

# SAINT AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY, HIGHGATE

## AN ILLUSTRATED ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

The Archway bridge dominates the Archway Road but the church of St. Augustine of Canterbury comes a close second. Its West Front demands a reaction from the passer-by sitting in the queue at the traffic lights. Opinions differ on the merits of its design. In the Time Out Book of London Walks it is called one of the two ugliest buildings in London. Betjeman describes it as being “one of the best furnished churches in London”. Its history follows the fortunes of a suburb of the city and the Church of England in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.



Its architecture is the work of three talented designers, John Dando Sedding, Henry Wilson and J. Harold Gibbons. Their contributions chart the development of architectural taste from 1885 to 1930. The final result achieves harmony and a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts.

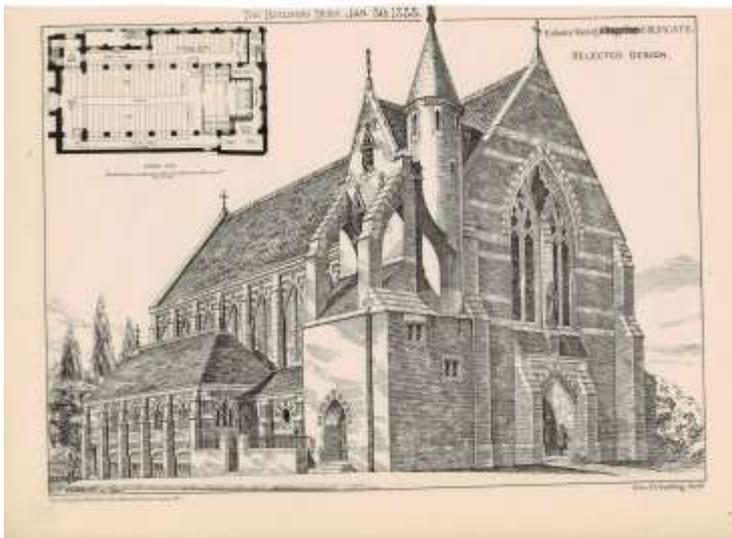
### ORIGINS

As London expanded in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the parish churches were bursting at the seams and new parishes sprang up to serve the spiritual needs of the growing population. Highgate became a separate parish from St. Pancras in 1831. In 1874 the parish of All Saints, Talbot Road was formed but by 1881 a new church was needed to serve the houses along and around the Archway Road. The Vicar of All Saints the Reverend Edgar Smith and his churchwardens purchased a suitable site on the Winchester Hall estate and the iron schoolroom of All Saints was moved to become an unglamorous temporary church.

The Architect C.H.M. Mileham, who was a churchwarden at St. Augustine's, produced a design for the new church but the estimate of £16,000 was considered too costly. A limited competition for a church half that price was held and Mileham, James Brooks, J.E.K Cutts and John Dando Sedding were asked to submit designs.

Brooks was already known for his noble East London churches, all brick solutions to the problem of building effective and economical town churches. Cutts was younger and went on to build many London churches. Sedding was comparatively unknown and was just beginning the phase in his career that was to lead on to Holy Trinity, Chelsea and Holy Redeemer, Clerkenwell. At St. Augustine's economy was the priority but Sedding's originality still manages to shine through. To keep costs down he used polychrome brickwork internally and externally and simple lancet windows.

**SEDDING'S PERSPECTIVE**



**SEDDING'S INTERIOR**



**NORTH ELEVATION**

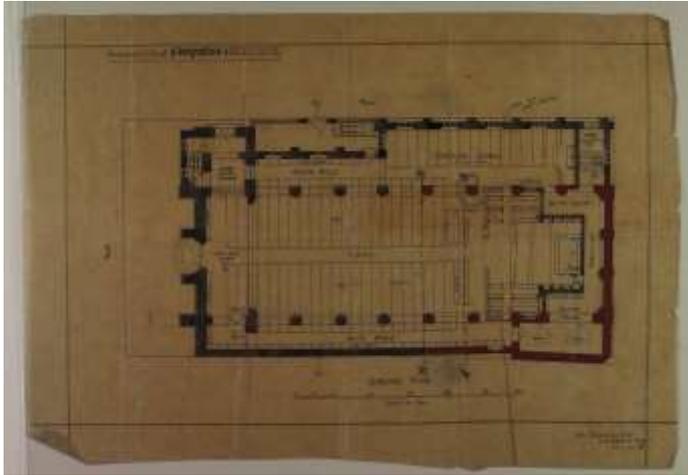


**INTERIOR 2010**



The foundation stone was laid in 1887 but progress was slow, proceeding as money was raised by a small parish without a wealthy patron. The shading on the east end of Sedding's plan shows how only a few bays and the chancel could be completed in the first phase. By 1895 the nave was complete as far as Sedding's proposed arch and west gallery.

### SEDDING'S PLAN



### UNFINISHED 1900



Sedding died suddenly and young in 1891 and Henry Wilson, his talented pupil, took over his practice. Wilson is responsible for the Lady Chapel. Sedding, Wilson and Christopher Whall (who painted the altarpiece in the Lady Chapel) were all Masters of the Art Workers' Guild which was the hotbed of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the late nineteenth century. Wilson, in particular, was influenced by the ideas of William Lethaby on mysticism. He uses the tree of life and the seven stars as motifs in his design of the grills either side of the altar. The stained glass in the Lady Chapel is by Westlake.

