

OXFORDSHIRE BUILDINGS RECORD REPORT OBR.106



St Luke's Church, Canning Crescent, Oxford



Figure 1 St Luke's, Canning Crescent

Introduction

The Oxfordshire Buildings Record are grateful to the vicar, Jane Sherwood, for allowing us access to this property for the purposes of compiling this report as a contribution to the better understanding of Oxfordshire's buildings. Liz Woolley and David Clark were able to spend about an hour and a half there on 1 July 2010.

The objectives of the survey were to understand the extent to which the church had been built to the submitted designs, the subsequent changes and their dates, and to record any features of the building likely to be lost following planned renovations and extensions.

We made a detailed visual inspection of the exterior and such internal spaces as were accessible. Photographs were taken by the authors of significant features. Liz carried out extensive research on the documentary evidence. Unless indicated otherwise, text and images were created by members of the recording team.

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Location

The church is located beyond the building line of the group of houses forming Canning Crescent off the Abingdon Road near the southern edge of the city of Oxford in the area once known as Coldharbour. The houses in Canning Crescent are attractive brick and tile-hung council houses, although the pair next to the church (34 and 36) are later, and in a different style, they also appear to predate the church.

Description

Structure

The building materials are substantially those discussed below (History). The weatherboarding below dado level was an alteration agreed before construction, and is the most obvious difference between the present building and the architect's drawings (Fig.2) The structure stands on a brick plinth, with concrete steps to the original side doors, and a modern disabled access ramp to the front lobby (see Fig.1).

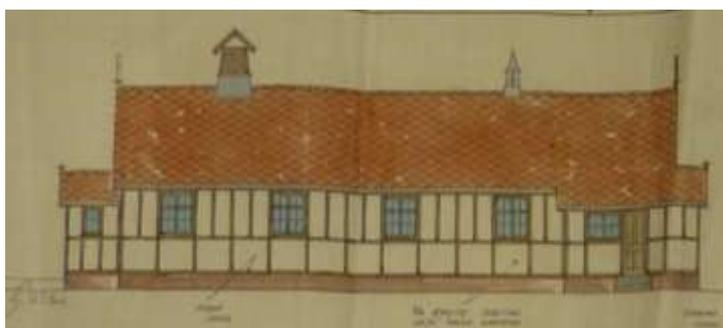


Figure 2 Architect's drawing of east elevation (1930)

The priest's door to the north-east vestry (to the right of Fig.2) has been blocked up, presumably at the time the kitchen was installed (Fig.3).

Figure 3 North-east vestry showing position of former doorway (different type of weather-boarding)

The bell-cote on the roof towards the south does not feature as part of the present building. There is a seating for this visible inside the church (Fig.4), where bolts for a structure can be seen, but there is no obvious arrangement for ringing a bell. However, a photograph of the church made in 1967 shows it in place.¹



Figure 4 (below) Seating for bell-cote



The ventilator towards the north of the roof was built and does survive.

Internally, the original structure is clearly legible. The two-tiered dais and the folding screen are still in place, but the doorways to the vestries were not built according to the plan (Fig.5). The north-west vestry has an apparently original doorway in its east wall to the altar area behind the screen, while the north-eastern one had an original doorway in its west wall giving access to the lower dais in front of the screen. This door is now unused, but it is *in situ*. A new doorway in the position shown on the plan was probably inserted when the vestry was converted to a kitchen in the 1960s.

¹ Oxfordshire Studies ref 21100-N

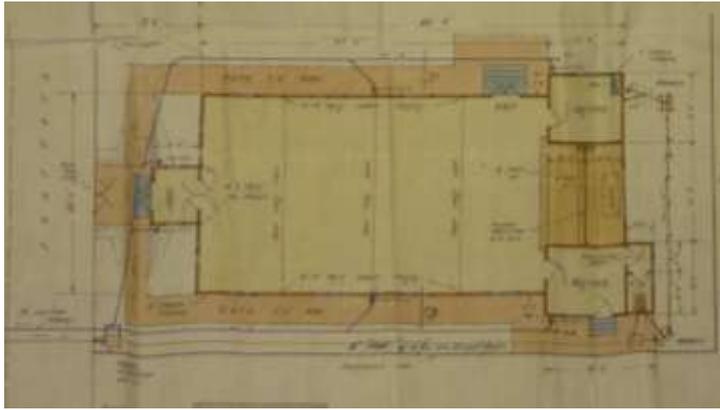


Figure 5 Architect's plan (1930)

The roof structure of trusses with low collars and principal rafters linked by raking struts and metal ties, survives in good condition, including the matchboarding behind



Figure 6 Roof structure

the purlins (Fig.6). All the timber seems to be softwood. Instead of a tie-beam additional iron rods below the collar are fastened to metal brackets where the rafters meet the wall-plate (Fig.7). These are not quite the same as those in the drawings, which seem to show additional small corbels at these points.

