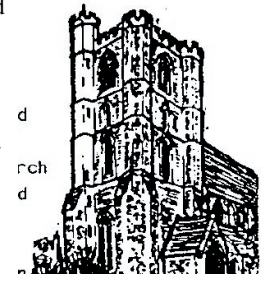


Introduction The Parish of Cowley St John dates from 4 August 1868 and owes its origin to Fr. Richard Meux Benson (1824–1915). The foundation stone of this Church was laid in October 1875, and the present Decorated Style building in Charlbury stone, was designed by Alfred Mardon Mowbray and put up in instalments as the money trickled in. A memorial Calvary to Fr. Benson has stood near the Church entry since 20 November 1917.



The Chancel (1875–79) was bricked across the west end to be used as a church. It is dedicated to Archbishop Longley of Canterbury, a previous Vicar of 'old' Cowley (Cowley St James) who died in 1868 and was much admired for his inspiration at the 1st Lambeth Conference.

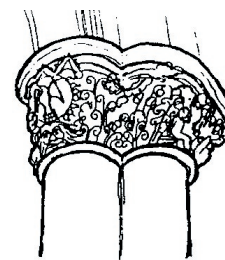
The Nave and Side Aisles were then built so that the whole Church could be dedicated on November 6th 1883.

The Tower and the South Porch were added in 1893, but the glass screen and doors were not added until 1988. The motif on the doors of St Mary and St John at the foot of the cross is by Margaret Cullen. The clock with its three faces in the tower was put in from 1928 to 1930.

The Vestries were built onto the east end behind the High Altar between 1911–1912.

The First Vicar from 1870–1886 was Father Benson who not only created this Parish but also founded within it the first Religious Order for men in the Church of England since the Reformation. Some of the members of this Order (The Cowley Fathers) are buried in unmarked graves marked by a stone slab in the churchyard. He also attracted a number of sisterhoods to work in the Parish and the buildings and grounds of the All Saints Sisters still adjoin the Churchyard.

Fr. Benson envisaged a Church building that would speak of God's work in nature and grace in every bit of its ornamentation. Lacking the means to realise this plan at once, he left many uncarved



blocks of masonry at the tops of pillars and along-side windows, hoping that money would soon enable the Nave to "exhibit a view of Old Testament History in the capitals of the pillars and the corbels of the windows" In the end twelve scenes were to be carved beginning at the Northwest corner with THE FALL OF THE ANGELS, THE SPIRIT ON THE FACE OF THE DEEP, and ADAM NAMING THE ANIMALS (under the Choir loft) THE CREATION OF EVE and THE FALL (NW Aisle Window), THE EXPULSION FROM EDEN, CAIN & ABEL and NOAH'S SACRIFICE (2nd N. Aisle Pillar). The corresponding S. Aisle Pillar displays ELISHA'S DEATH,

JONAH, UZZIAH STRUCK WITH LEPROSY, and ISAIAH'S VISION OF A REDEEMER. Of Fr. Benson's plan that "the corbels of the roof will be carved to represent the Nine Orders of the Heavenly Host" something came: five hover at the springing of the arches on either side of the Nave, intended to represent (from W to E) PRINCIPALITIES, POWERS, VIRTUES, DOMINIONS THRONES. Nothing came of the plan to show in the clerestory windows the principle events of Our Lord's life, and in May 1928 Fr.



Walsham How, then Vicar, abandoned any hope of completing the aisle carvings and had the corbels

alongside the windows there rounded off.

The Aisle Windows are arranged in threes, symbolising the threefold nature of God and of human beings. It was Fr. William Scott (Vicar 1886–1910) who began to fill the lights with a procession of holy men and women intending to "manifest the glory of the hidden kingdom". He also (unintentionally) illustrated a bit of social history. Frozen in stained glass is the segregation of the sexes: women to the left; men to the right. So it was right down to the Great War in the pews too. In consequence the lights were filled in very unevenly and incompletely. Ever since the Crucifixion, it would seem, Christian women have outnumbered Christian men, and our aisle windows (put in by ladies in memory of the beloved man in their life) are mute witnesses to the imbalance of the sexes on our electoral rolls since records began. So on the right they are dedicated to the male saints, Peter, Bartholomew, three of the four Evangelists, and Joseph the Workman (fittingly a memorial to David Fisher, Churchwarden, whose firm built both the Vicarage in the churchyard (Comper 1901) and the daughter church of St Alban in Charles Street (1933). In the left, or North Aisle, only two lights were put in. One of St Anne in memory of a much-loved Head-Mistress, paid for by her former Parish School pupils, the other, designed by Lawrence Lee (1949) complete with dreaming spires, is dedicated to Oxford's patron St Frideswide and is in memory of the Headmaster of the Cowley Fathers St John's Classical School. The plain (Mowbray) window in the south aisle is something of an oddity, but is perhaps something of a relief from the pink, blue and green 'Cathedral glass' panes in the other windows.