### WILSON'S LADY CHAPEL

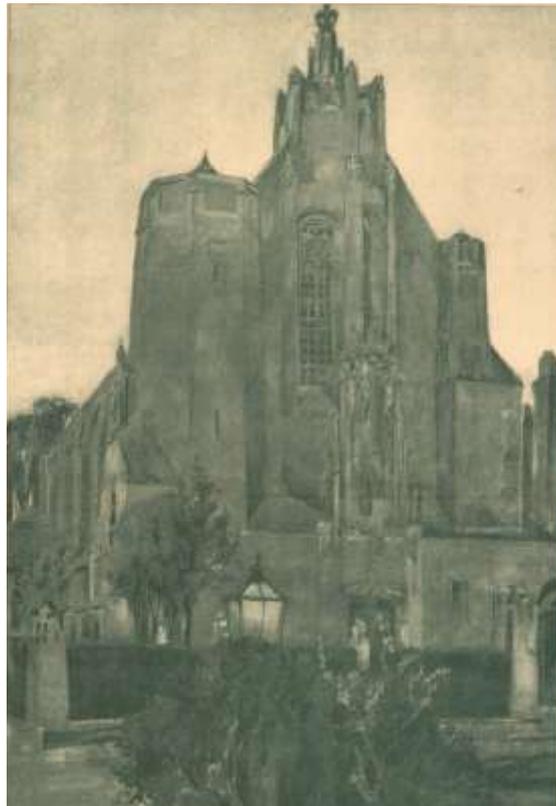


### MYSTIC REFERENCES THE TREE OF LIFE AND SEVEN STARS



In 1896 Wilson produced a concept design for the West Front. It was a striking composition, Gothic in every sense.

### WILSON'S DREAM

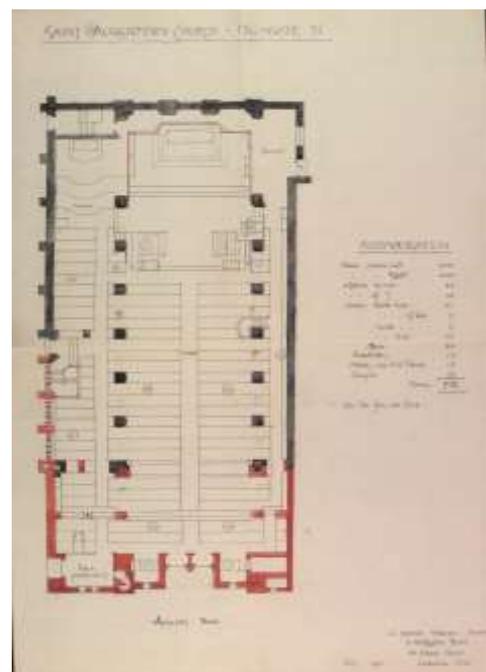


Wilson was an artist and teacher rather than a professional Architect and in 1910 J. Harold Gibbons, a pupil of Temple Moore, was approached to produce a scheme for the completion of the West End. His dramatic design is radically different from Sedding's but has some Wilson influence.

### GIBBON'S STATUARY



### GIBBON'S PLAN



J. Harold Gibbons' interior emphasises the vertical with its lofty spaces in the west transept.

### WEST TRANSEPT



### GIBBON'S FONT



The church was completed and dedicated shortly before the outbreak of the First World War.

On Friday 11 January 1924 disaster struck when a fire broke out and the nave was burnt out. The Lady and Remembrance Chapels were fortunately almost untouched.



J. Harold Gibbons was put in charge of the repairs and the opportunity was taken to add a spacious organ gallery with a replacement Hunter organ and an external sacristy. The St. Michael's Chapel was created in the South Aisle and stained glass windows were commissioned by Margaret Aldrich Rope, who was a friend of Gibbons.

#### **ST. MICHAEL'S CHAPEL**



#### **HUNTER ORGAN**



## MARGARET ALDRICH ROPE WINDOWS



In 1938, to mark the Jubilee of the first consecration, Adrian Gilbert Scott was commissioned to design a new High Altar and reredos. Only a part of his scheme was completed – the gilded lime wood altar and the panelling behind.

## ADRIAN GILBERT SCOTT ALTAR



In 2005 an altar which survived the 1993 IRA bombing of St. Ethelburga's in the City became available. The opportunity was taken to unclutter the nave below the chancel and to move the St. Joseph's altar, which competed for attention with the Scott altar, back to St. Joseph's chapel in the North Aisle.

## ST. JOSEPH'S ALTAR



The altar from St. Ethelburga's was installed centrally in the church. It is simple, elegant and functional.

## ALTAR FROM ST. ETHELBURGA'S



It is perhaps unusual for a late Victorian church to have had such a chequered history. The evolution of St. Augustine's resembles the steady accretion in a medieval church rather than the typical, all-of-a-piece, suburban London church. Opinions may differ on its architectural merit but it continues to be loved by its devoted and growing congregation.