Figure 7 (below) Detail of principal rafter, iron tie rod and bracket



Fixtures and fittings

The windows all have a distinctive shouldered arch frame with glazing bars and frosted glass. Some have opening upper lights (Fig.8), others have casements.



Figure 8 Detail of windows

Most of the windows have additional painted glass panels of various designs. These are shown in Annex 1. The idea for these was conceived by the late Hughie Rogers, ca. 2003, a member of St Luke's. He designed the geometric panels, which young people and children then painted. There are also some panels designed by Jane Sherwood, and some by young people themselves. The designs include biblical references, heraldic devices and abstract designs.² They are very colourful.

The original doors (ie all except the later south door to the north-east vestry) are pine, with four panels and box-type locks with brass fittings.



Figure 9 Folding screen



Figure 10 Altar table

The folding screen (Fig.9) has six leaves and has been decorated with a number of mosaic panels. Further details of these are in Annex 2. When the building is used as a church, the screen is folded back to reveal the altar table (Fig.10). This is a sturdy oak table, originally in St Matthews, Marlborough Road (Christopher and White, 1890) and thus probably part of the original furnishings.³ Details are shown in Figs 11 and 12. Also in this liturgical area are a lectern and small stone font (Fig.13).

² J Sherwood, pers. comm..

³ see Sherwood and Pevsner (1974) p.335



Figure 11 Altar table corner detail



Figure 12 Altar table detail

In front of the screen to the west of the lower dais is the pulpit (Fig.14). As discussed below, this came from a church in London, and is a fine piece of (probably Victorian) workmanship, although now lacking some backing panels. Inside, under the front cornice, are two wooden bowls, one looking very much like an ash-tray (Fig.15).



Figure 13 Lectern and small stone font (behind)



Figure 14 Pulpit



Figure 15 Interior of pulpit



Figure 16 War memorial plaque

To the right of the dais is a small brass war memorial plaque (Fig.16) recording the names of ten men of the Cold Arbour (sic) area who lost their lives 'for the cause of justice and freedom' in the second world war.⁴



On the east wall beneath a window is a small bracket with candles on CDs (Fig.17). This feature recognises the traditional liturgical significance of the east end of the church.

Figure 17 Candle bracket

On the upper part of the liturgical east wall (north) there is a painting, 'The Last Supper', ca. 1996 by Ernesto Lozada-Uzuriaga Steele.⁵ As can be seen from Fig.18, there are 13 figures, mostly women, including two small babies. Jane Sherwood writes that "it is perhaps best described not as a traditional Last Supper painting, but as a depiction of members of the Church surrounding Christ, who are themselves ministering to others, looking after others or simply resting at the table. Note the woman who is anointing the head of Jesus or the baby being baptised." At a time when the church is moving (slowly) towards enhancing the role of women in its affairs this picture may be making a statement about this while recognising that women's ministry in the church is important but often un-noticed.



Figure 18 Painting above altar table

There are a number of other pictures hanging from the roof, such as those in Fig.6 above. Jane Sherwood writes that "these are a series entitled 'Jesus' Hands' circa 1996. They are accompanied by prayers such as 'Lord feed me' 'Lord release me' 'Lord bless me'. They are also by Ernesto Lozada-Uzuriaga Steele, as is the picture above the bookcase entitles 'Judas kiss' - this picture contrasts the betrayal of the kiss Judas gives Jesus with the simple act of worship given by the woman who kneels and washes his feet (also ca. 1996)."⁶

⁴ Cold Arbour and Cold Harbour are used in various printed sources; both are correct but it seems that Arbour is the earlier.

