. For example, there are never quite enough seats for the annual Christingle service and church fetes and Christmas Fayres are well supported.

For a church building that wasn't expected to last longer than 25 years, St. Andrew's has survived astonishingly well. It has done so through the commitment and faith of some remarkable people, and by not being afraid to adapt to the circumstances of the day.

This endeavour continues. In fact it wouldn't surprise me if it lasted another 100 years!

Martin Jones, March 2011 – Updated December 2015