The Chancel is the one place where Fr. Benson's bible in stone was most completely realised. The lower corbels are angels with musical instruments, representing the Heavenly Host as joining in the offering of the Choir. The higher carvings represent Angels bearing shields with the instruments of Our Lord's Passion, the great event around which all the praise of heaven and earth is concentrated. Fr. William Scott added carvings of the four Evangelists: Matthew and Mark on the N. side and Luke and John on the S. His brother Fr. Cecil Scott (Vicar 1910–1923), added in 1911, Seraphim to the chancel arch, preferring this to Fr. Benson's original idea of Jewish Temple and Christian Church.



A study of the East window is a pamphlet in itself, but it follows Fr. Benson's desire that it should depict the Adoration of the Lamb even though it does not show the Parables as he had hoped. Earlier than the East Window (1891–2) are the seven sanctuary lamps sent back from Italy by Miss Ankstell Jones early in 1885. The Reredos (1918–20) and Rood Beam (1921) were both designed by C.G. Hare as part of a more complete furnishing of the sanctuary. The Reredos was originally plain, given as a thank-offering for Peace in 1918. Christ the King flanked by Mary and the Angel Gabriel top the screen. In canopies, Our Lord, centre, is enclosed by the four Archangels (Raphael with book, Uriel with torch, Gabriel with trumpet, Michael with sword and Satan underfoot) and flanked by the Patrons of the Parish and of the British Isles. From left to right, PATRICK, GEORGE, BARTHOLOMEW, THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, and then JOHN, ALBAN, ANDREW and DAVID. Fr Walsham How (Vicar 1925–1935) cleared the sanctuary and won agreement to colour the reredos, but it was left to his successor, the aptly named Fr. Painter (Vicar 1935–46) to carry through the plan during the first half of 1938. An old soldier, who recalled that it was a War Memorial, he added Coats of Arms. From top to bottom, these are, on the left Canterbury, Oxford, the Meux Family; on the right Navy, Army and Royal Air Force. An attractive Aumbry to the right of the High Altar, given in memory of Fr Boag by his wife, reminds us that the Holy Oils have been kept and used here since 1924. The modern Central Altar with its matching Credence Table were made by John Bye a local craftsman and were dedicated in 1985.

The Lady Chapel first housed a harmonium (1885–6) then a Martin's Organ (1886–1913) and was at first in visual contact with the congregation through the squint, still visible behind the statue of Mary (1919). After the organ was re-sited this space then became the first Lady Chapel with its attractive 'motherhood' window (1913) and Ruth Daniel, long-serving Enrolling Member of the Mothers Union, gave the twin Angels when the Chapel was changed in 1939. These angels were retained when the

present Chapel and its Altar were designed as a Memorial to Fr. Arnold (Vicar 1946–1975) who died after a road accident and is buried in an unmarked grave just to the south of the chapel.

St John's Chapel normally called the North Chapel was used as Vestries (1879–1911). The Organ was moved to a loft here in 1913 and stayed until 1940 when it was sold to Kings Sutton Parish. Our present Beard's Organ, bought from St Michael-at-the-North-Gate, was then installed at the West end, freeing this whole area for use as a Chapel. But the oak screen (a gift from Oriel College in 1913) used to run much nearer to the altar enclosing a tiny chapel of the Divine Compassion. Here, after a struggle with Bishop Gore, Fr Cecil Scott had been allowed to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in 1913. The main window here shows a priest kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in a Monstrance and seems to indicate that Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was in use as a service of praise in this church by the 1920's if not before. A fire in 1951 enabled Fr. Arnold to extend the chapel to the whole area, and Fr. Brotherton (Vicar 1976–81) had the screen filled in with glass for warmth. The Icon is a copy of Christ the Divine Wisdom (School of Salonica 14th Century).

The Pulpit was the outcome of small subscriptions collected among the poorest in the 'Robin Hood' district of Fr. Benson's Parish in 1885. The modern crucifix commemorates the work of a well known local figure, District Nurse Reade.

The South Transept Window (Bucknall & Comper 1892) pictures in the large top space the prophet ZECHARIAH with his finger resting on his prophecy (9:9) 'Rejoice greatly.....Behold thy King cometh unto thee'.

The two figures below are Edward Confessor and Anselm. Below is the Infant Jesus in the arms of his Mother. Sunbeams around the central figures and the moon beneath recall the vision of Revelation 12, and in the niche below is the lily, the symbol of purity.

The North Transept Window (Comper 1913) depicts the Christ of St John's vision breaking the seven seals at the end of time. The seven lamps are before the throne, the crystal sea, the golden beams streaming from the central figure, with the earth his footstool. On either side is an Annunciation with a lady circled below who is Mary Scott (wife of Fr. William) who died in 1908, in whose memory the window was given. She clasps an open book with the Latin words 'God reigns over me'.

The Stations of the Cross were carved at Oberammergau between 1911–13, and are the happy outcome of a holiday shared by the Scott brothers during an interregnum between the their incumbencies. They follow the traditional Way of the Cross and should, like all the other things in this Church, be viewed not merely as works of art, but as aids to prayer and reminders of the great and wonderful works of God proclaimed by Christians and centred in the life and death of Jesus in whom we believe we meet God face to face. Visitors are urged not to judge the church as an empty shell but as a place of prayer and worship, and to use it as such. All that is described in this guide is but a setting in which to praise God.