⁵ A former member of St Luke's from Latin America, who is currently an artist-priest working at Christ the Cornerstone Milton Keynes. His website (to view more of his art) is www.soultravellodge.com.

⁶ J Sherwood (pers.comm.)

These are complemented by decoration on cupboards containing children's toys (Fig.19). The designs (by Ernesto Lozada-Uzuriaga Steele and Jane Sherwood) were projected from an overhead projector onto the cupboards, the outlines filled in, and finally painted by young people from the church's youth group. As well as the usual animals and toys, there are less overt references, for example the person in a wheelchair in the sky symbolises people who do not let their disability compromise their independence. One such, who might have inspired the figure was Albert, from Canning Crescent, a well loved member of the church and a polio victim, who was an inspiring example of independence to the congregation. (St Luke's has had a long history of helping disabled people and had strong links with nearby Rivermead Rehabilitation Centre for strokes and head injuries. Wheelchair users and people with other disabilities frequently visit the church.)⁷

Seating in the church is of three main types, stacking single chairs (some can be seen on the left of Fig.20), two standard church benches (one shown in Fig.21) and a group of three domestic sofas which forms the main seating area during Sunday worship (Figs.20 and 22). This arrangement is also used for informal meetings. For some uses, a carpet is laid out within the group of sofas.



Figure 19 Children's toy cupboard



Figure 20 General view of hall/nave



Figure 21 Bench



Figure 22 Seating area

⁷ Jane Sherwood, pers.comm..

The general flexibility of the hall/nave space is shown in Figs. 20 and 22 above. Other aspects of this are the basketball net on the south gable (Fig.23), and other areas of space such as the carpeted children's area (Fig.24) and book areas such as those in Figs.25 and 26.



Figure 23 Basketball net



Figure 24 Children's area in SE corner



Figure 25 Book area in south-west



Figure 26 Book area on east wall

The north-west vestry continues to be used as such, with the vicar's desk and paperwork taking up most of the space (Fig.27)



Figure 27 North-west vestry

As stated above, the north-east vestry has been converted to a kitchen and the toilet has been extended (ca.1996) to allow for disabled access. A washbasin has been inserted into the extended 'ventilation lobby'. The present state of these interiors is shown in Figs.28 to 30 below.



Figure 28 Toilet



Figure 29 Washbasin



Figure 30 Kitchen area

History (Liz Woolley)

St Luke's is an Anglican church opened in 1933 as a mission hall for the area of Cold Harbour (or Weirs Lane), under the patronage of St Matthew's Church, Grandpont.⁸ Revd (later Canon) Stather-Hunt (1896-1979), who was vicar of St Matthew's from 1929 to 1975, set up a Boys' Brigade at St Matthew's in 1929, which soon attracted large numbers of children from all over the area. St Luke's was founded partly to give the boys from the Weir's Lane area a Sunday School of their own⁹.

Revd Stather-Hunt led the fundraising and organised the building of the church¹⁰. A fundraising committee was set up in June 1930 and St Matthew's agreed to contribute at least £250¹¹. The total cost of the building was to be £1,100¹²; fundraising was by means of sales of work, lenten boxes, collections in church and special grants¹³.

A piece of land 87' deep and with a frontage of 77' onto Canning Crescent was leased from Oxford City Council at £20 *pa* for 21 years, commencing 29th September 1930¹⁴. The fundraising took longer than expected; a grant of £400 was received in early 1933 (as a result of intervention by Canon Mowel (?spelling) taking the total raised up to £720¹⁵. The PCC noted that the rent on the land had already been paid for over two years, so it was decided to carry out a special door-to-door appeal to try to raise the remainder required so that building could begin¹⁶.

In May 1933 a special emergency meeting of the PCC was held to discuss an offer by the chosen contractors (William Harbrow Ltd, of 214 Rotherhithe New Road, London SE16¹⁷) to reduce the original estimate by £100 on condition that the work began immediately, "... owing at the moment to favourable markets for the purchase of building materials."¹⁸ As the amount collected had now reached £844, it was decided to proceed and a special committee was formed to deal with the practicalities of the building work¹⁹.

Work commenced on 12th July 1933, a licence to erect a *temporary* building having originally been issued by the City Surveyor on 2nd May 1931. The original plans showed all the external walls covered with asbestos sheeting, but the builder requested, and was

⁸ St Matthew's parish magazine, November 1933 (pages pasted into St Matthew's Church Minute Book, April 1897 - July 1952, and reproduced in this document at Annex 3).

⁹ Brenda Horwood, interviewed 30th Nov 2007. Miss Horwood was born in 1928 and has lived at 262 Marlborough Road since she was six. The house was built in 1890 by her great grandfather William John Giddings.

¹⁰ St Matthew's Church Minute Book, April 1897 - July 1952, minutes of PCC meetings between June 1930 and November 1933 (kept in a safe in the vestry of St Matthew's).

¹¹ St Matthew's Church Minute Book, minutes of PCC meeting 19th June 1930.

¹² St Matthew's Church Minute Book, minutes of PCC meeting 6th February 1933.

¹³ St Matthew's Church Minute Book, minutes of PCC meetings 18th July 1930 and 6th February 1933.

¹⁴ Oxford City Council, minutes of meetings of the Property and Estates Committee, 6th May 1930 and 21st April 1931 (Oxfordshire Studies).

¹⁵ St Matthew's Church Minute Book, minutes of PCC meeting 6th February 1933.

¹⁶ St Matthew's Church Minute Book, minutes of PCC meeting 6th February 1933.

¹⁷ Plan no. 5059 (NS), for 'Temporary building (church hall), Canning Lane, Abingdon Road'. Plans, planning application, correspondence and associated documents (held by City Council Planning Department, Ramsay House, St Ebbe's, Oxford OX1 1PT).

¹⁸ St Matthew's Church Minute Book, minutes of special emergency PCC meeting 15th May 1933.

¹⁹ St Matthew's Church Minute Book, minutes of special emergency PCC meeting 15th May 1933.

granted, permission to substitute creosoted weatherboarding up to cill height because it was considered more durable and to give an improved appearance. The walls were timber framed, with asbestos lining, the dado to be matchboarded. The roof was asbestos tiling on boarding. Labour was to be found locally, under the direction of Mr Hunt (Revd Stather-Hunt?)²⁰. The original architect's plan has been framed and hangs in the church. See Annex 4 for a reproduction of this document.

The church was opened on St Luke's Day, 18th October 1933²¹. Mr and Mrs Ward had been appointed as caretakers, on 5/6 per week²² (they requested, and were granted, a wage rise to 7/6 in January 1934²³). The pulpit and holy table came from St Matthew's, St Matthew's having received a new pulpit from Revd Stather-Hunt's father's church in London²⁴, and a new table from St Peter le Bailey²⁵. (The pulpits were swapped in 2004, so that the one in St Matthew's is now its original one, and the one in St Luke's is the one from London²⁶.)

The PCC meeting of 9th November 1933 praised: "*...the amount of work and the success obtained by the vicar in making St Luke's opening day possible and that no other vicar could have accomplished a better result to his efforts than our present vicar the Revd DK Stather-Hunt.*"²⁷

Conclusion

St Luke's in its present form is a remarkable example of the continued use since the 1930s of a utilitarian building designed for flexibility between worship and community use. It seems clear that a number of minor alterations were made to the building before or during construction. The external weatherboarding was an alteration suggested by the builder; the changed positions of the doors from the vestries were probably the result that the drawn locations required the incumbent to turn his back to the congregation before beginning the service. It is not clear, however, how the two vestries were intended to work. Only the north-east had an external door, and so perhaps was more of a lobby for use by organisers of secular activities, while the north-western was clearly for the vicar alone, as it is the only one with access to the area behind the screen where the altar table and other liturgical items are kept.

The main structural alteration was the creation of a kitchen in the 1960s and disabled toilet in the north-east vestry, probably at some later date. The bell-cote was removed after 1967. The fire doors on the west wall, replacing earlier ones, are also of late 20th century date.

²⁰ Plan no. 5059 (NS) and associated documents, letter of 16th May 1933 from W Harbrow to the City Surveyor.

²¹ St Matthew's parish magazine, November 1933 (pages pasted into St Matthew's Church Minute Book, and reproduced at Annex 3).

²² St Matthew's Church Minute Book, minutes of PCC meeting 9th November 1933.

²³ St Matthew's Church Minute Book, minutes of PCC meeting 24th January 1934.

²⁴ Brenda Horwood, interviewed 30th Nov 2007.

²⁵ St Matthew's Church Minute Book, minutes of special emergency PCC meeting 15th May 1933.

²⁶ Brenda Horwood, interviewed 30th Nov 2007.

²⁷ St Matthew's Church Minute Book, minutes of PCC meeting 9th November 1933.

The decoration of the church is very colourful; the children's toy cupboards have animals, but there are other motifs suggesting fantasy and collective memory. More overtly Christian are the decorative mosaics and window panels. Much of the artwork (which is an important aspect of the ministry at St Luke's) has involved children and young people. Nevertheless they are a serious attempt to make artworks in the Christian tradition, and have been recorded as such. With a major refurbishment programme planned for the church it is possible that some of this work will be lost. It is hoped that this report will go some way to capture the atmosphere of the church in 2010, and provide a record of any parts of the decoration which may have to be sacrificed.

Disclaimer

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D R Clark FSA and Liz Woolley
secretary@obr.org.uk
14 October 2010

Bibliography

Graham, Malcolm (ca.1975) *On Foot in Oxford 4. Folly Bridge and South Oxford* Oxford.
Sherwood, Jennifer and Pevsner, Nikolaus (1974) *The Buildings of England - Oxfordshire* London.

Annex 1 – Glass panels in windows.



Window 1 East wall 1



Window 2 East wall 2



Window 3 East wall 3



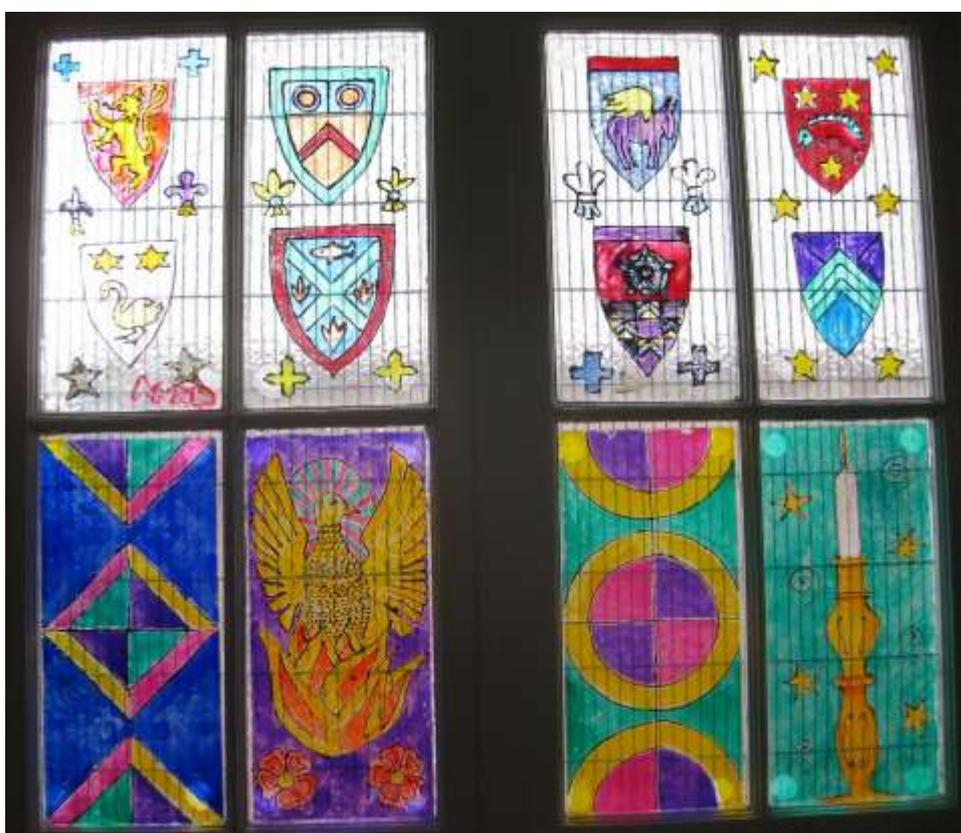
Window 4 West wall 1



Window 5 South wall west of lobby



Window 6



Window 7

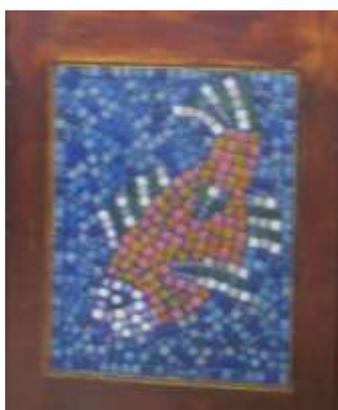
Annex 2 Screen mosaics (notes by Jane Sherwood)

The idea of the mosaic panels was conceived by Hannah Sparrowhawk, a younger member of St Luke's, designed by Jane Sherwood, and completed by a variety of different age groups in the church, but mainly young people and children from 2002 - present day. They mainly have Christian motifs:

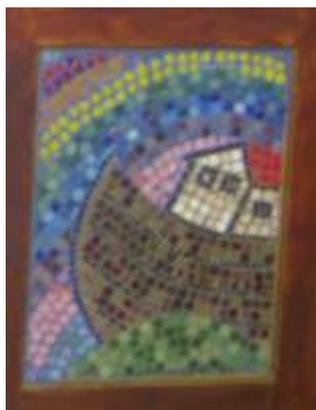


Panel 1 Left hand screen upper section

Left upper panel from left to right : Flames (representing the Holy Spirit); Dragonfly (actually a Buddhist symbol of summer- representing being open to dialogue with other faiths); Tree (the Tree of Life : Revelation 22) ; Simple Cross (made by children on Good Friday) ; Angel (made by children in our after school club); Heart and cross (inspired by our St Luke's logo of a heart and a cross)



Panel 2 Left hand screen lower panel



Panel 3 Right hand screen lower panel

Left lower panel: The fish (one of the earliest symbols of Christianity. this was the first mosaic panel completed)

Right lower panel: Noah's Ark (this depicts the Ark come to rest on Mount Ararat and the rainbow of God's promise above)



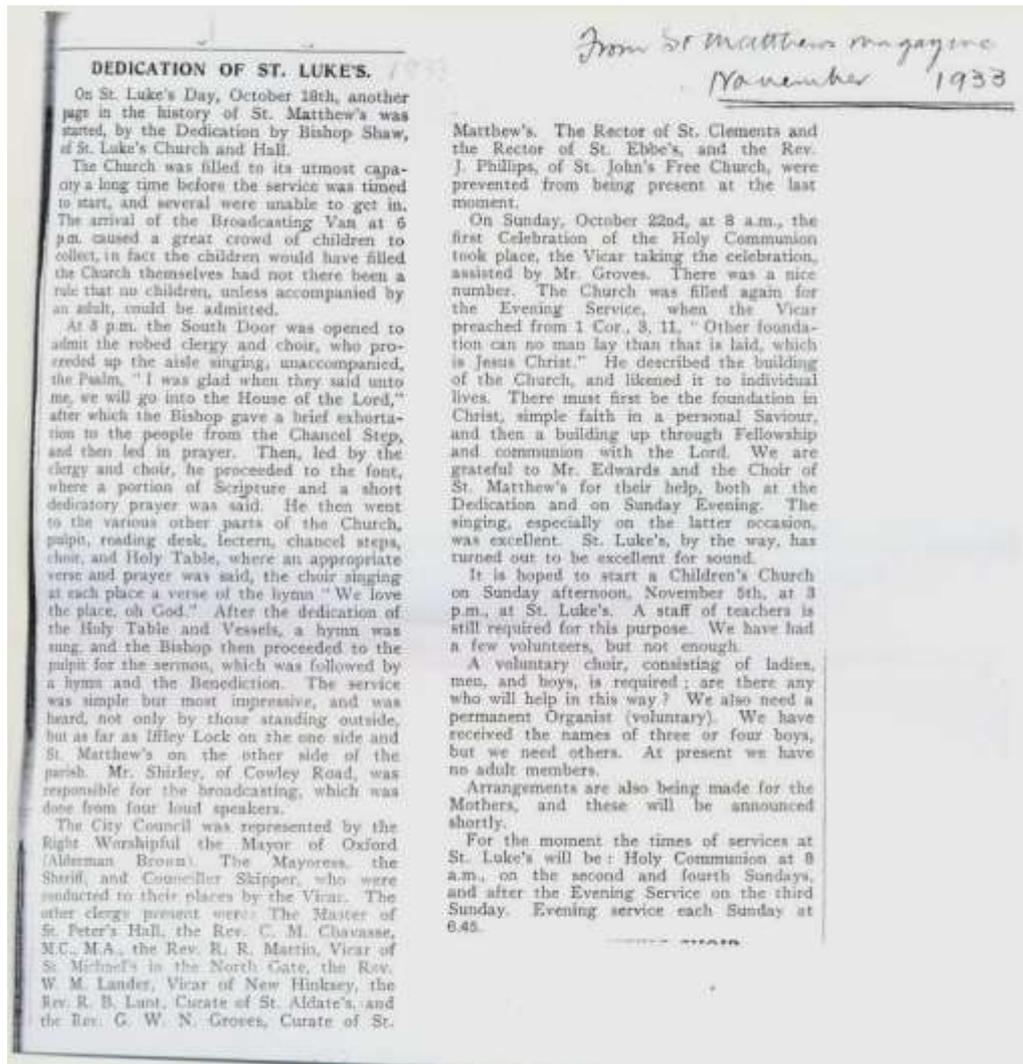
Panel 4 Right hand screen upper section

Right upper panel from left to right:

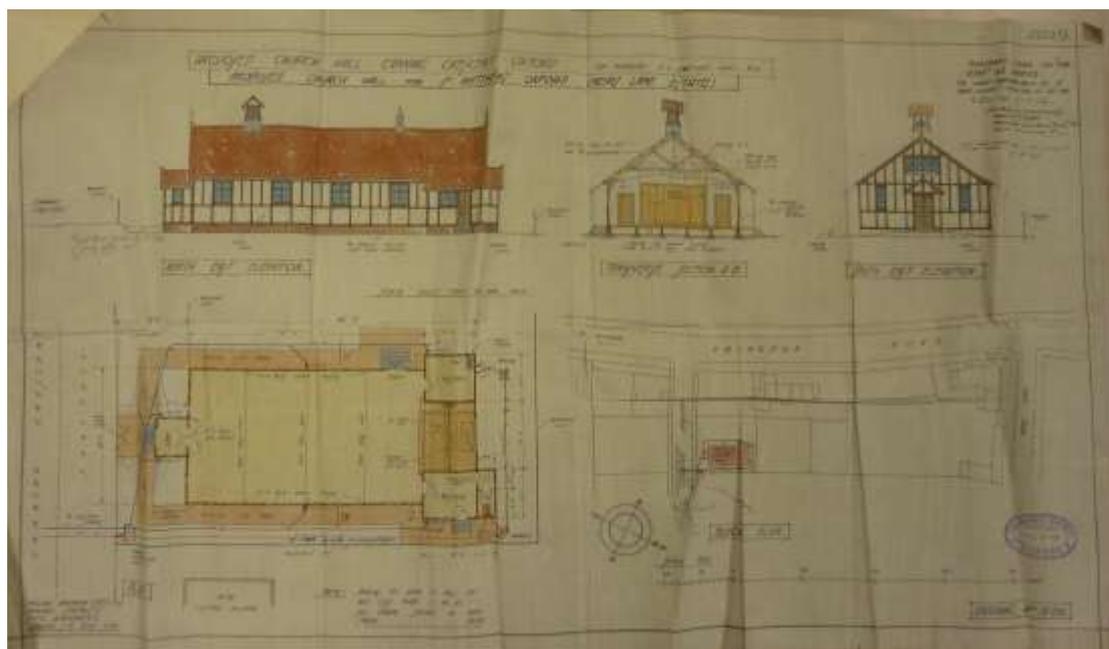
The wild goose (symbol in Celtic Christianity of the Holy Spirit. Made by our youth group). The chalice and wheat representing bread and wine of holy communion; The hill, three crosses and an empty tomb - a depiction of the Easter story, made by members of the church; the Celtic Cross; Candles representing our faith; sunflowers (again made by our children's group. Sunflowers turn to face the sun, much as we need to turn to God).

This is an ongoing project, with the intention that all the panels of the screen should be filled. There are also some mosaics on the outside of the church that are the result of a youth project.

Annex 3



Annex 4



Drawings for proposed church hall for St Matthew's church (1931) William Harbrow Ltd., Bermondsey, London. Oxford City Council planning department ref 5059 (NS)